

# Voices from the Floor

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## Special points of interest:

- The next General Meeting will be in Victoria on Saturday, May 24, 2008.
- The next General Meeting in New Westminster will be Saturday, June 28, 2008.

**Editorial Policy:** Letters and submissions are encouraged. The opinions expressed may not be those of either the Local or the National Union.

**Editor:**  
Darcy Suehn

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Brother Murray Gore places a gift envelope in the Lion's mouth. Photo by Brother Darcy Suehn

## Rewarding the Lion

By Brother Darcy Suehn

February 3, 2008 saw a large crowd at the CAW Hall in New Westminster for the first of what Brother Murray Gore, National Organizer, hopes will be many more cultural events that will draw members who would normally not come into the Union hall.

All of the Locals in the building were represented. Sister Ann Davidson, CAW Area Director was on hand to

represent the National Union. After the traditional Lion Dance and some words of welcome we enjoyed some great Chinese food in the specially decorated hall. A special thanks to all the volunteers who made this event a great success; and watch your Union bulletin board for other upcoming events that celebrate the cultural diversity in our workplaces and our Union. Want to help out? Visit the Back Page for contact info to reach Brother Gore.

# “Is the murder of political enemies genocide?”

By Brother Darcy Suehn

“Is the murder of political enemies genocide?” That is one of the fascinating questions posed by Naomi Klein’s new book **The Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism**. Perhaps more intriguing is the question, “Is neo-liberal economic theory inherently violent?” But before Klein answers these questions she lays out the theory and its strange connection to the ‘research’ by Dr. Ewen Cameron in Montreal in the 50’s and 60’s using electro convulsive therapy that was funded by the CIA .

Klein’s narrative begins by building the connections between Cameron’s work, torture and Milton Friedman’s economic theory we know as neo-liberal or laissez-faire capitalism. She points out that both men felt that a dramatic shock was needed to wipe away all pre-existing structures. For Cameron it was a patient’s personality for Friedman it was any vestiges of a Keynesian state that needed to be erased before the new healthy system could be introduced and balance restored.

So what exactly is Friedman’s ideal economic system? Well it looks a lot like the Federal Conservatives and Liberals, and especially the BC Liberal’s economic vision: massive cuts in government spending except for military, police and prison spending; privatization of all public services including healthcare and education, because the market is seen as the best method of distributing goods and services; elimination of ‘trade barriers,’ or ‘free trade’; cut government ‘red tape’ which means gutting labour, consumer protection and environmental laws that interfere with business; and of course massive tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. Friedman’s theory is underpinned by a belief in social Darwinism that means those who are wealthy are so because they possess some evolutionary advantage and

the poor are so because they are weak and lack drive and initiative and by ‘coddling’ them we only encourage and reward their weakness. These same ideas are applied to nations as well. Klein makes perhaps her most important point that even, though Friedman presents his theory as scientific fact, all of the data indicated the exact opposite and she provides numerous examples of nations in which Friedman’s “voodoo economics” have been implemented with disastrous consequences for the vast majority. What is really at play here is justification for greed and exploitation!

Of course to get these ideas adopted takes a spectacular event or crisis. That is the other central theme of Klein’s, book that this agenda of laissez-faire capitalism needs that overwhelming catastrophe under which to quickly change the economic policies of any nation or government or even political party. In fact, Klein makes the point that the presence of democratic institutions offers little protection in times of crisis. In other words, no one is safe.

Here’s how it works. Chile, South America had re-elected a socialist government led by Salvador Allende, a nation that had never seen a coup d’état, until September 11, 1973, when a US backed coup led by General Augusto Pinochet violently seizes power. In the weeks, months and years that follow an orgy of bloodletting, torture and disappearances swept this previously peaceful and democratic nation. Among the initial targets were left wing politicians and their supporters, students, academics (especially economics professors who were seen as Keynesian), trade unionists, peasant activists and anyone who was helping the poor. In the days and weeks that followed, Pinochet introduces or deletes whole sections of the legal and economic framework that had been built over the past number of years through democratic means. The new economic



dogma was developed by a group of Milton Friedman's students known as "Chicago Boys" from Chile who studied at the University of Chicago, where Friedman taught. They had been hard at work inside Chile for years prior to the coup developing the economic document called "the brick" to be forcibly implemented. Not only did his students serve this vile state terror machine but he personally met with Pinochet and served as an advisor for numerous years.

