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Socialist Voice #334, July 7, 2009

**'Colonialism and racism are never something to celebrate'**

*This statement, headed 'An Open Letter to the Canadian Arab Federation,' was distributed by Vancouver-based Indigenous activist Mike Krebs on July 4.*

To the Executive of the Canadian Arab Federation:

I am writing to express my disappointment with your decision to distance CAF from the statements regarding 'Canada Day' made by Omar Shaban, your (former) Vice-President for the west. I am an indigenous activist based in Vancouver. I am also actively involved in the Boycott Israeli Apartheid Campaign, as the struggle for Palestine is of immense importance to me.

Last year I personally contacted CAF to get an endorsement for the 'Walk for Palestine' event in Vancouver, where we commemorated the 60th anniversary of Al-Nakba, the 'catastrophe' for Palestinians that was marked by the birth of Israel in 1948 and the displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians from their lands and homes. I was happy that CAF readily endorsed this event, as I'm sure it has done for numerous events and initiatives for Palestine over the years.

On the other hand, this past week marked 'Canada Day,' which, for me and many indigenous people living in Canada, should be seen as a day to commemorate our own 'catastrophe' – that is, the forced theft and occupation of our territories, the break-up of our societies and traditional forms of governance, and a systematic policy of genocide that continues to this day. This history, this 'heritage,' forms the true foundations of Canadian society, and for indigenous people who have struggled for generations with living under Canadian colonialism, July 1st is not a day to celebrate.

This is the main reason I am disappointed with the July 1st press release posted on your website, as it seems there is a large contradiction where you identify with the struggle of the occupied in the context of Palestine, but in the context of 'Canada' are identifying with the heritage of the occupier. As someone who feels and understands the connection between our struggles as indigenous people here and that of the Palestinian people, it is disheartening to see an organization like CAF act in such a way as to deny this connection.

Another reason I am disappointed by your decision to distance yourselves from Omar Shaban's statements concerning Canada is that, as I'm sure you are aware, a number of indigenous organizations and individuals have been targeted by the Canadian government in recent years through the scope of the 'war on terror,' as have organizations and individuals within Arab and other communities with roots in the so-called 'muslim world', including the very open attacks that the Canadian Arab Federation has been recently enduring.

Two years ago, when the Canadian Department of National Defense released the initial draft of its new 'counter-terrorism' field manual, it explicitly listed 'indigenous warrior societies' as a group that the Canadian armed forces will be expected to deal with as 'terrorists.' This treatment of people active in our communities has been at work since the beginning of the 'war on terror', including the more prominent example of the harassment the now-disbanded West Coast Warriors faced from the RCMP's INSET squad (see [http://auto\\_sol.tao.ca/node/1475](http://auto_sol.tao.ca/node/1475) for more information on this).

I bring this up because I think it would benefit both of our communities to stand united against the racist attacks that we are up against at the hands of the Canadian government. I am personally appalled at the hateful campaign being waged against CAF and the cutting of funds for your ESL program, and I am not the only indigenous person that CAF should see as a potential ally whenever you are facing such a hateful campaign as this. However, the decision to distance CAF from Omar Shaban's comments and ignore what 'Canada Day' really means to indigenous people in Canada can only serve to fuel division, which in the end will make both of our communities weaker at a time when we truly need strength.

It appears that CAF is already familiar with some of the major issues facing indigenous people in Canada. According to a joint statement from your website that CAF signed its name to in April 2009 addressed to the Durban Review Conference Preparatory Committee, "Aboriginal peoples continue to struggle against extreme poverty, social exclusion and violation of their human, environmental and land rights." In the spirit of attaining a deeper understanding of why, as indigenous people, we are forced to endure these conditions as a result of Canadian colonialism, I urge you to reconsider your stance towards Omar Shaban's comments and what the 'Canadian Heritage' truly stands for. Colonialism and racism are never something to celebrate.

