

From Resistance to Counter Offensive! Organized Labour Fights Back!

For an Open Discussion of Communist Trade Union Policy

June 20, 2009
Canadians for Peace and Socialism

Thirty-nine years ago in Prague Czechoslovakia, at a Meeting of the International Communist Movement called to celebrate the Lenin Centenary Tim Buck in his address to the meeting made a brief but profound analysis of what constitutes a winning strategy for Communist labour activists in a period of rising militancy such as was occurring at that time in Canada and in particular in Quebec. Framing his remarks in the context of the struggle against monopoly capital's sell-out of Canada's vital economic interests to US imperialism Buck said the following:

“Closing the gap between the pace of the rise of militancy and that of ideological development will be, and can only be, a result of the enhancement of the role of Communists in the planning and development of the aims of their fellow-workers as well as the leadership of their immediate activities. The enhancement has to be achieved ‘inch by inch’ by consistent day to day work. Propaganda must explain the continuity of the chain of actions which link together the militant workers at all levels; from actions on the job to the formulation of the policies and slogans which express the guidance of Leninism but, as Lenin points out: ‘...the objective maximum ability of the proletariat to unite as a class is realized through living people and only through definite forms of organization.’”¹

Today the working class confronts major struggles, in the most difficult of circumstances, a period of imperialist war and depression. The organized labour movement is called upon to make a leap in trade union political action and close the gap between the pace of the growth of the economic crisis and an expanding imperialist war and the militant response that is required to defend the interests of all wage earners and promote the cause of peace.

¹ Tim Buck, Remarks to the Problems of Peace and Socialism Conference, Prague November 10-21, 1969, Leninism and the Revolutionary Process, Peace and Socialism Publishers, Prague 1970

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

We in CPS believe the Communists have a key role to play in helping to solve practically and theoretically the problems confronting organized labour. We contend that is not being done adequately. The trivialization of the theory and the teachings of Marxism-Leninism as applied to contemporary labour struggles is the main reason. The Communists have retreated from the field of polemics in the realm of theory and ideology as applied to the development of what constitutes a militant and winning trade union policy.

This weakness has left the field open to “leftist” and reformist nostrums of what organized labour should be doing as well as how to do it. By not opposing those influences, the Communists are making an accommodation to these opportunist tendencies.

Organized labour is under attack on all fronts, legal, political, economic and ideological. The fight back by the Communists against this all-sided finance capitalist assault on the working class must be with the aim to preserve the unity and independence of political action of organized labour. That can be achieved but only with a corresponding improvement in what Buck referred to as “ideological development.”

The need for a reinvigorated and open public discussion of what constitutes a winning strategy for organized labour now and as it moves forward will be successful to the extent it involves first of all labour militants who are members and supporters of the Communist Party.

A Political Statement - Wage Earners Fighting To Preserve and Expand Canadian Manufacturing

The working class is engaged in a desperate struggle to protect its vital class interests in the midst of a capitalist depression and expanding imperialist war. The sharpest front of the economic struggle at the moment is in eastern Canada in the manufacturing and specifically the auto sector.

It is not an exaggeration to say that a significant *political* statement was made on behalf of the entire Canadian working class and for all of Canadian organized labour engaged in the fight back against the current global economic and political capitalist crisis by the Canadian Auto Workers in its struggle for survival. The CAW made that statement loud and clear through two weeks of brutal and exhausting negotiating imposed on it by the anti-labour Conservative Government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

The bullying of the CAW by the Harper minority government, in a dirty, complicit and subordinate alliance with the US Obama administration, finance capital, and US auto

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

companies, to accept and comply with the terms of a corporate bailout was a blatant attempt to break the union and separate the membership from its leadership.

Calculated and malicious, the attacks on the auto worker's union by the anti-labour Prime Minister was and remains a part of the grander strategy of monopoly capital's general attack on the working class. This scheme attempts to pressure Canadian workers to obediently absorb the full brunt of the capitalist economic crisis. It is part of a big business plan to weaken and finally break organized labour in Canada under the pretext that "all stakeholders" are required to make sacrifices to save the economy from ruin.

The aim is to isolate the CAW, the most militant and best organized labour organization from the unorganized working class and organized labour in general, and label the autoworker's and their union as compliant and self-interested "bed fellows" with the US auto companies.

The characterization of the CAW and its leadership as actively and willingly collaborating with the corporate rulers of Canada and the USA is just what the capitalist class wants the general public and in particular the unorganized workers to believe. Failure to expose the anti-working class essence of the attack on the CAW, its leadership and its members, plays the bosses game.

The CAW confronts the full force of capitalist state monopoly power and intimidation. That fact must be the starting point for every class conscious worker seeking a principled standpoint to assess the current struggle of workers in the auto and manufacturing sector.

Forced by the Harper regime to reopen their contract with General Motors by threatening to withdraw billions of dollars in federal "assistance" to the US auto companies operating in Canada, the CAW angrily "held their nose" and reluctantly returned their Master Bargaining Committee to battle once more with the US corporations.

Prime Minister Harper decreed that the CAW accept huge reductions in living standards under the threat of shuttering the Canadian auto industry, throwing 10,000's of auto workers on the street and callously sacrificing 100,000s of jobs across the country tied to the industry.

What were the real on the ground circumstances faced by the embattled CAW Master Bargaining Committee?

For the 3rd time in a year *and* after Chrysler had demanded that the CAW "improve" on the harsh terms already extracted by GM from the CAW in GM's second round of

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

“negotitating” no more than 12 weeks before, the CAW was back at the “bargaining” table.

The May 19, 2009 statement from the Master Bargaining Committee to all CAW members and retirees at GM made the following assessment and characterized the process as “hell” saying:

“We’re still in incredibly intense talks – not just with GM, but with the federal and provincial governments, too. They continue to interfere in the process, making new demands all the time. Their lack of experience in labour relations, and their repeated threats to pull the plug entirely on GM Canada, have made this process all the more difficult.

“And it now seems clear to us there is still one more player involved in these talks – behind the scenes, but powerful all the same. That new player is the U.S. government. Some of the new demands placed on the CAW in this bargaining clearly originated south of the border.”²

How should militants assess the CAW bargaining committee’s statement?

The Master Bargaining Committee’s statement was a *political* statement. The union confronted the fact that politics had overtaken the economic issues involved. The norms of collective bargaining no longer applied. The union attempted to shift to the politics of the struggle by clearly identifying the class enemy and articulating a fighting stance by a besieged union forced into concessions by a united state-monopoly alliance acting brazenly in their own profit interests.

The CAW statement and actions to retain assembly plants and parts manufacturers in Canada had the effect of defying and exposing the class aims of the combined efforts of Harper’s anti-union hacks and repel the attempt to break the union and cause dissention within the rank and file. That was an accomplishment by the union leadership supported by the rank and file and certainly not a defeat.

Was the preservation of the union and its unity important or not?

