



Focus On Socialism

The Political Journal of Canadians for Peace and Socialism

SPECIAL BULLETIN 10

LABOUR AND THE NATION PART 1

**ORGANIZED LABOUR
UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL
ACTION AND THE SOURCES OF UNITY AND
MILITANCY TODAY**

WE TAKE ISSUE WITH COMRADE FIGUEROA

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Focus On Socialism

FOS is the political journal of Canadians For Peace and Socialism (CPS). In it we address current national and international issues. We strive to bring a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint to the struggle of Canadians for peace, progress and socialism.

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***LABOUR AND THE NATION –
PART 1: ORGANIZED LABOUR,
UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL
FOR POLITICAL ACTION AND
THE SOURCES OF UNITY AND
MILITANCY TODAY***

BY: DON CURRIE, CHAIR CPS, DECEMBER 22, 2007

*“From the early formation of the IWA, the chosen and democratically elected leadership of this great union fully understood the forces determining their position in society. **For them, the union struggle was only a part of a larger political struggle waged between labour and capital.** (Our emphasis DC.) The so-called White Bloc minority, on the other hand, could only embrace the struggle for wages, hours and working conditions which led them up a blind alley. The rank-and-file workers in the woods and mills were quite aware of the differences in leadership and supported those elected in the union’s early years. The White Bloc was only able to come to power with the assistance*



of an anti-communist campaign waged by the governments of Canada and the United States and the employers on both sides of the border.”

Harold Pritchett, 1st International President of the International Woodworkers of America – 1984

Foreword to One Union in Wood, A political history of the International Woodworkers of America – Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam. 1984 – Published simultaneously in Canada and the U.S. by Harbour Publishing Co. Ltd. and International Publishers.

REFORMIST AND COMMUNIST LABOUR POLITICS

Twenty four years ago Harold Pritchett in words that every worker can understand, without embellishment or hyperbole, spoke the plain truth when he said the leadership of the IWA understood that the union struggle was only part of a larger political struggle between labour and capital. Harold Pritchett was a Communist. For him it was clear, that for workers to win they would have to go beyond the economic struggle into a political struggle to change the economic and political system of capitalism. Harold Pritchett didn't start life as a Communist. Labouring in the logging industry and lumber mills of BC led him to Communist convictions.



Other militants in the organized labour movement shared Pritchett's experience. Last June 23rd, 2007 marked the fortieth anniversary of the merger of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Worker's in Canada with the United Steelworkers of America. The Merger Convention was held in Winnipeg in 1967 following the loss 18 months earlier of the certification vote of INCO Local 598 at Sudbury on December 10th 1965. The local 598 Mine Mill stalwarts, who built the union, lost the fight

after a decade of relentless red-baiting raids by the United Steelworkers backed by advisors from the NDP who acted in collusion with the Governments of the day, including Conservative Prime Minister John



Diefenbaker to oust Communists and militants from the leadership of Mine Mill.

Stanley Knowles NDP member of Parliament for Winnipeg North Centre that this writer as a candidate of the Communist Party opposed in the 1962 federal election in the constituency of Winnipeg North Centre, and David Lewis, later to become the leader of the NDP in collusion with William Dodge CLC vice president and Donald McDonald, CLC secretary worked together to oust Mine Mill in Sudbury in the early 1960's. They promoted the anti-communist right winger Don Gillis to the presidency of Mine Mill Local 598. Gillis took the presidency and promptly became a candidate for the Conservative Party. Gillis was soundly defeated and forever discredited as a Tory-Steel minion.

This writer was privileged to be present as an observer at the merger convention in 1967 in Winnipeg and listen to the impassioned debate as workers who had fought off the Steel raiders and the NDP right wingers and the Conservative Party, voted reluctantly for the merger and their mighty and legendary union ceased to exist except for 2000 members who fought on as Local 598 Falconbridge.

Mine Mill was led by Communists and non-party militants, some of whom were left-wing NDPers and some who were Liberals but who all shared the same view as Harold Pritchett, Communist, that union struggle was "only a part of a larger political struggle waged between labour and capital." Today there is no IWA or Mine Mill and the workers in those industries along with others are represented by the United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union - AFL-CIO/CLC. They have 280,000 members. Their union is not led by Communists.

