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Socialist Voice #283, November 2, 2008

Manifesto of the First Pan-Canadian Young Feminist Gathering

TOUJOURS REBELLES / WAVES OF RESISTANCE

For all those who think feminism is dead: the young feminists are far from silent! The first pan-Canadian young feminist gathering, "Waves of Resistance," was held October 10-13 in Montreal. More than 500 young women who invaded the classrooms of UQAM for 3 days to reaffirm the relevance of feminism and to act collectively on issues including the feminization of poverty, hypersexualization and racism. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a pan-Canadian young feminists' manifesto, a document that will be a political tool for all the young feminists in their communities.

Manifesto of the Pan-Canadian Young Feminist Gathering

We are the young ReBELLEs who have answered a feminist call and we are proud to call ourselves feminists. We recognize that there are multiple interpretations of feminism and we celebrate and integrate this diversity. We are committed to the continual expansion of the plurality of our voices. We are committed to an ongoing process of critical self-reflection to inform and transform our movement. We acknowledge the historical exclusion of "Othered" women by the majority Western feminist movement. We strive to learn from the past, honour the struggles of our foremothers and continue to dream for the future. We value the allies of feminism who support us in our fight for equity and justice.

We are women of diverse abilities, ethnicities, origins, sexualities, identities, class backgrounds, ages and races. Among us are employed, underemployed and unemployed women, mothers,

students, dropouts, artists, musicians and women in the sex trade. We state that transfolks, two-spirited and intersexed people are integral to our movement and recognize and respect gender fluidity and support the right to self-identify. Our women-only spaces include everyone who self-identifies and lives as a woman in society.

We are told that feminism is over and outdated. If this were true then we wouldn't need to denounce the fact that:

In reality, many of the demands of our feminist mothers and grandmothers remain unmet. Women continue to be the victims of sexual violence. Our communities are haunted by the silence that follows these assaults. Throughout Canada, in spite of our right to it, access to abortion services remains insufficient. Across Canada as well, colonized, marginalized, racialized and disabled women are coerced and/or forced to undergo unwanted or uninformed abortions, forced to use contraception and are subjected to forced sterilization. The hyper-sexualization of women in the media has taught us to view women as sexual objects rather than complete human beings. Getting off, lesbianism and being queer are taboo and a women's choice to seek sexual pleasure is seen as negative. Our identities are eroded as we are taught, from the time we are children, and through television and magazines, that how we should look, dress, and act is determined by our sex. Violence is normalized, sexual abuse eroticized. Our sexual health education is inadequate and our reproductive rights are disrespected. Our needs are not being met.

In reality, women still represent the majority of the underprivileged. Our government steals children from poor and Aboriginal women. Capitalism exploits working-class women and confines middle- and upper-class women to "consumer" roles. We are told that equality has been achieved, but still the wage gap persists. Immigrant women are denied acknowledgment of their academic credentials and are forced to endure intolerable work environments in order to stay on Canadian soil. We lack affordable and accessible childcare. Women remain underpaid, underappreciated, and undervalued in the work force. We have gained the right to vote, yet gender-based discrimination keeps women virtually unrepresented in political office.

In this globalized world, we must construct international feminist solidarity. The actions of Canadian political and economic elites harm women around the world, and in a way that is specifically gender-related. War, genocide and militarization are characterized by the use of rape as a war weapon, femicide, and the sexual exploitation of thousands of our sisters. Free trade contributes to women's increasing social, economic and cultural insecurity. In response to Canadian imperialism, we will globalize our feminist solidarity.

In this so-called post-feminist world, our roles in society are still defined by traditional views on gender. Religious and political forces aimed at maintaining the pillars of power in our society silence us from voicing our rights. We denounce the current rise of right-wing ideology in Canadian society and the steps backward in women's rights that this has caused. We are being stripped of rights for which those who came before us fought hard. Geography marginalizes women, with remote, northern and rural women lacking access to basic services. Showing

solidarity with our sisters means trying to understand all of the issues we face – including race, class and gender – and standing together against oppression.

Finally, we denounce the dismissal of the feminist movement as redundant. Our struggle is not over. We will be post-feminists when we have post-patriarchy.

Feminists Unite!

DOWN WITH the colonial legacy of genocide and assimilation of Aboriginal peoples, particularly of Aboriginal women

DOWN WITH the sexism and racism of the Indian Act\

DOWN WITH dishonoured treaties

DOWN WITH assimilation

DOWN WITH racial profiling

DOWN WITH Canada's fake multicultural policy

DOWN WITH warmongers & military power

DOWN WITH racist child welfare policies

DOWN WITH stereotypes in the media

DOWN WITH genocide and femicide

DOWN WITH stealing women and children

DOWN WITH COLONIALISM

ReBELLEs AGAINST banks for hijacking the world

ReBELLEs AGAINST drug companies for institutionalizing women's health

ReBELLEs AGAINST public spaces that don't accommodate all bodies

ReBELLEs AGAINST development that destroys nature

ReBELLEs AGAINST the class system that keeps us impoverished and deprives us of safe, affordable housing

ReBELLEs AGAINST the state that forces other countries to adopt the capitalist system

ReBELLEs AGAINST the devaluation of women's paid and unpaid work

ReBELLEs AGAINST corporations for making money off our backs

ReBELLEs AGAINST the advertisers who destroy our self-esteem and then sell it back to us

ReBELLEs AGAINST CAPITALISM

RISE AGAINST the industries that cause us to hate our bodies and our sexuality

RISE AGAINST heterosexism that makes it seem that there is only one way of living, loving and being sexual

RISE AGAINST the socialization of children in gender binaries, race categories and colonial erasures

RISE AGAINST the education that reinforces the heteronormative nuclear family

RISE AGAINST the religious Right and its influence on State policy and legislation

RISE AGAINST rape and violence against women

RISE AGAINST the objectification and control of women's bodies

RISE AGAINST all anti-choice bills, laws and strategies

RISE AGAINST the sexual division of labour

RISE AGAINST poverty and women's economic disadvantage and dependency
RISE AGAINST income support programs based on family status instead of individual status
RISE AGAINST masculinists, their false claims and demagogic arguments
RISE AGAINST sexual exploitation
RISE AGAINST PATRIARCHY

We envision communities committed to:

- Eradicating all forms of violence – including sexual, institutional, emotional, economic, physical, cultural, racial, colonial, ageist and ableist
- Challenging all forms of oppression, power and privilege
- Recognizing that others' struggles against oppression cannot be separated from one's own, because all people are intrinsically; and being conscious of how one fits into the different structures of oppression while fighting to eliminate them all
- Freeing our children and ourselves from the gender binary
- Building institutions and structures that promote the principles of Justice, Peace & Equality
- Eliminating economic inequality
- Funding and supporting affordable, accessible childcare, and the economic freedom to mother in the way we choose
- Learning and teaching true herstory and histories of our victories and struggles, especially those of women of colour and Aboriginal women
- Fighting the stigma and shame of mental health and psychiatric survivors and supporting their struggles

We will: Change our attitude: get pissed off, refuse, resist, walk out, speak up!