That pattern of violence is the same in almost every respect in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil as each nation is overtaken by US sponsored state terrorism. In fact, the four nations have swapped notes on how best to eliminate the opposition. In Argentina, Klein notes the evidence of cooperation from the multinationals is strongest. At the Ford Argentina plant in Buenos Aires troops and tanks physically occupy the plant and a torture centre was set up and used against Ford workers inside the plant gates. Union activists were literally disappeared off the line in front of their powerless co-workers after being identified by company foremen. Needless to say, the hard won gains at the bargaining table were erased overnight. Klein argues that trade unionists were the most common target of state terror but Gaston Gordillo PhD, who teaches Anthropology at UBC and lived through the coup in Argentina, disagrees, stating that student activists and middle class intellectuals were a more common target. Regardless of which

group was the favourite target, "...it is clear that these dictatorships targeted any social group that could organize an effective resistance to their political and economic policies, and that unions were one of their main targets." Professor Gordillo notes.

Even though debt became a new crisis to be exploited in the 1980's, China provided one last violent example of how to impose a neo-liberal economic agenda. Klein argues that Tiananmen



This 100 year old cartoon produced by the Wobblies was provided by Professor Ingo Schmidt who teaches Economics at SFU and Athabasca Universities and recently taught "Labour make the world go round".

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Square was not just about crushing student led pro-democracy protests; it was also about crushing worker and peasant opposition to the very same economic model imposed in Chile. And who comes to the defence of the Chinese Communists over the Tiananmen Square Massacre? Henry Kissinger rabid anti-communist and the former US Secretary of State in the Nixon administration. In the weeks and months that followed, Chinese Communist Party loyalists imposed the same draconian economic measures and led a campaign of terror that rivalled Pinochet, but this time in a 'workers paradise.' In the end it was the children, called "little princes", and friends of these guardians of socialism who came out owning most of China. Klein notes that it was this liberalizing of Chinese economic policy that turned China into the "the world's sweatshop". The one constant in both China and Chile was Milton Friedman who served as a personal advisor to both butchers.

The opportunities to use terror as a method of imposing their agenda had become more problematic, as Klein argues, for both the host dictators and for Friedman himself as he became linked with terrorists like Pinochet. As Friedman's 'theory' and his Chicago Boys grew in influence, they were able to gain control of the IMF and World Bank. By the 1980's Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan had been elected and, since the US and Britain both largely dominated these institutions the corruption the corruption was complete. John Maynard Keynes and indeed the world developed these two institutions, as response to chaos that the Great Depression and World War Two had produced. Keynes wanted to prevent economic, political and social chaos but now they had become the method of introducing

neo-liberal economic policies code named "Structural Adjustment". Debt crisis was the preferred disaster to be exploited. As anyone with a mortgage in the 1980's knows, those sudden and brutal spikes in interest rates led by Paul Volcker, a Chicago Boy, at the Federal Reserve Bank in Washington, DC, could spell economic ruin. Want help? Then all you have to do is agree to an IMF Structural Adjustment Plan: cut public spending with massive lay-offs in the public sector; cut personal and corporate taxes; privatize everything for pennies on the dollar; cut workplace protections and gut labour, consumer protection and environmental laws; and then open your borders to cheap foreign imports so your local industry can be decimated by foreign multinationals. Sound familiar?

It was debt crisis that became the vehicle for Poland's betrayal by the very same Solidarity Party that had given the whole world a sense of hope as we watched the Iron Curtain open. Again a couple of Chicago Boys, one a Pole, would bring the economic policies that would cause such suffering.

"Adam Michnik, one of Solidarity's most celebrated intellectuals...later observed bitterly...the worst thing about Communism is what comes after". Here was another example that, even in a democracy led by a political party avowed to introduce a hybrid of socialism and capitalism, with the right amount of crisis and preparation any nation could be transformed into a version of Friedman's neo-liberal economic paradise with riches for the few and poverty for the masses.