THE ERA OF MILITANCY IS NOT OVER

This is the 21st Century. The era of Communist led unions is over for now, but the era of militancy and independent labour political action is not. What has been constant through the decades from the earliest struggles to organize unions until now is the political struggle between labour and capital and it does not stop because the organized labour movement today is not led by Communists. In fact it never was.

Communist led unions were always a minority inside the larger organized labour movement. Communist led unions were the yeast in the mix, the



militant, incorruptible, politically advanced current inside organized labour, but they were not the majority. They didn't have to be to make a big difference in how the whole labour movement engaged the bosses in struggle and move forward. The Communists were influential because of the clarity of their political action programs and strategy and tactics that they brought to the rank and file and by their example as a fighting revolutionary party of labour that consistently fought for unity to defeat the policies of extreme right-wing reaction. And above all else, the Communists won grudging respect because of their consistent internationalism, their socialist partisanship and unwavering solidarity with the Soviet Union and all of the socialist states where the working class had come to power.

WE TAKE ISSUE WITH COMRADE FIGUEROA

It is for these reasons, and from this standpoint that we are compelled to take issue with the characterization of the state of organized labour in Canada and role of the Communist Party today as described by Miguel Figueroa, Leader of the Communist Party of Canada to a gathering of 53 Communist and Workers Parties in Minsk Belarus November 3-5, 2007. (The full text of his speech [The Choice Today: Socialism or Extinction](#) can be read at Communist Party's Web Site.) The quote that concerns us is lengthy, but necessary, to understand the gist of what the Communist leader is telling workers abroad and in Canada: His intervention was headed: "Socialism or Extinction" a rather stark declaration for a Communist leader.

After correctly characterizing right wing policies as the main obstacle to peace, progress and working class advance and calling for defeat of the Harper Conservative Government Figueroa then states:

"The paradox in this situation is that the Canadian people in the main oppose virtually every aspect of this right-wing agenda. The majority oppose the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and oppose the threat of war against Iran and elsewhere. They oppose increasing militarization and defence spending. They want to keep healthcare, education and other services public and universally available. They oppose the sell-out of Canadian sovereignty, etc.

And yet, the people's fight back against these policies is fragmented and sporadic at best, because social democracy and other reformist currents predominate in the leadership of the trade union movement and many of the other people's movements – forces who still hope for



a return to the good old days of the “social contract” between capital and labour, and are willing to accommodate themselves, and their members, to the increasing pressures and demands of the bosses and their governments, granting concession after concession in the vein (sic) hope of restoring social peace. They are afraid to struggle and therefore refuse to mobilize the workers and other people’s forces and lead them into battle against this business/state offensive. And, unfortunately, the Communist and other left forces are too small and weak at the moment to prevent this retreat. (our emphasis DC)

Take for instance, the recent agreement signed between the Canadian Autoworkers union, the largest private-sector union in Canada and one with a proud history of struggle, and the large auto parts company *Magna International*. The union has agreed – even without a fight – to an unprecedented number of concessions, including a “no strike” pledge *forever*, and to wage cuts of 50% for new workers in the industry... 50%! This is a monumental betrayal, one which sets a most dangerous precedent for all other workers and unions in our country. We fear that it will get worse before it gets better. This is why we feel that efforts to build up the size and political and ideological strength of our Party, and to expand its reach and influence – always a priority for any Communist Party – has assumed paramount importance for us today.”

After reading Figueroa’s gloomy analysis what shall workers conclude? We can only conclude that social democracy and reformism is so pervasive that the organised labour movement is in retreat, fragmented and out of touch with the Canadian people and until the Communist Party has built up its size and strength not much is going to happen. Worse than that, even the most advanced and militant union, the CAW has committed a “monumental betrayal” and “we fear that it will get worse before it gets better.” Such is the view of the leader of the Communist Party regarding the state of organized labour in Canada today and the tasks of the Communist Party.

PESSIMISM OR OPTIMISM - WHAT IS THE REALITY?

