

Twenty-Fifth Annual Walk for Peace Held in Winnipeg



Approximately 200 people participated in the 25th annual Walk for Peace in Winnipeg on June 17. This year's walk was held on the theme of ending Canada's participation in the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan.

Editorial

Canadian Government's Double Standard on Imprisonment Without Charges

Last week the Canadian Supreme Court was asked to rule on the constitutionality of security certificates which allow the federal government to hold immigrants or refugees without charge for indefinite periods of time in the name of "national security". Currently five individuals are in prison under such certificates for periods ranging from four to six years. The lead appellant in the Supreme Court appeal is Adil Charkaoui, a Moroccan-born permanent resident of Canada who is accused by federal authorities of being an Al Qaeda "sleeper

agent". To date, no evidence to substantiate this claim has been presented to Charkaoui or his lawyers, nor has any such evidence been presented to a judge. All of the imprisoned men face deportation under the security certificates and some could face torture or execution in their home countries based solely on suspicion of their alleged ties to terrorist groups.

The federal government argues that stripping these individuals of all rights is warranted because Canada is a potential target of terrorism. The argument that the

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The Federal Budget – Part 1

(This is the first of a series of articles analyzing the first budget of the Harper Conservative government.)

The first budget of the Conservative Party government of Stephen Harper passed its third and final reading in the House of Commons on June 6. It passed by unanimous consent with no recorded vote. The Liberals and NDP, who had stated that they would vote against the budget, explained later that there was a “mix-up” relating to the order of speakers. Consequently, they were absent when the debate opened and closed for the third reading. The budget was first presented on May 2 and the first reading was passed by a vote of 175 to 113 on May 11. The Conservatives and Bloc Quebecois voted in favour, while the Liberals and NDP voted against.

The theme and title of the budget is *Focusing on Priorities - Canada's New Government - Turning a New Leaf*. The budgetary measures are organized into five priorities - “accountability”, “opportunity”, “families and communities”, “security” and “restoring the fiscal balance” - which are the same priorities presented by the Conservatives during the last federal election. The message is that the Conservative Party, in contrast to the Liberal Party, is going to keep its promises. But this is not really the issue. The issue is the content of the promises. The Harper government is promising that this budget will deliver “real results for people” and will “chart a new course for building a better Canada”.

Accountability

The first priority of the Harper government is to improve the accountability and transparency of government operations. This appears as a response to the criticism of the Liberal governments of Jean Chretien and Paul Martin by the Gomery Commission and Auditor-General of Canada. Accordingly, some measures relating to the accountability of the government to the people would have been expected. But the real focus of the accountability measures in the budget are to ensure that the finance capitalists get their pound of flesh. Thus, the promise to reduce the federal debt by \$3 billion annually and advance by one year the goal of lowering the debt-GDP ratio to 25 percent is included in the accountability measures. Also included is the promise to restrain the government's rate of spending growth and identify “savings” on government programs of \$1 billion in 2006-07 and 2007-08.

None of these measures, including the new Accountability Act, addresses the lack of accountability of governments in Canada to the electorate. There is an immediate need for reform of the electoral process and constitution so that candidates for elected positions are selected and elected by and accountable to the electorate and so that the decisive say on all matters - economic, political, social and military - resides with the electorate. The Conservative government, however, does not have this kind of accountability on its agenda. On the contrary, it has already demonstrated its preference for absolutist rule, rather than accountability either to the electorate or to the House of Commons, by its handling of the vote on the extension of Canada's military presence in Afghanistan. In addition to the fact that the majority of Canadians are opposed to Canada's combat role in Afghanistan, the Harper government displayed its utter disdain for the House of Commons by giving six hours notice for the debate and by stating that it would extend the Canadian military stay whatever the outcome of the vote.

Opportunity

The most publicized aspect of the budget is the reduction of consumption, income, business and corporate taxes. These measures fall under the priority called “opportunity” and they are primarily opportunities for business. According to the federal government Canadians and Canadian business are faced with tremendous opportunities and major challenges as a result of the profound and ongoing restructuring of the global economy. As the budget says: “The rapid emergence of China and India as major economic powers, the development of global supply chains and the continued integration of global capital markets are collectively creating both tremendous opportunities and major challenges for Canadians and Canadian business.”

In order to take advantage of the opportunities and face the challenges, the Harper government has decided on several measures “to build a more competitive, productive Canada”. In fact, the improvement of Canada's productivity and competitiveness in the global market is the central focus of the entire budget. The budget falsely claims that higher productivity will raise the standard of living

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For Your Information

Israel Escalates Attacks on Palestinian Civilians

Israel has escalated its campaign of violence and terror against Palestinian civilians over the last week. Two recent targeted attacks resulted in the death of 18 Palestinians and the injury of 62.

The first attack, which wiped out most of a family enjoying a picnic on the beach in Gaza, took place on Friday, June 9. An Israeli naval boat, stationed off the coast of Beit Lahya in the Gaza Strip, is reported to have fired seven successive artillery shells at civilians on the beach. According to eyewitness accounts, once the shells started to fall the family immediately began to evacuate the portion of the beach under attack, which was where they were picnicking. However, the shells followed their progress, killing seven of the family, including the mother, father and five young children.

