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IDLE NO MORE leads the fight against Harper



- Respect treaty rights
- Respect workers' rights
- No more business as usual

by EVAN JOHNSTON

IN A Canadian history textbook popular in 1866, the reader is told that "Canada was one of the few countries which was not originally settled by (or for purposes of) conquest. The pursuits of her inhabitants were always peaceful, not warlike."

Nearly 150 years later, one would hope that such blatant whitewashing of Canada's founding violence would be relegated to the dustbin of history. But at a G20 news conference in 2009, Prime Minister Stephen Harper commented that, thankfully, Canada has "no history of colonialism," reflecting a national discourse saturated by the long-cherished myth of honest dealings by the Canadian state with indigenous peoples.

Fortunately, history provides us with moments when harmful ideas are vanquished not by the power of words, but by the self-activity of the masses. A new movement has erupted that has already begun to shake up the dominant ideas about indigenous people and the role the Canadian state plays in oppressing First Nations. Known as Idle No More, it has sparked a grassroots mass movement of indigenous people and their allies all across Turtle Island, demanding treaty rights be honoured

and that the poor living standards of indigenous people all across the country be addressed.

Origins of #IdleNoMore

On October 18, the Harper government introduced Bill C-45, its omnibus budget bill. At over 400 pages in length, the bill is part and parcel of the "age of austerity" that we have been seeing since the Great Recession hit in 2008. Bill C-45 includes measures to raise the age of retirement, creates a two-tiered public sector pension system, and crucial to the birth of Idle No More, it reduces the amount of federally protected waterways and makes changes to the Indian Act that will lower the threshold of community consent in the designation and surrender process of Indian Reserve Lands.

As the Canadian ruling-class sets its target on public sector jobs and social spending, it also looks to expedite the process of selling indigenous land to profitable mining and oil corporations. Canada's petroleum sector now ranks third in the world behind Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, and Canada is home to 75 percent of the world's mining corporations. For capital, treaties and sacred lands are seen only as temporary barriers to profitability, and Bill C-45 signals a

renewed emphasis by the Canadian ruling-class on aggressively expanding the resource sector.

Shortly after the introduction of the bill in Parliament, Idle No More was initiated by four (indigenous and non-indigenous) women from Saskatchewan who began with a series of rallies, teach-ins, and public outreach to indigenous communities in order to help build a grassroots movement that could put enough pressure on the government to stop Bill C-45 in its tracks, and to start a public discussion around respect for treaty rights and the treatment of First Nations by the Canadian state more broadly.

From flash mobs to road blocks

From province to province, indigenous people and their allies have taken to the streets. During the National Day of Solidarity & Resurgence on December 10, an estimated 1,500 people marched in Edmonton, Alberta, while hundreds attended a rally in Calgary, where they delivered petitions and letters to Stephen Harper's constituency office. Thousands took part in similar rallies and marches in Labrador, Manitoba, Toronto, Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Whitehorse, among others.

Over the past month, there has been an explosion of activity across the country, with activists employing a wide array of tactics. From flash mob round dances in shopping malls to blockades of highways, border crossings, and railways, the creativity and mass support characteristic of Idle No More contradict those who suggest that the movement is not truly grassroots and is merely serving band council interests.

On December 11, Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence began her hunger strike near Parliament Hill on Victoria Island, announcing that she is "willing to die" for her people. Spence has been demanding a meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Crown, and First Nations leaders in order to discuss the current state of treaty rights.

Many doubt that anything productive will result from a meeting even if Harper agrees to one, and Spence has given no sign that she will end her hunger strike anytime soon. In the meantime, the Harper government and its corporate media lackeys have been trying their hardest to smear Spence's reputation by reviving accusations of financial mismanagement at Attawapiskat.

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Quebec
austerity
budget: zero
deficit policy
benefits 1%

by JESSICA SQUIRES

IN NOVEMBER, we reported that the Parti Québécois (PQ) budget shows how bankrupt the strategic vote was. The PQ exposed themselves as the neoliberals they are. Since then, the picture has become even clearer. We present here a brief analysis of the budget and its impacts.

First, as Bernard Rioux observes in his article on *Presse-toi à gauche*, the left-wing Quebec blog, the PQ has maintained the cuts and attacks on social programs introduced by the Liberals. By insisting on a zero-deficit policy, they have a giant excuse to attack workers, women and the poor.

The first step will be a wave of “compressions”—deep cuts—in government departments, which, mirroring the cuts to the federal public service, will mean the loss of substantial numbers of jobs. Already the budget has announced deep cuts to education, including cégeps and universities—and these cuts are not even contemplated for next year; they apply retroactively to September. Universities must find millions of dollars in savings in this year’s budget—a near impossibility. It certainly places tuition fee reductions, or even continuing the freeze, well beyond certainty. This happens in the context of the summit on post-secondary education which is supposed to discuss the whole picture, including alternative means of funding universities.

The zero-deficit policy reminds people of the moment when, for most, the PQ stopped hiding its essentially ruling class alignment: the same policy was announced in 1996 by Lucien Bouchard. Today’s Marois PQ is no different and in many ways worse. They support the Canada-EU free trade deal, despite their earlier criticism of the process. They are not only continuing, but strengthening the Plan Nord—basically a plan designed to pillage Quebec’s north and aboriginal lands and resources in the name of profit—with Marois shoring up the message of tax havens and subsidies during her recent trip to NYC.

No redistribution or positive tax reforms for Marois’ PQ: only more tax cuts and subsidies for the private sector and user fees for everyone else. More private exploration of the Gulf of St Lawrence for oil resources; oil trade with Alberta, Enbridge, and the northeastern US; user-fee models and private funding of public services... far from being independentist, the PQ are staunch allies of Stephen Harper.

Even shale gas fracking is still a possibility despite the moratorium; only a grass-roots mass movement won that moratorium in the first place.

Many PQ members tore up their membership cards with Bouchard’s zero-deficit policy. Make no mistake, the PQ is still in crisis but it will take a movement to defeat them.

The Morgentaler decision, 25 years on

by JESSE MCLAREN

JANUARY 28 is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Morgentaler decision, when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the abortion law. This was a tremendous victory for the women’s movement and these lessons are crucial to resisting the ongoing threats to choice while fighting for broader reproductive justice.

In 1869, Canada criminalized abortion and even the dissemination of information about birth control, under Section 251 of the Criminal Code. As a result, many women died of illegal backstreet or self-induced abortions.

In 1969, Canada’s Parliament amended Section 251 to decriminalize contraception, but abortion was only granted in situations deemed “medically necessary” by Therapeutic Abortion Committees.

For the most part, wealthy or middle class white women had access to abortion, but many poor, working class and racialized women were denied, indigenous and disabled women faced forced sterilization, and lesbian and trans women were criminalized and pathologized.

Dr. Morgentaler began performing abortions in Montreal in defiance of the law. The police raided his clinic, and he was put on trial. Juries in Quebec would not convict him, although his acquittal was overturned and he was impris-



oned. He served 10 months before the newly-elected Parti Québécois government released him and determined that it would not enforce the federal law in Quebec.

The fight for choice

In 1982, the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics asked Dr. Morgentaler to open a clinic in Toronto to challenge the unfair restrictions in the criminal code. The pro-choice movement mobilized with a reproductive rights perspec-

tive—building unity between Quebec and English Canada, fighting the sterilization of aboriginal and disabled women, mobilizing clinic defence, and putting full access to free abortion alongside the fight for equal pay, child care, an end to racial and sexual harassment, the right to live freely and openly regardless of sexuality, and good jobs.

The movement won a major step in the fight for reproductive justice on January 28, 1988 when the Supreme Court struck

down the abortion law as unconstitutional—arguing it violated Section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by infringing on a woman’s right to life, liberty and security of the person.

The movement today

The Morgentaler decision was a huge step forward, but the struggle for reproductive justice continues today. New Brunswick still refuses to pay for clinic abortions, there are no services in PEI and many rural communities, and in Ontario anti-choice forces are trying to have abortion delisted as a medically insured procedure.

The federal Tories have supported anti-choice motions or bills masquerading as helping women—from Bill C-510 against “coerced abortion,” to Motion 408 against “discrimination against women through sex-selection abortion.” But the Tory motions reveal they are only able to attack abortion rights by stealth, for fear of remobilizing the women’s movement.

January 28 is an occasion to celebrate a major victory for women’s equality, and to undertake those lessons so we can beat back the Tory attacks, expand abortion access, and fight for broader reproductive justice.

25 Years Since the Morgentaler Decision is an event organized by the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics and will be held on Monday, January 28 at 7pm at Innis Town Hall, 2 Sussex Ave (at St. George)

Kenney targets Roma refugees

by IAN BEECHING

IN MID-DECEMBER, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Jason Kenney announced a list of 27 “designated countries of origin” (DCO) from which refugee applicants will be given half the time to prepare for a hearing, will have no right to appeal at the refugee appeal division of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), and will be denied even the most basic of health services.

Should the federal court be asked to review a negative decision, no stay of removal will be granted, effectively negating the court before it has the chance to deliberate. “Denying claimants access to an appeal, based solely on the country from which they have come, is unequal and unfair treatment,” said

Gloria Nafziger of Amnesty International. “It may lead to mistakes going uncorrected and refugees being forcibly returned to a risk of persecution.”

Roma refugees

In 2011, representing 17 per cent of total refugee claimants, 4,442 Hungarian nationals applied to Canada for refugee status. Twenty per cent of those to receive full hearings were accepted as legitimate refugees. But now that Hungary is on Kenney’s DCO list, Roma and other Hungarian refugees will face severe limitations when seeking asylum in Canada.

Roma people face the constant threat of eviction throughout Europe, segregation in education, police profiling, and employment discrimination. As late as 2004, Roma women in several countries have been forcibly

sterilized. Otakar Motejl, the Czech government’s independent ombudsman, identified dozens of cases of coercive sterilization between 1979 and 2001.

According to Peter Showler, the director of a refugee law research forum at the University of Ottawa, Roma people from Hungary have nowhere to turn: “There is an agreement in place that you cannot seek asylum in another European Union country.” In addition, the agreement limits to three months how long a Roma person may remain in another EU country without employment. Showler adds: “They are undereducated, stigmatized Roma from Hungary. Their chances of finding employment in these other countries is very low.”

War resisters

Other groups of refugees

claimants will be affected, including US soldiers who have refused to fight in the Iraq War.

The United Nations Charter, the Geneva Conventions, and the Nuremberg Principles all clearly state that soldiers have the right to conscientious objection, but Kenney’s DCO list will target them.

On June 3, 2008 and March 30, 2009, the House of Commons voted “to allow conscientious objectors and their immediate family members” to stay in Canada. Despite this victory, Canada continues to deny refuge to American war resisters. Those who have returned to the US have been detained and imprisoned. Some who have been convicted at military tribunals for going AWOL have received longer prison sentences than US soldiers convicted of murder in Iraq.

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Decolonization and settler solidarity

Despite the name of the campaign, indigenous people have been anything but “idle” in their resistance to the ongoing colonization by the Canadian state, and have been fighting back ever since British and French settlers first arrived. Recent examples include the Haudenosaunee and Grassy Narrows First Nations marching to uphold their treaty rights, a successful campaign by the Musqueam Band to stop destruction of their sacred land, and countless actions leading the anti-Tar Sands fight—from a freedom train across the country to a mass sit-in in Victoria.

These have contributed to Idle No More’s widespread

and united resistance by indigenous people from all across Turtle Island, and the decision to mobilize around one of the central contradictions of the Canadian state: namely, the inability of the state to live up to its treaty obligations while continuing its path of stealing and destroying for profit the land that belongs to indigenous people.

But it’s important to place Idle No More in the broader context of decolonization, which is the process of dismantling the social, political, economic, and psychological effects of colonialism that persist in the lives of, and relationships between, indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Colonialism is not an historical artifact but an ongoing reality, and to dismantle all that colonialism teaches both indigenous and

non-indigenous people about their place and worth in this society requires difficult work that the Idle No More movement has once more placed at the forefront. One need only think of the land disputes at Kanesatake (“Oka”) or the Six Nations of the Grand River to be reminded of the way in which many non-indigenous people respond toward the lives and land of indigenous people, and making it clear why decolonization remains so vital.

When we talk about decolonization, we are not just talking about changing ideas, though decolonization certainly involves a lot of that. More importantly, it is an acknowledgement that Canada was built on stolen land which it has no legal right to, and that the struggle against the Canadian state is a struggle

for the self-determination of First Nations as autonomous and self-governing.

What the future holds for Idle No More, in terms of its direction and aims, remains unclear. But what is certain is that Idle No More has shown the status quo between First Nations and the Canadian state to be untenable, and has made it impossible to return to the daily misery that many indigenous people live and work under. Non-indigenous allies need to be active in our solidarity with Idle No More and the First Nations communities that are leading the way forward. Many non-indigenous people in Canada have been idle for too long on issues facing First Nations, and now is the time to act.

Join the Pan-Canadian day of protest in support of Idle No More on January 28.

Niqab
ruling
unfair

by JESSICA SQUIRES

IN MID-DECEMBER, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that, in some cases, women who wear niqab could be required to remove it in order to testify in court.

At first glance, the ruling looks like a reasonable compromise; in fact, some Muslim groups have spoken in favour of the ruling.