We have a different view than Comrade Figueroa’s bleak assessment. We believe he has incorrectly characterized the state of the organized labour movement in Canada. We take issue with his view that right-wing social



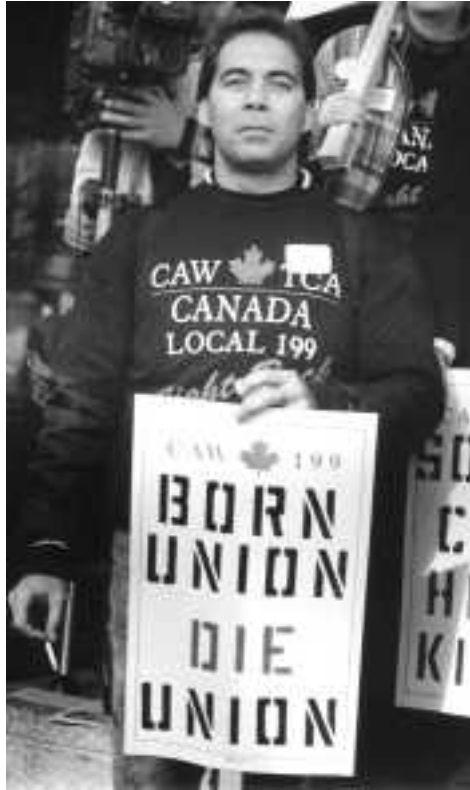
democracy and reformism has succeeded in suppressing the fight back. Comrade Figueroa could not draw that conclusion and be in close touch with new trends in the ranks of labour. There are challenges emerging in organized labour against business unionism. There are new forms of class struggle emerging in major sectors of industry, such as energy and the manufacturing. There are changes in the composition of the working class both organized and unorganized that are compelling labour to find new programs and new strategy and tactics. And there are political campaigns by organized labour that confront corporate power and anti-labour governments.

Organized labour is embattled on a number of fronts to protect workers from economic crisis and job loss, to protest war, to oppose racism and uphold the rights of women workers, to overcome poverty and for Canadian independence and sovereignty. One of the major fronts of struggle is to expose and defeat anti-labour legislation that poisons democracy and restricts the rights of labour to organize, strike, picket and mobilize public opinion in support of their just demands. **It is one thing to say the fight back is inadequate and falls short of what is needed but it is wrong to paint a picture abroad of a passive and inactive Canadian labour movement captive to reformist misleaders hip.**

THE CAW/MAGNA CONTRACT

The most egregious error in our view is the bewildering ongoing and unrelenting attack of the Communist Party leadership on the Canadian Auto Workers Union and the Magna/CAW agreement. The CAW is embattled in the auto and auto parts sector confronting plant closures and declining density of union members. For 30 years the CAW has been struggling to organize the parts sector of their industry without much headway. On top of that they are under Big Three pressure from major setbacks in the USA where the UAW has agreed to a two tier wage system and made major concessions on health and pension benefits.

For the CAW the situation is complex and poses big questions for their union of how organized labour should fight today to prevent whole sectors of the capitalist economy from disappearing and along with the industry the jobs of hundreds of thousands of workers. That reality seems to have gone right over the head of Comrade Figueroa who reduces all of the complexity of the current situation to upholding the principle of the right to strike.



The inability of the present leadership of the Communist Party to deal objectively with the Magna/CAW contract, to probe its causes resulting from the crisis in the manufacturing and auto sectors, brought on by globalization and neo-liberalism and to come forward with fight back strategies has led Comrade Figueroa to make some statements regarding the CAW that are very troubling. Figueroa has told a large gathering of the international Communist and Labour Parties that the CAW has concluded a no strike pledge with Magna International *forever*. He also asserts the CAW has agreed to wage cuts of 50% for new workers in the industry. Those assertions are not supported by any documentation we can find. **If it is out there it is incumbent upon Comrade Figueroa to cite chapter and verse. Otherwise the record needs**

correction.

For workers who visit this website and want to read what Buzz Hargrove and the CAW leadership are saying about the Magna/CAW agreement we have posted [Hargrove's December 7-9, 2007 speech to the CAW Council](#) and the [CAW & Magna Window of Opportunity power point presentation](#), Toronto December 2007. Both presentations can be downloaded and printed out for study by visiting www.CAW.ca . The view of Canadians for Peace and Socialism on Magna-CAW is posted on our website, www.focusonsocialism.ca .

The Magna CAW agreement cannot be reduced to a discussion of the principle of the right to strike. Out of context, a discussion of the right to strike becomes a barren sterile exercise providing the “hyper-leftists” with endless possibilities for creating hot air. In fact to do that is an evasion of the responsibility of serious working class leaders to help find answers to the dilemma faced by the workers in the parts industry that look to the CAW for help. It is alarming to non-member supporters of the Communist Party such as CPS to read the Communist newspaper and labour writers and see them sharing the same view as the Trotskyist Socialist Project and right wing social democrats such as Ed Broadbent and other “friends of labour”. We think the Communists are adrift on this issue and appeal to



them to consider a fresh approach and re-think the direction they have taken.

