

Editorial

Support the Just Claims of the Metis People

Following the 1869 uprising of the Metis people in what is now Manitoba, the federal government passed legislation promising to set aside 1.4 million hectares of land along the Red and Assiniboine rivers for the use of the Metis and their descendents. The land which was promised included the entire area of present-day Winnipeg, most of the land along both sides of the Red River from Lake Winnipeg to the U.S. border and both sides of the Assiniboine River as far west as Portage la Prairie, all of which has since become prime real estate. However, within a decade virtually all of that land had fallen into the hands of real estate speculators through swindles tacitly supported by the federal government or through direct government expropriation. In some cases, entire Metis villages were burned to the ground in order to clear the way for European

immigrant settlements. Twenty-five years ago the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) filed a formal land claim demanding that the original promise of Metis land be honoured by the government in the form of alternate land and/or financial compensation. After two-and-a-half decades of government stalling and so-called “negotiations”, authorization has finally been given for the case to be heard in the courts. It is now expected that the case will spend several years before the courts and will end up being resolved by the Supreme Court of Canada.

This case is deeply disturbing for a number of reasons. It is clear that the federal government has no more intention of dealing honourably with the Metis people today than it had 136 years ago when it

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Condemn the UN Security Council’s Presidential Statement on Iran

On March 29 the UN Security Council issued a presidential statement calling on Iran to implement the steps set out by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on February 4, and calling on the director general of the IAEA to report to the Security Council within 30 days on Iran’s compliance. The presidential statement, although legally non-binding, marks a further escalation of the all-round attacks on Iran led by the United States, Britain and France.

The presidential statement repeated the unsubstantiated allegations coming from the United States, Britain and France that Iran is building nuclear weapons. These allegations are based on unsubstantiated U.S. intelligence reports, as well as on the distortion and denial of the actual findings and

conclusions of the IAEA which has repeatedly declared that there is no evidence of any militarily-related nuclear activity in Iran.

The presidential statement endorsed the demands put on Iran by the IAEA board on February 4, especially that Iran re-establish full and sustained suspension of all uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development. These demands go beyond the legal obligations required by member states under the terms of the IAEA Statutes and Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. They are a blatant violation of the sovereignty of Iran.

The allegation that Iran is building nuclear

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weapons is a ruse created by the United States, Britain and France to disguise its hegemonic ambitions towards Iran. The Americans want the backing of the entire UN Security Council so that they can claim that they are acting on behalf of the international community and with full legal authority. The Canadian government has assisted the United States on this front by supporting its every action within the IAEA.

The United States, Britain and France would have preferred a Security Council resolution, adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, declaring Iran a threat to international peace and security, and making the suspension of uranium enrichment mandatory, thereby paving the way for severe enforcement actions. However, with only the limited co-operation of Russia and China on this issue, the United States, Britain and France had to settle for the presidential statement.

Even though the United States is the sole superpower in the world today, it is not strong enough to achieve its aims unilaterally. It would like a unipolar world under its dictate but is unable to achieve this. Even its undisputed control over the Americas has been put into question by the emergence of middle-level powers in South America. Therefore, the United States is forced to act in co-operation with other world powers and regional powers, like Britain, France, Russia and China, to pursue its hegemonic ambitions.

The resistance from Russia and China to some of the U.S. demands on the question of Iran does not indicate that these countries are allies of the oppressed nations or peoples. Rather, they are contending with the other major powers and regional powers for hegemony in their own regions and globally. They are also collaborating with the other major powers and regional powers to oppose the just struggles of the peoples for national and social liberation.

In the case of Iran, Russia and China have vested interests in maintaining relations with Iran, but they also have vested interests in maintaining their relations with the United States. Hence, on the question of Iran they have until now acquiesced to certain demands of the United States but not to others. They have also exerted pressure on Iran to accept some of the demands of the United States, Britain, France and Germany.

