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Socialist Voice #55, July 3, 2005

Advances for International Solidarity at CLC Convention

By Barry Weisleder

*Editors' Note: Reports on other aspects of the CLC convention have been published in **New Socialist, Socialist Worker, and Labor Standard.***

MONTREAL, QUEBEC: Despite generally lackluster proceedings that avoided dealing with the most serious ills of the Canadian labour movement—concessions bargaining, reduced internal democracy, and the decline in the rate of unionization—the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) convention, held here on June 13-17, took a number of important steps forward in the realm of international affairs.

The policies adopted by the more than two thousand registered delegates and the separate statements issued by the CLC reflect the pressure exerted by world events and by local solidarity movements. The new CLC positions create further opportunities for activists to educate and to involve union members in social justice struggles around the world.

Support for global working class solidarity was also shown by the participation of convention delegates in a Montreal street protest against Canadian government intervention in Haiti, and in an evening public forum on international issues organized by the Toronto-based Workers' Solidarity and Union Democracy Coalition.

Progressive resolutions

In a document titled "Unions Make a Difference Around the World", CLC officials presented a compilation of resolutions on international issues.

Very positive resolutions on Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti were presented with a recommendation of "concurrence." Limited time allotment did not permit discussion on the floor of the convention, but the resolutions, with the support of top CLC officials, will go to meeting of the CLC Executive Council in the autumn and will most likely be adopted.

Supporters of the "Venezuela, We are with You" coalitions from Montreal and Toronto worked together during the convention and distributed over one thousand pieces of literature, in English and French, sold solidarity buttons and DVDs, and collected dozens of signatures of unionists

from across the country on a petition (appended) opposing any imperialist intervention against Venezuela.

A substitute resolution on Colombia, covering eight other resolutions submitted by different unions and strongly supporting Colombian working people against U.S. intervention, was debated and adopted by vote at the convention.

Progressive resolutions were approved that demand increased government funding for treatment of HIV/AIDS in Africa and that vigorously oppose, “any Canadian involvement in the (US-based) Ballistic Missile Defence System”. The CLC issued policy positions in support of the popular movement for social reform in Bolivia, and demanding that Canada pressure the United States to extradite the anti-Cuba terrorist Posada Carriles to Venezuela to face trial on charges of murder and terrorism. On June 16, CLC President Ken Georgetti issued an open letter on the latter subject to Pierre Pettigrew, Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Haiti occupation protested

The above-mentioned street protest against the role of the Canadian state in Haiti took place on June 16. Over one hundred CLC delegates and observers gathered outside the Palais des congres (Montreal Convention Center) at noon. They were addressed by Carol Wall, the anti-establishment candidate for CLC President who drew 37% of the votes just moments earlier, then they walked to the site of the Canadian government-sponsored “conference of shame” at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel while chanting “Haiti for the Haitians; Canada, U.S. out now!”

A well-equipped sound truck led the parade and blasted popular Haitian songs of dance and rebellion, along with chants and short speeches, en route and across the street from the hotel entrance for the next hour.

The conference was organized to discuss and plan the future of Haiti under foreign occupation, specifically, to lay the groundwork for a United Nations-sponsored election in Haiti later this year. In February 2004, the constitutional government of Haiti was overthrown in a coup backed by the United States, Canada and France. Since then, United Nations-sanctioned police and military occupation forces are acting as a prop for a repressive regime that fires on protesters and fills its jails with political prisoners.

The following day, about 40 members of the Montreal Haitian community returned for another protest at the hotel, along with a handful of unionists.

Later that day, during a news conference inside the hotel, Haiti solidarity activist Yves Engler doused the hands of Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew with red paint, to symbolize the blood on the Canadian government’s hands for backing the coup that removed the democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and unleashed the killings which have largely targeted his Lavallas movement.

After Engler was arrested and Pettigrew had cleaned his hands and suit, the politicians, including Haiti’s puppet Internal Affairs Minister Herard Abraham, announced \$30 million in Canadian aid for the sham elections later this year. Pettigrew called news wire reports of repression and shootings of demonstrators in Haiti unsubstantiated and “propaganda”.

Although charges of assault with a dangerous weapon and assault police were dropped, Engler, who was released the next day, still faces a breach of the peace charge. Widespread coverage of the incident, supplemented by letters to editors, has raised public awareness of Canada's role in Haiti and of dissenting views on it.