THE FACTORS OF A WINNING LABOUR POLICY

What are the factors that comprise a winning labour policy today? A winning labour policy begins by recognizing that the organized labour movement is a large organic part of the mass of working people of Canada and does not live in isolation from it. It is this organic connection that gives labour the possibility of leading the nation. A winning labour policy takes into account that organized labour is part of objectively real class politics and does not live in isolation from it. It is this fact that enables labour to go beyond the struggle for economic gains into the broader domain of capitalist politics where it gains experience in confronting the parties and governments of the bosses and learns to be a class for itself. A winning labour policy takes into account that workers are influenced by social democratic reformist illusions but are not prisoners of that ideology, that there is an ongoing battle of ideas that remains unresolved but is not irresolvable. A winning labour policy takes into account that organized labour confronts political parties and governments and cannot evade that confrontation and must develop strategy and tactics to confront the parties and governments of capital and beat them at their own game.

Consider Comrade Figueroa's correct assessment that a majority of Canadians are opposed to the Harper Government but then veers away from that correct assessment to define that reality as a paradox. It is not a paradox. The majority of Canadian working people who oppose Harper are also members of unions that oppose Harper Government policies. Union members carry that opposition into their communities and among the unorganized. It is not just the Communist Party that is engaged in that political work. The anti-Harper views of union members are reinforced inside of their unions by learning about the hostility of extreme right wing governments to organized labour. How many union leaders today could propose a resolution in their council or local to endorse the re-election of the Harper Government and still keep their jobs?

LABOUR ASSESSING ITS OPTIONS!

There is a lot of discussion within the ranks of labour about political parties, at the centre of which is a growing debate over whether the NDP today adequately reflects the interests of labour. The Communist Party is

not adding much to that discussion. In its statements and resolutions it condemns the NDP, condemns the Liberal Party, condemns the Greens and at the same time blandly calls for a people's democratic majority to defeat the Harper Government. That is not the real world. Comrade Figueroa would help the discussion if he addressed the question of left-centre unity to defeat extreme right wing reaction.

Instead his Party pre-empts such a discussion by decreeing that it represents uncritical support for the Liberals which has the affect of intimidating the discussion by declaring that to consider left centre unity is tantamount to class collaboration. The working class leader that has called for a discussion of that problem has been Buzz Hargrove. Is it any wonder he and his union are shunned and targeted by the Harper Government and just about everyone else including the Communists? Why is that? In our view it is because most union leaders continue to uncritically support the NDP when many of their members do not. Hargrove has gone beyond the debate and works for left centre unity. Why is he wrong? Comrade Figueroa just doesn't talk about that.

Buzz Hargrove may be many things. We know him by his record and it seems to us to be not all that bad. What is more important is not what we think but what his membership thinks of his leadership and they seem to think he is pretty damn good. Hargrove is no saint and the CAW is



not a Church. CAW leaders are real people, and their union is a real flesh and blood fighting union. When they go in the barn they know what they get on their boots when they leave. That's real life. Hargrove makes mistakes and then has the strength to stand up before his union and say so. That is rare in labour politics. But one thing Hargrove is not - he is NOT a Liberal hack as some Communists continue to assert. Buzz Hargrove is a militant anti-Conservative and the labour movement could use a hell of lot more of that type of labour leader.



THE UNIONS ARE THE PEOPLE AND THE PEOPLE ARE THE UNIONS

Comrade Figueroa artificially separates unions from the majority of the people who oppose right wing reaction. The people are members of unions and union members are the people. There is a dynamic in every union between members and leaders, political parties and governments and economic and political struggles of the day. The organized labour movement is an accurate reflection of real class relationships and it is simply wrong to suggest that unions led by social democrats are not, and cannot be in opposition to extreme right wing policies. Just the opposite is the truth. The organized labour movement is a bulwark against right-wing reaction, in spite of its reformist leadership. To say otherwise is to characterize the rank and file as dupes of right wing leaders.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IS NOT ALL RIGHT WING

It is also wrong to postulate that social democracy is all right wing. It is not. There is and always has been a left wing in the NDP and for that matter in the Liberal Party as well. Mike Solski a Mine Mill militant was the president of the Sudbury and District Liberal Constituency Association and Buddy Devito a Mine Mill leader in Trail, still alive and kicking, was and is a left wing NDPer. Al King Mine Mill legend, was a Communist. They all worked together for the union. Communists that do not know any left wing NDPers and Liberals should get to know some. That is a crucial part of building rank and file labour unity in action.