We will: Transform our daily lives and relationships: actions can take place in small interactions

We will: Encourage people to learn about, care for and love themselves and their bodies

We will: Support safe and accessible space for individuals to define and express themselves without fear of judgement

We will: Create alternatives, write poetry, articles, letters, make art

We will: Join with others, find common ground, build community, create feminist spaces and gatherings, raise awareness, educate, spread the word

We will: Believe that a better world is possible and work to achieve it

We will: Organize and struggle: build alliances with existing feminist groups and create new ones, fight together in solidarity, be seen and be heard, disrupt, trouble, destabilize established powers, become culture jammers

We will: Build solidarity based on the commonality of our diverse struggles and perspectives

We will: Value people rather than profits

We will: Demand massive State reinvestment in social programs and the end of privatization

We will: Organize pan-Canadian decentralized days of feminist action against the rise of the

Right

We will: Protest and resist sexist bills and laws that threaten our reproductive rights, racist immigration laws, war, free trade, repression, the criminalization of political movements, corporate exploitation and plunder of the earth, and violence against women

We will: Champion safety, respect, justice, freedom, equality and SOLIDARITY!

This manifesto was adopted at the Pan-Canadian Young Feminist Gathering Toujours RebELLEs / Waves of Resistance, Montreal, October 13, 2008. It is a call to action! Find out more, get involved!

Socialist Voice #284, November 9, 2008

Afghan resistance is ‘terrorist’ under Canadian law, Khawaja trial judge rules

By Richard Fidler

In the first major prosecution under Canada’s *Anti-Terrorism Act*, Mohammad Momin Khawaja, a 29-year-old Ottawa-area software developer arrested almost five years ago, was convicted October 29 on five charges of participating in a “terrorist group” and helping to build an explosive device “likely to cause serious bodily harm or death to persons or serious damage to property.”

However, the prosecution was unsuccessful on its two major charges, which alleged that Khawaja had been part of a plot to commit deadly bombings in London, England — for which five individuals, all Muslims like Khawaja, were sentenced to life imprisonment in England in April 2007.

The verdict was not surprising. A lengthy non-jury trial that began in June produced no evidence to link Khawaja directly to the alleged London bomb plot, although there was extensive police evidence that Khawaja knew at least some of the London group. On the other hand Khawaja, through his lawyer Lawrence Greenspon, admitted building an explosive device, a remote detonator that he termed a “hi-fi digimonster,” at their behest.

A striking aspect of the verdict, however, although it was given little attention in the media coverage, was the rationale given by Justice Douglas Rutherford for rejecting Khawaja’s defence. That defence was that Khawaja thought the detonator was for use in fighting the NATO occupation of Afghanistan — for example in triggering the improvised explosive devices commonly used by the Afghan resistance. This activity, the defence argued, fell outside the definition of “terrorist activity” in the legislation, which excepts “an act or omission that is committed during an armed conflict. . . in accordance with customary international law or conventional international law applicable to the conflict.”

Judge endorses Canada’s war in Afghanistan

The Ontario Superior Court judge acknowledged “an abundance of evidence that Momin Khawaja’s central objective was to play a role in the fighting in Afghanistan. . . .” But in ruling that any such role would be “terrorist activity,” he explicitly underwrote the excuse given by successive Liberal and Conservative governments for Canada’s Afghan war.

The judge adopted the justification given for the initial imperialist attack on Afghanistan: “In response to the attack on the twin towers in New York on 9/11, the U.S.A. and the U.K. sent troops and equipment into Afghanistan with the objective of capturing Bin Laden, destroying al Qa’eda and removing the Taliban regime.” (paragraph 114 of the judgment) Then, citing a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions subsequently endorsing the assault on Afghanistan and authorizing continued occupation and fighting by the NATO-led International Assistance Security Force [ISAF], the judge declared that he took “judicial notice as well, that

Canada, along with other North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries, has contributed personnel and resources to the ISAF and that to date some 100 of Canada's armed forces personnel have been killed in fighting with insurgent forces opposing the initial American and British and subsequent United Nations intervention in support of a reconstructed and democratic Afghanistan." (paragraph 124)

(By "judicial notice," the Judge was referring to the legal doctrine that courts, without hearing evidence on the matter, are entitled, as the Judge says, to "resort to certain notorious facts . . . which I think are beyond dispute among reasonable people.")

And he concluded:

" . . . it seems to me beyond debate that, subject to the applicability of the exclusionary 'armed conflict' clause, those who support and participate in the insurgent armed hostilities against the civilian population, the government, and government and coalition forces attempting to reconstruct and maintain peace, order and security in Afghanistan, are, by definition, engaging in terrorist activity. Seen through the lens of a court of Canada, a Member State of the United Nations, I do not think it can be viewed otherwise. News reports of insurgent attacks in Afghanistan are characterized daily in the news as 'terrorist' and not surprisingly since, subject to the armed conflict clause, they meet the definition of terrorist activity in the Criminal Code. It seems self-evident that the armed insurgency in Afghanistan is

"- intended in whole or in part to intimidate the population or that segment of it that supports the legitimate government and those assisting it in its reconstruction and establishing of peace and order with regard to their security, and intended to compel the population, the government, NATO, the United Nations and all those agencies supporting the reconstruction and democratization efforts to refrain and desist, and

"- that consequential death and destruction is caused and reported throughout the world on a daily basis." (paragraph 125)

Largely on that basis, the judge held that the "armed conflict" exception in the *Anti-Terrorism Act* had no application to the case. He quoted his ruling in a motion on the defence argument during the trial:

"The exception shields those who do acts while engaged in an armed conflict that would otherwise fit the definition of terrorist activity from prosecution as terrorists as long as the acts are within the internationally recognized principles governing warfare. Momin Khawaja was not so engaged."

In other words, Canadian troops could not be convicted of "terrorist activity" while fighting in Afghanistan. But Afghan insurgents fighting in self-defence and to expel occupying armies — or those assisting the insurgents — could be so charged and convicted.

Pattern of anti-Muslim repression

The defence adduced no evidence on the nature of the war in Afghanistan, nor did it attempt to rebut the ideological rationale of the UN Security Council, dominated by the major imperialist powers. The defence strategy did not seek to expose Canada's Afghan intervention and its effect on young Muslims like Khawaja who, outraged by this war of conquest, sympathize with the armed resistance in Afghanistan.

Momin Khawaja is due to be sentenced on November 18. Under the *Anti-Terrorism Act*, he faces possible life imprisonment for committing an offence "for the benefit of, at the direction of or in association with a terrorist group." The Act is draconian legislation rushed through Parliament in 2001 in the wake of the September 9 attacks on the twin towers and Pentagon.

The Act, which amended the *Criminal Code*, is a virtual license for courts to override long-standing principles of due process in the application of criminal law. For example, in the only other trial to date under the Act, an under-age youth was convicted recently in Brampton, Ontario, of being an "eager acolyte" to and participating in a "terrorist group" — the "terrorist group" in question being comprised, as the judge found, of other co-accused who were not before him and have not yet been tried. In effect, the co-accused have already been convicted *in absentia* of "terrorism." The group in question, originally 17 but now reduced to 11 as a result of acquittals and dropping of charges, is comprised mainly of young Muslims, many under-age, who were arrested in a "sting" entrapment operation. (See The Toronto 'Anti-Terror' Arrests: An Attack on Muslims and Antiwar Opinion.)

Meanwhile, Canada still has five Muslim men who have been jailed- or, after years of incarceration, subjected to heavily monitored house arrest in the forced custody of family members – all without being charged with any specific offence, simply on the basis of being certified by two government Ministers that they were somehow engaging in terrorism, subversion or espionage. As non-citizens albeit permanent residents, they have been jailed under Canada's immigration legislation. One is still being held in Kingston, Ontario, at Canada's "Guantanamo North." They can be held indefinitely without charge or trial once a judge determines, on the basis of a secret hearing without the presence of the accused or his counsel, that they are somehow a threat to national security. (See the Report of the People's Commission on Security Measures).

