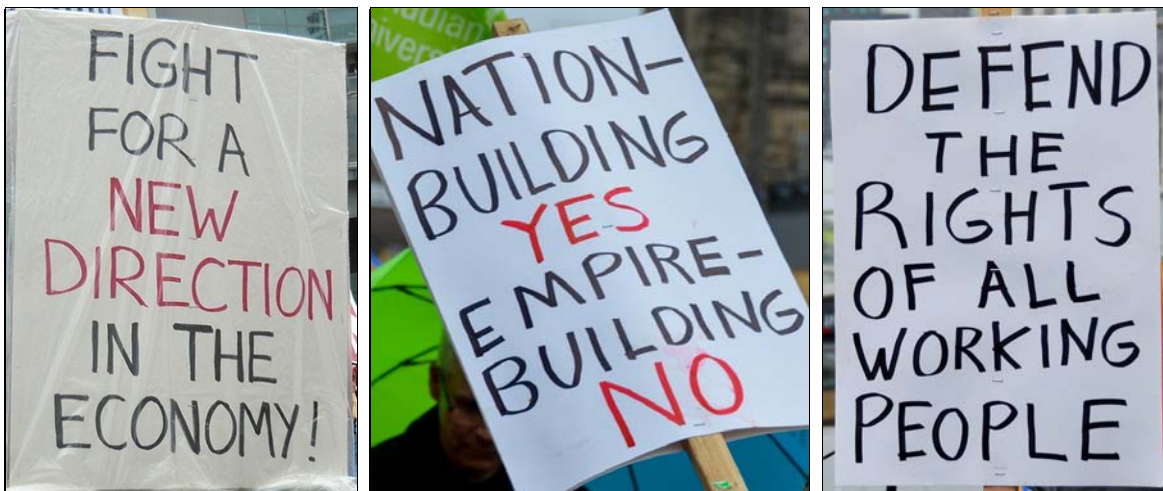


November 28, 2016

**31st Constitutional Congress of the
Quebec Federation of Labour**

The Difficult Situation Facing the FTQ



31st Constitutional Congress of the Quebec Federation of Labour

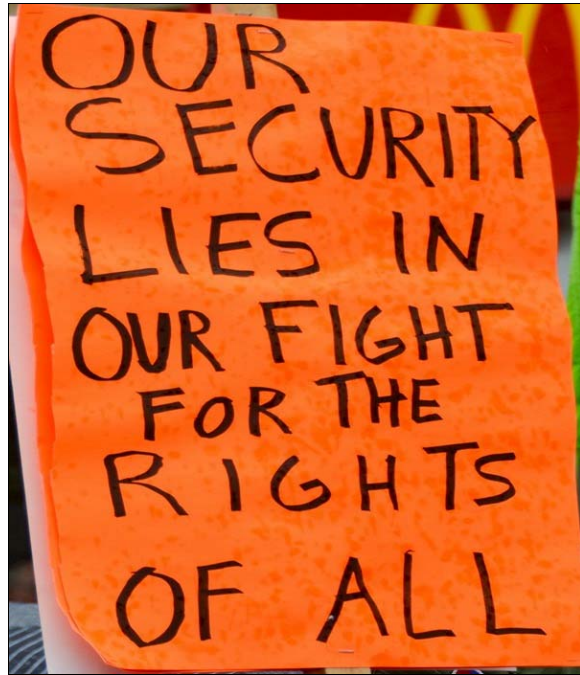
- **The Difficult Situation Facing the FTQ**
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31st Constitutional Congress of the Quebec Federation of Labour

The Difficult Situation Facing the FTQ

The 31st Constitutional Congress of the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) opens November 28 in Montreal and concludes December 2. The delegates, who hail from all parts of Quebec, see the five day convention as an opportunity to put forward an agenda of work which deals with the nefarious consequences of the brutal anti-social offensive. They come to the Convention with a rich experience of firm opposition to the anti-social austerity agenda of the rich and governments in their service in both Quebec and at the federal level. This has also given rise to a deep concern over the direction of the economy and future of society. This concern has deepened manifold as a result of the recent U.S. election which brought Donald Trump to the presidency with his promises to run the U.S. state like a business and what this means for Canada, Quebec and the rest of the world.

At present, the anti-social offensive appears as the concentration of power in the hands of the global oligopolies of the financial oligarchy.[1] Their supranational arrangements are designed to place at their disposal all the social wealth workers produce and the natural resources of the nation for use in their private empire-building. Crushing the organized resistance of workers and their unions is in the forefront of the attack of the oligopolies on nation-building and society. The financial oligarchy knows full well that an organized and conscious working class is the greatest defender of the rights and well-being of all and the general interests of nation-building and society.



