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STEPHEN HARPER: CRIME MINISTER

Make 2012 another year of revolt

THE YEAR 2011 was a historic year of revolt—from revolutions across the Arab world, general strikes from Chile to Greece, and a renewed anti-capitalist movement under the banner of “occupy”. Let’s make 2012 another year of revolt, against the 1% regime of our Crime Minister, Stephen Harper.

Despite incessant reassurances of a mythical recovery, 2011 saw a deepening of the global economic crisis, which is now engulfing the Euro. While Harper blames Europe for the crisis, he has been busy with his own economic crimes—bailing out Canadian banks and corporations, threatening 80,000 public

sector jobs, and planning to cut \$20 billion from Medicare.

The Arab Spring inspired people around the world, but Harper was the last to support Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak. He then joined NATO in highjacking the Libyan Revolution, and is now threatening to join war crimes against Syria and Iran—while remaining complicit with crimes against the people of Afghanistan, Palestine and Bahrain.

To justify spending \$490 billion on the military—from fighter jets to battleships—Harper has claimed that “Islamicism” is the major threat, and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney has forced Muslim women to uncover themselves dur-

ing citizenship ceremonies. These attacks have nothing to do with women’s liberation, as the Tories themselves continue to attack a women’s right to choose.

Meanwhile Harper has continued to commit climate crimes—supporting the Tar Sands and killing the Kyoto Protocol—while continuing colonial crimes of which Attawapiskat was just the tip of the iceberg.

But 2011 also showed the possibility of challenging our Crime Minister. The “orange wave” showed the appetite for a real alternative, and the NDP filibuster in Parliament in support of postal workers gave an example of how

Parliament can magnify workplace battles against the 1%.

There is growing opposition from indigenous groups and their allies against the tar sands, including a temporary halt to the Keystone XL pipeline. In Quebec a strike by 200,000 students has laid the groundwork for an even bigger student strike in the spring, inspiring students across English Canada for the February 1 day of action.

As the ongoing Egyptian Revolution shows, the power to challenge the 1% lies in taking the mood of resistance to the streets, schools and workplaces to actively involve the 99%. Let’s occupy 2012.

CLIMATE DISASTER IN DURBAN



Page 8

Tories declare war on Medicare

Page 2

Jesse McLaren on the Harper plan for health

Quebec political turmoil continues

Page 2

Jessica Squires on scandal and resistance in Quebec

Arab Spring, 2011 to 2012

Page 3

Yusur Al-Bahrani on the revolutionary process, one year later

US in Somalia

Page 4

Farid Omar on the escalating intervention in Africa

Italy: austerity and resistance

Page 6 & 7

Stefano Agnoletto on the crisis and fightback in Italy

Drop fees

Page 12

Mohammad Ali Aumeer on the February 1 national student day of action



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Quebec political turmoil continues

by JESSICA SQUIRES

IT NOW looks like even several years of political scandals surrounding Jean Charest’s Liberal government in Quebec City will not prevent an election in 2012, perhaps as early as the spring.

Charest will want to avoid bearing the full brunt of the negative fallout from the corruption inquiry he has been forced to call into the construction industry. His only hope of doing so would be to call an election before public hearings begin in the fall. Some commentators expect the writ to drop as early as April following a budget.

PQ crisis

There are other reasons for Charest to call an election. The crisis in the Parti Québécois (PQ) is far from over, and an early election would give less time for Francois Legault’s new party, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), to build up its base and prepare for elections. CAQ is a pro-business, right-wing split from the PQ.

Legault already has eight MNAs, due to several factors. First, the Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ)—Quebec’s right-wing, populist party that was reduced to six MNAs in the last election—has dissolved into the CAQ. Two former ADQ MNAs, up to now sitting as independents, have also joined CAQ.

Second, the PQ crisis caused by leader Pauline Marois’ shameful manipulation in favour of an unfair contract for the rabidly anti-union Quebecor to manage a stadium in Quebec City, led to six MNAs leaving the PQ—two of which have now joined the CAQ as well.

But, as Jean Charest observed, the ADQ have basically joined a poll. The CAQ’s support, polls actually show, is based neither on its ideas nor on Legault’s leadership, but purely on its new-ness.

Québec solidaire

In this politically charged situation, Québec solidaire (QS), the pluralist, anti-neoliberal left independentist party, will be able to make gains, especially by emphasizing how not new Legault and his party actually are. The only question is how much QS will gain, and where.

Recent polls are putting QS at 9 per cent, which is more than double what it got in the last general election. This core support seems to be solid in face of the CAQ wave. It could be enough to deliver QS a few MNAs, especially in the centre of the island of Montreal, where QS is the strongest.

Meanwhile, QS spokespeople Amir Khadir (the party’s only MNA) and Françoise David are among the most popular and respected politicians in Quebec.

Coinciding with the looming spectre of an election is a massive student mobilization, which could culminate in an unlimited general strike in late March or early April. A similar strike won a major victory against Charest in 2005. This strike could challenge both Charest and Legault and set the tone for the election and its aftermath.



Tories declare war on Medicare

by JESSE MCLAREN

THE HARPER government unilaterally imposed a health care funding plan on the provinces, which after 2016 will be tied to economic growth in nominal GDP. This will translate into \$21 billion in cuts to Medicare over 10 years.

Ever since a major grassroots mobilization won Medicare a generation ago, Liberal and Tory govern-

ments have been chipping away at federal funding—which used to be shared 50:50 with the provinces. Now the Harper government wants to accelerate this process through major funding cuts, claiming public health care is unsustainable and threatening other programs.

Cuts

But it is massive tax cuts, and cuts to other programs, that give public healthcare

the appearance of taking up a larger portion of funding. Public health costs have been stable for a generation, but private costs like pharmaceuticals are out of control.

Instead of controlling costs through a national pharmacare program, the Tories are scapegoating Medicare to justify gutting it, while spending billions on prisons, tax cuts, bank bailouts and warfare—

which they would never tie to economic growth in nominal GDP.

Defend Medicare

But the overwhelming majority of people continue to support public health care. This majority must be mobilized to defend and expand Medicare, and stop the real threats to health care—austerity, corporate bailouts, ecological destruction and warfare.

Wheat Board: Harper thumbs his nose at democracy and the courts

by REG MCQUAID

FEW ISSUES more clearly demonstrate the anti-democratic and arrogant style of the Harper government than its five-year campaign to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB).

To farmers, the right to market one’s produce collectively is as valuable as factory workers’ right to bargain collectively. But neither right has any place in the free market world of the Tories, still committed to a failed model which concentrates wealth in the hands of a few while destroying the social fabric and the environment.

On October 18, Bill C-18, the Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act was

introduced in the House of Commons, and was rushed through the legislative process without allowing Agricultural Committee hearings. It passed third reading on November 28 and was sent to the Senate for action, where similar fast-track treatment from the Conservative majority awaited it. It passed third reading in December, and was sent to Governor General David Johnston for Royal Assent before Christmas.

Wheat Board supporters have organized, led by CWB’s farmer-controlled board of directors, and have fought back against the government takeover at every turn.

Last summer, when the government refused to or-

ganize a plebiscite on the issue as required by existing legislation, the Wheat Board conducted its own plebiscite, which showed nearly two-thirds of wheat farmers in favour of continuing single-desk marketing.

When the government ignored the results of the plebiscite by unilaterally introducing Bill C-18, the CWB and supporting organizations filed a court action in Winnipeg against the proposed legislation. Federal Court Judge Douglas Campbell ruled the government violated the Canadian Wheat Board Act by not holding a vote among farmers before introducing legislation eliminating the Wheat Board’s monopoly position. The government immediately announced it

would appeal the ruling, while ignoring its effect by pushing forward with the legislation.

The Wheat Board and its supporters wrote to Governor General Johnston, asking him not to assent to Bill C-18, to no avail. A plea to a Winnipeg provincial court, asking for an injunction against government implementation of the bill before a final ruling with regard to its legality, was rejected.

All this has created confusion for wheat and barley farmers, who should now be entering into sales contracts for their 2012 crop. This is a direct result of the actions of a government that puts the interests of multinational grain companies over that of Prairie farmers.

Canada/US border deal threatens rights and freedom

by ALLAN WOOD

THE “BEYOND the Border Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness Action Plan” agreement between Canada and the United States for 2012 means that Canada will adopt the draconian (and often unconstitutional) Bush-Obama positions on privacy, security, immigration, and surveillance.

For the first time in its history, the Canadian government will track each time anyone leaves or enters the country. In addition, all airlines will be obligated to divulge personal informa-

tion on anyone flying out of a Canadian airport—regardless of destination—to Canadian authorities, and the US can receive this information simply by asking for it.

One of the stated goals of the agreements is to reduce traveller delays at the border. But the increased security measures will likely result in longer waits and harassment, especially for immigrants, refugees and racialized groups. The Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations has denounced the legislation for its failure to protect civil liberties.

Changes to border

infrastructure will cost at least \$200 million annually. What will move faster across the border is corporate trade. The border deal is not about surrendering Canadian sovereignty to the US, but enhancing the joint ability of both the Canadian and the US state to crack down on the civil liberties of citizens, immigrants and refugees, while promoting the flow of capital. The Canadian Council of Chief Executives enthusiastically supports the legislation for its “impressive range of practical, targeted measures”—which target people, not corporations.

As Council of Canadians

chairperson Maude Barlow noted, “the business community was the only sector at the table with government and guided the process from the beginning”. Groups concerned about health and safety, security and privacy issues, labour rights, and environmental protection were not consulted.

Despite his majority in Parliament, Harper is taking Canada in a direction contrary to the wishes of most of its citizens. There must be a vigorous debate in Parliament about these regulations, and resistance on both sides of the border, before they take effect in 2012.

Campaign builds against Enbridge pipeline

by BRADLEY HUGHES, JOHN BELL

FIRST NATIONS groups are leading a growing campaign against the looming threat of the Enbridge Northern Gateway project.

Enbridge wants to build a 1170km-long pipeline to ship tar sands synthetic oil from Alberta to a port in Northern BC. The proposed route will pass over 1,000 salmon-bearing streams and rivers, and will require over 200 oil tankers into and out of the port each year.

Enbridge’s environmental record is atrocious. Between 1999 and 2008 Enbridge recorded 610 spills that released 132,000 barrels of hydrocarbons into farms, wetlands and waterways on the continent. The only way to prevent the environmental devastation that will come from spills along the pipeline route and along the coast is to stop the project before it starts.

Early in December an “agreement” between the Gitksan First Nation of BC and Enbridge made front-page news. But the deal had been signed without the knowledge or support of the Chiefs, and without consultation or debate among the Gitksan people. A press release from the Gitksan First Nation two days later was unequivocal: they would join with other First Nations to oppose the pipeline.

Not only does the proposed pipeline route go through some of the most environmentally sensitive land in the west; this land is unceded First Nations Territory. Besides being an environmental crime, the pipeline would amount to theft of First Nations land. A coalition of over 130 aboriginal groups has promised to blockade the route, with the support of environmentalists and allies.