In Solidarity and Ni-Kso-Ko-Wa (all my relations),

Mike Krebs

Socialist Voice #335, July 8, 2009

## **Air Canada Workers Reject Wage, Pension Concessions**

**By Roger Annis**

July 6, 2009-Members of the largest union at Air Canada have narrowly voted to reject an extraordinary agreement that would have frozen their wages for the next 21 months and allowed the company to suspend payments into the employee pension plan. The International Association of Machinist (IAM) members voted “No” by a 51 per cent majority.

Similar agreements were negotiated with all five of the airline’s unions. Air Canada is the former state-owned, national airline. It was privatized in 1989 and today employs some 28,000 workers. It is the fourteenth-largest airline in the world.

The IAM represents some 11,000 technical, mechanical and support workers at Air Canada. Other unions include the Canadian Union of Public Employees (6,700 flight attendants) and the Canadian Autoworkers (5,000 service and sales employees). The CAW has already voted in favor of an agreement; votes among pilots and CUPE members will conclude on July 13.

The extraordinary agreements were negotiated after Air Canada announced earlier this year that it may head into bankruptcy protection. It says it needs emergency financing of hundreds of millions of dollars as well as relief from its pension obligations. Its current pension deficit is \$3 billion.

The law governing federally registered pension plans requires that payment schedules cover any deficits within five years. Canada’s largest industrial employers, Air Canada included, are lobbying hard to extend deficit payment schedules to ten years.

### **Ottawa demands concessions**

The Canadian government has said it will provide up to \$600 million in financing to the airline, but on condition that employees offer up monetary concessions, including on pensions. The company wants to suspend most payments to the pension plan for the next 21 months.

In exchange for monetary and work-rule concessions from workers, Air Canada will place stock value in the employee pension plan. Air Canada shares currently trade at \$1.43, down from more than \$8 at the outset of last year’s world financial collapse.

The IAM and the airline are now discussing what next steps to be taken. One option being considered by the union is to simply hold another vote. Voter turnout was low, less than 50 per cent of union members. Another option is to negotiate what one IAM leader called “a tweaking of the contract” to address worker concerns over job security.

The main reason for the “No” vote is anger and concern over job security in the airline’s maintenance division. Last year, Air Canada took further steps to spin-off its maintenance division, now called AVEOS. The division includes a repair facility in El Salvador, Aeroman, that the airline acquired in 2007. Union members are convinced that the company intends to transfer much of its maintenance work there in order to profit from significantly lower wages.

The “No” vote was strong in Montreal and tipped the national balance. Rank and file members of the union there reportedly organized against the deal. Air Canada’s largest repair facility is located in Montreal; its other two facilities in Canada are in Winnipeg and Vancouver.

Union members are also angered over the years of wages and work rule concessions they have taken, all the while watching shareholders and executives loot the company. The reviled former CEO, Robert Milton, earned a cool \$39 million for the two years 2006 and 2007.

### **Corporate looting**

At first glance, it would seem strange that Air Canada would be approaching bankruptcy for a second time. Six years ago, it emerged from bankruptcy protection and has since made a killing for its investors and executives. But as the June 2009 *Globe and Mail Report on Business* magazine reported, the source of the investor bonanza was a combination of financial gimmickry and the spinning off of profitable divisions into separate corporate entities. These include regional carrier Air Canada Jazz, the Aeroplan rewards program, and the aforementioned AVEOS.

Altogether, the former “Air Canada” has been looted of its profit-making divisions. What’s left is a fleet of large aircraft flying national and international routes in the face of very stiff competition.

“It was raped by Cerberus,” airline analyst Ben Cherniavsky told *Report on Business*, referring to Cerberus Capital Management, a New York “equity” firm that became one of Air Canada’s largest shareholders after the airline emerged from bankruptcy. “The good cash-flow businesses were taken out of it.”

There are striking similarities in all of this to the fate of Chrysler, General Motors and other recently bankrupted enterprises.