But the context of the case must be taken into consideration. N.S., whose identity remains anonymous because her case involves sexual assault, wanted to wear her niqab when testifying against her assaulters, an uncle and a cousin. The case ended up in court.

Removing her religious freedom in this situation has the double effect of revealing her face in a way even more impactful—exactly because of the sexual assault charges. The ruling suggests a judge must determine if the niqab is being worn for true religious reasons, and must establish the wearer’s sincerity. In a system in which judges are often men, and in a case in which the assaulters are male, it is highly problematic to assess the choice to wear niqab in the sole context of sincerity of belief.

The court should have supported dissenting judge Rosalie Abella’s opinion, which holds that a niqab is only one of many situations in which factors other than demeanour must be taken into account in hearing a witness. Abella mentions translation, speech impediments or paralysis as examples.

Predictably, the court’s ruling exposes the hypocrisy of a system that denies Muslim men the right to face their accusers (in Security Certificate and anti-terrorism proceedings), but forces Muslim women to reveal their faces to people who assaulted her.

The ruling is also consistent with the kind of discrimination that has been described as a “fair compromise” in Quebec’s ill-fated Bill 94. In that case, it was claimed that a teacher’s ability to judge how well a woman could speak French was impeded by a niqab—suggesting that teachers universally must see their students’ mouths and faces in order to judge how they sound. Does this mean that blind people would be incapable of teaching French as a second language?

The reality is that Islamophobia has played a role in this ruling, no matter how much it is portrayed as a compromise, and no matter how many women practice their faith by wearing niqab.

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Arab Spring 2013: the struggle against imperialism continues

by YUSUR AL BAHRANI

ECONOMIC AND political interests drive Western governments’ actions. According to the US Department of State: “The US is Saudi Arabia’s largest trading partner, and Saudi Arabia is the largest market for US exports in the Middle East.” Real victory to revolutionaries in the Arab region means a loss to imperialists.

This began with the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, where mass protests produced mass strikes that ousted Western-backed dictators in early 2011. But the regimes continued the same policies, leading to a second phase of the ongoing revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, part of a historic pattern of permanent revolution. But the Arab Spring includes all the revolutions, uprisings and pro-democracy movements happening in the Arab countries. Many of the movements have been globally ignored, as those pro-democracy activists are in a battle against Western-backed authoritarian regimes.

Saudi Arabia

There have been several pro-democracy movements demanding reforms to the authoritarian pro-Western Saudi monarchy (Al-Saud). For instance, feminist activists have been fighting for their rights for decades. Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to travel, work or even study without the permission of a male guardian. They are also banned from driving cars by a fundamentalist religious verdict. There have also been mass protests in several parts of Saudi Arabia, especially in the Eastern Province of Qatif, against the current class system in which only the royals and their loyalists have the privilege from the rich country’s resources. Systematic state oppression (arbitrary arrests, torture, targeting and killing protestors) has not defeated the revolutionaries, but united protesters under the banner of the revolution against the monarchy, which has been ruling for more than three centuries. Demands shifted from reforms to the fall of the regime. Tens of thousands of protesters in Qatif spent their New Year’s Eve chanting, “the people demand the fall of the regime”—during

the funeral of Ahmed Al-Mater who was shot by the regime’s forces. Families of political prisoners have been protesting in several cities including Qatif, Riyadh and Qassim.

Revolutionaries won the support of the people who have filled the streets demanding either reforms or the fall of the regime. Being aware of the strength of the opposition, the Saudi government decided to search for victories in other places in the region to strengthen the grip of the monarchy. The Western-backed monarchy has been intervening in other countries, whether directly or indirectly.

Bahrain

Bahrain, home to the United States Fifth Fleet, has been under the rule of the oppressive Al-Khalifa monarchy for more than two centuries. The Prime Minister of Bahrain, Khalifa Al-Khalifa, has been in his position for more than four decades. When pro-democracy protesters occupied Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain, the regime called on other Gulf countries to send troops to attack them. Only Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates sent troops to Bahrain, with most of the troops being Saudi. Saudi troops have still not completely left Bahrain.

Chilling violations including killing and detaining children have happened in Bahrain in the past two years. The government of Bahrain and its Western allies have been hiding behind the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report, which was released in November 2011 with recommendations to end and investigate human rights violations. The recommendations have not been implemented. The government continues its crackdown on activists, protesters and ordinary people; many of those who were dismissed from their jobs for participating in the protests have not returned to work; students who were dismissed from their universities due to their political activism have not returned. The government of Bahrain has also stripped 31 opposition figures of their nationality.

Earlier last year, the Bahraini and Saudi monarchies were considering a union, which was not formed. The plan of forming it is still in the air. The union will strengthen and protect the Western interests in the region, including the US

Fifth Fleet and the oppressive states of Al-Saud and Al-Khalifa.

Syria

Syrian pro-democracy demonstrators have been demanding an end to dictatorship, oppression and repression. At the same time, imperialists are struggling for a so called “humanitarian intervention.”

The Egyptian Revolution began after five years of strike waves and culminated in mass strikes, including at the Suez Canal, that forced out Mubarak. The Syrian Revolution has not had the same tradition and organization of strikes, so the regime has tried to win a battle of attrition and promote sectarianism. According to the UN human rights office, the death toll in Syria could be more than 60,000; this has included extremist militants claiming to fight Assad’s regime who have targeted many of the leftist and secular activists; at the same time, the repressive state has also been targeting those activists.

Both Assad and the West are trying to reduce the revolution to a military battle against a regime, like in Libya, rather than a broader fight for social and economic change. The West is intervening indirectly. The West now officially recognizes the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces and more arms and financial support is provided by Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The Western-backed Saudi intervention is doing nothing except escalating the sectarian-driven conflict in Syria. Qatar has been hypocritically supporting the Free Syrian Army while oppressing any opposition voice to the Qatari monarchy. The authoritarian monarchies that pretend to support the Syrian rebels have very dark records of human rights violations and oppression.

For the Syrian Revolution to overcome dictatorship, oppression and imperialism it has to deepen the social and economic fight against Assad and find real solidarity from activists around the world rather than imperialist intervention that sheds more blood.

Yemen

Protesters in Yemen took to the streets in an uprising against the autocratic rule of the Western-backed ex-President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh. He was ousted but the state was still run by his



loyalists: in February 2012, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, the country’s former vice president, became the president.

In its claim of “war against terror,” the United States has escalated the number of drone attacks in Yemen that have killed many civilians. The *Times* cited a US intelligence source, saying, “Some of the so-called drone missions are actually Saudi Air Force missions.”

The protesters who took to the streets against Saleh continue to struggle for a Yemen without dictatorship, poverty, famine, militants and Western direct and indirect military intervention.

Solidarity

The fight against Western-backed regimes is a very brutal battle. Protesters in many Arab countries including the ones mentioned above and others are increasing in number. While imperialists, and the ruling class in the Arab region are united, revolutionaries around the world have to form a united front too. It is good to have this as our New Year resolution for 2013—to support the pro-democracy movements in the Arab region while demanding an end to direct and indirect imperialist intervention.

Escalating attacks on UAE activists

by AHMED EL BASSIOUNY

IT ALL started as “precautions” to prevent the country from falling into the wave of the Arab Spring that swept many countries across the Middle East and Northern Africa. The state government of the United Arab Emirates has passed recent laws that govern Internet use and limit organized demonstrations.

The crackdown started with online social media, where a few activists had posted leaked documents that the government found “threatening.” The first activist to be taken down had leaked documents from the Ministry of the Interior about human rights issues. Saeed Al-Shamshi was believed to have the twitter account @weldbudhabi, where the leaked documents went viral. With around 11,000 followers, the only way the authorities could intervene was to “hack the twitter account a few times.” In response, the activist identified some of the secret agents for the ministry’s security agency. Seven other online activists were held in custody for similar actions.

The case became more severe when the authorities detained an 18-year-old blogger in early December. Mohammed Salem al Zumer was arrested a few times by the Emirati police for blogging in support of the arrested activists. According to the Emirates Centre for Human Rights, al Zumer was stopped by security officers while driving a car in Sharjah, and his laptop and other possessions were taken away.

The case is a repeat of human rights violations seen in Saudi Arabia and other dictatorships. According to reports, one of the eight activists arrested by the Emirati government was first arrested in Saudi Arabia and handed over. This shows the close relations between the two Western-backed countries and the cooperation in keeping the people quiet.

Tunisia: ‘The people want another revolution’

by JAMES CLARK

THE GENERAL strike that was supposed to take place in Tunisia in December was called off, following a last-minute deal between the government and the leadership of Tunisia’s General Labour Union (UGTT).

The union’s executive had called the strike in response to attacks on its members and offices in recent weeks, which the union says were carried out by the League for the Protection of the Revolution, a paramilitary group with connections to the governing Islamist party, Ennahda. The call also followed a growing number of anti-government strikes and protests across Tunisia.

The deal was struck just in time to avert a nationwide strike, which would have been the third in the union’s history since the 1940s. The second came almost two years ago during the Tunisian Revolution, and played a

key role in toppling the government of decades-long dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who fled to Saudi Arabia.

The union leadership agreed to call off the strike in exchange for four demands, which the government conceded: that the government protect and defend freedom of speech, expression, assembly and association, including trade unionism and political activism; that the government promise to address all grievances raised in recent discussions; that the government condemn all attacks on the UGTT, its members and its offices; and that the government strike a joint committee that includes the UGTT to investigate the recent attacks on the union.

Although a strike may have been averted for now, the social and economic conditions that provoked its call remain. The ruling Ennahda party is increasingly unpopular because it has failed to deliver on the demands of the Tunisian people in the wake of

the revolution. Unemployment has doubled to 17 per cent and rural areas remain with few resources and little help from the government. The League for the Protection of the Revolution has attempted to stifle any criticism of the government, as anger and dissatisfaction have become widespread.

The government’s unpopularity has also been fuelled by its support for Ben Ali’s neoliberal economic policies, which continue to impose austerity and impoverish Tunisians, and by its attempts to crack down on protests. Riot police have fired tear gas and bird-shot pellets at protesters, and have used violence to clear sit-ins at the parliament. In response, more and more ordinary people have joined the protests, and in towns and cities far from Tunis, the capital. In Siliana, a farming town, graffiti has appeared, saying, “The people want another revolution.”

Despite the union’s success in negotiating a deal with the government,

its rank-and-file could still push the leadership into action. Before the revolution, the UGTT had a cosy relationship with the regime, and prevented its members from organizing strikes or protests. As protests spread in the early days of the revolution, activists began meeting in the UGTT’s offices and coordinating actions with union members. The pressure from below became so great that the leadership were pushed into calling a general strike against the regime, which turned out to be the tipping point for the revolution.

The revolution changed the UGTT, and Tunisians remember what they did to get rid of the first regime. If Ennahda fails to respond to the demands of the people, which go well beyond cosmetic political changes—including economic demands around wages, and social demands including women’s equality—it may soon face the same kind of movement that got rid of Ben Ali in 2010.

Student struggles continue in Sudan

by CANDACE GHENT

THE PAST year has been filled with attacks on the student movement and other protesters and activists in Sudan.

In the early hours of December 7, the bodies of four Al Jazeera University students from Darfur were found in a nearby sewage canal, showing signs that they were beaten previous to their deaths. This came after massive

protests when first year students were denied a tuition waiver that is offered to other students at public universities.

According to Human Rights Watch, Sudan’s Justice Ministry has launched an investigation into their deaths, but whether the results of their findings will be transparent and accountable to the people is still to be seen. It has created an awakening of sorts, with a second protest in reaction to their

deaths following shortly after the first one.

The student movement in Sudan is very much alive. One of the movements is Girifna, which translates as “we are fed up.” The movement, composed mainly of university students, was set up in October 2009. Since then, the authorities have targeted its members. According to Amnesty International, many members of

Girifna have been arbitrarily arrested, detained, tortured and sexually assaulted.

The story of the tragic death of the four students should not be a story that we should have to tell again. Global solidarity and awareness is required amidst Western mainstream media silence regarding the students’ struggles against austerity and inequality in many parts of the world.

Indigenous women’s resistance

IDLE NO More emerges from a long period of resistance in indigenous communities. One of its central features is the strong role of women leaders—like the four women who initiated the campaign and Chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation in Canada, Theresa Spence. It is not coincidental that Spence is a survivor of the residential school system.

The movement has galvanized attention to the continuing oppression of indigenous peoples in Canada and internationally. But for indigenous communities, this is not a new story.

In an affidavit dated January 14, 2012, Spence addressed a case before the federal court between the Attawapiskat First Nation and the Canadian government, as represented by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. The case is in regard to government control of reserve housing through third party management.

Spence’s words deserve quotation: “I attended a residential school as a child. Most of the adults in our community over the age of 35 also attended residential school.... Our community and families were threatened with charges, imprisonment, and the withholding of funding if children were not surrendered to Canada to attend the schools. The rationale used by Canada... was that our families and community were incapable of caring for us and educating us adequately.... Canada promised our families and community that we would be well taken care of and educated at the schools. We were not cared for.... Moreover, many, perhaps most, of our members who attended residential school were physically, sexually and emotionally abused while in the care of Canada. Residential schools are one of many direct and catastrophic experiences that have taught the First Nation and its members that it is not safe to surrender our autonomy and decision-making to Canada.”

Tragedy

The tragedy of Canada’s residential school system is now well documented, thanks to the insistence of indigenous survivors. The extensive network of boarding schools for indigenous children involved Christian denominational churches and the federal government in a complex program of forced assimilation.