From Working Class Unity to Political Struggle

The always astute Tim Buck pointed out in his book “Canada: The Communist Viewpoint” that Marx summed up the objective reality confronting the working class when preserving the unity of its organization was at stake.³ Marx explained that worker’s will unite in favour of preserving unity over wages when the unity of monopoly capital is too great for the working class to struggle for and win increases in wages and improvements in working conditions. Marx described the process thus:

² We Are Approaching a Moment of Truth, A Bargaining Update for All CAW Members and Retirees at GM, Master Bargaining Committee, May 19, 2009, www.CAW.ca

³ Tim Buck, Canada: The Communist Viewpoint, “The Guide to Working Class Victory”, 1948, Progress Publishing Company, Toronto, page 213

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

“Large-scale industry concentrates in one place a crowd of people unknown to one another. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of wages, this common interest which they have against their boss, unites them in a common thought of resistance – combination. Thus combination always has a double aim, that of stopping competition among the workers, so that they can carry on general competition with the capitalist. If the first aim of resistance was merely the maintenance of wages, combinations, at first isolated, constitute themselves into groups as the capitalists in their turn unite for the purpose of repression, and in the face of always united capital, the maintenance of the association becomes more necessary to them than that of wages. This is so true that English economists are amazed to see the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages in favor of associations, which, in the eyes of these economists, are established solely in favor of wages. In this struggle – a veritable civil war – all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop. Once it has reached this point, association takes on a political character.

“Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have noted only a few phases, this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle.”⁴

Taking Marx’s views into account, how should Communists and left progressives assess the nature of the struggle underway in the auto sector and its outcome?

Corporate Bandits and Harper Accomplices

The outcome of the recent CAW corporate-government talks was not surprising given the balance of forces involved and concluded with a generous payment of public monies to the US auto corporation. Harper handed out over \$US10.6 billion in federal and provincial cash to GM in exchange for an 11.7% “equity” stake in the company⁵.

GM President and CEO Fritz Henderson “gratefully” accepted the money. In a gesture of “thanks” to the Canadian people Henderson said in a statement to a Windsor Star reporter, “Production levels in Canada will be driven by the level of market demand and not by anything else.”⁶ Henderson took the Canadian public money offered by Harper, thumbed his nose at all Canadians and hurried back to the US with his pockets stuffed full of the cash.

In a news conference on June 1, 2009 to announce the \$10 billion donation to GM the Prime Minister, standing next to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty in a matter of fact manner said:

⁴ Marx and Engels Collected Works, Vol. 6, The Poverty of Philosophy, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, pp 245.

⁵ GM Canadian operation reaps billions, none coming to Windsor, Dave Hall, The Windsor Star, June 1, 2009

⁶ GM Canadian operation reaps billions, none coming to Windsor, Dave Hall, The Windsor Star, June 1, 2009

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

“We are counting on significant return on the debt portion, but on the equity portion, we’re assuming up front, we will be assuming that that’s a 100 per cent cost... Obviously, it will be something lesser than that in the long term, but we’re not making any assumption of getting large amounts of money back.”⁷

Labour Unity in the Face of the Callous Harper Regime

Prime Minister Harper along with his lieutenants, federal Minister of Industry Tony Clement and Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, deviously attempted to pit unorganized Canadian workers against the CAW, and ingratiate the Harper Conservatives with the unemployed and Canadian “tax-payers”.

The Prime Minister declared that the CAW must give up pensions, good wages and benefits, because “not all Canadians have pensions”. Harper’s open hostility towards workers that have won pension benefits, which federal and provincial governments are pledged by law to protect, is a new low in the cynical and malevolent view by the power elites of the retirement needs of Canadian workers. This one issue more than any other exposed the class hate of government and employers for the autoworkers and must be condemned by all patriotic Canadians.

Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Diane Finley in a speech to the Economic Club of Canada in Ottawa on June 12, 2009 carrying forward the Harper line of dividing the unorganized and the unemployed from the organized labour movement callously rejected calls for EI reforms, relief for unemployed workers and the Liberal-NDP proposal to reduce qualifying hours to 360 per year. Emphasizing the Harper Government’s rejection of demands for changes to the EI system and their strategy of dividing organized labour from the unemployed and unorganized Finley said:

“There’s one thing we absolutely will not consider and that’s a 45 day work year, absolutely not... [a] lot of the jobs that have been lost have been in the manufacturing sector. Many of those jobs will be gone permanently. Those are people who have been paying into EI for 10, 20 years. They are not pleased at the thought that someone could work for 45 days and get the same benefits.”⁸

This divide and rule political line of the Harper regime is now the de-facto basis for renegeing on all norms of collective bargaining and an invitation to employers to begin tearing up agreements.

The working class rejects the invitation of government and employers for one section of the working class to abandon the other. To be unemployed is unacceptable to all

⁷ Canada, Ontario commit \$10.5B to revamped GM, June 1, CBC News

⁸ Bill Curry, “EI changes not a sure thing: Finley”, The Globe and Mail, Jun. 12, 2009

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

workers and the assurance of income for all those who are out of work is the minimum position that all labour progressives are required to fight for.

CAW Fights Back, Unites Workers on Pensions

This principle of “all for one and one for all” also applies to pensions. Harper’s cynical remark that all Canadians don’t have pensions can’t be allowed to stand. The Prime Minister must be made to explain why all Canadians *don’t* have pensions. Why *don’t* all Canadians have a decent pension? Harper must not be allowed to escape. Being without a pension is not a prospect the Prime Minister will ever experience.

Instead of expanding the opportunity for pensions for all Canadians the contributory Canada Pension Plan (CPP) has been earmarked by Finance Minister Flaherty and his parliamentary secretary Ted Menzies to be used to supplement wages of working Canadians. The scheme was announced at new conference on May 26, 2009⁹ after the meeting with provincial and territorial finance ministers in Chelsea, Quebec. The news report said, quoting Finn Poschmann vice-president of the CD Howe Institute that, “This is an important shift in the public-pension policy”. The news report went on to say that, “chief among the changes is that Ottawa is going to allow Canadians to draw on CPP benefits early and continue working”. This in fact is a scheme to compel workers to subsidize employers by supplementing their own wages from their deferred wage contributions to CPP.

The CAW confronted the need to defend not only the immediate economic welfare of its own members and retirees, but in doing so also conducted a frontline defence of all Canadian workers and in particular their pensions. The CAW correctly estimated that an attack on the pensions of its members and retirees was an attack on all workers pensions.¹⁰

The mass demonstration organized by the CAW at Queens Park over the pension issue was a political act of solidarity of the highest order. In the lead up to the demonstration Canadian Auto Workers Local 199 president Wayne Gates said, “In the future, the government (also) needs to ensure that all companies keep their pension funds fully funded.” The CAW pulled a full page ad to warn Canadians of the plans of the Harper Conservatives to gut the Canada Pension Plan.¹¹ The CAW website states:

“Canadian Pensions Must Be Protected: The CAW is demanding governments and corporations ensure all public and private pensions are protected and that an adequate safety

⁹ Paul Vieira, “Federal government will allow people to draw on CPP benefits while they’re still working”, Vancouver Sun, May 26, 2009

¹⁰ Don Fraser, “Protect pensions: retirees. Worry over Pensions: 'It's not just us, it's the whole community'”, The St. Catharines Standard, April 22, 2009

¹¹ Your Pension Is At Risk: Stand Up for Your Right to Retire in Dignity!, CAW News Paper Ad, April 20, 2009, <http://www.caw.ca/en/7352.htm>

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

net is available for those with insufficient funding. CAW President Ken Lewenza said: All Canadians have the right to retire with dignity and respect.”¹²

The demonstration of the power of independent political action by a trade union won public support beyond its own ranks for an issue that touched the interests of millions of Canadians alarmed the Harper government.