In every single nation that has been forced down Friedman's economic path the results have been the same. In nation after nation Klein notes: a rise in infant mortality rates; massive unemployment

“The modern Conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy—that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness.”

— John Kenneth Galbraith, *Economist, Canadian and economic advisor to both FDR and JFK.*



ment and the associated social ills; rapidly expanding slums; a massive increase in those falling below the poverty line; and, against this, a backdrop of fabulous wealth for those in control and their financial backers. For the vast majority, suffering is a constant companion as they wait for some of that wealth to 'trickle down'. The reality is of course that the wealth they generated in being siphoned up, not trickled down! And who would ever vote for that? No one, which is why not once has Friedman's neo-liberal model been adopted democratically and that is what makes it inherently violent. Professor Gordillo noted that, "Klein's point about the inherently violent nature of neoliberal economic policies is documented in her book with an overwhelming amount of data and in a very wide array of places and countries, and I agree with her entirely on that point."



So if the neo-liberal agenda can't be implemented democratically and it is inherently violent, does that make what happened in the early days of Friedman's neo-liberal revolution, in Chile and Argentina, genocide?

**CALM 2007**

Klein answers yes and draws on the legal decisions of two judges, one, Spanish and the other Argentinean, who look to the original UN General Assembly motion on genocide to support this verdict. "In December 11, 1946 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution by unanimous vote

barring acts of genocide when racial, religious, *political* and other groups have been destroyed in whole or in part." Why then would the current Convention on Genocide, passed two years later, omit the word "political"? Simple. Klein points out that Stalin knew that by this definition his purges would qualify as genocide and he had enough support from those who planned their own purges to make this definition the one we still have to this day. Klein clearly argues that, based on this earlier definition what happened in Chile and Argentina was an act of genocide and I am not sure she is wrong. Here Professor Gordillo and Klein disagree. Gordillo feels that the violence in Chile and Argentina were aimed at taming dissidents while the events in Nazi Germany or Rwanda were intended to eradicate whole segments of the population. But is class warfare all that different in nature or intent from ethnic cleansing? Perhaps we need to think in terms of genocide as a continuum.

Professor Gaston Gordillo, PhD. was interviewed by email.

### **Manufacturing jobs at record low**

CAW/CALM

In the month of February alone Canada lost 24,000 manufacturing jobs and over the last 12 months Canada has seen 106,000 manufacturing jobs evaporate.

Unfair trade coupled with the high Canadian dollar and lack of federal government action is resulting in massive job loss in manufacturing communities across the country.

According to Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey for February released Friday March 7, manufacturing now only accounts for 11.6 per cent of total employment in Canada, which is a record low. In 2002, manufacturing represented 15 per cent of Canadian employment.

## Closer to Home – We are what we buy

By Brother Darcy Suehn

April 22<sup>nd</sup> is Earth Day but for CAW environmental activists everyday is Earth Day and April is the month we take that message into Canada's classrooms. Across this beautiful but increasingly polluted country, CAW environmental activists will bring greetings from Canada's largest private sector union to 80,000 plus students in elementary and secondary schools.

This annual program has seen some down-sizing in the past three years, with the biggest cutback this year, when coordinators were asked to reduce their student numbers by 15% across Canada. The cutback has been the result of the economic downturn in the manufacturing sector, a downturn that is the result of a high Canadian dollar, government inaction that has allowed unfair trade policies to persist, and the movement of manufacturing overseas that has produced an all-time low in manufacturing job as a percentage of all jobs in Canada, according to Statistics Canada.

It seems very appropriate that this year's Earth Day in the Classroom theme is "Closer to Home", which focuses on the environmental and economic benefits of purchasing foods and products

which are produced as close to your home as possible. Once again the CAW's effort focuses on the areas where 'green and blue' have common cause. In addition to the social and economic reasons to shop close to home, there is a very strong environmental case to be made for green purchasing.