John S. Milloy’s important book, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986*, retells the shameful history. This study is based on Milloy’s research associated with the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Late Victorian British settlers approached indigenous peoples with the aim of “civilizing” those who were considered “savage.” According to Deputy Superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott, in charge of the Department of Indian Affairs between 1913 and 1932, education was “the most complicated Indian problem.” As Milloy summarizes, “In the vision of residential school education, discipline was curriculum and punishment was pedagogy. Both were agents of civilization; they were indispensable to the ‘circle of civilized conditions’ where the struggle to move children across the cultural divide would play itself out in each school situation, child by child, teacher by teacher.”

The residential schools were preceded by day schools. An example is the High River school, in High River, Alberta, 37 kilometres south of Calgary. The school was opened in 1884, directed by missionary Father Lacombe with support of the Catholic Church and the Canadian state.

This was the same year that Frederick Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* was published. The experience of egalitarian gender relations among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) of upstate New York inspired the work of American settler Lewis Henry Morgan. He documented an alternative to the stifling oppressive sexual practices that characterized Victorian England. This was the experience that animated Marx’s notes on Morgan’s work, and provided the basis of Engels’ *Origin*.

It was also the experience that the residential school system was consciously designed to destroy in indigenous children. Lacombe insisted that day schools were ineffective, as children went home to what was considered the “permissive” culture of their parents.

When good weather came, almost all of the school’s 25 pupils stopped attending. Candy and toys failed to lure them back. The children suffered, according to Lacombe, from being too “proud and set in their Indian ways.”

Residence

Compulsory residence was the solution. This went along with a regime, as Lacombe advised, of “coercion to enforce order and obedience.” Harsh repression was considered a necessary counter-measure to the influence of indigenous parents.

There was also concern to ensure against “retrogression” upon graduation. Boys and girls were strictly trained according to Western gender norms. The 1887 Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Lawrence Vankoughnet, advised then-Prime Minister John A. Macdonald that residential schools were a “good investment” in Canada’s future. Milloy aptly summarizes: “It was their goal after all to produce not only civilized young men integrated into the non-Aboriginal labour force, but civilized families. In the Victorian view, women were the centre of that most important institution, and motherhood was the most formative socializing element.”

The residential schools were literally intended to break the influence of the powerful women of Canada’s First Nations and destroy the teachings of generations.

This oppressive relationship continues in the current conditions of the Canadian state. And the ongoing resistance of the powerful women of Canada’s First Nations is rising in the Idle No More movement. Like Engels in 1884, socialists today still have much to learn.

INTERNATIONAL



Unnatural disaster: super typhoon Pablo kills 1,500 in the Philippines

by L.D. BORROMEIO

SOUTHERN MINDANAO lies outside of the Philippines’ very wide typhoon belt. In 2011, it was hit by a category 5 typhoon which killed approximately 1,500 people. On December 4, 2012, it was hit by Typhoon Pablo, another category 5 typhoon. Category 5 typhoons are referred to as super typhoons and have wind speeds in excess of 250 kilometers per hour. The Philippine government now predicts that deaths from this latest super typhoon will once again exceed 1,500.

On December 4, the initial death count—wildly inaccurate—was 42; on December 6, it was 322, and on December 21, it was 1,050. Much of this is to do with the slow pace of rescue efforts: over 800 people were still missing by Christmas. Meanwhile over 2,400 families—11,680 people—are staying in 43 overcrowded evacuation centres around the country with inadequate access to medical treatment, sanitation, food and water; 711,682 families or 6,243,998 people are listed as “affected” by the typhoon. A large proportion of these casualties come from Southern Mindanao.

Global warming will mean more typhoons in general for a population whose architecture, general infrastructure, and agriculture depends on relatively calm weather. Capital internationally blocks every effort to stop climate change, but it is the poor of the developing world who will be the first to pay the price.

But to understand the severity of the crisis we need to see the context

into which global warming enters. The Philippine GDP was \$224.8 billion in 2011; the Davao Region—which was particularly hard hit by the typhoon—contributes just over 10.4 per cent to that total. Services are the single largest contributors to this; however, mining and agriculture are important as well. Strip mining, logging and intensive agriculture have depleted the forests at the same time as they have marginalized small-scale farmers and miners. These industries not only release large amounts of greenhouse gases, contributing to global warming they also increase the severity of floods and landslides by destroying the forest cover. Over the decades, these developments have pulled some out of dire poverty, pushed others into it, and, in general, mirrored the economic inequality typical of Philippine society. Naturally, the families injured by the typhoon are not seeing the wealth that they generated for the Philippines being marshaled for their aid; in fact national development has increased the dangers of “natural” catastrophes without developing a commensurate safety net. This is demonstrated by the fact that a year has passed since the last super typhoon and yet the human cost is the same.

More than this, Mindanao is the site of an extended civil war, and is therefore one of the most heavily militarized areas of the country. Resistance fighters have declared a ceasefire in response to the typhoon, so the issue is not a lack of personnel. The fact that a single organization, the military, is tasked with both oppression and emergency relief is the issue. The military has acted for decades as legal mercenaries for the

capitalists—both domestic and international—to clear communities of the Bangsamoro, indigenous peoples and peasants. The New People’s Army—the armed wing of the largest Maoist organization in the country—claims that the government in Manila, with the help of American troops, is using the disaster to further attack the sovereignty of the local population by “monopolizing” aid work with various private organizations ignoring and undermining the local networks.

The inclusion of private organizations here points to another issue: the long-term retreat of the state in the period of neoliberalism. There has been a steady pattern of the state abdicating responsibility in every imaginable sector of society from housing to disaster relief. It is therefore unable to provide a centrally funded and coordinated response to catastrophic events and so relies on NGOs and charitable organizations to handle the work according to whatever methods each group deems appropriate (the government is however capable of giving “regulatory relief” to adversely affected banks). This issue is exacerbated and complicated by the government’s inability to work in partnership with the local peoples of Mindanao or to truly recognize their claims to sovereignty—an inability structurally determined by the current needs of Philippine capitalism.

Although the Bangsamoro and indigenous peoples have made some important gains in the past year, the truth is that global warming and the various contradictions of Philippine capitalism are going to conspire to keep the poor of Mindanao—and indeed the rest of the Philippines—vulnerable to similar catastrophes for a long time to come.

Venezuela left sweeps elections

by JOHN BELL

EVEN AS Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez’s cancer had worsened, candidates from his Socialist Party took 20 out of 23 state governorships in mid-December elections.

Henriqué Capriles, head of the right-wing opposition won his seat, but only by a narrow margin. The US and the Venezuelan business class had hoped for a much better showing, to suggest that sweeping reforms brought in by Chavez’s “Bolivarian Revolution” would not outlive him.

Chavez remains in a Cuban hospital, and the chances of his being able to re-

sume office are slim.

Chavez’s Vice President, Nicolas Maduro, will likely be his successor. News has emerged that direct talks between Maduro and US State Department officials have taken place, with the stated aim of reenlisting a post-Chavez Venezuela in the “war on drugs.”

The US may want to hedge its bets, especially in light of the strong pro-Chavez vote. Outright attempts to overthrow the Socialist Party government could lead to civil war and economic chaos. Spurred on by oil exports, the Venezuelan economy grew by over 5 per cent in 2012, and the *Guardian* newspaper reports that it had

the world’s best performing stock exchange, up 300 per cent.

No one knows what will happen at the top if Chavez dies soon. There may be a power struggle to challenge Maduro. Whoever takes the reins could choose between maintaining a confrontational position toward Washington, and placating the US by gradually weakening popular gains in housing, education and health care.

One thing is certain—and the strong election results show it: the people of Venezuela want the improvements in their lives to continue and expand. It is they, not the stock market, not the State Department and not even Maduro, who will have the last word.

Permanent revolution and the Arab Spring

Peter Hogarth *looks at the process of revolution throughout the Arab world and how it has evolved since the start of the Arab Spring.*

Based on the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905, Leon Trotsky developed the theory of “permanent revolution,” which was put into practice in the revolutionary wave of 1917. A century later, this theory continues to inform our understanding of the current limits and future potential of the Arab Spring—from the combined and uneven development of capitalism, to the central role of the working class, and the potential for international change.

Karl Marx outlined how capitalism could be defeated and how socialism could come into being. He wrote on the necessity of a certain level of economic development, and the emergence of a majority working class capable of both overthrowing the old system and also having the industrial and social development capable of sustaining a new socialist society. Many socialists at the time thought each country had to go through specific stages of economic and political development before the working class could lead a socialist revolution. This led to mechanical and sometimes Eurocentric conclusions that only highly developed countries like France, Germany and Britain were capable of having a socialist revolution based on their level of industrial and social development.

For many of these socialists, backward old Russia—with its autocratic monarchy, largely peasant population and working class that only numbered a few million—seemed an unlikely candidate for a revolution led by the working class. Even Lenin and the Bolsheviks thought that, while the working class could not trust the bourgeoisie and would necessarily play the leading role in a revolutionary movement, the revolution would stop short of a workers’ government and would instead carry out a series of democratic reforms that would make the struggle for socialism possible in the future. But based on the Russian Revolution of 1905, Trotsky elaborated the theory of “permanent revolution” in his book *Results and Prospects*—and just 12 years later Russia became the first (and still only) country to have a social revolution led by the working class.

Combined and uneven development

The theory of permanent revolution recognized the international development of capitalism. Breaking with the evolutionary socialism that was gaining prominence in the reformist German Social Democratic Party, Trotsky emphasized that the world-system of capitalism had to be understood in terms of uneven and combined development.

Capitalism develops unevenly, with different capitalist economies developing at different rates. The competitive nature of capitalism and the process of accumulation that is the engine of the system means that the differences between and within national economies can become quite intense. At the same time, capitalism draws all of the economies of the globe into a single, combined, world system.

The result of combined and uneven development can be seen in Russia 1905 or Egypt 2012: there is small peasant production and sub-



Mansoura-España Garments Company Workers
(photo by: Hossam el-Hamalawy)

sistence farming next to the most modern industries—like the Putilov metal factory in Revolutionary Russia, or the El-Mahalla El-Kubra textile sector in revolutionary Egypt.

As Trotsky wrote, the combined and uneven development of capitalism “permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages.”

Democracy and the working class

The political conclusions Trotsky drew from this recognition was that social and political structures of these countries were also affected by their late entry onto the scene of world capitalism.

Because the Russian bourgeoisie existed alongside a small but developed working class, and was intertwined with the global imperialist system, it could not play the revolutionary role the French bourgeoisie played in 1789 of overthrowing feudalism, achieving national independence and establishing bourgeois democracy. The bourgeoisie’s conservative role stemmed not just from their interests in the structures of the system, but also from a fear that the rebelling working class might go beyond democratic reforms and instead pose an alternative power.

Trotsky emphasized that the only social class that could play that leading role was the working class. The strategic position of the working class in the economy, and the reality that their fight for better living standards was necessarily bound up with cooperation and democracy, meant that even if that working class was a small percentage of the population, it could provide a progressive, leading role. This, in turn, could pull the mass of the peasantry and other oppressed elements of society behind it.

The decisive force that is the working class has been on display in many ways in the Arab Spring. In Tunisia, the role of the General Tunisian Workers’ Union was critical in deposing President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The weeks of

occupation in Tahrir Square shook the Mubarak regime, but it was the mass strikes of workers in the textile industry, ports and oil fields that finally toppled Mubarak. Similarly, in places like Syria, the lack of intervention by the working class as an organized force has been a hindrance to the development of revolution there.

The Arab Spring also shows the inability of the local bourgeoisie to secure “bread, freedom and social justice” and to challenge imperialism. President Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood came to power posing as an alternative to Mubarak, but he and the Brotherhood—a cross-class organization that includes many poor Egyptians, but which is led by middle class elements—have only helped to entrench the military’s hold on the economy, assured Israel and the US of its fidelity, and ordered a decree exempting themselves from judicial oversight. While in opposition, the Brotherhood proclaimed that if elected they would break the siege of Gaza with millions of people, but as Israeli bombs dropped on Gaza, the Brotherhood was nowhere to be found; instead, it was Egyptian socialists and other activists who broke the siege with aid and solidarity.

As Egyptian socialist Hossam El-Hamalawy wrote shortly after Mubarak’s fall, “We have to take Tahrir to the factories now. As the revolution proceeds, an inevitable class polarisation will take place. We have to be vigilant. We hold the keys to the liberation of the entire region, not just Egypt. Onwards we must go, with a permanent revolution that will empower the people of this country with direct democracy from below.” The recent rebellions against the Brotherhood, and the establishment of independent trade unions shows the potential of the second phase of the Egyptian revolution in Egypt—which has regional and global consequences.

From democratic to social revolution

As the bourgeoisie are unable to solve the basic democratic, agrar-

ian and national questions, Trotsky emphasized that solutions to these problems were also impossible without challenging the limits of bourgeoisie private property and capitalism itself.

The Russian example of 1917 makes this case quite clearly. What began in February as a demand for democratic rights and “peace, land and bread” turned into a socialist workers’ revolution based on the inability of the capitalist government that replaced the Tsar to end the war, end feudal land relations, or feed its people. The workers and peasants of Russia found they could not rely on new rulers to secure “peace, land and bread” and instead had to take power themselves—through “all power to the soviets.”

