

SocialistWorker

www.socialist.ca

\$2 | no. 559 | February 2014



The election that won by demanding a \$15 minimum wage **Page 5**

HARPER'S BUDGET: A HAZARD TO YOUR HEALTH

IN THE midst of economic crisis, Harper continues to "balance the budget" on the backs of the 99%.

The abstract and misleading mantra of "deficit-reduction" obscures the content of revenue and spending policies that transfer wealth to corporations and the military while ignoring the climate crisis, and the budget's timing (February 11) is designed to reduce scrutiny amidst the Olympics.

"Deficit-reduction"

Much is made of the \$18 billion federal deficit, but little about what produced it. Harper responded to capitalism's latest economic crisis by spending billions on bailing out the banks, while continuing the Liberal drive to undermine government revenue through tax cuts for corporations and the 1%. The latest addition is the proposed income-splitting for families with children, which would provide no benefit to 86 per cent of families and yet cost \$5 billion—the same amount that could fund a national childcare program benefiting far more people, especially women.

The government is also giving oil companies \$1 billion in subsidies, whose tar sands and pipelines undermine First Nations,

produce deadly spills like in Lac-Mégantic, and drive costly climate disasters like the floods in Alberta and Toronto. The resulting deficit then became an excuse to cut public services—scapegoating small but essential programs like the Interim Federal Health program for refugees.

According to Erin Weir, economist with the United Steelworkers, "The federal Conservative government has reduced the size of the Canadian state almost to record low levels relative to the Canadian economy." While Harper is cutting the public sector and public services, he is strengthening the Canadian state's repressive apparatus—prisons, spying and the military. Federal spending between 2010 and 2017 will have declined by \$90 billion, but just a few months ago Harper announced \$100 billion for 15 new battle-ships. This is part of the Canada First Defense Strategy of spending \$490 billion on the military over 20 years—clearly not intended for veterans that Harper sees as mere cannon fodder, who don't deserve pensions or services.

Do-nothing

According to NDP finance critic Peggy Nash, "the Conservatives are signalling it will be a do-

nothing budget. If they are going to wait another year or more to do anything, they are really abandoning the unemployed and abandoning all the families that are feeling so squeezed economically."

But what does the NDP leadership propose instead? Limits on ATM fees. The NDP leadership has launched a campaign on "making life more affordable," that focuses in consumer frustrations around bank fees and gas prices. So nothing on the bank bailouts, corporate tax cuts or military spending that produced the deficit, nothing on challenging the tar sands that are destroying the planet on which we all depend. Instead there's just the call to renew a small program of tax credits toward home renovations that increase energy efficiency, and a focus on "a return to the normal growth cycle of the economy"—an economy that exploits the 99%, and the planet, for the benefit of the 1%.

The fight for reforms

Rather than trying to reassure Bay Street and reduce people to consumers, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' Alternative Federal Budget reflects the resistance movements and demands that have challenged the



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Yusur Al-Bahrani looks at the Geneva talks and the future for Syria

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International Women's Day

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Carolyn Egan on the continuing importance of this radical tradition.



CPMA No. **58554253-99**
ISSN No. **0836-7094**

The benefits of not being alive

by EVAN JOHNSON

HOT ON the heels of a report released Tuesday by the Fraser Institute condemning living wages for workers, their follow-up report – entitled *Atlas Croaked: The Benefits of Not Being Alive* – is being hailed as their most generous and compassionate research to date.

According to the official press release, “What we found was that subjects who pursued alternatives to being alive no longer experienced debt, low wages, or a career with few opportunities for advancement.”

Some of the most significant findings include 100% of respondents reporting no negative consequences of being dead and buried, and 0% indicating that they would rather be living.

One curious finding was that 0.01% of the deceased may still be receiving their Senate pensions.

According to co-author Dr. Ronald Malthus, “Our research indicates that the more people choose to pursue alternative life options, the greater the savings will be for corporations in terms of wages and benefits.”

“The report also has clear implications for public policy,” Malthus continues. “Instead of continuing to encourage dependency on things like ‘food for your neighbour’s children’ or ‘health care’, individuals should be reminded of their freedom to choose to embrace the pure nirvana of non-being.”

A source close to the Prime Minister’s office says that the “the principle of making people no longer alive has been a cornerstone of our stance toward climate change and the Tar Sands, and has been a key motivating factor in our stance on pipelines. Poisoning lakes and rivers, and increasing cancer rates on First Nations communities, are just a few examples of our commitment to pro-life-ending policies.”

