

## The Issue of Party-Building is the Central Issue of the Day

-Statement of the Manitoba Regional Committee, January 1, 2009

The past year has been a momentous year for the working class and people. The crisis of capitalism has emerged with a vengeance, with an intensity which we were assured could never happen again. People's faith in the capitalist system is being shaken on a daily basis and presents possibilities for the communists and other revolutionary forces to make advances. However, in order for that to happen the revolutionary party of the working class must be established. This is the case not only in Canada but in virtually every country of the world.

This was the task that the Manitoba Regional Committee (MRC) set itself at its Regional Conference of 1999-2000. However, the task did not begin then. If we could pinpoint a beginning of this work, it would be the publication of the

Manifesto of the Communist Party by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and the establishment of a branch of the First International in Canada. The task re-emerged again following the Great October Socialist Revolution and the betrayal of revolution by the parties of the Second International. It emerged once more when the Khrushchevites betrayed socialism in the early 1950s.

This was the task adopted by the Internationalists in 1967 and the Canadian Communist Movement in 1968. It was also the ongoing work of CPC(M-L), and has been the work of the MRC in Manitoba for almost 40 years now. The founding of the Party in 1970 was an important milestone in this regard, but it also represented neither the beginning nor the end of

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## Israel's Escalating Atrocities in Gaza

On January 6, the eleventh day of its latest Gaza offensive (Operation Cast Lead), the Israeli air force bombed two United Nations-run schools, one in the Jabaliya refugee camp, killing 42 Palestinians. After the Israeli air force dropped Arabic-language flyers in the area alerting residents there would be bombings, hundreds of unarmed civilians crowded into the two schools seeking shelter. Israel then targeted them both, claiming Hamas militants fired rockets from the school yards. Given that Israeli has barred all international reporters from the Gaza strip, it is a claim that is difficult to prove. Israeli army spokespeople, it should be noted, have a history of claiming they were responding to militant rocket fire after they deliberately bomb civilian targets.

According to media reports, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, (UNRWA), provided Israeli authorities with GPS-coordinates of all its installations in Gaza, including the two schools. UNRWA is calling for a detailed explanation.

"There's nowhere safe in Gaza. Everyone here is terrorized and traumatized," John Ging, the UN head in Gaza told reporters. Ging went on to blame the international community for its inaction.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, (ICRC), the situation in Gaza is a "full-blown humanitarian crisis". The ICRC is also investigating reports that the Israeli army is targeting ICRC-affiliated medics, ambulances and stations.

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the work to build the revolutionary party of the working class. This is the constant work of the revolutionary communist movement.

Furthermore, over the years there have been other organizations subscribing to communism and revolution which also took up the work to build the revolutionary party of the working class.

Given the state of the revolutionary communist movement today, it may be tempting to conclude that CPC(M-L) failed to accomplish its goal and that all of the various other communist/revolutionary organizations also failed. However, that would be a mistake. The building of a revolutionary working class party anywhere in the world, let alone in the heartland of imperialism, is not an easy task. It takes many twists and turns. Some projects succeed and some fail. Individual parties come and go. But the necessity remains and so too does the work. Human understanding is a complicated process and we often learn more from our failures than from our successes. Those of us who worked in CPC(M-L) for many years learned valuable lessons from that experience, as did those who worked in other organizations and even those who did not formally belong to any organization. This experience, both positive and negative, is part of the experience of the Canadian and international working class.

At this time the work to rebuild the revolutionary party of the working class is at a low ebb everywhere. However, there is a growing consensus amongst the anti-capitalist and pro-socialist forces that every country needs such a party and that revolution is impossible without it. Discussions are going on in many countries about how to achieve such a party. In some countries the sectarian spirit of the past is predominant, while in others some headway is being made to overcome sectarianism and move forward.

It is important to understand that the problem of party-building poses itself differently in every country. Some principles may be universal, but the strategy and tactics of implementing those principles varies according to the specific conditions we face. Some countries have relatively large organizations which espouse various ideologies that fall under the general banner of communism. Other countries, such as

Canada, have no significant parties or organizations at this time although various political tendencies exist here, as well. While there are differences of opinion between the various political tendencies, these differences should not be put in the way of the advance of the revolutionary movement. There are more than enough areas of agreement to form the basis for some form of political arrangement against our common enemy.

