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World Social Forum comes to Montreal

On August 5, news broke that over 100 activists had been denied temporary visas by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) to attend a global social justice meeting, the World Social Forum, in Montreal.

The World Social Forum (WSF) is one of the largest global gatherings of civil society where tens of thousands of activists from labour and social movements meet to discuss and strategize solutions to the most important issues of our time affecting the economy, the environment, human and trade union rights, and democracy.

This year's event was the first time the WSF was being held in the Global North and many activists speculated that Canada's immigration system would be a barrier to participation of activists from around the world, particularly from poorer, racialized countries. With the new government in power, some were cautiously optimistic that the Harper-era immigration policies would change.

It was disappointing to learn this would not be the case.

Important social movement activists from Mali, Brazil, Palestine, Iran, Congo, Nigeria, Morocco, Haiti, and Nepal were denied entry into Canada. Those denied entry included Aminata Traoré, a high-profile anti-globalization activist and candidate to succeed Ban Ki-moon as United Nations Secretary-General.

Traoré was quoted by the CBC stating "the visa controversy is a stain on Canada's reputation as an open country." She observed that "the West is more and more afraid of debates on ideas ... We are bearers of ideas, not bombs."

CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer, Charles Fleury headed the CUPE delegation at the forum. CUPE's contribution included networking and strategizing with activists from around the world to oppose water privatization, flawed international trade and investment deals, austerity policies and precarious work, while also promoting a just

transition for workers in the energy sector.

In our workshop entitled What is a Blue Community? Protecting Water Against Extraction, Privatization, and Embracing the Right to Water, we examined how international trade and investment rules demand changes to our waste water effluent regulations. We addressed the shameful reality of boil-water advisories in First Nations communities, and exposed how new federal infrastructure funding is setting the stage for privatization in both indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Despite the many missing global voices, dynamic and inspired discussions did take place that chart a course to ensure water and wastewater around the world remain in public hands – and continue to be the source of good jobs and decent work. ●

Nicaragua and Honduras Delegation May 2016

CUPE sisters Minerva Porelle and Andréane Chénier participated in CoDevelopment Canada’s 2016 Maquila Solidarity Tour to Nicaragua and Honduras. A delegation of 10 trade union sisters traveled to Central America to express solidarity with the maquila workers and organizers in the textile industry where many multinational corporations are operating and exploiting workers. The focus of the tour was occupational health and safety and gender rights.



Andréane Chénier, CUPE national Health and Safety officer, was a delegate and shares her experience of the Solidarity tour.

There was something a bit surreal about standing among a group Nicaraguan and Honduran women, listening to each of their stories about what their life was like. I kept thinking how similar their situation was to what many CUPE members face. Certainly the scale was different, but the essential nature of those struggles was the same.

The women shared stories of strength and victory but also bitter setbacks and obstacles

to overcome. They told us about impossible employers, about not being respected as workers and as women. They told us about their experience of workplace violence. They spoke about how their workloads were overwhelming, how the work itself was backbreaking, the workplace unhealthy and about how their work stations were injuring them.

The Nicaraguan women told us how they had to fight their employers to be able to have decent work. Employers fired people who became too ill or were injured because of their work. Those same employers then tried to blame their occupational illnesses and

injuries on how they lived their lives at home or how they took care of their children – as if the fact that they did back-breaking, repetitive work to meet ridiculous quotas in hot, humid, fibre-filled air at poor ergonomic work stations for 10 to 12 hours a day wasn’t a cause of their injured spines, joints and lungs.

I marched next to Honduran women who chanted for their rights to a workplace free of violence and better health and safety, including a demand that the Ministry of Labour perform workplace ergonomic assessments. Marching in the heat, the women stood firm, united in their belief that they

could make a difference in their workplaces and in their society. Passers-by agreed with them and could see their determination.

But most of all, I marveled at the strength of these women. They touched us all as they were recounting their stories. In unity there is strength and by standing together they could make a difference.

We were there to show our solidarity with their struggle, to show them that they were not alone. But they reminded me of what we fight for, and what’s at stake. I will never forget them. ●

Global Justice is published three times a year to provide workers and their representatives an overview of international solidarity work taken on by the Global Justice fund and within CUPE as a whole.

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Defending education rights in the Philippines

Tiffany McLellan of CUPE 4600 recently interviewed Mabelle Desamito Caboboy, an executive member of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) in the Philippines. Tiffany and Mabelle spoke in Davao City, Mindanao, right before the commencement of the International Conference on People's Rights in July 2016. ACT is a CUPE National Global Justice Fund partner.

Nearly 80 per cent of all educators in the Philippines are women, and ACT ensures that 70 per cent of their executive board is composed of women.

• How long have you been a member of ACT? What position do you hold?

