

Labour and Africa: The Way Ahead through Real Partnership

"Poverty anywhere is a Danger to Prosperity everywhere"

These enduring words are taken from the Declaration of Philadelphia, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) call for global action to end poverty, a call which came at the end of its historic meeting in Philadelphia in 1948. Canadian trade unionists participated in that meeting, just as they had in the very founding of the ILO as a key element of the Peace Conference in Versailles almost 100 years ago. No African trade unionists participated in the Versailles Conference, and few did in the Philadelphia meeting. Since then, Africa's trade unionists have grown in number and importance, and it is with pride that the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) looks back to its years of partnership with African counterparts, and with determination that it looks ahead to utilizing this partnership in the struggle to ensure that Africa's "Recovery" finally takes place. We are further determined that this Recovery materializes not just as a result of and vehicle for foreign financial investment but as a better future for Africa's people.

We say "finally" not because we think in terms of achieving a new status quo, we do not, but because the recent history of Africa is replete with high-profile attempts to set the continent on a new economic, and even social, footing. Concentrating only on recent times, we have witnessed the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade for Africa (1978-88), the Lagos Plan of Action (1980-2000), the Industrial Development Decade for Africa (1985-1995), and the African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (1986-1990).

In introducing yet another "plan" for Africa, Senegal's president, Abdoulaye Wade, declared that these various schemes had failed to chalk up any concrete achievement.

In moving the "Omega Plan", he mentioned that African countries had, at the July 2000 OAU Summit made clear their determination to avoid being sidelined from the global economy and realized that they would have to pursue a new strategic vision based on regional integration and a commitment to economic policies which would eradicate poverty, largely through high levels of growth.

In September 2000, the United Nations held its Millennium Summit, and the Declaration stemming from this devoted a section to the special needs of Africa--among them the fact that Africa is the only region of the globe in which the number of people trying to survive on less than \$1 per day is increasing.

A prompt response of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was to begin work on the Compact for Africa's recovery as an important component of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. The Executive Secretary of the ECA had called for a Compact, in which the developed world would invest in African recovery should African governments put in place political reforms necessary to ensure that their economies would "take off". African Ministers of Finance endorsed this call, and charged that consultations be held, in the course of which it emerged that three African Presidents were developing the "Millennium Partnership