

Editorial

Aboriginal Day of Action – A Struggle for Basic Human Rights

On June 29 Aboriginal peoples and their supporters held demonstrations across Canada to demand that federal and provincial governments recognize their basic human rights, including the right to decent housing, education, health care and jobs. These rights belong to every human being and are recognized in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the Canadian government has never enacted legislation to ensure that any citizens of this country are guaranteed such rights. In the case of the Aboriginal peoples, the federal and provincial governments not only refuse to recognize these basic human rights, but have adopted a whole range of policies based on racist and colonial premises which violate these rights on a daily basis. The demand that all levels of

government should eliminate such policies and treat Aboriginal peoples with the dignity and respect owing to all human beings is a just demand which enjoys the support of the vast majority of the Canadian people.

In the days leading up to the June 29 Day of Action a lot of confusion was generated about both the form and content of the struggle of Aboriginal peoples for their rights. On the one hand were those who sought to limit this struggle to a matter of some demands for economic reforms, while others belittled these demands and proclaimed that the real struggle is for sovereignty, Aboriginal rights, hereditary rights, and so forth.

The first position seeks to block Aboriginal peoples from taking political action to solve their problems, equating political action with violence and

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For Your Information

Contradictions Intensify at WTO

On June 21, the latest round of negotiations aimed at salvaging the Doha round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks broke down, with the U.S. and European Union (EU) pitted squarely against Brazil and India. The four (known as the G4) had been meeting for close to a year in a desperate attempt to get world trade talks back on the rails, but according to media reports, talks broke down over a failure to reach a compromise on manufacturing and agriculture.

It appears that India and Brazil joined forces against the U.S. and EU. According to reports, they rejected demands to end state support for emerging industries in their countries (aerospace in Brazil, technology industries in India) and also refused to

reduce tariffs on European or American goods entering their markets.

This was just the latest in a series of failed attempts to rescue the Doha round of global trade talks, which began in November 2001. Ostensibly the talks have been aimed at further opening up global markets, although, in reality, it is clear that they have been the mechanism through which various world powers have tried to dominate others. While manufacturing was an issue in the collapse of the talks, the biggest stumbling block to reaching a new WTO agreement has been agriculture. Over the past six years disagreements over agricultural subsidies have been behind the collapse of talks in Hong Kong, Mexico and India.

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terrorism. The second position seeks to deprive the struggle for rights of its human content by reducing the concept of rights to an abstraction and then suggesting that the struggle for this abstraction is a higher form of struggle than the struggle for economic reforms.

The essence of the struggle of Aboriginal peoples is precisely a struggle for good education, quality health care and decent-paying jobs. This is also the essence of the struggle of the Canadian working class. As such this common struggle constitutes a basis of unity between the working class and Aboriginal peoples. To belittle this reality and suggest that it must be subordinated to some "higher" form of struggle for sovereignty, Aboriginal rights or some other right is to divide form from content and obscure what all oppressed peoples are really fighting for.

The issue is not that one form of struggle is higher than another form of struggle, but that the struggle of the Aboriginal peoples is being waged simultaneously on a variety of fronts – economic, political and cultural. The goal of this struggle is to put an end to the second or third-class citizenship status of Aboriginal peoples and to provide themselves with the tools needed to control their own destinies – a land base, economic development and political autonomy. These constitute the main content of sovereignty and of Aboriginal and hereditary rights.

One of the problems that came to the fore during the preparations for the Aboriginal Day of Action is that the federal government and various elites within the Aboriginal community are escalating negotiations between themselves to impose settlements on various fronts which not only fail to satisfy the aspirations of the Aboriginal peoples but also seek to block and frustrate those aspirations. Current proposals for Aboriginal self-

government maintain the worst aspects of the Indian Act while allowing certain Aboriginal elites to share in the spoils of the colonial status of Aboriginal peoples. Land claims settlements are being used to extinguish any other claims Aboriginal peoples may have, to open up vast territories for capitalist development and to put in place mechanisms whereby the land can be expropriated through other means. For example, the federal government has been trying for over a decade to implement a system of private land ownership on First Nations reserves. Without strong and viable economic development on reserves, private ownership of land is a virtual guarantee that, within a short period of time, the land will belong to the finance capitalists. In other words, in the name of eliminating the colonial status of Aboriginal peoples, the federal government and Aboriginal elites are planning to profit from the increased exploitation and oppression of Aboriginal peoples.

At every turn the Aboriginal peoples come up against the reality that governments at every level and the monopoly capitalists they serve are not interested in solving the economic, political, social and cultural problems facing Aboriginal peoples. If they were, then some progress would have been made over the past several decades in eliminating the terrible living conditions, the sub-standard education and health care, and the resulting plague of social problems that beset the vast majority of Aboriginal peoples. This reality is shared, in one way or another, by all but the wealthiest sections of Canadian society. The struggle to end this reality and build a new one in which all forms of exploitation and oppression are a thing of the past is a struggle which unites all sections of the Canadian people.

Discussion

Fighting Against the Elimination of Jobs

The relentless loss of jobs in the Canadian manufacturing sector, especially in southern Ontario, has led to a debate about how workers can fight against the elimination of their jobs. This is a complex issue because it deals with the most fundamental problems of how the economy is organized. In addition, there is a huge army of economists, think tanks and journalists who continuously obscure the nature of the problem in order to prevent people from finding solutions.