The source later added, “No other Prime Minister has done as much to ensure the non-existence of future generations than Stephen Harper.”

A spokesperson for the Liberal Party disagrees, telling socialist.ca that if it wasn’t for the severe budget cuts and restructuring undertaken during the Jean Cretien government in the 1990s, things wouldn’t be half as miserable as they are today.

“Name one other federal budget that made so many people to not want to be alive. Name just one! Paul Martin’s budget really set the template for making life unbearable, leading many hard working Canadians to consider alternatives to this wordly plane.”

The NDP could not be reached for a comment, but insiders suggest that their recent statement mourning the death of war criminal Ariel Sharon may indicate their willingness to re-evaluate their position on the “life” question.

Note: This article is a work of satire and should not be construed as a statement of fact.



Islamophobia and Quebec politics

by BENOIT RENAUD

WHAT WE now refer to as bill 60 or the Charter of secularism (formerly Charter of values) is no ordinary piece of legislation.

By putting forward a series of proposals including a ban on “ostentatious religious symbols” for all people working in provincial and municipal public services, the government of Pauline Marois has already changed its own party, restructured its base and permanently altered the whole political landscape.

For the left, this means new challenges and opportunities in a fast moving situation. Clarity of principles and tactical flexibility will both be needed.

Marois and the transformation of the PQ

First, it should be clearly stated that this policy of targeting religious minorities and stirring up Islamophobia is not in line with the PQ’s traditional approach to cultural diversity and national identity.

Bill 101, the Language Charter of 1977, was a clear break from the ethnic French-Canadian nationalism of the past, its purpose being precisely to include immigrants into the newly defined Québec nation. When Marois and her ministers evoke Bill 101 to argue in favour of Bill 60, they mislead their own base and rewrite history.

This shift began under the leadership of Pauline Marois, which immediately followed the historic defeat in the 2007 general election, when the PQ came in third place, behind

Mario Dumont’s ADQ—who had fuelled the media frenzy over “reasonable accommodation.”The Marois strategy, from that point on, has been to go after the ADQ base at all costs.

This new view of Québec identity therefore goes together with the abandonment of any concrete perspective for sovereignty, dismissed by Marois as “référendisme.” It is this move towards putting independence on a turned off back burner which ultimately caused the departure of four prominent MNA’s and the founding of Option nationale.

This new positioning has contributed to the PQ becoming official opposition 18 months later and forming a minority government in September 2012. But the cost has been to alienate a significant portion of the PQ base, especially in Montréal and among youth and minorities, and shifting their support to massively francophone ridings in suburbs and small towns.

The new party which replaced and absorbed ADQ, la Coalition Avenir Québec, after an initial success based on media hype and manipulated polls, has largely ceded the identity and minority-bashing issues to the PQ to focus on right wing economics and fiscal conservatism, which puts it in direct competition with the Liberals. As for the Liberals, they have maintained a strong federalist stance and vocal support for minority rights, allowing them to hold on to their traditional base in Montréal and the Outaouais.

Responses from the Left

Québec solidaire has attempted to balance a defense of individual and minority rights with some concessions to fear mongering and popular misrepresentations.

The QS intervention would have been more effective if it outright rejected most of what the PQ is proposing and added to the arguments in favor of minority rights a clearer understanding of how oppression (of women and of racialized groups) is at the heart of this situation. Educating people about Islamophobia should be at the center of the QS and the Left’s response.

In spite of these weaknesses, the fact that QS has opposed the PQ’s most controversial proposal helped strengthen the “anti-charte” camps within social movements. In response, a split has occurred within the women’s movement, with a new organization bringing together “pro-charte” women.

Option nationale has increasingly distanced itself from the PQ, including on this specific question. The sovereigntist camp is divided in spite of the image of unity displayed by the PQ caucus.

The union movement has been generally divided: the main teacher’s union still has not taken a stand, the CSN decided to support banning “symbols” from several professions, and the smallest of the teachers’ unions, FAE (with 32,000 members) passed a reasonably good policy, similar to that of QS and Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ),

What’s coming next?

Polls put the Liberals slightly ahead of the PQ (both in the 30’s) and CAQ a distant third (between 15 and 18 per cent), with QS at around 10 per cent and ON at 2 or 3 per cent. An election could lead to another PQ minority, a narrow PQ majority, or a return of the Liberals to power. CAQ is likely to lose many seats and QS could gain one or two.

