

Editorial

## The CLC Convention and the Crisis of the Trade Union Movement

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) held its 25<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Convention from May 26 to 30 in Toronto. The CLC is the largest trade union central in Canada, with approximately 3.2 million members.

Among the issues discussed at the convention was the steady decline in trade union density over the past two decades. Between 1988 and 2007 the overall percentage of the working class organized into trade unions in Canada fell from 39.5 percent to 31.5 percent. In the private sector, union density declined from 21.3 percent to 18.7 percent between 1997 and 2007. While the decline in Canada is not as drastic as that in the U.S., where union membership is hovering around 12 percent, many Canadian unions, particularly those with large memberships in the industrial centres of Ontario and

Quebec, are suffering huge declines in membership.

The policy papers presented to the convention delegates for discussion addressed the issue of declining union density and the loss of industrial jobs by calling for various measures. First, it is urging its member unions to take up the task of organizing the unorganized, but this has been a constant refrain of the CLC for decades and little has been done to put it into effect. Instead, most unions have contented themselves with merging with or raiding other unions, which is much easier and cheaper than actually organizing the unorganized. The CLC is also calling for government intervention to stop the decline in the manufacturing sector, an end to free trade deals and so on. These have also been perennial demands of the

*See page 2: Trade Union Crisis*

Commentary

## Manitoba Legislature Honours Ukrainian Swindler

On May 27, the Manitoba Legislature honoured Victor Yushchenko, the current president of Ukraine. Politicians from all parties in the legislature gushed with praise for the Ukrainian president, calling him a “champion of freedom and democracy”. In reality, Yushchenko stands neither for freedom nor democracy, for the Ukraine or elsewhere. Like Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and all of the other oligarchs who came to power in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yushchenko has spent the past two decades enriching himself at the expense of the Ukrainian people and selling out the country to the highest bidder.

Yushchenko was a career member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and a high-ranking bureaucrat in the Soviet state bank for many years. When the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s, Yushchenko and several colleagues seized control of the Ukrainian division of the bank. Through a series of financial manipulations they proceeded to appropriate the assets of the bank for themselves, swindling millions of Ukrainian workers out of their life savings and pensions.

Yushchenko’s sometime coalition partner and sometime rival, Julia Tymoshenko, likewise used her positions in the Soviet communist party and state to

*See page 4: Ukrainian Swindler*

## **Trade Union Crisis...from page 1**

CLC, but its voice has been largely ignored by governments at all levels for many years, especially since the smashing of the “social contract” in the late-1990s, first by the Harris government of Ontario and subsequently by virtually every other provincial government across Canada.

The so-called “social contract” is a polite term for the Liberal-Labour alliance which emerged during the immediate post-war period in Canada. The Liberal-Labour alliance began with a truce between the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) and the Liberal government of Mackenzie King during and immediately after the Second World War, which saw the CPC drop its revolutionary program in exchange for legal recognition. However, despite this truce, in the late 1940s the Canadian state adopted McCarthyite Cold War policies and forged an alliance with the social democrats of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF) to destroy the influence of the Communist Party amongst Canadian workers. The Communist Party had been instrumental in organizing some of the most powerful industrial unions in Canada, including the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) and played a major role in leading the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL). With the support of the CCF and its activists within the labour movement, the Canadian state was able to purge the communists from all leading positions within the CCL by 1950. Those unions which refused to purge the communists, such as United Electrical and Mine Mill, were expelled from the CCL. The CCL merged with the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) in 1956 to form the Canadian Labour Congress, whose constitution specifically forbade the election of any communist to any level of leadership in any member trade union.

The elimination of the communists from the leadership of most of the trade unions and the *de facto* elimination of a revolutionary alternative within the broader working class movement with the adoption by the Communist Party (renamed the Labour Progressive Party) of its program of “the peaceful and parliamentary road to socialism” paved the way for what has become known as the “social contract” between the Canadian state and the trade

union movement. In exchange for legal recognition by the Canadian state and certain reforms like collective bargaining and an automatic dues check-off, the main trade unions in Canada swore allegiance to the capitalist system and the capitalist state.