Left tendencies are the basis for promoting left-centre unity to defeat right wing extremism. Such ideas find little support in the top leadership of the NDP or the Liberal Party. That is not a reason for rank and file workers and militant labour leaders not to consider them. The top leadership of the NDP and the Liberal Party does not give consistent or reliable support to the agenda of organized labour. We have to fight with them to get their attention. It is their purpose to blur class lines and it is our purpose to clearly define them. At one time it was popular on the left to speak of two parties upholding the profit system. Today all parties uphold the profit system except the Communist Party. That is a reality that should not be obscured from workers but must not be used as an argument against advocating left-centre unity.



THE JOB OF THE COMMUNISTS IS TO CLARIFY NOT POSTULATE

The problems discussed above are a source of confusion for many workers who are militant anti-Conservatives and want to defeat Harper. It is not clarified by attempting to find major differences in the labour policies of the NDP and the labour policies of the Liberals. The list of MPs publicly supporting the CAW Manufacturing Matters Campaign were both NDPers and Liberals. The leaders that showed up at the 30,000 strong rally in Windsor were both NDPers Liberals and the Bloc. It is wrong to list all of the reasons why Communists should *not* advance a policy of left centre unity to defeat Harper when in reality it is the only way it can be done. Nor is it good enough to say both are opportunist. Leave that to the Troskyists – they are good at that sort of stuff. That is not real labour politics.

NDP and Liberal Party leaders alternately distance themselves and embrace organized labour as they get closer to the next election. That is a reality when there is no mass revolutionary party of the working class. These are difficult questions that cannot be answered by slogans and sound bites because what we are confronted with is an unfolding political process and that always demands more analysis and more complex answers. These are the questions Comrade Figueroa should be discussing with his members and with all class conscious workers, including the CPS. The situation is not static and fixed as Comrade Figueroa suggests. It is more complex than that.

THE HARD FACTS OF A WINNING LABOUR POLICY

What are some of the hard facts that need to be considered when developing a winning labour policy? Today union density is 30%, higher in the services sector and declining in the private sector unions. For two decades, in the US and Canada extreme right wing, neo-con anti-labour, anti-working class, anti-communist governments have held power. Reactionary big business governments since Reagan and Mulroney have been pursuing policies to weaken and marginalize and ultimately destroy organized labour. They have failed, in spite of the fact that Communists were only in a position to support those struggles, not lead them. Today in both the USA and in Canada labour is on the comeback trail partially free of the baggage of the cold war. It is still locked in the embrace of capitalist



politics but wiser about who is the main enemy and more critical of the “friends of labour” than in the past.

The basis of unity has broadened, both electorally and in economic struggles. Today the yeast is still working in the mix. In spite of right wing social democracy, reformist illusions, business unionism, there remains a trend in organized labour that knows the score. Today there are numbers of union members undreamed of in past decades that lends organized labour a powerful potential to rock the system, drive back the right wing, regain what has been lost, defend what we have won and move forward to take what we need. There is potential, there is militancy and there is a thirst for a reliable guide to action. **Comrade Figueroa’s analysis is simplistic and pessimistic and reduced to the subjective notion that nothing is moving forward, nothing *can* move forward *until* the Communist Party has built up its size, its political and ideological strength.**

Comrade Figueroa is also mistaken in declaring that until there is growth in the Communist Party, labour progress cannot be made in moving organized labour into mass political action. Communists do not create labour struggles. Capitalist exploitation creates labour struggles. Labour struggles create militancy and militancy seeks a theory to move the struggle forward. Militant workers who eventually embrace the ideas of Marxism-Leninism as a guide to action get there through experience and in contact with communists and socialists, are strengthened, move forward with greater clarity of purpose, cope better with the inevitable need to master the strategy and tactics of the class struggle. Workers who embrace Marxism do so not because it is a good idea but rather because it is a necessity, for without theory action is blind.

It is wrong to lose sight of the fact that the organized labour movement is a living reminder to capitalist society that working people in the 21st Century have learned something about politics. There *is* a labour presence in politics that goes beyond how workers vote. The presence of organized labour in politics is due in part to its sheer numbers which is significant but more importantly to its self awareness that it is not at peace with the capitalist economic system, that it is in a conflict that is never resolved.