Forum on world issues

Engler was one of five speakers who addressed a public forum titled "Resisting War, Occupation and Imperialism" on June 14, at the site of the CLC Convention, under the auspices of the Workers' Solidarity and Union Democracy Coalition.

Over eighty delegates and community activists gathered to hear Meissoon Azzaria, an Iraq solidarity activist, Freda Guttman, a member of Jews Against the Occupation (of Palestine), Mike DesRoches of Block the Empire, along with spokespersons from the Free the Cuban 5 Committee and the Montreal-based Coalition-Venezuela, We are with You.

Ontario-based Workers' Solidarity, which operated as a Caucus at the CLC Convention, held two evening forums, daily lunch-time meetings, and massive information distributions. Its ongoing aim is to unite labour and social movement militants to resist labour concessions and social cutbacks, support struggles for union democracy, to turn the unions into fighting organizations, and to advance the interests of working people and oppose corporate profit and power.

Socialist Voice #56, July 12, 2005

Iraqi Unionists Speak Out as Failure of Occupation Deepens

By Roger Annis

Two years ago, the U.S. and British governments boasted that the war in Iraq was over and the country would soon thrive under their occupation. Today, Iraq still lies in ruins and the occupiers are more hated than ever. They are staring at a political and military failure from which there is no evident escape.

Their dilemma was starkly expressed in the speeches of two leaders of the Iraqi General Union of Oil Employees (GUOE) to a supportive and enthusiastic audience of 150 people in Seattle on June 23. The meeting, sponsored by **U.S. Labor Against the War** and the King County (Seattle) Labor Council, highlighted all that has gone wrong for the occupiers.

After two years of U.S.-led occupation, the unionists reported, the conditions of life and work for ordinary Iraqis have gone from bad to worse.

“Our Iraq is a very cruel and unjust country today,” said Hassan Juma’a Awad Al Asade, Chief Executive of GUOE. “Many workers are not receiving their pay. There are no labor laws to protect us.”

“The first stage of the occupation of our country was to seize the oil fields,” he explained. “Now, the second stage is under way, and this is the privatization of the oil and manufacturing industries of our country. We are against this because it is against the interests of the Iraqi people.”

Faleh Abbood Umara also spoke. He is the General Secretary of the union, which counts 23,000 members in and around the cities of Basra, Nasiriyah and Amara in southern Iraq. “The occupation forces have totally failed to bring progress to our country. We have no reliable water or electricity services. Roads and infrastructure have not been repaired, and we have neither peace nor security.”

The unionists reported exceptionally high rates of unemployment throughout Iraq.

They were part of a group of six Iraqi unionists that spoke to thousands of union members; union, religious and political leaders; antiwar activists; and others in 25 cities in the United States from June 10 to 26. The group represents three Iraqi labor organizations and their speaking tour was organized by U.S. Labor Against the War.

In a statement at the end of the tour, the Iraqi unionists stated,

“All of us, both Iraqi and American, were deeply heartened at the solidarity expressed throughout the tour. We have seen with our eyes and felt with our hearts that the people of the United States do not want the war and occupation of Iraq to continue.... We are strengthened in our understanding of the deep commitment of organized labor and

workers in Iraq to a unified, democratic, independent Iraq, with full equality between women and men....”

“The principal obstacle to peace, stability, and the reconstruction of Iraq is the occupation.... Iraqi sovereignty and independence must be restored.”

Divide and rule

Faced with growing Iraqi disaffection with the occupation and the stubborn resilience of armed resistance forces, the occupiers are banking on a policy of allying with sectors of the Iraqi elite and setting Iraqis against each other in a civil war. They have convinced a section of the Shia elite to lead a puppet government and join in suppressing armed resistance. In the north of the country, the Kurdish elite has been in a de facto alliance with the occupation.

The puppet government is purging government employees accused of membership in the former Baathist ruling party. Sunni communities are now patrolled by mostly Shia and Kurdish police and army units. Previously, the armed resistance had reached truces with locally-recruited Iraqi units stationed in its communities; this has now largely broken down.

In response, the armed resistance has changed its targets. Many attacks are now focused on puppet army and police in its communities. Some elements in the resistance target Shia civilians, though it is likely that pro-U.S. provocateurs play a role in such attacks.