When the oligopolies want something, they take over the state institutions and get laws and regulations passed which are intended to get them what they want. Only the struggle of the workers for justice, human dignity and the rights of all stand between the people and unbridled impoverishment and enslavement in the name of prosperity, freedom, human rights and democracy. Such is the case with the broad attack on the rights of municipal workers to negotiate their working conditions, which are the very conditions for the delivery of public services. By denying municipal workers their right to participate in making decisions concerning their working conditions and the economic and social development of the cities and towns in which they work, the global oligopolies are attempting to remove all obstacles to their seizure of Quebec's municipal assets and their capacity to generate new value. They want open season on the collective wealth of municipalities and the social wealth workers produce.

The Quebec Liberal cabinet passed Bill 110 to seize control of negotiations in the municipal sector so as to serve the takeover of public services by global oligopolies and their anti-social supranational agenda imposed among other ways through free-trade agreements under their control. A treaty such as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union considers public services as assets and markets to exploit. The global oligopolies want to sweep aside any government of laws, any national decision-making that may serve the well-being of the people and society and recognize the rights of workers. They demand freedom to trade on their terms to satisfy their narrow private interests and the right to sue governments that may restrict their exploitation of workers and the nation's assets and natural resources.

The dictate of the global oligopolies can also be seen in the attempts of governments in their service to impose "free zones." The oligopolies want free zones where they are exempt from state claims on the added-value workers produce and where labour, commercial and environmental laws and regulations do not exist or are flouted in the name of "being competitive" and "attracting investment."

The Couillard Liberals plan to impose free zones within their Maritime strategy. Within these zones, the government promises the oligopolies it will make no claim on their net income. It will provide them with all privileges and exemptions from regulations if that is the demand of the international investors. The government even promises to lower the rate of unionization in Quebec and take stern measures against workers' organized resistance so that the financial oligarchy can have free rein to exploit workers and resources at whim outside any government of labour laws. The

Couillard government's Plan Nord is itself a vast free zone to serve the power, privilege and empire-building of mining oligopolies for whom resources and rights are sacrificed.



The workers' movement puts on its agenda the need to step up organized resistance in defence of its rights and the rights of all at a time grave dangers exist. These dangers include the stepped up criminalization of resistance struggles, dangers posed as a result of theft and plunder of resources and careless exploitation of the natural environment as well as increased danger of all out war.

The workers' movement is its own saviour and has the ability to map out a new direction for the economy that guarantees the rights of all and their well-being, and affirms the general interests of the nation and society. The worker's movement must cast off all doubts and hesitation regarding its capacity to control the economic, political and social affairs of the nation and defend it from the marauding financial oligarchy. Our future rests in our own firm hands.

A difficult situation faces the FTQ at this time as its members are threatened in myriad ways if they refuse to cooperate with the anti-social aims of the rulers. Only by standing firmly in defence of just social aims and in defence of the rights of all can the workers movement and the FTQ, as one of the main trade union centres in Quebec, make headway under these difficult circumstances. *Workers' Forum* wishes the delegates to the FTQ Congress successful deliberations.

Note

1. The three salient characteristics of oligopoly are commonly described as: (1) an industry dominated by a small number of large firms, (2) firms sell either identical or differentiated products, and (3) the industry has significant barriers to entry. (i.e. Coca Cola/Pepsi Cola, the pharmaceutical industry, communications, health insurance, high technology, etc.). Whether by noncompetitive practices, government mandate or technological savvy, these companies take advantage of their position to increase their profitability.



