

Editorial

Are We Witnessing a Crisis of Capitalism?

There is a debate raging amongst the Left about whether or not we are witnessing a crisis of capitalism. Some in this debate are arguing that this is a crisis of capitalism, that U.S. imperialism is collapsing and has lost its hegemonic position within the imperialist system of states. Others argue that capitalism is extremely resilient, the U.S. economy is still the largest economy in the world and that both the U.S. and world capitalist/imperialist system can recover from the current crisis. They argue that various economies may be going into crisis but that capitalism, itself, is not.

In a sense this debate is over the issue of whether or not the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by socialism is necessary or possible. Those who are arguing that this is a crisis of capitalism are actually suggesting that revolution is not necessary because capitalism will implode due to

its inherent contradictions. Those who are arguing that this is not a crisis of capitalism are suggesting that, while the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is necessary it is not possible at this time because capitalism is still too powerful and the working class too weak.

In the opinion of *Modern Communism* both sides in this debate are right and both sides are also wrong. First, of course this is a crisis of capitalism. Capitalism goes into crisis on a regular basis, approximately every 10 years, and has done so for its entire existence. Some of these crises have been relatively mild and some have been relatively severe. Some have affected a few countries and some have affected the entire world. Each time that capitalism goes into crisis huge amounts of capital are destroyed and workers are forced to shoulder the burden. This

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Commentary

How Can All of the Political Parties Have Won When the Canadian People Lost?

In the days following the October 14 federal election, every political party contesting the election issued statements declaring themselves “winners” in the election. The Conservatives claimed that they were winners because they had been re-elected with a minority government, despite the fact that they went into the election expecting a majority. Also, despite the fact that the Conservatives obtained the votes of less than 22 percent of eligible voters, according to Stephen Harper this amounts to a solid mandate to implement the entire Conservative agenda.

The Liberals, despite losing 16 seats and dropping to their lowest ever percentage of the vote,

claimed to be winners because they prevented the election of a majority government. This claim is repeated by the Bloc Quebecois, which reduced the Conservatives by one seat in Quebec. However, it is not the Bloc Quebecois, but the working people of Quebec who deserve the credit for depriving the Conservatives of a majority. The BQ just happened to be the only party positioned to defeat the Conservatives in Quebec, so the people had nowhere else to turn.

The NDP also claimed to be winners in the aftermath of the election because they picked up a

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International Conference of Mental Health Professionals Denied Access to Gaza

A Winnipeg doctor and anti-occupation activist was a member of a delegation that has been denied access to the Gaza Strip to participate in a conference on the impact of the Israeli occupation on mental health. The fifth international conference "Siege and Mental Health: Walls vs. Bridges" was scheduled to meet in Gaza on October 27 and 28. Organized by the Gaza Community Mental Health Program (GCMHP) in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the conference was to be attended by 120 foreign academics and mental health care workers, all of whom were denied permits to enter Gaza by the Israeli authorities.

"We have just received news that the Israeli authorities have decided to block admittance to foreign participants, which has shut down our capacity to convene this conference in Gaza," the GCMHP noted in a statement. "Our conference about the effects of the siege has

itself come under siege. ... We feel strongly that these actions represent a profound blow to the rights of academic freedom, free speech, education, and cultural dialogue."

Conference organizers and participants decided to hold the conference in Ramallah instead, using teleconferencing to connect international participants with Palestinians. Research on the impact of the occupation on the mental health of Palestinians has shown that psychological disorders, trauma, anxiety and depression are very common. Over 90 per cent of Palestinians feel as if they are living in a prison. Parents worry that they will not be able to find adequate food, clothing, shelter and medical care for their children, while children live in a constant state of fear and insecurity. The number of patients seeking treatment for mental health disorders in Gaza has increased by 38 per cent in the last eight years.

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few seats, mostly at the expense of the Liberals. The fact that the NDP is still the fourth largest party in a parliament comprised of four parties seems to have escaped Jack Layton's attention.

As for the Green Party, it is also claiming a victory, despite not electing a single member, because its leader Elizabeth May got to debate with the "big boys" and managed to hang on to a greater percentage of its pre-election support than in previous elections.

For the working class and broadest sections of the people the election result was a defeat. The Conservative government will not re-orientate the economy from the serving the interests of the rich minority to serving the interests of the working class and people. It will carry on with its anti-social agenda for at

least the next 18 months to two years with little or no danger of losing a confidence vote in the House of Commons.

For that matter, none of the federal parliamentary parties presented a programme to re-orientate the economy. Their response to the deepening economic crisis is to shift the burden onto the working class and people. While the Canadian people are in danger of losing their jobs and their homes, immediately after the election Stephen Harper handed over \$25 billion to the big banks to ensure that the owners do not lose their fortunes. Not a single federal parliamentary party objected to the bailout. Once again this election underscores the necessity for the working class to begin discussing how it can provide itself with all of the instruments necessary to get rid of this anti-worker system once and for all.

U.S. Armed Forces Attack Syrian Territory

U.S. armed forces based in Iraq staged an attack across the Iraqi/Syrian border late last month. The attack killed eight people including four children. According to claims made by U.S. officials the incursion was aimed at disrupting the flow of fighters from Syria into Iraq. They said the target of the attack was an al Qaida network that is using Syrian territory to funnel insurgents into Iraq.

