

**Labour Development Forum
“Solidarity for Development”**

**February 12-13, 2002
Toronto, Ontario**

Final Report

Sponsored by:

Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW)
Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP)
Industrial, Wood and Allied Workers of Canada (IWA)
United Steelworkers Union of America (USWA)

Forum on “Solidarity for Development”

February 12-13, 2002; Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Hosted by the Labour International Development Committee

FINAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The “*Solidarity for Development*” forum was convened under the aegis of the Labour International Development Programme (LIDP) to deepen understandings of North-South programming practices while strengthening relations that promote social change.

This forum was structured around two major workshops with the aim of facilitating learning on:

- Building and using a policy framework to guide development programming
- Tools and methods for strengthening solidarity programming

The format of the workshops consisted of panel presentations followed by questions and a general discussion. Several guest speakers came from Africa and Latin America and provided a southern perspective to the areas under discussion. Other panellists represented an international trade union secretariat, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and several LIDC members.

The sponsor of the workshop was the Labour International Development Committee (LIDC) which functions as the implementing body for the LIDP. The lead in organizing this year’s forum was taken by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). In addition to the CLC, the other LIDC members are: the Canadian Auto Workers Social Justice Fund; the Canadian Union of Public Employees Union Aid; the Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada Humanity Fund; the Industrial Wood and Allied Workers of Canada International Solidarity Fund and the Steelworkers Humanity Fund.

OPENING

Kenneth V. Georgetti, President of the Canadian Labour Congress addressed the group of 45 union representatives, policy makers, researchers and non-governmental representatives. In his remarks, Mr. Georgetti pointed out that this was the 5th annual Labour Development Forum and that it has become an important feature of the LIDP cost-sharing agreement with CIDA. He underlined the expectations for the “*Solidarity for Development*” forum that included taking stock of the LIDP, to examine its impact and find ways to improve upon what the LIDP has accomplished to date.

Mr. Georgetti stressed that the world is not a better place than it was 20 years ago. The gap between rich and poor continues to grow and it urgently requires concerted action at all levels to reverse that trend. “Partnership in Development” a phrase used by Lester B. Pearson in 1968 and by CIDA today remains a core value for labour’s solidarity work. Partnership, respecting diversity and differences is the cornerstone of the LIDP.

Ken Georgetti recalled that the Steelworkers started the initial Labour Development Fund in 1985 at the time of the Ethiopian famine. The CAW, CEP, CUPE and IWA now all have their own funds built along somewhat different lines to suit their own particular context. Canadian workers are currently contributing some 5 million dollars a year to international development projects. In 1995 an agreement was reached with CIDA regarding matching funds that formed the basis for the LIDP collaborative work being discussed at this forum.

The CLC President welcomed the growth of international solidarity funds among the affiliates including initiatives taken by the OSSTF, UFCW, CUPW and GSU. He remarked that the old idiom “Think Globally but Act Locally” needed to be updated as union members have become increasingly convinced of the need to act globally. The presence of southern partners at this forum as an example of the importance of two-way sharing was highlighted, as was the certainty that all attending the forum from south and north would come up with new ideas to help the international work move forward.

In closing, Mr. Georgetti stressed the Canadian labour movement’s willingness to engage with the Canadian government to restore Canada’s reputation as a leader in global affairs by working to support equitable and sustainable development for all.

SESSION A: Building and Using a Policy Framework to Guide Development Programming.

Session chair: David Mackenzie, Director, Steelworkers Humanity Fund (USWA)

Session rapporteur: Gary Cwitco, Executive Secretary, Humanity Fund, Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP).

Jorge Robles, member of the National Directorate of the Frente Autentico del Trabajo (FAT) in Mexico stressed the strengths that trade unions bring to international development relations. Because labour has a membership base, it is in a strong position to determine policy and programming directions and then get funding to make it happen. NGOs that do not have a comparable social base may find themselves having to make adjustments to their programming in order to obtain financial support. Trade unions are in a position to pick those they wish to associate with and not have funding become the mediating factor.

Trade unions are used to working strategically, organizing in the workplace and relating to other unions as well as to labour centrals.

Transparency in south-north and north-south dealings is critical in building the trust necessary for equitable relations to grow and strengthen. Knowing how to work strategically and transparently opens the door on a deeper level of policy and programming collaboration and will allow trade unions in both contexts to experience and learn from projects that are undertaken ‘jointly’.