As with autoworkers, the unions of airline and aerospace workers need a political program and course of action to end the corporate looting of social wealth and place vital services such as transportation under public ownership and planning. One of the pressing goals of economic planning must be a radical change in urban design and transportation modes in order to end the environmental destruction that accompanies the reckless proliferation of fossil-fuel burning cars and aeroplanes. The vote of IAM members at Air Canada and questions over the fate of the airline opens up more space for such discussion.

*Roger Annis is an aerospace worker in Vancouver and a member of the International Association of Machinists.*

Socialist Voice #336, July 22, 2009

## **Honduras: The Hour of the Grassroots**

**By Felipe Stuart Cournoyer**

Three weeks after the June 28 military coup that expelled Honduran President Mel Zelaya and claimed to overthrow his government, the country remains shaken by a profound and dynamic popular upsurge demanding Zelaya's return and the restoration of democracy.

The collapse on July 18 of the much-touted "negotiation dialogue" between Zelaya's government delegation and representatives of the military coup was all but inevitable.

The talks foundered on the one issue that neither side could agree to discuss or give ground on — who is the constitutional president of Honduras?

Mass resistance and even opinion polls show that a strong majority of Hondurans back Zelaya as their elected president and demand his immediate return. The coup has been denounced by all the relevant international organizations: the ALBA Alliance, the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Rio Group, the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union, and the United Nations.

### **Failure of negotiations**

However, the coup junta's delegation at the San José, Costa Rica negotiations broke off the talks, proclaiming that they could not even discuss the possibility of Zelaya continuing as president. The Zelaya delegation then withdrew from the talks and announced that the president would quickly "return to Honduras to help organize an insurrection against repression."

For Washington and the coup high command, Zelaya's return to Honduras may represent the only way to avoid an armed popular uprising. But the Honduran masses would see his return, even under onerous conditions, as an admission by the coup leaders of the illegality and disastrous impact of the military takeover. Zelaya's return could thus fuel mass resistance and further undermine the pro-coup faction. The coup leaders and their U.S. supporters are in a bind. This explains why they tried to stall for time with the manoeuvre of the San Jose "mediation dialog."

Lamenting the failure of his mediation, Costa Rican president Oscar Arias warned of the imminence of "civil war and bloodshed that the Honduran people do not deserve."

Meanwhile, OAS Secretary General José Miguel Insulza exclaimed that "it is almost impossible to avoid conflict between Hondurans and call for calm when a dictatorship seeks to stay in power in full view of everyone."

### **Washington's complicity in the coup**

The dictatorship has imposed brutal repression against unarmed civilian protesters, including assassinations and disappearances. Washington, for its part, has pursued a two-faced and deceitful course.

The coup was planned in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, with the participation of the U.S. embassy and U.S. military officials at the Palmerola air force base. The U.S. then voted in favour of the unanimous OAS resolution in support of Zelaya. But the sincerity of this vote was undermined by statements by both U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama. Although they sometimes used the word “coup” to describe the army takeover, they waffled when it came to action. More important than their talk was their walk: they did nothing to help force the army out of power, such as by ending military aid or imposing economic sanctions.

The Obama administration has since shown its hand. On July 20, Phillip Crowley, spokesman for the Department of State, responded to a reporter’s direct question, about whether or not the coup was illegal. He admitted that the U.S. does not consider the military power grab to be a coup in the “legal” sense. The coup, evidently, was “not legal” — but by the same token it was not “illegal.” The distinction means that it is not illegal to continue U.S. military and economic aid to the coup administration and the armed forces. (See Eva Golinger’s report at Postcards from the Revolution).

Obama’s duplicity should come as no surprise, despite the unusually intense hopes millions of people have for his promise of real change in an imagined “post-Bush” world. U.S. Honduran policy is in complete continuity with its long history of domination and intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean. As Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega pointed out to a rally of hundreds of thousands in Managua on July 19, the coup in Honduras came just ahead of the announcement of the opening of five new U.S. military bases in Colombia — a response to the forced closing of the U.S. Manta airbase in Ecuador and the feared loss of U.S. bases in Honduras.