From this notion comes the final point of Trotsky’s permanent revolution; that is, the completion of the socialist revolution “within national limits is unthinkable ... Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.”

While the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt are far from socialist revolutions, it is plain to see that they have certainly caused convulsions in other countries—triggering regional revolts across North Africa and the Middle East, inspiring public sector workers in Wisconsin, Occupy activists and Quebec students in the “printemps érable.” We are a long way from the potential of international socialism raised by the Russian Revolution in 1917, but it is clear that the Arab Spring has brought new life to struggles around the world. Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution shows how we can make sense of a world in revolt, how we can understand the limits placed on the revolutions so far, and how the organization and self-activity of the global working class are critical to achieving a better world. In this way, it locates less-developed countries as potentially central to the possibility of another world, not peripherally, as was once thought.

In places like Syria, the lack of intervention by the working class as an organized force has been a hindrance to the development of revolution there.

Contradictions and capitalist crisis in the Chinese Economy

Amidst a global capitalist crisis many commentators have looked upon China as the last bastion of ‘healthy economic growth’ and hoped it could pull the global economy out of ‘the great recession.’ Socialist Worker argues this is a fallacy. In fact, China already has serious and growing economic and political problems of its own.

by PAM FRACHE

THE SHANGHAI Composite Index rallied in early December when the new leadership of the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Xi Jinping announced its commitment to increasing investment in urban development and deepening economic reforms.

Business news commentators welcomed the news of rallying markets and an uptick in the Chinese economy to 8.6-per cent growth in the fourth quarter of 2012 (after falling to a low of 7.4 per cent in the third quarter). Indeed, with a modest recovery in the US housing market, some are suggesting that China and the US will kick-start the global economy.

Yet all the contradictions in the Chinese economy revealed in the immediate wake of the global financial crisis remain, and more sober economists are not as optimistic as the headlines suggest.

China remains dependent on low-cost exports made possible through the combination of Foreign Direct Investment and cheap labour. When demand for exports slumped, first in the US and then in Europe, China weathered the global crisis primarily with mass infusions of cash and credit to fund continued investment in plant and greater investment in infrastructure (including railway tracks to nowhere and vacant cities replete with empty office and apartment towers). But as the *Economist* notes: “[China’s] momentum is sustained by nothing but an outpouring of investment in plant, infrastructure and property. This appears profitable only because each round of investment creates demand for the products of the previous round. If this investment stopped flowing, China’s economy would fall to earth.”

Capacity
Excess capacity is both a cause and effect of the global economic crisis and persists on a world scale. This explains why capitalists the world-over have largely failed to reinvest in plant and equipment, despite some restoration of profit. Excess capacity needs to be absorbed before capitalists feel confident to reinvest in plant and equipment profitably. It is a dynamic that contributes to continued stock and commodity markets where profits can still be made quickly via speculation. In China, state-driven investment in plant and equipment (as opposed to social spending, for instance) can only exacerbate this contradiction within the global economy, and in China.

For example, in August 2012, the *New York Times* reported that China has unprecedented levels of unsold goods, with stockpiles of everything from steel to cars. An investment management firm notes: “One challenge is the amount of capacity that is still being added to the country’s manufacturing base. Chinese auto production is expected to grow in the next two years by an amount nearly equal to all of the auto factories in the US.” This excess capacity will put downward pressure on auto prices as firms compete with China to unload their vehicles. As the management firm puts it: “We expect this

excess capacity will keep import price inflation subdued here in the US for quite some time.” Indeed, it will also ensure continued attacks on workers’ wages as firms compete for market share and sustain profit margins.

Speculation
In addition to adding to the crisis of over-production, the Chinese stimulus program fuelled stock and real estate speculation. Cheap credit and low interest rates resulted in speculation frenzy. Stock markets climbed, real estate prices rose and inflation soared. In 2011, food prices skyrocketed by a whopping 15 per cent. Food price inflation hurts workers whose wages do not keep up and further depress domestic demand as greater portions of workers’ wages go toward food. It also contributes to workers’ resistance and social instability—a serious concern for the autocratic Community Party. To control inflation and speculation, the Chinese government increased interest rates, tightened the money supply (tempering infrastructure spending) and tightened banking regulations to mitigate the issuance of risky loans. But just as these problems are mitigated, so arises the problem of slowing GDP growth. The 7.4-per cent growth rate in Q3 of 2012 was an historic low for an economy that has averaged 10 per cent or more for the past three decades.

Unsurprisingly, the Chinese government is once again reducing interest rates to ease credit, expand the money supply, and increase public spending on infrastructure. But scope for this course of action is certainly smaller for the incoming Communist Party leadership. First, most economists are suggesting that the days of Chinese growth rates of 10 per cent are long gone. (Some economists are predicting growth of less than 5 per cent as early as 2014, which most agree is not fast enough to absorb even modest population growth).

Debt
China’s ability to spend its way out of the crisis is much narrower than it was even 10 years ago. China’s public debt as a percentage of GDP nearly doubled to 34 per cent of GDP between 2009 and 2010. By 2012, China’s public debt was estimated at 43.5 per cent. Perhaps more worrisome is that corporate debt in China has increased from 108 per cent of the entire Chinese economy in 2011 to 122 percent in 2012. As a Bloomberg news report puts it: “Key industries such as steel, construction machinery, aluminum, and coal are facing overcapacity, squeezed margins, and most alarmingly, debt.” Many of these corporations are technically state-owned, which means that the Chinese people will be expected to bailout these overleveraged enterprises should they fail. The extent of China’s debt obligation, then, becomes significantly higher: “Lump together corporate, public, and household debt,” reports Bloomberg, “and you get a figure close to 206 per cent of GDP.” For an economy estimated to be worth \$4.7 trillion US dollars in 2010, a debt obligation worth nearly \$9 trillion is a tremendous risk, economically and politically. Bloomberg reports that a bad-loan ratio of only 12 per cent

would “erase the banking industry’s [\$1.2 trillion US] in capital.”

At the same time, there has been a surge in the “shadow banking” system, where, according to the IMF, “lending is to higher-risk entities including local government investment vehicles and property developers that don’t have access to bank loans.” Adam Wolfe, an economist with Roubini Global Economics, suggests these bad debts will impair the banks’ ability to lend and will choke off investment in the year ahead, increasing concerns about a “hard landing” in China. According to Wolfe: “Faster growth now only pushes China closer to the inevitable sharp slowdown that will come when its debt-fueled, investment-led growth model collapses.” (Such a scenario will have grave implications for commodity prices and economies—like Canada—that have prioritized commodity exports assuming sustained rapid growth in China).

Currency
Part of China’s growth model has been its currency advantage relative to the US economy. Low value currencies make exports cheaper and helps sustain demand for them. But the global slump in demand over the past four years has hurt China’s exports, since Europe and the US could not absorb as many Chinese goods. Although China has typically intervened to prevent the Chinese currency—the Renminbi (Yuan)—from increasing in value relative to the US dollar as a means of keeping its exports competitive (the Renminbi was officially pegged to the US dollar until 2005), China has been diversifying its reserve holdings away from US dollars, buying instead, the debt of its other important trading partners. As a result, countries like Japan and South Korea are now purchasing more US treasury bills to prevent their own currency from rising against the dollar. This is partly because US monetary policies in the aftermath of the global crisis put downward pressure on the US dollar, making it more risky for China to purchase US currency to retain its value against the Renminbi (and simultaneously de-valuing the US dollar assets already held by China). This dynamic has narrowed the value gap from about 30 per cent to 8 per cent between the Renminbi and the dollar, and eroded China’s currency advantage.

According to the Bank for International Settlements, the global currency market has more than doubled since 2004 as currency speculation has grown alongside stock market speculation. This is another wrinkle in the economic terrain; the increasing size of this market dilutes the relative impact of any nation state’s ability to intervene to keep the value of its own currency in check.

Demand
Still, there remains the question of domestic demand, long considered the holy grail of the Chinese economy. At present, domestic consumption accounts for only about 35 per cent of the Chinese economy and increasing this proportion appears to offer the potential for a resurgence of domestic demand-driven growth and the new Communist Party leader-



ship has promised to take measures to stimulate it. However, a meaningful expansion of domestic demand would require unprecedented wealth redistribution, especially in the form of rising wages and increased state spending on social programs. But in a global capitalist market, China’s abundant supply of cheap labour has been a competitive advantage, and one upon which China still depends. Although nominal wages have increased somewhat in China, they have not done so dramatically. Nevertheless, even modest wage growth has helped re-direct FDI toward even lower-wage economies like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam, and FDI fell significantly throughout 2012. Thus, despite slumping exports and a diminishing trade surplus, China is counting on re-vitalizing itself as an FDI destination; despite double-digit wage improvements in the first half of 2012, by year’s end, wage growth had declined by six percent. In this context, the Chinese government will be loathe to make meaningful improvements in wages and—by extension—domestic demand.

Liberalization
The Communist Party has raised expectations for “liberalization.” Economic growth in a world market does require some “opening up” of the Chinese economy and, as it progresses, it simultaneously raises expectations among the Chinese population that liberalization will entail both economic and political reforms. These expectations can spill over into domestic protest alongside struggles for improvements in wages and working conditions.

For example, on New Year’s Day, workers at *Southern Weekly*—a newspaper in the city of Guangzhou—took strike action to protest Chinese state censorship of an editorial that had called for constitutional change. When newspaper staff went on strike, hundreds joined them in solidarity demon-

strations demanding the resignation of Tuo Zhen, the provincial propaganda tsar of the Chinese Communist Party. Hundreds of other workers and intellectuals have condemned the censorship and signed an open letter also demanding Tuo’s resignation: “In recent days, the general attitude at home and overseas following the 18th National Congress has been one of optimism over China’s prospects. The actions of Minister Tuo Zhen, in Guangzhou and on the very front lines of reform and opening, are entirely contrary to the [new] policy orientation.”

In relatively bold moves, some newspapers refused to run a subsequent state-sanctioned editorial that criticized the actions of the journalists at *Southern Weekly*, while other newspaper outlets only printed it alongside a disclaimer that translated as “posting this piece does not mean sharing the views expressed.” Some observers believe this is China’s first direct confrontation between newspaper workers and state officials. Since Communist Party propaganda departments supervise the Chinese media and penalties for political dissidence are high, there has until now been little room for resistance. The dissent—and strike—of *Southern Weekly* workers underlines the contradictions the Community Party unleashes when it promises liberalization on the one hand, but expects business as usual on the other. As a different state-run newspaper editorial stated: “The reality is that old media regulatory policies cannot go on as they are now. The society is progressing, and the management should evolve.”

It is unlikely that the Chinese and US economies will be ‘kick-starting’ the global economy in 2013. A more likely scenario is one in which Chinese workers find increasing cause to resist both economically and politically in mutually reinforcing struggles. When they do, international solidarity—especially from Western workers—will be critical.

Chinese workers at heart of protests

by J.Y. HODGE

IN APRIL 2012, a group of jewelry workers in Guangzhou barged into their factory manager’s office demanding payment of long-denied pension contributions.

The manager called the police and had them imprisoned, a historically typical story of Chinese labour dispute resolution. However, in this case, the workers’ colleagues, rather than acquiescing, rallied and demanded their co-workers’ release, as well as denouncing the company’s refusal to fund their pension. At the end of it, the company caved and acceded to all the workers’ demands.

In December, on the central East coast, in Jiangsu province, over 1,000 ship workers struck for two days against the internationally-owned Jiangsu Eastern Shipyard over the lack of payment of five months’ back wages. The strikers blocked the national expressway and the accompanying bridge over the Yangtze river, the major waterway in the country. The enterprise is typical of modern Chinese industry in that the vast majority of the employees are sub-contracted through labour agencies while a small number are formal employees

who enjoy better wages and job security. Both groups of workers struck over arrears as the formal employees’ learned from the sub-contractors’ protest that fighting back could win. As one said to *China Labour Bulletin*: “After the sub-contractors protested, the local government only cared about their problems and ignored ours. Neither the trade union nor the labour bureau helped us get our salary back.”

Also in December, hundreds of kilometers inland, approximately 600 workers at a state-owned oil firm in Shaanxi protested over unequal pay and the use of agency labour and they won collective bargaining rights in what is believed to be the first case of collective bargaining in a Chinese state-owned enterprise (SOE). Through December 2012 to January 9, 2013, when this research was done, the *China Labour Bulletin* online strike map (<http://www.numble.com/clbmape.html>) records 56 incidents—including taxi strikes in two provinces, industrial workers, sanitation, transport, healthcare, and teachers all leading job actions.

What do these events have in common? A sustained militancy that long-time observers argue has been absent for a generation or more. Chinese workers are now typically involved

in upwards of 30,000 workplace actions a year. The country’s labour arbitration and mediation committees (the state’s institutions of redress) handled over a million cases in 2010 alone. Actions are being led by a new generation of migrant workers who are younger, better educated and more articulate, and coming with higher expectations than the previous generation.

At a time of growing domestic wealth and consumption in China, workers are demanding a larger share of what they produce. The relatively high cost of living in urban areas, combined with the lack of respect accorded to migrants considered to be rural dwellers rangles many. Additionally, the government has made repeated announcements in recent years about programs to bridge the wealth divide. So many workers are taking the rhetoric at face value when confronted with harsh realities. Minimum wages have increased in some jurisdictions by as much as 30 per cent, yet workers in those areas continue to find themselves with nothing in their pockets at month-end but debtor’s notes.

