

Seeing Red: relentlessly class-ist analysis from Halifax, NS

Nova Scotia and the G8

AN ECONOMIC ASSAULT



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On April 26th and 27th, the International Development Ministers of the Group of Eight (“G8”) meet in Halifax. The meeting takes place before the bigger G8 and G20 meetings in Toronto this summer.

The G8 is made up of eight of the world’s largest economies: Canada, the US, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia. It sets the agenda for the world’s economy, acting as an international chamber of commerce. It was they who decided that the banks had to be bailed out; it was they who chose inaction on climate change. Sweatshops and slums in the Third World show that the G8’s policies result in human tragedy. For them, short-term profits and the market take priority over human needs. This exploitative and irrational global system we call Capital.

In recent years, Capital has brought disaster to working people in Nova Scotia. Manufacturing has been shut down or moved overseas. These jobs have been replaced by lower paying jobs in the service sector. A prime example is the spread of call centres where wages are low and work is often part-time and temporary.

In 2007, the TrentonWorks plant in Pictou County was shut down because Greenbrier Companies moved it to Mexico. Workers who earned on average \$19 per hour had their livelihoods snatched away from them. At the new plant in Sahagun, Mexico, the average hourly wage is three dollars.

Clearwater Foods has closed fish plants in Nova Scotia and moved them to Newfoundland and China where labour is cheaper. In Glace Bay, Clearwater slashed workers’ wages by 18 per cent. These changes hurt workers but kept the company profitable. Despite the fact that their headquarters is on the Bedford Highway, the company does not serve the needs of Nova Scotians, but rather the needs of Capital.

Other businesses cannot be so easily moved to where labour is cheaper. Increasingly, labour is imported to Nova Scotia. Farms employ migrant labour from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. These people, escaping the devastated economies of the Third World, arrive here only to work at low wages and with even fewer rights than Nova Scotian workers. This two-tiered system divides workers and makes us all more vulnerable.

Capital’s drive to dismantle social programs puts working people in a dangerous position. In 1995, the federal government cut transfer payments to the provinces for healthcare, education, housing, and social assistance. Early last decade the Nova Scotia government slashed social assistance rates and made it more difficult for people to qualify for benefits. These policy changes were consistent with the G8’s agenda; they were meant to make Nova Scotians desperate and willing to work the lowest paying and most exploitative jobs.

Capital is an irrational and exploitative system. It prioritizes abstract concepts like “competition” and “the market” over the needs of our families, friends, co-workers, and neighbours. We hear the NDP government calling for working Nova Scotians to tighten our belts, to accept higher taxes and more cuts to government services, so we can “stay competitive” and pay off “our” public debt. Yet the government still manages to find millions in subsidies to hand out to profitable companies like Irving and Nova Scotia Power.

The only way working people can change this situation is if we struggle together as a class. We have the power to replace this exploitative society with a real human community -- one where our activity is geared to meeting human needs, not to accumulating wealth for the few.

More info. on working class struggles:

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