Having established this level of collaboration, north-south exchanges become an important tool for learning. Visits from union officials and rank and file workers from another country can have a powerful impact on all involved, but are likely to be most successful when the exchange takes place between unionists from similar work places.

However, it is important to bear in mind that in the building of these north-south partnerships it is critical that individual trade unions like FAT retain their autonomy. The challenge for autonomous trade unions wishing to relate strategically within and beyond national borders is to reach agreement on what is going to be built jointly, on the basis of labour solidarity, while avoiding the disrespect embodied in a charity model of development funding.

Baptiste (Bobby) Marie, labour consultant from South Africa followed up on Jorge Robles’ last point by asking if LIDC work is seen as being ‘development assistance’ or ‘solidarity’? There is an important distinction to be made, because the assumptions and approaches will differ significantly between one and the other. Project assistance should never be seen as an end unto itself, rather it is a part of a larger vision of building organization. An understanding of solidarity should not be reduced to the transferral of funds from north to south; rather the discussion should focus on working together to build a global organization.

In Africa, the trade unions are a very powerful force for change. In most cases the union leadership is not an elite minority as some have argued. Instead many of these leaders have played a key role in backing other forms of

social organization in their respective nations. However a significant level of frustration does exist around the funding of projects in Africa. There are a variety of reasons for this frustration, particularly among northern funders. Some donors have trouble with the fact that trade unions are political organizations. Others are astonished at how impoverished the labour movement in Africa generally is. Infrastructure in many southern nations is so poor that the logistics related to a project can sometimes take an enormous amount of energy that can end up overwhelming the project's content.

Northern unions for their part can bring problems with them when working with counterparts in the south. Some funders are not interested in supporting the strengthening of trade union organization. At times the monies involved can become a source of division within the labour movement. In other cases the financial support provided ends up sustaining negative union practices.

Where labour organizations north and south are not sharing information or providing opportunities for joint learning - there is no 'solidarity'. The challenge is to find creative and respectful ways to overcome these obstacles to social change.

Françoise Mailhot, Partnership Branch of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) explained that CIDA is engaged in a thorough review of institutional policies and programmes that will look back to learn from the experience of the 1990s and forward, to ask what CIDA will look like in 2010. CIDA's organizational culture makes it difficult to conduct an open and self-critical assessment of past initiatives, but some key questions related to the effectiveness of the delivery of aid will have to be addressed. The aim of this wide-ranging review is to develop a more holistic view of international assistance with a key objective of empowering the development partners.

Some preliminary observations on past practices at CIDA that need to be changed would include; most CIDA funding goes to

stand-alone projects in the south; CIDA staff rotation leads to important loss of knowledge and having to begin over again with new persons; Branch 'independence' causing a disjuncture between policy and programming; staff hard put to manage an over extended portfolio of programmes; CIDA needs to better understand the role it could be playing domestically; a need exists to review the question of untying aid. Preliminary thinking on learning from the past is to try several pilot projects to see how new and more strategic approaches to policy and programming questions might work.

Looking forward to 2010, some preliminary assumptions to be tested would include; CIDA will continue to fund projects but its role would change to being more of a facilitator/catalyst, ready to participate more actively in programme development; the concept of 'local ownership' at the centre of a changed way of thinking; a greater degree of donor coordination (with DANIDA, Swedish SIDA etc.) in the future; an effort to harmonize aid and trade policy; CIDA to take a more corporate (meaning branches to sing from the same hymn book) approach; a greater consistency in rules and procedures; and public engagement (in Canada) will be brought back onto the agency's agenda.

Elizabeth Cotton, Education and Programmes Officer at the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Union (ICEM) pointed out that in ICEM's experience as a global union, there has been a slow but steady decline in union membership particularly among ICEM's affiliates in the north. This trend requires a change in operating strategies for the ICEM and its world wide membership to include the following considerations; being clear on what the labour body can and can not do (the process that is used in developing policy is key); being clear on how to work in the future at building the organization (issue of transparency); greater knowledge of the terrain (e.g. understanding Buddhist trade unionism in some Asian nations) with help available because of the long standing relations with

affiliates in those countries; employing strategic planning and strategic management (building relations that extend beyond project funding); changing the relationship with other northern donors (northern behaviour has to change and donors have to be clearer about what they want to get out of relations with the south); construction of a new level of north-south cooperation (negotiating the ways to work together in the future) to include programmes of action and not just projects, accepting advice given by southern unions that can then be adapted for campaigns in the north (child labour example); articulation of projects with other activities that are part of the life of the union; building union to union relations is a political process which involves making choices and that has as a key objective to motivate and mobilize the ICEM membership (part of the challenge of building a global union).