A majority of people in BC oppose the pipeline. After an intensive one-month campaign by environmental organizations including ForestEthics and the Dogwood Initiative, over 4,000 people have registered to make oral statements to the panel that is reviewing the Enbridge pipeline proposal.

The next step in the campaign is to recruit people to put their opposition in writing and submit it as Letter of Comment to the panel. The deadline for letters is March 13, 2012.

Visit gatewaypanel.review-examen.gc.ca for all the official details, and contact ForestEthics www.forestethics.org for help in writing your letter.

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Arab Spring, the revolutions continue

by YUSUR AL-BAHRANI

THE ARAB Spring enters its second year continuing its twin demands of political freedom and economic justice. Amidst deepening economic crisis and ongoing Western intervention, with international and local forces attempting to contain the revolutions, workers have the power to spread them.

The Arab Spring that inspired the world began on December 17, 2010 when a desperate young Tunisian fruit seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in front of the Sidi Bouzid regional council in central Tunisia.

He sparked an uprising in Tunisia against political repression and economic austerity, and four weeks later, the repressive government that ruled for 23 years came to an end after a general strike.

Tunisians participated in elections, and a new freely-elected government led by the moderate Islamic party Ennahda received a vote of confidence in parliament,

and was sworn in December 24. While President Marzouki has called for an end to strikes and sit-ins, driving a wedge between the political and economic aspirations of the Tunisian Revolution, Tunisian workers can push the revolution forward.

Egyptian Revolution

Inspired by Tunisia, on January 25, a mass protest sparked a movement against Mubarak’s regime. More than 600 protestors were killed. On February 9 mass strikes erupted, and on February 11 Mubarak stepped down and a military council was formed to run the country’s affairs.

But the brutality against peaceful protestors in Tahrir Square continued even after the fall of Mubarak. On October 9 Coptic Christians showed their anger and disappointment against the army after at least 25 Christians were killed as troops brutally attacked their protest. Tens of thousands of Egyptians joined protests on November 25, demanding an end to military rule,

and about 42 protestors were killed in one week. Then battles between protestors and the military left at least 17 dead in December. The videos showing the Egyptian Army attacking and arresting peaceful activists, and stripping and beating women, shocked people around the world. But this was followed by a 10,000-strong march of women, showing the determination of the Egyptian Revolution.

Amidst the brutality the Egyptian regime held elections starting November 28, during which the Muslim Brotherhood received about 40 per cent of votes cast for party lists in the second round. They were the largest opposition force to Mubarak but have since supported the military regime and called off strikes and demonstrations.

But Egyptian workers are continuing to organize independent trade unions and strike for economic and political demands. Mass strikes toppled the dictator, and have the power to topple the dictatorship.

The slogan “People demand the fall of the regime” has united Arabs in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Saudi Arabia in 2011 — producing a major challenge to Western imperialism. NATO used the pretext of bloodshed to launch a war in Libya, reducing the revolution to minor changes, and threatens to derail the revolt in Syria as well.

Hands off the Arab Spring

On the other hand, the same Western powers are silent towards Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned, but the system remained the same. The Saudi and the Bahraini governments continue repressing pro-democracy protestors and activists — killing, injuring and arbitrarily arresting thousands.

The hope for a continued Arab spring in 2012 lies with the people of the region themselves — especially workers organizing unions and mass strikes — and a halt to Western military intervention.

Resistance and solidarity in Bahrain

by JESSE MCLAREN

ON NOVEMBER 23 the people of Bahrain continued resisting the regime of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, in a “black day of anger”—in reference to the black smoke from burning tires.

Despite an intense crackdown on Bahrain’s uprising since it began in February, demonstrators continue to fight for justice, and the small country of 1.2 million people is getting the world’s attention.

The day of anger coincided with the release of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which is deeply critical of Bahrain authorities. The report, conducted by international experts, criticizes the use of torture and force by the Bahrain government in dealing with protests that have rocked the country since February. The report cites hundreds of cases

of abuse, including mass arrests of peaceful demonstrators, torture in detention and dozens of military trials. It also calls for greater protections of human rights and justice for the victims and protections for human rights.

The report vindicates the experience of the people of Bahrain, but there are concerns it will be misused. While journalists have been welcomed back into the country after a months-long ban, and on November 21 all forms of torture were declared illegal, many do not trust a commission appointed by Khalifa to stop the systematic repression that has gone on against peaceful protestors. The report fails to blame anyone for the repression, allowing the regime to claim all the violence was simply the result of rogue elements who will take the fall.

The report also ignores the international context of the crackdown.

Bahrain is home to an important US navy base, and the regime could not survive without heavy US military backing. The NATO bombing of Libya was used not only to attempt to hijack the Libyan Revolution, but also to bury any news of Western complicity with the dictatorship of Bahrain. As recently as this summer the Obama administration approved \$53 million in military sales to the regime. The US state department said it would put the sale on hold until it reviews the report, and there are concerns that the report will be used to justify continued Western arms sales to the dictatorship in Bahrain.

Just hours before the report was to be released, police fired teargas at protestors and continued their assaults on makeshift medical clinics. Abdul Nabi Kadhem, 44, was killed when his car was intentionally hit by a police vehicle, running him into a

building. Police used sound bombs and arrested a number of people protesting the death of Kadhem.

International Solidarity

But the people of Bahrain are continuing to resist, and there is growing international solidarity. When the regime sentenced 20 medics to up to 15 years for healing the wounded, international outrage forced a retrial for November 28. On November 26, petitions signed by 1,000 global medical professionals were delivered to Bahrain embassies in Washington and London, demanding their immediate release. The trial will resume on January 9, with the regime now making the preposterous claim that the medics were armed and dangerous. Continued international solidarity, and pressure on Western governments, can help the people of Bahrain fight for their own freedom.

Yemeni president forced out

by PETER HOGARTH

AFTER 33 years in power, 10 months of protests and fighting between rival factions of the Yemen elite have forced President Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down. Thousands celebrated when Saleh signed a deal on November 23 to relinquish his power.

The deal was signed with opposition leaders in the Riyadh, Saudi Arabia at a ceremony hosted in the royal palace by Saudi King Abdullah. The deal states that Saleh will immediately hand over power to his deputy, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, while Saleh will keep the title of president until new presidential elections. An interim government of Hadi and sections of the opposition will govern until elections are called in three months.

However, as we have seen in Egypt, elections and small concessions such as these do not address the real concerns of the thousands of Yemenis calling for change. While opposition forces supported the protest movements that were inspired by revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, their interests are very different from those of the angry, impoverished protestors who took the streets 10 months ago. Members of the opposition, including the Islamist party Islah and defected army General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, come from some of the most powerful families in Yemen and had taken part in the Saleh government before throwing their weight behind the opposition to his regime.

Not surprisingly, the US and European Union hailed the accord as an important step forward for the democratic aspirations of the people of Yemen. US President Barack Obama took the opportunity to commend the graceful abdication of power and confirmed that the US and Pentagon would work with Yemen to stamp out militants and terrorists in the country.

The US and Saudi Arabia are looking for an arrangement in which they can retain their interests and influence. Saleh had the backing of the US as an ally since the September 11 attacks and supported the invasion of Iraq. Saleh even colluded with the US in a series of assassinations and bombings within Yemen as a part of the “war on terror.”

The relationship between Saudi Arabia, the ruling elite of Yemen and their cooperation in military repression is still a very real concern. US and Saudi endorsement of the Saleh step-down does not mean that the two regimes have done an about-face and thrown their lot in with the youth-led struggle for democracy in Yemen. Rather, it is an attempt to deflect the revolutionary wave sweeping the Arab world and placate the people of Yemen by leaving essentially the old order intact, minus Saleh. Yemen’s elite security forces are still led by Saleh’s son, nephews and brothers, and the possibility of violent suppression of protests still remains.

So while Yemenis celebrated the ousting of Saleh, the protestors who have faced 10 months of blood-stained repression acknowledge that this is just a start. As in Egypt, the revolution will have to continue to oust the mini-Salehs to make the change they demand.

For Iraqis, the war is far from over

US PRESIDENT Barack Obama has called the US withdrawal from Iraq a historic moment and declared the mission a “success”.

For most Iraqis the war is far from over and the scars on the country will never get a chance to heal.

Lost in most of the unquestioning media reports of the withdrawal are

the massive and ongoing costs to the people of Iraq. While estimates vary, it is safe to say that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed and at least 1.5 million have been internally displaced. Bombings happen daily and the country has been carved up into sectarian enclaves where there once were Sunni and Shi’a living side by side.

Worse still for the Iraqi people is the fact that the US plans to keep more than 5,000 mercenaries in the country and have gained rights from both Iraq and Turkey to continue flying unmanned drones throughout the country.

But there is hope for the people of Iraq. There have been demonstrations in Baghdad’s Tahrir Square,

uniting various forces, Sunni and Shi’a, in opposition to the Maliki government and the continued US presence. Crucially, the workers in Iraq’s oil fields have struck against the rampant corruption and played a central role in fighting for independent workers’ organizations. These forces, not the guns of the US, will bring true freedom to Iraq.

Quebec Left: From Charlottetown to Québec solidaire

FROM THE student movement to labour-organizing, from the women’s movement to the anti-war movement, resistance in Quebec has helped to shape the left in the rest of Canada, often leading the way and inspiring others to organize and fight back.

The strength of the Quebec left is grounded in its history of mass participation against both capitalism and the oppressive, colonial practices of the federal state. While some sections of the English Canadian left have embraced this legacy, it is an uneven process.

The abortion rights movement in Ontario, for example, worked closely with Dr. Henry Morgentaler and the Quebec women’s movement, generalizing the battle for women’s right to choose.

But during the debates on the Canadian Constitution, much of the English Canadian left failed to identify the central issue of Quebec oppression at the heart of movements against constitutional reform. These debates reached a high point in the lead-up to the October 26, 1992 Canada-wide referendum on the Charlottetown Accord. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), for example, tragically sided with the ‘no’ side. But this position encountered considerable challenge, most importantly from Quebec feminist allies, including the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ).

At the time, the International Socialists, a member organization of NAC, wrote an Open Letter calling for a reversal of the ‘no’ position. As a summary of the issues, it is useful to revisit this letter today.

“Dear Sisters... As a socialist organization committed since our inception to the principle of women’s liberation, we share many of the objectives of NAC. Over the last year, we have frequently quoted NAC’s public position in defence of Quebec’s right to self-determination, and its role in the constitutional hearings in particular, in our publications and actions....

