

Editorial

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“Time to bring them home”

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Working people from both sides of the border will gather on Saturday September 29th at the Peace Arch border crossing to send a strong message to both our governments – it’s time to bring our troops home. It should come as no surprise that organizations representing more than 800,000 workers have come to the same conclusion. It is not because we are afraid to fight that we are opposed. Working people are fighters. Our movement and our countries have been built by the struggle and sacrifices of ordinary citizens acting with extraordinary courage. As trade union leaders, we are challenged to speak out because it is the young daughters and sons of working people whose lives are being wasted in an impossible war which will have no end.

The cost of continuing the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is enormous. More than 3,000 Americans have been killed and 30,000 have been injured. While Canadians have not died at the same level (71 deaths), they have the highest death rates. A Canadian soldier in Kandahar is nearly six times as likely to die as an American in Iraq.

We have sacrificed our sisters and brothers in wars that have no victories, and rather than bring freedom to these countries, they have brought violence, death and insecurity. If the death tolls of the invading countries are high, the toll in Iraq is truly staggering. While official numbers top 65,000 Iraqi deaths, unofficial numbers put the carnage at more than 500,000 lives.

As the death toll climbs, so does the economic cost. Public money and resources (working people’s taxes) support this war. The amounts are staggering. We watch as living standards continue to decline on both sides of the border. Poverty grows, and along with it so does the homeless crisis in all of our cities. Every week the United States spends \$8 billion more on war. To date, the war has consumed more than \$450 billion; in Canada the number has climbed to more than \$5 billion. Swedish experts report that in 2006 the world expenditures on arms reached over \$1.2 trillion dollars, enough to feed, clothe, house and provide basic education and medical care for the planet’s poor.

Yet, as both our countries pour billions into war, we have fallen far short of our commitments to providing foreign aid to developing countries. A 35 year-old United Nations target for aid was finally endorsed two years ago by the richest countries in the world (including ours). The United States and Canada have not even set a target date to meet the modest commitment of donating 0.7 percent of our annual economic activity. Ironically, the United States finds itself dead last on the list of donors and Canada is just slightly better.

It is no surprise to us that our leaders are friends and allies. George Bush and Steven Harper lead governments that continue, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, to demand ever-increasing funds to bring “peace” to the region. After six years of war and massive military and civilian casualties, we are no closer to peace and the people of both countries know it. A recent Canadian poll showed opposition to the war at 59 percent while support was only 36 percent (only 7 percent strongly). In the United States, the polls are similar. To make matters worse, both Afghanistan and Iraq have become the breeding grounds for publicly-funded private armies and contractors who are earning billions. These are some of the same corporations who are also busy at home exporting industries to cheap labour zones, undercutting good jobs and union rights.

We want to conclude by extending our sympathy to the families of the young men and women in both countries who have died. We pledge to work together to stop these wars and to turn our minds, money and energy to solving the real problems of our countries and the world --- poverty, inequality, environmental degradation and climate change. The success of our struggle for economic and social justice for all peoples is tied directly to our ability to ensure the majority of people opposed to war are heard, not only in the streets, but in the corridors of power in Washington, DC and Ottawa.

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