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Editorial

Stephen Harper's Double Standard on Human Rights

It is ironic that Stephen Harper had to travel half-way around the globe to present himself on the international scene as a champion of human rights in Vietnam and China, while much closer to home he has nothing to say about human rights violations in Canada, the United States and other allied countries. He has singled out these two countries for criticism although, since coming to power, his government has failed to acknowledge a single instance of human rights violation by the two other countries that share the North American continent with Canada, namely the U.S. and Mexico.

The fact is that the Canadian government, just like the American government, only raises the human rights issue in countries where it is seeking some strategic advantage. Then both the U.S. and Canada will politically and financially support dissidents, "pro-democracy" movements, "colour" revolutions, and civil society groups in order to bring about regime change. The Canadian and American governments are not backing these movements and organizations in order to expand the democratic rights of the working class and people of these countries. They are backing them in order to put their own cliques into power so they can profit from the exploitation and oppression of the people of these countries. This is exactly the outcome of the "colour revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine.

Stephen Harper is very smug, self-righteous and condescending when talking about human rights. On his way to the APEC Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, he

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The Alberta Economic Boom

Part Two

The current economic boom in Alberta is increasing the dependence of the province's economy on oil exports rather than deceasing it. This lopsided development is completely dictated by monopoly and U.S. interests. Alberta has less diversity of exports than any other province. Crude oil and natural gas alone account for almost two-thirds of goods exports, while another 10 percent is contributed by refined petroleum, petrochemicals and coal. Non-energy international exports rose six percent in 2005. The largest non-energy exports were agricultural products, notably livestock and grain, followed by forestry products. Metals and machinery and equipment remain small at about seven percent of all exports.

In all, Alberta exports 62 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to other countries and provinces; that is more than BC, Ontario or Quebec. The U.S. is the destination for 90 percent of Alberta international exports; a decade ago it was 80 percent. Nominal exports to other countries have also steadily increased, rising 13 percent in 2003, 11 percent in 2004 and 15 percent last year. Most of this increase reflects higher energy prices, as the volume of total exports only rose 4.2 percent over this period.

The *Canadian Economic Observer* states that "Alberta imports more capital and consumer goods from other provinces, leaving it to specialize in

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U.S. Senate Approves Indo-U.S. Nuclear Pact

On November 16 the U.S. Senate approved the U.S.-India Nuclear Cooperation Promotion Act by a vote of 85-12. This legislation establishes an India-specific exception to a U.S. law that bans nuclear trade with countries that have not signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). In doing so, it reverses a 30-year old American policy of denying nuclear materials and equipment to India, which was prompted by India's first nuclear weapons test in 1974. In July 2005, an agreement in principle was reached between U.S. President George Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, giving India access to U.S. nuclear fuel and reactors in return for a pledge to open its civilian nuclear facilities to international inspections. India's eight military plants will be excluded.

Although the Indian government has given a commitment that any nuclear technology obtained from abroad will only be used for civilian purposes and that such nuclear reactors will be open to inspection by international agencies, it still wants to refrain from opening its entire nuclear program to scrutiny. The Indian government maintains that India's record as a "responsible democratic nation" should be enough for the international community to allow it this nuclear exception.

The significance of this agreement and legislation goes far beyond the sharing of civilian nuclear technology between the two countries. Cementing its ties with the Indian ruling class and bringing India, a big power in Asia, into its orbit is all part of the of U.S. imperialist strategy of extending its domination over Asia as part of its drive to dominate the world. By offering India the enticement of lifting restrictions on the supply of nuclear fuel, reactors and related technology, the U.S. is hoping to lure India away from developing any strategic economic, political or military alliances and relations with Iran, China and Russia. This will also further enable the U.S. to manipulate India and Pakistan, by playing one off against the other, to advance its own interests in that region. In addition, the agreement will give American companies an edge over their competition in the Indian nuclear market.

President Bush praised the Senate action saying: "The United States and India enjoy a strategic partnership based upon common values. Today, the Senate has acted to further strengthen this relationship by passing legislation that will deliver energy, non-proliferation and trade benefits to the citizens of two great democracies." The U.S.-India Business Council of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce also applauded Senate support for the bill. Ron Somers, president of the council, which is comprised of the top 220 American companies doing business in India, stated that India's nuclear energy market, estimated to require $100 billion in foreign direct investment, will now be open for American companies.

The impact of this impending deal on India's foreign policy has been apparent since the president and the prime minister met in July 2005. First, India suddenly turned against Iran and voted for a U.S.-backed International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution on September 24, that falsely condemned Iran for not complying with the NPT. Second, the multi-billion-dollar, 25-year natural gas agreement, signed in January 2005 between India and Iran, which the Americans oppose, hit a snag over pricing.

The gas deal, however, brought India into confrontation with the United States, especially over American oil-related sanctions against Iran under the Iran and Libya Sanctions Act of 1996. While China, Russia and the European powers have circumvented the American ban on oil-related investment in Iran, India is in a more disadvantageous position. In a candid statement to the Washington Post by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during his July 2005 visit to the United States he admitted: "I don't know if any international consortium of bankers would probably underwrite this." In short, India is yet to reach a stage where it can defy international financial pressure, especially from the U.S.

There are a number of steps that have to be taken before the U.S.-India nuclear co-operation agreement can come into effect. Differences between the Senate bill and a version passed by the House of Representatives have to be reconciled before a final bill is sent to the president for his

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resource exports". The lion's share of Alberta's trade surplus comes from trade outside Canada, where exports exceed imports by $33 billion. Alberta runs a surplus of only $7.5 billion with the rest of Canada. It runs deficits with Ontario and Quebec which are offset by surpluses with other provinces. This reflects a number of specific characteristics of Alberta's trade.