It is important to remind ourselves of the size of the presence of organized labour in society and what the trends are. That is what Buzz Hargrove is talking about when he warns about declining union density in the auto



sector. It is a potential disaster for the workers in that industry. We cannot pour scorn on efforts to defend their interests. That is unacceptable.

ORGANIZED LABOUR — A REALITY CHECK

Information obtained by Labour Policy and Workplace Information, Labour Program, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada in its January 1, 2006 survey revealed that 4,441,000 Canadian workers were union members. This represents an increase of 60,000 members compared to the 4,381,000 members accounted for on January 1, 2005. During 2006, the number of non-agricultural paid workers reached 14,434,000; an increase of 165,000 over 2005. No doubt the 2007 may change these numbers but not significantly.

The rate or union density (union membership as a percentage of non-agricultural paid employment) was 30.8% as of January 1, 2006. Union density needs analysis on an industry to industry basis since that will reveal the changes underway in the composition of the workforce.

The affiliated membership of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) increased by 41,040 from 3,156,560 on January 1, 2005 to 3,197,600 on January 1, 2006, however, its share of total union membership slightly decreased from 72.1% in 2005 to 72.0% in 2006.

Information as of January 1, 2006, indicates that the percentage of membership from unaffiliated national unions increased slightly from last year (11.4%) to this year (12.0%). This represents an increase of 34,430 members.

In 2006 there were 4.441 million union members representing 30% of non-agricultural workers indicating that union density has fallen in 15 years.

That is what comrade Figueroa and his labour advisors need to get their teeth into. In 1991 there were 4.068 million union members or 35.6% of non-agricultural paid employees. While absolute numbers have increased density is gradually declining indicating the need to organize the unorganized in the conditions of the 21st century. That problem confronts every union leader and working class leader today.



Unions with Largest Membership, 2005–2006		
Union	Membership (000's)	
	2005	2006
Canadian Union of Public Employees - CLC	540	548
National Union of Public and General Employees-CLC	337	337
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union - AFL-CIO/CLC	280	280
National Automobile, Aerospace, Transportation and General Workers Union of Canada (CAW-CANADA) - CLC	265	265
United Food and Commercial Workers Canada - CLC	230	233
Public Service Alliance of Canada - CLC	156	162
Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada - CLC	150	150
International Brotherhood of Teamsters - AFL-CIO/CLC	125	120
Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux - CSN	110	114
Service Employees International Union - Canada - CLC	78	85
Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement - CEQ	84	82
Laborers' International Union of North America - AFL-CIO/CLC	85	72
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario - CLC	65	69
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers - AFL-CIO/CLC	56	57
Fédération des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec - Ind.	49	56
Canadian Union of Postal Workers - CLC	55	55



Unions with Largest Membership, 2005–2006		
Union	Membership (000's)	
	2005	2006
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation - CLC	53	55
Ontario Nurses' Association - CLC	50	51
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America - AFL-CIO/CLC	52	50
Fédération des employées et employés de services publics inc. - CSN	42	46
UNITE HERE CANADA- CLC	45	46
Alberta Teachers' Association - Ind.	33	45
British Columbia Teachers' Federation - Ind.	44	45
Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada - Ind.	48	44
United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada - AFL-CIO/CLC	41	43
Syndicat de la fonction publique du Québec - Ind.	43	43
International Union of Operating Engineers - AFL-CIO/CLC	40	40
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers - AFL-CIO/CLC	42	39
Christian Labour Association of Canada- Ind.	30	38
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association - CLC	35	36
Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union - CLC	35	34
Fédération du commerce inc. - CSN	34	32

Source: Labour Policy and Workplace Information.

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Union Membership by Congress Affiliation, 2005–2006				
Congress Affiliation	2005		2006	
	Membership	%	Membership	%
CLC	3,156,560	72.1	3,197,600	72.0
CLC only	1,975,800	45.1	2,376,990	53.5
AFL-CIO/CLC	1,178,940	26.9	818,770	18.4
Directly Chartered Local Unions	1,820	0.0	1,840	0.0
CSN	280,650	6.4	284,280	6.4
CSQ	129,750	3.0	123,510	2.8
CSD	61,180	1.4	59,160	1.3
CCU	8,660	0.2	9,390	0.2
AFL-CIO only	87,370	2.0	74,650	1.7
Unaffiliated National Unions	497,290	11.4	531,720	12.0
Unaffiliated International Unions	1,860	0.0	2,150	0.0
Independent Local Organizations	158,530	3.6	158,085	3.6
Total	4,381,000	100.0	4,441,000	100.0

Source: Labour Policy and Workplace Information.