From Right-Wing Attacks to Leftist Snipes

Anti-worker attacks from a compliant monopoly media, orchestrated from the PMO, set the tone for an all-out assault on the CAW. The anti-labour pundits were called into service to mount daily disinformation campaigns to foment a climate of hostility among the Canadian people against the CAW. One only has to review the “Comments” section of any auto industry article on the Globe and Mail website to read the reactionary vile that was cultivated by these worms and agents of monopoly capital.

Beleaguered and harried from the Harper right for not being compliant enough with government-monopoly coalition plans, the union also confronted the “left” for not being “r-r-revolutionary” enough and failing to lead Canadian workers into a struggle for the nationalization of their industry.¹³

Sam Ginden, former CAW economist and now teaching political economy at York University and Socialist Project oracle stated in an article in the lead up to the GM Chrysler forced negotiations with the CAW that:

“This is an historic moment that challenges us to think big or suffer even worse defeats. Faced with immediate needs, workers and their union have too often shied away from taking on larger issues of social change that seemed too abstract, too distant, too intimidating. The lesson however is that if we only focus on the immediate, the options we have are always limited. We are all now paying the price of that failure to think bigger.”¹⁴

One can only conclude from this gratuitous advice that the defeats of the working class are attributable in the first place to the failures of the working class itself. Who is Ginden referring to when he says “we”? Does Sam Ginden still have a pension and a job? Is he “paying the price” for these so-called “failures”? We are certain that the workers will soon offer the appropriate apologies for their failures and shortcomings to academia.

Ginden was wrong. The issue confronting the CAW bargaining committee was an immediate one. The union leadership confronted the need to stave off an attempt to

¹² <http://www.caw.ca/en/7317.htm>

¹³ Sam Hammond, “CANADIAN LABOUR LATENT THREAT OR SPENT FORCE?”, People’s, May 16-30, 2009

¹⁴ Sam Ginden, “The Auto Crisis: Placing Our Own Alternative on the Table”, The Bullet E-Bulletin No. 200, April 9, 2009

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

destroy the union and to preserve some semblance of collective bargaining and preserve some of its basic gains, namely – wages, pensions and unity.

Sadly the Central Labour Commission of the Communist Party didn't see it that way. Its Chair Sam Hammond in fact echoed the musings of Sam Ginden and the Socialist Project.

The April 16-30 2009 issue of Peoples' Voice published the views of the CPC Central Labour Commission. Hammond says:

“It is in the interests of all working people to resist as strongly as possible the capitalist aim of rebuilding at our expense...we must decide our tactics...some previous working class representatives supported their own national capitalists...that collaboration did not lead to liberation; it led here, to the present crisis of unemployment, war, hunger, disease and environmental destruction...Are those who comply and co-operate really leaders? Or are they captives of an ideology that sees no other life, no other existence, just a social perspective of despair and subservience tied to the sinking ship of imperialism

“This is not a personal gripe, but rather an objective look through the lenses of need and historical experience. It is through these lenses that the present concessionary partnering of CAW President Ken Lewenza should be examined.”¹⁵

Not only does Hammond parrot Ginden's sentiments but he takes it one step further suggesting that these “failures” and this “captive collaboration” have resulted in the present crisis of “unemployment, war, hunger, disease and environmental destruction”. This in Hammond's estimation is what CAW President Ken Lewenza should be measured against – *all* of capitalism's crises.

In the article Hammond seizes on CAW President Ken Lewenza's remarks to the Economic Club of Toronto on April 1 2009 where he said in defence of his union's efforts to reach an agreement that, “We've even proposed a Canadian VEBA fund, like the ones used in the U.S.” Hammond without considering the context of the venue, the audience, or the full text of Lewenza's remarks, accuses the CAW President of “[a]lienating one's own class while serving the interests of another” which in Hammond's estimation “poses a serious threat to the future of the labour movement.”

Comrade Hammond then goes onto say that, “Hopefully there will be debate and analysis throughout labour on these issues. There is too much at stake to stay silent.”

One presumes that invitation to a debate also includes discussion and analysis of the position of the Central Labour Commission within the ranks of the Communist Party and its supporters as well. *There is too much at stake to remain silent.*

¹⁵ Sam Hammond, “CAW Enters Dangerous Waters”, People's Voice, April 16-30, 2009

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

Organized Labour is Compelled to Search for New Forms of Struggle

The CPS takes a different view. We assert that all commentary by Communists on struggles undertaken by organized labour must, without exception be made, by first explaining the full objective context in which those struggles take place.¹⁶

The starting point is the fact that the Canadian working class is embattled on many fronts, resisting the attempt of the Harper minority government acting for finance capital to make wage earners bear the brunt of the capitalist depression.

Working class resistance has inspired a broad political counter offensive in eastern Canadian communities against plant closures where tens of thousands of wage earners dependent on manufacturing and basic steel are out of work. In the west wage earners dependant on industrial and commercial construction, forestry and energy resource extraction industries also confront unemployment, sudden loss of family income, crushing debt burdens and exhaustion of savings.

All of organized labour is compelled to search for new forms of struggle, more effective political action, new tactics and strategies as its membership and the class it represents confronts the plans of the employers, banks, corporate elites to condemn working people to a bleak future of chronic unemployment and poverty. The slogan “we didn’t create the crisis and we will not be made its victims” represents a step forward in class awareness.

The counter-offensive led by organized labour of necessity is becoming more organized and militant. The resistance is changing federal and provincial politics and compelling all Parliamentary political parties to reveal their fundamental class point of view of labour and its role in the nation as the creator of all wealth.

Labour mass action has the effect of strengthening the NDP and the Bloc, exposes divisions in the Liberals and reveals the visceral hatred of the Conservatives for organized labour. The current crisis of capitalist politics and the prospect of another federal election¹⁷ is the result of a deteriorating capitalist economy overwhelming the ruling class with crisis phenomena it cannot control.

The ruling class is not united and unable to control events. Its only recourse is to attempt to preserve the profit system at the expense of the working people. The criminal abandonment of the needs of wage earners by the Harper Conservatives in favour of corporate and bank profit is crude and shameless and will not change.

¹⁶ Don Currie, “The Magna-CAW Framework of Fairness Agreement (FFA)”, FOS, November 13, 2007,

<http://www.focusonsocialism.ca/random.asp?ID=85>

¹⁷ CPS, “Oust the Harper Conservatives on Friday June 19th”, June 15, 2009, <http://www.focusonsocialism.ca/random.asp?ID=242>

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

The Harper Conservatives have never expressed any interest in the welfare of working Canadians. Harper's slogan about "hard working Canadians" is a sham and hoax. The only preoccupation of the Harper Conservatives has been how to keep its electoral base of wealth and privilege intact. The Harper Conservatives are preoccupied with the plunder of the wealth of the country to ensure the continued dominance of the banks, energy and military profiteers and big foreign and domestic investors. All other considerations are secondary.

The instability in Parliamentary politics is attributable to mass public discontent with corrupt establishment politics in general but this mass discontent is given its clearest expression by organized labour as it strives to mobilize public opinion for government action on behalf of the people and against corporate greed.

The actual mass struggle by labour does more to expose the arrogance and abuse of power by the Harper minority government than all of the opposition parties put together. As such organized labour is the most powerful expression of democracy.

Organized labour and its fight back in all of its forms, direct action, labour education, political action has the effect of upholding the dignity of labour, the democratic rights of the people, strengthens the struggle against racism and for women's rights and has a unifying affect on the progressive movements of the people. Objectively, organized labour is the main obstacle to open corporate rule.

