

The Agitator

A Bulletin for the Student Left

June 2008 ★ no.15

WAR RESISTERS VICTORY

Battle remains to force government to comply with non-binding motion



On June 3, parliament passed a historic motion urging the government to allow American war resisters and their families to stay in Canada. The motion was brought forward in the wake of a May 21 ruling against war resister Corey Glass' application to stay in Canada. Glass has been given until June 12 to stay in Canada.

The ruling resulted in a flurry of activity to push through a political solution for allowing war resisters to stay since the legal route was filled with several ridiculous obstacles. For example, the refugee board has refused to hear arguments from war resisters about the illegality of the Iraq war.

The non-binding motion was passed 137-110 with the support of all opposition parties, including the Liberals. The motion, however, doesn't guarantee that Glass will be deported, meaning the fight is not yet over. The War Resisters Support Campaign is leading the fight. For more information visit resisters.ca

CFS-Ontario joins peace alliance

Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, with a quarter million members, formally affiliated to the Canadian Peace Alliance last month. This is a big step forward in building the anti-war on the campuses. CFS-Ontario is the largest provincial section of CFS, CFS being the largest student federation in Canada with over half a million members. Alongside CFS-Ontario, a handful of other individual student unions joined the CPA.

Out of the mass anti-war protests in early 2003 against the invasion of Iraq, the Canadian Peace Alliance became the main anti-war umbrella group in English Canada. Its membership includes numerous unions, social justice organizations, community anti-war groups, and now, student unions. It has also established a positive relationship with the Montreal anti-war coalition, *Échec à la guerre*.

The two organizations commonly co-sponsor days of action.

In 2005, the CPA began to shift its focus to opposing the war in Afghanistan as the Canadian government ratcheted up its involvement in the so-called "war on terror". In doing so, the Canadian anti-war movement is now at the forefront internationally in opposing the war in Afghanistan. This is important because Canada's reputation as a "peacekeeper" has been used by the governments of other NATO countries to justify their involvement in Afghanistan. At recent international anti-war conferences in London and Cairo, the CPA was sought out by several European anti-war movements to help advance their campaigns against their own governments' occupation of Afghanistan.

Nothing is automatic

For anti-war students, the affiliation of CFS-Ontario to the CPA does not automatically mean that CFS-Ontario will prioritize anti-war work. This is up to activists on the ground to push the federation into action. The affiliation also opens up new opportunities for anti-war activists on the ground to push their own student unions into taking formal anti-war positions, building counter-recruitment actions, and/or joining the CPA. All of this could not have been possible without the hardwork of anti-war activists on the campuses who have patiently and consistently mobilized around Afghanistan, helping to build and give confidence to anti-war sentiments on campus.

CPA website: www.acp-cpa.ca



Given an effective majority by the spineless Liberals, the Tories are unveiling their real agenda. Ken Epp and Harper are anti-choice and anti-women.

Kill Bill C-484

After years of cuts to women's programs most Canadians were understandably suspicious when they heard of a Tory bill targeting violence against women. On closer examination of the so-called "Unborn Victims of Crime" bill, these suspicions were confirmed. C-484 is no more than a Trojan horse for the anti-choice movement. The bill is justified using the well-known statistics on the increased rates of intimate violence experienced by pregnant women. But the bill makes the fetus, not women, the object of protection.

As an anti-violence initiative the bill is unusual in that experts in the field have argued for years that the best way to end the violence is to invest in support systems for women. Reputable groups do not argue for legal punishments as such laws are rarely enforced, retributive, and fail to prevent the violence. Not surprisingly, none of these groups have supported C-484.

The focus on a legal system which consistently fails women is misdirected. Even within that system, the bill is useless as it allows for a reduction in charges if the crime is perpetrated under a state of "passion". The bill does nothing to eliminate the causes of violence against women or support victims of violence. Instead it focuses on a legal system which regularly fails

women, and excludes the majority of cases of violence with the "passion" clause.