At first, an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) spokesperson claimed the deaths were caused by rockets being fired by Palestinian militants. However, a forensic analysis of the beach area found conclusively that it was shelling from the sea, not rockets from Gaza, that killed the family. At that point, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert expressed regret

for the family's death. He also denied allegations fuelled by the eyewitness reports of the targeted nature of the shelling that the IDF is deliberately targeting civilians in Gaza. He claimed that the Israeli army is "the most moral army on earth".

On June 13, "the most moral army on earth" was once again, according to eyewitness reports, deliberately attacking civilians. This time, the attack occurred as part of an extra-judicial execution of two members of the al-Quds Brigade, the military wing of Islamic Jihad. IDF aircraft launched a missile at a car travelling near a hospital in a residential area in northeastern Gaza. Civilian bystanders, who saw the car hit and could hear the cries of at least one of the occupants, rushed forward in a rescue effort. As they swarmed towards the car, the IDF aircraft dropped another missile, killing nine people including a seven-year-old boy.

Both these attacks follow the recent announcement by Israeli Defence Minister (and head of the Labour Party) Amir Peretz, who has said his aim is to step up extra-judicial assassinations to try and end rocket attacks on northern Israel from Gaza.

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of Canadians and will help governments to invest in health care, education and other areas. This would be true if the added value created by higher productivity were invested in these areas. However, the added value will be taken out of the economy in the form of profits and invested for the purpose of making even more profits rather than for the purpose of improving the standard of living of the people.

The government's entire economic policy is oriented towards creating an environment for the capitalists to make maximum profit rather than to improve the living and working conditions of the people. For example, in this budget the federal government is creating a more competitive environment for Canadian businesses to compete against American businesses by accelerating the elimination of the federal capital tax, reducing the general corporate income tax rate to 19 percent from 21 percent, and eliminating the corporate surtax. This will give Canadian businesses a statutory tax advantage over American businesses and lower the taxes on investments in Canada by foreign companies. These measures may result in the creation of more jobs, or they may lead to the elimination of jobs

through the introduction of newer technology. The point is that the creation of jobs is only incidental to the aim of making of maximum profits. It would be a mistake to believe that the government or the capitalist system has the aim of creating jobs.

The same is true of the budgetary measures related to education and training which are also part of the "opportunity". The federal budget includes measures to increase support for education and training, to support foreign credential recognition, and to reduce personal taxes. The natural resource sector, particularly oil and gas, is going through a "boom" in Alberta and Saskatchewan and is short of skilled labour. A similar situation exists in the high technology sector in the Ottawa region in the so-called "Silicon Valley North". The severe cutbacks in public spending in the 1990's also drove many Canadian doctors, nurses and teachers to the United States in search of jobs and higher salaries. The monopoly capitalists are competing internationally to keep Canadian skilled labour in Canada and to attract foreign skilled labour. The budgetary measures are designed to assist them on this front. These measures are not intended to improve the quality of the educational system or its accessibility.

(To be continued.)

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charging of these individuals or disclosing the evidence against them would jeopardize ongoing security operations or the “war on terrorism” rings hollow, as the mere detention of these individuals would surely have tipped off their confederates, if indeed there ever were any. Similarly, it is difficult to believe that these five individuals would pose any serious threat to security since the RCMP and/or CSIS would presumably have them under constant surveillance.

Furthermore, the Canadian government is extremely selective when it comes to the application of this standard. For example, it has never protested the U.S. government’s practice of holding prisoners in Guantanamo without charge and without any rights under the Geneva Conventions, nor has it protested the fact that these prisoners are routinely tortured by their American captors. Hundreds of the Guantanamo detainees have now been released without any charges being laid, indicating that they were never a threat in the first place. Nor has the Canadian government protested the U.S. “rendition” of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen, to Syria where he was tortured by Syrian security officials, despite the fact that Arar is now considered totally innocent of any connection to terrorism.

Furthermore, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay recently demanded that the government of Iran either charge or release Ramin Jahanbegloo, a Canadian-Iranian lecturer who is being held without charge in Iran on the basis that he is a threat to the national security of that country. Similarly, the Canadian government routinely attacks China as a violator of human rights because it has tried, convicted and imprisoned a number of individuals it claims have been involved in acts of terrorism or plots to overthrow the government. Another example is Cuba where, apart from those prisoners being held by the U.S. in their Guantanamo prison, there are no prisoners who have not been duly charged and convicted by the Cuban judicial system. Yet the Canadian government repeatedly labels Cuba a human rights violator because it prosecutes and imprisons individuals for accepting money from a foreign power (the United States) in order to organize the overthrow of the legal government of Cuba. In addition, in the case of Iran and Cuba, there is

extensive evidence that the U.S. government is funding individuals and groups to commit acts of sabotage and terrorism against various targets in an effort to destabilize the governments of those countries, whereas no act of terrorism has been carried out in Canada since the bombing of the Air India plane 20 years ago.

According to Article 10 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Canada is a signatory: “Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.” The use of security certificates to hold non-citizens without charges, without trial and without even knowing what offence they have allegedly committed is therefore a violation of human rights and of international law. The Canadian government is quick to use this section of the UN Declaration to condemn as human rights violators any countries with which the U.S. has a dispute. However, it routinely ignores the Declaration’s application to either itself or any of its allies, particularly the U.S. Such a double standard is totally unacceptable to anyone who genuinely stands for human rights and justice.

If these individuals are suspected of committing an offence, then they should be charged and their guilt or innocence should be determined by “an independent and impartial tribunal”, as is their right under the UN Declaration and international law. If there is no basis or insufficient evidence for such charges to be laid, then they should be released immediately.

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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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