A Syrian government statement said that four American helicopters attacked the Sukkariyeh Farm near the town of Abu Kamal, eight kilometers inside the Syrian border. The focus of the action was a civilian building that was under construction.

This raid is consistent with the American policy of asserting its power wherever it wants in the world. The U.S. recognizes the sovereignty of no nations other than its own and that of its allies. Countries such as Syria and Iran that have been declared official U.S. enemies can expect ongoing aggression from the Americans as the military situation in Iraq and Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. Even U.S. ally Pakistan has regularly had its territory violated by the American military's predator drones. These attacks frequently kill civilians as the weapons used are indiscriminant and the intelligence on which the attacks are based is unreliable.

Cross-border attacks such as the one last month in Syria are illegal under international law. However, the U.S. only recognizes international law if it is the offended party. In all other situations it considers that its actions are above the law and subject to no restrictions other than its own self-interest.

This latest attack on Syria is only the most recent violation perpetrated against Syria by the Americans either directly or

through their Middle-Eastern ally Israel. Earlier this year Israel launched an air attack on a Syrian site. On that occasion the justification given was a claim made by Israel and endorsed by the U.S. that the bombed facility was a nuclear weapons development site. In addition, Israel continues to occupy Syrian territory on the Golan Heights with the active support of the American government.

The U.S. government has also waged a constant campaign against Syria on the question of Lebanon. It regularly blames the Syrian military and secret service for bombings and assassinations in Lebanon usually without producing any actual evidence. Following the assassination of Rafik Harriri in October 2005 it engineered the withdrawal from Lebanon of the Syrian military forces that had brought an end to the 20-year sectarian civil war in that country. Since that time the U.S. has regularly attacked Syria for supporting the Hezbollah in its efforts to defend Lebanese sovereignty against repeated attacks by Israeli air and ground forces.

Although the American pretext for its October 2008 raid on the Syria/Iraq border was the disruption of the flow of fighters to Iraq this justification seems highly questionable. The Iraqi/Syrian border is approximately 600 kilometres long and it is unlikely that raids such as this could do much to slow this alleged flow of anti-US fighters into Iraq. A more likely explanation is that the raid was simply another in a series of provocations aimed at destabilizing the Syrian regime. After all, Syria was one of the countries on the Bush administration's hit list for regime replacement had the invasion of Iraq gone as smoothly as the Americans had hoped. In the absence of regime replacement it appears that the U.S. has decided to engage in a little gratuitous vandalism.

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inevitably leads to questions about the usefulness of this system and the need to replace it with a more humane and less destructive economic system. The more severe the crisis, the broader is the questioning.

The issue that is really being debated is whether or not this is **the** crisis of capitalism, the crisis which brings the whole system crashing down. However, this is missing the point. There is no crisis which, by its very nature and severity, is **the** crisis which will bring an end to capitalism and imperialism. At the same time every crisis has the potential to bring capitalism to an end in one or more countries, those countries where the link in the imperialist system is weakest. For example, at the time of the First World War Russia was the weakest link in the imperialist system and capitalism was overthrown in that country. At the same time, there was no possibility that the capitalist system in the United States could be overthrown because the U.S. was not a weak link in the imperialist chain.

So, if we look at the current situation in Canada or the U.S. we may conclude that capitalism is still too powerful and that revolution is impossible. This may or may not be a valid conclusion because revolutions are extremely complex phenomena and a non-revolutionary situation can transform into a revolutionary situation in a matter of weeks or months. Furthermore, when the imperialist chain is broken in one place it encourages breaks in other places, but whether or not the working class is able to take advantage of such situations depends on its level of organization and its preparedness to go into action. So, the real issue is not whether or not capitalism is on the verge of collapse, but rather what the revolutionary forces need to do to prepare themselves and conditions for revolution in their own countries.

The situation at the end of the First World War is instructive in this regard. Russia was not the only weak link in the imperialist system at that time. Most of Eastern Europe, as well as Germany, France and Britain were also shattered by the war and there was a very real possibility that capitalism could fall in all of those countries. Yet revolution succeeded only in Russia. Why? Because the Russian working class was led by a revolutionary party with the theoretical,

political and organizational capacity to take advantage of the revolutionary situation in Russia, while there was no such organization in any other country.

This underlines the fact that an economic or political crisis, no matter how severe, is not enough to put an end to capitalism, either in a single country or on an international scale. Capitalism can recover from any crisis so long as it is able to make the working class pay for it. There are those that think that the workers can prevent this from happening if they strengthen their trade unions and mount a militant fight-back. However, history does not support this thesis. The trade union struggle is not insignificant or irrelevant, but unless and until the working class is ready to challenge the capitalist class for political power it will always be forced to pay the bill. And for that the trade unions are not sufficient; a revolutionary political party of the working class is essential.

Therefore, in the opinion of *Modern Communism*, the debate about whether or not this is **a** or **the** crisis of capitalism should be put to rest. The debate that has to be waged on the Left is how we can build a revolutionary organization capable of taking advantage of the opportunities that the deepening economic crisis presents to us to transform the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism from a necessity to a possibility to a reality. That is a debate with the potential to renew the revolutionary working class movement in Canada.

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