Such militancy is a welcome change and hopefully the harbinger of a renewed and combative workers movement in China. But the

overall context remains poor. Chinese workers continue to have very limited economic prospects and almost none of the rights that are taken for granted in Canada. Most protests are ostensibly spontaneous and dissolve once grievances are addressed, leaving little material legacy of organizational skill and memory of struggle to lay the foundation for a sustained fight-back.

Analogously, the official trade union federation and the bulk of Chinese workers have little in common—this is possibly a good thing for workers, as the ACFTU has long been an arm of the state, the same state that decided what your education and job would be, and where you would work. The ACFTU’s official position for many years was to work with the state to increase labour productivity. This does not sound like an organization shaped to lead worker’s struggles.

However, the new Chinese militancy shows no signs of withering. The state has argued that it needs to increase domestic consumption and that can only happen with improvements in domestic wages and working conditions. The time, then, is ripe for a newly confident workforce to exploit the change in the wind and produce a storm for its own rights and freedoms.



Shut down the tar sands, no matter who owns them

by BRADLEY HUGHES

THE TAR Sands development in northern Alberta is an ecological nightmare, and an insult to indigenous land rights. This nightmare and this insult are profoundly Canadian—shaped by Canadian corporations and Canadian government policies.

In December 2012, the federal government approved the decision of the share-holders of Tar Sands oil company Nexen to allow itself to be taken over by the state-owned Chinese oil company China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC). At the same time, the federal government was in secret negotiations on a free trade deal with China, an issue that the Tories would not allow to be debated in Parliament. This led to much discussion about the role of Chinese government-owned corporations in Canada.

Opponents to the trade deal and the take-over of Nexen rightly point to the human rights record in China, and to a system that allows less democracy for its citizens than Canada’s. But some have gone further and see a danger—that the relationship between Canada and China could become the opposite of the traditional

relationship between a rich country and a poor country, that Canada could somehow become a colony of China.

In May 2012, Nikki Skuce from ForestEthics Advocacy analyzed the ownership of corporations exploiting the Tar Sands in a report called “Who Benefits? An Investigation of Foreign Ownership in the Tar Sands.” Based on share ownership of oil companies, she concluded that “the vast majority of Tar Sands production is not owned by Canadians,” and singles out the growing role of “rising Chinese Investment.” In the section on China, she claims that this is “positioning Canada as China’s resource colony.” The conclusion of the article is that the majority of profits and jobs created by the Tar Sands are being shipped outside of Canada.

Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party, while highlighting concerns about the trade deal between Canada and China, also came to the conclusion that Canada would “become the resources colony in that context.”

Canada does have a colonial history, but Canada is the colonizer. This is a story of colonial violence, carried out by the newly created Canadian state, directed against the Cree, Assiniboine, Métis and other peoples, as Canada

used force to consolidate its developing capitalist economy. Canada is not a victim of colonialism, but is rather a colonial power in its own right.

That is unlikely to change. China might be undergoing a massive industrial revolution, but it remains a society far more impoverished than Canada. In this context, singling out China’s role in the oil fields runs the risk of opening the door to racism in the environmental movement.

In an article on his blog, Paul Kellogg disputes that control over the Tar Sands is predominantly in non-Canadian hands. Using Statistics Canada data going back 60 years, he shows that Canadian companies have increased their share in the Tar Sands such that they now account for around two-thirds of those companies. While acknowledging that the majority of shares in companies responsible for the horror of the Tar Sands are not owned by Canadians, he points out that it is the one or two largest share-holders that effectively control a company. He argues that, in the case of Tar Sands oil companies, that control still remains in Canadian hands.

However, final control over the Tar Sands does not rest in the hands of the corporations exploiting them. It is shared between the Alberta

government, the Canadian government and the irrational market. The recent boom in the Tar Sands has occurred only because oil prices have risen. Capital, no matter of what nationality, goes where the profits are; when oil prices decline, so will Tar Sands development and extraction. In addition, there can only be mining if the provincial and federal governments allow it. The Tar Sands have been developed because successive Liberal and Tory governments have put profits before people and the environment.

This argument over who has more control and who is getting most of the profit and where the refining jobs are located leaves out the most important question: how can we build a movement to shut down the Tar Sands and replace those jobs with better paying climate jobs?

It doesn’t matter where the profits from the Tar Sands are going, exploiting this resource is destroying the immediate environment where mining is underway, the process is poisoning nearby rivers and it’s contributing to climate change that already kills 140,000 people a year, according to the World Health Organization.

Our movement needs to be absolutely clear: the Tar Sands are a Canadian creation, and it’s our responsibility to shut them down.

DISABILITY RIGHTS

US fails to ratify treaty

LAST MONTH, the US Senate refused to ratify the United Nations treaty on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The CRPD took the rights and freedoms laid out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and put them in the context of the lives of people with disabilities. Persons with disabilities consider it the most accurate and inclusive global statement regarding their own dignity, independence, personal empowerment and accessibility.

What makes this legislation even more remarkable is that it was drafted over a long period of time by people with disabilities from all over the world who saw how important it was to give their time to develop this treaty, rather than having to depend on others with only a limited understanding of their experiences and needs speak on their behalf. Great care was taken to make sure this treaty covered the details, from the obvious physical barriers to the more elusive reproductive justice. It is a treaty written by those who understand what it means to experience these barriers: people who understand that to a person who uses a wheelchair, equality isn't just about having equal access to the stairs of the court, but having access to the justice inside it; that to a person who is blind, equality isn't just about equal access to the heavy textbooks carried by her classmates, but to the education within them.

By not ratifying the treaty, the US fails to advance the human rights principles it once championed in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the landmark disability civil rights law upon which the CRPD is largely based. With that in mind, how did it all go wrong?

Most Senators voted for ratification of the treaty; they were only 8 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass it into law. The Senators who voted down the treaty—all of them Republican—gave unfounded excuses, citing American sovereignty and protecting parental rights. The real reasons are far more chilling.

One "right to life" website published this disturbing quote: "We congratulate the Senators who stood for American sovereignty by refusing to ratify this treaty... pro-life groups oppose this legislation because it leaves open the potential for the international community to permit sterilization or abortion for the disabled." Meanwhile, the CRPD clause that relates to reproductive justice, found in Article 25, calls for "free or affordable health care including the area of sexual and reproductive health and population-based health programs."

Whether it was the recession, reproductive rights or political grandstanding, not ratifying this treaty will leave another stain on American human rights history. If nothing else, it should serve as a reminder that our fight is not yet won.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

The struggle for abortion rights in Ireland

SAVITA HALAPPANAVAR died because women are not free to control their own bodies.

Halappanavar, who was a dentist in Galway, Ireland, was 17 weeks pregnant when she went to the hospital on October 21, bleeding from a spontaneous abortion (commonly known as a miscarriage). The hospital refused to treat Halappanavar because of Ireland's total ban on all abortion services—even though the fetus she was carrying was not viable. Over the next few days, Halappanavar developed severe infections, which led to multiple organ failure and, finally, her death. She was 31 years old. Her death was completely preventable.

Halappanavar's death sparked tremendous outrage in both Ireland and her native India. Thousands of people rallied in Ireland, demanding an end to the abortion ban, including an estimated 15,000 who marched from Dublin's Garden of Remembrance to the Irish parliament, where they held a candlelight vigil. This is highly significant and encouraging in a country where women's reproductive freedom has been consistently thwarted by the Catholic Church.

Following these protests, the Irish government announced upcoming legislation that will legalize abortion when medically necessary to save a woman's life. Although this is nowhere near true reproductive freedom, it represents the first crack in the Church-sponsored anti-abortion laws.

Public anger at the senseless death of Savita Halappanavar is best seen in the context of the ongoing struggle of women in Ireland and the UK to gain full control of their own bodies. Until now, all abortion has been illegal in Ireland, including in Northern Ireland—making it the only part of the UK where the 1967 law legalizing abortion does not apply. Irish women who need abortions are forced to travel to England, putting basic termination services far out of reach of working class and low-income women.

The first Marie Stopes clinic in Ireland (similar to Planned Parenthood in the US) opened in Belfast just weeks before Halappanavar's death, and the clinic offers limited abortion services. The clinic's opening sparked pro-choice rallies throughout Ireland and a renewed public debate, with thousands of women and men demanding Ireland repeal its outdated, anti-women, anti-choice laws.

A volunteer group called Abortion Services Network (ASN) raises money to help women travel from Ireland to England to obtain abortions. The group was founded by a pro-choice activist who previously helped run a similar grassroots organization in New York City. In the US, almost 90 per cent of counties have no abortion provider, and anti-abortion laws force women to negotiate expensive and time-consuming obstacles in order to terminate a pregnancy. These laws disproportionately affect low-income women, who are less likely to have access to contraception, face greater barriers to travel and child care, and usually lack health insurance.

Although focused on the practical needs of women choosing to terminate pregnancies, ASN's work has helped raise awareness of the need for abortion services in Ireland, and helped build public support for the opening of the Marie Stopes clinic. ASN and its American cousin, The Haven Coalition, are grassroots efforts created by women, for women, in places where government has actively obstructed women's reproductive rights.

Reproductive rights activists in Ireland and the UK are determined to continue their struggle. Savita Halappanavar should not have died, and she should be the last woman in Ireland forced to choose between an unwanted or unviable pregnancy and her life.

OPINION

Close encounters with revolutionary history

Historian, author and long-time socialist, John Riddell, has edited and translated the proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International.

TOWARD THE United Front, the newly available record of a world socialist conference in 1922, enables us to make the acquaintance of revolutionaries from every continent, just five years after workers and farmers took power in Russia. Provided here are examples of how to use this recently published work in order to better understand the issues facing the Comintern in 1922 and how to connect them with the issues we face today.

Socialists in Toronto have held several "self-guided study sessions," explaining and discussing the ideas of delegates at the 1922 conference, organized in Moscow by the Communist International. A session begins with a round of presentations, five minutes or less, each focused on a speech by a conference delegate recorded in *Toward the United Front*. Here are three samples from the study sessions, dealing with colonial liberation, international solidarity, and the work of socialists in cooperatives. The texts have been shortened slightly.

Unity with Muslim anti-imperialists

by Abbie Bakan, presenting on Tan Malaka

The Fourth Congress had a commitment to support national liberation movements against imperialism and colonialism, but applying this in practice on the ground proved a challenge. Even the allotment of a reasonable amount of time to discuss the "Eastern question" was contentious.

Some delegates identified the changing relationship between Marxist and pan-Islamic currents within the anti-imperialist struggle. Tan Malaka, a delegate to the Fourth Congress from the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia after 1945), addressed the promise of uniting in practice, and the dangers of a sectarian attitude.

"We have a long experience of pan-Islamism.... In Java there is quite a large association called Sarekat Islam (Islamic Federation), which includes many poor peasants. Between 1912 and 1916 this organization had perhaps a million members.... Our party, with 13,000 members, went into the popular movement and carried out propaganda there. In 1921 we were successful in getting Sarekat Islam to adopt our program. The Islamic association spoke out in the villages for control of the factories and for the slogan: All power to the poor peasants, all power to the proletarians!...

"But in 1921 a split occurred.... The government ... made use of the decision of the Second Congress of the Communist International: 'Struggle against Pan-Islamism!' What did they say to the ordinary peasants? They said: You see, the Communists do not merely want to split your religion, they also want to destroy it."

As Tan Malaka appealed to the delegates to understand this error, and to apply the tactic of the united front consistently, the chair interrupted, "Your time is up." But Tan Malaka replied: "I come from the Indies; I travelled for forty days." At this point, the proceedings indicate "Applause," and Tan Malaka continues to draw lessons for the Comintern.

Clearly there are rich lessons in these discussions for socialists today, who continue to challenge imperialism and to strive to build global solidarity.

Lessons from International Workers' Aid

by Suzanne Weiss, presenting on Willi Munzenberg

Willi Münzenberg spoke to the Fourth Comintern Congress as head of International Workers' Aid, a vast campaign to gather material support for the Soviet republic. Thirty-three years old, he had been a founding leader of the Communist Youth International.

The Workers' Aid campaign was the International's most successful united-front effort at that time.

There had been a famine in Russia the year before. The workers' aid campaign had raised millions for famine relief and economic reconstruction, equal to about half the Soviet investment fund that year.

The campaign drew support above all from workers—but also from those with more resources, Münzenberg said. "We are now raising a million-dollar loan in order to provide funds for our enterprises in Russia." Workers Aid equipped and managed its own factories there. "This loan project found a response in substantial layers of the middle class"—even from some bankers.

Some comrades see here a danger of petit-bourgeois backsliding, Münzenberg said. True, famine relief and economic aid is very tricky, but every method of struggle has its dangers.

When Münzenberg spoke, famine relief was over; the Soviet economy was recovering. Yet he called for continued economic aid, to help buy industrial tools for Russia. Why? The main reason, Münzenberg said, is to make it possible "to approach the broadest masses, whose ideas are still very rudimentary and who are otherwise hard to reach" with Communist ideas.

Some comrades object that the aid campaign is restricting the parties' revolutionary political struggle by taking away our best comrades and that it makes the party look like a charity, he said.