“Our objection to the adoption of the ‘no’ position in the referendum is that, despite the best intentions to the contrary of NAC members and supporters, being ‘pitted against Quebec again’ will be the inevitable outcome.... The issue at the core of the constitutional debate is recognition of Quebec as a distinct society that will be assured a minimal degree of ‘affirmative action’ in the form of a guarantee of 25 per cent representation in the House regardless of the size of its population. Moreover, the historic constitutional demand of the Native rights movement has been for recognition of the inherent right of aboriginal peoples to self-government. This demand has been dismissed in every previous constitutional offer, but it has at last been conceded in the current proposal.... The Reform Party was able to grow dramatically and to move into national prominence in the aftermath of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord. They did this by challenging the Tories from the right, maintaining that even [then PM] Mulroney and Co. were too lenient in ‘succumbing’ to the demands for recognition of the national rights of the Québécois. The result of that growth is measurable....”

Sadly, the outcome of the referendum led to further divisions, and the right wing continued to gain momentum. Stephen Harper’s wing of the Tories, originating in the far right Reform Party, owes its rise in influence to this period.

And this legacy continues to influence Tory policies. It is no accident that Harper has not only advocated increased militarism, but also overt identification with the British monarchy, which has the lowest support in Quebec.

The divisions between Quebec and rest of Canada continue to be reflected in federal electoral politics. The recent growth of the NDP in Quebec catapulted the social democrats to Opposition status, reminding the rest of Canada that the Tory majority is hardly unanimous.

Within Quebec, a new political party, Québec solidaire (QS) continues this pattern. The party is still in its formative years, but QS combines the politics of the street and the ballot box. Amir Khadir sits as a QS MNA in Quebec.

Importantly, QS has incorporated feminism in its core principles, building on the history in the province in the abortion rights movement and NAC. QS identifies this historic element on its website:

“Québec solidaire is the result of a merger that took place between the Union des forces progressistes party and the Option citoyenne political movement. Founded in 2002, the UFP was the culmination of a merger process that took place between Rassemblement pour une alternative progressiste, the Socialist Democratic Party, and the Communist Party of Québec.

“... In May 2004, the Option citoyenne movement ... brought together approximately 100 people at its foundation, with a predominantly female membership. After touring Québec in the summer of 2004, Option citoyenne’s membership mushroomed, and its first Québec-wide meeting was held in November 2004... establish[ing] Option citoyenne’s political orientations about issues that included feminism, globalization, the economy, sovereignty, and relations with Aboriginal peoples. ...[A]t a policy convention, held on November 26 and 27, 2006, Québec solidaire adopted its political platform [which] drew their inspiration from positions taken by the two former political entities, and from the Women’s Global Charter for Humanity, which collectively called on governments to adopt policies to promote equality, environmental integrity, civil liberties, solidarity, justice, and peace.”

These are good principles to start from, and continue to inspire activists in English Canada to organize for radical change.

INTERNATIONAL



US escalates threats against Iran

by JAMES CLARK

THE US is moving closer to a military attack on Iran, as it prepares to implement tough new sanctions.

The sanctions follow the November release of another report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which attempts to prove that Iran is building a nuclear weapon—although it provides no real evidence. Most of it is based on unverified intelligence from “member states,” which are not named.

Although the IAEA report remains inconclusive, the US and its allies have attempted to spin its findings as an excuse to further target Iran.

If implemented, new sanctions would target Iran’s oil industry, blocking exports and undermining Iran’s economy. Iran has responded by saying it will block the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway that allows access to the Persian Gulf. Up to a third of global oil supply passes through the Strait.

The US has said it “would not tolerate” any interruption to oil flow to the West, a clear indication that mili-

tary strikes remain a possible US response. In late December, Iran’s navy conducted military exercises near the Strait. Weeks earlier, it shot down a US drome over Iran.

The flow of Persian Gulf oil is so important to the US that it has stationed its fifth fleet in Bahrain. This “strategic interest” also explains why the US ignores Bahrain’s ongoing attacks on pro-democracy protesters. If the US continues to threaten Iran, it could inadvertently provoke a spike in global oil prices, creating havoc for already fragile Western economies.

Escalation in Somalia part of AFRICOM’s resource wars in Africa

by FARID OMAR

AFTER SUFFERING defeat in Iraq and getting bogged down in Afghanistan, the US is shifting its imperialist ambitions to Africa. The bloody military intervention in Libya was swiftly followed by deployment of Special Forces in Uganda, paving the way for large-scale militarization in the Central African region and the new escalation by President Obama of America’s two decades-old war in Somalia.

Under the auspices of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), the US is looking to forcefully secure Somalia’s vast untapped oil reserves, natural gas and uranium deposits. Strategically located at the confluence where the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea converge, resource-rich Somalia is the gateway to the world’s busiest shipping lanes along the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

Its proximity to oil-rich Sudan, North Africa and the Middle East makes it a

pawn in the new scramble for Africa, pitting the US against China’s rapid ascendancy in Africa, characterized by its increased inroads into the continent’s oilfields. The US is also seeking to counter the wave of revolutionary protests that have swept North Africa and are now spreading into other regions of the continent.

Since mid-October 2011, the US has deployed regional proxies to conduct its war in Somalia, with Kenyan forces rolling into the southern region of Jubaland/Azania under the pretext of flushing out Al-Shabaab militants blamed for a recent spate of kidnappings of foreigners in Kenyan soil, a charge the Islamists vehemently deny. It appears that the recent kidnappings have nothing to do with Kenya’s incursions into Somalia as officials in Nairobi have openly admitted that Kenya’s planned invasion of Somalia has long been in the making.

Under the tacit approval of Washington, Ethiopian forces re-

invaded Somalia’s central region in November while Djibouti, which is home to US and French bases, has started deploying troops in Mogadishu under the banner of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), seen by many Somalis as another US proxy force. Sierra Leonean forces are expected to deploy soon.

In addition to the multiple proxy forces on the ground, the US is also waging direct war in Somalia through air strikes and sustained drone attacks in the South that has resulted in civilian deaths.

The US strategy in Somalia is to escalate the 20-year old conflict to consolidate AFRICOM’s military objectives of securing vital resources, countering China’s strategy and confronting the revolutionary wave sweeping across the continent. America’s war in Somalia has had a devastating impact on the Horn of Africa nation resulting in massive loss of civilian lives, mass displacement, a refugee crisis and ongoing famine.

NATO attacks on Pakistan reveal divide in ‘war on terror’

by SALMAAN ABDUL HAMID KHAN

THE NATO assault on a Pakistani border post that killed 24 soldiers and wounded 13 others does not come as much of a surprise. It is commonplace for the US to violate Pakistan’s sovereignty and show complete disregard for human life.

In response to this act of aggression, the Pakistani government reacted by halting NATO supply convoys to Afghanistan and asked the US to vacate the Shamsi airbase from which drones are launched on targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This is not the first time Pakistan has reacted by halting supply lines: the same action was taken last year when NATO helicopters opened fire on a similar Pakistani border post, killing three

and injuring four.

In response to this recent tragedy, the US has refused to accept official responsibility. A recently released investigation report maintains that the incident was the outcome of a lack of communication and knowledge about the existence of the Pakistani checkpoint. These conclusions are highly contested as Pakistan maintains that it has long supplied NATO commanders with maps and markings of all checkpoints in the region. The “Volcano” border post was set up at the request of the U.S. in order to help curb the flow of militants across the border.

Though what really happened that Saturday morning may never be known, what is very real is the continued destabilization of the region as a result of such military ventures. The recent at-

tack will contribute to ever-increasing divisions within the Pakistani military, the further weakening of a corrupt civilian government, and a strengthening of religious militants and anti-US sentiment.

These sentiments have been growing as Pakistanis continue to receive the blows of a war they never asked for. To date, America’s “war on terror” has resulted in the deaths of 3,097 Pakistani troops, and 721 being permanently disabled. As for innocent civilians caught in this conflict, 40,309 Pakistanis have lost their lives and millions have been displaced.

All this in a country plagued by endemic poverty and still recovering from floods last year which UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon called “the worst natural disaster he has ever seen.”

THE DISABILITY MOVEMENT: REFLECTIONS ON MOVING FORWARD

by MELISSA GRAHAM

The past year has been eventful for many movements, with protests taking place across the globe.

The disability movement is no exception. We've seen a strong increase in disability activism with protests against austerity and an active presence in the Occupy movement. The trouble is, the same cuts that are encouraging increased solidarity among people with disabilities are also increasing their poverty and oppression.

The austerity measures in the UK have already hit people with disabilities hard. The government's public spending cuts include further attacks on the inadequate but vital disability benefits in that country, similar to social assistance in Canada. Their aim is to roll back the hard-won gains affecting all sections of the working class.

A recent report by Glasgow University Media Group found an increase in media articles on disability benefit fraud, comparing benefit cheats to muggers robbing taxpayers. Terms such as "scrounger," "cheat" and "skiver" were used in 18 per cent of articles in 2010/11 compared to 12 per cent in 2004/5. Focus groups believed up to 70 per cent of claims were fraudulent, justifying this by saying they had read it in newspapers. A survey last week found two-thirds of people in the UK actively avoid people with disabilities because they have no idea how to act around them.

The program admits false claims for sickness benefits are less than one per cent of the total recipients. Years of rhetoric about benefit fraud and "dependency on the state" have helped legitimize and reinforce prejudice and ignorance against people with disabilities. It's not just the media—politicians in the UK have freely expressed their ableism. Tory MP Philip Davies recently claimed that workers with disabilities are "by definition" less productive, so could work for less than the minimum wage. The language and subtle messaging of describing people with disabilities as "expenditure items" or as a "drain on economic efforts" further contributes to their oppression.

Understanding oppression against people with disabilities and the movement to fight it can help to unite resistance to the attacks that lie ahead.

Movement history

The disability movement has a long history that is largely unknown to most activists. A huge part of disability rights history has been made invisible by the more socially acceptable, liberal vein of human rights advocacy that is entrenched in modern disability politics. The connections between the disability movement and workers' movement are known to even fewer people, but that is where the movement was born.

In the UK, the years of explosive strikes and growth in trade unions also saw the formation of the British Deaf Association and the National League of the Blind and Disabled (NLBD). Founded as a trade union in 1899, the NLBD affiliated to the Trades Union Congress three years later. Its members included blind war veterans, mainly working in sheltered workshops, who campaigned for



Blind workers union march in Delhi, India

better working conditions and state pensions. The league organized a national march of blind people on Trafalgar Square in 1920, carrying banners with the slogan "Rights Not Charity". Despite the small numbers, its demands were widely supported. The first legislation specifically for people who are visually impaired was passed in the same year, followed by more in 1938.

The long economic boom after World War II created space to challenge institutionalization and the patronage of charities, with significant numbers of people with disabilities joining the workforce. By the 1960s some had begun to reject their labeling by the professions as deviants or patients, and to speak out against discrimination.

Inspired in particular by the black civil rights struggle, the disability movement began in the US. An example of this shift was the "Rolling Quads," a group of student wheelchair users at the University of California, who established the first Independent Living Centre in 1971. Within a few years hundreds of Independent Living Centres were created across the US and in other countries including Britain, Canada and Brazil. Its opposition to institutionalization and focus on the self-reliance of people with disabilities gave the independent living movement a lasting influence.

