

Editorial

Demands to Support the Unsupportable

The deaths of six more young Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan last week led to renewed calls for Canada to withdraw its troops from that country. It also led to a spate of military spokespersons demanding that Canadians should unite as one in support of “our troops”, whether or not we support their mission in Afghanistan. It is understandable that the family and friends of the fallen soldiers may repeat this refrain as they try to make sense out of the senseless death of their loved ones. However, the demand that we should “support the troops” even though we oppose their mission makes even less sense than their deaths.

This demand originates in the U.S. where the attitude “my country, right or wrong” is also quite prevalent. It is accompanied with the implied threat that anyone not accepting this demand will be labelled a traitor to their country. Capitulating to this pressure, that section of the U.S. anti-war

movement most closely associated with the Democratic Party has sought avoid the stigma of being ant-American with the slogan: “Support Our Troops, Bring Them Home”.

The fact of the matter is that the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan was in violation of every principle of international law and did not even have the approval of the UN Security Council. While that approval would not have made the invasion legal and the UN Security Council later went on to violate its own Charter by endorsing the occupation of Afghanistan, according to international law, the lack of prior UN Security Council approval means that every participant in that invasion is guilty of a crime against humanity. How can one support those of any nationality, especially their own, while they are participating in crimes against humanity?

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Israeli Settlements in West Bank Expanding

According to recently released Israeli government data, 90 per cent of the Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank extend beyond their official boundaries. There are now over 160 Israeli settlements in the West Bank, taking up around 40 per cent of the territory. Of these, 122 are official settlements, with another 42 ‘unofficial’, meaning that they are not recognized on any Israeli maps. Despite the fact that their very existence is considered illegal under international law, the official settlements receive a range of Israeli state services, including such things as water, health care, education, highways and roads, and armed protection.

The data, released by the Israeli government following a court order, also shows that 10 per cent of the land within the settlement boundaries is held privately by Palestinians, while 70 per cent of the land the settlements occupy outside their boundaries actually belongs to Palestinians.

Under the 1993 Oslo Accords, Israel agreed to freeze the creation of new settlements or the expansion of existing ones. However, the newly-released data confirms that 92 existing settlements have expanded since Oslo. During the same period, the number of settlers living within the West Bank has doubled, with construction on new housing within the

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Discussion

Campaigning to “Protect Jobs” Leads to a Dead End

Trade unions in industries facing plant closures and layoffs almost invariably launch campaigns to convince governments and the public that the jobs of their members should be preserved through one or another form of government subsidy. These campaigns always look at the issue of protecting jobs in a very narrow way that covers up the real consequences of subsidizing the monopoly capitalists in the name of “job protection”.

Since these campaigns usually take place within the context of fierce international competition between monopolies, the first consequence is to line up the workers of one country against the workers in another country. Clearly, within conditions of a global crisis of overproduction, if jobs are saved in one country they must be eliminated in another country. As a result these campaigns instill workers with a spirit of national chauvinism in which the workers of other countries are viewed as the enemy rather than the monopoly capitalists of all countries.

Furthermore, these campaigns do not just divide workers along international lines; they also divide the working class nationally on the basis of supporting one group of monopoly capitalists or another. This is because these campaigns are conducted in an ideological vacuum, with no consideration being paid to the fact that every industry exists within both a national and an international capitalist economy.

For example, the Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) union has called for increased trade protection and government handouts for the “Canadian” automobile manufacturers in order to save the jobs of autoworkers. Of course, autoworkers have a right to jobs, but so does every other worker. However, since auto manufacturing exists within a real economy where resources are finite, any increase in subsidies to the auto manufacturers must come from somewhere. That somewhere may be decreased subsidies for other sectors of the economy with a corresponding loss of jobs in those sectors. Or, as is more likely, it can come from cutbacks in spending in the public sector (health, education, social services) with corresponding jobs losses in those sectors.