A PQ majority would be a defeat for democratic rights and a victory for Islamophobia. The best way to prevent the PQ from winning a majority is to vote QS. Also, voting QS can be a rallying point for independentists who reject the ethnic nationalist turn of the PQ and still see the national project as inclusive.

In this context, QS should open a dialogue with ON and attempt to unify the progressive independentist camp on the basis of a rejection of both the autonomism of the New PQ and its ethnic nationalism, as well as strong criticism of its energy policy being aligned with the Harper government and the Oil and Gas industries.

If the PQ doesn’t win a majority, it is likely to undergo an internal crisis. Considering the likely crisis of CAQ, the reshaping of Québec politics would create three poles of attraction: a Liberal party entirely dedicated to the status quo, a PQ deeply conservative and irreversibly autonomist, and QS as the embodiment of national aspirations as well as social struggles and environmental resistance.

Accommodation at York

by CHANTAL SUNDARAM

NOT ONLY has the York debate generated a backlash against religious accommodation at universities, it has sparked discussion about whether Ontario, like Quebec, should explore the need for a Charter on secularism.

There is still an ongoing need throughout the West to justify the increasingly complex war on the Arab/Muslim world--by linking Islam with the oppression of women--and to create distractions from austerity.

The narrative that dominated even before the details of the York incident were known, was one that identified religious accommodation intrinsically with discrimination against women. This point is made eloquently in an excellent opinion piece in the Toronto Star by five Canadian Muslim women (“The Misplaced Moral Panic at York University,” The Star, January 24): “We have been warned about slippery slopes apparently ending rapidly and ineluctably in Iranian-style oppression of women. While slippery-slope arguments are excellent for fear-mongering, they often have little basis in legal reality. Religious accommodation is, by definition, an exception to the normal functioning of an institution – not a wholesale transformation of standard practice.”

Fundamentally, there is a great deal of hypocrisy that underlies the panic over this incident compared to others, particularly when you consider the many recent incidences of sexism on Canadian campuses--from anti-feminist “men’s rights groups” at UofT, rape chants at UBC, McMaster and St Mary’s University, and a high rate of sexual assault at York.

This point is also made forcefully by the five women in the Star: “Islam is not the threat to gender equality in Canada: patriarchy, in all its various manifestations, is. Yet these systemic, structural derogations from equality routinely fail to incite the same type of moral panic induced by the York accommodation case. This suggests that the current hysteria is not simply about the position of women in the university, but contempt for religious minorities.”

Any call for an Ontario Charter on secularism should sound warning bells: it would do nothing to address the real systemic bases for sexism and inequality of women, and to confuse and destabilize broad progressive forces resisting austerity.

Socialist Worker

e-mail: reports@socialist.ca
web: www.socialist.ca
lphone: 416.972.6391

All correspondence to:
Socialist Worker
P.O. Box 339, Station E
Toronto, ON M6H 4E3

Published every four weeks in
Toronto by the International Socialists.
Printed in Hamilton at a union shop; member of the Canadian Magazine Publisher’s Association / Canadian Publications
Mail Agreement No. 58554253-99,
Post Office Department, Ottawa / ISSN
0836-7094 / Return postage guaranteed



Geneva talks: no solution for Syria

by YUSUR AL-BAHRANI

MEETINGS IN Geneva haven’t produced any concrete solution to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria. On the other hand, United States will resume supplying rebels labeled as “moderate” with arms.

No further evidence is needed to prove that the Syrian state is a dictatorship that has been committing human rights violations. However, the timing of the recent report based on leaked photos of torture in Syrian prisons is questionable. It coincided with the Geneva talks to bash the Syrian government, urge power transition and call on for intervention.

Around 27,000 photos of starved and tortured bodies were captured and leaked by a Syrian government defector who claimed that all of the images are of prisoners detained by the authorities. The report was written by a British law firm funded by the government of Qatar. It is essential to investigate and condemn the crimes and torture that prisoners were subjected to. However, it is equally important to question why the Qatari government would be interested in democracy and human rights in Syria, while it is reluctant to apply those values in Qatar.

The Syrian National Coalition, backed by the US, is pushing for a “power transfer” and forming a transitional government in Syria. The Syrian National Council is a Western-backed opposition. Ahmed Al-Jarba, a Saudi-backed Syrian figure, is the head of the coalition.