Apologists for the social-democratic trade union leaders refer to this “social contract” in glowing terms, as a great victory of the working class, the result of the bloodshed and heroic sacrifices of the working class and its allies to defeat fascism and build the trade union movement. Nothing could be further from the truth. The “social contract” represented the subjugation of the mission of the working class to the agenda of monopoly capital and the tying of the trade union movement to the coattails of monopoly capitalism and U.S. imperialism.

The current crisis of the trade union movement in Canada is a direct result of the anti-communist, pro-capitalist “social contract” forged between the main trade union leadership and the Canadian state in the 1940s and 1950s. It is a crisis which cannot be overcome either through organizing the unorganized or by convincing governments to subsidize various sectors of the Canadian economy to “save jobs”. The proof of this is that a virtually identical crisis exists in many countries with much higher union densities and government subsidies for manufacturing, such as most European countries. This is because the crisis of the trade union movement, in essence, has nothing to do with the declining number of members. This is a symptom of the crisis and not the cause.

The real crisis of the trade union movement is a crisis of confidence and a crisis of credibility. For decades the trade unions promised the working class that the unions could tame capitalism and make it serve both the owners and workers. Since the economic crisis of the early 1990s, that promise has been proven to be patently false. Furthermore, because the social-democratic trade unions quite adamantly reject any alternative to capitalism, they are now totally unable to offer any way out for workers. In fact, they are not even looking for a way out, but rather for a way back in for the trade union leaders and the labour aristocracy, for a new “social contract” based on an even deeper integration of the trade unions into the Canadian state. The CAW-

**See page 4: Trade Union Crisis**

## Commentary

# Barack Obama's "Change" – More of the Same

Barack Obama has spent the past two years campaigning for the Democratic nomination for president of the United States on a platform of "change". He made a big deal about being one of the few senators to vote against the Bush invasion of Iraq and promised to bring a new approach to U.S. foreign policy. His followers pointed to Hillary Clinton's hawkish statements on Iran to underline the differences between Obama and her.

However, no sooner had Obama wrapped up the Democratic nomination than he joined Clinton and Republican nominee John McCain in sabre-rattling against Iran. Addressing the powerful pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), on June 4 Obama assured the audience that Israel could count on his full support and that he would do anything in his power to prevent Iran from "gaining nuclear capability". He offered his unconditional support for "Israel's right to defend itself" by any means necessary and demanded that Iran "abandon its dangerous nuclear program, support for terrorism and threats to Israel". Iran currently has no nuclear weapons and has declared repeatedly that it has no intention of developing them. Israel, on the other hand, is reported to possess 150 nuclear warheads and has repeatedly threatened to use them against its neighbours if it sees fit.

In his speech, Obama attempted to position himself as a greater defender of Israel than George Bush, criticizing the Bush administration for supporting open, democratic elections in Gaza which were won by Hamas. Obama attacked Hamas, stating that he would never "negotiate with terrorists". He also supported Israel's pre-emptive bombing last year of a Syrian military installation which the U.S. and Israel claimed was a nuclear installation, a claim refuted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On May 23 Obama delivered a speech to the Cuban National Foundation, an organization of Cuban émigrés which has funded hundreds of terrorist attacks against Cuba over the past 48 years. Obama told that audience. "Throughout my entire life, there has been injustice and repression in Cuba.

Never, in my lifetime, have the people of Cuba known freedom. Never, in the lives of two generations of Cubans, have the people of Cuba known democracy ... I won't stand for this injustice ... I will maintain the embargo."

Over the past half century or so U.S. there have been two pillars of U.S. foreign policy – unconditional support for Israel and unconditional opposition to Cuba. Barack Obama has now declared himself fully in line with the past policy on both accounts. So precisely what new approach to U.S. foreign policy is Obama proposing?

There are apologists for Obama who claim that he is simply playing to the Jewish and Cuban vote in Florida in order to get elected, after which he will follow his own course. At best this smacks of rank opportunism. If he would tell the Jewish and Cuban lobbies what they want to hear just to get their votes, is it not likely that he is also telling his "core constituents" – young people and blacks – what they want to hear just to get their votes?