### **ALBA’s role**

The U.S. administration’s tacit support for the coup leaders reflects their hatred of Zelaya’s measures to support the poor and in bringing Honduras into the ALBA anti-imperialist alliance. ALBA — the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America — unites Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, and three English-speaking Caribbean countries as a spearhead and bulwark of anti-imperialist struggle to build social and economic solidarity among the partner nations. (See “Honduras and the Big Stick,” [www.counterpunch.org/kozloff07202009.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/kozloff07202009.html))

ALBA led the process of Latin American unity against the coup, holding a series of emergency meetings in Managua to lay the basis for the unanimous OAS and UN resolutions. When Latin American and Caribbean unity and determination to smash the coup became loud and clear, Washington opted to try to camouflage its role. But there is no hiding the fact that the coup is directed against ALBA itself — against all its members and potential members. As Latin American leaders have pointed out, if the coup is consolidated other countries will become coup victims again, even without Washington’s prompting. U.S. tacit support of the Honduran coup is a clear signal to military plotters.

ALBA leaders understand in blood and flesh that the coup is intended as blow against them. Bolivia's Evo Morales stressed this yesterday, explaining to a radio audience that "this coup is a threat against the continued growth of ALBA."

### **Resistance on the streets**

Despite repression, mass resistance continues to grow in Honduras. International solidarity up and down Indo-Black-Latin America and across the Caribbean has not waned.

Insurrection is in the air. Stay in the streets, Zelaya appeals. "It's the only place that they have not been able to take away from us.... I have not surrendered and I am not going to. I am going to return to the country as soon as possible.... The right to insurrection is a constitutional right."

The coup regime has tried desperately to silence all critical media and has imposed a night-time curfew. Security forces have violently attacked peaceful protesters and arrested a large number of activists. Two protesters were killed on July 5 and two activists and members of the left-wing Democratic Unification Party (UD) have been assassinated by unknown gunmen.

Returning to Honduras that day, visibly exhausted UD Congressman Marvin Ponce stated, "The people owe Honduras a revolution, and if the legitimate president, Manuel Zelaya, is not reinstated, there will be a confrontation between social classes. What I can say is that the days of peaceful resistance, like as we have had until now, are numbered."

On July 14, tens of thousands of workers, students, farmers, and indigenous people massed in front of the U.S. Embassy in the capital, Tegucigalpa. They came from all over the country in response to a call from the National Front to Resist the Coup d'État (FNRG). About 1,000 delegates joined the rally from a rank-and-file convention of the Liberal Party, to which both Zelaya and the illegitimate president installed by the coup, Roberto Micheletti, belong. Zelaya's wife, Xiomara Castro played a prominent role in the mobilization.

Since the coup, over three weeks of mass resistance has all but paralyzed the country and shattered its already feeble economy. At least two huge demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of workers and oppressed sectors have rocked the country. On July 16, Central American labour unions staged solidarity protests, closing Honduras's borders with Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. Export earnings and investments are in free fall.

Despite total press and media censorship within the country, and a near-blackout internationally, coup leaders have not been able to muffle ongoing reports and rumours of fissures in their "united front" and even among lower echelons of the armed forces and police.

The demonstrations and strikes are not spontaneous. They are led by the mass organizations of campesinos (peasants), indigenous people, students, Afro-Hondurans, trade unions, teachers, journalists, professional associations, religious groups, and human rights groups.

The FNRG is made up of dozens of organizations. They are well connected internationally through active networks. They have been influenced by previous struggles in the region, especially the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua during the 1980s. Ongoing advances for the

oppressed in Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and El Salvador have inspired and assisted the Honduran mass movements, giving inspiration and lessons for the struggle.