Comrade Figueroa comes to the problem from the wrong end of the telescope. He is unable to see the big picture. What is that bigger picture?

In addition to its numbers the organized labour movement wields economic, social and moral influence on the majority of workers who are unorganized. Whether workers are represented by a union or not they are aware that unions exist independently of the will of finance capital and the political parties that uphold the profit system. As such organized labour, wields a certain measure of political independence that all political parties are compelled to take into account and that finance capital must grudgingly acknowledge. It is that *presence* that makes it possible for organized labour to force governments to contend with their demands and to sometimes force them to make concessions.



The relative political independence that organized labour in Canada wields has been won at great cost to workers through a century and more of economic and political struggles to break free of the direct political control of capitalist parties. That process is not over and won't be so long as capitalism exists. The process itself is highly political reflecting both internal political struggles as well as the ongoing political interaction between organized labour, political parties and government.

Organized labour engages in politics but is not a political party. Organized labour is the mass economic organization of the working class, the front line, the point of contact with the owners of the means of production, where economic gains are won or lost. The organized labour movement develops out of economic struggles with domestic and foreign capital. It is the product of the capitalist system and a reaction to it. The organized labour movement is the first step in the process by which workers transform spontaneous acts of protest into organized mass action for higher wages, improved working conditions and benefits. As such it is a training ground, a school where workers begin to learn through struggle to become a class for themselves. The process, by which organized labour breaks free of class collaborationist illusions, becomes consistently militant and able to master class politics is a complex process. The struggle involves moving from trade union consciousness to class consciousness to the acceptance of the idea that capitalism is the problem and where the ideas of social reformism which holds that capitalism can reform itself confronts revolutionary theories that assert that for workers to be free of exploitation capitalism must be overthrown and that is essentially a political act.

In the course of the economic struggle organized labour learned long ago that it could not avoid participating in politics. Organized labour constantly makes demands on government. Labour has developed policies on peace and war, on social and economic justice, on racism and women's equality, on the rights of immigrant labour, on poverty, on civil rights, on international labour unity and solidarity and much more. The policies adopted by organized labour are heavily influenced by right wing social democracy and reformism. Those reformist policies confront real life and where they do not match up to the new objective conditions of struggle, they are challenged and eventually discarded.

Trade unions today are not in the grip of the anti-Communist cold war frenzy that poisoned the class struggle for decades. Today leaders of the



organized labour cannot use anti-communism to evade confronting the real enemy, capital. The wall erected between economic action and political action is crumbling. Organized labour has little choice about entering the political arena. It is in it. There isn't a labour federation, labour council or union local today that can evade discussing corporate takeovers, tax policies, labour legislation, civil rights, immigration, trade policies, the environment and peace and war.

Capitalist parties are hostile to organized labour playing an independent role in political life. In the beginning labour organizations were often little more than extensions of capitalist parties. The struggle of organized labour to break free of the control of capitalist parties continues to this day. Inside the labour movement that struggle is reflected in ongoing intense discussions, often breaking out in leadership struggles, over what principles define and determine the form and content of independent working class political action.

That is where the Communists need to be, in the thick of that discussion, not on the periphery with the “friends of labour” and the “hyper left”.

NEXT: THE CHANGES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORKING CLASS
– THE FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION OF CANADA.

DON CURRIE, CHAIR, CANADIANS FOR PEACE AND SOCIALISM

***EXCERPTS FROM:
FOCUS NEWSLETTER
VOL. 1 No. 1 MAY 1979***

BY: WILLIAM BEECHING, CHAIR CCC, MAY 1979

Focus on Socialism (FOS) will be publishing excerpts from the forerunner to FOS – Focus Newsletter. Focus Newsletter was published by the Committee of Canadian Communists (CCC). The Focus Newsletter was edited by William Beeching. William Beeching died January 3rd 1990. Canadians for Peace and Socialism will be publishing the full archives of the Focus Newsletter and Focus on Marxism-Leninism, the political journal of the CCC and can be downloaded at www.focusonsocialism.ca.