C-484 fails as an anti-violence initiative, but is an excellent vehicle for the anti-choice cause. The bill is so effective that it has anti-choice groups salivating at the prospect of victory. The bill makes the penalty for killing the fetus equal to homicide, including it as an offence "Against the Person and Reputation". Similar American laws have been used to criminalize women who experience stillbirths after choosing to refuse risky C-sections. It has also been used to criminalize doctors who perform abortions. Most worrisome in a Canadian context, C-484 would give personhood to the fetus, or the "unborn child" in the bill's text. If passed it would create a conflict within Canadian law providing a framework for challenging women's rights. This is the motivation, and desired outcome of C-484.

So why bother framing the bill as an anti-violence initiative? Surely its proponents could not have hoped to fool the pro-choice movement? In order to understand the use of anti-violence as justification for the bill we need to recognize the accomplishments of the pro-choice movement. Using multiple strategies it has not only decriminalized abortion, it has also won the support of the majority of Canadians. Quite simply, C-484 is presented as an anti-violence bill because it would be politically

impossible to be honest about its anti-choice nature. Previous anti-choice bills failed miserably. Antipathy towards anti-choice is so strong that pro-choice discourse has been effectively used as electoral strategy in numerous elections. Masking C-484 in the discourse of anti-violence is the only hope this marginalized movement has of gaining popular support for an anti-choice bill.

This situation leaves pro-choice advocates in the enviable position of simply needing to let Canadian's know the bill exists, that it is anti-choice, and motivating them to remind the over 60% of MP's who voted in favor of the bill that pro-choice is the Canadian way. However, there is a real concern that the bill will pass regardless as the anti-choice movement has far superior financial resources, and organizational frameworks which are currently being applied to parliament. In light of the threat it is imperative that activists spread the word, join local pro-choice groups, call MPs, and use all the other skills honed in other campaigns to beat this bill. In doing so we will send a strong message that the pro-choice majority is here to stay.

Ashley Hunkin is a undergraduate student union councillor at Carleton University and former coordinator of the Carleton Women's Centre

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York Federation of Students, choice and freedom of speech

YFS - York's undergrad student union - has passed a motion to ban student space and funding for anti-choice student groups. Hue and cry have emanated from the usual quarters: the CanWest newspapers, right-wing students, "pro-life" groups and so on. Unpacking the criticisms is necessary for students to understand what has really happened.

The key issue is choice. But the anti-choice groups and their media backers have deliberately conflated "pro-life" with "anti-choice". Pro-life is not necessarily a position opposed to pro-choice. Pro-choice means precisely what it says. Pregnant women have the *right to choose* an abortion or to have the child. Someone can therefore be pro-choice and pro-life.

However, the groups targeted by YFS and other student unions are anti-choice. They do not want abortion to be a choice for women because they advocate the criminalization of abortion. In addition, their campaign techniques - graphic images, aggressive protesting and propaganda littered with falsehoods - creates an atmosphere hostile to women. This is precisely why anti-choice groups are sexist, too.

The anti-choice bigots have wrapped up their cause in that of "free speech." The decision by YFS and other student unions to deny student union space and

funds to such groups, is denounced in many quarters as an attack on "free speech."

This argument completely ignores the fact that student unions are not the arbiters of free speech on campus, let alone in Canada. Debates, meetings and campaigning can take place on campus without the sanction of the student union. This is in fact what happened on March 18 at York when a debate was held (between two men) with no support from YFS. Student unions have the right to decide who they support with their own resources - its called freedom of association.

The strategy of the anti-choice bigots is twofold. First, they conflate anti-choice with pro-life to dupe sections of the student body into supporting them. For example, in a similar controversy at Carleton in late 2006, anti-choice bigots told religious student groups that the student union, CUSA, would cut funding to them for being "pro-life". This was not the case at all as CUSA's motion specifically targeted groups advocating the criminalization of abortion and carrying out intimidating campaign tactics. The second part of the strategy is to declare the appropriate student union response as an attack on free speech. The strategy is one of hiding agendas, and winning allies through false arguments about free speech. The anti-choice bigots are required to do this

because if they came out openly with their politics, they would gain little to no support from the general student body.

The attacks on women's rights are now coming from not simply fringe right-wing groups, but Harper's government as well in the form of Bill C-484. Student unions are providing a lead in the fight to defend and improve women's rights, and should be defended for their democratic decisions.

