

# The Agitator

Bulletin for the Student Left

September 2007 ★ no.6

## EDUCATION NOT OCCUPATION

by Mohammed Ali Aumeer

Canadians now accept the truth: Canada is in Afghanistan to secure oil not to promote democracy. Canadian public opinion was clearly put to the test on August 24 2007 at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. Peter Mackay, Canada's Minister of National Defence, and General Rick Hillier, Chief of Defence Staff were on hand for "Red Friday", a day where Canada's warmongers called on the public to show up in the thousands to support their imperialist agenda in Afghanistan. Despite being hyped by the corporate media,

and wild predictions of a 25,000-strong rally, only a few hundred answered the call.

This is a sign that the anti-war movement in this country is succeeding in raising awareness about Canada's true motives in Afghanistan. It also serves as a wake-up call to the military establishment. "Red Friday" made it clear to the military that it has a long way to go in reaching its recruitment goals. And they have already made it quite clear how these goals will be met:

MILITARY RECRUITMENT  
ON YOUR CAMPUS.

We are already seeing ads on campus, in school bathrooms, hallways, and student newspapers and even military recruiters at campus job fairs. Coupled with the fact that in the past decade, tuition fees have more than doubled nationally, the military establishment is in a prime position to promote a "poverty draft." A recent National Defence survey of Canadians aged 16 to 34 found that 30 percent said they would consider joining if their education was paid for or if they were offered an entry bonus.

Students across Canada fighting to lower tuition fees

must connect this struggle to the anti-war movement. This can be done through "Operation Objection" and its War-Free Schools initiative. This campaign is organizing nationally to confront and remove military recruiters from Canadian campuses through both education and action. It is time for all students who oppose rising tuition fees and imperialist wars to join together and say no to the poverty draft. To get involved or find out more about Operation Objection, please visit their website: [www.operationobjection.org](http://www.operationobjection.org)

## October 27: The next step for the anti-war movement

by Chad Brazier

As Americans prepare to take to the streets October 27 to call for an immediate end to the Iraq War, Canadians are doing the same to demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan.

A majority of Canadians, especially students, have never supported the war in Iraq, and most of them have not been deceived into lending support to the US-led project in Afghanistan either.

Contrary to triumphant reports that boast of Afghan resistance fighters being killed off or driven away, attacks on the occupying forces have increased steadily. Canadian troops are now confined to armoured convoys and fortified bases. The situation in Afghanistan is becoming more,

not less, dangerous for *everyone* involved.

Claims that Canadians are there in any sort of humanitarian capacity are disproven by recent investigations into CIDA's aid programs. A CIDA-funded hospital in Kandahar "is filthy and there is absolutely no medical equipment to be found anywhere", reports a visiting Vancouver paramedic. "There is no sign of foreign aid in those hospitals."

The professed gender equality that has been "brought to" Afghanistan is a cruel sham even at the highest levels. Parliament is made up mostly of warlords, many of whom are notorious human rights abusers. Women representatives are berated and expelled for speaking their mind,

notably Malalai Joya, a leading Afghan feminist and democrat. Rape is widespread, its victims stigmatized and jailed.

Canadian troops are not in Afghanistan to bring peace, development or equality to the Afghan people; they are pawns in a larger geopolitical contest between global and regional powers and the struggle over strategic control of oil and natural gas resources.

Canada should pull out all its troops now, not in a few years. "The strategy we're following is wrong; we should take our troops out," insists NDP leader Jack Layton, stressing that "NATO's presence in Afghanistan is only serving to increase civilian backing for the Taliban."

When Harper echoes his pals in the White House and

speaks of fighting the "War on Terror", he backs it up with billions of our tax dollars, to be spent on expensive toys like warships, tanks and fighter jets. Debt-ridden students know where this money could be spent, and that's why students are at the forefront of the anti-war movement.

Get involved in your campus anti-war group, or start one up if you have to. Prepare for the day of action: put up posters, hand out flyers, organize an info session. The larger the demonstrations on October 27, the harder it will be for the Conservative government to ignore public opinion and continue this war.

For more info on October 27 visit the Canadian Peace Alliance at [www.acp-cpa.ca](http://www.acp-cpa.ca)

# The University of Ottawa's Blood Money

by *Sam Ponting*

What is in a name? The name 'Desmarais' represents much more than the \$15 million contribution the family has donated to the university's "Campaign for Canada's university." Paul G. Desmarais, an alumnus of the university, also has grandchildren currently attending. But who is Paul G. Desmarais, and how did he obtain the money he has donated to the institution?