The UN Security Council is only one front of the American attack against Iran. The United States is also trying to encourage pro-U.S. forces in Iran. It has recently budgeted millions of dollars to spread disinformation within Iran in order to incite people against the government. It has also made contingency plans with its NATO allies like Canada for economic, political and military actions against Iran outside of the framework of the United Nations.

On March 5, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, told delegates to the annual convention of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, the leading pro-Israel U.S. lobby group, that: "The Iran regime must be made aware that if it continues down the path of international isolation, there will be tangible and painful consequences". He said Iran poses a "comprehensive threat" as a state sponsor of terrorism as well as a nuclear aspirant and so "we must be prepared to rely on comprehensive solutions and use all the tools at our disposal to stop the threat that the Iranian regime poses."

On March 9, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said at a U.S. congressional hearing that "We may face no greater challenge from a single country than from Iran, whose policies are directed at developing a Middle East that would be 180 degrees different than the Middle East we would like to see developed."

On March 13, U.S. President George W. Bush issued an executive order to continue a national emergency with respect to Iran that was declared on March 15, 1995 "to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States constituted by the actions and policies of the government of Iran." The executive order extends the U.S. economic sanctions against Iran.

Modern Communism condemns the UN Security Council's presidential statement on Iran and the Canadian government's stand on this question. The Canadian working class and people want a foreign policy which opposes hegemonism and war. They want a foreign policy based on respect for the equality of all countries, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries, the peaceful resolution of disputes between countries, and peaceful coexistence among countries with differing systems.

Canada Cuts Aid To Palestinian Authority: Foreign Policy Double Standard

Shortly after the new Hamas Palestinian government was sworn in on March 29 Canada became the first western government to cut all aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA). This was something of a reversal of the position Foreign Minister Peter McKay had expressed just weeks earlier when, following a meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister, McKay declared that Canada would work with the Palestinian government .

In the statement released by the Department of Foreign Affairs announcing the decision , McKay is quoted as saying that Hamas has failed to address Canada's concerns about "non-violence, the recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the roadmap for peace. A clear commitment by the Hamas government to the principles that we and the international community have outlined remains an essential precondition for Canada to resume any assistance to the Palestinian Authority."

The same statement quotes International Cooperation Minister Josée Verner saying there is a distinction to be made between aid to the Palestinian Authority and to Palestinians. Canada will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinians by working through NGOs and the United Nations, she said. "Canada will also continue to work with the voices of moderation within Palestinian society."

Of the roughly \$30 million Canada provides in aid to Palestine per year, around \$7 million goes directly to the Palestinian Authority. The aid that has been cut was earmarked for a handful of projects, with most of the money earmarked for use in a PA-led project to reconstruct housing demolished by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.

Speaking to reporters after issuing the statement, McKay stressed repeatedly that Canada would not provide any money to a Hamas-controlled PA unless Hamas agrees to meet a number of conditions. "Until such time as we see a change in position from the Hamas government and the Palestinian Authority, there will be no direct contact, and there will certainly be no aid flowing through that government," he said. Pressed to elaborate, McKay said Hamas must "respect existing agreements, follow the road map, recognize Israel as a state and renounce all violence. To date, that has not happened."

On the same day that Canada cut aid to the PA, Prime Minister Stephen Harper phoned Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ehud Olmert to congratulate him on his Kadima party winning the most seats in the March 28 parliamentary elections in Israel. "Canada and Israel enjoy solid bilateral relations and Mr. Olmert and I agreed to work together at expanding them even more," Harper told reporters. "Canada remains a staunch supporter of peace in the Middle East and we will continue to work with Mr. Olmert and [Palestinian] President Mahmoud Abbas to reach that goal."

Olmert campaigned and won the Israeli election on a platform that openly contravenes the road map to peace and all existing agreements on the Middle East, namely Israel unilaterally declaring its international borders to include the largest settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Olmert and his predecessor Ariel Sharon also presided over a campaign of targeted assassinations against suspected Hamas and other Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip and Occupied Territories that has resulted in the killing of dozens of civilians.

However, this blatant double standard apparently presents no problem to the Canadian government or other western governments. On April 7, the U.S. and European Commission announced that they too are suspending aid to the PA.