Fascists attack students in Rome

On May 26, students occupied Rome's La Sapienza university, preventing a fascist party leader from speaking at a conference. The speaker was Roberto Fiore, leader of the fascist Forza Nuova party. Fiore fled Italy in the 1980s when he was implicated in the 1980 Bologna train station bombing that killed 85 people.

A day after the occupation, Forza Nuova thugs armed with knives and iron bars ambushed a group of socialist students from Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) who had helped lead the occupation. One student was hospitalized.

The attacks coincided with attacks on immigrants in various cities led by fascist gangs.

Messages of support can be sent to Sinistra Critica at sinistracritica.stampa@gmail.com

Archives campaign wins deal for workers

April 30 marked the closure of the United Church of Canada/Victoria University Archives, ending an eight-month campaign by the Campaign to Save the Archives, a group of union members, academics, archivists, genealogists, historians, students and other community activists.

As a result of the campaign, Victoria University agreed to a union proposal that provides for the remaining Steelworker Local 1998 members working at the former archives to remain in a redeployment pool for up to 24 months after layoff, and during that time they would only have to be qualified for a posted bargaining unit position, instead of having to be the best candidate.

As for the Archives' collection, April 30 came and went, staff were laid off and the collection stayed at the University. It came as no surprise to the members of the coalition that, in spite of the Church's optimistic announcement that the collection would open to the public at its new location on May 8, by May 1, the new space at the head offices of the Church was not ready and the collection had not moved.

written by Alex Thompson and reprinted from Socialist Worker no.496, May 7 2008

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McGill TA strike continues

By Meredith Warren

At 12:01am on April 8, The Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill declared a strike. After many hours of negotiations with McGill that day, the TA union decided that its only option in attaining a fair contract was striking. This move followed a record-breaking strike vote in which almost 80 percent of union members voted to strike.

"Unreasonable" demands

The strike is the result of almost a year of failed negotiations with McGill University, which, after numerous cancellations of meetings and late proposals, denied almost all of the demands made by the union. These included such "unreasonable" things as a sexual and psychological harassment policy, limitations on conference and tutorial sizes in undergraduate courses, sick leave and conference leave, a mandatory work-load management sheet to help prevent unpaid overtime, and a pay raise in line with the current inflation in Montreal.

The pay raise is the most contentious issue McGill refuses to budge on this issue because it claims that McGill TAs are the highest paid in Quebec. In other words, while McGill administrators and professors are paid in line with pay scales in the G13 - the top thirteen research universities in Canada, including UofT, Queens, UBC, and McGill - it prefers to pay its front-line teaching staff, the TAs, according to lower, provincial levels.

McGill's fraudulent claims

While this is clearly an unfair double-standard, another problem with McGill's claim is that McGill TAs are in fact not the highest paid in Quebec: Concordia University's are. At up to



Pickets and their supporters marching outside McGill on April 10.

\$27 per hour, some Concordia TAs are making up to \$5 per hour more than McGill's! TAs in the other G13 universities make over \$10 per hour more than McGill's for the same work; at UofT, over \$35 per hour is the going rate.

Recently, McGill administration made an insulting settlement offer to the TAs at McGill, which included writing illegal scab work into the very contract! TAs rejected the offer by a vote of over 80% - higher, even, than the initial strike vote! When AGSEM responded with a settlement offer more in tune with its workers' needs, McGill did not respond, and cancelled scheduled negotiation sessions. AGSEM is still waiting for a response!

Support is strong

Needless to say, union members across the campus are angry at McGill's disrespect for its foundational academic staff. At an AGSEM rally on April 10th, hundreds of TAs chanting, singing, and picketing were joined by members of other unions like MUNACA, the McGill University Non-Academic Certified Association, which includes Library Assistants and admin and support positions at the university, who are currently also in negotiations with the university.

More, then, is at stake than just one contract. McGill's TA union will be the rod against which McGill measures the strength of organized workers. The success of AGSEM's strike enables the other unions to stand up for their right to improve their working conditions.

Send messages of support and solidarity through the union website AGSEM.ca. Meredith Warren is a member of AGSEM and of the International Socialists

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socialist.ca/agitator

The Agitator is an initiative of the International Socialists



During times
of universal deceit,
telling the truth becomes
a revolutionary act.
George Orwell