Participant discussion following the panel presentations raised a number of points including:

- As several panellists had remarked, it is important to know the people and their culture when supporting programming in another country/context. North-south relations are also about finding commonalities in critical analyses of the world wide corporate system.
- Panellists made reference to both 'solidarity' and 'development' in their presentations. Perhaps solidarity can also be seen as an instrument to create people-centred development. Solidarity, however, is not related to the determination of 'cost-benefit'. In our international work we need to be able to clearly see the difference between working 'in solidarity' and operating from the basis of a charity model. Solidarity can include extending your hand to another who is in trouble.
- Before accepting the premise that genuine development flows from healthy relations of solidarity, one has to ask some key questions such as; why are we doing this together, where are we going to go with it

and with whom will we be working? Trade unions are universally concerned about issues like globalization, jobs and the growth of the informal sector. These common concerns provide the basis for collaboration and financial support based on areas of mutual interest. New relations are being forged on the international stage because, increasingly, not to do so is no longer an option.

- A panellist mentioned that the relationship between trade unions and NGOs was problematic, but isn't the challenge for labour to work with civil society in all of its manifestations?
- What did the CIDA panellist mean when she mentioned greater decentralization at CIDA in the future? Could she also explain the comment about "harmonization of trade and aid"?

Panel responses to points raised included:

- Priorities for collaboration with NGOs should be established around what unions and NGOs have in common. NGOs are not the enemy. In fact some trade unions have formed their own NGOs for very specific purposes. The issue of 'accountable to whom' needs to be clarified at the outset along with a mutual understanding of the concept of working 'in solidarity' when different sectors are involved.
- By 2010, CIDA is likely to be more decentralized in the field than it is today, but it will not be a return to decentralized models tried in the past. CIDA has a Task Force that is looking at fashioning a renewed public engagement strategy, but it won't be a repeat of the Public Participation Programme discontinued in the early 1990s. In regard to comments made earlier about harmonizing trade and aid, the reference was to achieving greater policy coherence among the departments within CIDA itself.

SESSION B: Tools and Methods to Strengthen International Trade Union Solidarity Programming.

Session Chair: Carol Phillips, Director, International Department, Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)

Session rapporteur: Graham Deline, Senior Officer, Union Aid, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)

Sue Carter, National Representative, Education Department, Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) began by asking; are we successful at international development education? And how do we measure success anyway? Sue made reference to the Global Solidarity Toolbox (1995) that she had collaborated on while at the CLC, and to the CAW courses on globalization that she is currently involved with which are a part of 'Globalization and Solidarity'(G&S) education at CAW. She drew on this background to put forward 10 key considerations that she keeps in mind as she carries out international solidarity/education work. These are that:

- The charity model ("help" them, "teach" them etc.) needs to be challenged and critical questions raised about 'development', including who is deciding what development is?
- The impact of globalization on workplaces and on communities north and south is addressed;
- Union members develop a deeper understanding of the neo-liberal model;
- These courses have an explicitly anti-capitalist approach to global solidarity;
- This work mobilizes members to support trade union struggles in other countries;
- It also mobilizes support for people in times of disaster;
- Members connect with others around the world on the basis of shared goals

(importance of exchange being a two-way street);

- Members connect with others in their role as consumers (problematic as it may erode working class consciousness);
- The education work provides an historical framework for looking at globalization which includes racism;
- Members are empowered to make local-global connections (local efforts to make a global difference).

Sue Carter also went on to outline some of the challenges in doing international solidarity work.

- Global phobia among some members – plants will leave if we take them on;
- Why are we bringing forward the international examples that we do? (Are we making the local connections? Are we vigilant in not creating victims?);
- Make the most of members experience locally (Walkerton allows one to act locally but connect to World Trade Organization rulings, privatization etc.);
- Focussing on 'global' does not just mean focussing on the south;
- Use success stories (or even the mundane) not just disasters to avoid overwhelming members when dealing with the bigger picture.