The movement today

These days the movement has shifted again, with the development of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Many organizations that were once strong advocates, are now relying on government legislation to provide the next steps for the movement. These same organizations are forced to fight each other for scraps of funding, effectively silencing them from any meaningful criticism of policy.

While there are individual activists rising to the challenge, the movement is still divided by disabilities and class. Those of us who are activists are marginalized by this neoliberal current of disability rights advocacy. Dissent and mass action have been discredited as a negative social disruption instead of the valid form of people-led democratic intervention that it is. Activism as a whole has been pacified to be more palatable to people, especially in Western society.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Canada was one of the last to sign) creates a paradigm shift from viewing people with disabilities from a charitable perspective to one of rights and inclusion. There is a very real fear that the austerity measures have the potential to infringe on the specific or practical rights contained in the CRPD. These rights include the right to social protection, the right to live independently in the community, and the right to mobility.

We're beginning to witness a similar shift in the movement itself, in connections made between the disability movement and the Occupy movement, and the marches of thousands in the UK, fighting back against austerity and cuts to benefits. As actions took place across the world last month for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, social media gave a sense of the international solidarity in the events that occurred—from wheelchair square dancing in Vancouver to a flash mob in Vienna. Young people with disabilities are stepping up to the plate, creating exciting new progressive groups and actions that can potentially create new momentum within the movement.

Socialists

So how can socialists build solidarity? Any struggle for freedom from oppression has something in

common with Marxism. The capitalist class exploits wage earners for profit to the detriment of the working class. A primary source of oppression of people with disabilities (those who could work with a reasonable accommodation) is their exclusion from capitalist exploitation.

Many people with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed against their will. Industrial capitalism imposed the label of disablement upon those people whose bodies did not conform to the standard of the ideal worker. The ideal worker is one who's body can work like a machine for the ruling class. Though people with disabilities are deemed less or not exploitable by the owners of the means of production, they are further oppressed by being left out of it. To put it in terms of the Occupy movement, they are often the lowest 1% of the 99%.

The best thing we can do right now is build connections. Reach out to people with disabilities who we see doing activist work, and connect them with related struggles. One of the biggest barriers people with disabilities face is isolation. Even when groups of people with disabilities do become active, it is rare for allies to reach out. Last October, when the Toronto Disability Pride March took place, people from Occupy Toronto and the International Socialists were there in solidarity. There was strength added to that action because of their presence, and it stands out as an example of the kind of solidarity that is needed.

It seems fitting that the theme for the 2011 International Persons with Disabilities Day was "Together a better world for all." This is a very exciting time for many movements, and a time of exciting growth for the disability movement.

ITALY: AUSTERITY AND RESISTANCE

As the focus of Europe’s debt crisis shifts from Greece to Italy, Italian economist and economic historian **Stefano Agnoletto** discusses the prospects for Italian workers’ resistance to neoliberal austerity.

Italian workers celebrated a bittersweet victory in 2011: while they cheered the end of the hated Berlusconi regime, they braced themselves for deep government cuts and harsh austerity measures. Ironically, despite nearly two decades of a strong labour-led fight against the Berlusconi regime, the defeat of his right-wing government was not the result of a mass mobilization of workers. Instead, it was a dik-tat coming from the European Central Bank (ECB) and other global financial institutions that no longer trusted Berlusconi.

Anti-democratic
As in Greece, capitalist interests showed little interest in the official democratic process, simply appointing a new government of technocrats. On November 16, Mario Monti, an economist, became Italy’s new prime minister. Until becoming premier, Monti was a member of the European Commission, the European president of the Trilateral Commission (a secretive, undemocratic discussion group of world leaders) and an advisor to multinational corporations such as Coca-Cola and Goldman Sachs.

Italy is a perfect example of how the ruling class is exploiting the crisis to dramatically restructure Europe’s economy and society. Monti’s government took power in response to widespread fears that Italy would default. In recent months, both government propaganda and almost all of the mainstream media have campaigned incessantly about the need to reduce Italy’s public debt. They have created the impression that the only way to save the European economy from complete collapse is by dismantling the welfare state, raising taxes on workers, gutting social programs and deregulating the labour market. In other words, they are trying to argue that there is no alternative to austerity.

Neoliberal ideology
Both right- and left-wing media echo this argument, including newspapers that endorse the centre-left opposition of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico). They describe Monti and his ministers as “neutral experts” who can rescue Italy from the failure of the “politicians.” The neoliberal ideology that guides the economic and social policies of the new government becomes hidden behind the “laws of the economy” and the “rules of the market.” The public is expected to wholeheartedly endorse the government, in the name of the “national interest.”

It is in this context that, on November 17, the new government won a confidence vote in the Senate, with 281 votes in favour and just 25 against. The following day, the Lower Chamber of Italy’s parliament also backed the new government, with 556 votes in favour and only 61 opposed. Not since the end of the fascist regime has any government won so much parliamentary support in Italian history. The only opposition came from the Northern League (Lega Nord), an extreme, right-wing racist party. Both Berlusconi’s People of Freedom party (Il Popolo della Libertà) and the Democratic Party, the centre-left official opposition, supported Monti.

‘Save Italy’
On December 16, the Lower Chamber approved the austerity program contained in Monti’s proposed budget law: 495 voted in favour and 88 voted against. On December 22, the Senate followed suit, with 257 votes backing the program and 41 votes opposing it. The new law is called “salva Italia” (save Italy). In the days before the vote, Monti and his ministers went on a media offensive, constantly repeating the word “equity,” as part of their attempt to win the support of the Italian public.



Italian Prime Minister, Mario Monti

During the press conference where the government presented its austerity program, Italy’s Minister of Welfare Elsa Fornero broke into tears as she attempted to describe cuts to pensions. She said she was “very sorry” but that “there was no alternative.” Monti supported his minister by insisting that the law is “fair” and that the pain of austerity demanded “by the international markets” is equally shared. The reality, however, is another story.

Who will pay?
The key features of Monti’s budget have all the usual characteristics of classic neoliberal austerity programs: higher taxes on low income earners and the middle class (VAT will rise from 21 per cent to 23.5 per cent); higher regional taxes; new and higher taxes on family households; cuts to pensions; an increase in the retirement age; cuts to health, education and social welfare; etc. In addition, Monti has announced the deregulation of the labour market and the privatization of local and municipal services.

Despite the government’s claim that “we all must tighten our belts,” corporations and the richest Italians will hardly notice the new austerity measures, if at all. For instance, there will be no new taxes on large assets and estates, capital gains or high incomes. Military spending has also been excluded from any cuts. Worse still, Monti has refused to address wide-scale tax evasion, one of the most problematic (and embarrassing) characteristics of Italy’s economy.

Just as Italians realized their dream of ending 20 years of rule by Berlusconi, they are now faced with the nightmare of a devastating austerity agenda. How is that possible? The recent history of Italian politics provides us with some answers.

Berlusconi has dominated Italy since the early 1990s. He came to power at the end of the Cold War, when political scandals and

judicial inquiries destroyed most of the old mainstream parties, especially the Christian Democratic Party (Democrazia Cristiana). The Christian Democrats had guaranteed for more than 40 years after Word War II that the powerful Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano) would never form a government. The disappearance of the Communist threat undermined the existence of the mainstream parties, which were no longer useful for Italy’s capitalist class. Through Berlusconi, Italian capitalists could more easily access power, without any kind of political mediation.

A new populism
In the last two decades, Berlusconi performed his duty exceedingly well. He successfully changed the culture of Italian politics, breaking the left’s hegemony and replacing it with a neopopulist, old-style anti-communism. The effect of Berlusconi’s approach was to destroy the militant tradition of the Italian workers’ movement. But now, Italy’s capitalist class has no use for him. The time has come for “serious” neoliberalism.

Berlusconi had to be replaced by a technocratic government that, on the one hand, could take advantage of the anti-labour culture spread during Berlusconi’s reign, but on the other hand, is considered by Italy’s economic and financial elites to be more effective in imposing neoliberal reforms. Even for Italy’s most desensitized citizens, Berlusconi’s “immoral” behaviour, his all-night “Bunga bunga” parties with underage women, and his egocentric vision of the world became intolerable.

Anti-labour
For Italy’s ruling class, the “serious economist” Mario Monti was the best alternative. Already, the so-called “Super Mario” is off to a great start, by imposing harsh anti-labour policies that Berlusconi himself had failed to pursue.

Despite Berlusconi’s much celebrated departure, the situation for ordinary people in Italy is getting worse, especially in the absence of any significant political opposition. This is the result of an attitude generally referred to as “anti-Berlusconismo,” in which Berlusconi himself becomes the personal embodiment of all Italy’s problems, rather than as a representative of a much bigger system. Over the last 20 years, the personification of power in one man, not surprisingly, led to the belief that simply getting rid of him would solve the problem. The most important opposition newspapers often represented Berlusconi as a sort of devil, as if he alone were the source of all the challenges facing Italians. He was variously described as the “Mafioso,” the “immoral libertine” or the “embarrassing gaffeur.”

The “common sense” view among many left-wing activists was no longer based on concepts of right versus left or rich versus poor. Instead, they adopted the view that the main dividing line in society was between the dishonest Berlusconi (and his supporters) on one side and the honest people on the other.

Far too many articles argued that Italy’s economic and financial crisis was not the result of neoliberal capitalism (of which Berlusconi was just one representative), but of Berlusconi’s personal behaviour. As a consequence, when Berlusconi was forced to resign and Monti took over the government, the parliamentary opposition, steeped in the dogma of anti-Berlusconismo, fully embraced the “serious economist” who doesn’t attend all-night sex parties with underage women.

The situation has worsened as many members and supporters of the centre-left coalition—among them one of Italy’s most influential newspapers, *La Repubblica*—publicly congratulate Monti for “having the courage” to impose neoliberal measures that, they believe, are long overdue and will save Italy from default.



‘In these conditions, workers’ and social resistance to austerity can win’

Resistance

In this context, resistance to the government’s austerity agenda can be very difficult. Unfortunately, the idea that there is no alternative (and that anything is better than Berlusconi) has gained support among some activists and the wider public. Another challenge is the ongoing crisis of the radical left, particularly the Communists. Since 2006, the Communists have absolutely no representation in Italy’s parliament, the first time in history since the end of fascism.

Moreover, after decades of scandal and corruption, there is widespread distrust in official politics, popularly expressed by the slogan, “They’re all the same!” The situation is made worse by the growth of the extreme right, from the Northern League to many other neofascist movements. These groups have attempted to blame immigrants and refugees for the effects of the crisis. The recent murder of two immigrants in Florence and attacks on Roma camps in Turin and other cities are just a few examples of this alarming development.

Trade unions

However, despite these obstacles, there are signs of resistance. The devastating effects of Monti’s austerity measures on the day-to-day lives of ordinary people have begun to generate a feeling of anger and bitterness. In the absence of any organized political force on the left, a number of Italy’s trade unions are now beginning to build support for large-scale mobilizations. Immediately after parliament approved Monti’s austerity budget, some unions called a three-hour general strike, while other sectors organized demonstrations.