To the human rights community, Desmarais' name carries a significance much greater than the university's new 12-storey Desmarais building at the corner of Laurier and Waller. He is one of Canada's top businessmen: Chairman of the Executive Committee of Power Corp., he has also served on the board of the French oil conglomerate Total, and has since then given his seat to his son Paul Desmarais Jr. The nature in which Total has accumulated its profits not only demonstrates that its pledge to uphold "corporate social responsibility" is meaningless lip service to the international community, but that the company will greedily spit on the dignity

of human beings in order to achieve the bottom line.

The human rights violations committed by Total in nations such as Burma, human rights violations that Paul Desmarais is affiliated with, undermines everything a progressive academic institution should represent, and is enough to drown the campus in disgust. In Burma, Total, UNOCAL, and Premier Oil, were contracted to construct the \$70 million Yadana gas pipeline. Earthrights International (ERI) has released a 180 page report that compiles first-hand testimonies of human rights abuses from several hundred villagers: abuses performed by Burma's military junta that are evidently a result of the pipeline's construction. Hundreds of civilians have suffered from forced labour, rape, execution, and forced confiscation of property. Total's company documents reveal that they were aware forced labour was being used throughout construction, according to the ERI report. Furthermore, many allege the company directly funded the Burmese military, in order to "protect installations." Villagers claim

the land was never heavily militarized prior to construction. Total's complicity in these abuses is evident, and Paul Desmarais was once a powerful and integral voice within Total's decision-making. Yet, University President Gilles Partry audaciously asserts that, "We are proud to recognize the contributions of Mr. Paul G. Desmarais and Mrs. Jacqueline Desmarais to the University and to Canada in this very tangible way."

According to the CBC, Paul Desmarais is currently Canada's fifth richest Canadian, with a worth of \$4.41 billion. It's shameful to have glorified on our campus the name of a rich, white male representing corporate elitism, its accompanying gross economic inequalities, and the bloodshed of Burmese civilians carried out to attain such wealth and status. Goodbye to the integrity of our academic institutions...

How to contact President and Vice-Chancellor Gilles Partry: [partry@uottawa.ca](mailto:partry@uottawa.ca)  
Tel: 613-563-5809, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5, Rm. 212A

## Bridging the Gap: Hip Hop and Socialism 101

There is a prevailing school of thought in the hip hop community that Hip Hop was born on August 11, 1973 at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the New York borough of the Bronx. This was when DJ Kool Herc staged the first of his legendary parties, providing an environment where youth could assemble without fear of reprisal from neighbourhood "gangs". The gatherings quickly evolved into a sub-culture which used artistic expression to protest against the oppressive American state. Over three decades later, Hip Hop culture has expanded not only to every major urban centre in North America, but also in the suburbs of the continent and overseas to every region of the globe.

Hip Hop's birth was not a miracle that took place the moment Herc decided to link two record players together to avoid the pause while DJs switched records. It did not start with the inception of Afrika Bambaataa's "Zulu Nation". Nor did it start

when "Rapper's Delight" first hit the American airwaves. There is no way to pinpoint the birth of hip hop culture because it is merely a continuation of the ongoing struggle against imperialism.

In the late 1970s, what made Hip Hop culture unique was its rejection of reformist ideals. This new generation would not be satisfied with leaders who "had a dream". They did not dream of a better world but rather build it them-selves. The economic realities that America's black urban populations faced made it quite clear that the gains of the civil rights movement were nowhere near enough just to make ends meet. To the next generation, the Hip Hop generation, the revolution was not over. It had just begun. And that is where it stood in the 1970's. But again, Hip Hop did not start in the 1970's just as it did not end in the 1990's.

*continued next page*

### About the Agitator

*The Agitator* is an initiative of the International Socialists on several university and college campuses. It was created to offer a forum for the student left, and act as a collective organizer to help build a stronger student movement against neo-liberalism, war and oppression.

Anyone can contribute and readers are encouraged to get involved, and help distribute the paper. If you are interested in writing, editing or distributing *The Agitator*, please get in touch with us:

**[agitator.online@gmail.com](mailto:agitator.online@gmail.com)**

We can be found at the following campuses: Carleton, UOttawa, Trent, UVic, Langara, UofT, Ryerson. Help build the network!