All of the "security certificate" victims are under threat of expulsion from Canada to repressive regimes in North Africa or Asia, with probable torture and possible death as a result of being labelled terrorists by the Canadian government. Their potential fate has been underscored by the horrendous case of Maher Arar, the Canadian tortured for more than a year in Syria on the basis of Canadian police reports falsely linking him with "terrorists," and, more recently, the case of three Muslim Canadians — Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad Abou-Elmaati and Muayyed Nureddin — whom retired Supreme Court judge Frank Iacobucci has confirmed were tortured in Syria and Egypt, again, on the basis of Canadian police reports falsely linking them with terrorist activities.

Political overtones

The judge's reasoning in the Khawaja case is a fresh reminder of the close connection between Canada's "war on terrorism" and its war in Afghanistan. The political overtones were evident

throughout the trial. Summing up the case for the Crown, the prosecutor told the court that “It was his [Khawaja’s] intention to bring death and destruction to the West.” This was the theme repeated over and over in the lurid media coverage. It is, of course, an underlying theme in the constant propaganda against Muslims in the media.

This was an important trial for the government, as it was the only case so far in which the Canadian police had managed to come up with substantial evidence of a plot by some Muslims to engage in violent acts that could somehow fit within the definition of “terrorism” in Canadian law. (The lack of such evidence is clearly the reason why none of the security certificate victims has been accused of any specific crime.) Yet even in Khawaja’s trial, it was impossible to ignore the political context. It was dramatically illustrated when prosecution witness Zeba Khan, Khawaja’s ex-fiancée, testifying by video link from her home in Dubai, explained that his references to “jihad” in his numerous emails to her, which the police had seized as evidence, had nothing to do with terrorism.

“Jihad and terrorism are different things,” she told the court. “You will not meet a young Muslim man in the world who is not angry about something. Anyone who watches the news, if he wasn’t mad then (a) there’s something wrong with him or (b) he’s ignorant.” Not surprisingly, the prosecution limited its examination-in-chief of this witness to less than 10 minutes! In her July 2004 statement to police, Khan had said fighting troops in Muslim lands “is not an act of terrorism.” As reported by the *Ottawa Citizen*, she and Khawaja had “shared a belief in jihad — struggle — that fell far short of terrorism.”

Further evidence of what motivated Mohammad Khawaja was revealed in an *Ottawa Citizen* profile last June that began:

“Four days after the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, a gang of white males in Orléans (an Ottawa suburb) pulled a 15-year-old Muslim boy off his bicycle and beat him unconscious. ... Buried in the Citizen story of the boy’s beating was a quote by a 22-year-old man named Mohammad Khawaja.

“I didn’t think something like that would happen in Orléans,” he told a Citizen reporter during a random interview at the Orléans mosque. “It’s shocking.”

On a pre-trial motion, Khawaja’s lawyer Lawrence Greenspon got Justice Rutherford to strike down on constitutional grounds the *Anti-Terrorism Act*’s requirement that a “terrorist act” be one committed “for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause.” The decision raised eyebrows in the legal defence community as it seemed to widen the potential for terrorism charges to be laid in connection with activities that had no such motivation, such as a strike by workers on wage issues. Greenspon defended his motion, however:

“It gave the right for police to investigate people on the basis of their religious, ideological or political beliefs, which we knew would be Muslim males aged 22 to 45,” he told the *Ottawa Citizen*.

“We’ve been down that road before in the name of security,” he adds. “Let’s target a particular group of people and put them in a camp — the Italians, the Japanese Canadians

— or the FLQ and its sympathizers in the jails of Montreal. What we have now is a definition of terrorism that is a lot closer to the definitions in other western countries.”

Ominous precedent?

In any event, the judge held in his verdict that “there is an abundance of evidence that what was being done by Khawaja . . . and his associates was clearly motivated ‘in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause.’ Whether that is an essential ingredient of these offences or not, it has been abundantly proven.” No doubt this finding will play some role in the probable appeal.

The *Khawaja* verdict makes clear that the “terrorist” label can be slapped on any armed resistance to Canadian and NATO troops in Afghanistan or elsewhere. It ominously echoes the reasoning of the Bush Administration in another case involving a young Canadian Muslim — Omar Khadr, the Canadian child soldier who has been imprisoned and tortured by the U.S. military in Guantánamo since 2001, and is now charged with killing a U.S. soldier in Afghanistan during a U.S. attack on his family’s residence that killed his father. There is now eyewitness evidence that Khadr did not shoot the soldier in question. And there is a mounting movement in Canada demanding the return to this country of this last remaining citizen of a Western power being held in Guantánamo.

However, even if Khadr is returned to Canada what is his likely fate? He may not be prosecuted for murder. But following the judge’s reasoning in Khawaja’s case, is it excluded that Khadr, as a non-military “enemy combatant” in Afghanistan, could be considered a “terrorist” in Canadian law and subject to the extreme penalties in the *Anti-Terrorism Act*?

Richard Fidler, a Socialist Voice Contributing Editor, maintains the blog Life on the Left. This article has also been published in MRzine.

Socialist Voice #285, November 17, 2008

Olympics Financing and Housing Crisis Shape Vancouver Election

By Roger Annis

Vancouver's November 15 municipal election was a rout for the incumbent Non-Partisan Alliance, which is closely tied to right-wing parties in the provincial and federal governments. Former NDP MLA Gregor Robertson, the candidate of the Vision Vancouver party, was elected mayor, and Vision took seven seats on the ten-member city council. Its electoral allies, the Coalition of Progressive Electors, took two seats, leaving the NPA just one.

The electorate's lack of enthusiasm for either option was shown by a near record low 26% voter turnout.

This election campaign holds important lessons for independent working class politics across Canada.

Two key concerns emerged in Vancouver's 2008 municipal election: voter discontent with preparations for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, and the city's worsening housing crisis.

The Winter Games have been enthusiastically supported by all major municipal and provincial parties, but from the get-go politicians and corporate promoters have had a tough time selling them to a skeptical population across the province of British Columbia and especially in Vancouver. Worries run high about the cost of hosting the games and the inevitable drain of public financial resources from pressing social and public transportation needs.

Indigenous activists are campaigning against the very idea of holding the Games because most of British Columbia is unceded Indigenous territory.

It took an extraordinary series of maneuvers in 2002 and 2003 to get the Games approved by a process bearing some semblance of public approval, including a plebiscite in Vancouver in February 2003.

Broken promises

The plebiscite passed in large part due to promises that the Games would not affect government spending on social programs. Among other promises: a portion of the units in the vast athlete village to be built in downtown Vancouver would be available for social housing after the Games are over, and real estate developers would not be allowed to displace low-income renters and homeless people in the desperately poor neighbourhood adjacent to Vancouver's downtown.

Social housing as part of the athlete village was tossed after the plebiscite passed. "Too costly," said the municipal and provincial governments. And in the past year, more than one thousand tenants have lost their dwellings as owners of single-room occupancy hotels prepare to cash in on the demand for room rentals by Games visitors or to profit from the escalation of land values in Vancouver's Olympics-fueled real estate market.

‘Green’ Games?

Boosters also claimed the Olympic Games would set lofty environmental objectives. That became laughable as plans were laid to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to widen the highway that links Vancouver to the resort of Whistler, where skiing events are to be held. The pristine area near Vancouver called Eagle Ridge was leveled to make room for the highway.