It is also important to understand that the strategy and tactics of party-building vary over time. What worked in the 1960s is not necessarily valid today. What worked for the Bolsheviks in 1917 may also not be valid today. Principles are crucial, but if they become reduced to dogmas they are worse than useless.

As revolutionary communists and Marxist-Leninists, we have very definite opinions on what kind of ideology and what kind of organization a revolutionary party must have. However, as much as we wish it to be the case, our views are not shared by all revolutionaries. In fact, our views are currently in the minority, to put it mildly. And there is always the possibility that our views may be proved incorrect, as difficult as that may be for us to accept. Regardless, it was always the position of CPC(M-L) that ideology must serve politics and not the other way around. This is a crucial point, because there has always been pressure within the communist and revolutionary movements to elevate ideology to first place and to make it the basis of unity (or more often than not the basis of disunity). The MRC does not agree with that perspective. As Marxist-Leninist communists we oppose both dogmatism and pragmatism. We do not agree with making ideology the basis of unity nor do we agree with unity at all costs, that is unprincipled unity.

The main and most urgent task facing the Canadian working class is to establish a revolutionary party. As communists this must therefore be our main political objective. The first question that emerges from this political objective is what exactly constitutes a revolutionary party. It is the position of the MRC that a revolutionary party must be an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist organization. It must stand for the

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overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement with socialism.

Must it also be Marxist-Leninist in its outlook? The MRC considers this to be an important attribute of any revolutionary organization, because it is our belief that without Marxism-Leninism a revolutionary organization will not be particularly effective. However, we cannot agree with making Marxism-Leninism a basis of unity. Rather, it is the job of the Marxist-Leninists (as is the case with other political tendencies) within such an organization to use their political skills and insights to lead the organization in the solving of problems and advancing the revolutionary movement. What, after all, is Marxism-Leninism if not the scientific approach to solving political problems? Marxism-Leninism is not just a collection of writings and teachings of some dead revolutionaries. Nor is it merely a methodology as some claim. It is the scientific method applied to politics. And just as is the case with any other science, Marxism-Leninism has a number of underlying principles, including its partisanship to the working class, its anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, its attitude towards the state and so on. Many of the solutions to problems discovered by the founders of Marxism-Leninism remain valid and relevant today, while others have surely lost their relevancy over the course of time, as is the case with every other field of scientific endeavour. The issue is not to duplicate solutions to problems of the past, but to discover solutions to the problems of today.

One of the problems of today is that Marxism-Leninism has lost its authoritativeness. This has its drawbacks, but it also has its advantages. When Marxism-Leninism was accepted as the be-all and end-all of revolutionary theory, many things were accepted without question because the party said so. Many terrible things were accepted as normal which no self-respecting revolutionary would have tolerated coming from the bourgeoisie. We do not want Marxism-Leninism to have that kind of authority. We want Marxist-Leninists who can speak with authority, but we do not want Marxist-Leninists who are followed blindly simply because they are Marxist-Leninists. That kind of authority is corrosive and dangerous. Revolutionaries are created by adversity

and struggle, not by surrounding themselves with sycophants. So, if we Marxist-Leninists are forced to justify our positions, to constantly elaborate, to win over people through the force of our logic and arguments, what is the downside to that? That is what being political means.

The period we are in at present is similar in some ways to the mid-1960s. A revolutionary movement does not yet exist, but such a movement shows signs of beginning. A revolutionary party does not yet exist, but many people are gravitating towards establishing one. The exact form and content of such a party is also up in the air. In summation, we are in the period of preparing to build a revolutionary party. In many ways, this is the most important period because the work we do now will to a large degree determine the shape that such a party will take in the future.

So, what approach does the MRC advocate? We think that the basis of unity should be agreement with the need for a revolutionary anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist organization. However, at this time we are faced with enormous pressure that revolution is neither possible nor necessary in Canada, even amongst those who do not agree with social democracy. Therefore, we cannot restrict the discussion to those who already agree with the necessity for revolution, but rather must involve everyone who feels the need for a new working class party. This is an issue that we have been emphasizing for some time now. Pessimism about the possibility of revolution in Canada is the legacy of the Liberal-Labour alliance and the abandonment of the revolutionary path by the communist movement of the 1940s and 1950s. The Liberal-Labour alliance in Canada, like the New Deal in the U.S. and similar arrangements in other countries, represented an alliance between the dominant section of monopoly capital and a section of the working class – the labour aristocracy and the trade unions controlled by it – with the aim of blocking the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. For over 60 years the Liberal-Labour alliance has worked non-stop to convince the Canadian working class that revolution is neither necessary nor possible in Canada. The MRC is convinced that the defeat of this anti-working

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class alliance is a crucial task facing both a revolutionary party and the broader revolutionary movement.