The reforms implemented by Zelaya since he was elected in 2005 responded to growing pressure from the grassroots, as his government faced dozens of major protests and industrial disputes. This gave impulse to a new dynamic interplay between Zelaya and exploited and oppressed grassroots sectors.

### **A ‘council’ dynamic**

The FNRG has managed to unite people across gender, ethnic, age and class lines. Its ability to resist savage repression, and maintain street and workplace protests, has proven its political maturity. That’s why the “Zelaya delegation” to the San Jose dialog included a rainbow of union, campesino, indigenous, and Afro-Honduran representatives.

On July 20, a large council gathering of grassroots leaders resolved to step up the resistance. Unions announced a call for a general strike. They reaffirmed their support for Zelaya and their call for a Constituent Assembly to remake the country’s constitution. This assembly, in my estimation, revealed that the mass protests have taken on what historians of revolution and insurrection call a “council dynamic” — that is, organizing the participation and representation of workers, campesinos, national minorities, students, and oppressed sectors through local and networked councils.

The FNRG has enabled a new, dynamic interplay between government-level leadership and the will and initiative of the grassroots. It is still only a beginning, but a vigorous one. Whether it can be consolidated depends on the course of the struggle and on international solidarity.

How long can the mass resistance endure the ongoing repression? People have to make a living, and cannot remain in the streets forever. Campesinos will soon have to begin planting their fields. Time is now more than ever critical to victory.

If resistance deepens, the hour of José Francisco Morazán, the 19th century Honduran national hero who implemented important pro-people reforms, may well have sounded.

Socialist Voice #337, July 28, 2009

## **Debate: How Should Anti-Imperialists Respond to Iran's Political Crisis?**

### **Introduction**

A recent *Socialist Voice* article, "Iranian Workers in Action for Democratic Rights," by Robert Johnson and John Riddell, provoked an online debate about how anti-imperialist activists should defend Iranian sovereignty in response to the political crisis there. Because this debate reflects broader disagreements in the left around the world, we are publishing two submissions by Stansfield Smith, together with responses from Johnson and Riddell.

All four contributions originally appeared as comments to the *Socialist Voice* article:

- "A poorly veiled way of taking sides in Iran" (Stansfield Smith)
- "Self-determination and democratic rights are two aspects of the same question" (Robert Johnson and John Riddell)
- "Support workers movements – but not regardless of the context" (Stansfield Smith)
- "Siding with Ahmedinejad against imperialism does not mean siding with him in his repression" (Robert Johnson and John Riddell)

We welcome further comments on the issues raised in this discussion.

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### **'A poorly veiled way of taking sides in Iran'**

**By Stansfield Smith**

June 29, 2009

Your statement is better than what I have seen in Links, the RCP paper, ISO paper, CP, or IMT, but it still not very good.

1. The most important activity people in imperialist countries should be doing is exposing the imperialist campaign against Iran. You now consider this incidental. The CIA and NED, as you must know, have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to destabilize Iran. Iran is surrounded by countries with U.S. troops. It is blockaded by the U.S. The Big Business media, as you must know, was not simply reporting on they called Iran's democracy movement, but was instigating it.

These are examples of the primary issues Marxists should be exposing to the public.

2. So far there has never been presented evidence of election fraud on the scale that would overturn Ahmadinejad's vote. As the protestors against him were calling for the overthrow of the government, should the Iranian government, which was just approved by a large majority vote, simply let them do that? Should a government chosen by the majority in an election just surrender to the forces of the losing candidate? I am sure the Big Business media would call that

a victory for the “democracy movement.” As the losing candidate was the choice of imperialism to be president of Iran, and neither he or the movement behind him, denounced the role that imperialism was playing in his campaign, it certainly is reasonable that any anti-imperialist nationalist government should take repressive measures once they warned demonstrators to stop. (And this repression, if the number is still 17, includes eight government police killed by anti-government people.)