Like Libya, the West is trying to

intervene to undermine the socio-economic demands of the revolution—simply transferring power from Assad to another ruler instead of redistributing power.

Humanitarian crisis

The conflicts in Syria have resulted in a humanitarian crisis that worsens and deepens. Civilians in besieged cities and villages are starving every day, while militants are managing to get arms and weapons used in conflicts with each other and with the government forces.

In a statement prior to the Geneva peace talks, Amnesty International said: “The Syrian authorities may inspect goods entering and leaving towns but must not block the delivery of basic supplies including food and medical aid. Both government and opposition forces must also guarantee safe access for workers delivering life-saving humanitarian aid and immediately end attacks on medical and humanitarian workers.”

In a press conference in Geneva on January 27, UN’s Joint Special Representative for Syria (JSRS) Lakhdar Brahimi told reporters “the humanitarian discussions haven’t produced much.” There is an agreement with the Syrian government that women and children can leave the old city of Homs. “I think the government is willing to make it happen but it’s not easy because there are snipers and there are all sorts of problems,” said Brahimi. “So I am still begging, asking, that we, something be done about these

areas, whether these areas are under siege by the Government or by the armed groups.”

Much of the humanitarian discussions have been about the situation in Homs, known as the capital of the revolution that has been under the control of the armed rebels, while ignoring other areas where civilians are suffering from starvation and lack of necessary medication. One of the areas that have been badly suffering is Al-Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp. The opposition’s only concern on Homs might unveil their priorities—armed rebels over civilians.

Western-backed armed groups

While the spark of revolution was initially ignited in March 2011 by mass protests that built unity against the regime, each armed group claims to be representing the uprising now. The armed opposition groups that exist now include: the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, Al-Jabha Al-Islamiya and many other groups. The Free Syrian Army is often referred to as the “moderate” group, which has gained the support of the West. However, it has been very hard to differentiate between the different acting forces in Syria.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been arming the several opposition groups. While the mass media attempt to divert the attention of the public away from the violations committed by the militants, there is evidences of war crimes committed

by the opposition rebels in the name of the revolution. The term “moderate” is very vague and used by the Western powers to legitimize supplying arms to rebels of their choice.

Counter-revolutionary forces such as the “moderate” Ahrar Al-Sham are not interested in democracy, but are seeking control with the help of different outside forces such as the Western-backed Saudi Arabia. Opposition armed groups attacked the industrial town of Adra. Hundreds of men, women and children were brutally killed and tortured, and survivors said that armed rebels went from house to house killing members of minority groups. But there has been less sympathy for these victims compared to the everyday condemnations of the authorities’ crimes.

Solidarity

Imperialist forces are hijacking a revolution that began, as part of the Arab Spring, with demands for socioeconomic change. The violence in Syria, from the regime and from Wester-backed groups, has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands.

Any solution to end the Syrian crisis has to have Syrians’ right to self-determination as its foremost priority. Solidarity with Syrians means standing against any direct or in-direct Western intervention. While so-called “humanitarian intervention” has to rejected, Syrians’ needs to urgent humanitarian aid must be fulfilled immediately and unconditionally.

No to Western intervention in Syria

by PAUL STEVENSON

THE REVOLUTIONARY wave that had existed in Syria is now stuck between the brutal Syrian government and the equally brutal sectarian forces that are now dominating the scene.

The uprising against Bashar Al-Assad is in a very dangerous position. The situation in Syria since the initial revolutionary wave has always been complex but the arrival of increasing numbers of Al-Qaeda linked groups has caused a real problem for those who seek peace and democracy. Over the past number of months, those groups such as the Al-Nusra front and the ISIS have been taking the initiative and this has set back the revolutionary movement.

Regional rivalry

The spillover into Iraq and Lebanon has embroiled other regional powers even more firmly in the conflict. The Saudi government and many of the Gulf states are using the uprising to advance their own regional positions. They hope to undermine the Shia’a dominated governments in Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Lebanese group Hezbollah. For the Saudis, all these groups and states are an impediment to their desire to exercise more control over the area of the Middle East.

But it’s not just the regional powers at play. The Saudi dictatorship has the full backing of the US, which is sending roughly \$50 billion in weaponry each year. For the western powers, getting rid of Bashar Al-Assad would be a great advantage. They want to use the conflict to further isolate Iran, to undermine Russian influence in the region and to help the Israelis deal with Hezbollah. In this case, the interests of the Saudis and the west are in lock step.