I have been a member of ACT since 2001 when I was still a student at the University of the Philippines Diliman. I wear many hats within the union now. Currently, I am the Vice President of the Quezon City Public School Teachers' Association. This is my second term. Concurrent to this, I am also the Vice President to ACT National Capital Region, Quezon City Chapter. Lastly, I am the Deputy Secretary

General of ACT Philippines. I was appointed by the National Council to be the Deputy Secretary General this past June 2016.

• What are the top issues your members face?

The salary increase for teaching and non-teaching personnel is a major issue, and has been for some time. Second, we focus on the transfer of the local supplemental allowance of Quezon City teaching and non-teaching personnel from the Land Bank, a government bank, to the privately own BPI-Globe Banko. This arrangement allows for a private bank to profit from public funds.

I would say another big issue is the K-12 reformulation of the public school curriculum. ACT also cares deeply about the struggles faced by the indigenous peoples in Mindanao, known as the Lumad people.

• Why did ACT join the Lumad struggle? How does ACT express its solidarity with Lumad communities?

ACT joined the Lumad struggle because there were schools which were closed

and encamped by the military, which is unconstitutional. Students have suffered from harassment since 2005 and as a consequence have been evacuated from their communities on a regular basis. So, because of this, we are one of the convenors of the Save Our Schools (SOS) network and campaign. This campaign aims to end the military occupation of Lumad schools, bring the Lumad people back to their ancestral homeland, re-build their schools, and let them continue with their education. The SOS network helped in sourcing funds to purchase instructional school materials

during the evacuation in September 2015.

• What does international union solidarity mean to you, and for ACT more generally?

It means that unions here in the Philippines are one and in solidarity with other teachers and trade unions around the world. We would like to be in solidarity in fighting imperialism, the commercialization and privatization of education, and making sure that students are given their basic right to education no matter where they are in the world, and to uphold teachers' right to organize and unionize. ●



African grandmothers stepping in for a generation of parents lost to AIDS

Over 18 million children have lost one or more parent from AIDS worldwide. But the vast majority of these children, over 80 per cent, are from Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Go Go Grannies are a group of women who have stepped in to care for this lost generation.

In July, Mark Hancock, national president of CUPE, attended the first ever South African

gathering of the Go Go Grannies, coinciding with the 2016 World AIDS Conference in Durban. Hancock was part of a group invited by Stephen Lewis, whose foundation supports the Go Go

Grannies, to see first-hand the challenges they are facing.

"It was a life-changing experience, plain and simple," said Hancock, who spent three

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days hearing the stories and experiences of the 300 Go Go Grannies attending the gathering.

“The stories were heartbreaking. I heard stories of grannies leaving their villages at 4:00 in the morning to line up for AIDS medication or to get their tiny pittance of support from the government, only to be robbed. I heard how AIDS deaths, after many years of decline, are now on the rise again,” recounted Hancock. “Throughout all of this, the grannies’ emotions

swung wildly – one moment there was not a dry eye in the room and the next, everyone was up singing and dancing!”

The conference culminated with a march to the World AIDS Conference centre to present the South Africa Grandmothers Statement – a Charter of Rights for the grandmothers and the children they care for.

“The Go Go’s are starting to stand up for their rights and health. This conference was a great demonstration of how



these elders advocate – both for their rights and for those in their care. I know that these strong women who have faced extraordinary challenges will be

triumphant,” said Hancock.

To learn more about the Go Go Grannies, visit stephenlewisfoundation.org



1. Labour Law Reform in France Following months of unprecedented protests by worker and student movements in France, the French government invoked special powers in July to impose labour legislation by decree that will make it easier for employers to hire and fire workers.

These labour law reforms also give individual companies more flexibility to make decisions about pay and working hours according to economic conditions, rather than being “constrained” by collective bargaining procedures.

At the height of the protests, activists disrupted the operation of the oil refineries, nuclear power stations and transport hubs.

2. “Soft” coup in Brazil The Brazilian Senate voted to impeach the country’s democratically elected President Dilma Rousseff from office at the end of August in what many are calling a coup.

This impeachment ends 13 years of rule by the Workers’ Party in Brazil and brings to power right-wing leader, Michel Temer.

Temer is set to launch a huge program of privatization and cuts in education, health and other social programs. Labour rights are also under attack by the government, and the country’s national trade union centers have jointly pledged to fight against plans to eviscerate the labour code. The largest of the labour centers, the CUT, was leading the campaign against the impeachment of Dilma.

3. Strike Action in South Korea At the time of publication, the Korean labour movement was waging the largest public sector strike in its history. The strike is the culmination of months of struggle by Korean public sector unions against government attacks on public services, including new plans to privatize the rail and energy sectors and the imposition of a discriminatory performance-related salary and termination system on public sector workers. Workers were also mobilizing in support of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions’ (KCTU’s) campaign against regressive labour law reform.

After losing its majority in the National Assembly in general elections in April, the ruling New Frontier Party has focused its labour reform plan on the public sector where it can push reforms through government directives rather than legislation. The public sector has become the front line in the wider attack on the working class.