Judith Marshall, Coordinator, Education and Southern Africa Programmes, Steelworkers Humanity Fund (USWA) put forward observations that were based on the 'Worker to Worker' exchanges that the Steelworkers have been involved in. She stressed the use of each project as a 'doorway' that could allow for 'traffic' north-south so that trade unionists get a sense of each other's struggles. At first the exchanges were generic in the sense that the travel was for one's own education (not to

inspect). Later the exchanges gained a greater focus – women to women etc. More recently members have begun to link up with other workers that have a common transnational employer (strengthens everyone's hand in getting fairer treatment). A couple of years ago workers from Peru, Chile and Canada that all have Cominco as their employer, held a joint strategizing meeting. Those on the receiving end of exchange visits have had to get past the visitors being seen as 'exotic'. Now exchanges involve people spending time in each other's communities. Also other events such as the World Social Forum (2002) gathering in Porto Alegre, Brazil is bringing people together.

Some of the learnings that have resulted from the 'Worker to Worker' exchanges thus far include:

- It works best at several levels – national and local..... workplace links community links;
- Mutuality builds trust and allows issues to be raised and dealt with that otherwise would serve as a distancing factor in north-south relations;
- Exchanges are hard work and it takes time for them to gel;
- Cultural coding can make it difficult to 'exchange' – what sort of biases are out there? Perceptions of one another have to be dealt with;
- These worker to worker connections helped unions from several countries organize a "commission of enquiry" into corporate conduct in the Americas;
- Transnational companies sit up and take notice when communications between workers north-south are strong and frequent;
- Exchanges allow all involved to discover new and useful ways of being helpful to each other.

Paul Puritt, Programme Coordinator, International Department of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) spoke about the evolution of the West Africa programme that has been supported by the CLC over the past five years (1996-2001). He began by situating this initiative as part of the outrage felt throughout the Commonwealth following the hangings in 1995 of prominent Nigerians who had been vocal in that country's human rights movement. In response, Canada made new funds available for work that emphasized training in democracy.

A plan was put forward that received official funding and which included the following programmatic components:

- *Regional workshops* in West African countries to look at different aspects of democracy; conflict resolution, women and democracy, environment and democracy (e.g. Shell in Nigeria), internal trade union democracy;
- *National workshops* repeated the regional sessions outline but involved a greater number of workers in each country;
- *Exchanges* had people from some of the West African countries participating in labour schools in Canada and also had Canadians going to workshops in West Africa, depending on the theme;
- *The Nigeria Labour Fact Sheet*, published bi-monthly through project funding, served as an important platform for debate and a vehicle for informing union leadership in Nigeria and the sub-region;
- *Educational Manuals and Workbooks* were prepared and distributed to allow for a greater multiplier effect;
- *Self-assessment* was a tool used to evaluate programs.

Some outcomes from this five-year initiative include:

- The project helped strengthen the trade union movements of West Africa to resist military and authoritarian repression.
- It created a “safe space” where union leaders could share information, analyze events and formulate strategies of action. As the political context changed, the project served as a launching pad for education activities and organizational ideas to rebuild union structures.
- The study visits to Canada built direct relationships between union leaders in West Africa and Canada and assisted the West Africans in their organizational work in their own countries.
- Project participants were directly involved in campaigns to restore democracy to their countries. Two project participants became General Secretaries of their respective national centres (Nigeria and Ghana). One participant became a minister in the Sierra Leone government.
- The project enhanced the role of women. Of the 132 participants in regional workshops, 55 were women. In each phase at least one regional and local workshop focussed on women and gender issues.

Steve Song, Senior Programme Specialist, Bellanet/IDRC addressed the opportunity that exists for organizations and networks to leverage the potential of information and communication technologies. He opened with a question related to communication tools like the Internet-what did these have to do with international development work? Steve explained that some tools for example, Microsoft programmes, tend to be ‘closed’ in the sense that you pay for a package that a company has developed. The company retains the exclusive right to make any changes/improvements to that material. The user works with what is provided (with all the limitations which may become

evident during its use) until a new or upgraded version appears in the marketplace.

Open Source is a tool that operates from a completely different logic. This technology is constantly being developed and improved upon by the users who can get recognition but receive no remuneration. Consequently open source is free to all who wish to use it on the understanding that no proprietary rights can be claimed by those who improve upon some aspect of the existing technology. This approach is much more in tune with the concept of partnership and the non-exploitative relations that should be governing north-south interchanges.