In today's reality, at the forefront of the unfolding struggle by labour are the autoworkers. Their experience and the forms of struggle they have been forced to take up, merit the closest study, support and solidarity by all left progressives.

The most vile and reprehensible anti-working class slanders are being heaped on the autoworkers and their families and their union by corrupt media commentators, right-wing academics and corporate think tanks, and even some so-called "left" labour experts and analysts.

The CAW is Not a Political Party

The reactionary attack on the CAW should cause every worker, trade unionist, militant and left progressive to reflect and ask the question – WHY?

It is up to the Communists in the first place to answer that question. What does comrade Hammond say about this reality? In a bewildering continuation of attacks on the CAW leadership extending from the 2006 federal election to the present Hammond now shifts his critical comments from Buzz Hargrove to Ken Lewenza declaring;

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

“In fact, Ken Lewenza has mistakenly complimented the two levels of government for their injection of public cash into the corporations, approved the takeover of Chrysler by yet another foreign corporation (Fiat of Italy), and failed to raise the possibility of nationalizing what we have already paid for to launch a real Canadian vehicle, transportation and farm implement industry. He is no doubt desperately searching for a way to save his members and his union. This deserves respect, but it is not the way.”¹⁸

If saving his members and his union is “not the way” for Lewenza, what is “the way”? Hammond doesn’t appear to have an answer to his own question, something he is noted for, posing questions without answers.

The CPS has said this before and we repeat it now. The CAW is not a political party. The union engages in forms of independent political action but does so as a militant union, not a political party. The Communist Party of Canada is a political party, declaring itself to be the party of the whole working class. Its attitude to, and the way it addresses questions of the strategy and tactics of labour action is always one of partisanship.

The Communist Party can better serve the cause of the working class if it outlines its program for independent Canadian economic development including nationalization and invite and campaign for the labour movement to adopt it as their own program. Hammond is coming at the question from the wrong end, attacking the CAW leadership for not being Communist enough. If the CAW is not Communist enough that is a problem for the Communist Party first of all.

CAW Electoral Tactics and Socialist Project Oracles

Further, Comrade Hammond continues his worn and sorrowful attack on past CAW president Buzz Hargrove that was first launched in the federal election campaign in 2006, when the CPC attacked Buzz Hargrove and the CAW leadership for adopting a strategic voting *electoral tactic* to defeat the Harper Conservatives whom the CAW correctly identified as the greatest threat to organized labour when most on the left did not see the Harper Conservatives as a threat to form a government.

Hargrove was pilloried by Socialist Project luminary, Sam Gindin and labour commentator Murray Dobin, the anarchists, the Ontario NDP and the Communist Party. The carefully worded and elaborated statement¹⁹ of the CAW leadership on its reasoning for adopting *an electoral tactic* that called for unity at the polls to defeat Harper including supporting Liberals where the NDP had no chance of winning was

¹⁸ Sam Hammond, “CANADIAN LABOUR LATENT THREAT OR SPENT FORCE?”, *People’s*, May 16-30, 2009

¹⁹ Buzz Hargrove, “Making the Most of an Opportunity”, *Context Newsletter*, Volume 8 No.5, December 9, 2005

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

ridiculed. Ginden said, “Why the panic over a possible Harper victory and the action now, when polls showed Harper significantly behind?”²⁰

The Communist Party of Canada not satisfied with disagreeing with an *electoral tactic* of a union stretched that disagreement to an accusation that the union was a tool of the Liberal Party.²¹

The leader of the Communist Party Miguel Figueroa took the same view as Sam Ginden of Socialist Project. When asked in an interview “Does that mean voters should cast their ballots "strategically" to prevent a Tory election victory?” Figueroa replied:

“No. We don't think that voting Liberal to stop the Tories is the answer. This is where we part company with Buzz Hargrove and other advocates of "strategic voting." Working people need to break with both parties of big business, and to elect the largest block of progressive MPs possible. That said, we also feel it's crucial that the labour movement and the Left and progressive forces use the remaining days of this campaign to warn the people of this main danger, to expose the real Tory agenda, and show how punishing the Liberals by voting Conservative would be like "hopping out of the frying pan and into the fire.”²²

Figueroa must have known when he said that, that he was deliberately saying the opposite of what Hargrove was advocating which was clear and unambiguous, calling upon his members where there was no chance of electing the NDP to hold their noses and *punish the Conservatives by voting for the Liberals.*

All this tortured reasoning by Gindin, Hammond and Figueroa evades the fact that the first and only voice on the left in the lead up to the 2006 federal election to warn of the main danger of a Conservative victory and to propose a practical and immediate means of defeating it was Buzz Hargrove and the leadership of the CAW.

It is not credible to assert that Buzz Hargrove and the CAW leadership advocated and worked for a Liberal majority. That is a wilful and dishonest evasion of the CAW *electoral tactic* which was based on the reasoning that in constituencies where the NDP had no chance of election, voters should unite and support the candidate with the best chance of defeating the Conservative candidate and that may mean voting for the Liberal candidate.

That same reasoning arose again during the brief sojourn of Stephane Dion and the coalition agreement that was concluded between the NDP, the Liberals and the Bloc. The confusion over strategic voting as tactic and the refusal of the CPC leadership to fully analyze what balance of forces would be called into mobilizing such an effort is

²⁰ Sam Gindin, “The CAW’s Direction: Some Questions”, The Bullet E-Bulletin No. 10, December 14, 2005

²¹ Editorial, “Tories remain worst danger”, People’s Voice, January 1-15, 2006

²² Miguel Figueroa, “Stop the Tories elect progressive MPs”, People’s Voice, January 16-31, 2006

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

rooted in and has led to the bewildering and incoherent statement declaring CPC “support for the coalition”:

“Our Party welcomes the refusal of the opposition parties to be taken in by Harper's latest retreats (to abandon the cancellation of party financing and the ban on federal workers' right to strike), and calls on these parties to hold firm in their commitment to defeat this discredited government and to establish a new working majority in Parliament.

“The defeat of the Harper Tories will mark a significant victory for working people across Canada, but while such a change is a necessary condition for real progress to address the pressing needs of the people, it will not be a sufficient condition to ensure a genuinely new direction in government policy. A new Coalition government would be highly susceptible to public pressure, and would open new doors to win pro-people policies.”²³

Acknowledging it's above class view and refraining from not “formally” supporting the coalition the Communist Party said:

“While not formally supporting the Coalition, our Party recognized that a coalition government (no matter how short lived) was the only practical alternative to continued Tory rule, one which would have opened prospects for the labour and people's extra-parliamentary struggle to win certain concessions and set the stage to shift the political balance in future elections”²⁴

How are workers to read such statements? On the one hand the CPC did not “formally” support the Coalition, yet it fully acknowledges that a Coalition government “no matter how short lived” would place the central plank of the CPC political line of “extra-parliamentary struggle” to the forefront of the political agenda opening “new doors to win pro-people policies”. It would be a “significant victory for the working class across Canada” and yet the CPC did not “formally” support the Coalition. Utter confusion!

The CPS added its voice to the call to oust the Conservatives.²⁵ No doubt it will arise again in the forthcoming federal election which may occur this fall. Whether there is a formal agreement or not strategic voting will continue to occur as millions make up their own minds as to how to defeat the minority right wing Harper Conservatives. The above mentioned Hargrove critics refuse to take any responsibility for the outcome of the 2006 federal election, the election of the Harper Conservative minority and its aftermath.

