



Vol. 71/No. 47 December 17, 2007

Canada labor federation debates support for war in Afghanistan

BY JOHN STEELE

TORONTO—After a lengthy and heated debate, delegates to the November 26-30 convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour voted by a 62 percent margin to demand the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan. The debate on both sides was couched in Canadian nationalist terms.

The proposal was made in separate resolutions by locals of the United Steelworkers (USW) and Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). Officials of the Union of National Defence Employees (UNDE) launched a sharp attack on the proposal. The UNDE organizes 14,000 workers at military bases across Canada and some at Ottawa's military base in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Delegates from the USW, CUPE, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) spoke in support of the resolutions. Some argued that Prime Minister Stephen Harper was undermining the Canadian military's "peacekeeping" role in the world by supporting the "U.S. empire" of President George Bush. Canadian soldiers are also deployed in Haiti, Lebanon, Cyprus, Bosnia, and Kosova, among other countries.

"This is the way to support our troops," a CUPW delegate said in the debate." He argued that the billions spent in Afghanistan could be used for health care, child care, and other social needs in Canada.

"We should get out of Afghanistan and oppose any U.S. attack on Iran," said USW Local 1005 president Rolph Gerstenberger. He argued that U.S. Steel's recent takeover of the Stelco steel plant in Hamilton, Ontario, would mean more pressure to support "U.S." wars.

"This is not about not supporting our troops," said USW Local 8300 delegate Carolyn Eagan. "We are supporting a government of warlords in Afghanistan, not reconstruction," she said, reminding delegates that the New Democratic Party has also demanded the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops.

More of the UNDE delegates who opposed the resolutions... and their... with... and the...

Many of the UNDE delegates who spoke against the resolutions wore red t-shirts emblazoned with a yellow ribbon and the slogan "Support our Troops."

"Our soldiers are in Afghanistan supporting women's rights and making life better in that country," another UNDE delegate said.

After the vote was announced, UNDE president John MacLennan asked that his vote against the resolutions be publicly recorded. Many of the UNDE delegates then left the hall in protest against the outcome.

Related articles:

[NATO calls for more troops in Afghanistan](#)

[Imperialist forces step up assault on Pakistan border](#)