In summary, we believe that the basis of unity for a new revolutionary party must be: 1. agreement with the goal of the revolutionary (in its broad sense of rapid and fundamental change) transformation of society from capitalism to socialism; and 2. opposition to imperialism. Once such a party is established it may very well decide to modify its basis of unity to correspond to changing circumstances. However, this would constitute a minimum basis of unity for any revolutionary organization.

The goal of the MRC over the next year is to further develop the discussion about the necessity to build a new revolutionary working class party. We are open to talk to anyone who expresses an interest in such a discussion. We think that it is quite crucial that we present our views on the subject as widely as possible in order to divert any attempts to establish some kind of “pre-revolutionary” organization, that is, a left social democratic organization with revolutionary pretensions. We are convinced that the current crisis is going to radicalize the Canadian working class, especially the young workers, and that the creation of a revolutionary pole in Canadian politics will attract increasing support in the coming months and years.

Great efforts are being made to line up workers behind “their own” capitalists and behind the Liberal party, but despite all of the money and propaganda of the trade unions for the “coalition” to replace Harper, they have not succeeded in capturing the imagination of the working class. In other words, the crisis is only beginning and the labour aristocracy is already in trouble. They are extremely vulnerable, but only from revolutionary positions. There are some on the “left” trying to throw them a lifeline, to provide them with “revolutionary” sounding demands to cover up their abject capitulation to big capital. So part of our efforts over the next year will also be to cut those lifelines.

This is not the first time that the labour aristocracy has been in deep crisis and it is not accidental that the

former crises of the labour aristocracy were also associated with severe crises of capitalism – first in the late 1800s and early 1900s and again in the 1930s. Those who attempt to tie the working class hand and foot to the capitalist system are bound to go into crisis when capitalism goes into crisis and all of the illusions they have pedaled are smashed. In those previous periods the working class, or more precisely its revolutionary wing, responded to the crisis by establishing a new form of trade union movement, revolutionary trade unions which not only organized the day-to-day economic struggles of the workers but also educated them about the necessity to overthrow the capitalist system itself. The new revolutionary trade union movements (in North America, the Industrial Workers of the World and later the Congress of Industrial Organizations) found themselves opposed not only by the capitalists and their state, but also by the old trade union movement. In the absence of a revolution of the working class, these new trade unions lost their revolutionary edge and were absorbed into the old, capitalist trade union movement. Hence the necessity to take up the task once again to build a revolutionary, anti-capitalist trade union movement.

Ultimately, the work of party-building does not take place in a vacuum. It takes place within the working class movement as a whole. So, we should look seriously at what constitutes the working class movement.

In its most general form, the working class movement is the class struggle of the working class against the capitalist class. That struggle expresses itself in various ways – economic, political, ideological, cultural, journalistic, electoral, and so on. There are those who suggest that there is a hierarchy of forms of struggle with economic struggle at the bottom and political struggle at the top. However, we do not agree with that analysis. We see it as one struggle with many forms and many fields of battle. Therefore, while the greatest need at this specific time in history may be to establish a revolutionary party of the working class that is not the only work which must be carried out. In fact, there is a dialectical

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relationship between all of the various aspects of the class struggle. We cannot build a party without looking after the other needs of the working class, as well.

What are those needs? The working class needs revolutionary trade unions to organize the various economic struggles that the working class of necessity must wage. The working class needs a broad movement of the people, a movement against war, against impoverishment, against racism and fascism and so on, in other words a movement of the working class and its allies against various consequences of capitalism and imperialism and for democracy. Without a revolutionary party there can be no revolutionary movements of any kind, but at the same time, without such movements there can be no revolutionary party. This is the conundrum that the revolutionary forces find themselves in today, because the problem is being looked at in a mechanical way. They feel they cannot build a revolutionary party because there are no revolutionary trade unions and no broad revolutionary movement. But they cannot build such movements because there is no revolutionary party. As a result, many people who consider themselves socialists and communists are ready to throw up their hands and declare defeat, to accept that the whole project is impossible.