# Consumerism, Coercion and Consent

by Jessica Squires

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist imprisoned by the Fascists in Italy. His most well-known work was his *Prison Notebooks*, written in a kind of code to get the work past the censors.

Gramsci is of particular importance to present-day Marxists because he was writing in the context of a stabilization of capitalism and a corresponding downturn in struggles for workers and the oppressed. That is, he realized that the opportunity for the defeat of capitalism presented by the years 1917-27 had passed, and social justice struggles would need to come to terms with the power of the capitalist class. Workers and their allies would need to fight a "war of position" - a battle of ideas and for reforms, against a relatively stable capitalism; and not the kind of social "war of manoeuvre" seen in 1917 and the decade after.

Today, capitalism is not on the verge of defeat, but it remains unstable. Gramsci's ideas can point the way forward for revolutionaries figuring out how to navigate the complexity of today's world.

Gramsci conceived of the need for legitimacy on the part of the capitalist class and modern state institutions (the state, in shorthand) as a combination of consent and coercion. The state would, as far as possible, create conditions of consensus on the part of populations, and resort to coercion as necessary.

The modern state exists only with the consent of the population. But that consensus is hard-won by capitalists, and must be constantly re-invigorated. Gramsci referred to this process as a battle for hegemony. The principal tools used by capitalists to secure hegemony are

ideas, used to convince large groups of people that the interests of different classes are actually the same. In Canada an example was the consensus created around Keynesian economics in the 1930s: a government-managed economy was seen as beneficial both to the economy, by shielding it from further crises like the depression, and to ordinary people who would benefit from social programs paid for by progressive taxation. In reality the new economics served only to satisfy the needs of modern capitalism, and the well-being of ordinary people proved expendable.

When a false consensus is exposed as a means of hiding internal contradictions, the state often resorts to coercion to stabilize the system. Recent examples have included massive police presence at peaceful demonstrations and the use of force in international relations, also known as war.

The battle of ideas is reflected in individual consciousness in a contradictory way. All people, no matter how "enlightened" or educated, have what Gramsci referred to as "contradictory consciousness." That means, for instance, that a student may recognize the need for free post-secondary education but may nonetheless support charging international students fees, even though charging international student fees creates a justification for charging domestic students fees as well. Another example is the worker who supports radical action by unions but does not support the right of Muslim women coworkers to wear a hijab. In that case, progressive ideas commingle with racist ones to undermine the workers' ability to work together effectively to win gains from the

employer or the government. As Gramsci wrote in his *Prison Notebooks*:

"One might almost say that [one] has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in ... activity and which in reality unites [us] with all [our] fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which [one] has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences."

That explains why many students and workers in Canada today seem lulled into complacency. They are convinced by the ruling class media that they need to consume specific things in order to be happy. But many of them also feel as if there is something wrong. When those latent ideas about something being 'off' rise to the surface, then radicalization can occur. That usually happens when a person takes some kind of action in their own interests like participating in an anti-war demonstration, for instance.

Consumerism actually makes life harder. We are told implicitly by the mass media that there are no classes, or that we are all middle class, or that class divisions don't matter, while in fact we are workers upon whose collective labour the wealth of society depends.

For revolutionaries, the conclusion is simple. We have to mobilise against the hegemonic impulses of war and oppression. We need to encourage people take action, no matter how small. And we must organize those of us who are already radicalized into groups that can take collective decisions and action.

*continued from page 2*

To properly examine where Hip Hop culture is going and how it can best be maximized in improving the lives of the future generation of alienated youth, one must look at the culture prior to 1973. The New York City gang culture that preceded Hip Hop's rise must be accounted for. The civil rights movement which preceded both the aforementioned movements is also an essential piece to the

puzzle. To truly understand Hip Hop, one must first ask themselves questions such as: "If Hip Hop was born working alongside communist organizations like the "Young Lords" and the "Black Panthers" in the 1970s, then why were they more closely aligned to spiritual organizations like "The Nation of Islam" in the 1980s and corporate entities like "Time-Warner" in the 1990s?" Rapid changes in Hip Hop's brief history, although common,

were not always part of its natural progression. In the coming months, *The Agitator* will examine Hip Hop culture, history and politics. The examination will look at everything from slave emancipation to downloading music online. This article posed many questions to the Hip Hop community. The articles to follow will answer as many of them as possible. Peace.