Attacks that kill or injure civilians are putting a strain on relations among Iraqis, the sentiment for resistance and unity remains strong. This was dramatically illustrated by the demonstrations of tens of thousands of Iraqis in Baghdad on April 9 calling for an end to U.S. occupation, freeing of political prisoners, and other democratic reforms. Large rallies were held on the same day in the cities of Najaf and Ramadi. These actions were called by the movement of Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr and supported by Sunni-based organizations such as the Association of Muslim Scholars.

The speeches by the Iraqi unionists that toured in the U.S. is evidence that the occupiers have failed to win support among Iraqi working people, even in the mostly Shia south of the country.

Failure of imperialist occupation

The occupation forces continue to devastate Iraqi society with murderous violence. The savage assault that destroyed the city of Fallujah in 2004 has been repeated in other parts of Iraq. In the last two months, U.S. forces have conducted military operations across the west of Iraq, including near the border with Syria. The two cities of Haditha and Al Qa'im have come under the heaviest attack.

The organization Doctors for Iraq Society released an urgent appeal on June 26 calling for investigations of attacks on hospitals, ambulances and medical personnel in western Iraq. (You can read more on this appeal at the website of independent journalist Dahr Jamail.)

A 2004 survey conducted by the United Nations Development Program confirmed that living conditions for ordinary Iraqis have deteriorated significantly since the onset of war in 2003. Tens of thousands have died; hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee their homes.

Years of sanctions and war have also had a major negative impact on Iraq's health care system, once considered among the best in the Middle East, the survey's authors observe. Iraq's Health Ministry had requested \$2 billion for health care services in 2004 from U.S.-controlled funding authorities, but reportedly received less than half that amount—only \$950 million.

The report also details the high number of Iraqis living without reliable electricity, clean water or sewage sanitation.

Child malnutrition rates have doubled since 2003, Jean Ziegler told a March 2005 meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission. He is the commission's expert on the right to food. The situation facing Iraqi youngsters is "a result of the war led by coalition forces," he reported.

Overall, more than one-quarter of Iraqi children don't have enough to eat, Ziegler told a meeting of the 53-country commission. The U.S. delegation did not respond to the report immediately, but later attacked it sharply.

Ziegler's criticism was in line with previous studies of the food crisis in Iraq since the U.S.-led war two years ago.

In these conditions, the murderous and indiscriminate attacks on the armed resistance succeed only in deepening popular hatred of the occupation and support for the resistance.

Deepening opposition in U.S.

As the destruction in Iraq mounts and the number of deaths on both sides grows, so too does opposition in the U.S. Polls and surveys confirm that support for the occupation among the U.S. population is in decline. Recruitment to the U.S. armed forces is also dropping, putting more pressure on the troops in Iraq and on soldiers, sailors, and pilots serving outside of Iraq and hoping to avoid the call to serve there. More hired labor is being brought into all the U.S. armed services to perform non-military functions so that more enlisted men and women can be shipped to Iraq.

John Burns, chief of the *New York Times* bureau in Iraq, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on June 21 that the 140,000 U.S. troops presently in Iraq will not be enough to defeat the resistance of the Iraqi people to the occupation.

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman wrote a piece in the June 15 issue in which he argued that the only way to salvage the occupation of Iraq was to "double the American boots on the ground."

Military recruiters are adopting increasingly aggressive tactics to pressure young people to sign up. Newspapers here regularly feature news of the recruiters' work, and of the efforts of young people or their families to thwart them.

The *Washington Post* reported on June 22 that the U.S. government is establishing a national database of all young people aged 16 to 18 that recruiters will use to target potential victims. The measure has provoked harsh criticism from defenders of privacy rights, and it can only deepen opposition to the war course of the U.S. rulers.

Unease in ruling class circles

Growing numbers of ruling-class political figures are voicing concern and uncertainty about where the U.S. role in the world is headed. Bush took to the airwaves on June 28 to restate his case for war and occupation and try to reverse declining support for it. The best that he could do was to restate all the old lies of why the U.S. is at war in Iraq.

Several army generals and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld were obliged to publicly disassociate themselves from comments by Vice-President Richard Cheney, who recently described the Iraqi resistance as in its “death throes.” In televised testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in June, army generals and political figures such as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld were unable to present any convincing evidence that the U.S. is prevailing in Iraq or that a possibility of victory exists. Rumsfeld said the U.S. war in Iraq could last “up to a dozen years.”