Other natural areas are being leveled or encroached on to make room for luxury housing projects that highway expansion will enable.

A new rapid transit line connecting Vancouver’s downtown to the airport is to be a showpiece of a “green” Games. But the cost of that line — more than \$1.5 billion — is out of whack with the low number of riders who will use it once the Games are finished and is draining other parts of the metropolitan area of funding for desperately-needed transit expansion.

Meanwhile, federal and provincial governments are undertaking a vast expansion of roads and highways in the Vancouver region as part of a planned doubling of shipments in and out of the port of Vancouver.

Looming cloud of financial debacle

The biggest Games story of all was the looming financial crisis now looming. This will now dog the Vision-dominated council and dominate the provincial election campaign next May.

Construction cost overruns, falsified budgeting, ballooning security costs and the collapse of world financial markets are setting the stage for a deficit of hundreds of millions of dollars that taxpayers will be paying off for decades to come. The latest bombshell came on November 5 when the *Globe and Mail* reported details of an emergency meeting of Vancouver City Council on October 14 where politicians unanimously approved \$100 million in loan guarantees to Millennium Developments, the company building the \$1 billion-plus athlete village.

Millennium had already received a \$190 million loan guarantee from the city. Now it is reporting serious cost overruns as well as difficulty in financing the completion of construction.

The athlete village was supposed to pay for itself through sales of its units into Vancouver’s high-priced condominium market once the Games are over. All that is evaporating as the cost of financing the completion of construction escalates and prices for condominiums decline.

Another recently revealed cost escalation is the cost of “security” for the Games. It was pegged at \$175 million in the original budget but is now “somewhere between 400 million and one billion dollars,” according to federal Minister of Public Safety, Stockwell Day.

Housing protests on the rise

The looming financial debacle comes at a bad time for the cabal of corporate interests that fought to host the Games. Advocates of affordable housing for the poor and homeless in Vancouver are stepping up actions demanding effective and immediate measures by municipal, provincial and federal governments to tackle the city’s growing housing crisis. Significant protest actions have taken place in recent months, and more are planned.

Homelessness in the city is on the rise, as is the cost of rental accommodation. For years, builders have cashed in on condominium construction and conversions and neglected the building of rental units. At the same time, successive federal and provincial governments have all but abandoned building social housing.

Another dimension of the housing crisis will soon emerge as Canada's version of the U.S. housing bubble bursts. House prices in Vancouver are dropping steadily — by 13 % so far this year — while the cost of re-financing is going up. Growing numbers of homeowners will not be able to afford their mortgages and will risk losing their homes.

The homeless fight back

The ruling class in British Columbia was thrown into a panic by an October 14 ruling of the provincial Supreme Court. Justice Carol Ross ruled that in the absence of adequate government shelter programs, homeless people in the provincial capital Victoria have the right to protect themselves from the elements by erecting tents or other shelters in public places. There are 104 shelter beds in the city, which has an estimated homeless population of 1,200.

After the ruling, tent cities immediately sprang up in several city parks. But the Victoria city council acted equally fast—it passed an emergency resolution banning tents or other structures in parks between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. On October 17, police broke up some dozen tents in Beacon Hill Park, the city's oldest and largest park. They arrested five people who resisted the brazen police attack on the spirit of the court decision.

Despite the police attack, there is growing public sympathy for people who provide themselves with shelter by any means necessary.

Two candidates for mayor — no solutions

The housing crisis was a central issue in the Vancouver municipal election. The mayoral and city council candidates of the two leading parties—the incumbent Non-Partisan (sic) Alliance (NPA) and Vision Vancouver— were compelled to address the crisis at public debates and other campaign events.

The NPA is closely allied with the provincial and federal governments that have slashed funding for social housing over the past several decades. Vision, which carries the banner of concern about poverty and homelessness, is heavily funded by real estate and other corporate interests but is also supported and financed by most trade unions and municipal reformers in the city, including leaders of the New Democratic Party (NDP).

Vision promised to fund more emergency shelters for the homeless and apply the city's existing bylaw that obliges slum landlords to repair the worst conditions in their buildings. Enforcement of the bylaw has dropped to near-zero under the NPA regime. Vision mayoral candidate Gregor Robertson also said empty buildings could be used for temporary shelters.

The party made no statement about the court ruling concerning the right to temporary shelter. It did not defend those who erected tent cities in response to the ruling.

Advocates of affordable housing argue for much stronger measures than those offered by Vision. They want a city housing authority to oversee the expansion and upgrading of social housing stock by using the considerable resources at the city's disposal and by pressing other levels of government to act. Vision and the reformist Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) are both silent on the call to create a housing authority.

The Olympics financing debacle became the other key election issue in the closing days of the campaign. It degenerated into farce when, following the November 5 *Globe and Mail* report, the outgoing, lame-duck mayor called for a "police investigation" into the leak of the October 14 city council decision to extend the \$100 million loan bailout. Leading candidates of Vision and COPE agreed to take lie detector tests (!) to prove that they abided by the council decision to keep its decision a secret from the pesky electorate.

Whatever happened to municipal reform in Vancouver?

COPE was formed in 1968 and was the voice for municipal reform in Vancouver in the decades that followed. But it went into decline after winning a majority of city council seats in 2002

A central issue in that election was whether a Vancouver city administration would support the provincial government's bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics. Many in COPE opposed the bid. They saw the Olympics as a profit bonanza for engineering, construction and tourism companies with little benefit for ordinary citizens.

But the party was divided. Trade union leaders and the provincial NDP backed the bid. They lobbied for COPE to support a pro-Olympics mayoral candidate, former policeman Larry Campbell.

Campbell wanted the Olympics to be decided by a plebiscite. After he won the mayoralty, a plebiscite took place in early 2003. COPE was split down the middle and the "yes" side carried the day.

In 2005, three COPE councilors left the party and, with Campbell, formed Vision. They wanted closer ties to the capitalist interests that control the city of Vancouver. They saw COPE's reform program, timid though it was, and especially its activist member base, as obstacles to those plans.

In the 2005 election, the NPA retook the mayoralty and won a majority of city council seats. Vision elected four councilors, COPE only one. Popular disillusion with the passing of the Olympics bid and an uninspiring performance by the COPE-led city council saw voter participation drop to 32 per cent, down from 50 per cent in 2002.

To avoid vote splitting this year, COPE and Vision entered into a non-competition agreement. COPE supported Gregor Robertson for mayor. Other municipal candidacies were shared as follows: City Council — 8 Vision and 2 COPE; School Board — five COPE and four Vision; Parks Board — 4 Vision and 2 COPE. The municipal Green Party was also part of the agreement with one candidate for Parks Board.

The two COPE nominees for City Council were chosen at a meeting of more than three hundred party members on September 28. Two proponents of the agreement with Vision, David Cadman

and Ellen Woodsworth, were selected in a bitter contest that saw former city councilor Tim Louis lose by a handful of votes. Louis is a voice of COPE's left wing and a critic of the agreement with Vision. He argued that the party should have achieved a better division of candidacies.

Needed: Independent working class political action

Working people in Vancouver need a different kind of politics than what we witnessed in the recent campaign.

The collapse of the capitalist financial order will hit the city with increasing ferocity. Working people need a party based on popular mobilization and empowerment that challenges the corporate interests currently dominating the city.

