



CUPE Internationalist

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Message from Outgoing CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee

During the past two years, the Committee has continued to function primarily as an organizing space versus simply a discussion/meeting space. Committee meetings have occurred on a monthly-basis and are “open” to all rank-and-file CUPE activists (not just elected committee members) interested in doing global solidarity work. The committee has also been proactive about establishing links with community organizations outside the union in order to support progressive initiatives (through small-level funding, in-kind donations, outreach and organizing support). These alliances are important because the bulk of global solidarity organizing is taking place outside the union movement and also these links help bridge the gap that tends to exist between unions and local community organizations.

In terms of specific initiatives or campaigns the Committee has been active on various fronts. This has included organizing within the union to support the passing of a resolution on Boycott of Israeli Academic institutions at the February 2009 Ontario University Workers’ Committee Conference and developing a draft pamphlet to support education around this resolution. There have been various initiatives related to the impact of the Canadian mining industry, including a CUPE member teach-in and support for two public education tours featuring anti-mining community activists from El Salvador. Anti-mining work also included support for the Tyendinega Support Committee and the struggle of the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte (Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory). The International Solidarity forum has continued to be a dynamic and well-attended event at Convention featuring speakers and information materials on key issues, including: the military occupation in Haiti, the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka, the resource-fuelled war in the Congo, anti-union violence in the Philippines and other international struggles. Through its delegates, the Committee also participated and maintained an active voice at the CUPE Ontario Human Rights Committee, CUPE National Global Justice Committee and CUPE’s Women’s Conference in 2008.

The Committee has continued with its activist mandate of keeping global solidarity struggles more front-and-centre in CUPE’s agenda. An important way of trying doing has been member education/outreach focusing both on specific campaigns and the importance of global solidarity work to trade union activism. A final general observation is the pressing need for CUPE’s Equity Committees and activists to improve our networks of communication and coordination in order to formulate and advance a more effective and progressive “equity agenda” within the union.

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On behalf of outgoing International Committee Members:

Suby Kerr (local 4400) - Rafeef Ziadah (local 3903) - Edgar Godoy (local 2191) -
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**NO TO MINING! YES TO LIFE!
THE STRUGGLE IN EL SALVADOR AGAINST CANADIAN MINING COMPANIES**

By
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INTRODUCTION

During the spring of 2008, Bernardo Beloso, a representative of the Roundtable Against Mining in El Salvador, conducted a successful CUPE-supported speaking tour through Ontario and Québec which provided Canadians with first hand testimonies of the negative impact Canadian mining corporations are having in his small country of El Salvador. He also told us how the broad-based anti-mining movement, which includes trade unions, had successfully prevented the mining industry's attempt to begin gold extraction operations in an already environmentally battered country. Bernardo spoke at the CUPE Ontario Division Convention in Niagara Falls, where delegates adopted a resolution committing CUPE Ontario to work in solidarity with Salvadoreans in their fight against mining in their country and to lobby the Canadian government to better regulate Canadian corporations' activities abroad.

A lot has changed in one year. On March 15th, 2009, Salvadoreans elected the first left-leaning President in their country's history, the FMLN's Mauricio Funes. Both prior to and after his election, Funes committed to revise the previous government's northern development strategy and to work with civil society organizations in order to stop mineral exploration licences. Anticipating this change of government, however, Pacific Rim, a Canadian corporation with mining operations in the country, launched arbitration procedures against the government of El Salvador under the Central American Free Trade Agreement, CAFTA-DR, of which Canada is not a signatory (it should be noted that Canada is in the final stages of negotiating a free trade agreement, the CA4FTA, with four Central American countries, including El Salvador, very much along the lines of the CAFTA-DR). Although it is a Vancouver-based company, Pacific Rim used a U.S.-based subsidiary to file for arbitration.

The company is demanding \$100 million in compensation from El Salvador for allegedly failing to fulfill its obligations under the trade agreement. If successful, this lawsuit will open the door for other companies that hold exploration licences, covering over 20% of the total surface of the small country, to follow suit. That the new government needs every last dime at its disposal to fund the social and anti-poverty programs Salvadoreans have desperately needed for decades makes these lawsuits even more insidious.

MINING IN EL SALVADOR, THE CANADIAN CONNECTION, AND LOCAL RESISTANCE

Canadian mining corporations, such as Pacific Rim, Tribune Resources, and Intrepid Mines, hold exploration licenses to more than 20% of the northern region of El Salvador. In the face of local opposition, these companies undertook large-scale “green mining” propaganda campaigns which

claimed there are no negative environmental impacts to mining! There are also numerous recorded cases of agents suspected of acting on behalf of these companies and their subsidiaries attempting to buy out, and in some cases, intimidate impoverished farmers in the areas where they wish to open mines. In 2009 numerous cases of violent attacks against anti-mining activists were documented. On June 18th, 2009, Marcelo Rivera, a prominent anti-mining activist from the town of San Isidro, where Pacific Rim owns its contentious “El Dorado” site, was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered.