### Closer to home We are what we buy

- ♦ I will make good choices today and for a healthy and sustainable tomorrow.
- ♦ Is this purchase something I need?
- ♦ Do I already own something that will serve the same purpose?
- ♦ Can I make or borrow something that will do the same thing?
- ♦ Is my purchase locally made?
- ♦ Is the produce made with environmentally sustainable materials?
- ♦ Was it produced by workers who were treated fairly under safe and healthy working conditions?
- ♦ Can I easily compost or recycle the product when I am finished with it?

The further a product has to travel to reach your home the greater its carbon footprint, which is the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that is produced by transportation over increasingly longer distances. Obviously some things simply aren't available locally, so here the message is select Fair Trade products wherever possible. Fair Trade products are produced in environmentally and socially responsible ways that make sure that the people who do the work are treated fairly and compensated for their labour.

In addition to reducing the CO<sub>2</sub> produced when you purchase im-

ported products versus locally produced goods, you have the chance to have a greater say in how local goods are made and under what conditions. We get the chance to control the use of toxins and how they are treated before they are released into the environment because, after all, **"We are all downstream!"**

## Economic anxiety in boom times

by Ish Theilheimer Straight Goods/CALM

A recent poll pointed out that concern about the economy is rising. Despite the buoyant tone of economic reports that focus on low unemployment rates and the high dollar, the outlook for many Canadians is grim.

Forest industries are collapsing as a result of cut-throat competition that has opened up through international trade deals. Entire towns like Dalhousie, New Brunswick, are looking at shuttering up because they have lost the mills that powered their entire economies. The ripple effect of mill shutdowns is felt widely in the economy, from machinery manufacturing to social services costs. The same forces are buffeting the industrial heartland of Ontario. One in seven jobs is tied to the auto industry, which now finds itself hard-pressed to compete with imported products. Imports rule, thanks, once again, to trade deals. The auto sector is not alone. Nearly all domestic manufacturing is on the way out. Shoes no longer come from Kitchener; jeans no longer come from Winnipeg. In fact, very little that we purchase is now manufactured in Canada entirely, or even mostly of Canadian parts. Stuff is considerably cheaper than it used to be, but we pay a high price for cheap stuff, both in terms of our domestic economy and in terms of human and environmental abuse "over there," where all this cheap stuff comes from.

Still, if we have a full-employment economy, what's the problem? Well, there may be Help Wanted signs in front of every Wendy's but that doesn't mean you can make a living working there.

Here's an example worth considering. If you're lower-income, it will explain your anxiety. If you are (still) middle—or upper-income, it may explain your neighbours'. It's a budget for someone working for \$14 per hour—a young person who just graduated with a technical certificate, or a semi-skilled older worker whose plant just closed. Some people in this category earn \$20 per hour—few earn more. So let's use \$14, which is not bad

in a lot of places.

A monthly income at \$14.24 an hour works out to \$2,468.

taxes, EI, CPP etc. (about 20 per cent) \$481  
accommodation \$800

transportation (city transit if available, more with a car) \$300

food (assumes almost no eating out) \$500

clothing \$100

insurance \$50

health (dentist, drugs) \$100

phones, Internet, cable \$100

Monthly expenses add up to \$2,431.

At this modest level of spending, a single person falls behind every month. If both members of a young couple are working for this kind of money, they might possibly get ahead, if they don't have kids. The places with the most and the best-paying jobs (Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto), however, also have high accommodation costs.

Such tight finances, combined with student debt, are forcing many young adults to wait a long time to start families, if they do so at all. In centuries past, people needed kids. Now they can't afford them.

For an older worker at this income level, trying to pay a middle class mortgage, put kids through school, and prepare for retirement, it's impossible to get a good night's sleep.

With a lot of people looking at budgets like this—or worse—it's no wonder there is a high level of economic anxiety in the land. The middle class are by no means insulated, with rising user costs for public services like education and health care and soaring energy and real estate costs.

Looking toward a federal election, federal parties need to address these anxieties with bold and practical ideas—not just platitudes, band-aids and partisan attacks. Canadians are experiencing extreme stress due to sweeping economic change that was triggered by the corporate trade deals the Right continues to fight for, after 25 years. Voters may be ready to consider visionary and realistic responses.

*Ish Theilheimer is publisher of the leading, oldest, independent Canadian online newsmagazine, StraightGoods.ca.*



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