However, neither is the project impossible, nor can we approach it mechanically. It is not the case that one aspect of the work follows another in a chronological fashion. We have to accept and try to understand the dialectical nature of the problem. We have to look at what is absent and begin providing ourselves with those things that we lack. In fact, we lack organizations and institutions on every front of the class struggle. We need institutions of revolutionary culture; we need an electoral vehicle and ultimately we will need some form of military organization. But the key problems at this time are those identified above – the lack of a revolutionary party, the lack of revolutionary trade unions and the (relative) lack of a broad anti-capitalist, anti-

imperialist movement of the people. These problems must be solved simultaneously and in an organic way.

One of the things that we have learned over the past 30-some years is that nothing can be built without a movement, without a broad collective effort and maximum political mobilization. So to pose the problem in a slightly different form, we need a movement to build a new party, we need a movement to organize the working class into revolutionary trade unions and we need a broad popular movement for democracy. So these are the movements that we have to build. Fortunately for us, the conditions for building all three movements have not been so favourable at least since the early 1970s and probably not since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

What we are calling for is a discussion amongst the revolutionary and progressive forces with the aim of building three great movements: a movement to establish a new revolutionary party; a movement to organize the unorganized (and the already-organized) into a new, revolutionary trade union movement; and a movement for democratic reform under the general banner of Make the Rich Pay for the Crisis! These three movements require their own specificities, but are also complementary in nature. So long as we approach this work as a totality, as necessary component parts of organizing the working class, then any work done on one front will also assist the work on the other fronts.

The MRC considers this last point to be of special significance and bears emphasis. We must not approach this work with a sectarian spirit, from the perspective that we have all the answers and everyone must bow to us. We are not interested in building a new religion. Nor are we interested in building a new party which belongs to us. That spirit infected the revolutionary movement of the 1960s and 1970s and we can see the consequences today. We need to take the perspective that we are building a party and movements which belong to the entire working class. Much as we may wish it to be the case, the working class is not a monolithic class, nor

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will it be for a very long time because there are a myriad of conflicting interests between different sections of the working class. There are also many different political tendencies within the working class, including social democracy (and worse) and we have to find non-antagonistic methods of dealing with those tendencies and diverting them towards the goal of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Does that mean that we should water down the basis of unity of a new party so that it is acceptable to social democratic workers? Or to Liberal or Conservative workers? Of course not. What it means is that we cannot automatically dismiss uniting with a section of the working class because we disagree with its politics. We have to look for areas of agreement rather than areas of disagreement. We must be imbued with a spirit of unity rather than disunity. There are many workers, and soon will be many more, who are fed up with the current trade unions, with their class collaborationism and impotence. If a worker agrees with us on that issue, what do we care who he or she votes for? Similarly, on the broad democratic front, why can't we unite with people who agree with us only to that extent and disagree on other issues? It is our position that there is a need for many kinds of organizations and, if the need arises for an organization which is capable of uniting on a broader basis, then such an organization should be built instead of broadening the basis of unity of a revolutionary party.

This issue is not a small issue within the international anti-capitalist "left". There are those who are arguing passionately that to be non-sectarian means that we have to welcome virtually everyone into a new party and that, furthermore, we should make the basis of unity broad enough that anyone with a nominally progressive view will feel comfortable. In practice this means a party in which so-called "left social democrats" feel welcome and it will quickly lose whatever revolutionary character it has.

Being non-sectarian does not mean being without principles. It does not mean that one cannot argue passionately for a particular point of view. It does not mean abandoning our principles for the sake of "unity". Rather, it means that one should not raise

non-crucial issues to the level of principles and then use them to split an organization. It means that we do not approach organizing from the perspective of furthering the interests of our "faction", but from the perspective of furthering the interests of the working class. So long as we maintain such a perspective and such a spirit we will not fall into the swamp of sectarianism.

This is the work that the MRC has assigned itself to carry out over the upcoming months and years. Over the past nine years we have persisted in carrying out this work and inviting everyone who will listen to join us in making it a reality. The results have been encouraging and we intend to continue on that path. It is too early to tell how much success we will meet over the short term, but over the longer term we know that this work will advance. Marx stated that capitalism has created its own grave diggers. What we have to do now is provide them with the tools to do their job.

