



Global Justice

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Circumventing the state to promote democracy

By Dan Gawthrop

AS MANY activists know, effective communication is critical to solidarity-building efforts. A recent Canadian visit by two Burmese pro-democracy activists, co-sponsored by CUPE's Global Justice fund, Canadian Friends of Burma and CUSO/VSO, offers insight into the work they do. Despite the oppressive conditions of media censorship, limited Internet and cell phone access, and the threat of arrest, jail or violence, Burmese exiles on the Thai-Burma border continue to promote human rights and democracy with tenacity, inventiveness, and courage.

Aung Naing Soe, 32, is general secretary of the Nationalities Youth Forum (NYF), a multi-ethnic youth umbrella organization representing 13 groups and 11 ethnicities. Aie Son, 31, is chairperson and deputy director of programs for the Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO). Both based in Thailand, their organizations provide human rights, media, and other forms of training for border-area ethnic peoples inside Burma, also known as Myanmar.

During the Fall 2007 "Saffron Revolution," when the country's Buddhist monks led a nationwide protest against the military regime, MYPO collected information, photos and video clips from various news agencies and websites. The text was translated into Burmese and Mon



Aung Naing Soe and Aie Son at CUPE national convention.

languages, everything was put on a video compact disc, and thousands of copies were made—and distributed inside Burma.

More recently, MYPO distributed 1,000 radios in three different rural townships in Mon and Karen states that are cut off from media. This was an effective campaign to reach community and religious leaders, and young people interested in political change in Burma.

The NYF provides human rights training for young people from ethnic

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WATER WORKERS UNDER THREAT OF VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

By Karin Jordan

PASSIONATE, courageous and committed, Colombian water worker Margarita López brought her inspiring story about defending public water to CUPE's national convention.

López is president of SINTRACUAVALLE, representing workers delivering water and wastewater services in 33 municipalities. She's headed the union for the past 12 years, and is its first female president.

The union has mobilized its own members and built community alliances into a formidable force that's beaten back repeated attempts at privatization. López and her members have challenged corruption and repression – including death threats – to build this grass-roots movement. “We're a union with a huge heart and a great capacity for the struggle,” she says.

Community-worker solidarity is absolutely crucial to keeping water public and extending access to the 12 million Colombians who have no drinking water services.

The union works closely with residents through local committees and regular town halls to raise awareness about the need to improve quality and keep services affordable. The vast majority of users are poor, and need government subsidies to pay for water and wastewater services.



Margarita López

“Through all this work, we've been able to develop a common front to maintain water as a common good, because it's essential to all of us for life. Water workers are fundamental, absolutely key, in the struggle against privatization,” said López.

With thanks to Barbara Wood a CUPE 1004 member and CoDevelopment Canada Executive Director for her interpretation work.

Haiti: Building and rebuilding public services and civil society

By Pierre Ducasse

DUKENS RAPHAËL is the secretary general of the Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers in Haiti (CTSP). He attended the CUPE Convention and met with us to discuss re-construction efforts in Haiti.

For Raphaël, the reconstruction of Haiti extends well beyond the rebuilding of physical infrastructure. Good public services and a dynamic civil society are essential components of the reconstruction.

With issues of access to education, clean drinking water, health care, energy supply and basic trade union rights, the list of problems to address is both long and pressing.

“The reconstruction of Haiti is, first and foremost, a matter for Haitians. It is we who have the vision of the kind of country and development we want. There are many issues: democracy, the organization of civil society, decent work, and accessible public services. The unions must also join with other elements of civil society. We must work with other unions, with human rights organizations, with rural organizations and others,” said Raphaël.

These are things that must be improved and the CTSP wants to make its contribution.

Wisconsin a lesson for Canadians

By Janet Szliske

WHEN GOVERNOR

When Scott Walker announced he would be taking away the rights of state workers to collectively bargain; students, religious leaders, immigrant rights activists, and farmers – saw it as a threat to democracy and got involved. More than 100,000 people rallied at the Legislature and participated in marches.