Such a party would fight for affordable housing and would enforce existing laws to protect standards in low-income housing. It would fight for effective public transit and confront the rise in police violence as exemplified by the death-by-taser of Polish visitor Robert Dziekanski at the Vancouver airport in October 2007.

Unlike Vision and the NDP, a municipal working class party would fight for environmental protection and enhancement, including stopping the planned expansion of highways in the Vancouver region. It would not shy away from confronting the provincial and federal governments, which control much of the financial resources needed to make cities livable. In fact, an activist municipal party would be a force for political change at those levels of government, too.

Socialist Voice #286, November 19, 2008

Battered Labour Movement Needs to Agitate Like It's 1944

By John F. Conway

Democracy leads the struggle of the working class not only for better terms for the sale of labour power, but for the abolition of the social system that compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich... Trade unionist politics of the working class is precisely bourgeois politics of the working class." — *V. I. Lenin, What Is To Be Done?*

Lenin's famous booklet, *What Is To Be Done?*, is considered the blueprint for his successful leadership of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 in Russia. He was writing in 1902 and the working class was on the rise. From the mid-1800s to the 1940s the working classes of the advanced capitalist nations engaged in two struggles. One was the narrow economic battle for collective bargaining rights to improve the terms and conditions of work — which led to the trade union movement. The other was the general political campaign for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a socialist society — which led to communist, socialist and social democratic political parties.

What Lenin consistently argued — as Marx had, and as every militant political leader of the working class continued to argue to the present day — was that the working class had to remain keenly aware that the economic fight within capitalism through trade unions, though immensely important, must never be allowed to divert the working class from the general struggle for socialism.

Socialism was never achieved in the advanced capitalist societies. The socialist victory in industrially backward Russia became so distorted under Stalin, after both the death of Lenin and Trotsky's purge and murder, that it tended to discredit the promise of socialism for many. Nevertheless, great gains were made as the capitalist ruling classes embraced the welfare state — if only to prevent the victory of working class political parties. The construction of the welfare state accelerated after the Great Depression and World War II, largely because working class parties either won power or came very close to winning power in the industrial world: the victories of the Labour Party in 1945 in Great Britain and of the CCF in Saskatchewan in 1944; the near victories of the Communist Parties of France and Italy after the war; the rise to power throughout western Europe of social democratic parties.

Add to this the rise of the Soviet Union as an international contender for ideological support for socialism and against capitalism as an economic system, and the pace of the reform of capitalism was astonishing from 1945 to 1980. Yet Capitalist ideological hegemony, and political and economic power, remained dominant in the western, industrialized world. When the Soviet Union imploded in 1991 and turned to capitalism, and the Chinese revolution embraced capitalism to become the industrial workshop of the now capitalist world, socialism was dead as a viable alternative.

As you look around you today, the things that you take for granted as part of our good life were won by the political struggles of the working class and its allies: free health care; free K to 12

public education; minimum wages; labour standards; the health and safety regulation of work places; workers' compensation; employment insurance; the Canada Pension plan — the list goes on and on. Each of these gains was first proposed and then fought for by the working class and its organizations — the trade unions and the political parties the working class founded or helped to found.

Even our democratic system was won only after long and bitter, sometimes bloody, struggles in which the working classes played the central role. When the capitalist democratic revolutions overthrew aristocratic tyranny in the 18th and 19th centuries (with the mass support of an armed working class), they established a democracy of the propertied. Only men with property of a certain value could vote.

The agitations in Great Britain leading to the Reform Act of 1832 — agitations which came very close to a general insurrection — reluctantly added men who rented property of a certain value as also eligible to vote: this meant that one in seven men could vote. Further agitations led to the Reform Act of 1867 which extended the vote to all male householders. Universal suffrage for men in Great Britain was not won until 1918, when all men of 21 got the vote. True universal suffrage was achieved in 1928 when all men and women of 21 got the vote. Canada largely followed Great Britain on the suffrage issue. True universal suffrage was won in Canada in 1960 when all aboriginals under treaty were finally granted the franchise.

The historical record is clear. Democracy was never given freely by the capitalist ruling classes; it had to be taken from them, just as all other reforms had to be taken by struggle.

Beginning in the 1980s, and accelerating after the fall of the Soviet Union, the international capitalist ruling classes again dominated the world as they had in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. The reformist mask of capitalism was discarded, and a vicious neo-liberal “take-back” campaign began. The era of neo-liberal globalization was proclaimed as the justification for a relentless attack on the welfare state and the trade unions — a relentless attack on the working classes of the world.

As technology advanced, factories in high wage areas were closed and redistributed around the globe to low wage areas. Unions were faced with massive layoffs, and contract demands from employers included a whole variety of concessions to cheapen the costs of labour in order to achieve global competitiveness. Unions were compelled to take wage cuts, to accept benefit reductions or eliminations, to accept two-tier wage and benefit packages (one “grandfathering” existing workers with existing wages and benefits, the other for new hires with lower wages and fewer benefits).

Besides this attack on trade unions, capitalist political parties (which now included the formerly pro-labour social democratic parties) proclaimed that the new era of global capitalist competitiveness demanded massive cuts to the welfare state.

This campaign against the trade unions and the welfare state has been going on for over 25 years now, and continues to get worse and worse as the numbers of broken unions and discarded social programs mount each day.

Canada's working class is on the ropes. Its major institutions — the trade unions — are reeling from successive defeats. The number of union members in Canada is in serious decline, from 35 per cent in the 1980s to 28 per cent today. The Canadian Auto Workers — Canada's largest, most successful and most militant union — is in a state of collapse as cuts in the auto industry force it to its knees. The CAW, which denounced concession bargaining and proclaimed it would never, ever go down that road, has now fully embraced concession bargaining and two-tier contracts in the name of the "investment competitiveness" of its bosses.

These are dark days for the trade union movement, days of defeat, concessions, and cap-in-hand pleas to the bosses. If the trade union movement continues down this road, it will only get worse — the concessions demanded by capitalism will never end until the working class is powerless and on its knees.

The political clout of the working class in Canada is at its lowest ebb since prior to the Great Depression. The NDP has bought into neo-liberal ideological hegemony, and has essentially become just another capitalist political party. Unorganized workers feel less and less sympathy for trade unions desperately trying to salvage their entitlements while leaving the unorganized to their fate. Public sympathy for unions is very low since unions appear only concerned about the narrow economic interests of their existing members.

What should the working class and its last remaining institution — the trade unions — do at this juncture?

Perhaps the trade unions should learn from history. What did trade unions do during the Great Depression, the last time capitalists tried to use an economic crisis to crush the modest gains the working class had made? The only power of the working class is its own self-organization. And that is what the trade unions and socialist activists did in the 1930s — they commenced a massive organizing drive of the unorganized; they fought strikes over demanded concessions; they occupied closed factories in solidarity with laid-off workers; they organized the unemployed and the poor; and they produced that great slogan of solidarity — "an injury to one is an injury to all," and actually acted on it.

Today unions are not doing much of this. They say they want to do it, they pass resolutions and make speeches about doing it, but they are not acting. As they accept concessions involving two tiers, they are fracturing their own internal solidarity. As they ignore the plight — except for pious, self-congratulatory resolutions passed at conventions — of the unorganized and the poor, they fracture the solidarity of the class as a whole.

The only way the working class ever obtained any effective power was through mass self-organization.

That was true in 1850, and it is even more true in 2008.