"These objections reveal that comrades do not know how to apply the united front policy," Münzenberg said. "The economic aid campaign provides us with a hundred starting points where we can pose the Russian question and, flowing from that, revolutionary questions in general. There are thousands of workers and party comrades who are inactive. It enables us to work with the broad masses in daily political struggle and to discuss proletarian revolution."

Have you ever taken part in anything like Workers' Aid to Soviet Russia? I have. When Washington made war against Nicaragua in the 1980s, I took part in the movement to provide political and economic support to the Nicaraguan people. Here in Canada, it was called "Tools for Peace," and it won major trade-union support.

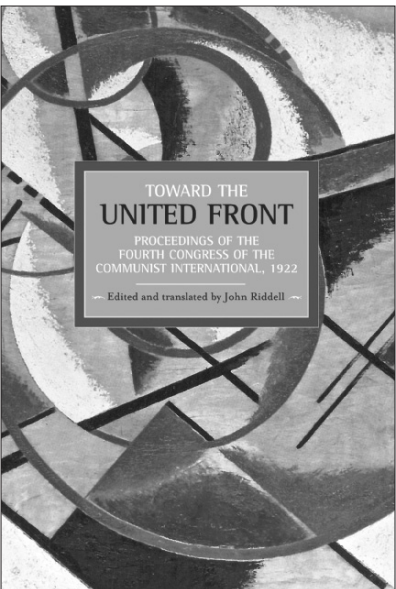
Another example is the Viva Palestina effort to break the siege of Gaza.

There will be other campaigns like this, and Münzenberg has good ideas on how to carry them out in the context of winning social hegemony.

The challenge of cooperation

by John Sharkey, presenting on Vladimir Meshcheriakov, Henri Lauridan, and Arthur Henriet

As a Toronto community activist living in the Bain Apartments Housing Cooperative, affectionately known as



The Bain, it was an eye-opener to read the debates on the role of the cooperative sector during the Russian Revolution. Absorbing the wealth of information about co-ops in *Toward the United Front*, I realized that not much has changed for the better over the past 90 years.

The November 1922 Communist International Congress was preceded by a six-day convention of international Communist cooperative activists. V.N. Meshcheriakov, a Russian Communist, presented their recommendations to the world congress.

Before the Russian Revolution, he said, his party had focused on winning proletarian hegemony through trade-union class struggle. It had largely ignored the cooperative movement, viewing the leadership of this economic sector as petit-bourgeois (as it still is today). As a result of this neglect, distribution of goods, especially food, to the revolutionary forces during the civil war was ineffective and had even been sabotaged by cooperative leadership.

Based on the Soviet Russian experience, the world congress recommended that national communist parties in other countries create cells within cooperatives to closely align them with the party and revolutionary trade unions and to win workers, women and youth to communist ideas. In this way other national communist parties would ideally control the cooperative sector in advance of their revolutions and thus avoid the oversights of the Russian party.

The previous world congress, in 1921, had adopted a similar position on cooperatives, but this decision had been poorly carried out in Western Europe. That led to considerable discord, particularly in France, about the party's resource allocation and leadership to the cooperative sector.

Two French delegates to the congress, Henri Lauridan and Arthur Henriet, made lengthy, somewhat pedantic, speeches in response to Meshcheriakov's presentation. They agreed with his general recommendations, but provided more details on cooperatives in France, especially housing and producer cooperatives. They both argued that these types of cooperatives should be approached with caution as they tended to inculcate ideas of capital accumulation into workers.

Although Lauridan acknowledged the importance of the cooperatives, especially in promoting socialized land use by the peasantry, he was skeptical about their revolutionary potential. Henriet, in keeping with the Bolshevik position, stressed that cooperatives were a vehicle for social transformation—but only after a workers' revolution.

Lauridan interrupted Henriet's speech repeatedly, raising procedural issues and ideological objections, as if to illustrate Meshcheriakov's opinion that the French Communist Party was badly divided.

Unfortunately, in all too many ways, this individualistic squabbling reminded me of the ongoing bickering at general meetings in The Bain...plus ça change!

There will be a book launch with editor and translator, John Riddell, on Sunday, February 3 at 4pm, at OISE, 252 Bloor St W, room 5280.

For information on the book and outlines for study sessions, visit <http://johnriddell.wordpress.com>

The 1,300-page volume, *Toward the United Front*, can be purchased for \$55 from Resistance Press Bookroom, 427 Bloor Street W., Toronto, ON M5S 1X7, (416) 972-6391, or from the publisher, Haymarket Books, haymarketbooks.org

REVIEWS



FILMS

Do you hear the people sing?

Les Misérables

Directed by Tom Hooper
Reviewed by Jessica Squires

SINCE DECEMBER 25, social media have been buzzing, especially on the left, about the movie *Les Misérables*, with Hugh Jackman and Anne Hathaway. With good reason: it's hard not to be inspired by a movie full of red flags and revolution. There are also lessons for the left in the story, which is always a good thing. But *Les Misérables* is also, simply, a fine movie.

Warning: spoiler alert.
Victor Hugo, the poet and novelist, was also a radical intellectual at a time in France when the bourgeoisie was still a force for political change. He participated in several revolutions, and was elected to the National Assembly twice: after the 1848 revolution, and after the Paris Commune.
During his life, he broke with the Catholic Church over its indifference to the plight of workers. Hugo wrote his novel, *Les Misérables*, while he was in self-imposed exile in England. While there, he also wrote two political pamphlets against the dictator Napoleon

III, only returning to France after the Paris Commune and the beginning of the Third Republic in 1870.
The events of *Les Misérables* are based on the ill-fated revolution attempt—the Paris Uprising—of 1832. Following the riotous revolution of 1830, which succeeded in drastically reducing the power of the monarchy, a movement largely made up of students hoped to repeat the past and finish the revolt against poverty and the desperate living conditions of Paris' burgeoning working class.
The students in the film's events clearly have Hugo's sympathy. Their desperate last stand and revolutionary anthems on the barricades at dawn don't fail to evoke tears from the sternest viewer.
The mistake the students made was to assume the people would rise spontaneously to follow them. But past mistakes are mistakes in retrospect, not necessarily for those who made them. The students of 1832 were trying to reproduce what they had, in fact, experienced: a largely spontaneous uprising of the masses. The working class movement and the selling-out by the bourgeoisie with the development of capitalism were only just beginning to be observed, let

alone theorized.
So when a student leader sings a lament for his lost comrades, the audience laments with him; and when Hugo's heroes Valjean and Fantine sing about their own motivations for their actions—love—the audience can't help but agree. Love, and passion for ideas, is a potent mix.
Today we know more about how movements work, especially since the further development and solidification of capitalism. But we, in 2013, after Occupy, the Arab Spring, the Printemps Érablé, and now Idle No More, are inspired by the events of 1832 in Paris as few other stories to hit the big screen have been able to inspire.
Jackman and Hathaway are brilliant. Russell Crowe's Javert is solid, Helena Bonham Carter and Sacha Baron Cohen are hilarious, and the performance by relative "unknowns" Eddie Redmayne and Samantha Barks in the roles of Marius and Eponine are flawless. *Les Misérables* uniquely combines the raw emotional power of musical theatre with the immediacy and intimacy of film as well as the hyper-realism of contemporary cinematic techniques. So see it on the big screen while you can.

Economic hit man

Killing Them Softly

Directed by Andrew Dominik
Reviewed by Faline Bobier

THIS IS a movie about what current-day America is without solidarity, without any kind of collective response to the economic meltdown of 2008, and the repercussions since then.
Often the most important questions in US political and social life are broached in movies about the mob—either the grandiose version in *The Godfather* I or II or the street hustler variety in Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*.
Killing Them Softly falls into this tradition with a kind of mid-level mob culture. Brad Pitt, in a great chilling performance, is the hired killer who's called in to fix a mess wrought by two guys barely surviving on the edge of drug addiction and getting by any way they can. They execute an ill-planned heist of a Mob-protected card game, complete with yellow rubber gloves, more suited to cleaning toilets than holding their guns. In spite of their goofy demeanor, they successfully make off with the dough, causing the local criminal economy to collapse. Pitt is then called in to fix the situation.
There are several great scenes between him and the fine character actor Richard Jenkins, playing a mob lawyer, discussing what the higher-ups want done about the "situation."
The film is directed by New Zealand-born Andrew Dominik, who also

directed Brad Pitt in another quintessentially American tale, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*.
He has a penchant for slow-motion close-ups and there is one here used to great effect near the end of the film where Pitt paces in slow motion amid bursting fireworks. The fireworks are for Barack Obama. The movie is set during the climax of the American presidential elections and the economic slump.
Killing Them Softly was filmed in New Orleans, although it's unrecognizable in the film, because most of what we see is urban desolation—parking lots, dumps, depressing tract housing. Fitting, nonetheless, that in a film that points to the utter uselessness of mainstream politics in the US, amid shots of Bush and Obama vying to 'fix' America, the setting should be the same city that suffered through Hurricane Katrina and was abandoned by Bush and his cronies.
But Obama offers very little to challenge Bush's dog-eat-dog society, especially knowing now what we didn't necessarily know then. At the beginning of the movie, we hear Obama promising "the freedom to make of our lives what we will."
This must seem like a sick joke to most of the characters in *Killing Them Softly*, although by and large they are not following any of the election messaging. It's simply there in the background, in the same way that Warren Beatty used the Nixon re-election campaign in 1972, as a backdrop to his commentary on the

state of US society in *Shampoo*.
Killing Them Softly sets up a commentary on the economic collapse in the microcosm of the mob world, which is mirrored in the larger society. These are all characters for whom the struggle to survive is about avoiding the violent retribution of their own.
There are virtually no police or agents of the state in this movie. The gangsters don't need them because they are very much a self-regulating society. And violence is the final regulator.
You could say these people live by a very harsh code. But, again, if you look at what happened to ordinary people during and after the economic meltdown in the US—how many people lost their homes, their jobs, their pensions; and how little their government cared, then or now—it seems a short step to the kind of jockeying for position and individualism that runs rampant in *Killing Them Softly*.
Theirs is also a very misogynistic world. The only woman in the entire film is a black prostitute and the casual contempt with which women are treated in the conversations between the two hapless thieves speaks to the extreme alienation of this world.
In the last scene of the film, Pitt punctuates this desolate world view when he says, "America isn't a country. It's a business. Now pay me my fucking money."
Luckily, struggles such as Occupy Wall Street, the fight-backs in Wisconsin and Michigan, and the Chicago teachers' victory point to another way out of the crisis caused by capitalism.

LEFT JAB

John Bell

When history means managing the message

AS I write, Stephen Harper continues to ignore the hunger strike of Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence. In this context, it is worth recalling a speech he made to the 2009 G8 meeting in Pittsburgh, extolling the virtues of Tory-ruled Canada. Among other things, he made this rather astounding statement: "We also have no history of colonialism. So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them."

Canada is a creation of imperialism and violence. The conquest of indigenous First Nations was a genocidal act, from the extinction of the Beothuk people on the Atlantic coast to the use of British gun boats to destroy the communities and cultures of the Pacific Northwest. That history took different forms as French colony was conquered by British Empire, and colonial status was succeeded by nationhood. But a domestic genocide it remains.
Whatever else he is, Stephen Harper is neither stupid nor uneducated. Less than a year earlier, he had publicly apologized to the survivors of Canada's horrific Residential School system, guilty of an official policy of "aggressive assimilation"—cultural genocide is the term preferred by most First Nations people. The explicit mission of the Residential Schools was to "kill the Indian and save the man." So what can we make of Harper's ridiculous pronouncement to the G8?
It only begins to make sense when seen as part of a bigger project to rewrite history, to sanitize the violence of imperial conquest, to justify the plunder of natural resources found on or under land belonging to First Nations, and to promote future military adventure at home and abroad by glorifying a mythical military past.
I've written in previous issues about how the phony "celebration" of the War of 1812 fits into this project. Harper's Tories are throwing millions of dollars away to celebrate a "victory" that is historically dubious, ignoring the real story of pacifism, draft-dodging and desertion that characterized the colonial population in 1812.
But the grand project of Tory historical revisionism goes much deeper. It involves cutting funding and access to libraries and archives, where the raw data of our real past stories reside. It involves huge cuts to Statistics Canada, and privatizing the task of gathering data to military mega-corporation Lockheed-Martin. It involves muzzling scientists and cutting environmental protections.
So it is not surprising that the Tories are changing the name and mandate of the celebrated Museum of Civilization to the Museum of Canadian History. As McGill history professor Allan Greer told the *Globe and Mail*, "There is a kind of a narrowing of a sense of the Canadian past with this emphasis on the military and on deeds of State. The War of 1812 matters, Confederation matters, but the discomfort comes from the sense that so much else is being erased and getting less attention."
As the mandate changes, expect a loss of curatorial autonomy, and more direct and in-

direct government interference into what parts of our history are displayed, and how they are portrayed.
Much of the old Museum of Civilization focused on archeology, and celebrated the richness of First Nations cultures. In this way it reinforced the idea that these were not just primitive bands of poorly organized hunters and gatherers, but rich and well-developed societies deserving to be dealt with as sovereign nations. These ideas are meant to be enshrined in the museum building itself, designed by celebrated Métis architect Douglas Cardinal.
This is anathema to the Tories and their plans to gouge as much profit from the land as they can, as quickly as they can. That requires that they sweep aside the First Nations that reside on the land, have never ceded their control of the land, and whose cultures put defence of the environment at the very centre of their world view.
Museum of Civilization workers are privately complaining, but speaking out in public would result in loss of livelihood and being black-listed in their profession. To see what their future will entail, look no further than the new Canadian Museum of Human Rights, slated to open in Winnipeg sometime in 2014.
It was supposed to be open this coming year, but cost overruns and an ongoing crisis of staffing has pushed that back. The pricetag is at \$351 million and counting. And already 24 employees have been fired or have quit.
The departing workers have not spoken publicly about problems at the museum—since they are bound by a gag order telling them "not to disparage or make negative comments, publicly or privately, oral or written about the [museum], including employees of the [museum]. Any breach of this provision will result in forfeiture of some or all of the settlement proceeds."
The fact that disgruntled employees of a Museum of Human Rights must sign away their right to free speech is beyond ironic. We're entering Orwellian territory here.
One person who has not been so gagged is Mary Eberts. She is a law professor and expert in women's equity issues, and was a member of the museum's advisory council of human rights experts. On quitting the museum, she openly complained about a culture of political interference, a toxic workplace and poor morale.
With much of the funding coming from private donors, solicited by Tory politicians, would this Museum of Human Rights have the nerve to exhibit the human rights abuses heaped on Canada's First Nations, past and present? What about the gross rights abuses taking place in Palestine? The exodus of museum workers and human rights experts is answer enough.
Shrugging off the signs of crisis, professional complaints and political interference, Museum CEO Stuart Murray stated: "This is going to be a museum for human rights, not human wrongs."
Chief Theresa Spence wants to tell the genuine story of her people and their treatment at the hands of successive Canadian governments. Harper wants to silence her and control the message. That, in a nutshell, is what rewriting history is all about.