Activists in the West

The changes on the ground in Syria pose difficult questions for revolutionaries in the west. While many of us have been strongly in support of the revolution against Assad, the increasing dominance of the sectarian groups makes calls for a broad support for the uprising problematic.

There are some who suggest that we need to call for support for Assad to stop some of these groups. That is a non-starter. Assad is a brutal dictator who has tortured and murdered tens of thousands of people. A knee jerk, “we support Assad because he is against the designs of the imperial powers” response cannot stand up to any scrutiny if we are in support of the rights of the Syrian people.

What we need to do is maintain the principled opposition to the NATO powers using the conflict to gain geopolitical advantage, and to oppose any potential military response from the West. We must also call for all foreign intervention to stop.

Western imperialism is manipulating the Arab Spring. Harper has been supporting the Western-backed opposition in Syria, uncritical of Israel and has called multiple times for an attack on Iran. Our job is to make sure that the Syrian people decide their future and that Stephen Harper and the government of Canada stay out of the conflict.

Israel oppresses African migrants

by HANAN JIBRIL

AFRICAN MIGRANTS have been protesting all over Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and towns. While living in fear of being deported back to the danger in their countries, migrants are subjected to violence and racism in Israel.

Many of the migrants are from Eritrea and migrated to Israel from Egypt. Other migrants are from western and southern Sudan. There is a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in all of those regions where African migrants or refugees are coming from. But the Israeli government, including the Prime Minister, are treating the migrants as a threat to Israel who do not deserve asylum.

Racism and discrimination

Added to the struggle of migration is the oppressive, racist attitude of the Israeli government, which claims their presence as a “demographic threat to Israel.” Israel’s Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, called Africans “infiltrators” and said that they threaten Israel’s Jewish social fabric. Earlier, former Knesset Member Ya’akov Katz proposed to make a separate state for people of colour in Israel before being deported from the country.

In December 2011 the Mayor of Tel Aviv Ron Huldai demanded that the government take “immediate emergency actions” against the migrants: Huldai vowed to protect Israel’s borders against “infiltration”

and claimed the immigrants who already entered the country “caused severe distress to the residents of the neighborhoods who were forced to deal with this influx.” Recently, Israel, passed open-detention law, which allows migrants to be sent to a desert prison.

Attorney Omer Shatz of the human rights group Anu Plitim (We are Refugees), condemned the Tel Aviv mayor’s statement: “The mayor of the Hebrew city and the Jewish Prime Minister have forgotten that Israel is itself a nation of refugees and survivors.” But the Western imperial powers used the horrors of the Holocaust to impose an apartheid state on Palestinian land, which also oppresses migrants.

Resistance

On December 2013 and January 2014, thousands protested in Tel Aviv against detention of asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea. The protesters marched from Levinsky Park in South Tel Aviv to the city centre, decrying the detention without trial of African refugees in the Saharonim and Holot detention facilities. On January 5, tens of thousands of African migrant workers and asylum seekers and their supporters joined the protest. African asylum seekers went on a three-day strike.

The struggle against Israeli apartheid—which oppresses indigenous Palestinians and African migrants—continues.

The roots and reality of racism

THE RECENT release of British director Steve McQueen’s movie *12 Years a Slave* is a reminder of what it took to make the United States the world’s wealthiest capitalist country.

This wealth was inscribed on the very bodies of black men and women, who toiled as slaves on the masters’ plantations. But slavery was not simply or only an economic transaction, in which one party profited from the immiseration of the other. As McQueen’s movie so tellingly illustrates, it was a whole world view, reinforced on a daily basis by the edifice of racism, which could only enslave Blacks by creating the myth that they were less than human, so that any indignity or violence that was visited upon them was justified by their inferior status.

Capitalism

Before the rise of capitalist society, based on colonialism and the often violent expropriation of resources from those who lived in the “colonies,” modern day racism as we know it did not exist. In pre-capitalist societies there was prejudice against others, but there was no systematic categorization of different ‘races’ as inferior.

This understanding was something that Karl Marx wrote about very compellingly in Capital, Vol 1: “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of the continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins are all things that characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production.”

In one sentence Marx encapsulates immense amounts of human suffering, from the genocide visited on First Nations people in North America to the slave trade which saw Blacks forcibly removed from their homes to die on slave ships or to survive only to become the property of white masters.

