

Canada: The class struggle and geopolitics

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As socialists, our solidarity should be with the international working class, not with governments or states

The United States is the world's hegemonic power, though that position is less secure than it used to be. It dominates and exploits countries across the planet, imposing puppet regimes where it can and working to regain control when countries try to break free. Chief among its foes are Russia and China, which it regards as "big power rivals," especially the latter. A series of lesser imperialist countries, of which Canada is one, act as its accomplices.

These are challenging times for the US world order. The financial crisis and recession of 2007-9 was followed by a decade of sluggish recovery and harsh austerity that unleashed the social and political conditions that produced the dangerous and erratic Trump presidency. This period, with the pandemic and economic slump adding to the problems, saw US prestige on the world stage badly tarnished. The Biden restoration is devoted to restoring trust and respect for the leading [role of the US](#). There are many sides to this but none match the importance that the new administration attaches to containing the growing power and [influence of China](#).

It is hard to imagine any credible political perspective on the left that isn't hostile to US-led imperialism. However, there is more to be considered than the geopolitical map and the actions of governments. We live in a world in which working class people face exploitation and oppression and in which they take to the streets to challenge those conditions. Such struggles break out all across the planet and the question that arises is how we should relate to working class resistance in countries with governments the US State Department has in its sights.

There are some on the left who focus on the geopolitical side of things and see the countries of the world in terms of a US-led camp and an anti-imperialist camp. The problem with this ["campist" outlook](#) is that it takes a rather forgiving view of oppressive regimes provided they are at odds with Washington. Even worse, working class struggles in such countries are seen as decidedly inconvenient and entirely suspect. No matter how serious the grievances involved or how significant the base of support mobilizing behind them, those taking to the streets will be presented as dupes of the West. [The Grayzone](#) is a less than subtle representative of this approach. A million people can fill the streets to demand democratic rights but this website will gleefully point to some small group waving the [Stars and Stripes](#) as supposed proof that it's all the work of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Local exploiters

The countries that Washington aims to bring under its control are still class divided societies, with local capitalists and governments that serve the interests of those exploiters. Workers and communities will resist the exploitation they face and the repression that is unleashed when they do. They don't see how challenging employers that have robbed them of their wages or a government that has imposed a ruinous tax on a [basic necessity](#) is serving the interests of US imperialism.

That such grievances exist in countries with political regimes that the US denounces is really impossible to deny. The huge economic growth in China in recent decades has involved the creation of a level of wealth inequality that rivals that of the West. Last year, there were 389 billionaires in China, the second highest number in the world and their combined wealth stood at \$1.2 trillion, up 22 percent from the [previous year](#). Already by 2011, 90 percent of the 1,000 richest people in China were members or officials of the ruling Communist Party, which had opened its doors to capitalists [ten years previously](#). This wealth has been generated by creating a manufacturing powerhouse within the global supply chain of the neoliberal era. A working class that includes millions of rural migrants has created vast profits for foreign investors and Chinese capitalists. As of 2017, the notorious Foxconn was the largest employer in the country and the desolate conditions in its workplaces gave rise to an infamous phenomenon known as the [Foxconn suicide](#).

The Chinese working class is the largest in the world and it is rife with discontent. Strikes, protests and more extreme disturbances break out all the time. An account of an attempt to form a union by workers in Shenzhen in 2018 reveals the collusion between the employers and police. "When the boss says we're making trouble, you, the cops, trust them and rush to the factory, beat us up and take us to the police station... In your eyes we are just like tiny bugs waiting to be stepped on," [declared](#) one of the workers.

Russia, for its part, is the most unequal of the world's [major economies](#), following the highly corrupt privatization process that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are ongoing strike actions throughout the country and "the overwhelming reason that workers strike or protest is [non-payment of wages](#)." If we take the case of Iran, certainly a country Washington seeks to dominate, there are constant challenges to exploitative employers and brutal state repression. No doubt, US sanctions massively compound the economic hardships but, when "municipal workers, coal miners, machine manufacturers, and nurses... [take part in protest gatherings](#)" over unpaid wages across Iran, as they did last year, we cannot regard their struggle as geopolitically inconvenient.

We celebrate the defeat of the coup regime in Bolivia and the return to power of MAS. However, even where we support a political leadership, we shouldn't assume that working class people have no grievances or a right to put them forward. In 2016, when Evo Morales was still president, disabled people made their way to the capital to call for a basic pension. Disgracefully, riot police attacked the protesters with [shocking brutality](#). Morales needed to be challenged over his refusal to meet with the disabled people or respond to their just demands. When I put out information on this incident on social media, several people accused the disabled protesters of being stooges of Washington. This reflects a deeply disoriented political perspective.

Internationalism

How, then, can we develop an approach to international solidarity that supports working class struggles all over the world without giving comfort to our enemies in Washington and Ottawa? I would suggest four considerations.

Firstly, the main enemy really is at home. The US-led imperialist camp is the greatest global exploiter and we must do all we can to weaken it. We should challenge its acts of aggression and condemn its international rivalries. When the US or Canadian government fakes moral outrage at China's human rights record, we should denounce their hypocrisy and point to their crimes on the world stage. I firmly believe that the oppression of the Uighurs in Xinjiang is [very real](#) but the [Trudeau government](#) is in no position to lecture China. If Trudeau wants to advance human rights, he can ensure Indigenous communities have clean drinking water, stop arming the Saudi torture state and, for that matter, get Canadian [mining companies](#) out of Xinjiang.

Secondly, if we are to develop a clear and consistent form of international solidarity, we must be ready to face the contradictions and complications of the global context in which working class struggles take place. There's no doubt that Washington tries to infiltrate and influence movements of resistance that break out in countries it has in its sights. It's also quite true that upsurges of resistance that emerge will frequently be full of contradictions. If workers fill the streets to challenge government abuses in Iran, pro-Western political forces will be looking for openings. In Hong Kong, there have been vast actions involving a huge portion of the population. People understand that the neoliberal hell that Beijing and the local capitalists are imposing on them can't be resisted without defending and extending democratic rights yet the presence of a reactionary current within the movement, cheered on by Western political leaders and media outlets, is [beyond dispute](#). All of this poses real dangers, but it hardly helps when left activists in Hong Kong, trying to link their struggle to resistance to the neoliberal order, are denounced as Washington's useful idiots by so-called anti-imperialists in the West.

Thirdly, we must do all we can to support working class resistance and develop a true sense of global solidarity. The class struggle can't be an unwelcome interference with our geopolitical preoccupations. If the Foxconn workers in China strike against the exploitation they face, we need to promote knowledge of their struggles and convey our deepest respect and solidarity—not tell them to resume a submissive place in the global supply chain for the good of “anti-imperialism.” When Iranian workers take to the streets, we should similarly celebrate their struggles, while challenging and denouncing hypocritical expressions of support from US or Canadian governments.

Finally, we need to understand that the pandemic-triggered crisis and its aftermath will unleash huge and explosive struggles on a truly international scale. In such a context, building a much stronger sense of global solidarity will be essential and we cannot condone capitalist bad faith. The class struggle will be waged and must be fully supported everywhere on earth.

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