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.



DEMAND GOOD JOBS, PUBLIC SERVICES WORKER'S RIGHTS & RECALL THE LEGISLATURE

RALLY FOR RIGHTS DEMOCRACY

Resisting Bill C-377 and the attack on union rights

by RITCH WHYMAN

JUST AS the state of Michigan, the birthplace of industrial unions in North America, was passing anti-union "right-to-work" legislation, the federal Tories were passing Bill C-377—forcing unions to publicly report their finances and the salaries of higher level union officials. This is part of a massive attack on unions aiming to end the Rand Formula, and it's critical to remember the historical lessons of union struggles to build resistance to the new assaults.

The claim is that, because union dues, like professional fees paid by doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc., are deductible, unions benefit from the public purse and therefore should be accountable to the non-dues paying public.

Of course, this is just a barely hidden sleight-of-hand to attack unions and workers' organizations. The bill never suggested that professional associations who have the same tax benefit, or religious organizations, face the same policy. Nor do corporations that receive large tax breaks and incentives face similar legislation.

Furthermore, every union is governed by a constitution and almost all have clauses that make regular financial reporting to the members mandatory. In many provinces, the labour laws force annual audits to be reported and made available to the membership.

Bill C-377

Bill C-377 is designed to do two things: feed into the ongoing war against workers, and force unions to spend money and expose themselves financially to employers.

Unions will now have to publicly report how much cash reserves they have, how much they have in strike funds, how much they spend on organizing campaigns and more. This clearly gives employers who are fighting their employees' right to unionize an upper hand. It will allow them to see what resources employees have to fight for their rights. Furthermore, it would allow employers to see how many resources employees have to strike, allowing them to wait out strikes or break unions by drain-

ing resources through the courts and arbitration.

While this bill may be ruled illegal and an unwarranted intrusion on privacy, it has set the stage for further attacks on unions. Already Tory MP Pierre Poilievre has begun to publicly raise the prospect of introducing US-style "right-to-work" policies at the federal level and the Ontario Tories have made the introduction of right-to-work a main plank of their electoral platform under leader Tim Hudak.

These attacks all have the intent of undermining the ability of workers to resist austerity and ending the current state of laws governing unions and employers, known as the Rand Formula.

Rand Formula

The Rand Formula, named after Justice Ivan Rand, was introduced in the wake of a massive strike wave in 1945 that began with the shutting of Ford in Windsor.

The "formula" basically means that, where a majority of employees vote in favour forming a union at their workplace, all employees—whether members or not—must pay dues to the union as they benefit from gains made by the union. In essence, the formula states that no employee gets a free ride.

Further, the "formula" states that employers are to deduct dues from employees "automatically" and forward them to the union, a process known as dues check-off.

This was a victory for workers as it prevented employers from starving out workers during strikes. However, it also prevented workers from going on strike during the length of a collective agreement. So the Rand Formula was a trade-off: employers were forced to recognize unions and workers were prevented from striking during a collective agreement.

This gain has allowed unions and workers to have the ability to push back against employers and collectively pool resources to challenge multinationals and big business.

Today, that is under threat and it is unclear how unions will respond.

Strategy and tactics

On one hand, the NDP leadership and the leadership of major unions are putting efforts into legal chal-

lenges against C-377. Some unions have begun to raise the issue with the membership, but few unions have recognized how serious the threat is.

On the other hand, some unions and activists have begun to look at what happened in the US and figure out how to better prepare not just for right-to-work legislation but to use that fight to strengthen the union on the shop floor.

The stark reality is that legal challenges won't stop Harper from continuing to undermine unions and workers' rights. The lesson for union activists has to be to look back at how we won the Rand Formula in the first place.

The Rand Formula was won through militant action. The workers in Windsor struck against Ford's anti-union policies and shut the plant down by mobilizing not just employees but the community. They surrounded Ford's main plant with cars and forced the company to recognize the union.

This strike followed by those across the country forced the ruling class to back down.

If we want to stop the Tory attacks on workers and unions, we need to look at what the parliamentary road did for workers in Wisconsin. There, workers and allies mobilized in unheard of numbers to stop right-to-work, a huge momentum was built up and rank-and-file activists mobilized in ways not seen in years. Unfortunately, the union leadership wasted this mobilization by putting its energies and resources into electoral campaigns to get Democrats elected. The Democrats refused to fight for union rights and provide an alternative to the Republicans so they lost; it was the movement from below that forced the courts to revoke anti-worker legislation.

The strategy that has the best chance of beating the Tories is the sort of strategy that won the reforms in the first place: mass militant action.

The students in Quebec, teachers in Chicago, workers in Greece and the indigenous Idle No More movement show the way forward.

That's why the first step in stopping the Tories isn't a legal challenge but supporting the Idle No More demonstrations across Canada, and in Ontario mobilizing all out for the demonstrations at the Liberal Party Convention on Jan 26.

international socialist events

TORONTO

Fighting Austerity in North America: from Walmart to Bill 115

Speakers: Elizabeth Clinton, OUR Walmart campaigner from Texas; Ritch Whyman, International Socialists
Tue, Jan 15, 7pm
OISE, 252 Bloor, room 2227
Info: reports@socialist.ca

Ideas to Change the World

One-day political conference
Sun, Mar 3, 11:30am
OISE, 252 Bloor St W
Info & registration:
ideas2changetheworld.org

YORK UNIVERSITY

Socialism and Indigenous Rights

Speaker: Evan Johnston
Wed, Jan 16, 2:30pm
307 Student Centre
Info:
yorkusocialists@gmail.com

UNIVERSITY of TORONTO

What is Marxism?

Speaker: Chris Bruno
Mon, Jan 21, 3pm
Sid Smith, 100 St. George,
room 1083

Are all political parties useless?

Speaker: Darren Edgar
Mon, Feb 11, 3pm
Sid Smith, 100 St. George

The liberal defence of murder: 'humanitarian' intervention

Speaker: Yusr Al Bahrani
Mon, Feb 25, 3pm
Sid Smith, 100 St. George

How do ideas change?

Speaker: Evan Johnston
Mon, Mar 11, 3pm
Sid Smith, 100 St. George

Info:
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Info: ottawa.socialists@gmail.com

HALIFAX

Info: halifax.socialists@gmail.com

ALBERTA

Info: reports@socialist.ca

VANCOUVER

Info: vancouver.socialists@gmail.com

peace & justice events

TORONTO

Rally for Rights & Democracy

Sat, Jan 26, 1pm
Rally at Allan Gardens
followed by march to
Ontario Liberal convention
at Maple Leaf Gardens
Info: http://ofl.ca/

25 Years Since the Morgentaler Decision

Mon, Jan 28, 7pm
Innis Town Hall, 2 Sussex
Ave (at St. George)
Organized by the Ontario
Coalition for Abortion Clinics

Toward the United Front: Translations for the 21st Century

Book launch with editor and
translator John Riddell
Sun, Feb 3, 4pm
OISE, 252 Bloor, room
5280

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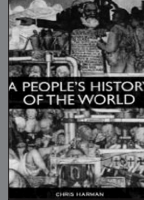
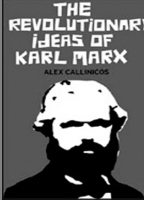
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RESISTANCE
PRESS
BOOK ROOM

OTTAWA TEACHERS

by CHANTAL SUNDARAM

MANY HUNDREDS turned out in the cold wet snow in Ottawa to confront the Liberal leadership debate at Carleton University on December 18.

Most represented were teachers, carrying placards of the elementary (ETFO) and secondary (OSSTF) teachers' unions, with the clear slogan: Kill Bill 115, the legislation that attacks fundamental free collective bargaining rights for teachers.

But they were joined by flags and banners from OPSEU, CUPE, CAW, PSAC, CAUT, and a banner that read "Students and Workers: Same Fight."

Due to alleged security concerns over the protest, the building was closed and student exams were moved elsewhere. Protesters confronted everyone entering, chanting "Kill the Bill!" but posing no threat of violence.

Liberal MP Gerard Kennedy came outside and attempted to glad-hand the crowd, campaigning for protester votes on the basis of his supposed opposition to Bill 115. And while some shook his hand, hoping for a commitment to fight for the repeal of the Bill, others heckled him for his complicity in his party's assault on union rights.

It was a show of force in the Ottawa area, following the ETFO one-day picket lines the week before. It is surely a sign of more labour unrest—and support for it—to come.

SUPPORT OUR TEACHERS

by PAM FRACHE

ON DECEMBER 18, the ETFO's "Super Tuesday" action saw walkouts across some of the province's largest school boards, including Toronto, Durham, Peel and others. In total, the actions mobilized some 35,000 teachers.

In my neighbourhood, some Catholic teachers joined the picket line in solidarity, as did teachers represented by the OSSTF. Baked goods were distributed and car horns were honked in solidarity. The window signs proclaiming that teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions were a big hit with both teachers and passers-by. Some urged us to go door-to-door with them and suggested posting them up around another elementary school just a few blocks south.

Teachers were resolved and buoyant. It's not about money—it's about fairness and respect, they said. "We're all losing a day's pay to do this, but that's not reported in the news," said one. "But it's important to stand up to this government; they need to know that they can't just ride roughshod over us."

"The majority of elementary teachers are women," said another. "This government is attacking women."

One teacher on the line had been part of the historic teachers' action in 1973, when mass resignations were the only tools teachers had to improve working and learning conditions. That action helped secure Ontario teachers' right to strike in the first place.

Anybody can show support for Ontario teachers and their struggle to defend quality education in Ontario by visiting picket lines in their neighbourhood—even just to say hello!

Visit socialist.ca to download a solidarity sign to display in your window at home or work or in your school or neighbourhood. Download a solidarity petition to circulate among parents, students and anyone who wants to show their support for teachers. Then fax them to the union: 416-642-2424.

On December 13, 1,500 high school students rallied at Queen's Park to 'Kill Bill 115'



TEN YEARS LATER, HARKATS MORE DETERMINED THAN EVER

by JESSICA SQUIRES

ON INTERNATIONAL Human Rights Day, Mohamed "Moe" Harkat and his wife Sophie "celebrated" their ten-year anniversary: it was 2002 when Moe was arrested on a so-called security certificate.

Since then, Moe has been detained for years without charge and without access to the information on which the government bases its claims that he is or will be involved in terrorism. A full year of his detention was spent in solitary confinement. Even today he must wear a tracking bracelet and report to the Canada

Border Services Agency once a week. He cannot leave Ottawa without permission.

In 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that security certificates are unconstitutional. However, the government made only cosmetic changes to the regulations, leaving the central problem intact. The Supreme Court will hear another appeal on the constitutionality of the security certificate regime this year. On December 10 (International Human Rights Day), supporters of the Harkats and their fight for basic due process and justice gathered on Parliament Hill, holding symbolic signs listing ten negative aspects of their experience, one for each

year of Moe's detention. A press conference in the centre block included Green Party leader Elizabeth May, the New Democratic Party caucus, Amnesty International and the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group.

Human rights activists will be watching closely this year because Canada is also under scrutiny by the United Nations human rights process, and will have to answer questions about why it has not responded to the criticisms levelled against it in 2008.

To support the Harkats' campaign against security certificates, please sign the Statement Against Security Certificates by visiting www.justiceforharkat.com

FOOD SERVICE WORKERS DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

by LAURA KAMINKER

ONE OF the most exciting developments currently unfolding among the working class in North America is the organizing efforts of non-unionized workers. Non-union workers make up about 70 per cent of the labour force in Canada and about 88 per cent in the US. This represents untold volumes of untapped power.

The recent actions of Walmart workers, while significant and exciting, are only one of several groups of non-union workers organizing to improve their own working conditions.