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Four health care workers have already been killed during Operation Cast Lead, one doctor and three medics, all of whom were clearly identified as medical personnel. The ICRC is investigating reports that on January 5, an ambulance station, also in the Jabaliya camp, was attacked by the Israeli army. This follows reported attacks on January 2 on two ambulances, clearly identified as belonging to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, by Israeli armed forces. "The missiles were clearly aimed at the ambulance," the driver told reporters, adding it was unclear whether the Israelis were trying to hit the ambulances or just prevent them from entering a combat zone to provide assistance to the dead and wounded. Both are illegal under international law.

The latest atrocities bring the death toll in the Gaza Strip to almost 900, a number that will surely have risen by the time of publication as it is increasing daily.

Israeli ground troops in Gaza, according to reports on Israeli TV, are seizing Palestinian men aged 18-45 and smuggling them out of Gaza for interrogation in Israel as "suspected Hamas militants". Over 100 men had been removed from Gaza in the first four days of the Israeli ground invasion.

# Background of the Current Israeli Assault in Gaza

The current offensive being waged against the population of Gaza is the latest round in an ongoing campaign by Israel to prevent the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This latest incursion comes at the end of a five-month cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. During that time Hamas was able to largely halt the firing of missiles at Israeli towns and cities, while Israel on its part suspended its campaign of assassination directed against Hamas militants within Gaza.

At the same time, in violation of international law, Israel continued its blockade of much needed food, fuel and medical supplies entering Gaza. It also severely restricted the Gaza's access to drinking water and electricity.

The cease-fire between Hamas and Gaza was broken by Israel on November 4, 2008 when Israeli Defense Forces entered Gaza and killed six Hamas supporters and then again on November 17, 2008 when another four Hamas supporters were assassinated. Approximately one month later Gazans began firing rockets into cities and towns in southern Israel.

It is widely acknowledged that Hamas would have been willing to maintain the cease-fire had Israel agreed to lift its blockade of Gaza and stop targeting members of Hamas. As is apparent now Israel had other plans for Hamas and Gaza. Though the pretext for the invasion of Gaza was the firing of rockets into Israeli cities and towns, plans for the invasion, it has become evident, were actually drawn up in March of 2008 under the direction of defense minister Ehud Barach.

From the Israeli point of view the invasion has two objectives.

The first relates to Israeli domestic politics, specifically to the up-coming February 2009 national election. At present the Likud Party, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, has a wide lead in the polls and looks likely to defeat the current government coalition of the Labour and Kadima parties. Likud is running their

campaign based on a hard line against Hamas and any concessions toward a Palestinian state within the territories occupied by Israel. The current campaign going on in Gaza would therefore appear to be an attempt by the governing party to demonstrate to the substantial right-wing Israeli electorate that it can be just as determined in its attacks on the Palestinians and their ambitions as Likud proposes to be.

The second and more long-term objective of the Israeli attack on Gaza is Israel's desire to destroy Hamas as a political and social force and, as such, deprive the Palestinians a leadership that has been representing their national interests.

Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the PLO and President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) has little authority in the West Bank and virtually none in Gaza. He has become a puppet of Israel to such an extent that he has blamed Hamas for the Israeli attack on the Palestinians of Gaza. Israel would love to replace Hamas with the PLO led by Abbas in Gaza and tried to do this in the summer of 2007. At that time part of Abbas's military organization, with arms and training supplied by the U.S., attempted to stage a *coup* against Hamas, which had won the PA election in 2006. Hamas however thwarted the attempted *coup* and has since been the political authority in Gaza. Since that time Abbas and the PA he leads have been essentially shut out of influence in Gaza.

The problem that Hamas creates for Israel is that, unlike Mahmoud Abbas, it has shown itself unwilling to surrender its national and economic rights to Israel. Israel has no intention of allowing the creation of any kind of Palestinian state even in the 20 percent of Palestine that has not been expropriated by Israel. Instead, it wants to replace Hamas with Mahmoud Abbas and the PLO, which it now considers a "willing partner".

This is not a plan that the Palestinian people are likely to accept.

# Winnipeg Rally Against Israeli Aggression in Gaza

On January 3, 2009 over 350 people gathered on the steps of the Manitoba Legislature to protest Israel's bombardment and invasion of Gaza. Below are some scenes from the rally. Another rally of 200 people took place on January 10 in front of the Federal Building in Winnipeg. It was announced that rallies would continue every Saturday at 2:00 pm at the Federal Building until the Israeli aggression ends.



## Modern Communism

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