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Socialist Voice Editor Translates Proceedings of Fourth Comintern Congress

In October, John Riddell, co-editor of Socialist Voice, completed a draft translation of the proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International. This ambitious effort (more than 500,000 words) will make all of the resolutions, speeches, and debates from that important 1922 meeting, together with full explanatory annotation, available in English for the first time. The work, which Riddell is preparing in collaboration with the London-based journal Historical Materialism, is planned for publication in 2010.

The following interview with John Riddell about this project was published in the November 22 issue of the British newspaper Socialist Worker.

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By Ken Olende

In 1922 socialists from around the world travelled to Russia to discuss and debate the future of the workers' movement.

In doing so they helped craft the policy of the "united front" — a strategy which has guided efforts to bring revolutionary socialists together with workers and organisations that hold reformist views ever since.

Last month the historian John Riddell completed a translation of the historic conference that charted this course — the Fourth World Congress of the Communist International, held in the cities of Moscow and Petrograd.

The full text of the debates will be ready for publication next year. John spoke to *Socialist Worker* about the project, which was undertaken in collaboration with the *Historical Materialism* book series.

The Communist International was a world union of socialists formed in 1919 by leaders of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. Initially they hoped that the flood tide of revolution would soon sweep capitalism away. But by the time of the fourth congress in 1922 that tide was ebbing — and the congress's character was shaped by this fact.

In particular, the delegates had to discuss how to work with other political currents. "The majority of politically conscious workers in the main countries in Europe still followed reformist parties," explains John.

"That was despite the fact that the leaderships of those parties had betrayed the working class — first by leading them to the slaughter of the First World War, then at the end of the war by blocking attempts to establish socialism.

"But it was not enough to denounce these parties. Some way had to be found to unite with these workers."

Militant forces

In 1922 the working class was on the back foot, struggling to defend earlier gains from a renewed ruling class offensive. “The capitalist economies were in crisis,” says John. “There were massive lay-offs and attacks on workers’ living standards. This posed a great challenge for the unions.

“Most union leaders were reformists — they offered the bosses collaborative support in order to win reforms. By 1922 they weren’t winning any reforms — but they still stuck to this orientation.

“In this situation, what should revolutionary socialists do? Some were tempted to break with the old unions and try to build new ones. But the Communist International stood very strongly for unity within the labour movement.

“It argued that in every industry we should fight to get everyone together in a united struggle. This was difficult, because the reformists were trying to drive the militant forces out of the unions, so they also had to carry out a fight against expulsions.”

The key activities of revolutionaries within unions involved advancing basic demands, he adds — “stop the wage cuts, stop the lay-offs,” but these could go further.

“They would also call for workers’ control of production. In more extreme situations they called for the arming of workers and the formation of workers’ governments.”

In particular the Communist International hoped that the united front would help pull the majority of workers to the left. “They believed that divisions in the working class could be overcome in struggle. People would see that if they stood together, they could win.

“That in turn would encourage them towards other victories. It would take them on the trajectory of the struggle for workers’ power, regardless of what prejudices they might previously have held. The idea was — let’s fight together and win together, and in that way we’ll resolve our differences.”

The year 1922 was a critical time for the working class in other respects too. “The congress took place just after the first victory of fascism, when Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy,” says John.

Fascism was then a totally new phenomenon. But the conference debated how to fight it and crafted the policy of organising a united front against fascism.

“They didn’t come to this decision easily,” John notes. “It was something that brewed through the congress and was finally arrived at just in time for inclusion in the final resolution.”

Great weight

Reading the transcripts of the conference, “you really get the impression of the great weight of the rank and file, of frontline fighters, helping to craft this decision — and also of the weight of the congress itself as an arena in which discussion could take place.”

Combing through these records was a central part of John's historical research. "The congress took place before air travel," he says. "It took weeks for delegates to get there. And once they got there, they talked for about three weeks."

People who had attended the congresses "wanted the folks back home to know what had been said," which drove them to take extensive notes. "They took a detailed record of the discussion and published it in book form."

So the basic record of the congresses has long been available — but the translation into English was often not good. John's project has included retranslation from original German and Russian texts.

He is now in the final stages of producing a book of the proceedings. This will contain new material, he explains, such as records that have been locked in Russian archives since the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin.

The Communist International was created as a centralised international party rather than the much looser structure that had characterised previous international socialist federations such as the Second International. John explains why this was the case.

"You have to look back to what happened at the outbreak of the First World War," he says. "The reformist leaders helped herd the workers into the war — despite the fact that they had passed resolutions at the Second International saying they would never do that.

"The Communist International was founded on the idea that you must not betray your international. The principles of the international take priority over the tactical problems of this or that country."

There are obvious advantages to this method, says John, but also dangers that flowed from the fact that the International was dominated by Russia — the only country to have pulled off a successful socialist revolution.

The fourth congress was the last to largely avoid those dangers. It was also the last one that Lenin attended.

"After Lenin's death the Russian Bolshevik party came to be dominated by a conservative bureaucracy headed by Stalin," says John. "It degenerated, swerved to the right and eventually became an instrument for counter-revolution.

"Then this concept that the international always came first was utilised to make all the member parties around the world follow Stalin's orders and Russian foreign policy.

"For example, in Germany there was an attempt to deny the legacy of Rosa Luxemburg, one of the greatest socialist leaders ever.

"Now Luxemburg was right on some questions and wrong on others, but this rejection of her was aimed at making the German party a simple transmission belt for the decrees of Moscow."

Mistakes in Germany promoted by Stalin fatally weakened the Communist Party there. They failed to create a united front with reformist socialists — and failed to stop Adolf Hitler's rise to power.

However, John is studying an earlier, more positive period, when the united front tactic was central. "Conditions were so different in different places. For example, take the united front against imperialism in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

"Countries such as China, India, Indonesia and Iran all had small but very able groups of Communists. In these countries mass movements were beginning to take shape against colonialism."

Dissolving

The communists had to decide how to work with these larger forces without dissolving themselves within them or painting them as more left wing than they actually were.

"Look at the situation in Turkey in 1920," says John. "It was sort of like the Iraq war now. There was an attempt by the imperialist powers — above all the British — to dismember Turkey.

"The Turks were led by Mustafa Kemal. He was a fighter for national liberation, but from a conservative wing of the ruling layers of Turkey. His perspective was definitely capitalist and not socialist.

"The response of both the Soviet Union and the Communist International was to form a united front with him, despite all of the disagreements, in order to beat back imperialism.

"They felt that if this struggle could be won and imperialists driven out of Turkey, it would turn the tide for the entire region.

"By 1922 Turkey had won. But Kemal's government repressed both the Communists and the workers' movement. The Communist International protested loudly against that.

"At the same time it emphasised that they would always stand with Turkey against the imperialist powers in defence of Turkish independence.

"Another good example are the Islamic anti-imperialist movements of the day. They were very militant, but were usually hostile to socialism.

"The united front tried to build a bridge to these forces and create an effective anti-imperialist struggle. But unity with Islamic fighters was not so easy to achieve. They were working within a religious framework of the unity of Islamic people internationally.

"The Communist International had initially taken the position that pan-Islamism was not progressive. Some Communists, particularly those from Algeria and Indonesia, came to the fourth congress to get that policy changed. It was modified to say that we definitely want to unite with Islamic fighters and we regard their struggle as progressive.

"It added that we maintain our own communist views on the historic role of the working class and how socialism will be achieved, but we will discuss that within a framework of fraternal unity."