Obama has been endorsed by a significant section of the U.S. anti-war movement because he claims to differ with the Bush administration over the war in Iraq. Indeed, in 2002 he spoke passionately against invading Iraq, but, at the same time, he fully supported the Bush administration's invasion of Afghanistan. He is still advocating a "withdrawal" of U.S. troops from Iraq in order to concentrate on the war in Afghanistan. There are many in both the Democratic and Republican parties who agree with him, but this position can hardly be called a "new approach" to U.S. foreign policy. Recently, Obama declared that he will visit Iraq this summer to see for himself what is happening there. Following that visit, will he declare that he has changed his mind about Iraq because that is what the voters in the swing states want to hear? Or will he ramp up the rhetoric against Iran's supposed supplying of Iraqi "terrorists" with weapons, because that is what the Israeli's and their American lobbyists want to hear? Perhaps he will do both.

**See page 4: Barack Obama**

### ***Trade Union Crisis...from page 2***

Magna deal is a blueprint for that new arrangement, in which the workers have no rights and the role of the union is to openly co-manage labour with the capitalists.

Those who insist on creating illusions about the real anti-worker content of the post-war “social contract” and about the willingness and/or ability of the social-democratic trade unions to establish a new “social contract” which favours the working class are doing a huge disservice to the working class movement in Canada. There can be no “social contract” between monopoly capital and labour which serves the interests of the working class; such a “social contract” can only serve the interests of monopoly capital. The only “social contract” that serves the interests of the working class is one between the working class and all other classes and sections of society which are negated by monopoly

---

### ***Ukrainian Swindler...from page 1***

amass a personal fortune when the Soviet Union collapsed. She took control of the multi-billion dollar natural gas industry in Ukraine during the early years of the Leonid Kuchma regime and served as deputy-prime minister under Kuchma.

The contradictions between Yushchenko, Tymoshenko and former Ukrainian Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich have nothing to do with freedom and democracy for Ukraine or any other matters of principle. They represent a falling out among thieves, each eager to grab the lion’s share of the wealth looted from the Ukrainian people. Yushchenko and Tymoshenko see their fortunes linked to selling out Ukraine to the U.S. and Western Europe, while Yanukovich is more closely linked with the Russian oligarchs who seized control of that nation’s public assets.

Ukraine’s history is that of being a battleground for its more powerful neighbours fighting to control its rich agricultural lands and natural resources. For most of the past several centuries Ukraine has been divided between the big powers, with Russia controlling the eastern regions, while Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled the western regions. Yushchenko’s agenda to sell out the nation to the U.S. and European interests and his determination to bring Ukraine into NATO threaten to split the country once again.

capital. Such a social contract would, of necessity, be based on the common interest to overthrow monopoly capital and usher in a democratic and socialist Canada. The CLC will never agree to such a social contract.

It will be many weeks or months before the CLC publishes the results of its deliberations from May 26 to 30. However, it is not necessary to read those documents to predict with confidence that this CLC convention will do nothing to alleviate the crisis of the Canadian trade union movement. On the contrary, that crisis will only deepen and broaden in the coming years, because it can only be overcome through the rejection of social democracy and its insistence on tying the working class hand and foot to monopoly capital. This crisis will only be resolved on the basis of the Canadian working class rejecting the CLC and building a new trade union movement based on class struggle against the capitalist system.

---

### ***Barack Obama...from page 3***

When most people talk about “change” and “new approaches”, they are talking about a break with the past. For Barack Obama it appears to mean that he will tell the voters whatever they want to hear and then do whatever the most powerful monopolies tell him to do once he is elected. It can be argued that this is merely what every previous U.S. presidential candidate has done before him, but, regardless, it cannot be argued that Obama represents any kind of change, let alone fundamental change, in American politics.

## **Modern Communism**

**Bulletin of the Manitoba Regional Committee  
of the Communist Party of Canada  
(Marxist-Leninist)  
Editor: Ken Kaltornyk**

***To contact the Manitoba Branch of CPC(M-L):***  
**Fax: 477-6741**  
**Email: [mrc-cpcml@mts.net](mailto:mrc-cpcml@mts.net)**  
**Internet: [www.modern-communism.ca](http://www.modern-communism.ca)**  
**Produced by volunteer labour**