Other proposed measures, such as trade barriers, represent a different form of subsidy -one that comes out of the pockets of consumers by reducing

competition and, thereby, keeping prices artificially high. If consumers are paying more for the protected commodity (such as cars), then they will have less disposable income to spend on other commodities (such as, say, refrigerators). Profits in those other sectors will then decline and the monopoly capitalists in those sectors will respond by laying off workers there.

The complexity of these issues is illustrated by a situation that has developed in the paper industry. The U.S. has imposed countervailing duties on imports of coated paper from China, South Korea and Indonesia, citing the “dumping” of coated paper from those countries on the American market. This was initiated as a result of a complaint from a large U.S.-based manufacturer of coated paper. The Printing Industries of America, representing printers in the U.S., has called for the American government to end the countervailing duties because it is driving up the price that they have to pay for coated paper in the U.S., making it more difficult for them to compete with foreign printers.

What stand should workers take on such an issue? Clearly, the dumping of cheap Asian paper on the American market will have a negative impact on manufacturing jobs in the pulp and paper industry. However, imposing countervailing duties on those Asian imports has a negative impact on manufacturing jobs in the printing sector. Furthermore, since printers in other countries will step in to fill the void, it is not even clear that the American paper manufacturers will sell any more paper than they were before the duties were imposed. Depending on how much business is diverted elsewhere it could possibly be even less and could actually lead to a further reduction in jobs in the U.S. paper industry. On the other hand, the pulp and paper capitalists may very well benefit in the short term because the revenues from countervailing duties are usually turned over directly to the capitalists to replace their “lost” profits.

The practice of erecting tariff barriers to protect domestic industries worked to an extent a century ago because most capitalist economies were still organized on a national basis, transportation was slower and capital was less mobile. However, today this is no

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Eighteenth Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba

For the eighteenth year, the American Pastors for Peace organization is sending truckloads of material aid to Cuba, in direct violation of the longstanding U.S. boycott of that country. Throughout that time, many Canadians have assisted and contributed to the caravans.

On June 30, after a few days delay, a truck loaded with material aid for Cuba from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba made it across the U.S. border at Emerson, Manitoba. The truck is on one of the 14 routes the Pastors for Peace Caravan will travel over the next two weeks, stopping in more than 125 cities and towns on their way to Texas. There all routes will converge and the trucks will cross over together into Mexico.

Along all the routes public events are being held in each community the Caravan passes through, speaking out against the 46 year long U.S. blockade of Cuba. The truck that left from the Prairie provinces stopped in Calgary, Edmonton, Regina and Winnipeg before crossing into the U.S. Successful public events were held in each of those cities and several thousand dollars was raised to support the Caravan.

This year more than 150 people are travelling the full journey with the Caravan. After loading the

material aid onto ships in Tampico, Mexico, the participants will fly to Havana to join the thousands of Cubans who will gather to welcome the arrival of the shipment.

It is illegal in the U.S. to deliver goods to Cuba and major challenges sometimes occur at the U.S.-Mexico border crossing. The Pastors for Peace point out that it is the blockade which is illegal by all international standards as well as immoral because it punishes the Cuban people for the long-standing hostility of the U.S. government against its second-closest neighbour. This hostility has led to innumerable terrorist attacks, assassination attempts and other acts of aggression and sabotage over the years against Cuba by the U.S. government. Under the Bush administration, the anti-Cuba policy has strengthened to an unprecedented extent.

A Caravan border crossing from British Columbia into Washington State was also successful on June 30. However, the attempted crossing from Quebec into Maine was denied that same day due to instructions from the U.S. Homeland Security authorities. That particular shipment carrying medical supplies such as breast pumps and surgical gowns was seized and will be held for 30 days to investigate its security threat to the U.S.

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longer the case. Small capitalists may still have difficulty dealing in international markets, but the big capitalists have no such problem. They have become extremely adept at outsourcing production to anywhere in the world where the price is cheaper.