Socialist Voice #288, November 28, 2008

Making the World's Poor Pay: The Economic Crisis and the Global South

By Adam Hanieh

The current global economic crisis has all the earmarks of an epoch-defining event. Mainstream economists-not usually known for their exaggerated language-now openly employ phrases like “systemic meltdown” and “peering into the abyss.”

On October 29, for example, Martin Wolf, one of the top financial commentators of the Financial Times, warned that the crisis portends “mass bankruptcy,” “soaring unemployment,” and a “catastrophe” that threatens “the legitimacy of the open market economy itself....The danger remains huge and time is short.”

There is little doubt that this crisis is already having a devastating impact on heavily indebted households in the US. But one of the striking characteristics of analysis to date-by both the Left and the mainstream media-is the almost exclusive focus on the wealthy countries of North America, Europe, and East Asia. From foreclosures in California to the bankruptcy of Iceland, the impact of financial collapse is rarely examined beyond the advanced capitalist core.

The pattern of capitalist crisis over the last fifty years should alert us to the dangers of this approach. Throughout its history, capitalism has functioned through the geographical displacement of crisis by attempting to offload the worst impacts onto those outside the core. This article presents a short survey of what this crisis might mean for the Global South.

World trade drops

This crisis hits a world economy that-for the first time in history-is truly global. Of course exports and the control of raw materials have always been important to capitalism. But up until the 1970s most capitalist production was organized nationally. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s both production and consumption began to be organized at the international scale. Today, markets are dominated by a handful of large companies operating internationally through interconnected chains of production, sub-contracting, and marketing. Almost every product we consume has involved the labor of thousands of people scattered across the globe-from the production of raw material inputs, research and development (R&D), assembly, transport, marketing, and financing. At one level this interconnectedness of production suggests that human beings have become one social organism. At the same time, it continually runs up against a system organized for the pursuit of individual, private profit.

This interconnectedness has taken a very particular form over the last couple of decades. The world market has been structured around the consumption of the US (and, to a lesser extent, European) consumer. Goods produced in low-wage production zones such as China and India-using raw materials mostly sourced from other countries in the South-are exported to the US where they end up in the ever-expanding homes of overly indebted consumers. Control of this

global chain of production and consumption rests in the hands of large US, European, and Japanese conglomerates.

This structure helped to fracture and roll back national development projects across the globe. Coupled with the debt crisis of the 1980s, export-oriented models of development were imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other financial institutions on most countries in the South. Many of the elites of these countries bought into this development model as they gained ownership stakes in newly privatized companies and access to markets in the North.

The ever-expanding consumption of the US market is/has been predicated on a massive rise in indebtedness. US consumers were encouraged to take on vast levels of debt (through credit cards, mortgages, “zero-down” financing, etc.) in order to maintain the consumption levels that underpinned global demand. The dollars that enabled this growth in debt came from financial instruments that were purchased by Asian central banks and others around the world. These institutions lent dollars back to the US where they were channeled to consumers through banks and other mechanisms.

The US real estate market was just one of the financial bubbles that permitted this treadmill of increasing indebtedness to continue. People could continually refinance their mortgages as real estate prices went up. But with the collapse of this bubble, global world demand is suddenly drying up. Because of the interconnectedness of world trade, this will have a very severe impact on every country across the globe, particularly in the South.

One measure of this is a relatively obscure economic indicator called the Baltic Dry Index (BDI). The BDI measures the cost of long-distance shipping for commodities such as coal, iron ore, and steel. From June to November 2008, the BDI fell by 92 percent, with rental rates for large cargo ships dropping from \$234,000 a day to \$7,340. This massive drop reflects two factors: the reduction in world demand for raw materials and other commodities, and the inability of shippers to have their payments guaranteed by banks because of the credit crisis.

Falling commodity prices also demonstrate this drop-off in world trade. Copper prices, for example, have fallen 23 percent in the past two months. Chinese consumption of the metal, critical to much industrial production, has fallen by more than half this year. ArcelorMittal, the world’s largest steelmaker, stated on November 5 that its global output would decline by more than 30 percent. The World Bank (which has consistently underestimated the severity of the current downturn) is now predicting global trade volumes to shrink for the first time since 1982.

Social dislocation

This drop in world trade will have a particularly devastating impact on those countries that have adopted export-oriented models of development. This model was heavily promoted by the World Bank, the IMF, and most economists over the last couple of decades. As global demand shrinks, countries reliant on exports will be faced with collapse of their core industries and potential mass unemployment. This will place further pressure on wages as new labor reserves augment already large levels of unemployment.

Standard Chartered estimate, for example, that Chinese exports could tumble to “zero or even negative growth” in 2009. JP Morgan Chase is predicting that Chinese exports will fall 5.7 percent for every one percent drop in global economic growth. This is not just a matter of getting by on smaller levels of still positive growth. China needs to create 17 million jobs a year in order to deal with the large numbers of farmers moving from the countryside to urban areas. Even if growth drops from 11-12 percent annually to 8 percent, the country faces potentially huge social dislocation. Already, workers in China are protesting in the millions as their factories close and owners abscond with unpaid wages.

A collapse in world trade is not the only potentially devastating threat this crisis presents to the global periphery. Like the 1997 Asian Crisis, the rapid withdrawal or repatriation of foreign funds from stock markets and other investments in the South could cause the meltdown of currencies and the collapse of industries already reeling from slowdowns in trade. A quick survey of a few countries demonstrates the deadly mix of capital outflows, high inflation, and drops in export earnings:

- In Pakistan, foreign-currency reserves have dropped more than 74 percent in the past year to about \$4.3 billion. The country is teetering on the edge of total collapse and urgently requires \$6 billion in order to pay for imports and service its existing debt. The dire situation of foreign outflows led the German foreign minister to state on October 28 that the “world has just six days to save Pakistan.” (At the time of writing it looks like Pakistan will get this money in the form of loans from the IMF and/or countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.)
- India has seen its foreign exchange reserves drop by 17 percent since March 2008. Over \$51 billion left India during the third week of October, the largest fall in eight years. The Indian textile industry, which makes up the second largest component of the country’s labor force after agriculture, exports 70 percent of its product to US and European markets. It is expected that textile and garment orders will decline by at least 25 percent over the winter and mass layoffs have already begun. On October 29, the Association of Chambers of Commerce and Industries predicted that companies in seven key industries (steel, cement, finance, construction, real estate, aviation, and information technology) would need to cut 25 percent of their workforce.

These patterns are repeated across the globe. Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, Brazil, Argentina, and South Korea, as well as the poorer countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, face collapsing growth rates, capital flight, and declines in the value of their currencies. In many cases, these problems have been exacerbated due to a proliferation of low-interest loans taken by individuals and companies that were denominated in foreign currency (such as Swiss francs, Euros, and dollars). These loans initially offered a better interest rate than the domestic currency but, as local currencies have dropped in value, the amount of money required to be repaid has increased dramatically. Business Week estimates that borrowers in these so-called emerging markets owe some \$4.7 trillion in foreign-denominated debt, up 38 percent over the past two years. This is the reassertion of a debt crisis from the 1980s that never really went away, but only partially subsided.

IMF returns

This unfolding social crisis has returned the IMF to center stage. Typically, the IMF lends to those countries facing potential collapse and, in return, demands the fulfillment of stringent economic conditions. The scale of borrowing is already immense: Iceland (\$2.4 billion), Ukraine (\$16.5 billion), and Hungary (\$15.7 billion) have been extended loans. Pakistan, Serbia, Belarus, and Turkey are likely candidates in the near future.

