

Letter on Canadian prime minister's "apology" to Aboriginal peoples

19 June 2008

Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a formal apology in the House of Commons June 11 to all Aboriginal people who suffered abuse in native residential schools.

According to media outlets, "Harper will deliver a speech that takes responsibility for the abuse many aboriginal children suffered at the hands of those running the mandatory schools, which operated for a century, ending in the 1970s."

Harper's apology appears to echo the Australian federal parliament's formal apology to its Aboriginal people made on February 13 of this year.

Like Canada, the Australian apology was extensively covered by its national media. In fact, this and other similarities between the Canadian and Australian situations are striking—so much so, that I believe that a Canadian reader would gain valuable insights by re-reading the WSWs Australian articles on this topic.

For example, like Canada, Australia's "Aborigines continue to face conditions comparable to those in the poorest developing countries. They can expect to live for about 17 to 20 years less than the average Australian, with indigenous infants three times as likely to die before their first birthday as their non-indigenous counterparts. Aborigines are far more likely to be unemployed, and they comprise 22 percent of the prison population, while making up just 2.4 percent of the total population. Unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse and violence afflict many Aboriginal communities and families." (See "Australian federal parliament's 'sorry' resolution: the real agenda")

And like Harper's residential school apology, Australia's "reconciliation" agenda sought "to obscure the fundamental issues—above all that responsibility for the oppression of the Aboriginal people lies not with 'whites' but with the capitalist profit system, and that it is impossible to overcome this centuries-old

oppression within the framework of the present social order."

These fundamental social relations are concealed by the current media hype. Residential schools, or other examples of mistaken policies or bad administration, did not devastate Aboriginal communities. Instead: "...they were the product of the profit system, with its legal foundations in private ownership, which the parliamentary system and all the parliamentary parties are committed, above all else, to continue defending" (See "Australian Prime Minister apologises to 'stolen generation': rhetoric versus reality")

So why apologize? According to the first article cited above, in Australia, "The real aim of the 'sorry' resolution is to facilitate Labor's plan to draw in a layer of privileged indigenous leaders and utilise them to continue and deepen the policies of the former Howard government." Undoubtedly the Canadian government has similar designs!

In summary, the capitalist social relations, with its private property and parliamentary system, along with a similar colonial history exist in both countries. As a result, the solution to these and other social problems are the same: "[It] requires nothing less than the abolition of the system of property relations that gave rise to, and continues to perpetuate, these injustices. Society must be reorganised from top to bottom on socialist and genuinely democratic lines, ensuring that the basic needs of all are met."

Canadians wanting a deeper understanding of the Harper "apology" should give these and other WSWs articles a read.

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11 June 2008



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