In September 2012, New York City restaurant workers walked off the job and won a historic victory—a collective bargaining agreement that is a first for low-wage food-service workers, many of whom are undocumented people.

Twenty-three workers at one Hot and Crusty café (part of a chain) were organizing for more than a year, with support from Occupy Wall Street and the Laundry Workers Center, a workers' support group. The Hot and Crusty workers were earning below minimum wage, were forced to work overtime (sometimes as much as 70 hours per week) without a higher hourly pay, and endured verbal and sexual harassment on a regular basis. They formed an independent union, the Hot and Crusty Workers' Association, and demanded salary increases and improved conditions.

In retaliation, their employer closed the restaurant. Workers occupied the store, holding a workers' assembly until forced to leave by the police. Undaunted, the workers opened their own café on the sidewalk outside the closed restaurant, serving coffee, bagels, and donuts in exchange

for voluntary donations.

After only four days, the company asked to negotiate—but the workers rejected the company's initial offers. Like restaurant workers throughout the US, most Hot and Crusty workers are undocumented, meaning they cannot work legally in the US. Employers routinely use the workers' immigration status as an excuse for dangerous and unhealthy working conditions and illegally low pay, believing undocumented workers will be afraid to speak up. In this case, the company's initial offers would have applied only to people with official work permits. In a strong show of solidarity and commitment, the Hot and Crusty Association workers rejected attempts to divide them.

Over the course of a 55-day picket, the workers received a tremendous outpouring of support, including thousands of petition signatures from the community (a high-income area), daily visits from students and faculty from nearby Hunter College, and letters of support from dozens of unions and labor organizations. Eventually, the owner sold the restaurant and the new ownership negotiated in good faith. The Hot and Crusty Workers' Association now has a three-year collective agreement, truly a ground-breaking moment for food-service employees in North America.

The agreement includes wage increases, paid vacation and sick time, seniority, grievance and arbitration procedures, and union recognition, and is the first of its kind for food-service workers in North America. The agreement is the direct result of the workers' own intelligence, determination, and courage—and their unity.

Also in New York City, 200 fast-food employees walked off their jobs in November

2012, demanding a \$15 per hour minimum pay—a figure slightly more in line with the towering cost of living in that city. With the slogan "We can't survive on \$7.25," workers from dozens of fast-food outlets, including McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's, organized under the banner of Fast Food Forward. It was the largest strike ever in the US against the fast food industry, which reaps some \$200 billion a year in profits. Fast Food Forward emphasizes that better pay for workers benefits the entire community, calling for "better pay for a stronger New York."

Along with pay increases, Fast Food Forward seeks health benefits and reliable scheduling. Fast-food workers cannot attend school or organize adequate child care, because their scheduling is often so erratic. The restaurants also force workers to work "off the clock"—with no pay at all—by scheduling tasks either before workers punch in or after they punch out.

In Chicago, retail and food-service workers formed Workers Organizing Committee of Chicago. Like their sisters and brothers in New York, the Chicago workers received support from community groups but did the organizing themselves. WOCC's "Fight For Fifteen" campaign calls for a \$15 per hour minimum wage. The workers have organized pickets and marches through the Michigan Avenue shopping area, and in an upscale, Michigan Avenue vertical mall, unfurled a banner reading "\$1.5 billion"—that's the combined salaries of the CEOs of their employer companies last year. WOCC represents workers of more than 100 different employers, from widely different backgrounds, all united in their struggle to improve their own lives.

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

Ontario austerity and rank-and-file resistance

THE ATTACKS on working class people and the poor are intensifying as we witness the passage of "right-to-work" legislation in the state of Michigan, which was once the heart of union strength in the United States. In Ontario, Tim Hudak, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, is calling for the same. The Liberal government has passed Bill 115, which allows it to impose concessions contracts on teachers and educational workers, taking away their democratic right to collective bargaining.

We had previously seen the federal Conservatives legislate against postal workers, airline workers and rail workers, removing their right to strike. Corporations and governments at every level are set on a course to take away the gains that workers have achieved over past decades.

In Toronto, Mayor Rob Ford came to power denouncing public sector workers and the "gravy train" of public services which "we could no longer afford." A major fight-back from the broader labour movement and the community was able to stop many of the cuts but there were still significant losses. CUPE 416 and 79, which represent city workers, accepted concession contracts.

The library workers went on strike for over two weeks and pushed back the worst of the attacks with broad community support and active participation of the rank and file. We also saw the Machinists at Air Canada stage a wildcat strike in support of suspended workers that had "slow clapped" the federal minister of labour who had legislated against them. The work stoppage spread from Toronto to British Columbia and Quebec.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario has been calling rotating one-day strikes across the province, affecting every school district. Polls show that 47 per cent of the population supports the teachers, while 35 per cent do not. We are in

a major fight for the hearts and minds of workers and the communities they serve.

These actions give a glimpse of working class power and shows the spirit of resistance that we saw in the Occupy movement and the Quebec student strike. Both young and old are taking to the streets and picket lines to defend their rights but the fight must be broadened.

The January 26 rally called by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) for 1pm at the Liberal Party Convention in Toronto is an important step forward. Public and private sector unions are coming together against the austerity agenda and attacks on unions.

Unfortunately, the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union (OPSEU), which has withdrawn its support from the OFL, is calling its members out to a separate rally in the morning. This is unnecessarily divisive and is putting the squabbles of union leaders over the interests of the members. Some OPSEU members are organizing to join the afternoon rally in solidarity with the broader labour movement which is an important step forward.

This important march and demonstration rally must be built and followed up upon. At a recent meeting of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, a motion was passed calling for a steward/activist assembly on March 2. The assembly will bring rank-and-file workers together to initiate a major campaign to organize in our workplaces and engage as many members as possible in the fight against the anti-worker agenda.

The meeting was very spirited and workers came forward recognizing what was at stake and pledging their support to engage with their fellow workers. The intent is to take the offensive and fight for greater organizing rights, stronger labour laws and living wage policies. The only way that this can succeed is if rank-and-file workers take up the challenge, push for action, and show the way forward by building a strong fight-back in every workplace.

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SocialistWorker

Harper's energy policy: more oil, coal and gas

by NAZISH AZIZ,
ANNA ROIK & JOHN BELL

LAST YEAR was a beautiful year of organizing against the Northern Gateway oil pipeline project. The proposed \$6-billion pipeline will transport Tar Sands crude from northern Alberta to the port of Kitimat, BC.

Thousands have written or spoken to the Joint Review Panel for the project—set up by the Harper government—and everywhere the panel went it was greeted with protests. In October, thousands rallied in front of the BC legislature in Victoria.

In December 2012, Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson signed onto the Save the Fraser declaration and proclaimed December 3 “Save the Fraser Declaration Day” in Vancouver. This indigenous law declaration—signed by the Tahltan Central Council, the Tahltan Band Council, the BC Métis Federation and more than 130 other First Nations organizations—works to prevent the building of the pipeline and tankers from crossing the province.

A poll conducted in BC in December shows that opposition to the pipeline project has increased over the year—now 60 per cent are opposed, while 31 per cent are in favour.

Despite this opposition, Federal Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver stated that he still believes the pipeline will be built. Oliver considered only those in favour of the pipeline as open-minded. It seems fossil fuels have become the focal point for the federal government.

Enbridge has acknowledged that most jobs created by the pipeline will be short-term construction work. Only about 35 to 40 long-term jobs would be created at the Kitimat marine terminal, with some additional



jobs in pipeline maintenance. But the federal government and oil companies continue to salivate over potential profits while dismissing indigenous sovereignty and the long-term effects of oil spills, damage to coastlines and climate change.

Coal ports

Vancouver is set to become North America's largest coal exporting port if the Port Metro Vancouver Corporation approves two new permits. These coal exports could release more carbon into the atmosphere than the oil exports from the planned Northern Gateway Pipeline.

Fraser Surrey Docks, near

New Westminster, and Neptune Terminals, in North Vancouver, applied last June to increase their coal exports. Neptune Terminals applied to increase their exports of metallurgical coal, used for making steel, from 12 million to 18 million tonnes per year. Fraser Surrey Docks, however, is looking to build a new terminal solely for the export of thermal coal, primarily to Asian markets. Thermal coal is burned and releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The new terminal will not export coal from BC's expanding coalmines. They will import the coal by rail from Wyoming, starting at 4 million tonnes per year and potentially doubling soon after. The US coal industry is looking for an alternative port after protests in Oregon and Washington have already stopped one of six proposed export terminals. As well, demand for coal has fallen off in the US as the country has increased both renewable energy production and shale gas extraction. The industry needs new markets to remain profitable.

Port Metro Vancouver was set up by the Government of Canada in 2008, and is responsible for shipping and port-related land and sea use. It is the sole entity in charge of applications such as those by Neptune and Fraser Surrey Docks. Port Metro Vancouver makes decisions without formal public hearings and local politicians cannot influence its decisions.

Protests have been held recently in opposition to the pending permits. Local residents are concerned about the potential for pollution from the increased coal exports. Health organizations, including the BC Lung

Association and Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, have written letters expressing their concern. Not enough research has been done on the cumulative regional health effects from increased coal dust in the air and diesel pollution from trains passing through residential areas—at times within a kilometer of schools, daycares and seniors' homes.

Coal dust settling into the Fraser River delta and offshore areas will likely affect the sensitive salmon populations and their habitat. On December 7, a coal ship being escorted by two tugboats ran into the causeway at Westshore Terminals in Delta, BC, dumping a third of a rail car of coal into the ocean. The cause of the crash remains unknown, as does the eventual environmental impact of that much coal—which contains toxic heavy metals such as mercury and lead—being dumped into shallow water.

Port Metro is considering the environmental and neighbourhood issues of the coal terminal expansions—noise and air pollution—but not the climate change implications. It claims the “port is here to facilitate trade” and ensure the coal is transported safely.

Fracking

There is a fortune of fossil fuel underfoot, wherever a layer of shale rock forms part of the bedrock. All that is required to release the fuel—mostly natural gas—is to break up that rock layer by injecting massive amounts of pressurized fluids. The process is called hydraulic fracturing, better known as fracking. And there are potential fracking shale beds under much of North America. Along

with creating billions of dollars in potential profit, more and more evidence is emerging that fracking creates a legion of environmental problems—from depleting the water table, to poisoning ground water, to causing earthquakes.

Like extracting synthetic crude from the Tar Sands, releasing gas through fracking is difficult and expensive. The method has been used on small-scale local projects for decades, but now fracking, along with increased exploitation of coal, is the centerpiece for US energy policy. US government data shows that the fossil fuel industry intends to drill more than 100 new wells this year.

Fracking uses huge amounts of water. Industry sources admit a single well may use over 5 million gallons over its lifetime. Some of the most heavily exploited fracking areas, like north Texas, are in semi-arid plains regions where the subterranean aquifer is the only water source. Though surely not the only cause, fracking contributes to the on-going drought that has plagued the US mid-west in recent years.

The fluids used in fracking are a combination of water, sand and chemicals. Energy corporations do not publicly report what chemicals they use. There are many instances where toxic wastewater has migrated back into the local aquifer, poisoning well water for entire communities. Additionally, natural gas can be released into the water table. The documentary film Gasland introduced the frightening image of people being able to ignite the gas and flammable waste coming out of their kitchen taps.

Every fracking injection

creates a mini-earthquake. They often trigger local fault lines to cause more serious quakes. Some areas, like Guy, Arkansas, have experienced hundreds of quakes, dubbed “swarm” quakes. While not severe enough to individually cause surface destruction—the largest Arkansas quake had a magnitude of 4.3—there is concern that buildings are being weakened and may become dangerous. These quakes do allow gas and toxic wastewater to escape from their shale strata, into aquifers or even escaping to the surface. Health problems result from water and air pollution.

Many European countries have banned or placed temporary moratoria on fracking. In the US, some communities (Pittsburgh and others) and entire states (Vermont, New Jersey) have at least temporarily halted fracking. This results from growing grassroots opposition. Meanwhile, the oil and gas industry defends the practice and has forced a compliant federal government to exempt them from serious environmental scrutiny.

In 2004, Shell acquired rights to natural gas and petroleum covering over 4,000 square kilometers in northwest BC. This region, known as the Klappan Valley or the Sacred Headwaters, is the origin of the Skeena, Nass and Stikine rivers. During that year and the next, Shell drilled three exploratory wells. Opposition to the project led Shell to stop drilling and then in 2008 to agree to a four-year moratorium on exploration. On December 18, the day the moratorium was due to expire, Shell Oil, the Province of BC and the Tahltan Central Council came to an agreement to extend the moratorium indefinitely.

This decision by Shell to end its exploration in the area, and for the Liberal government to agree to issue no future petroleum and natural gas tenure in the area, comes due to the well-organized opposition to this project as well as the still growing opposition to the Northern Gateway pipeline.

Across North America there has been rapid growth in natural gas drilling, so much so that the price has dropped and as a consequence the number of new wells being drilled has also declined.

It is this combination of the determined and spreading opposition to the Enbridge pipeline and the lowering gas prices that drove Shell out of the Sacred Headwaters.

The ban does not extend to other shale-bearing areas of BC, and the province and fossil fuel industry still plan to use fracking to release gas to be liquefied and shipped to Asian markets by supertankers.

Canada has the technology to eliminate fossil fuels usage by replacing them with renewable energy sources. We need to build a movement to make this happen before it's too late.

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