Mohammed Ali Aumeer

# The Agitator

September 2007 ★ no.6

## Montebello Redux

by Erik Halliwell

The Security and Prosperity Partnership summit in Montebello was not your average event. In attendance were Prime Minister Steven Harper, George Bush, and Felipe Calderón. Inside, these three with the help of their corporate friends in the North American Competitiveness Council outlined regulatory changes that would further integrate the North American economy.

The NACC consists of thirty major corporations. Four are on Global Exchange's 2005 list of worst corporate evildoers: Chevron, for its human rights and environmental abuses in Burma, Nigeria and Ecuador; Ford, for emitting more greenhouse gases than any automaker; Lockheed Martin, the world's largest military contractor; finally Wal-Mart, the second biggest corporation in the world, for its record of forced overtime, sex discrimination, child labor and relentless union-busting.

The Canadian contingent of the NACC includes Suncor Energy, and PowerCorp. The former is the scourge of Alberta's biodiversity and largest developer of the tar sands. The latter, PowerCorp, according to Amnesty International, have dubious dealings with China regarding human rights.

The big corporate names in attendance this year were not just regulating "jellybeans" as Harper claimed; in fact the agenda of the SPP is far more sinister. The SPP in a nutshell, is the result of the corporate scheme to further integrate the

North American economies, but with a twist. After 9/11 "security" became central to integration. To get this so-called security in order to improve trade, our civil liberties have wound up on the chopping block. Harmonizing our "no-fly" lists, aggressive border security, information sharing between security agencies, and measures such as Security Certificates have all been constructed or reinforced. The U.S. and Canada have agreed to negotiate a "visa information-sharing agreement". Both governments have already decided to share fingerprints of refugee asylum seekers. They also intend to develop compatible biometric border and immigration systems, and coordinated background checks, credential recognition and document standards. Military integration, exemplified by the war in Afghanistan, is also accelerating.

So, despite the police provocateurs, thousands showed up for three days of protest, one day in Ottawa two in Montebello. The Council of Canadians teach-in "Integrate This!" was attended by hundreds, packing a UOttawa lecture hall, with people sitting in the aisles.

So despite the efforts to keep this whole process a secret, people from across North America came out to hit the streets and to educate themselves on the SPP.

The message in the mainstream media was that so many different coalitions came out, War Resisters, anti-war

## Getting this party started... Venezuela's new socialist party

by Chad Brazier

After his third overwhelming electoral win last December, Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez revealed his goal for the next term: the creation of "socialism from below". It doesn't look like he was kidding. Responding to the need to replace over-reliance on his own personal leadership, as well as to consolidate the gains already made by the "Bolivarian Revolution", a call was made for a new, grassroots unity party, the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela).

Days after his reelection, citing the plethora of pro-Chávez political parties as an obstacle to the creation of "21st century socialism", he proposed: "We need one party, not an alphabet soup with which we would be falling over each other in lies and cheating the people."

activists, anti-SPP activists, environmentalists and anti-Bush activists, making our message "indiscernible". If the mainstream media trips over itself just to understand the message they aren't really listening. We reject all of it: the war, the SPP, the companies who pollute our planet, and we reject an imperial and corporate agenda to shape the planet in their image. The unifying message, if the mainstream press bothered to listen, is democracy. The secret backroom deals are no longer acceptable to the new generation of activists, and that message was made loud and clear.

Envisioned as neighbourhood-based, the PSUV would finally grant a permanent vehicle for the participation of the masses, who have time and again had to take to the streets to defend their democratic rights.

In a process that began in April of this year and lasted for six weeks, a staggering 5.7 million people signed up for the new party. This, in a country of 26 million, means the registration of close to a quarter of all Venezuelans in just over a month! The founding congress begins this September and will last three months.

Today, even the poorest Venezuelans understand the dangers facing their government from without, dangers exacerbated by the anti-imperialist rhetoric and policies of Chávez himself. Still, because these same policies have made possible what has been described as a qualitatively different Venezuela than in the pre-Chávez period, support for the government has never been higher. Since first elected in 1998, Chávez has overseen tremendous improvement in the material conditions of the poor and working-class majority.

Together with constitutional reform, which is also taking place at the moment, the politically activated masses of ordinary people are mobilizing to ensure that this progress is permanent. A united socialist party is how they will guarantee that their voices are heard. *Chad Brazier was a delegate to the 2006 World Social Forum in Venezuela*