Revelations contained in a British government memo written in the summer of 2002 have added to the woes of capitalist politicians in Washington and London. The “Downing Street Memo,” first published in the *Sunday Times* in Britain on May 1, summarizes a meeting of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and cabinet members on July 23, 2002, where plans for a war on Iraq were laid out.

The memo cites U.S. and British intelligence reports concluding that no convincing reasons for a war on Iraq had been found. The reasons would have to be fabricated. And so they were — from the “weapons of mass destruction” swindle through to the “war on terrorism”.

The U.S. and Canadian media have said little on the memo, but it has prompted several dozen Democratic Party members of Congress to establish an “Out of Iraq” caucus that favors an “eventual” U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Others calls are heard for an “exit strategy” from Iraq. Such calls propose, in essence, a better way to wage the war. Yet they help legitimize broader questioning of the war and expressions of open opposition.

Call for protests on September 24

The two main antiwar coalitions in the United States—United for Peace and Justice and ANSWER — have issued calls for a demonstration against the war and occupation on September 24 in Washington, D.C. This call is being taken up internationally. In Canada, discussions are under way over the scope and character of actions here.

There is a pressing need to bring to public attention the deepening role of the Canadian government in Washington’s war course. The war in Afghanistan, in which three thousand Canadian troops are engaged, is escalating. As in Iraq, the occupation forces have failed miserably to improve the conditions of life or ordinary Afghans. The beginning of a cholera epidemic appeared in the capital city Kabul in mid-June, with 2,000 people infected and at least eight people dead. Cholera is a water-borne disease. The trash and sewage that fills the streets of Kabul provide an ideal breeding ground for its spread. The pacification of Kabul is the one “success story” that the Canadian occupiers in Afghanistan like to brag about.

Proponents of the Iraq occupation will now try to use the July 7 bombings in London to justify continuing their policy, just as the proponents of the 2003 war manipulated public sentiment in

the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York City. But their policy in Iraq is failing. Any upturn in support they hope to gain from the London bombings will be fleeting and short-lived. Growing numbers of people around the world will correctly see that it is the criminal wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan that are to blame for acts of retaliation in the home territories of the warmakers. The bombings in London are the inevitable result of a war policy of lies and colonial conquest.

Iraqi oil workers union leader Hassan Juma'a Awad Al Asade told the June 23 Seattle meeting, "Labor rights in Iraq today is an international issue because the problems we face are the same problems that many other workers face. We are fighting for an independent and democratic Iraq, but we can only achieve this through the removal of the occupation force, and for that, we need your support and solidarity."

All out for September 24!

Socialist Voice #57, July 28, 2005

International Resolutions and Statements from the 2005 Canadian Labour Congress Convention

Editors' Note: See Socialist Voice #55 for a discussion of the context of these resolutions, statements and petitions.

Colombia

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) will:

- call upon the federal government to oppose the US sponsored “Plan Colombia”;
- work with its affiliates to strengthen our solidarity work with the Colombian trade union movement by coordinating activities such as exchanges and trade union delegations in order to maintain up-dated information regarding anti-union violence and attempts to annihilate the Colombian trade union movement;
- work closely with affiliates, the Global Union Federations, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Amnesty International to try to bring a halt to assassinations and the systemic intimidation of trade unionists in Colombia;
- demand that the Canadian government require Canadian investors in Colombia to respect all international standards on human and labour rights and environmental protection, as well as the rights of indigenous people to protect their communities and maintain their traditions;
- demand the Canadian government commits resources to Colombian civil society to assist in building a lasting peace and in strengthening social, economic and cultural rights for the Colombian people;
- support the One Democratic Coalition in Colombia to defend human rights and democratic freedoms, negotiation of a peace accord and the struggle against privatization and Free Trade; and
- coordinate a day of action in Canada against specific targets such as Colombian consulates and the Embassy in Canada and Canadian companies operating in zones of conflict in Colombia.

Bolivia

“Recent events in Bolivia have led to several government changes due to their extreme commitment to the western corporate agenda. Working women and men in Bolivia have played a leading role in the successful revolts which are shifting power from an elite to an indigenous majority of the population. The popular movements of Bolivia are demanding that interim president Eduardo Rodriguez immediately nationalize key natural resources and call for immediate parliamentary and presidential elections.