We Are Wisconsin brought together many progressive groups working in a broad coalition to take on Republican policies.

Candice Owley, president of the Wisconsin Federation

of Nurses & Health Professionals, says Wisconsin is the “test case”. Many municipalities and counties are seeing budget cuts similar to Wisconsin.

Owley says it is crystal clear that this is a well researched, coordinated and organized attack. “It’s like there is a playbook that says these are the 20 things you can do to gain power for the Conservative movement,” says Owley. “This is a plan to make a decades-long shift to conservatism. Do not think this couldn’t happen in Canada.”

Wisconsin was the first state to get collective bargaining for municipal employees fifty years ago, and now it’s gone. “Many of our members are still in shock and disbelief,” says Owley.

“We couldn’t have envisioned that we would lose all rights to bargain and that it would be illegal to collect dues. No-one could have believed that this could be done in Wisconsin, and you could be next.”

We Are Wisconsin will start collecting signatures to recall the Governor on November 15.

CUPE “a hotbed of social activism” - Stephen Lewis

By John McCracken

ONE OF THE GREATEST orators ever to come out of English Canada, Stephen Lewis, had delegates on their feet with a rallying cry against what he called “criminal passivity” around the world.

Lewis accused Stephen Harper of “being determined to change the landscape and values of Canadian society to the point where it will be unrecognizable.” Offering a bouquet to the work of the Global Justice Committee on women’s issues, Lewis suggested, “There is no more important struggle on the planet than the



struggle for gender equality. “CUPE reaches out to the rest of the world like no other union I have ever seen, from the Arab Spring to the fight for the right to clean water around the world.”

Known for his work with the United Nations in fighting the HIV-AIDS epidemic in Africa,

Lewis described as “magnificent” the \$250,000 in support which CUPE and its locals and members have contributed to his Stephen Lewis Foundation stephenlewisfoundation.org/.

CUPE's Global Justice Fund

SUPPORT FOR CUPE's international work took a further step forward when convention delegates approved resolution 175 calling for a plan to ensure sustainable and stable funding for our Global Justice work. By 2013, our international solidarity work will be funded for the long-term. 'This resolution is the best way to build our global movement' said Doug Sprenger, committee co-chair. The Global Justice Fund will be on a firm footing and will allow us to expand our international projects'.

Sharing strategies: CUPE and UNISON face a common threat

By Wes Payne

UNISON PRESIDENT Eleanor Smith knows she's got a big fight on her hands. Privatization of public services, wage freezes, and attacks on pension plans have been high on the agenda of the Conservative-led coalition government in the UK, and the country's largest public sector union is responding with action.



"We have a ballot for taking industrial action, which could lead to a strike," explained Smith in an interview at CUPE's national convention in Vancouver. Results from the ballot, released Nov. 4, showed overwhelming support for job action, with 76 per cent of those voting prepared to strike.

The job action, currently slated for Nov. 30, comes in response to pension payment increases and other austerity measures being imposed on public employees.

"The government wants us to increase [worker payments to] the pensions by double, basically," said Smith. They're also increasing the retirement age to between 66 and 68. "We're working longer, paying more, and getting less at the end of it," added Smith.

The details may vary from the Canadian situation, but the struggle is the same. With the job action in the UK approaching, CUPE members are sending messages of solidarity and watching closely.



Burma continued areas with limited access to Internet and media.

"We explain international law in relation to human rights, UN agencies and procedures, the International Criminal Court," says Aung Naing. "But first, they need to understand the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

Both the NYF and MYPO apply a "training the trainers" approach to their work: trainees spend up to three months in Thailand—learning about civil rights, women's empowerment, land use and control issues—before returning to their communities in Burma and leading education efforts there.

Despite the glacial progress of political change, the efforts of groups like MYPO and NYF are making a difference. On September 30, President Thein Sein canceled the US \$3.6 billion Myitsone dam in Kachin State after an all-too-rare popular uprising.

"We are trying our best to change our country," says Aie Son.