The leadership of the most important trade union federation, the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), is traditionally reformist and not at all oriented to radical, grassroots struggles, but it has recently shown a willingness to lead a real fight against austerity. Its metal workers’ union, the left-wing FIOM (Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici), is playing a strategic role in organizing resistance and trying to assemble a large, united movement of workers, pensioners and students.

Solidarity

Militants in smaller trade union organizations, such as the rank-and-file COBAS (Confederazione del Comitati di Base) and USB, and which have a more radical tradition, have been on the streets almost daily, distributing leaflets and posters. In addition, the response of the social movements—including students, anti-capitalists, the Indignados, NGOs, etc.—represents an attempt to link the struggles of organized workers with the wider public, especially those sections already engaged in their own fight-backs.

Ordinary people in Italy are facing both a deepening economic crisis and a devastating austerity agenda. Berlusconi’s legacy makes the situation more difficult for workers’ and social resistance. However, we should remember that the Italian situation is structurally similar to that of many other

European countries, including Greece, where there has been an inspiring movement against the cuts. We should also remember that, although the crisis is described as purely a financial one (with all the usual fear-mongering about debt defaults), the reality is completely different.

Capitalism in crisis

The crisis is a natural process of capitalism, and the result of the system’s inability to sustain growth—even with the help of neoliberal measures. In Italy and worldwide, the ruling class is trying to overcome the system’s limits by destroying the welfare state, slashing social programs, privatizing services, reducing workers’ rights and impoverishing the mass of ordinary people.

These same political problems are increasingly present in

many other countries: aggressive, extreme right-wing movements that try to exploit the fear created by the crisis and neoliberal centre-left parties that are completely subservient to the dominant logic of capitalism.

In these conditions, in Italy and worldwide, workers’ and social resistance to austerity can win. The movements can challenge neoliberal dogma by exposing its fallacies: workers shouldn’t have to pay for a crisis they didn’t create. An “Italian spring”—one that goes beyond the limits of the current anti-Berlusconismo politics—will become possible once we demolish the lies of the neoliberal agenda, and when we see the possibility of a truly global resistance to austerity. The fight in Italy is the same as in Greece—and in France, Canada, Egypt and elsewhere. Now more than ever, another world is necessary.



Revolution from below, not bombs from above, can bring change to Syria and Iran

CANADA AND other Western powers are trying to stifle the Arab Spring—escalating the threat of military intervention against Syria and Iran, while quietly supporting repression in Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The Harper government announced sanctions on Iran, declaring “the question is not if, but rather the degree to which, we will act.” Meanwhile Canada’s navy will continue to patrol the Mediterranean, despite the end of the war on Libya, raising questions about a similar intervention in Syria. Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird announced new sanctions on Syria, declaring “we will not sit idly by, while Assad and his thugs continue to violate the rights of the Syrian people.”

But the West will sit idly by while the thugs it supports continue to violate the rights of people in Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

One scenario for war with Iran would have Israel attack. Clearly the only nuclear-armed power in the Middle East, which for six decades has maintained a brutal occupation in Palestine, will not help the people of Iran—who showed through mass protests in 2009 that they have the power to challenge their own regime.

In solidarity with Palestine the people of Egypt overthrew their Western-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak, and continue to challenge his military regime. Harper supported Mubarak to the end and has been silent on the recent brutal beatings of Egyptians; while US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed “shock,” the US continues to supply the Egyptian dictatorship with a billion dollars of weapons each year.

Revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt inspired the region, including people in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. But the West continues to arm those dictatorships and sit idly by while they brutally repress democracy movements.

Where the West has intervened, it has been to hijack popular movements while bombing civilians. In Libya NATO was forced to admit it had killed dozens of civilians during its bombing campaign—which hit civilian houses, a food warehouse and an ambulance. Meanwhile the new regime in Libya is ruled by former members of the Gaddafi regime, who have maintained his contracts with Western oil companies.

On December 11 the people of Syria organized a general strike, one of the key factors to revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. As in Libya, a Western bombing campaign could derail revolutionary change from below in order to install a puppet regime that supports neoliberalism.

The Arab Spring has shown that liberation only comes through self-determination, which means challenging Western imperialism. The real way of showing support is by stopping Western arms sales and military intervention, so the people of the region can liberate themselves.

Tories’ war on choice

IMMIGRATION MINISTER Jason Kenney has banned Muslim women from the right to choose what they wear during citizenship ceremonies, declaring face coverings like the niqab “frankly bizarre” and that claiming that “we want women to be full and equal members of Canadian society.” But the Tories are scapegoating Muslim women to distract from their own anti-choice policies.

As a spokesperson for the Canadian Council of American Islamic Relations said in response to the niqab ban, “I can’t think of anything more damaging to women’s equality and women’s rights than removing their freedom of choice. So I think it was an easy political point to score and at the expense of a vulnerable group of women.”

Kenney said he brought the ban on the advice of Wladyslaw Lizon, the Tory MP for Mississauga. If he was so concerned about women’s equality, he would stand up for his constituent, Inas Kadri, who was assaulted in Mississauga and had her niqab ripped off her face. Meanwhile another woman, “N.S.,” has been forced to go to the Supreme Court to defend her right to wear her niqab while testifying against men who sexually assaulted her.

The Tories are stoking Islamophobia, and resulting hate crimes against Muslim women, in order to distract from their own anti-choice policies. Kenney has a long history in the anti-choice movement, and the Tories repeatedly attack the right to choose, both legally—from the 2008 Bill C-484 (“Unborn Victims of Crime Act”) to the 2010 Bill C-510 (against “coerced abortion”)—and financially. During the G8 summit in 2010 Harper specifically cut abortion funding from his global maternal health plan—and Tory senator Nancy Ruth told women’s groups to “shut the fuck up on this issue.” The austerity agenda is encouraging anti-choice groups to also demand the defunding of abortion, like a rally did last October at Queen’s Park in Toronto. Then last month two Tory MPs demanded a parliamentary discussion on giving human rights to the unborn.

While attacking the rights of Muslim women and eroding abortion rights, Harper continues to insist he “won’t re-open the debate” on abortion, because he’s not confident to openly challenge the women’s movement or the majority of people who support choice. But the debate is already open, and the pro-choice majority needs to stand up in support of abortion rights, and against Islamophobia.

OPINION



Durban climate conference: a bitter disappointment

The Durban climate talks have offered little or nothing, writes Jonathan Neale, in this eyewitness report. Now is the time for climate activists to take their message into the new radical movements

THE UNITED NATIONS climate talks in Durban, South Africa have ended. Evil has been done on a scale that is hard to grasp.

Delegations from the governments of the world have been meeting each year to negotiate an agreement to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Along the way many countries signed up to the Kyoto Protocol, which came into force in 2005.

Kyoto called for small emissions cuts. It was riddled with market loopholes. The US government refused to sign. Kyoto did not cover developing countries. So under Kyoto, global emissions rose faster than ever before. But at least it was an attempt.

Kyoto is due to expire in 2012. Durban was the last chance to extend and deepen an international agreement to limit climate change.

Instead, the governments of the world have agreed that negotiations will continue until 2015—and that the agreement decided then will come into force in 2020. This is a delay of nine years that comes on top of 17 years of inaction before the Durban talks.

By 2020 we will have to cut back from much higher levels of annual emissions than today. And there will be much more carbon dioxide stored in the atmosphere. Yet 2020 will only be the start of a gradual reduction in emissions that will take many years.

That’s assuming there is any action in 2020 at all. But the delay decided at Durban is a signal from the 1% that climate change does not matter. It makes action in 2020 less likely.

Nnimmo Bassey, chair of Friends of the Earth International, said, “Delaying real action until 2020 is a crime of global proportions.

“This means the world is on track to a 4 degrees Celsius temperature rise. The richest 1% of the world have decided that it is acceptable to sacrifice the 99%.”

Consequences

The consequences will be severe. The

effects of climate change have accelerated in the last two years. Many places in Africa have seen drought. The most spectacular this year is Somalia. And drought has moved down into northern Ghana, northern Kenya and northern Uganda.

In other areas climate change brings torrential rains that the land cannot absorb. Bangkok in Thailand is the first great city to be flooded. In neighbouring Cambodia half the country is under water. Most people have had no help at all. They have lost their homes and crops.

This is now. And the pace of change will increase, deepen and spread over the next nine years. At some point in the future we face the prospect of run-away climate change, with disasters in many countries at the same time.

Next year the climate talks will be in Qatar, a country with one of the highest rates of emissions per person in the world. It is a dictatorship with no rights for activists to organize or demonstrate.

Instead, the international circus will move to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in June. Twenty years after a UN conference in Rio decided governments had to do something about climate change, a “Rio+20” summit and NGO festival will congratulate capitalism on delivering a “green economy.”

Durban will make it harder to campaign for climate action. As the UN process runs down, most big environmental and development NGOs are accepting that governments will not act, and turning their energies elsewhere.

Friends of the Earth International and other organizations in the Climate Justice Now network are honourable exceptions.

Bankrupt

Since the economic crisis began, each part of capitalism, each corporation and country, has been competing with each other part. They are all afraid of being the next to go bankrupt.

And it will cost money to cut emissions. To stop climate change we need massive spending on wind power, solar power, refitting buildings, public transport and much else. Globally it will take at least 100 million workers at least 20 years to do the work that needs to be done.

For the workers of the world, that could be a new industrial revolution. It could give many of us work and dignity. But for the 1%, it is a cost they do not want to pay.

The South African campaign for One Million Climate Jobs was very impressive in Durban. It organized wide support from unions, a good presence on the streets and a conference attended by 500 people. Britain’s Campaign Against Climate Change has a similar campaign here, and the idea is spreading to other countries.

I have lost track of the number of times people from NGOs and official parties have said to me, “We cannot wait for the revolution to do something about climate change.” But now I feel that if we wait for their system to stop climate change, we will wait forever.

New possibilities

The revolts in Egypt and the Arab world have shown what mass uprisings can achieve. Strikes in Europe are transforming trade unions. The Occupy movement in the US has made equality central to the political debate in the most powerful country on Earth.

We have to absorb the meaning of Durban. This is a time for bitterness. But as the movements from below spread and grow in confidence, people may begin to believe that we can do something about climate change.

But they will only believe that if climate activists and environmentalists take the issue of climate into the new resistance.

Jonathan Neale is the author of *Stop Global Warming—Change the World*, available in the Resistance Press Bookroom.

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BOOK

Inside Quebec politics

Of Anger and Hope

Written by Françoise David

Reviewed by Jesse McLaren

FRANÇOISE DAVID, one of Quebec's leading activists and political figures, has written an important primer on the politics and fault-lines of the Quebec left, which should be read across Canada.