There was a difference and there continues to be a difference in whether or not the country is governed by a Liberal minority or a Conservative minority. Under a Liberal

²³ Statement on the developments in Parliament, by the Central Executive Committee, Communist Party of Canada, Dec. 2, 2008, People's Voice, December 1-31, 2008

²⁴ CC Report, Meeting of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Canada, January 31-February 1, 2009, Toronto, ON, page 10

²⁵ Statement CPS: “Organized Labour and a Liberal-NDP-Bloc Coalition Government”, November 29, 2008, <http://www.focusonsocialism.ca/random.asp?ID=178>

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

minority supported by the NDP as the Communist Party correctly asserted, certain gains were possible.²⁶ A Conservative minority has proven the opposite. Right wing reaction has been strengthened as a result of the failure to defeat Harper in 2006 and in November 2008. Labour and the people have suffered setbacks and defeats because there was a Conservative minority in power. To argue otherwise is self serving and an evasion of reality.

What great victory was achieved by the critics of the *electoral tactic* advocated by the CAW? How were the interests of the working class advanced?

Hargrove was expelled from the Ontario NDP and Harper was elected. Since then the Communists have continued to imply that the CAW is effectively a tool of the Liberal Party without citing its evidence for such a charge.

In defence of the CAW's electoral stance of February 2006 Buzz Hargrove said:

*"We saw this Conservative threat coming. We tried to prevent this... We could have continued pretending that there's no difference between Stephen Harper's Tories and Paul Martin's Liberals... There's a powerful right-wing force that is now poised to bring Canada firmly back into the orbit of the most reactionary form of global capitalism. That will put Canada back in step with the United States, Britain, and yes, Australia in a unified, aggressive, imperialist system: a system motivated by greed, not by social justice."*²⁷

The Communists refuse to acknowledge as do the oracles of Socialist Project and the NDP that they erred in directing all of their initial fire at the Liberals and underestimated the threat from the far right. The record will show that they were all late in identifying the Harper Conservatives as the main danger. When they corrected that tilt they failed to draw the full conclusions. The main danger does not only need to be identified, it must be defeated and that requires electoral unity. The main danger as Canada approaches another federal election remains the danger from the extreme right and an electoral tactic to defeat it continues to be on the agenda as the country confronts a possible fall election.

Liberal Party Hacks and the Austrian Freedom Party

The Communist critique of the CAW leadership includes using its differences with the union leadership over the Magna deal to reinforce the charge that the CAW is a tool of the Liberal Party.

In his November 2007 article "CAW : Then and Now", Sam Hammond labelled Brother Hargrove and the CAW leadership as "Liberal party hacks", described the

²⁶ Miguel Figueroa, "Stop the Big Business parties Elect progressive MPs", People's Voice, December 1-31, 2005

²⁷ Buzz Hargrove, Speech to CAW Council, Port Elgin, Ontario, April 21-23, 2006

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

Framework of Fairness Deal as a “dirty deed [that] was consummated at one collaborationist stroke...by Hargrove and his mentor Frank Stronach of Magna Corporation”, Hammond disparaged the deal stating; “The CAW has created an anti-worker monster and will surely defend it as a new industrial model, one which could eventually become the model for the Canadian auto industry... turning it into a corporate fifth column in the labour movement.”

Fast forward to today. In an otherwise good statement on the outcome of the CAW’s forced concessions with GM the Communist Party of Ontario Leader Liz Rowley also engages in dubious attacks on the CAW. The Communist leader draws attention to the fact that the CAW’s Magna agreement has been concluded with Frank Stronach who Rowley asserts has links to the Austrian right-wing Freedom Party. Rowley says:

“Meanwhile, Frank Stronach has moved to buy a majority stake in GM's German Opel unit, and plans to expand assembly and production of Opel into Ontario within 24 months. A close friend of PM Stephen Harper, Stronach plans to sell and export the new Canadian-made Opel all over Canada and the US.

“But the Opel plants in Canada will be union-free, just like the Magna auto parts plants. A supporter of the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party, Stronach said in recent Toronto Star article that “there is still too much of an adversarial and confrontational environment... We need the right structure and (entrepreneurial) environment. The key is if you're not competitive you won't make any monies. Then business wouldn't be a benefit to society. In fact you would become a liability to society as we see now.”

“Stronach offered to let the CAW organize his parts plants two years ago, but without either the right to strike or union representation in the plants or on the shop floor. Worries that the Magna deal would set conditions that would work their way into the assembly plants now seem to be well-founded.”²⁸

Just what point is being made in this statement? What are workers in the auto parts plants covered by the Magna deal to conclude? The position of the Communist Party towards the CAW for concluding the Magna deal is public and well known. What is it now suggesting? Is it not fair for workers to ask “are the Communists implying that in addition to its class collaborationist errors the CAW can now be accused of consorting with an Austrian fascist party”? Since when do workers have the luxury of determining the politics of the boss with whom they are forced to bargain?

If Stronach has fascist friends what does that have to do with the CAW? Such loose talk is way over the top. It is unworthy and deserves at the very least an explanation by the Ontario leader as to what was intended in placing the matter in this way.

Our criticism of the CPC attitude to trade union politics has not changed. We assert that what Communists say about labour struggles has to be tempered with

²⁸ Liz Rowley, “AUTOWORKERS ACCEPT 3RD CONTRACT IN 12 MONTHS”, People’s, June 16-30, 2009

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

partisanship and solidarity and the utmost respect in the way it expresses its differences with unions confronted with the complex problems of organizing, bargaining and advancing their struggles today.

For example, like a dog on a bone, nineteen months after his labelling Hargrove a Liberal hack, and after Hargrove had left the leadership of the CAW, Comrade Hammond complains in the May 2009 PV article that:

“...the CAW leadership made some rather dramatic turns into concessionary bargaining and a failed experiment with a company compliant, collaborationist "Framework of Fairness" agreement with Magna Corporation. The die was cast. Buzz Hargrove no longer looked to the militants in the rank and file, but to the elements of compliance and careerism who could be easily recruited to his agenda.”²⁹

In the People’s Voice of April 2009, denying a “personal gripe”, the Central Labour Commission Chair says, “concessionary partnering of CAW President Ken Lewenza should be examined”. Then adds as an after thought that however disastrous the policies of the “collaborationist” CAW leadership has been, Comrade Hammond states in his May 2009 article that, “[t]he most mauled, the CAW, is still intact.”

What are the readers of People’s Voice to conclude from all of this? We believe it is fair to ask; who is comrade Hammond writing for and addressing his remarks to? How are militant workers to understand this confusion of musings and obsession about the CAW and its leadership? What is the CAW and its leadership in the opinion of the CPC, an anti-worker monster or an intact and embattled and responsible union?

Hammond criticizes the union but fails to elaborate the winning strategy the CAW has failed to deliver. Presumably there was a winning course that could have given the autoworkers a better outcome to their struggle, but Hammond is keeping it a secret.

Which begs the question; with all the power and collusion of the Harper regime, the McGuinty Liberals and the full weight of the Obama administration all in alliance with finance and industrial capital in an attempt to break the most militant and fighting union, warts and all, just where did the CAW leadership err and what was the alternative strategy they should have pursued that would have won a better deal? Does Comrade Hammond know something that the working class in general should know about the struggle in current conditions but won’t tell? If the Trade Union Commission of the Communist Party has the answer why is it kept a secret?