Divide and rule

But why has racism continued to exist, even after wide-spread colonialism and slavery have been relegated to the past, at least in their more overt forms? Racism is a double-edged sword. Its first target is obviously those who suffer most directly from prejudice and hatred. However, racism has another objective, which is to bind those who share the same skin colour or religion or national affiliation, to their own ruling class.

Marx understood that this false consciousness or affiliation with one’s own ruling class could only divide the 99% and make it much more difficult for ordinary people to make any gains: “This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.”

The myth of “reverse racism”

It’s important to differentiate what Marx is saying here from a notion that is sometimes put forward as ‘common sense,’ that is the idea that there is something called “reverse racism.” Charges of reverse racism (racism against the dominant racial group in a society) became widespread, for example, during the backlash against initiatives such as affirmative action, which aimed to try and address the inequalities many US Blacks faced in the areas of employment and education. It’s no surprise that these charges of “reverse racism” became popular under the Reagan administration in the 1980s, as a way not only to push back any gains that Blacks had made, but also to attack white and other workers as well. As Marx also noted, “Labor in the white skin can never free itself as long as labor in the black skin is branded.”

The “secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power” is this ability to pit one group against another. In order to fight effectively it’s important that we build real solidarity with those who face the daily reality of racism and discrimination and that we reject as pernicious nonsense claims of “reverse racism” or “reverse sexism.”

Indigenous sovereignty and solidarity

Last month a Saskatchewan high school told its grade 8 students Tenelle Starr, a member of the Star Blanket Cree Nation, to stop wearing her shirt that says “Got land? Thank an Indian”—because it was “racist.” There was an online backlash, including racist attacks and threats to her safety. Michele Tittler of the so-called “End Race-Based Laws” claimed that the shirt was evidence of “reverse racism”: “This is racism. Canadians are really getting sick of the double-standard. No white kid could walk into a school with a shirt that says that in reverse.” But there was a far stronger flood of support for Starr—who continues to proudly wear her shirt at school—and for the shirt’s creator, Jeff Menard, a postal worker and member of the Pine Creek First Nation in Manitoba.

In Canada the Idle No More movement has highlighted Canada’s genocidal history of colonialism, and resisted the continuing destruction of their land through government-backed projects like the tar sands its pipelines. Non-Natives have been building solidarity in the realization that the continuing plunder of the environment—and the environmental racism on which it is built—is something that concerns us all. It’s this kind of solidarity and a refusal to let racism divide us that can win in the struggles ahead.



Ariel Sharon escapes trial, but Palestinian resistance lives on

by PAOLO BASSI

REGARDLESS OF the number of Palestinians who died by his hand, Sharon never faced criminal prosecution. The reason is simple: Israel could never have been created without the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Men like Sharon, David Ben Gurion, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, all understood and accepted this brutal reality - and were prepared for the dirty work.

Zionism and ethnic cleansing

Sharon cannot be understood without first understanding Zionism: if Israel was to survive, the Palestinians had to be driven out, killed or subjugated. Sharon and his fellow Zionists had one problem – the Palestinians themselves, their courage and attachment to their land.

After Israel’s creation in 1948, Sharon became commander of a secretive army unit 101 (later the Paratroopers Brigade). In 1953 Unit 101 attacked the village of Qibya, dynamiting dozens of Palestinian homes and killing about 70 civilians. Sharon took part in many such “operations” against Palestinian civilians, with the ultimate objective

always being to drive out the Arabs and allow Jewish settlers to claim the “abandoned” land.

War crimes

Even if all the secret operations Sharon led since 1948 and his actions in the wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973 are ignored, what happened in Lebanon in 1982 is enough to condemn him. In 1982 Sharon was Israel’s Minister of Defense and ordered the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to invade Lebanon.

The IDF surrounded the unprotected Palestinian refugee camps of Shatila and Sabra. The IDF then allowed 1,500 mostly Christian Phalangist militia to gather at Beirut airport and even transported them in IDF vehicles to West Beirut. For the next three days, the Phalange rampaged through Sabra and Shatila butchering defenseless Palestinian men, women and children. Hundreds of Arab women were raped and then killed. Between 800 and 3,500 Palestinians were murdered between September 16 and 18 of 1982.

Colonial expansion

Sharon was rewarded for the next 20 years Sharon as minister in various governments, and in 2001 his right-

wing Likud party took power and he became PM.