David blends the personal and political in this short conversational book, describing her work with the Quebec Federation of Women in the 1990s, the World March of Women in 2000, the formation of the progressive action group Option Citoyenne in 2004, and the merger to form Québec solidaire in 2006.

QS did not emerge from thin air but from a process of convergence between feminist, labour, student, antiwar and environmental movements. It marked a major breakthrough for the Quebec left, combining sovereignty with a left political platform, and David describes the impact this small party has already had on Quebec politics—channeling popular anger at the Liberals, and provoking a crisis in the Parti Québécois.

As a result of QS's link to the movements it has quickly risen to 10 per cent popularity based on an inspiring platform of taxing the rich; stopping health care privatization and ecologically destructive resource extraction; providing accessible public services, green jobs, a minimum guaranteed income, social housing, child care and respect for indigenous groups.

It's important across English Canada to learn about these social and political movements, and their link with a left sovereigntist project. Because of Quebec's history as an oppressed nation—from the War Measures Act to Harper's anti-Quebec chauvinism—the demand for sovereignty has a democratic content, and David stresses the importance of this project standing in solidarity with indigenous people and immigrants. This book explains some of this sentiment, and why progressives in English Canada need to support Quebec's right to self-determination if we want the “orange wave” to continue in Quebec.

Fault-lines

The book also reveals the fault-lines on the Quebec (and international)

left. David devotes a chapter to Islamophobia, which she identifies as a product of post-9/11 scapegoating that allows governments to ignore pay equity and abortion rights. But while she talks about the importance of asking Muslim women their opinion, she simply denounces the niqab, which undermines a principled argument against Islamophobia.

There are also some contradictions to David's position on sovereignty. On the one hand, she embeds sovereignty in international movements for a better world, referring to struggles for justice from Egypt to Spain to Canada; on the other, she claims that QS should form alliances to make the National Assembly work better, and that a left in control of the Quebec state would solve the problems.

As the economic crisis deepens and the ruling class turns in increasing desperation to Islamophobia and a sovereignty devoid of radical content, navigating these fault-lines will determine the future of QS as a force for change. For these dangers, and the huge and inspiring opportunities that David and QS have created, this is an important book to read.

theorizing about new social movements written by academics who dismiss the potential of the working class as an agent for change.

Class

Rather than being removed from class, the base for new social movements are managers and professionals. This managerial professional class has neither the control of society that the ruling class enjoys, nor the possibility of collective action that the working class and unionized professionals have.

The leadership of organizations like Greenpeace is made up of members of this managerial professional class. As a consequence new social movements not only ignore the working class, but actively organize against sections of it.

The bulk of the book examines Greenpeace campaigns against sealing, logging in Clayoquot Sound, and efforts by its own staff to join a union.

In the summer and fall of 1993 over 11,000 protesters joined protests and blockages against logging in Clayoquot Sound, BC. Greenpeace helped to mobilize and publicize this campaign. John-Henry documents how they targeted loggers as the en-

emy alongside the forest companies. Blockades kept workers unpaid and away from work.

Of course, this allowed industry backed organizations for “fair-use” of the forests to win allegiance from many workers. This also made the false jobs versus the environment dichotomy popular on both sides of the barricades.

Divisions

The halt to logging in the area resulted in a win-win situation for forestry businesses. Greenpeace went on to partner with one of the largest forestry companies to help market their products, and in 1997 the continuing division between workers and environmentalists resulted in the Industrial Wood and Allied Workers of Canada union blockading two Greenpeace ships in Vancouver.

The book details similar tactics and results in other Greenpeace campaigns.

The perceived division between the needs of workers, the 99%, and the need to solve our many environmental crises, only benefits the 1%. We all need to overcome these divisions, and this book can help.

Reading the tea leaves for 2012

“FOR A long time it has been frowned upon to use terms like ‘class’ in everyday conversation; that’s just old fashioned, dusty, Marxist jargon, we’d be told. Just a few years ago using the word ‘capitalism’ brought a similar response. Now ‘capitalism’ is back in common parlance, in the newspapers and around the water cooler. My prediction for 2011 is that we are about to see a similar return of ‘class.’”

Exactly a year ago a very perceptive pundit wrote those words, and boy-o-boy was he right. Best pundit ever! Okay, it was I. Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.

Sooner or later ideas and debates about “class” were bound to come to the fore. The division of society into opposing classes—particularly into a minority who own and control the resources and technology, and a great majority who live by selling their ability to work—is the stark reality. The ideology that we had evolved beyond class, that we were all in it together and that anyone could rise to the top through their hard work and initiative, that was the fiction.

That fiction has been blown away by the fearless masses of the Arab world, still struggling to push their revolutions forward in the face of tricky words, false friends and brutal repression.

And by the working people of Europe who refuse to see the progress won by several generations of struggle wiped out to benefit financial speculators.

And by the Occupy gang worldwide who wisely resisted demands to get “specific” about their demands. Refusing to point to one or another symptom, they effectively indicted the entire sick system that grinds down the 99% to empower the 1% beyond the dreams of avarice.

Class war

Everywhere you looked in 2011 you saw class warfare breaking out. From Tunisia to Wisconsin to Athens to Sudbury: the battle lines were being drawn more clearly and honestly than at any point in my lifetime.

Oh yes, Harper got his majority. Yes, Rob Ford took Toronto's City Hall. Yes, the bankers got richer. It takes two sides to make a class war, and while we've been dithering for years, our enemies have always been clear (if not always united) in pursuit of their class ends. In many ways we were playing catch-up, and often we lost this skirmish or that battle.

But the genie is out of the bottle. Our class is starting to get organized, to feel the strength in its numbers and, more importantly, the crucial position it holds in the economy. If the 99% refuses to work, the 1% loses its hold.

Occupy everything

The *Lancaster Eagle Gazette* is the newspaper of Lancaster, Ohio. Lancaster is a small city in the middle of the state that epitomizes middle America.

Its Christmas Day editorial about the Occupy movement is worth noting:

“Those who ‘occupy’ today's streets use the occasion to demonstrate—not so much against Wall Street, but against their loss of both economic status and their self-esteem.

“It could be called class warfare.”

The *Eagle Gazette* points out: “Four years ago, 26 million Americans' incomes were so low that they qualified for [food stamps]. Today, the number has increased to 46 million, an increase of 20 million during the Great Recession and its supposed recovery.”

The editorial isn't out to fan the flames of revolt. It ends by telling readers all will be well if they go back to school and learn new skills. The inane conclusion is beside the point. If people are talking about “class warfare” in Lancaster, Ohio they are talking about it everywhere.

My fearless prediction of 2011 didn't come out of nowhere. If one strains to listen to the deep rumblings from below instead of the noisy chatter from above, one has a good chance of spotting the coming trend. The level of struggle and protest in Egypt had been rising for years. The gross chasm between the 1% and the struggling 99% had been growing wider and more evident for years.

Continued crisis

As for 2012, my bet is that the Canadian economy will be sucked deeper into the instability and crisis that we see everywhere. Harper's vaunted claim, that Canada is exceptional and its banks a model of stability and honesty, will crumble like a house of cards. That isn't a cliché; the Canadian housing bubble is due to burst, revealing the weakness and corruption within.

I'm not alone in predicting this, nor does one have to be a socialist to see this train wreck. One of my favourite bloggers is former Tory MP Garth Turner. Of the Canadian real estate bubble he writes:

“It's impossible to play down the magnitude of this mess... Millions made the choice of throwing whatever investment dollars they had into a single asset—real estate. It may have worked while the economy chugged, but no longer. So without enough financial assets to actually provide income, even more needed as the feds cut back, what'll they do? “Simple. Bail.”

Canada is about the only nation in the world where the majority holds a favourable opinion about its bankers and, by extension, about its financial system. That impression has been fostered by a sycophantic business press, and by the fact that the housing bubble didn't pop in 2008. My guess is that the real estate balloon, and with it the fiction of the righteous Canadian banker, will not survive 2012.

The class warfare is about to get hotter.

New Social Movements, Class and the Environment

Written by John-Henry Harter

Reviewed by Bradley Hughes

THIS BOOK begins in the anti-capitalist movement that bloomed after 50,000 people joined the 1999 anti-WTO demonstration in Seattle. One of the placards spotted by the author at the demonstration, “Teamsters and turtles together at last,” illustrates why this was, “a bright spot in the struggle for social justice to mark the end of the twentieth century.”

The author, and everyone with a drop of anti-capitalist blood in their veins, was overjoyed at this display of new found solidarity between the organized working class and the new social movements.

This book tries to answer the question, why was this solidarity so unusual, and why has it been hard to maintain? In particular the book looks at the politics of new social movements in relation to trade unions by way of the history of Greenpeace as a case study.

Harter outlines a few decades of

WHERE WE STAND

The dead-end of capitalism
The capitalist system is based on violence, oppression and brutal exploitation. It creates hunger beside plenty. It kills the earth itself with pollution and unsustainable extraction of natural resources. Capitalism leads to imperialism and war. Saving ourselves and the planet depends on finding an alternative.

Socialism and workers' power
Any alternative to capitalism must involve replacing the system from the bottom up through radical collective action. Central to that struggle is the workplace, where capitalism reaps its profits off our backs.
Capitalist monopolies control the earth's resources, but workers everywhere actually create the wealth. A new socialist society can only be constructed when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution to satisfy human needs, not corporate profits—to respect the environment, not pollute and destroy it.

Reform and revolution
Every day, there are battles between exploited and exploiter, oppressor and oppressed, to reform the system—to improve living conditions. These struggles are crucial in the fight for a new world. To further these struggles, we work within the trade unions and orient to building a rank and file movement that strengthens workers' unity and solidarity.
But the fight for reforms will not, in itself, bring about fundamental social change. The present system cannot be fixed or reformed as NDP and many trade union leaders say. It has to be overthrown. That will require the mass action of workers themselves.

Elections and democracy
Elections can be an opportunity to give voice to the struggle for social change. But under capitalism, they can't change the system. The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary developed under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers. These structures cannot be simply taken over and used by the working class. The working class needs real democracy, and that requires an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates.

Internationalism
The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries. We support all genuine national liberation movements.
The 1917 revolution in Russia was an inspiration for the oppressed everywhere. But it was defeated when workers' revolutions elsewhere were defeated. A Stalinist counter-revolution which killed millions created a new form of capitalist exploitation based on state ownership and control. In Eastern Europe, China and other countries a similar system was later established by Stalinist, not socialist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

Canada, Quebec, Aboriginal Peoples
Canada is not a "colony" of the United States, but an imperialist country in its own right that participates in the exploitation of much of the world. The Canadian state was founded through the repression of the Aboriginal peoples and the people of Quebec.
We support the struggles for self-determination of Quebec and Aboriginal peoples up to and including the right to independence. Socialists in Quebec, and in all oppressed nations, work towards giving the struggle against national oppression an internationalist and working class content.

