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Death lies where gas and black gold run

War between Georgia and Russia on the
21st-century Silk Road

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

12 August 2008

Mikheil Saakashvili and his dextrous National Movement were brought to power in Georgia on the wave of a “rose revolution” in 2004. In these last four years, Georgia has strengthened its links with NATO and the EU, but has had to put up with a tough embargo on its goods from Russia, which props up the two secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, both effectively out of Georgian control.

Saakashvili as president has not kept his promises. At least a third of the Georgian population is living below the poverty line; unemployment is officially at 16% but is actually much higher; the monthly pension is €16. Current employment legislation permits employers to fire workers without just cause. Popular discontent exploded on the occasion of last January’s presidential election, called following the huge demonstrations of November 2007: poverty had been growing at the same rate as the economy. Saakashvili won for the second time, but in order to do so was forced into repressing tens

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of thousands of demonstrators in the capital, Tbilisi, who were protesting against vote-rigging, corruption, authoritarianism and economic disaster.

But so what?! The strategic control of Georgia is worth much more than the state its people live in. And that de facto Russian-guaranteed autonomy that exists in South Ossetia is no little worry to US and European interests in the area. Georgian entry into NATO would justify an international military presence with the aim of protecting and controlling two enormously important strategic corridors for the West: the famous Baku-Tbilisi-Cehyan (BTC) corridor bringing gas from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum corridor bringing gas from the Caspian to Turkey, where it is planned to link up with the TIG (“Nabucco”) corridor which will link Turkey to Greece and Italy. But both these oil and gas pipelines pass too outrageously south of Russia and too near Ossetia. Russia (and Gazprom) will certainly not be sitting around doing nothing! As long as there is tension in the Caucasus, there will be no room for NATO and Europe will be forced to deal with Russia if it wants Caspian oil and gas.

Italy’s Foreign Minister is worried that the conflict will spread to Abkhazia... but in reality his fears are more for the interests of ENI (which has a 5% stake in the BTC) and Edison (BTE), and he is already offering to send an Italian “peacekeeping” mission to the Caucasus on a European mandate.

Along the 21st-century Silk Road, the lives of 70,000 South Ossetian inhabitants (for whom independence is denied, unlike Kosovo) are worth nothing; as are the lives of the people of Georgia — two peoples apparently divided by ethnic conflict, but in reality hostage to the inter-imperialist conflict for the control of raw materials and corridors.

There will be no peace or stability in the Caucasus until its peoples obtain full autonomy and self-determination of their own destinies and until they cooperate in solidarity in the pro-

duction and shipping of raw materials, against dictators and local ruling classes, against all forms of nationalism, against all forms of imperialism and against capitalism.

Permanent ceasefire. International solidarity with all workers in the Caucasus.