Yet the “collaborationist/concessionary” charge is dragged out of the closet time and again while the CAW leadership is in the midst of the most trying and difficult

²⁹ Sam Hammond, “CANADIAN LABOUR LATENT THREAT OR SPENT FORCE?”, People’s, May 16-30, 2009

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

negotiations in their history, forced on them by an open state-finance capital alliance and lead by the anti-union Harper administration. It is a time to ask just what side are we on?

Comrade Hammond concludes his May 2009 article with an appeal:

“There must be early and urgent meetings to plan a counter-offensive that includes the social justice movements. Coalition building led by organized labour is the order of the day. No group or strata is strong enough to repulse the tactics of the offensive by capital and the state. With the organization and experience of labour in the pivotal position, coalitions will rush together to turn the tide and win public support.”³⁰

To what forces is this fervent appeal directed? Is that an appeal to the CAW? The entire left? The Communists?

In our view it is gratuitous advice that no one will disagree with and doesn't advance the struggle one dot. This is not Marxism. It is pure subjectivity and it is harmful.

Who Bears Responsibility?

What is the responsibility of the Communist Party in this matter? What is the question it is duty bound to answer? The question they are duty bound to answer is; what were the concrete conditions of the recent CAW – corporate-government negotiations and what should have been done that wasn't done. Unless the Labour Commission of the Communist Party answers that question concretely the musings of its Chair cannot be taken seriously.

On this point it is fair to ask. Is it only the CAW that bears responsibility for building a people's democratic coalition? What about the responsibility of the CPC, the NDP, the CLC, the Council of Canadians, the progressive think tanks such as CCPA and the Parkland Institute, Canadian Dimensions and others?

When was the CAW supposed to mobilize the “united working class” in a grand alliance with the “social justice movement” as it was fighting for its life with a united corporate-government right wing alliance with overwhelming political power and when the union was in a desperate struggle to save the auto locals that Hammond himself characterized as being “mauled”?

The CAW was the organizing force behind the manifestations that occurred in the Manufacturing Matters campaigns, in the marches in Windsor and the pension rally at Queens Park. There were mass meetings throughout the CAW campaign and struggle. We look to the Communists to assess the *political* lessons to be drawn from

³⁰ Sam Hammond, “CANADIAN LABOUR LATENT THREAT OR SPENT FORCE? “, People's, May 16-30, 2009

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

all of this militancy – instead we get a long and dreary and wearisome litany of complaints of how the CAW has let down the expectations of the CPC and Socialist Project. This is not Marxism – this is infantilism. Do the statements by the Central Labour Commission Chair even begin to stand up to the sum total of the lessons to be drawn from the fight that the CAW is conducting on behalf of its members, the unorganized and the labour movement in general? If the communists want to be taken seriously they will begin to study and learn from the conditions in which the leadership of the CAW is conducting the struggle? That is how they can begin to assist labour instead of hectoring it.

What are the balance of forces that confront the CAW and the labour movement? Is the CAW a political organization fully mature and armed with Marxism? Do the members of the CAW support their leadership? Hammond doesn't deal with such matters limiting his criticism to the CAW leadership concluding with an accusation of class collaboration.

Corrected Policy or More Confusion?

The statement issued by the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Canada for May Day 2009 entitled, "For a United, Militant and Mass Struggle" is better and seems to be an attempt to correct some of the subjectivity of the Central Labour Commission Chair. The CEC May Day statement said:

"The economic crisis is now being used to attack labour rights like a sledgehammer. Corporations and their governments demand trade unions open collective agreements and accept deep cuts to wages, benefits, and pensions, under threat of bankruptcy and the loss of all jobs, pensions and benefits. This union-busting is happening in all the capitalist countries, carried out jointly by governments and corporations. The aim is to break the back of opposition to the massive redistribution of wealth from the pockets of workers to the bank accounts of the global corporate/capitalist elite.

"In Canada, the front line of the attack on labour is in the manufacturing sector. The union on the line this spring is the Canadian Auto Workers, traditionally the most militant private sector union and still the most resistant to concessions... Corporations and governments are trying to turn unorganized, lower-paid workers against organized workers, falsely blaming the relatively high wages of unionized autoworkers for the crisis. This campaign aims to pit worker against worker, and to blur or erase the class divide between workers and bosses.

"While the union is weakened by these factors, and also by a tendency (since the Auto Pact was struck down in 2001 by the WTO) to accept responsibility for the corporate bottom line, the CAW has refused to make any further concessions despite intense pressure from the Harper Tories, the McGuinty Liberals, Obama and the Democrats, the Big Three automakers, and the unorganized automakers including Toyota, Honda, and other Asian and European automakers with plants in Canada.

"This is the cause that all of labour must rally to, with the understanding that an injury to one, is an injury to all. But this won't be just an injury. If the corporations and their

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

governments break the CAW, they set the pattern that federal Labour Minister Tony Clement wants, a pattern that will break the back of the trade union movement across Canada. This cannot be allowed to happen. Labour and its allies must meet the challenge by mobilizing workers across Canada to take mass independent labour political action to protect free collective bargaining, which is what the CAW's struggle now represents.

“The ferocity of the attack on autoworkers and the CAW, and through them on all unions and all workers, has exposed capitalism's authoritarian nature. The gloves are off and the right to free collective bargaining, the right to organize and strike, and virtually all labour rights are on the line. Right-wing, authoritarian governments like the Harper Tories are quite willing to follow the example set by "Iron Heel" Bennett in the Dirty Thirties, when he attacked workers, jailed their leaders, passed anti-labour and anti-democratic laws. Like RB Bennett, Harper is prepared to do whatever it takes to save capitalism and corporate profits.”

As much as this statement seemingly moves from the attacks on the CAW leadership and begins to correct some of the more bleak assessments of the Communist Party Labour Commission it to illustrates confusion and vacillation within the central leadership on Communist labour policy, tactics and strategy.

Not more than 12 weeks before the May Day statement the February 2009 CPC Central Committee (CC) Report³¹ asserts that Lewenza voluntarily “prepared to reopen union contracts to grant wage and benefit concessions”³² to the Big Three automakers. This is a serious charge for a communist party to make. Once it is made, the CPC is duty bound to state what those voluntary concessions were and what should have been done instead. What is implied by the CPC is that there was a winning course for the union that its leadership refused to take but the CPC won't say what it was. By saying what it did in its statement the CPC invites the conclusion that concessions are always ruled out.

Surrendering Demands

On concessions Lenin had something to say and concluded that, “Of course, an advocate of proletarian revolution may conclude compromises or agreements with capitalists. It all depends on what kind of agreement is concluded and under what circumstances.” Defining compromise Lenin said:

“The term compromise in politics implies the surrender of certain demands, the renunciation of part of one's demands, by agreement with another party.”³³

How did the CC report conclude that Lewenza voluntarily agreed to reopen the CAW contracts?