In view of the above developments, the Canadian Labour Congress will issue an immediate statement in support of the workers and the people of Bolivia, will support linkages with Bolivian labour organizations and incorporate the Bolivian experiences into the struggle against neo-liberalism, including opposition to trade agreements and privatization.

Cuba / Posada Carilles

Dear Minister Pettigrew:

I write today on behalf of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the representatives of over three million Canadian working women and men gathered in Montreal, 13 – 17 June, for the CLC's 24th Constitutional Convention, to express our concern over the strong possibility that the U.S. government might grant asylum to terrorist Luis Posada Carriles.

It is universally acknowledged that Posada Carriles has, over many years masterminded a series of terrorist acts, including the bombing of a civilian airliner, causing the death of all 73 passengers, and many other innocent people.

As you no doubt know, Posada Carriles escaped from Venezuela while awaiting trial on charges of masterminding the airliner bombing, and the Venezuelan government has demanded his extradition.

Indeed, if asylum were to be granted, it would only confirm the hypocritical policies of the U.S. administration with respect to its so-called "war on terror."

Minister, in line with established Canadian foreign policy, as well as fundamental Canadian values of fairness and respect for the rule of law, the delegates gathered here today, therefore, urge you to:

- publicly denounce the U.S. administration for providing protection to Posada Carriles;
- call on the U.S. to immediately take the necessary steps to extradite Posada Carriles as requested by the government of Venezuela; and
- –use every diplomatic means possible to bring international pressure on the U.S.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Georgetti, President

cc: CLC Officers and Executive Assistants; CLC Executive Committee; The Honourable Joe Fontana, Minister of Labour; Guy Ryder, General Secretary, ICFTU; John Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO

Venezuela

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) will:

- continue to monitor events in Venezuela in collaboration with other progressive labour movements in the Americas paying special attention to attempts to destabilize the country by the United States;

- give its full support to the Venezuelan progressive trade unions and social movements concerned about strengthening democratic governance and the full respect of internationally recognized trade union rights and freedoms; and
- continue to facilitate exchanges between Venezuela unions and Canadian unions and activists.

“Venezuela We Are With You” Petition

We, the undersigned, demand an end to all economic, political, and military intervention by the United States and its allies against the people and government of Venezuela. We call on the government of Canada to oppose US and allied foreign intervention which undermines Venezuela’s sovereignty. We demand that Canada facilitate increased solidarity, improve bilateral relations, and positively recognize the efforts of the Venezuelan people for their self-determination. We support the efforts of the government led by Hugo Chavez to expand democracy and public services, to improve access to health care, education and land for poor farmers, and to raise general employment, living standards and income levels for the majority of Venezuelans.

Cuba

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) will:

- express its solidarity with Cuban workers, encourage worker-to-worker exchanges, demand an end to the US embargo, and demand an end to US efforts to destabilize and sabotage Cuba’s socialist gains and national sovereignty;
- continue to cooperate with the Cuban trade union movement and encourage affiliates to do likewise; and
- condemn the imprisonment of Cubans Rene Gonzalez, Ramon Labanino, Gerardo Hernandez, Fernando Gonzalez, and Antonio Guerrero in Florida and call for their immediate release from prison.

Haiti

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) will call upon the Canadian government to:

- strongly support the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)’s call for an investigation into President Aristide’s removal;
- do everything in its power to support the restoration of democracy and constitutional rule in Haiti;
- cease support for and participation in the so-called “stabilization force” currently deployed;
- condemn the indifference of Haitian authorities in the face of mounting human rights violations;
- call for the release of all political prisoners in Haitian jails;

- oppose the re-establishment of the Haitian army;
- review the role of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to ensure that it is appropriate for a society based on the rule of law and democratic principles and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) so that assistance provided to Haiti be used for humanitarian purposes; and
- call for a review by the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development to examine the human rights situation in Haiti.

Because:

- reports of international human rights organizations have identified worsening violations against people identified as Aristide supporters, mostly the poor;
- Jean Bertrand Aristide was Haiti's first democratically elected president, whose Lavalas Party won 90% of the vote with a 60% turnout in 2000;
- on February 29, 2004, Aristide was forcibly removed from Haiti by a US military coup, supported de facto by Canada and France, and exiled to the Central African Republic;
- the CIDA is paying the salary of at least one employee of the unelected "interim" government; and
- Canada has committed and is assisting with preparations and the holding of free and fair election.