Three-quarters of Alberta's energy exports go to the U.S., especially crude oil destined for the U.S. Midwest and Rocky mountain states. At the same time, much of the oil in eastern Canada is imported from Europe because of lower costs and its older refineries which are designed to process lighter grades of oil than that produced by Alberta. Conversely, Alberta exports more refined petroleum and less crude oil to the rest of Canada, especially the west, reflecting the concentration of large refineries in the province. Edmonton has almost three-quarters of all western Canada's refining capacity.

Last year Alberta bought almost as many goods and services from the rest of Canada ($41.8 billion) as it did from the rest of the world ($51.1 billion). While international imports supply the lion's share of the province's machinery and equipment, imports from the rest of Canada have risen faster since 1999 (up 36 percent). Alberta itself has a machinery and metal fabricating industry that supplies the "oilpatch".

Another measure of the boom is business investment. In Alberta this expanded 37 percent over the three year period from 2002 to 2005, including a 17 percent jump in volume last year. Firms are reportedly planning to increase their investments another 11 percent in 2006. As expected most of the business investment growth was in the energy sector, especially the "oilsands" north of Edmonton. This investment was fuelled by exports, which hit $134 billion last year, double their level in 1999.

The *Canadian Economic Observer* states that the impact of an oil price crash on "oilsands" development would be different than drilling for conventional oil, because the planning and investment horizon there is so much longer and on a much grander scale. The authors base this conclusion on the experience of the past 15 years. For example, while the oil price crash in 1998 triggered substantially less drilling, investment in the "oilsands" was less affected. It is possible that the same thing might happen again, but it is equally possible that investment could drop abruptly. What the authors do not deny is that the Alberta economy will boom or bust depending on the price of oil. With 90 percent of the province's total exports going to the U.S., and two-thirds of this in crude oil and natural gas, the Alberta economy is more dependent than ever on demand from south of the border.

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signature. The agreement also needs the approval of the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group(NSG) that controls global nuclear trade. However, this is really just a formality as the NSG guidelines regulating the export of nuclear materials and equipment are voluntary and not enshrined in any international treaty. In addition, the U.S. and India still have to negotiate the specific technical details of the agreement, which, in turn, will then have to be approved by the U.S. Congress.

Also, India still has to negotiate a safeguards agreement with the IAEA. Whatever spin the U.S., India and the Director General of the IAEA put on this issue the agreement is bound to further discredit the NPT non-proliferation regime. The dilemma for the IAEA is whether it offers India an agreement with terms given to a nuclear-weapon state or the terms given to a non-nuclear-weapon state. Since the NPT only recognizes five nuclear-weapon states, and India is not one of them, the U.S.-India plan would see the IAEA apply the standards reserved for a nuclear-weapon state to India without recognizing it as a nuclear-weapon state. The only alternatives are to revise the NPT to officially recognize India as a nuclear-weapon state or for India to destroy its nuclear weapons in order to qualify as a non-nuclear-weapon state. Of course, neither of these alternatives are really options.

The joint statement issued by President Bush and Prime Minister Singh in July is explicit about the kind

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declared: "I think Canadians want us to promote our trade relations worldwide, and we do that, but I don't think Canadians want us to sell out important Canadian values. They don't want us to sell that out to the almighty dollar." If Harper were actually to practice what he preaches then Canada would have to sever all relations with the both the U.S. and Mexico. However, Harper's continued good relations with these two countries is precisely because his government does worship the almighty dollar.

Several recent examples illustrate this selective approach to human rights. In Mexico, on October 29, the government sent its federal police to put down a popular rebellion against the dictatorial state government in Oaxaca. On November 5, over one million people descended on Oaxaca demanding the expulsion of the federal police and the resignation of the state governor. A national general strike against the electoral fraud and in solidarity with the people of Oaxaca has been called for November 20. Yet, Stephen Harper has not uttered one word in criticism of the Mexican government or expression of solidarity with the Mexican people fighting this repression and exploitation. His only pronouncement relating to Mexico has been to congratulate President-elect Felipe Calderón on his election and to announce that the new president will visit Canada on October 26-27.

In the United States, on October 17, President George Bush signed the Military Commissions Act into law. This legislation legalizes military commissions to try terrorist suspects at Guantanamo Bay and allows the continuation of "alternative interrogation practices" by the CIA. It also re-interprets parts of the Geneva Conventions that prohibit "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating, and degrading treatment" in such a way as to justify U.S. torture and detention abroad. To date the Harper government has not issued a single statement condemning this law that is blatantly in open contempt of human rights and of accepted norms of international law. Harper's silence is even more reprehensible given the fact that several Canadian citizens have been the victims of U.S. kidnapping and torture in Syria and other places.

The Canadian working class and people should condemn the Harper government for its obvious double-standard on human rights and for its cynical manipulation of this issue to advance the geo-political interests of the Canadian bourgeoisie.

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of safeguard agreement they have in mind for India. It said that India is willing "to assume the same responsibilities and practices...as other leading countries with advanced nuclear technology, such as the United States." The distinguishing feature of such an agreement is that it is voluntary and the materials and facilities falling within the scope of the agreement are chosen by the "nuclear weapon" state, and can be withdrawn by the "nuclear-weapon" state at any time. This is very different from the safeguards agreements that other states like Iran are subject to today as "non-nuclear-weapon" states. They are required to put all of their nuclear facilities under IAEA scrutiny which India will not do.

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Editor: Ken Kalturnyk

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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