

Copenhagen: an historic chance or missed opportunity?

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, set for December 7-18, could be an historic opportunity to deal with what is probably the most urgent problem in today's world. But it could also be a missed opportunity if governments involved fail to agree on concrete steps for reducing emissions.

"Fiddling while Rome burns" surely describes the attitude of the Harper government, which seems determined to squander a chance to deal with this crisis, given its aversion to international environmental controls (remember Harper's earlier denunciation of the Kyoto Accord as "socialist"), and its base in the Alberta oil industry. As reported in the *Globe and Mail* (Oct. 22), Environment Minister Jim Prentice has been "consulting with provinces on a plan that would impose a cap on industrial emissions, but allow Alberta's energy intensive, emissions-heavy oil sands to continue expanding." The government has also avoided releasing a detailed report on possible actions in advance of the Copenhagen conference, emphasizing vague goals rather than concrete targets for reducing emissions, and attempting to shift greater responsibility on developing countries such as China and India in order to evade Canada's responsibilities.

Australian environmental author Tom Flannery

commented, "We desperately need Canada to play a much more positive role ... The most important contribution now would be for Canada to go to Copenhagen and negotiate in good faith to secure a fair, ambitious and binding agreement." Dale Marshall of the David Suzuki Foundation has also criticized Canada's obstructive stance, warning, "A failure of diplomacy often leads to conflict. The triggers are all there: food security, mass migration of people, breakdown of law and order, dramatic changes in our environment."

Perhaps the only hope for change in Canada and elsewhere is the growth of a broad-based activist movement, which Naomi Klein extolled in a recent article, "Copenhagen: A Movement Comes of Age" (*rabble.ca*; Nov. 16). Klein drew parallels to earlier anti-WTO protests in Seattle, but this time activists in Copenhagen are not aiming to shut down the summit but to open it up, promoting various ideas including sustainable agriculture, smaller, decentralized power projects, and respect for indigenous land rights, and paying for such changes by cancelling foreign debts. Such solutions probably hold out more hope for the environment than essentially business-oriented solutions such as "carbon credits." In any case, meaningful change on this as on other issues can only come as the result of actions on the ground, not just from the top.♦

Harper Conservatives join in attack on Goldstone

Throughout the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, full of strong polemics, few have been as fierce as those surrounding the Report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, or "Goldstone Report," as it is better known, after its main author, distinguished South African Jewish jurist Richard Goldstone. The report rightly criticizes attacks on civilians on both sides, those perpetrated by the IDF and Hamas. But it records the obvious truth that the human toll of the IDF onslaught was far greater than anything Hamas was capable of.

For documenting this reality, Justice Goldstone has been the target of an unprecedented campaign of vilification on the part of the Israeli government—which refused to cooperate with the inquiry—and its supporters, who have often attacked Goldstone with the tiresome slander of "self-hating Jew." American Jewish academic Tony Judt, praising Goldstone as being "in an ancient tradition of Jewish self-questioning and uncomfortable truth-telling," deplored "Israel's short-sighted attempts to discredit the man That our own [U.S.] government has chosen to join in this unworthy exercise should be a source of deep embarrassment and shame."

It should be a source of embarrassment and shame to Canadians, and especially to Canadian Jews, that Canada was one of 14 countries to vote

against the recent UN General Assembly Resolution endorsing the Goldstone report and calling on both Israel and the Palestinians to undertake "independent, credible investigations" into human rights violations on both sides. The Harper government has denounced the report as unbalanced, in spite of its criticisms of both sides, and the obvious difference in the scale of violence on the two sides.

The Goldstone report, in its call for an end to impunity and for justice for the victims, is a source of hope for a better future for both Israelis and Palestinians, which will require an end to the decades-long occupation. Rula Odeh, president of the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations (NCCAR) put it well regarding Canada's recent vote: "Such a vote serves neither the interests of Israel, Palestinians, nor the rule of law in international affairs." The Harper Conservatives, in joining the attack on Goldstone, are isolating Canada from large segments of world opinion. They are not "friends of Israel," as they say, but uncritical defenders of the worst aspects of Israeli state policies. The only alternative to such rigid "loyalty" is the peaceful resistance to the occupation of people of all backgrounds—Palestinians, Jews and others—and the realization of self-determination and equality for both peoples in Israel and Palestine.♦