Even for those who can see through the ideological overgrowth and who understand that the cause of the problem is capitalism this is a difficult problem to deal with. It is not sufficient to state that the problem is capitalism and the solution is socialism, even though this is true and is the concrete reality facing the working class. So the question naturally arises: “What are workers supposed to do while they are waiting for a revolutionary situation to develop?”

The problem is that this question arises naturally because it is based in the overgrowth of bourgeois ideology that is suffocating the entire society. It seems like an innocent and concrete question, but within it is contained every bourgeois prejudice against revolution and socialism and against the class struggle in general.

The first prejudice contained in this question is the deep-seated prejudice against revolution. This prejudice is particularly deep in the Canadian psyche for a number of reasons. The first reason is the arrogance of Anglo-American exceptionalism, which is based on the notion that the Anglo-American ruling classes are very enlightened and democratic and, therefore, revolution is entirely unnecessary. This notion was actually openly adopted by the communist parties in Canada and the United States in the 1940s, so for a long period of time there was no alternative to the constant bourgeois propaganda against revolution and socialism.

The post-war boom of the capitalist system in North America further reinforced this prejudice. Suddenly, workers could actually make some gains in terms of wages and working conditions. The 1960s also saw the *de facto* adoption of social democracy as the official ideology of the Canadian ruling class,

partly in response to the needs of the Cold War ideological struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and partly because the development of Canadian capitalism required massive public works expenditures in order to be profitable. The cornerstone of social democracy is the belief that revolution is not only unnecessary but is evil, and that capitalism will gradually evolve into a just and caring society.

Combined with these factors was the massive ideological assault on the working class by the U.S., the Soviet Union and their respective allies to convince workers that capitalism was synonymous with human rights, freedom and democracy while socialism was synonymous with oppression and human right violations.

On the basis of this deep-seated prejudice against revolution and socialism, the assumption is drummed into every Canadian that the prospects for revolution are very remote indeed. Therefore, while workers are waiting for a “messiah” to deliver revolution to them on a platter, they should get on with figuring out how to get by under capitalism. In other words, they should concern themselves with “practical” reforms, which can supposedly be achieved relatively easily under capitalism, and leave the problems of revolution and socialism to a future generation. This is presented despite the reality which exists in front of their faces that all of the post-war gains are being eroded, all of the social-democratic reforms of the past are being dismantled, real wages are falling and human rights are increasingly under attack by the state. Thus, while the entire society is moving backwards by leaps and bounds the illusion is held onto that things will somehow turn around if we just continue to do the same things we have done for the past several decades.

The concrete experience of the Canadian workers is that capitalism is failing to provide them with security on any front and the prospects for the future are even bleaker. They are coming under increasing attack from their employers in the form of demands for concessions, cutbacks in social spending, plant

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Both the U.S. and EU spend billions on agricultural subsidies each year, money that flows mainly to large agri-businesses throughout Europe and America. These subsidies guarantee that American and European agricultural products are dumped into world markets at well below the cost of production, thus destroying small-scale agricultural production in countries around the world. The subsidies have also made a handful of agribusinesses among the largest multinational corporation in the world. For example, Minneapolis-based Cargill, which is the largest privately held company in the U.S., controls much of the soybean production in Brazil and Argentina. The American giant Monsanto sells everything from glyphosate to seed throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America and is currently seeking patents in different countries that would enable it to charge small-scale agricultural producers for using varieties of seeds that they have been using for decades. The giant French company Louis-Dreyfus has interests in everything from cotton to sugar to mines in Africa, while Bunge has been expanding into Latin America for the past 40 years.

The Americans and Europeans have used the Doha talks as an instrument to protect those subsidies which have benefited their capitalists the most. For example, the U.S. has been willing to give up export subsidies, which depress global prices, in exchange for ensuring that billions of dollars in direct crop support and research and development money continue to flow into the coffers of their agribusiness industries. The Europeans have likewise offered up some of their subsidy programs in exchange for ensuring that the majority, which they have labelled “non trade distorting”, remain in place.

Over the last few years, when they have been unable to use Doha to further their respective agendas, both the U.S. and the EU have been busily negotiating bilateral trade agreements. Most recently, the Americans signed a bilateral agreement with Peru and Colombia which will give American wheat, sugar, beef, pork and produce preferential access in those two countries. Europe has turned its attention to the Middle East and Africa, while also trying to establish a hold in certain parts of Asia.

However, this reliance on bilateral trade agreements does not mean that the U.S. and EU have given up their desire to use the WTO to sort out their contradictions. Both have suggested that the WTO talks can be salvaged and both are reported to be working behind the scenes to jumpstart the talks. It

remains to be seen if they can find a way to accommodate the interests of Brazil, India and the emerging powers they represent at the WTO or not. If they are unable to accommodate them and come to some sort of an agreement, it will be a significant blow to the world’s two largest imperialist trading blocks.

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closures and layoffs. Of course, they are fighting back against these attacks because they have no choice but to do so. However, that fight-back is, at best, merely slowing the rate of decline. To suggest that workers can actually win these battles if they only fight a little harder or a little smarter, when the capitalists have a huge advantage in the form of wealth, organization and state power, is a pipe dream.

Therefore, the answer to the question, “What are workers supposed to do while they are waiting for a revolutionary situation to develop?”, cannot be that they should fight for some “realistic” reforms or lobby the government to “save” their jobs. Instead, the answer must be that during this period workers must not only continue to fight for their rights but should also provide themselves with the instruments, institutions and organizations necessary to actually win these struggles. In that way, instead of passively waiting for someone to save them they will be preparing conditions for the revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to socialism, as well as preparing themselves to be capable of governing society once that transformation occurs.

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