As a result, campaigns to “protect jobs” through government subsidies or trade barriers, at best, merely shift the problem onto workers in some other sector or some other region or some other part of the world. They do nothing to solve the underlying problem because the underlying problem is created by the laws of the capitalist system itself. If the trade unions were to acknowledge this reality, then they would come under pressure from workers to provide real alternatives to capitalism, something that very few trade union leaders are prepared to do.

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settlements reaching record levels between 1995 and 1997.

Using this data, Israeli peace movement activists have put together a report on Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank. They conclude, based on a careful analysis of the last 40 years of the occupation, that Israel is doing everything it can to ensure that it will be impossible for a viable Palestinian state to exist. Allowing the settlements to sprawl beyond their official boundaries assists this aim by creating a further barrier between the settlements and Palestinian land as well as preventing any Palestinian construction there. This, coupled with the illegal separation wall, reveals the reality of what any future Palestinian state would look like: it would consist of small, isolated villages separated by either a 6-metre-high wall or heavily armed gated settlements.

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Of course, the U.S. and its sycophants - including the Canadian government, various Canadian military spokesmen and the media - attempt to hide these illegalities by presenting everything in the jargon of the U.S. "war on terror". According to them, regardless of what one may think in regard to the legality of the war, it is far preferable to "fight them over there than on Canadian soil". The fact is that no evidence has ever been presented implicating the Taliban or any other Afghan resistance forces of committing acts of terrorism either at home or abroad. No Afghan citizen was linked to the September 11, 2001 events or any subsequent terrorist attacks anywhere else in the world. The Taliban has never directed its attacks against the Afghan people, but against military targets and those who are collaborating with the occupying forces.

It is a well-recognized principle of international law that the people of an occupied nation have the right to use violence against the occupiers and there is a long tradition acknowledging that this includes collaborators. The Taliban are doing nothing that was not also done by the partisans during the Second World War and, at that time, only the Nazi occupiers referred to them as "terrorists", while the rest of the world saw them as freedom fighters. In other words, the justification that it is better to "fight them over there than on Canadian soil" is nothing more than the worst form of jingoistic nonsense.

Furthermore, Taliban attacks on military targets have claimed the lives of only a tiny fraction of the estimated 100,000 civilians who have been killed by the U.S., British and Canadian forces and who are dismissed in the most cynical and racist manner as "collateral damage". From the perspective of the Afghan people, it is the foreign occupiers, including the Canadians, who are guilty of being terrorists by raining bombs, missiles and artillery shells down on their heads and homes.

The demand that all Canadians should support the troops is also often accompanied by the claim that they are risking and sacrificing their lives in the service of their country. Nothing could be further from the truth. The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan has never been in the service of Canada, but rather in the service of U.S. imperialism and those Canadian monopoly capitalists who are profiting from the war. Their participation in that war and their propping up of the gang of warlords, drug dealers, rapists and murderers imposed by the U.S. as the government of

Afghanistan have done more to destroy Canada's international reputation than any other activity in recent times. The activities of the Canadian armed forces in Afghanistan do a disservice to Canada.

While the young men and women in the Canadian armed forces may be misguided and brainwashed into thinking that they are doing "the right thing" in Afghanistan, that neither makes it right nor worthy of support. It is tragic that young Canadian men and women are dying in Afghanistan, but it is equally tragic that Afghan people, young, old, women and men are dying at the hands of "our" troops in the name of freedom, democracy and "combating terrorism". Are not those victims and their families and friends also deserving of our sympathy and support?

Unfortunately, the realities of war mean that when we support "our" troops and wish them well, we are automatically opposing and wishing ill to those Afghans who also see themselves as "doing the right thing" by liberating their country from foreign occupiers; and international law is on their side, not the side of the Canadian troops. Therefore, for Canadians to do the right thing necessarily means to oppose what our troops are doing in Afghanistan in our name and to demand that they be immediately withdrawn, along with all other foreign troops, and that the Afghan people be allowed to sort out their problems without foreign interference.

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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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