3. We should normally support workers movements, but not regardless of the context of the whole class struggle. Any progressive workers movement that does not denounce its being used in an imperialist campaign against an anti-imperialist government is forfeiting its legitimacy and credibility.

We have seen events somewhat reminiscent of this, probably Poland in the 1980s being the most well-known, Walesa never denounced the imperialist role in Poland, and moved steadily to the right over time. Solidarity discredited itself, and Poland became a de facto U.S. colony, all accomplished via a democratic revolution.

Similarly, your printing of articles from workers struggles against the government of Iran right in the middle of an imperialist campaign against Iran strikes me as quite insincere. Is this not participating in the imperialist campaign in a back-handed way?

4. You state, “Progressive activists in Canada should not take sides between the competing factions in Iran ‘s capitalist class, nor should we try to instruct the Iranian people on how the present crisis might be resolved. These questions can only be settled by the Iranian people themselves.”

But then you state the following, which is nothing but a poorly veiled way of taking sides in Iran:

“We should, however, support the right of the Iranian people to communicate freely, to demonstrate, and to form trade unions and other popular associations independent of government supervision or control. We should support calls for freeing political prisoners and for an end to the repression.”

Your first paragraph quoted here would sound more sincere if you eliminated the second and then followed it with this:

“At the same time, we should strongly oppose attempts by imperialism to take advantage of this crisis, and call for an end to sanctions and other forms of foreign oppression of the Iranian people.”

However, you do make it seem like the attempts by imperialism to interfere in Iran are hypothetical, while in fact imperialism is intimately involved. Again, the primary task for us in imperialist countries is to oppose the imperialist campaign against the gains of the Iranian revolution. That is the most effective way we can ensure the democratic rights of the Iranian people.

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**‘Self-determination and democratic rights are two aspects of the same question’**

**By Robert Johnson and John Riddell,**

*July 11, 2009*

Thanks to Stansfield Smith for a thoughtful comment on our article, “Iranian Workers in Action for Democratic Rights.”

We heartily agree with his main point, that the central activity regarding Iran in imperialist countries must be to oppose the imperialist campaign against Iran. This activity has gained new urgency as the imperialist powers renew their campaign against Iran, taking diplomatic reprisals, planning new sanctions, and revving up for a possible Iraq-style campaign of “regime change.”

U.S. Vice-President Joseph Biden has now declared that Washington may not restrain Israel from a military attack on Iran – an obvious threat of a U.S.-sponsored aggression in one form or another. It should be a wake-up call as to the real stakes in the Iran question.

We also agree that we in the imperialist countries should not support the media campaign to overturn Iran’s election results or line up behind the Mousavi opposition faction among Iran’s capitalist rulers. Nor should we support the pro-Ahmadinejad faction in its dispute with what is clearly a substantial proportion of the Iranian people. The Iranian people must be allowed to decide these matters, free of foreign interference.

We stated these points strongly in our article. What, then, are Stansfield Smith’s objections?

Many issues here are worth discussion. But in our opinion, the central issue relates to our advocacy of support to “the right of the Iranian people to communicate freely, to demonstrate, and to form trade unions and other popular associations independent of government supervision or control. We should support calls for freeing political prisoners and for an end to the repression.”

Quoting this passage, Stansfield Smith states that it is “nothing but a poorly veiled way of taking sides in Iran.”

Yes, supporting democratic rights for the popular masses is a way of taking sides – but not for imperialism, as Smith implies, but for Iranian sovereignty. During the 30 years since the Iranian revolution, the Iranian popular masses have been the main bulwark of resistance to imperialism, leading the people’s defense against the imperialist-backed invasion of the 1980s and holding firm against the continued imperialist sanctions and conspiracies to this day.

To be an effective force for Iran’s defense, Iran’s masses need to be able to speak, organize, and assemble – including, when they wish, to raise criticisms of the present government or defend themselves against exploitation.

