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No to the Militarization of Vancouver!

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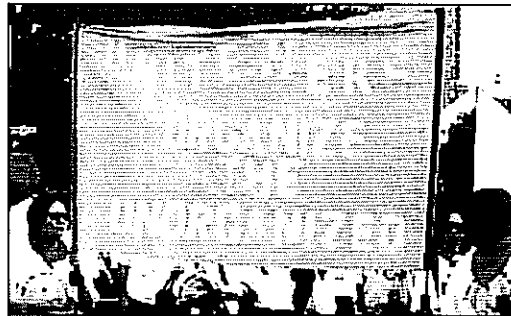
Discussion on Issues Affecting the Working Class

Contract Workers

- *Workers' Centre of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist)* -

Amongst the important issues to be discussed by the working class are contract workers, which represent a spontaneous development of capitalism in socializing the working class. Contract workers are not tied to a particular workplace. This phenomenon results from owners of capital's drive for absolute productivity. How does the working class turn this phenomenon into a strength in its battle with capital and a factor for developing its consciousness and organization of, for and by itself?

Contracting workers is a feature of the capitalist labour market, which allows owners of capital to use the labour market more efficiently. Workers are taken from the labour market and returned more quickly without the expense of hiring and firing them. Workers are utilized more intensely when needed, which increases absolute productivity and the amount of added-value claimed by owners of capital. Contracting workers also allows particular companies to avoid certain claims for human security associated with company pensions, health and other benefits such as sick pay, and avoid some of the government payroll deductions for EI and CPP and the bookkeeping expense of looking after personal income taxes. This transfer of claims from workers to owners of capital is not associated with increased productivity but with a lack of organization of contract workers to defend their rights. This negative aspect can be changed through organizing to defend the rights of contract workers.



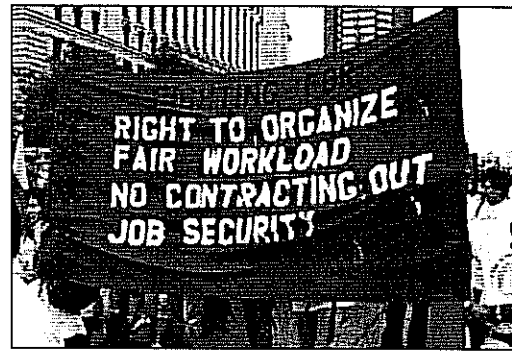
In any one day, Stelco Hamilton Works has 50 to 100 mostly trades people working as contract labour in the plant. Two companies in particular, managed by former salaried employees provide the contract workers: DMR and Staff-aid.

Contracting workers is a longstanding practice in the construction industry, especially in those sections that are boom and bust. In urban residential and commercial construction, some of the responsibility for contracting workers has been given to the construction unions, which operate labour hiring halls. Within this situation the construction unions have mostly played a managerial role allocating labour where it is demanded, and acting as a middleman between the contract workers and employers and government concerning issues such as EI, health and safety and apprenticeship programs and managing registered pensions. Construction unions have not made any headway in restricting the labour market in the construction sector but rather have accommodated and institutionalized this negative practice of capitalism.

Contract workers and services also exists as a sector that provides certain functions within an industry such as food services, cleaning and one of the biggest, private security. The public sector is increasingly being carved up into lucrative parts that are handed over to private monopolies either providing labour or an entire service. This could be the provision of food in a hospital, cleaning staff or even the entire non-medical operations. A recent example in the news is the contracting of the BC paratransit system throughout the province to a California monopoly. The Greater Vancouver unit of paratransit workers (HandyDART) recently went on strike against concessions and won that particular struggle.

How should the working class movement view the phenomenon of contracting workers? Contracting workers is a feature of the labour market. From this

reality it should be asked, how does the working class movement view the labour market. The labour market and its feature of contracting workers are dialectics with opposing aspects. The labour market and its particular features have come into being as part of the capitalist system and the exploitation of the actual producers by owners of capital. The negative aspect of the labour market is that it defines the actual producers as chattel labour to be bought and sold. The buyer is the owner of capital and the seller is the labourer. (The labour market is different from the slave market in that



Toronto, Labour Day 2007

the whole person is not sold to the buyer only the person's capacity to labour.) Similar to the slave market, the labour market is an unequal social relation. The labour market is a passing phenomenon of a transient capitalist system wedged between petty production and mass industrial socialized production with corresponding socialized relations of production -- socialized relations among humans engaged in the economy in harmony with the socialized conditions of mass industrial production or more simply put, socialized property relations where the actual producers collectively own and control the means of production.

The immediate aim of the working class movement is to restrict the labour market as much as possible while the ultimate aim is to eliminate it altogether.

The positive aspect of the labour market is that it proletarianizes (or socializes) the actual producers. Contracting workers rather than having them employed with a specific enterprise intensifies this process of proletarianization. By contracting workers, labour is increasingly alienated from any particular workplace and associated more and more with the general socialized economy although owners of capital continue to block workers from participating in controlling and deciding the economy's direction.

A sense develops that the security of a contract worker is not found in the success or well-being of any particular company but with the socialized economy as a whole and government social programs. This is similar to the notion of those working in the public sector towards the socialized economy. The spontaneous gravitation of contract workers is towards demanding measures that guarantee the well-being of all through social programs and towards demanding an overall healthy socialized economy that guarantees employment for all. Contracting workers specifically goes against the false neo-liberal arguments that the security of workers at a monopoly is found in making their particular monopoly competitive in the global market and generally within inter-capitalist competition.