Oppression
Within capitalist society different groups suffer from specific forms of oppression. Attacks on oppressed groups are used to divide workers and weaken solidarity. We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls. We support the right of people of colour and other oppressed groups to organize in their own defence. We are for real social, economic and political equality for women. We are for an end to all forms of discrimination and homophobia against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people. We oppose discrimination on the basis of religion, ability and age.

The Revolutionary Party
To achieve socialism the leading activists in the working class have to be organized into a revolutionary socialist party. The party must be a party of action, and it must be democratic. We are an organization of activists committed to helping in the construction of such a party through ongoing activity in the mass organizations of the working class and in the daily struggles of workers and the oppressed.
If these ideas make sense to you, help us in this project, and join the International Socialists.



Canadian soldier confronted during the Oka crisis

Key lessons for a new year of struggle

Imperialist Canada
Written by Todd Gordon
Reviewed by Paul Kellog

It is not uncommon to analyze the world system using the category of imperialism. It is unusual to associate Canada with the term. By putting the two together in his book *Imperialist Canada*, Toronto author and activist Todd Gordon has provided us with a compelling and important analysis of Canada's place in the world system.

There is an older literature that "portrayed Canada as a subordinate nation with little or no imperial ambition of its own and dominated first by Britain and then the United States." This left-nationalist or dependency school of political economy, nearly-hegemonic in left-analysis in the 1960s and 1970s, conceptualized Canada, not as imperialist, but as the victim of empire.
Gordon surveys the emerging literature that challenges this "dependency" analysis, insisting by contrast "that Canada is an imperialist country—not a super-power, but a power that nevertheless benefits from and actively participates in the global system of domination in which the wealth and resources of the Third World are systematically plundered by capital of the Global North."

Gordon roots this understanding of Canada in a particular understanding of the dynamics of the world system of capital accumulation. For Canada, this means that its actions abroad cannot be seen as "the result of pressures from the Americans and increased integration with them...Canadian capital is still an independent force, however much its interests often coincide with its American counterpart."

Empire at home
The second chapter is a riveting account of "empire at home," documenting in grim detail the conquest of indigenous lands which laid the foundation for what is today

Canada. "The whole foundation of Canadian capitalism rests upon indigenous land and resources," he writes. "Canada's existence is premised on the forceful subjugation of indigenous nations and their resources to its interests."
In an analysis influenced by David Harvey's notion of accumulation by dispossession, Gordon puts Canadian mining interests at the centre of this analysis. "Canada has the largest concentration of mining companies in the world, with interests in over 3,700 properties." This makes the dispossession of indigenous lands a central focus for Canadian capitalism, as "approximately 1,200 indigenous communities are located within 200 kilometres of an active mine."

Global exploitation
This analysis of Canadian state formation provides an indispensable foundation for Gordon when his analysis turns abroad. "Although separated spatially from the domestic agenda, the international imperial agenda is not an entirely different project; it is a continuation of the former, both geographically and historically."

In part, this reflects similar commercial interests to that of the mining corporations seeking profits on indigenous lands in Canada. There is quite a long history of Canadian banks in the Caribbean, Indonesia, Guatemala and elsewhere, profiting from the exploitation of natural resources through repressing the rights and interests of local populations.
But Canada's role abroad is not reducible to these straightforward commercial interests. Canada is a full partner in the complex architecture of Structural Adjustment policies and their "well-documented devastating impact on the Third World."
These policies were overseen by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, institutions in which Canada has "played

an important role...By the late 80s structural adjustment was strongly endorsed and advocated by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the departments of Finance and External (now Foreign) Affairs as part of an effort to facilitate the expansion of Canadian economic interests in the wake of the profitability squeeze of the 1970s and 80s."
Canada's push abroad has clear economic motives. But is that sufficient to label Canada "imperialist?" Gordon addresses this issue directly. "Any country with imperial ambitions backs up its dreams of global power with some degree of military might". Even though not as militarized a society as the US, Canada nonetheless has a clear military component to its imperial projects.

Quebec
Future writings will be needed to fill in areas not covered in the book—most importantly to do with the complex relationship between Quebec and English Canada. Gordon documents the state-sanctioned execution of Métis leader Louis Riel in 1885. There is a reason that Canada's prime minister of the day famously said, about Riel: "he shall die...though every dog in Quebec barks in his favour." The one part of the country where Métis resistance found mass sympathy was in Quebec, a nation with its own deep grievances against the Canadian state. Integrating Quebec into our understanding of imperialist Canada remains an important task for activists today.

It is for activists that he writes his conclusion. "As imperialism is the product of the contradictory dynamics of capitalist accumulation, it will not disappear of its own accord. We must build an anti-imperialist resistance."

The complete version of this review can be found in *Socialist Studies* 7, (1/2) 2011. <http://bit.ly/xJuf6V>

international socialist events

TORONTO
Revolutionary Reading Circle
Topic: Marxism and Ecology
Friday, January 13, 6:30pm
For info: www.socialistworkercanada.com/events

UofT International Socialist club organizing meetings
For info: international.socialists@utoronto.ca

York University International Socialists organizing meetings
For info: yorkusocialists@gmail.com

Occupy, Strike, Resist: How do we beat the 1%?
One-day political conference
Saturday, February 4 from 11:30 am to 5:30 pm
Sessions include:
-Capitalist crisis: What's behind the Great Recession?
-Student power: can students change the world?
-Humanitarian intervention' vs. national liberation
-Climate chaos: How do we stop capitalism from killing the planet?
-Crisis and resistance: fighting racism by any means necessary
-From strikes to revolutions: How can workers change the world?

Register: <http://bit.ly/Feb4conf>
Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/Feb4FB>

OTTAWA
Ottawa International Socialists organizing meetings
For info visit: gosocialists@yahoo.ca

VANCOUVER
Europe: crisis and resistance
Wednesday, January 11, 12:30pm
Langara College, room A218
For info: vancouver.socialists@gmail.com

peace & justice events

TORONTO
Rally for Toronto Save city services and good jobs
Tuesday, January 17, 5:30pm
City Hall
For info: www.labourcouncil.ca

Occupy Toronto Activist Assembly
Friday, January 20 to Sunday January 22, OISE building, 252 Bloor St. W. A weekend-long, conference-style event, focused on developing Occupy Toronto's activist capacity
To register: occupyactivistassembly@gmail.com
Facebook: Occupy Toronto - Activist Assembly

PAN-CANADIAN
Drop Fees National Student Day of Action
Wednesday, February 4
On a campus near you
For info: <http://www.cfs-fcee.ca/>

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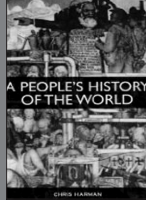
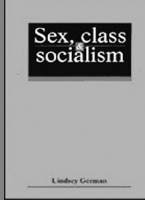
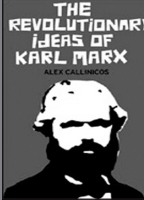
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NSCAD RESISTS

by JESSICA SQUIRES

A NEW report from former Conservative deputy Minister of Education, Howard Windsor, commissioned by the Department of Education under Darrell Dexter's NDP, has stopped just short of recommending that the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) be subsumed into Dalhousie University.

NSCAD is the oldest degree-granting independent art school in Canada. The administration ran a \$2.4-million deficit last year, which is what led the government to commission Windsor to conduct his top-down, barely consultative investigation. Amidst rumour and conjecture, Windsor did not conduct his investigation in a very public manner. Many expected NSCAD to be wound down.

Unfortunately in this climate, the faculty union voluntarily signed a zero-wage-increase collective agreement; staff received a one per cent increase. In mid-December the Board of Governors effectively capitulated to Windsor before his report was even issued, promising to file a financial plan with the Department by the end of March explaining how NSCAD will balance its budget. But projections had already foreseen a shortfall of significant additional proportions.

The capitulation was followed by the release of the report, which recommended that Dexter's government fund this year's \$2.4-million shortfall on condition that the financial plan not ask for more money from the government, that NSCAD "investigate collaboration agreements," and that the government basically hold a big axe over the neck of NSCAD if they don't comply.

NSCAD cannot ask for additional funding to make up its shortfall. But Dexter's government cut university spending by four per cent this year, and university funding per student is lower than it was in the 1990s. Any new funding will have to come from a combination of higher tuition fees and program cuts.

Now, some students and alumni are advocating for individual donations to be the focus to raise money for NSCAD. The fact is that no amount of alumni donations and individual actions will save NSCAD in the long-run. Alumni donations are a model completely in synch with a neoliberal approach to post-secondary education, which is why NSCAD is in this situation in the first place.

What is needed is a united fight against the neoliberal approach to post-secondary education: against tuition fees, privatization and corporate management models, against university "competition for students," and against all forms of rationalization to favour a market-friendly model. Education is a right, and Nova Scotia needs NSCAD.



ALL OUT JANUARY 17 TO DEFEND TORONTO JOBS AND SERVICES

by PAM JOHNSON

AFTER ENGINEERING a budget deficit and squandering the budget surplus he inherited, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford has declared a crisis and is proposing the first mass layoff in Toronto's history.

Over 1,200 workers will be laid off and 1,148 vacant positions will be eliminated in 2012. Other announcements are cuts to library hours and TTC routes and the proposal of fees for recreation programs.

When his high paid consultants at KPMG found no gravy, Ford, undeterred, announced that the "gravy" is city workers themselves and the services they provide. This exposes Ford's real agenda: austerity for the workers coupled with privatizing services and selling assets to the private sector.

Ford's main target is unionized city workers who

faced attacks in 2009 from a "pro-labour" mayor, David Miller, and went on strike.

These workers in CUPE 416 and 79 are understandably wary of public perception if they are forced into a strike situation again. The bitterness of the 2009 strike proved to be a wake-up call to the labour movement that solidarity is necessary in the face of harsh attacks by employers and governments.

Ford's cuts have raised the anger and frustration of Torontonians, even many who voted for him. Labour and community organized rallies on April 9 and September 26 brought thousands of people onto the streets. The library workers organized a very popular campaign against the library cuts. CUPE 416 members have campaigned door-to-door.

People packed City Hall through the night to depute against cuts, and rallies have

been organized against social housing, child care, city farm cuts. City Councillors who previously supported Ford are abandoning him.

Despite these positive signs, Ford has not backed off and all indications are that he will push ahead.

City managers have been training to do workers' jobs and their vacations have been cancelled in the New Year, pointing to a possible lock-out.

Toronto and York Region Labour Council and community groups have called a rally on January 17 when the final budget is due to be voted on.

This rally needs to be built in workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods. The level of anger and continuing protests by groups affected by the cuts speaks to the possibility of pushing back against Ford's austerity agenda, but it will require a broad-based effort.

19th-CENTURY LABOUR RELATIONS FOR 21st-CENTURY EDUCATION IN BC?

by TARA EHRCKE

IN A surprising move, the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) tabled a package that intensifies the attacks and concessions in teacher bargaining.

BCPSEA now wants to remove job security provisions, fair access to assignments and positions, teacher autonomy in professional development and classroom teaching practices, and due processes in teacher evaluation and discipline.