BETRAYAL OF CANADA

The financial oligarchy which dominates the economy and politics of Canada is a partnership of US and Canadian monopoly capitalist interests. The commanding heights of the Canadian economy are owned by US monopoly interests. Canadian big-business makes quick and enormous profits from this partnership. From time to time, there is friction between the partners, but the differences do not extend to a disagreement over the continued joint plunder of the country.

United States imperialism expanded its ownership and control over the Canadian economy all through the period when Trudeau was making his most eloquent speeches about Canadian independence. In particular, the control of the US oil monopolies of Canada's vital energy resources has become even tighter under the Liberal administration.

The massive penetration of US capital into Canada has contributed to the disintegration of the unity of the country. The rush of provincial governments to sell resources to the highest bidder has created regional and provincial rivalries that artificially divide Canadian working people.



US imperialism, with the help of the Conservative and Liberal parties, has extended its domination over every aspect of Canadian life – exporting raw materials - importing machinery and supplies - dominating the manufacturing market - creating trade imbalances - worsening the energy crisis and interfering in the political life of the country.

NATIONALIZE OUR RESOURCES

Wider democracy and economic renewal requires putting monopoly under control. **Nationalization of the commanding heights of economic power is not merely an option it is a vital necessity for continued progressive advance.**

Trudeau, Clarke and Broadbent proclaim their concern about Canadian unity while carefully avoiding a confrontation with the policies of the top circles of US and Canadian finance. It is obvious that continued leadership of the country by the Trudeau's and Clarke's means the continued subordination of Canadian economic development to the interests of the US Canadian financial oligarchy.

The criminal irresponsibility of big corporations in polluting large industrial areas of eastern Canada and the Great Lakes, the chaos caused *in* major cities by the ruthless land grab by the big developers, the callous disregard for the investment requirements of Canadian development by the banks and the arrogant "profit first" policy of the CPR demand that comprehensive policies of nationalization to serve the rational development of the economy be fought for and won. **Unless nationalization of resource industries is undertaken swiftly, especially in the energy field and in water conservation, a threat is posed to the survival of Canada as a viable and independent country.**

FEAR AND PESSIMISM VS. OPTIMISM

The billions Canadians have been forced to pay for Canada's involvement in NATO and NORAO, for Canadian support for the US war of aggression against Vietnam and now US imperialism's gambles in the Middle East has been a root cause of the galloping inflation that is driving down the living standards of workers and farmers. We cannot afford to waste the enormous economic and scientific and technical capabilities on the arms race at a time when our people are lacking housing, schools, comprehensive Medicare and adequate facilities to care for retired workers.



The federal election is an occasion to publicly repudiate those policies pursued by the pro-war factions which do not like detente nor an end to the arms drive and work for a revival of the cold-war.

The realignment of Canadian foreign policy towards peace and disarmament is indivisible from labour's goal of full employment without inflation in a world at peace.

THE NDP AND LABOUR

A major shift to the NDP would be a reflection of the desire of all Canadians who want far reaching social reforms, expansion of employment, a reduction in prices of food and housing, for nationalization, and a redirection of federal spending away from arms and to the needs of the people.

It would reflect that desire - but it would not guarantee the achievement of those goals. While large numbers of workers will vote NDP out of a deep desire for change, it would be a serious mistake to believe that they are at the same time underwriting or forgetting the actions of the top leadership of the NDP in supporting wage controls.

The call of Dennis McDermott, President of the CLC, for all-out labor support for the NDP fails to explain to workers the limited aims of social reformism for labor. McDermott's horizons for labor end with the election of an NDP government. The lack of vision as to the transforming role that labor can play in wresting the country from the control of the monopolies has led McDermott and other top leaders of the CLC to subordinate labor's interests on crucial questions to the short-term political interests of getting votes for the NDP. The abandonment by the top leaders of the CLC of the postal workers in the midst of a crucial strike with long-range consequences for all workers is dramatic proof of the inability of social reformism to measure up to the challenge faced by labor. **It underlines the importance of exposing the inherent weaknesses in reformist labor policy even at a moment when large numbers of workers support it electorally. Failure to do that would help spread the illusion that labor can advance to the leadership of the nation without an independent political program.**



www.FocusOnSocialism.ca

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The Problem - Imperialist War & Capitalism!
The Solution - Peace & Socialism!**

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