

Editorial

Stephen Harper's Apology to Residential School Victims

On June 11 Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered an apology on behalf of the federal government to the thousands of victims of the Indian residential school system. The Indian residential schools were set up in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the mandate of assimilating Aboriginal peoples into the dominant European culture. All of the students who attended the schools were cut off from their families for most of the year and were punished for speaking their native languages or practicing their religious and cultural traditions. Most were also subjected to physical and psychological abuse, with many also suffering sexual abuse at the hands of the teachers and administrators of the schools.

This apology on behalf of the federal government is long overdue. It is to the credit of the determined

struggle waged by Aboriginal peoples and the broad support they received from the Canadian working class and people that the Harper government was finally forced to issue the belated apology. It has been reported that one of the main reasons for the delay was to avoid saying anything which could be construed as an admission of guilt while a class action suit on behalf of residential school victims was still before the courts. That case was eventually settled out of court when the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) was approved on May 10, 2006 by all of the parties involved: the Government of Canada, legal council for former students, churches, the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit representatives. Implementation began on September 19, 2007. A small number of victims have opted out of

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Federal Government Violated Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Gagging Wheat Board

A Federal Court judge ruled June 19 that the Conservative government of Stephen Harper violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms when it banned the Canadian Wheat Board in 2006 from participating in the debate over the future of grain marketing. Commonly known as the gag order, the ban was imposed by Order in Council of the federal cabinet in October 2006, just months before the Conservatives launched a non-binding plebiscite on barley marketing. While the CWB was forbidden from spending any money or using its resources to provide information about the benefits of collective marketing, the Conservatives and a small group of hand-selected farm groups with close ties to the Conservative party, spent millions of dollars promoting an open or dual barley market.

The Honourable Mr. Justice Roger Hughes, who

likened the government's tactics to those of a dictatorship during the June 16 hearing into the case, noted the government overstepped its authority and that ultimate sovereignty and accountability for how the CWB spends its money rests with its board of directors; ten of the 15 board members are directly elected by farmers.

During the hearing, the CWB was able to confirm that the government would not have imposed the gag order had the CWB been spending money to support the Conservatives' position of ending single desk marketing.

Below are excerpts from Justice Hughes' decision:

- The direction is couched in terms of expenditure of funds, however nowhere in the record is there any evidence that genuine consideration

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Communiqué of the 13th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Ghadar Party of India

(Reprinted from People's Voice, organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Ghadar Party of India, dated June 16-30, 2008)

The 13th plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Ghadar Party of India was convened in the first week of June 2008. Reviewing the situation in the world and in India, the plenum noted that capitalism is in acute crisis and the liberalisation and privatisation program is greatly discredited. This offers an opportunity for the working class and communist movement to make a breakthrough.

The plenum concluded that the urgent necessity is for communist parties to boldly put forward and mobilize people around the alternative program aimed at building a modern socialist society, where working people rule themselves and production is oriented to provide prosperity and protection for all.

Analysing the crisis of world capitalism, the impoverishment of workers and peasants due to soaring prices of food and oil, the plenum concluded that the root cause lies in the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist-imperialist system. It lies in the domination of finance capital over all aspects of society, and its relentless drive to reap maximum profits, in spite of the objective tendency of the average rate of profit to fall. The successive creation and bursting of one bubble after another – including the IT or dot.com bubble, real estate bubble and now the commodities bubble – shows that capitalism is unable to carry on without creating frequent crises, and making the working people pay for maintaining the super-profits of the super rich. The crisis is awakening more and more people around the world to the dangers posed by capitalism, which has become extremely parasitic and unbearable.

The fall of the Soviet Union was used by the world bourgeoisie to push the notion that socialism is dead and that there is no alternative to capitalism. Today this claim of the bourgeoisie stands discredited. More and more peoples and nations are fighting the capitalist offensive. The crisis is therefore an occasion for the progressive forces to advance a program for ending the capitalist system and opening the door for society to advance to a higher stage.