In an opinion piece published in *The Guardian* on March 31, PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh notes that since Hamas was elected in what all international observers agree were free and fair elections in January, western governments have continually insisted the group recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept existing peace agreements. "But we have not heard a single demand of the Israeli parties that took part in [Israeli] elections, though some advocate the complete removal of the Palestinians from their lands."

"The problem," he writes "is not with any particular Palestinian group but with the denial of our basic rights by Israel. ... The message from Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to the world powers is this: talk to us no more about recognizing Israel's 'right to exist' or ending resistance until you obtain a commitment from the Israelis to withdraw from our land and recognize our rights."

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passed and immediately violated the Manitoba Act. The opening statements of the lawyers representing the federal government claimed that the government had fulfilled all of its commitments in the Manitoba Act and that the Metis people had lost their claim to the land through legal means. However, it matters little if the methods used to cheat the Metis people out of their land were “legal” or illegal. This is not a matter which should be resolved by the courts because it is primarily a political and not a legal issue. The issue is that, as every student of Canadian history knows, the spirit of the federal government’s commitment to the Metis people was violated. As such, this is a political issue which demands a political solution.

The MMF has made it clear that it has no intention of demanding the relocation of the people who are now living on land which rightfully belongs to the Metis people. The MMF president stated that the Metis people have always opposed the forced relocation of populations, having been victims of such relocations far too many times themselves. Despite these assurances, the news media has been attempting to generate public opinion against the Metis land claim by repeating over and over again that the claim, if successful, would cost taxpayers billions of dollars in compensation. However, these are specious arguments which betray the Eurocentric and colonialist bias of the Canadian media.

First, it is unconscionable that a price tag should be put on justice and the rights of the people. Second, the entire issue of the “cost to taxpayers” is a red herring. Are the Metis people not part of the Canadian people? Only those who maintain that they are not could claim that there is a “cost to taxpayers”. If the Metis people are considered to be part of the Canadian people, then any compensation paid to them for past injustices amounts to a transfer of monies from the Canadian people to themselves. It is analogous to a family farm which pays members of the family for their labour; all of the money stays in the family, so it costs the family absolutely nothing. It is really a symbolic transfer which has more to do with maintaining the dignity and sense of belonging of family members than anything else. The issue of compensating the Metis people falls into the same category. All of the monies would remain in the community and would re-circulate through the Canadian economy, so there would be no real cost to the Canadian people. Rather, this would represent a gesture to the Metis people that Canada considers them equal members of the Canadian family.

Furthermore, far from representing a financial burden to Canadians, the recognition of the rights and just claims of the Metis people would actually benefit Canadian society in a number of ways. A significant section of the Metis nation has been marginalized and impoverished ever since the suppression of the 1869 and 1885 Metis rebellions. The provision of lands and money for economic development would assist these people to get out of the cycle of poverty to which they have been condemned for over a century, thereby alleviating many of the social costs, such as the extra burdens on the health care and justice systems that result from poverty and marginalization. In addition, people who are acknowledged as full members of society tend to give back more to society through their creativity and productivity. In other words, Canadian society would benefit enormously by the simple act of recognizing the rights and just claims of the Metis people and compensating them fairly for the past injustices inflicted on them by successive Canadian governments.

Only the monopoly capitalists stand to lose by the recognition of the Metis land claims. The monopoly capitalists are determined to extinguish all Aboriginal claims to the land of Canada because recognition of such claims would force them to compensate the Aboriginal people for the exploitation of the natural resources of this country. This would cut into their profit margins. By forcing the Metis people to spend many years and enormous sums of money to pursue their claims in the courts, the federal government has made it clear that it is representing the interests not of the Canadian people but of the handful of monopoly capitalists who have realized enormous profits at the expense of the Metis people.

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Editor: Ken Kaltornyk

To contact the Manitoba Branch of CPC(M-L):

Fax: 477-6741

Email: mrc-cpcml@mts.net

Internet: www.modern-communism.ca

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