National polls consistently indicate that over 80% of Salvadorans do not want gold mines in their country. Civil society organizations, including trade unions, NGOs, churches, students and others, established a coalition to organize opposition to these mining projects. They are focusing their efforts on lobbying, public debates, information campaigns, and demonstrations, where upwards of 70,000 have marched to show their resistance to mining. Local community organizations and municipal governments of various political party affiliations in the regions directly affected have also voiced strong opposition.

RAISING AWARENESS IN CANADA

On October 15th, 2009 a five member delegation representing the Roundtable Against Mining in El Salvador travelled to Washington DC to receive the prestigious Lettelier Moffit Human Rights Award. After receiving the award in Washington, Bernardo and William Castillo, members the delegation, continued their trip on to Canada to once again engage Canadians in conversations regarding their struggles against Canadian mining corporations.

The community groups and civil society organizations working to oppose mining in El Salvador were seeking the support of allies outside their country, particularly in Canada, where much of the capital behind these projects is based. Through this speaking tour, CAMES aimed to increase linkages between Salvadorean and Canadian civil society organizations. Organizers hoped that through sharing their experiences, Bernardo Belloso and William Castillo would gain the support of civil society in Canada, make mining in El Salvador a priority for Canadian organizations working on mining issues, and raise awareness about how our mineral consumption and support for Canadian mining companies negatively affects local populations in El Salvador and beyond. Everywhere they went, Bernardo and William implored Canadians:

- To demand that Pacific Rim withdraw its complaint against the government of El Salvador under the Central American Free Trade Agreement, CAFTA-DR.
- To pressure the Canadian government to pass legislation that regulates the behaviour of Canadian mining corporation at home and abroad - Bill C-300
- To demand that all Canadian mining corporations withdraw their operations from El Salvador so that sustainable development can occur without the threat of environmental degradation.

For more information and to find out what you can do, please go to www.sialavidatour.com.

The Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA): What Are You As A Trade Unionists Doing About It?

As I write this piece, the Harper government is invoking a “motion of closure” in the House of Commons to stop debate on the second reading of Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA) implementation legislation. The aim of the Conservatives with the support of the Liberal opposition is to send the CCFTA bill to the Standing Committee on International Trade (CIIT) where both parties have majority votes for quick ratification. Unlike a similar Free Trade Agreement with Peru which was ratified a few months back, without public scrutiny, the proposed FTA with Colombia has generated considerable opposition. Through a combination of parliamentary procedural maneuvers, government lobbying and community organizing, a loose alliance of NDP/Bloc Quebecois MPs, unions, human rights NGOs and Colombian solidarity activists have delayed Bill C-23’s ratification for close to nine months.

Despite Colombia’s five-decade armed conflict and widespread human rights crisis, the Conservatives and Liberals are committed to ratifying an FTA for key reasons. On the geopolitical front, right-wing Colombian president Alvaro Uribe Velez, who has been in power since 2002, represents a trusted ally in the Andean region. His regime and staunch neoliberal outlook is viewed as a defense to contain left-of-centre governments and strong social and Indigenous movements in neighbouring Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. The recent agreement signed by Uribe and the U.S. government to install five new military bases in Colombia, not only threatens to intensify the country’s own armed conflict, but has aggravated inter-border tensions and raised legitimate fears of increased regional militarization and a possible future war or intervention.

On the domestic economic front, the CCFTA like previous FTAs signed by Canada (NAFTA, Israel, Chile, Costa Rica and Peru), will serve primarily to open up Colombia’s rich natural resources (i.e., petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, nickel, gold, copper, emeralds and hydropower resources) to

increased corporate investment. Like its predecessors, CCFTA's text enshrines very strong investment rights which safeguard corporate interests, including allowing Canadian corporations to sue the Colombian government if it is felt that the rights upheld in the FTA have been violated.

In contrast to CCFTA provisions protecting corporate investments, the labour and environmental protection provisions contained in the deal are merely "side-agreements" lacking any effective or binding mechanisms to ensure that these rights are protected as a result of any violations by corporate activities. This is of particular concern to Canadians because resource-rich rural areas where corporations are most active (and will increase due to the proposed FTA) are the sites of highest armed conflict, displacement, human rights violations and environmental degradation in Colombia.

The FTA with Colombia has to be stopped. Ultimately it is a threat to the country's sovereignty and biodiversity. Increased intrusion of Canadian corporations, especially in the extractive resource mining sector, will intensify social polarization and devastate local communities, especially Indigenous and Afro-Colombians, which continue to mobilize and advocate for their constitutionally-recognized collective land rights.

No longer is this struggle being waged mainly in the global south. Key decisions that will affect the future of broad sectors of Colombian civil society are being deliberated in our own House of Commons. What are you as a trade unionist doing about it?