The plenum noted that the bourgeois program of liberalisation and privatisation, pushed by the Congress Party, BJP and some others over the past 17 years and more, has made the working class and people of India highly vulnerable to the ups and downs in international markets. Rapid capitalist growth is based on intensified exploitation of workers. The plenum stressed that independent of anybody's will, this capitalist growth has and will continue to aggravate the crisis in agriculture, driving peasants to ruin. This ruination affects not only the poor but also middle and even rich peasants.

Based on this analysis of the crisis of capitalism and the offensive of the bourgeoisie, the plenum called for a vigorous countrywide campaign by the party and mass organizations, to step up the struggle to halt and reverse the liberalisation and privatisation program, and oppose the shifting of the burden of the capitalist crisis on to our backs, through soaring prices, longer working hours, etc.

The plenum reaffirmed the need for the Indian working class to lead the struggle against the bourgeoisie offensive and for establishing a new system of economy and political power. In order to enable the class to fulfill its historic mission, it is essential to expose and defeat those trends within the communist movement that serve to de-politicise workers and convert them into a tail of the bourgeoisie, by spreading illusions about a 'secular front' with the bourgeoisie and a 'human face' of capitalist reforms.

As part of efforts to politicize the class, the plenum decided to activate and mobilise mass organisations of workers to celebrate in July the centenary of the first political strike in India, when thousands of workers marched on the streets against the imprisonment of anti-colonial leader Tilak by the British rulers in 1908.

Noting that the working class is now almost half the population, growing in size and changing in composition, with rising level of education and skills, the plenum reviewed the status of the ongoing study of the changing profile of the Indian working class. It reiterated the importance of this study to grasp what is

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going on, and to deepen the party's roots in the class, and raise its level of consciousness and political unity.

The plenum noted that the Ghadar Jari Hai movement has struck deep chords with the broad masses of Indian people, who understand that even though colonialism ended more than 60 years ago, the legacy of British rule still weighs heavily on us. The plenum reaffirmed the need to bring from our past what is purest and useful to defeat the bourgeoisie today, such as the notion that land and water are gifts of Nature, and hence cannot become anyone's private property.

The plenum reaffirmed the conclusion that the kind of land reform needed today is not the distribution of small plots to individual tillers. Nor is the recognition of peasants' rights over their tiny plots the main issue. What is needed is the restoration of land to its status as social property, and promotion of its collective use by groups of peasants, with free or cheap technical support arranged by a worker-peasant state.

Assessing the situation in Nepal, the plenum noted that the successful election of a new Constituent Assembly is an important step forward in the movement of the peoples of South Asia for their empowerment. The plenum hailed the abolition of the monarchy and declaration of Nepal as a republic. It resolved to expose and oppose all machinations of external imperialist forces to undermine the movement for people's empowerment in Nepal, including the machinations of the Indian bourgeoisie.

In India, too, the empowerment of the working class and people is the need of the hour. This requires active participation of communists in elections, to expose the flaws of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, and agitate for radical changes in the political process, towards empowering the people.

In the context of the coming assembly elections in Delhi and other states, and looking towards the Lok Sabha elections due in early 2009, the plenum noted that the ruling bourgeois class will try to find a way to continue with Congress Party or BJP in power. This is the preferred arrangement of the big bourgeoisie, in order to push ahead with its drive to become a major imperialist power by 2020. Both these parties are discredited in the eyes of our people. In this situation, it is essential for communists to place before the working people an alternative to Congress and BJP rule – an alternative to the liberalisation and privatisation program, an alternative to state terrorism and communal violence.

The plenum resolved that the party will take initiative to forge a new united front of all political forces opposed to the present course of India, under communist leadership, to defeat Congress Party and BJP in the coming elections. The defeat of both these parties, and forging of a united front against the bourgeoisie, will be stepping stones to defeat the bourgeoisie and its anti-social offensive. It will open the path to worker-peasant rule, with direct democracy as the political process and socialism as the economic system.