This fact must be apparent in Iranians’ intensive utilization of the democratic rights which they already possess, which are more extensive than in U.S. client states in the region such as Jordan, Kuwait or Egypt. We are confident that Stansfield Smith joins us in defending the democratic rights that exist in Iran today.

Elections in all capitalist countries are channelled and manipulated by the wealthy and powerful. That is true of Iran as well as of Canada, to say nothing of Canada's ally Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy with no elections at all. Canada's rulers have no right to preach to Iran about democracy.

But democratic rights in Iran are restricted in ways that are harmful to working people in Iran and that have led to considerable disaffection. In the statements we reprinted, workers call for the right to form unions freely and for these unions to function without mass arrests and police persecution. Such a reform would strengthen Iranian popular sovereignty and improve its defenses against imperialism.

Moreover, workers in Iran, just as in Canada, need freedom to defend themselves against the impact of capitalist exploitation in the neoliberal era. Expansion of worker rights should be supported in Iran as in Canada.

Venezuela today provides us with a striking example of how to organize defense against imperialism by building a dense network of unions and popular committees to draw working people into political action.

Of course Iran must take firm action against imperialist plots and disruption. But this must not become an excuse for anti-worker repression. When workers strike to receive back pay, for example, this cannot be dismissed as an imperialist plot.

To repeat: our main responsibility toward Iran is to oppose imperialist threats against its sovereignty and the hypocritical media campaign aiming to demonize the country and its institutions. However, in defending Iran, we must recognize that national self-determination and democratic rights for the people are two aspects of the same question: popular sovereignty. Defense of Iran includes speaking out against repression that bears down on Iranian working people and weakens the country's ramparts against imperialist attack.

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**'Support workers movements – but not regardless of the context'**

**By Stansfield Smith**

*July 15, 2009*

John Riddell in reply states, "We also agree that we in the imperialist countries should not support the media campaign to overturn Iran's election results or line up behind the Mousavi opposition faction among Iran's capitalist rulers."

Does this mean that you now repudiate what was in your article, where you take Teachers union statement and print it without criticism:

"The Teachers' Organization of Iran, further, supports the goals of Messrs. Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi and calls on the election authorities to annul this election and undertake a free election."

If you recognize that you should not support the media campaign to overturn Iran's elections, what do you think you were doing by printing that Teachers Organization statement?

You approve of the Vancouver group, which states they:

“sends warm greetings and solidarity to all those who are rallying for democracy and justice in Iran and abroad this week. We share your commitment to a peaceful and just resolution of the disputes brought to the surface by the recent presidential election in Iran, and your desire for Iranians themselves to determine the future of their country.”

The Mousavi supporters are rallying for “democracy and justice” and the Ahmadinejad supporters were not? That view is taken straight from the corporate media. If there was no fraud more substantial in any bourgeois election, and if there is no fraud of such a size to show that Mousavi won the election – and there has been no evidence of that yet, then the Iranian people have spoken in their election.

And the interests of democracy and justice would mean we respect the will of the Iranian people to overwhelmingly re-elect Ahmadinejad. Why are the supporters of the losers in the election the supporters of “democracy and justice”? That is the view of the corporate media, not the view of Iranians. If that is not the case, where is the evidence Mousavi won the election?

The Vancouver group goes on:

“We demand the release of all arrested workers, students, and political prisoners.” In their statement, they do not mention that 7 volunteer government militia members were killed by protesters. The Vancouver group does not qualify their statement by saying “except for those guilty of crimes, which included murder.” They demand that ALL those arrested be released.

There is no other way to regard their statement except as one that gives legitimacy to the imperialist campaign against Iran.

In addition, I will repeat what I wrote in my first letter, which you did not address:

3. We should normally support workers movements, but not regardless of the context of the whole class struggle. Any progressive workers movement that does not denounce its being used in an imperialist campaign against an anti-imperialist government is forfeiting its legitimacy and credibility.

As I said before, your statement is better than what I have seen in Links, the RCP paper, ISO paper, CP, or IMT, but it still not very good.