The phenomenon of contract workers has been particularly evident in Japan since the 1989 economic crisis from which the country has not yet recovered. The post-war social contract between particular monopolies and their employees, cemented with "company unions" has gradually been eroded. A big role in this erosion has been played with the introduction of contract workers on a large scale, beginning with female office workers but now extending to female and male industrial contract workers.

The post-war patriarchal relation between workers and individual monopolies under the Japanese social contract has been undermined. This patriarchal relationship includes most aspects of life

such as company sports facilities, health spas, cultural events, company pensions, guaranteed employment and annual bonuses. This is being replaced either by abruptly severing the relationship or by introducing new workers only on a limited or one or two year renewable contract with no patriarchal relationship or social contract with the monopoly and only an incidental relationship with the contractor. Laid-off long-term workers and newly contracted workers have only two places to turn for their security -- their own renewed trade unions and other organizations organized on a new basis of, for and by themselves, and government social programs.

Another aspect of this positive phenomenon of loss of identity with an overall employer is the uniting of workers from different companies into a single trade union local because of various circumstances. Within Hamilton Works the situation has arisen that the bloom and bar mills may be sold to a German company. Over one hundred workers within the plant are associated with those mills. This means that workers within the same plant or at least with a history of working together are "sold" along with the machinery and order book to other owners of capital. Whether they are in the same plant or not, such as Stelco workers who were members of units sold off during the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*, workers face difficulties dealing with pensions, benefits, working conditions, union rights etc. How should workers view this situation? They have spontaneously developed ways such as an "amalgamated union" where "sold off" workers or new ones that are bought remain within the local. For instance, Stelco Lake Erie Works USW local is an amalgamated union local composed of the Lake Erie Workers, Nelson pickling plant members, and Heckett-Multiserv workers.

An example of many worksites under one USW local in Hamilton is Local 16506 with a membership of over 1,700 workers, comprising 30 different units from 30 different companies.

The direct experience of workers is that capitalist ownership of a particular worksite or ownership is not the decisive aspect in whether they can defend themselves or not. The decisive aspect is organizing of, for and by themselves to defend their rights. The issue of working conditions and defending Canadian-standard wages, benefits and pensions under capitalism is determined essentially through class struggle waged by an organized, united and determined working class.

The issue of ownership should be seen in general as a political issue to be sorted out politically with workers organizing with their allies to discuss and develop a program for public ownership of the basic sectors of the economy. This discussion is now raging with regard to foreign monopoly ownership and control of important sections of the economy including steel, mining, forestry and auto assembly, specifically U.S. Steel, ArcelorMittal, Essar Steel Algoma, Vale Inco, Xstrata, AbitibiBowater, Shell, GM, Ford, Chrysler etc.

From their own perspective, particular ownership or changes in ownership should not interfere with workers' struggles to defend themselves. They have to find ways to overcome the legal roadblocks to uniting and defending their rights. They should not allow the shuffling of capitalist ownership to dictate their organizations, activity and fight for their rights and legal recognition of their right to organize and defend themselves.

Active and retired workers at a particular plant such as Hamilton Works view the wealth active workers produce as the basis of their well-being and quite naturally they have a stake in the plant and the wealth the active workers produce as well as the wealth and services produced by other

Canadian workers. Contract workers view the wealth they produce in the many plants where they work as the basis of their well-being and quite naturally they have a stake in the socialized economy and the wealth they produce within that economy.

The direct experience of workers in a single plant, the experience of contract workers and others working for units within a larger whole is converging into a single direct experience of workers within an integrated socialized economy who have a stake in that economy because they are the producers of wealth and the providers of services. This leads them to the conclusion that they must organize to defend their rights and they must fight actively and consciously for control over the direction of their socialized economy.

Contracting workers and the shuffling of ownership of companies can have a spontaneous positive proletarianizing effect on workers, but for this spontaneous effect to play a positive role, it must be consciously organized, guided and developed. Practical measures have to be developed to bring contracted and "sold" workers together into the trade union movement to defend their rights and the rights of all and to strengthen the social solidarity of workers within the city and region.

As contracting workers and ownership changes become more widespread, the role of government in guaranteeing the rights of all becomes more obvious, such as on the front of pensions and security of work and income. Workers must organize to force governments to uphold their social responsibilities to guarantee social programs for all, such as Canadian-standard pensions, and to demand enough social product from the owners of capital and their companies to allow those social programs to function. This means that the labour market must be restricted by either guaranteeing work or guaranteeing income while unemployed.

Monopolies such as U.S. Steel want to benefit from the increased productivity of contract workers but do not want to take social responsibility for the consequences of these practices. Under capitalism, owners of capital must be forced to provide this mobile workforce enough work or sustain them while not needed. The same is true in the event of change of ownership.

A mobile workforce in a city could very well be a great thing for the socialized economy and working class, but such a development has to be pushed into a positive direction first by workers uniting to defend their fundamental rights to security of work, wages, benefits and pensions and their working conditions at the various sites where they may be needed. And secondly, workers and their allies must unite politically to fight for control over the direction of the economy. This requires organizing Committees for Democratic Renewal to fight for working class representation in government as an effective workers' opposition and ultimately as the government.



United States

One Year of Obama's Presidency

January 20 marked one year of the Obama presidency and tonight Obama presents the State of the Union Address to the joint Houses of Congress. *TML* will be discussing the significance of the