Steve pointed to three key areas that are under constant development:

- *Open Source* licensing where software (Apache Web server, Linux, Postnuke [web content management] etc.) that is free can be changed as long as you don’t charge for the changes that you make.
- *Open Content* licensing allows material to be used and adapted but never charged for. This can make collaboration across country borders easy (for example translations) and/or in the area of Law, you can collaborate to develop a legal case (around an employer in common etc.).
- *Open Standards* permits the users to agree on standards needed to be able to store and exchange information and could prove useful in any effort to build a common database. Applications could vary from storing the Labour Codes of different nations or provinces, to keeping a common register of human rights violations (all of which could go, for example, to underpin a multinational effort to provide safer workplaces for workers who may be in similar sectors or who have an employer in common, north and south).

Yaya Mallé, founding member of the Confederation syndicale des travailleurs du Mali (CSTM), Mali began by making reference to the 1980s and structural adjustment programmes introduced in Africa that had a devastating impact on levels of employment. During this period trade unions were rapidly losing members and this had an impact on their credibility with other sectors of society. This loss of esteem was not helped by the fact that in some countries trade unions had a history of serving the interests of the governments in power. Later more independent organizations evolved but attempts to advance workers interests were blocked.

The imposition of the neo-liberal model in Africa came close to putting the last nail in a coffin intended for the union movement by worsening poverty and exclusion, thereby driving formerly waged workers into the informal economy. Under this economic model, 'democracy' cohabits with widespread misery and does not provide jobs or encourage organizing.

Training programmes for workers started when unions were at a low ebb. Training has helped to build hope by addressing workers' issues and concerns. Workshops were participant centred, had practical content plus a format that allowed trainers to understand the pedagogical approaches underpinning workplace education (e.g. FTQ-CLC supported "Unionism and Democracy" training sessions). This training experience has expanded to other parts of Francophone Africa marking a new level of south-south communications, and has also allowed for a greater sharing of knowledge about workplace conditions in other countries. Trainers have been adapting course materials to meet the needs of the participants in each country.

A greater emphasis is being placed on pilot projects or 'social solidarity projects' to help with credit access, information about safety hazards, or an understanding about labour standards and when they should be applied. Some of these pilot projects also target other less organized sectors to promote self-reliance. For example,

work is being done in fishing communities to allow men to fish and women to sell the fish in the marketplace. Women in some of these communities are also establishing small funds to help meet basic needs. Another example is a sand and gravel project. This enterprise was seriously handicapped by a lack of proper tools. Once the members got the required tools and received some management and accounting training, the enterprise prospered.

North-south collaboration around training needs has strengthened unions and in particular their women members, and has forged alliances with new sectors in civil society. Training is a key element, but it should not be limited to the funding of seminars. The challenge, as in all our work, is to move beyond research to taking action.

Participant discussion following the panel presentations raised a number of points including:

- Several participants thanked the panellists and expressed an opinion that their presentations pointed to the possibility/necessity of more work being done jointly in the future. The forthright presentations from the two brothers from Africa underlined the importance of other people/sectors being encouraged to look to the trade unions as a place where 'big picture' problems can be discussed and addressed.
- The challenge is how we respond to globalization through development programming. How do we support workers that don't work for transnationals and are being peripheralized in the global economy? Will exchanges bring in members from the union locals and not just from the central labour bodies?
- Building alliances should be understood as linking up among equals. In this respect the Hemispheric Social Alliance is a good example of a multi-sectoral initiative. Under the canopy of this grouping there have been small projects developed to strengthen

members of the Alliance. There are also opportunities to build new links between ORIT, ICFTU and the Global Unions.

- The criteria for measuring 'success' must be qualitative. In discussing electronic communications such as the Internet, we need to remember that only 1% of the planet uses this technology.
- The informal sector in the north is also growing rapidly, and this is an area where we can learn from southern experience and strategies. In the struggle against neo-liberalism we also need to look at fostering exchanges between trade unions and NGOs.
- A report of this forum will be circulated to all the participants. Participants were challenged to review what was said and to find the most appropriate way to take this discussion back to their organizations.

Panel responses to points raised included:

- Growing community usage of on-line services and communication possibilities will force government to be more responsive. In fact, as this technology becomes more established and interactive, the distinctions between civil society and government may begin to blur.
- Evaluation can be activity based, but the real impact of a programme will be seen in the longer term.
- The importance of workers meeting face to face through exchanges cannot be over emphasized. We need to 'internationalize' our members' discussions in the north and find ways to collaborate in the empowerment of our partners both south and north.

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