

Canadian Media Attacks Labour Leader for Syria Solidarity

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One hundred trade union delegations from around the world gathered in Damascus on September 8-9, for the Third International Trade Union Forum in Solidarity with Syrian Workers. The purpose of the meeting was to build opposition to imperialist intervention against Syria and the economic sanctions against Syria.

The forum was organized on the initiative of Syria's General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), in cooperation with the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU) and World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Among the trade unions which participated were the Arab Labor Organization (ALO), the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), and several national labour organizations from throughout the world.

The war and sanctions have caused over \$90 billion USD in damages and losses to Syria. More than 9000 Syrian workers have been killed by terrorist attacks, with another 14000 wounded and 3000 kidnapped. The Trade Union Forum agreed to develop a worldwide campaign to confront those governments and organizations that support terrorism and sanctions against Syria and the Syrian people. This includes exposing the corporate media, which the forum statement noted use "false slogans to justify the policies of imperialist intervention, domination, aggression and terrorism."

The forum also expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle and demanded an end to the Saudi aggression against Yemen. Participants saluted the resistance of the peoples of Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia against imperialist attacks and provocations.

Canadian labour participant attacked

Donald Lafleur, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), attended the meeting and spoke to Telesur TV.

"The sanctions on Syria are completely unacceptable. The Canadian labour movement does support the people in Syria and we're here to put pressure to take the sanctions away."

Almost immediately, Lafleur was attacked in the mainstream media in Canada, who questioned why a Canadian labour representative was calling for an end to sanctions. CBC News claimed the forum was "organized by the Assad regime" and repeated the usual US-NATO narrative that the Syrian government is clinging to power despite its "authoritarianism" and "crimes against humanity." Postmedia's Terry Glavin went further,

calling Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad a “mass murderer and war criminal” and claiming that the forum was made up of false trade unions from “fictional” countries.

In response, the CLC stated that they “had no interest in being represented there [at the Trade Union Forum]” and said they were going to investigate Lafleur’s participation.

In doing so, the CLC is scrambling to disassociate itself from basic working class internationalism and solidarity. Lafleur’s comments were principled – he simply said that workers in Canada support workers in Syria, that the sanctions were unacceptable, that the purpose of the forum was to build pressure to end them. He could have also pointed out that Bashar Al-Assad is the legitimate president of Syria, that the Syrian working class and trade union movement is strongly united behind the Syrian Armed Forces and the defense of the country against imperialist intervention, or that an estimated 90% of anti-government “freedom fighters” are foreign mercenaries and conscripts who have been recruited and armed by the US and its allies in NATO and reactionary Gulf governments. He could have said all of these very true and provable things, but he did not. What he gave was nothing more than a minimal – yet very welcome – expression of solidarity.

Apparently even this is too much for the Canadian Labour Congress leadership.

In contrast to the CLC’s efforts to throw Lafleur under the “Opportunism Express” bus, a group of trade unionists in the United States has taken a more upright approach. They have launched a campaign to get labour organizations in the US to send letters to the CLC, encouraging the Canadian union central to defend Lafleur and, in the process, take a stand for peace and international solidarity. It’s a bizarre twist of events.

The conflict in Syria is nothing less than imperialist aggression aimed at forcing “regime change.” The instruments of this intervention are a proxy invasion by terrorist organizations and brutal sanctions. There is nothing democratic, humanitarian or just about any of it. That the CLC leadership cannot – or will not – see beyond the confines of the US-NATO storyline is an indication of how deep and damaging labour’s reliance on right-wing social democratic politics has become.

The Third International Trade Union Forum in Solidarity with Syrian Workers shows a different way for workers to engage globally, based on genuine working class internationalism. This is the necessary path for Canadian labour.

It starts with defending Donald Lafleur, supporting Syrian workers, and ending these murderous sanctions.

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