Citing Lenin's work “On Compromises” the CC report referenced the following³⁴;

³¹ CC Report, Meeting of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Canada, January 31-February 1, 2009, Toronto, ON

³² Ibid, page 6

³³ On Compromises, Lenin Collected Works, 4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 30, pages 491-493

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

“The task of a truly revolutionary party is not to...renounce all compromises, but to be able, through all compromises, when they are unavoidable, to remain true to its principles, to its class, to its revolutionary purpose, to its task of paving the way for revolution and educating the mass of the people for victory in the revolution...Now the question [at issue] is not [one] of a forced, but of a voluntary compromise.”³⁵

The CC report commits an egregious error by applying Lenin’s thesis of “tasks of a truly revolutionary party” to a so-called “collaborationist” labour union leader requiring that he apply the same rigour and accountability as is expected of a revolutionary party of the working class . The CPC takes the view that it is called upon to pass judgement on the CAW for all of its work. We have said it before and we repeat we believe that is presumptuous and an unwarranted attempt to micro-manage the affairs of a sovereign union. That in our understanding of Marxism is not the role of a Communist Party and it is certainly not the way to influence labour policy.

On this point the CC report said, “This distinction is by no means an abstraction. For instance, new CAW head Ken Lewenza signalled... his union is prepared to reopen union contracts to grant wage and benefit concessions...”³⁶

The CPC of Canada, if it wants to be taken seriously by embattled unions and workers confronting a state-corporate coalition is also responsible for discussing why such concessions were offered. Why did the CAW leadership adopt the stance that it did and could it have been avoided?

Lewenza and the CAW leadership concluded that in the current conditions and given the balance of forces such “concessions” were unavoidable. The answer implied, but never openly stated, by the CC report is that the balance of forces favoured the union and that the “concessionary stance” of the CAW was avoidable.

Speaking of workers on the question of compromise Lenin said:

“Every proletarian has been through strikes and has experienced ‘compromises’ with the hated oppressors and exploiters, when the workers have had to return to work either without having achieved anything or else agreeing to only a partial satisfaction of their demands. Every proletarian - as a result of the conditions of the mass struggle and the acute intensification of class antagonisms he lives among - sees the difference between a compromise enforced by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, starvation and exhaustion) - a compromise which in no way minimises the revolutionary devotion and readiness to carry on the struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise - and, on the other hand, a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to objective causes their self-interest (strike-breakers also enter into

³⁴ CC Report, page 6

³⁵ On Compromises, Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1977, Moscow, Volume 25, pages 309-314.

³⁶ CC Report, page 6

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

*"compromises"!), their cowardice, desire to toady to the capitalists, and readiness to yield to intimidation, sometimes to persuasion, sometimes to sops, and sometimes to flattery from the capitalists."*³⁷

The CC report seems to characterize Lewenza as falling into the latter category. But is that the reality and is it justified to make that accusation in this case?

The CC report went on to suggest that Lewenza's "offer" "not only gives the 'green light to companies to extract concession after concession from Canadian auto workers; it also undermines the position of unions in other industries which will soon confront similar corporate pressures to retreat."³⁸

Finally In a broad sweeping attack on the "leading bodies of Labour" the CC report concludes its apparent preoccupation with concessions, class collaboration and compromise by saying that, "Those who constantly search for accommodation and compromise with the employer class and long for a return to the 'social contract' act like a wet blanket suffocating the entire movement and sabotaging and real progress toward building the fight back."³⁹

We are asked to conclude from this statement that the *entire movement* is incapable of making any advancement toward a genuine response to the crisis and anti-labour attacks. Without defining who "those" are and what "real progress" is deemed acceptable, the CC report chastises the "collaborators" for a desire to "return to the social contract" while at the same time the report suggests real progress is to be found by nostalgically returning to "efforts to organize the unemployed as was done quite effectively in the 1970s and '80s".⁴⁰

What is being said here? The Communist Party has the habit of making assertions based on the assumption that every worker and supporter must know what the leadership means regardless of how unelaborated their statements are. Just what is meant by the experience of the 1970's and 80's? What is being referred to? Or is everyone supposed to have full knowledge of that decade of labour struggles? It is fair to ask "just what on earth are the authors of such stuff talking about?" If they are writing for themselves say so. If they are writing for workers learn how to do it! Lenin poured scorn on such pretentiousness when he said in his work entitled "Once Again on the Trade Unions" when he castigated Trotsky and Bukharin for eclecticism demanding that when writing; "You must write for the masses without using terms that require a glossary."⁴¹

³⁷ VI Lenin, "Left Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder, Collected Works, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972 Volume 31

³⁸ CC Report, page 6

³⁹ CC Report, page 15

⁴⁰ CC Report, page 15

⁴¹ VI Lenin, "Against Right Wing and Left Wing Opportunism, Against Trotskyism", Progress Publishers 1975, Page 469.

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

Now the CEC is asking workers to accept a change in assessment that the CAW is no longer deemed “class collaborators” and have returned to their traditional role as “the most militant private sector union” and still the “most resistant to concessions”. From leading the entire movement into a concessionary corner 12 weeks previous by *voluntarily* reopening contracts for negotiation, to now refusing “to make any further concessions” (and all under the leadership of Lewenza no less), the CAW now is back in the good graces of the CEC leadership.

The CEC now says that the fight of the CAW is critical to the entire labour movement since it has now shaken its lethargy and purged collaborationist positions from its ranks. The CEC May Day statement now concludes that Labour Minister Tony Clement wants to “break the back of the trade union movement across Canada” and end free collective bargaining “which is what the CAW's struggle now represent.”

How are serious labour activists and supporters to understand such a hodgepodge of statements? It is a riot of conflicting dogma pulled from a grab bag of empty phrase mongering.

A Central Point Must Emerge

Why the change in the CEC position from that of the CC and the Central Labour Commission? On this question Lenin said:

“When a prolonged, stubborn and heated struggle is in progress, there usually begin to emerge after a time the central and fundamental points at issue, upon the decision of which the ultimate outcome of the campaign depends, and in comparison with which all the minor and petty episodes of the struggle recede more and more into the background.”⁴²

This definition by Lenin requires close examination. Does the statement by Ken Lewenza to the Toronto Economic Club meet this test? More importantly should a labour leader that is not armed with Marxism be expected to meet this test under the coordinated attacks by the state and capital that the organized labour movement is facing? And if so what should labour leaders do to achieve protection of jobs, wages and pensions while meeting the approval of Communist leaders? What general economic, social and organised labour conditions is the CAW facing? What is the effect on the problems confronted by the union of agreements that are being concluded between imperialist states in secret behind the backs of the union? What is the current balance of forces within finance capital, global and Canada-US that bears on trade union struggles today? What role is the state playing in these relations?

⁴² VI Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, Second Edition, 1965, Moscow, Volume 7, pages 203-425

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

Without analysing and discussing objective conditions, the balance of forces between labour and capital and relationships within monopoly capital, all that is left is, as Engels ridiculed - “empty phrase mongering”.

Lenin went further describing such characterizations as a “riot of phrase mongering”.

How should labour analysts avoid empty talk when considering real class struggle problems? Was the CAW leadership essentially class collaborationist or attempting to conduct a struggle where the balance of forces were against the union?

The CAW sensing that the odds of making any gains were not good were forced to retreat to the defence of unity and job protection. Were they wrong? If they were wrong what was the appropriate militant response that would have been better? Were compromises ruled out in this instance? Are they always ruled out?

The Leninist theory of compromises is rooted in real struggles. During the period when the Soviet revolution was fighting for its life, Lenin challenged the “Lefts” to provide “clear and straight forward” answers to imperialist provocations when he said,

“Anyone aspiring to political leadership must be able to think out political problems, and lack of this ability converts the “Lefts” into spineless preachers of a policy of vacillation, which objectively can have only one result, namely, by their vacillation the “Lefts” are helping the imperialists to provoke the Russian Soviet Republic into a battle that will obviously be to its disadvantage, they are helping the imperialists to draw us into a snare... At the present moment we must retreat and avoid battle...”