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Colombian Anti-Union Violence at a Glance:

According to the National Trade Union School (ENS) between 1999 and 2005, of the 1,174 reported murders of trade unionist throughout the world, 816 were Colombian. Since president Uribe came to power in 2002, 503 trade unionists have been murdered. The majority of these killings have been carried out by right-wing paramilitaries, often in collusion with state security forces, and disproportionately impact unionists in the education sector. Anti-union violence tends to occur during periods of collective bargaining or labour strife. It occurs when unions oppose neoliberal restructuring, including large-scale privatization of public utilities/services, contracting out, mass lay-offs and firings. To date in 2009, thirty-three trade unionists have been murdered as well as numerous other social movement activists.

Poverty, wage-slavery in Haiti, solidarity with the labouring classes

*haiti you goin an no one seem to care
 haiti you goin neighbours beware
 de poverty and death that haunts every day
 de boat dat leave to the de u.s.a.
 "Haiti" – Mutabaruka*

The members of Haiti's working class and peasantry have been experiencing some of the most exploitive economic conditions in the western hemisphere. It is not an accident that Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas and rank very low on the United Nations' annual Human Development Index. Haiti's development is certainly not aided by the loss of about 80% of its university graduates. Can you imagine what such a rate of migration of university-educated Canadians would mean for this country's development?

About 80% of Haitians live below the poverty line. They depend on food aid from abroad in order to live. Living by handouts is a crying shame. In the 1980s, Haiti was able to feed itself from the food produced by its agricultural sector. However, the imposition of investor- and elite-friendly trade and other economic polices by Western countries such as Canada, France and the United States as well as international financial institutions put an end to its self-reliance in food production.

The labouring classes in Haiti are forced to live with an unemployment rate of about 70% in the formal sector. This country has the lowest official wage rate in the Americas, which stands 70 *gourdes* or US\$1.75 per day. In the Dominican Republic, Haiti's next door neighbour, the daily minimum wage is US\$9 in the free trade zones. The small, local elites and overseas investors have mercilessly exploited the high unemployment rate to frighten legislators and some of the trade unions into accepting poverty-level wages. Massive job losses, the reduction in international investments, and the closure of factories were threatened when Parliament voted in May 2009 to increase the minimum wage from 70 *gourdes* to 200 *gourdes* (\$5.00). President René Prével vetoed the legislation and the Chamber of Deputies later approved an increase in the minimum wage to 125 *gourdes* (\$3.20) which was met with massive protest by students and workers.

Many members of the Canadian working-class know what it is like to work for wages that make the use of food-banks necessary, force them to dwell in inadequate housing and to live in fear of losing basic utility services. As such, we need to work in solidarity with the Haitian working-class and rural people to fight for a livable wage, end the United Nations' occupation and expand the capacity of progressive student, trade union, community and women's organizations to resist local and international exploitation. An investigative human rights tour is being planned for March 2010. You may show your solidarity for the labouring classes in Haiti by encouraging your trade union local or community or social movement organization to be a part of this delegation. Please contact CUPE Ontario's International Solidarity Committee for further information.

Ajamu Nangwaya is the 3rd Vice-President, CUPE Ontario and writes regularly on various international solidarity and social justice issues.

Factsheet on Women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The suffering of the women in the Congo, particularly in the east of the country has long reached biblical proportions, yet and still the silence continues throughout the global community.

- Since 1996, over 5.5 million Congolese have died as a result of the armed conflict and war-related disease and malnutrition. This resource war in the DR Congo is the single most deadly one since World War II. Close to 50 million Congolese have been affected by the war.
- Over 250,000 women have been violently raped, mutilated and terrorized by a host of culprits (rebel groups, Rwandan soldiers, Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, civilian population and even the United Nations' peacekeepers). According to Dr. Mukwege of the Panzi hospital, approximately 90 percent of the violent rapes committed in the east of the Congo are done by **foreigners**. A recent report by the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund on rape and sexual violence in South Kivu revealed that 'Rwandan Hutu' armed groups were overwhelmingly the perpetrators.
- The atrocities visited upon these women are hardly mentionable much less believable. They have faced gang rape, sexual slavery, kidnapping, forced incest, genital mutilation, torture, murder of loved ones and psychological trauma; all in an attempt to terrorize, displace and subdue the population.
- **The ultimate reason for the terrorizing of the women and displacement of entire villages by the perpetrators is to gain access and control of mineral rich land of gold, coltan, tin, niobium and other valuable resources.** In fact, two types of systematic rapes are taking place in the Congo; one is the violent raping of women and the second is raping of the resources by multinational corporations; and the two are inextricably linked.
- The Guardian newspaper in Britain reported in 2007 that 75% of all the world-wide rapes cases attended to by the medical group Doctors without Borders occurred in the eastern Congo.
- According to a 2008 report from the Human Rights Center of the University of California, Berkeley, the United Nations disclosed that "in 2006, 27,000 sexual assaults were reported in South Kivu alone. In one town surveyed, 70 percent of the women reported being sexually brutalized."

- In 2008, the United Nations Population Fund reported that 45 women and girls were raped each day between January and March in South Kivu.
- Due to the impunity and absence of punishment of the perpetrators, rape as a tool of violence and control has pervaded the society. However, in spite of the enormous odds, women and men have organized themselves to combat the culprits and provide support and comfort for the surviving victims of the atrocious crimes committed over the past ten years.

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