Discussion on the Theme of the Congress

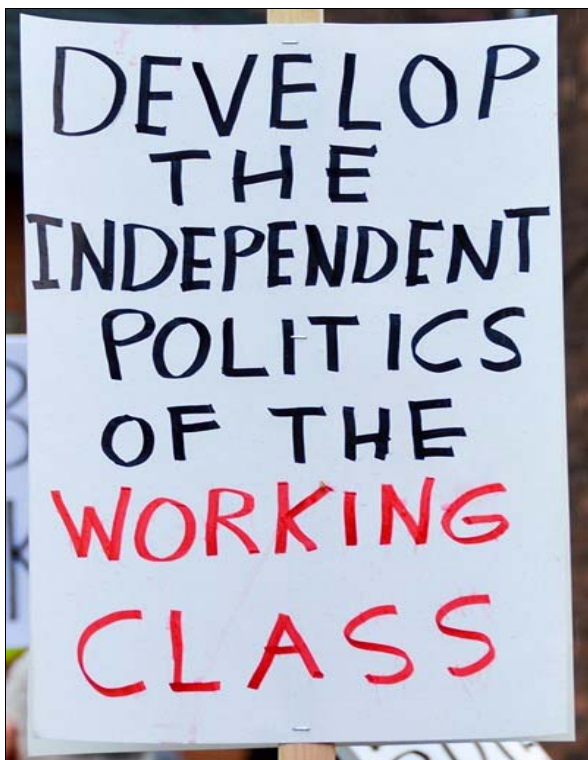
The FTQ delegates attending the 31st Congress do so within a situation in Quebec of increasing abuse and denial of workers' rights including the right to negotiate collective agreements. Also, the political atmosphere throughout North America with the election of oligarch Donald Trump as U.S. President is very concerning for working people. The reality as it presents itself needs serious discussion in a calm but firm atmosphere of resistance to all attacks on rights and the necessity for a new direction for the economy and nation.

Within the concrete conditions workers face, the theme of the Congress as presented of a fight against social inequality and for transition to a green economy, especially from the point of view of a transition in jobs this may bring about, is problematic. Such a theme does not have a sharp edge aimed at defeating the assault on rights and charting a new path forward for the economy.

Broad statements on social inequality and the green economy only make sense if the FTQ, similar to all defence organizations, has a bold agenda in defence of all those who are under attack, and recognizes the need to put the full weight of the organized workers' movement behind particular struggles. These include all workers who are waging battles for their rights, for their pensions and wages or struggling against contracting out and privatization; workers in opposition to companies renegeing on agreements such as Rio Tinto; and, those fighting government actions to deny workers their fundamental right to negotiate collective agreements, such as Premier Couillard's unjust Bill 110 targeting municipal workers.



Postal workers have been waging a protracted fight to stop the dismantling and privatization of Canada Post and the phony consultations of the Trudeau government, which began from an anti-worker premise that the work-time of postal workers is a cost to the economy and does not create value. The struggles include the youth, where the most vulnerable youth have just been hit hard by the passage of Bill 70 attacking people on welfare instead of changing the social conditions that give rise to inequality, poverty and hopelessness. The struggles include women, indigenous nations, students, seniors and all those whose dignity and rights are under attack.



All these particular struggles need a particular agenda of resistance, which must include the full weight of the organized workers' movement. A general statement on social inequality and the green economy means little when it comes down to the actual battles people are waging in defence of their rights. The same is true when speaking of a transition to the green economy in terms of jobs. With this transition, similar to all aspects of life in Quebec, the first issue to be settled surrounds who controls the transition and whom will the transition serve. Are the working people themselves in control? The truth of the matter is that the working people control nothing in the socialized economy and society other than some private matters and their own independent organizations and institutions.

No one can deny that the basic economy today is under the control of the financial oligarchy. Any change is also under its control. With this understanding of the reality, how can the

working people control any transition to a green economy or struggle against inequality and keep affairs out of the hands of those forces presently in control of the economy and society who are plotting to profit from any change. Only the social forces that are defending their rights through actions with analysis independently from the dominant privileged class can establish a meaningful agenda to deal with these problems, can give the movement for change a positive aim, and decide who the changes are to serve and under whose control the outcome will be.

General statements on important social and political issues first have to concretize the reality of all the particular struggles and who is in control of the struggle to put right what is wrong in the economy and society. General statements are useless unless first the full weight of the workers' movement is brought to bear on all the particular struggles people are waging in defence of their rights. Through these battles in defence of rights, the people can put those of their peers in control who are genuine and have proved themselves in battle, those who seek only outcomes that favour the people and not the financial oligarchy.

Election of Oligarch Donald Trump

The issue of the election of oligarch Donald Trump as President of the United States is an issue of concern for the delegates and workers generally and indeed the whole of humanity. His election strengthens the rule of the oligopolies through the use of unrestrained police powers, which function through repression and criminalization, negating the very existence of people fighting for their rights. Those who resist the anti-social offensive and fight for their rights and the rights of all are presented as "troublemakers," "professional demonstrators" and other derogatory categories of things so as to justify the use of police powers to crush them. Trump's election is yet another stone thrown at the working people and society. The constant provocations and threats from the highest authority in the United States and the disinformation in the media raise the necessity to discuss these matters in a calm and rational climate with the aim to find solutions through actions with analysis that favour working people.



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