“This is deceiving the people. If you want to fight now, say so openly. If you don’t wish to retreat now, say so openly. Otherwise, in your objective role, you are a tool of imperialist provocation. And your subjective “mentality” is that of a frenzied petty bourgeois who swaggers and blusters but senses perfectly well that the proletariat is right in retreating and in trying to retreat in an organised way.”⁴³

Ken Lewenza, on April 17 2009, in a statement to the CAW Council in Port Elgin Ontario said, “One after another, business executives and political leaders, working clearly in tandem, have lined up to denounce the CAW’s role in the auto restructuring process”. Now it seems that the CPC Central Labour Commission is lining up as well, throwing in their “two cents” from the left.

It would be worthwhile for all Communists to return to Lenin and review “Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder⁴⁴, and paying particular attention to Chapter VIII, No Compromises?” to assess the current CAW situation in the light of what Lenin said on the question.

⁴³ VI Lenin, “Left Wing” Childishness, Collected Works ,Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972 Volume 27, pages 323-334

⁴⁴ VI Lenin, “Left Wing” Communism, An Infantile Disorder, Collected Works ,Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972 Volume 31

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

What is at Stake for Canadian Workers?

What is at stake for the Canadian working class, the thousands of auto workers and their families, dependant on wages, healthcare and pensions derived from the survival of the auto industry is stark. It means, quite literally, the survival of families, there homes, mental and physical health and the prospect of descending into despair, depression and hopelessness. No amount of “revolutionary” rhetoric will change that reality.

Within this reality is the objective nature of the balance of productive forces and the relation of social production and private accumulation of capital a decisive factor? These relationships are objectively antagonistic and the balance of forces is reflected in the organization and operation of the state to act now as a conciliator and now as an instrument of suppression and demanding compliance of labour to the interests of monopoly capital. The role that Harper minority conservatives, in collusion with the US Obama administration and US auto corporations, at this historical moment is conducting, is one of enforcer.

What is the Communist Party duty bound to begin to study and discuss to really assist organized labour in a changing economy? The productive capacity of the working class is immense. The causes of unemployment, cut backs, restructuring are the results of the capitalist system in crisis. Workers bear no responsibility for what trends are unfolding in the development of the productive forces.

The division of the working class into smaller and smaller units of specialised production is an objective historical process and the development of what Lenin termed a “holding system” is now fully realized and complete within Canada. The Canadian auto industry is a reflection of this process. This network of holding companies is consolidated and controlled within the framework of the completely integrated and predatory nature of finance capital and now dominant global market of neo-liberal trade relations between imperialist states.

Lenin commenting on the nature of this relationship said:

“Finance capital, concentrated in a few hands and exercising a virtual monopoly, exacts enormous and ever-increasing profits from the floating of companies, issue of stock, state loans, etc., strengthens the domination of the financial oligarchy and levies tribute upon the whole of society for the benefit of monopolists.”⁴⁵

Continuing Lenin says:

⁴⁵ Imperialism, Progress Publishers page 51

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

“During periods of industrial boom, the profits of finance capital are immense, but during periods of depression, small and unsound businesses go out of existence, and the big banks acquire ‘holdings’ in them by buying them up for a mere song, or participate in profitable schemes for their “reconstruction” and ‘reorganisation’.”⁴⁶

Acting in the interests of the Harper Conservative’s political support base, which is derived from monopoly oil, militarism and speculative finance capital, the auto industry moguls are in a contest with other capitalist competitors to extract greater concessions, wages and leverage from organized labour to maintain the rate of profit it has traditionally derived from manufacturing capital. Harper and his lieutenant Tony Clements seek to break the most militant section of organized labour and drive a wedge between the membership and its leadership for profit reasons period.

The policies of the Harper minority conservatives as one of reliance on the export of raw resources, primarily energy, and the expansion of Canadian finance capital abroad is now being played out with devastating effect in the Ontario manufacturing sector. The CAW is on the frontline of this corporate-government policy battling to maintain jobs and income from a shrinking manufacturing and auto sector.

State monopoly capital is conducting a ruthless assault on the gains that the working class have achieved through decades of hard fought labour struggles and union bargaining. The integration of Canadian capital within US capital remains an uneven, but generally subordinate relationship. US imperialism is confronting for the first time since the counter revolutionary forces dismantled the Soviet Union and the socialist block of nations, a challenge to its unfettered expansion and “leadership” within the global finance relations. This is reflected in the Obama administration reaction to “protecting” the US auto industry.

US President Obama outlining the policy of his administration for a “restructuring” of the US auto industry and his commitment to private capital said on March 30 2009 in a White House statement that, “These companies – and this industry – must ultimately stand on their own, not as wards of the state.” Obama’s prescription is to “[i]t will require unions and workers who have already made painful concessions to make even more.”

Tied up in these demands by the Obama administration are for the Canadian people to accept the policies of “clean energy” and subordinate Canadian policies of industrial expansion in favour of Obama’s “absolute (commitment) to working with Congress and the auto companies to meet one goal: the United States of America will lead the world in building the next generation of clean cars.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ ibid

⁴⁷ http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-the-American-Automotive-Industry-3/30/09/

Focus on Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

Obama did not mention protection of the Canadian auto industry. Obama's statement clearly articulates his willingness to sacrifice Canadian workers in an effort to retain a US position in auto manufacturing and placate the growing "Buy American" forces shutout by the bank bailouts. Prime Minister Harper is in agreement with the US President.

Travelling to New York as part of the G20 preparations and outcomes of the global financial crisis summit, the Prime Minister conducted a major interview with the Financial Times (FT) explaining the policies of his government to US investors. Prime Minister Harper, reassuring the Obama administration continued compliance and support of United States imperialist policies, maintains the line that Canada can do little with our own national economy and development without "US leadership".

When asked about the threats of Chrysler pulling out Canada unless they get major concessions from the Canadian auto workers Harper reiterated his willingness to sacrifice the industry;

*"First of all, let me just say about what the Obama administration is doing that we are extremely supportive of it. I think the message sent today is that the Obama administration is going to force the industry to make the tough decisions, to swallow the bitter pills. Whatever taxpayer money goes into this must lead to a successful outcome. Yes, it will be a smaller industry. Yes, there will be job losses. But in the end, we must produce viable companies. If we throw a bunch of money in and it fails anyway or we have to do it over again in a year and half, this is an absolute disaster. And all the signs based on what the Obama administration is doing today is they are not prepared to take that risk, and I think that is very positive."*⁴⁸

Harper's willingness to conclude agreements assume the risk that the US auto monopolies refuse to, and claim to do it on behalf of Canadian workers and for which he has no Parliamentary mandate, is reprehensible and should be condemned for what it is – a traitorous act by an unpatriotic sell-out Canadian Prime Minister.

With the odds stacked clearly in favour of monopoly capital at this point the CAW made the most significant political statement that a labour union could make in these present conditions – unity. Not only did they protect themselves but they fought to retain in Canada the tools and machinery that otherwise would have been shipped south. It was a patriotic act and one which all labour activists must understand. And in the words of one auto worker at the end of the negotiations: **"We will live to fight another day"**.

⁴⁸ Transcript Stephen Harper Financial Times interview, Published: March 31 2009, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/43f78316-1d65-11de-9eb3-00144feabdco.html?nclick_check=1