The conditions that come with this latest round of IMF lending have been particularly opaque. The policies that Ukraine is expected to pass, for example, are not yet known despite the fact that the country has essentially agreed to accept a \$16.5 billion loan. Hungary has already agreed to cut welfare spending, freeze salaries, and cancel bonuses for public sector workers, but the final details of the deal have not been made public. Iceland was required to raise interest rates to 18 percent with the economy predicted to contract by 10 percent and inflation reaching 20 percent.

We can certainly expect that the conditions attached to loans in the poorer countries in the Global South will be much more stringent than those imposed on these European countries. There is little doubt that these countries will face massive job losses, intense pressure to privatize public resources, and the slashing of state spending on welfare, education, and health in the name of “balanced budgets.” Whether these attacks on the social fabric are successful, however, will ultimately depend on the level of resistance they face.

Authoritarian state

On October 11, a meeting of progressive economists in Caracas, Venezuela, issued a statement warning that the dynamic of this crisis “encourages new rounds of capital concentration and, if the people do not firmly oppose this, it is becoming perilously likely that restructuring will occur simply to save privileged sectors.” This is an important point to understand: capitalist crisis doesn’t automatically lead to the end of capitalism. Without effective resistance and struggle, the crisis will eventually be resolved at the expense of working people-particularly those in the South.

This could be one of the most serious crises that capitalism has faced in living memory. But we should not be fooled into thinking that the system will somehow be reformed or its contradictions solved through peaceful and orderly means. The most likely immediate outcome is a hardened, more authoritarian state that seeks to restore profitability through ratcheting up repression and forcing people to accept the loss of jobs, housing, and any kind of social support. In the South, this will inevitably mean more war and military repression.

If this is not prevented then the system will utilize this crisis to restructure and continue business as usual. This is why resistance-both at home and abroad-will be the single most important determinant of how this eventually plays out. In Latin America, for example, attempts to restrict capital flight, place key economic sectors under popular control, and establish alternative currency and trade arrangements are important initiatives that point to the necessity of solutions beyond capitalism. In the Middle East, popular resistance to the political and economic control of the region has undoubtedly checked the extension of US power.

Any displacement of crisis onto the South means playing different groups of people against one another. For this reason, the ideological corollary of war and military repression abroad is likely an increasingly virulent racism in the North-directed at immigrants, people of color, and indigenous populations. This means that for activists in North America the question of global solidarity and resistance to racism must be a central priority of any effective fight-back. Any attempt to turn inwards or dismiss international solidarity as less important in this phase will be disastrous for all working people across the globe.

Adam Hanieh writes on the political economy of the Middle East and is a graduate student at York University, Toronto. This article was first published in Left Turn.

Socialist Voice #289, November 30, 2008

Toronto ‘Good Jobs for All Summit’ Builds Unity of Working People

By Robert Johnson

The “Good Jobs For All Summit” in Toronto on November 22 was good news for labour – an important advance in building the unity of all working people. Of the approximately 900 who took part in the one-day conference, about half were workers who are not union members, and many were from oppressed minorities.

The initiative for the conference came from the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, which brought together more than 30 local unions and community-based advocacy groups in the Good Jobs Coalition. Meetings were held in various communities to prepare for the event. These efforts proved fruitful; attendance was more than twice what organizers had expected.

The gathering continued the spirit of the Ontario Federation of Labour initiative last year when the OFL combined with community groups and the New Democratic Party (NDP) in a powerful campaign for an immediate increase in the minimum wage from \$8 to \$10. The pressure forced the provincial government to legislate an increase to \$10.25 by the end of 2010.

A fighting, multinational working class

Toronto is one of the most nationally diverse cities in the world, and this was strongly reflected in the conference. At least a third of the participants were people of colour. The conference opened with a First Nations welcome. The proceedings were translated into Tamil, Chinese, and Somali, and a dozen different languages were used when the final declaration was read to the conference.

The three hours devoted to workshops marked the high point of the day. Women and members of oppressed nationalities played prominent roles in these discussions. Participants, some members of a union, others not, described the many ways that they are abused in their work, living conditions, and legal status.

But the presentations and discussions did more than describe such exploitation. In most cases, the same workers described how they have been fighting back, often with the support of local unions and/or community advocacy groups. I was particularly moved by three presentations – one by a immigrant farm worker from Trinidad, one by a live-in caregiver from the Philippines, and another by an Asian-Canadian auto parts factory worker.

Organizing among the most oppressed

Participants in the workshops were able to learn more about union organizing efforts, for example by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), which is organizing farm workers, and by UNITE-HERE, which is organizing hotel staff. Rank and file workers involved in these struggles participated actively in the workshops that I attended.

The design of the workshops and above all the active participation of these workers in them reinforced a strong sense of solidarity between workers who are in unions and those who are not, with a particular stress on solidarity with the most oppressed and exploited members of our class.

Another common theme was the need for union members to support the struggles of other unions.

Overall, the attendees were not particularly young, but the leaders of the workshops that I observed appeared to me to be approximately 25 to 35 years old. They spoke and acted with the confidence of people seasoned in struggles. A good number were women.

The Good Jobs Coalition supports a number of community and labour campaigns for social justice. These were promoted throughout the conference by participants, aided by about a dozen different literature tables.

For example, “Equal Pay For Equal Work” is a campaign of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) that demands fair treatment for part-time and temporary workers. “Justice for Janitors,” a division of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), fights against the abusive wages and working conditions of cleaning staff, many of whom service the offices of Canada’s richest corporations. The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care has been promoting universally accessible, quality, non-profit regulated child care since 1981.

Limitations and uneven participation

The conference also reflected the limitations of the prevailing union leadership. The leadership’s orientation of class collaborationism was most apparent in the tone and content of the opening plenary session, which resembled that of many routine union gatherings, and in the presentations of Dave Foster and Maria Elena Durazo, two of the keynote speakers.

Deena Ladd, the other keynote speaker, took a different approach. She gave a hard-hitting talk that introduced many of the themes that were taken up in the workshops. Ladd is the coordinator of the Workers’ Action Centre in Toronto, which defends such groups as low-wage immigrant workers, women, racial minorities, and people in precarious jobs.

The same limitations were expressed in the final declaration of the conference.

Judging by the contributions that I heard during the workshop sessions, union attendance at the conference was uneven. The strongest participation came from unions and locals that have been involved in the struggles that were being discussed, notably some locals of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, UNITE HERE, the UFCW, and the SEIU. I heard no contributions from production workers in the big auto or steel plants, although they may have been present.

Both NDP federal leader Jack Layton, and Olivia Chow, the Member of Parliament for Trinity-Spadina, attended; Chow participated in the workshop on immigration policy and labour, but these were the only signs of an NDP presence that I observed.

The meeting adjourned without deciding on any concrete steps to advance the campaign for good jobs. I understand that the organizers will meet soon to consider how to follow up on their success.

A glimpse of labour's future

Taken as a whole, the Good Jobs For All Summit registered an important advance toward the goal of uniting all workers. It also provided a glimpse of what the labour movement can and must become as the class struggle deepens – the spearhead of a broad social movement fighting on behalf of all toilers for social justice and for a better world.

The Summit was the product of months of organizing by labour and community activists. Other labour councils and federations can learn from their example.

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For more information:

- Equal Pay For Equal Work campaign
- Good Jobs Coalition
- Hotel Workers Rising
- Justice for Janitors
- Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care