The plenum positively assessed the work of the Central Committee and party organisations at all levels over the past four months, noting that we are in a good position to launch major initiatives to build political unity against the bourgeoisie. It discussed and adopted measures to further strengthen the party organisation at all levels, as the key to achieve our goal.

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was given to the nature or extent of funds that were in issue or at risk.

- It is entirely clear... that the directive is motivated principally to silencing the Wheat Board in respect of any promotion of a "single desk" policy that it might do. There is no mention in the direction to any promotion that the Wheat Board might do, for instance, to support the Minister's preference for an open market or market choice. If the Minister were truly concerned about the cost of such promotions, and there is no evidence of any genuine grounds for concern, then surely the Minister should have dealt with promotion for or against the Minister's preferred position, and not just against.
- ... (T)o restrain the Board in one respect only, that is, from advocating a position contrary to the policy of the government in power, is inconsistent with any aim or objective established in the Wheat Board Act. If advocacy was of serious financial concern, then all advocacy, for or against, would be the only sound basis for dealing with that concern.

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the settlement and have continued to pursue private lawsuits, but the financial implications of those lawsuits are miniscule compared to what may have been ordered by the courts if the class action suit had been allowed to run its course.

The IRSSA includes the following: 1) Common Experience Payment to be paid to all eligible former students who resided at a recognized Indian Residential School; 2) Independent Assessment Process for claims of sexual and serious physical abuse; 3) Truth and Reconciliation Commission; 4) Commemoration Activities; 5) Measures to support healing such as the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program and an endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

The Common Experience Payment was set at \$10,000 for the first year spent in residential school and \$3,000 for each additional year – in most cases approximately \$30,000 in total. Those who can prove physical and sexual abuse are entitled to additional compensation. The Truth and Reconciliation process is being given \$60 million, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation \$120 million and the Commemoration activities \$20 million. Another \$100 million has been budgeted for lawyers' fees.

This kind of compensation only addresses the suffering of some individuals and only in a limited way. While the apology and compensation are important both to the individual victims and to the Aboriginal community as a whole, they only deal with one consequence of the Canadian government's policy towards Aboriginal peoples. The residential school system was part of a broader policy of "assimilation" adopted during the late 19th and early 20th centuries which was aimed at destroying Aboriginal cultures, a policy which has been defined as cultural genocide and condemned by the United Nations as a crime against humanity. This policy, which had little to do with assimilation and would more properly be called a policy of extermination, was, in turn, a component of the broader policy of settler colonialism of the Canadian government. The aim of these policies was to remove Aboriginal peoples from their lands in order to clear the way for farming, logging and mining, while crushing their spirit to resist and avoiding the armed uprisings common south of the border. The reservation system was another component of this colonial policy.

For the federal government's apology to be meaningful and sincere, it must go beyond the limits imposed by the IRSSA settlement and address the

underlying issue of the wrongs committed by the Canadian government against Aboriginal peoples as a collective. Among other things, this would entail the restoration of the hereditary rights of the Aboriginal peoples as a collective (sometimes referred to as Aboriginal rights) – restoring and/or compensating them for the theft of their lands, recognizing their right to self-determination, and assisting them to build a modern economy and infrastructure. This is the only way to end the cycle of poverty, disease and violence plaguing Aboriginal communities and to sincerely address the wrongs of the past. If the federal government refuses to take this second step the underlying injustice that led to the residential school system will remain and the abuses of Aboriginal peoples will continue in new forms.

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- ... (A) direction that is not in accordance with the objects and purpose of the Act, as I have found, and impinges on freedom of expression, is in violation of section 2(b) of the Charter and I so find in these circumstances.
- There has been no demonstration of any pressing or substantial economic objective, the only true objective to constrain the advocacy of the Board against government policy. Given the true objective, there is no rational connection to economic considerations. The impairment of the Board's activities may be minimal, but the clear public interest against stifling public debate overwhelms that consideration.

(to be continued)

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