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**‘Siding with Ahmedinejad against imperialism does not mean siding with him in his repression’**

**By Robert Johnson and John Riddell**

*July 27, 2009*

Thanks again to Stansfield Smith for his penetrating questions. To reiterate, for us in Canada, the central issue posed here is the necessity of supporting Iran against imperialism – and that includes supporting its government, headed by President Ahmedinejad, in that confrontation.

But we have no cause to take sides in the present dispute among Iran's rulers. Nor do we have cause to condemn Iranians who have taken a position for one side or the other.

Stansfield Smith's comments focus on the need to differentiate between the world's imperialist countries and countries, like Iran, that suffer imperialist oppression. We agree that it is necessary to forge alliances of countries prepared to resist imperialism, on whatever level, and to defend them against Empire. This is certainly the ABC of revolutionary politics in today's world. It is the essence of the policies of revolutionary Cuba and its ALBA allies, and explains their firm defense of Iran in the present context. Their policy applies the spirit of socialism at a governmental level.

It is disturbing that many socialists in imperialist countries do not grasp this principle.

However, siding with Ahmedinejad in Iran's struggle with imperialism does not mean siding with him in his repression of the recent protests. In our opinion this was a spontaneous outpouring of protest, initially not planned or organized by the Mousavi leadership. It is false to claim, as the Iranian government does, that the protests were inspired and organized by U.S. and British imperialism – although we do not doubt that they have made every effort to take advantage of the situation. The crisis that erupted last month over the election results is only the latest in a series of crisis that have occurred in Iran in recent years as working people have attempted to defend and extend their democratic rights. The struggle to form independent unions has been an important aspect of this broader trend.

The current crisis is deeper and more sustained than its predecessors, reflecting the profound challenges facing Iranian society. Although the movement has been heavily repressed and driven from the streets, the strivings that it expressed remain an weighty factor in Iranian political life.

At present, two factions within the Iranian leadership appear to be waging an extended struggle for power. One faction is headed by President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the other by Mir Hossein Mousavi and Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. They are conducting their struggle mainly behind closed doors; we know very little about the substance of their differences. But each of these leading figures has a long history as a leader of the Iranian government. There is no evidence that any of them have acted as a Trojan horse for imperialism; their policies on the issue of Iranian sovereignty have been essentially similar. During their rule each of them has repressed political dissent, labour organizing, and pro-democracy movements. They have acted to safeguard the interests of Iranian capitalists at the expense of the working people.

Smith states that a workers' movement that permits itself to be used in an imperialist campaign forfeits its credibility. If we wish to apply that concept, surely the place to start is right here in Canada, where our Labour Congress shares responsibility for Canadian government crimes in Palestine, Haiti, and elsewhere. Yet no one suggests we should withdraw support for struggles by workers in Canada for union rights.

We have no cause to lecture Iranian workers about anti-imperialism. They have stood firm against imperialism for 30 years, and if they protest now, it is not in favour of fraudulent U.S.-style "democracy" but for basic rights of speech, assembly, and unionization. It goes without

saying that if these rights are persistently denied, in the name of defending national sovereignty, this casts discredit on the national movement and creates an opening for the CIA.

Smith objects to us publishing the position of the Iranian teachers' union. We think that the voice of Iranian workers on the crisis deserves to be heard. We published statements by three different workers' organizations, presenting a range of views. We stated our own position in the introduction to the article.

Smith also objects to the call of the Vancouver antiwar coalition Stopwar.ca for "the release of all arrested workers, students, and political prisoners." He states that this gives "legitimacy to the imperialist campaign against Iran." But in its statement Stopwar – which unites a wide range of political currents – unambiguously opposes imperialism's attempts to use the crisis to undermine Iran's right to decide its own future. This appeal remains one of the very few statements on Iran to combine respect for the democratic rights of working people with a firm axis of opposition to imperialist intervention. This is an example of effective defense of Iranian sovereignty that is well worth emulating.