Imposition of this type of relationship would effectively de-professionalize teaching. It is an approach being pursued vigorously in the US, where teachers have less and less ability to meet the individual needs of students as they are forced to conform with new standards, focus on testing rather than creativity and problem-solving, and increasingly have fewer and fewer rights to negotiate collectively.

People packed City Hall through the night to depute against cuts, and rallies have

Rather than respecting the professional opinion of teachers, BCPSEA wants teachers to be subject to directives of the employer in many areas of their work, or else be subject to dismissal. Such an environment of control will put a chill on teachers and reduce creativity, variety and adaptation to student needs.

As one teacher asked, why are they bullying, not bargaining?

A full version of this article is available at <http://bit.ly/xyjDJJ>

SOLIDARITY WITH YORK REGION TRANSIT WORKERS

by PHILIP MURTON

IN LATE December, York Region Transit workers met to consider the most recent offer from the company. They refused to even vote on the offer. One member said:

"Let's send this back to (York Regional Chairman) Fisch with our compliments of the season."

A very impressive show of militancy and solidarity, these workers have been on strike since October.

The key issue in this strike is pay. Workers are asking for wages to be closer to Toronto transit workers. Currently, there is \$7 per hour difference.

York Region Transit is run by three private companies—Viva, Millar and First Canada—so any increases in pay would affect their profits.

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 113 represents the Viva workers. ATU Local 1587 represents the others workers.

From the second week, the unions have proposed binding arbitration knowing that they are likely to do better than the 11 per cent offer over four years.

The call for arbitration has been consistently rejected by the York Regional Chariman Bill Fisch.

The clear answer to this

strike is to call for solidarity with the workers but also to call for a public transit system in York Region.

To quote from Toronto Labour Council: "It is time to remove these middlemen that have no concern for the people of this region, and create a truly public transit system. One that is accountable to the public, and run in the interests solely of the public. One where everyone can see that every public dollar goes to improved service, not some profit line...."

The militancy and solidarity of these workers need and deserve our support—let us see what we can do.

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

Ontario workers fight back against austerity

WE ARE heading into a time of labour strife in Ontario. The provincial Liberals have sounded a warning with the Drummond Commission about cutbacks to come.

In Toronto, Mayor Rob Ford has declared war on the public sector unions. CUPE inside workers, outside workers and library workers are all facing negotiations, and the word from City Hall is that they have to pay the price for the economic crisis.

The city is putting forward concession-heavy proposals and is talking tough. Labour and the community have to respond to defend the jobs and services that are at stake.

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) has just gone through its bi-annual convention and the delegates strongly endorsed the Unity Team headed up by president Sid Ryan.

The last two years have been marked by internal bickering and power struggles. A few unions cut their dues to the federation trying to cause a crisis, resulting in the lay off of staff and a questioning by employers of the capacity of labour to fight back against the austerity agenda.

Some leaders seemed more interested in personal power and advancement than the needs of working people and the poor. We believe that it is the rank-and-file that must mobilize in their workplaces to counter the boss' agenda, but at the same time we do not stay neutral when there is a fight between the left and the right in the labour movement.

Sid Ryan and the Unity Team openly called for a militant fightback against the austerity agenda.

For the first time in years, in spite of dues being withheld and vicious internal disputes, the OFL put out the call to mobilize workers in support of the Vale Inco strikers in Sudbury.

Ryan called for unions to provide solidarity for the long running ECP strike in Brantford, which resulted in the shut down of the scabbed workplace for three days.

Ten thousand rallied in Hamilton due to the mili-

tancy of the 900 locked-out Steelworkers, and Ryan called for trade unionists from across the province to join them in the fight against US Steel.

When a labour leader pushes for this type of solidarity, it allows for activists to put pressure on their own leaders to mobilize in support. They will often run to catch up with the membership.

We cannot depend on the leadership to make the fight. In the end it is always the rank-and-file that will make the difference between winning and losing, but the labour movement in Ontario is in a better position with the overwhelming victory of the Unity Team at the OFL Convention. The members came out in record numbers for the convention to support a leadership, which was openly calling for a militant response from labour.

Common Front

A Common Front has been set up across the province linking labour and community with the hope that local and cross-province alliances can be made to mobilize against both provincial and municipal cutbacks.

In the city of Toronto, the next step is to continue the pressure on City Council. Two large mobilizations have taken place on September 26 and April 9, bringing thousands of people into the streets to protest the cuts. The Toronto and York Region Labour Council has called a rally for the evening of January 17, the first day of the council meetings.

We are seeing the fightbacks that are taking place in Egypt, India, Britain, Greece and many other countries. In the US, we saw the occupation and marches against the Republican-controlled state legislature in Wisconsin, and the huge mobilization of "We Are Ohio," which was able to defeat the reactionary anti-labour legislation that the Tea Party legislature had passed.

The assaults are hard, but the working class is showing its resilience, winning some and losing some, but fighting back every step of the way.

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HANDS OFF SYRIA, VICTORY TO THE REVOLUTION

by **BRADLEY HUGHES**

NATO POWERS are using repression in Syria as a pretext for long-sought intervention. As in Libya, Western military intervention in the Syrian Revolution would hijack another part of the Arab Spring and undermine its potential.

In recent weeks, hundreds of soldiers have defected from the army. On December 11, a general strike shut down most of Daraa province, including the city of Homs. Strike action and civil disobedience are on the rise, all over Syria.

For decades Western imperialism has wanted “regime change” in Syria, one of the few regimes of the region not armed and controlled by the West. After 9/11, Syria was targeted by the US, along with Iraq and Iran. Like Iran, the Syrian regime presents itself as anti-imperialist, and has provided support for resistance movements in the region like Hizbullah in Lebanon. But both regimes brutally repress their own opposition movements and have increasingly embraced neo-liberalism. The effects of the global economic crisis have only exacerbated the genuine grievances of the people.

Syrian Revolution

Syria is a country of 17 million people, half of them under 19. Unemployment stands between 25 and 30 per cent. GDP is falling and the oil is running out. At the same time as poverty is growing, a small corrupt layer around the president is getting richer and richer. After 11 years of rule by the dictator Bashar al-Assad, and 29 years before that by his father, the people

of Syria began an uprising last March as part of the Arab Spring.

The Syrian opposition is made up of many groups, including the Syrian National Committee (SNC), which is largely based abroad, and local coordinating committees, which are entirely based in neighbourhoods across the country, and which organize demonstrations and the defence of local opposition forces.

Some sections of the SNC are openly calling for foreign military intervention in Syria, the way NATO did in Libya. These forces are aligned with Western imperialism and represent a threat to the Syrian Revolution, since their interests are limited to gaining power for themselves—even at the expense of resistance movements in the region. The local coordinating committees appear to be a more genuine expression of the revolution, having publicly opposed any foreign interference whatsoever in Syria—from the US and Israel to Saudi Arabia and former members of the Assad regime. The most advanced sections of the committees have warned that imperialism is no friend of the revolution.

Opposition has also emerged in the Syrian Army, from which hundreds of soldiers have defected over recent weeks and months, leading to the creation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The FSA has been attacking Syrian army units that have been deployed to disrupt protests. In some cases, they have attacked the officers and recruited their soldiers.

In early December, widespread protests led to a one-



day general strike that was observed throughout Daraa province, which has been the centre of the revolt. The escalation of the protests to strike action is crucial; it was strike action combined with mass protests that toppled the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt.

The threat of counter-revolution

The regime has sent soldiers to attack and imprison protesters, even hijacking ambulances and kidnapping injured protesters from hospitals. The UN estimates that over 5,000 people have been killed by the regime, with hundreds imprisoned

and many tortured—despite the presence of Arab League monitors.

Now the West is using Assad's attacks, and the impotence of the Arab League, as pretext for intervention. Canada and the US have imposed economic sanctions against Syria, which could spill over into military intervention. “Canada will continue to put the squeeze on the Assad regime,” Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird told the CBC. “We will not sit idly by—not while Assad and his thugs continue to violate the rights of the Syrian people.”

But Canada and the US's

record of not “sitting idly by” includes their complicity in the “extraordinary rendition” of Maher Arar. In September 2002, the US kidnapped Canadian citizen Maher Arar during a layover at an American airport. US officials sent him to be tortured in Syria. The Canadian government knew he was imprisoned and did nothing.

In addition, Canada has its own economic interests in Syria, like the corporation Suncor that opened a \$1.2-billion natural gas plant last year.

A genuine revolution in Syria threatens not only Assad and Syrian elites, but

also Western imperialism in the region.

This is why NATO countries are intervening with the support of some sections of the SNC and FSA. But like the intervention in Libya, this would reduce the revolution to a military exercise—purging its political and economic demands.

Only the people of Syria can win their revolution, with solidarity from other struggles around the world. Solidarity movements must stand with and defend the Syrian Revolution, and at the same time, organize to stop all foreign intervention and interference.

Never miss an issue.

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2012: The year of student resistance

by **MOHAMMAD ALI AUMEER**

PERHAPS NO one person has had a greater impact on the academic careers of today's Canadian post-secondary students than former federal leader of the Liberal Party, Paul Martin.

Martin, a former Prime Minister, left his haunting legacy long before he became Canada's leading politician. Rather, it was during his tenure as the federal Minister of Finance in the mid-1990s, under the Chrétien government, that Martin enacted massive cuts in federal transfer payments to the provinces for health care, social services and education.

These cuts are the roots of the current crisis in post-secondary education (PSE). The continual decline in funding

to the provinces for PSE has in turn led to a sharp rise in tuition fees, bringing record levels of student debt. Some students are graduating with debts the size of mortgages.

According to Roxanne Dubois, National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), today “students collectively owe more than \$15 billion in student debt to their government and this is limiting their ability to persist in their education and to meaningfully participate in the economy.”

As funding decreases, tuition increases, not only is the quality of education put at risk but PSE as a whole also becomes less accessible for many marginalized groups and communities. A press release from CFS notes that, “In 2002 Statistics Canada

reported a pronounced drop in participation rates from students from low and middle-income families.”

Fighting back globally

The failings of the neoliberal model that was ushered in during the 1980s have created a series of fight-backs across the globe that have not been seen on such a scale for decades. All over the world, we see students, workers, communities experiencing systemic poverty, the unemployed, the disfranchised rising up in resistance to a global agenda that puts profits before people.

February 1st day of action

As the resistance to the current crises continues globally,

we have to look no further than our very own campuses for the next round of resistance.

The CFS is calling on all PSE students across the country to take to the streets on February 1, 2012 and demand that the federal government and our respective provincial governments properly fund PSE by lowering tuition fees, increasing per-student funding, and making education more accessible.

As the energy of the Arab Spring spreads across the world, and the Occupy movement continues to grow, students in Canada need take hold of the opportunity to stand united, like our counterparts in the United Kingdom and demand nothing less than the demise of the neoliberal agenda.