As the Second Intifada erupted leading to more bloody assaults on Gaza, Sharon seemed to do a u-turn when he pulled support for Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip. About 10,000 Jewish settlers were forced to leave. The pull-back was strategic and a cover for expanded colonization in the occupied West Bank, where 70,000 more Israeli Jews settled during Sharon’s tenure.

Legacy

In early 2006 Sharon fell into a coma and never recovered. Not only had Sharon escaped international justice, his life was a great success measured in Zionist terms: Zionist supremacy within Israel and Israeli hegemony in the Middle East. With American money, military equipment and political support these have largely been achieved.

But Palestinian resistance has out-lived Sharon, and the courage of their resistance has won solidarity around the world. Palestinian resistance also helped spark the Arab Spring, whose potential to overthrow all the Western-backed Arab dictatorships upon which Israel depends would have been Sharon’s worst nightmare.

Sawant responds to Obama’s address

PRESIDENT OBAMA talked about the deepening inequality. But that is a testament of his own presidency. A presidency that has betrayed the hopes of tens of millions of people who voted for him out of a genuine desire for fundamental change away from corporate politics and war mongering.

Poverty is at record-high numbers - 95% of the gains in productivity during the so-called recovery have gone to the top 1%. The president’s focus on income inequality was an admission of the failure of his policies.

An admission forced by rallies, demonstrations, and strikes by fast food and low wage workers demanding a minimum wage of \$15. It has been forced by the outrage over the widening gulf between the super-rich and those of us working to create this wealth in society.

While the criminals on Wall Street are bailed out, courageous whistleblowers like Edward Snowden are hunted down and the unconstitutional acts he exposed are allowed to continue...

The President claims ending two wars while he continues to intensify a

brutal campaign of drone wars in multiple countries, killing hundreds of innocent civilians, and not to mention the plight of US soldiers returning with permanent medical conditions and declining veterans’ benefits.

Obama is the president whose broken website is a symbol of the broken hopes of millions who believed his promises for affordable healthcare.

“Climate change is a fact,” says Obama. Here is another fact: Climate change is getting worse and worse, on his watch. There has been a massive increase in incredibly destructive practices like the use of coal and fracking.

Leadership in stopping the disastrous Keystone XL pipeline has come not from Obama or Congress, but from the thousands of courageous people organizing and taking direct action to stop it.

Obama shouts “Fix our broken immigration system.” He is the president with record numbers of deportations...

Let’s talk about minimum wage. Obama said, “No one working full-time should have to raise a family in poverty.”And his solution? Raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 over 3 years.

Fast food workers and Walmart workers have gone on strike and built powerful protests in cities in every part of the country over the past year for \$15/hour. And that is the only reason politicians are now talking about raising the minimum wage. Look at the example of the SeaTac \$15/hour initiative. A initiative for \$15/hour minimum wage was on the ballot – and won!

“Let’s make this a year of action,” Obama said. In my view, we need action by working people and the poor for higher wages and a \$15/hour minimum wage. Action by young people fighting student fees and the debt around their neck for the rest of their life. Action by homeowners against the epidemic of foreclosures. By trade unionists against anti-trade union laws and for workers’ rights.

Get organized! Get active in your union. Get active in a local movement. Join the struggle to defend the environment.

For the full speech, visit http://www.votesawant.org/state_of_the_union_response

Inside the historic election of Seattle's first socialist city councillor, Kshama Sawant

*Socialist.ca's Kevin Brice interviewed **Ramy Khalil**, campaign manager for Kshama Sawant, about her historic election victory and the prospects for radical change in the US.*

What is the significance of this election victory?

The result in Seattle – the election of Sawant an open socialist to city council with 95,000 votes, 51 per cent of the total – is historic.

The result in Minneapolis of Socialist Alternative city council candidate Ty Moore, barely losing by 230 votes and gaining 42 per cent of the vote compared to the winner's 47.5 per cent was also an historic breakthrough.

These results show a profound shift of mood of people in the US, especially the working class. This shift is rich in opportunities, and challenges, for socialists and real progressives. There is a powerful desire for change, change that ends the domination of US society, politics and life by the corporations and their lackeys.

This victory was the result of the real mood for change, which flowed from the change in class understanding exposed by the Occupy movement, and the seriousness of Socialist Alternatives' campaign. Grasping this changed mood came from both a clear political analysis of US society and an understanding of how to campaign.

Our campaign demands were vital to gaining widespread support. The demands connected to everyday life, articulated the anger at the present deep inequality and linked to a vision of a better – socialist – society. The victory also took an enormous amount of hard work.

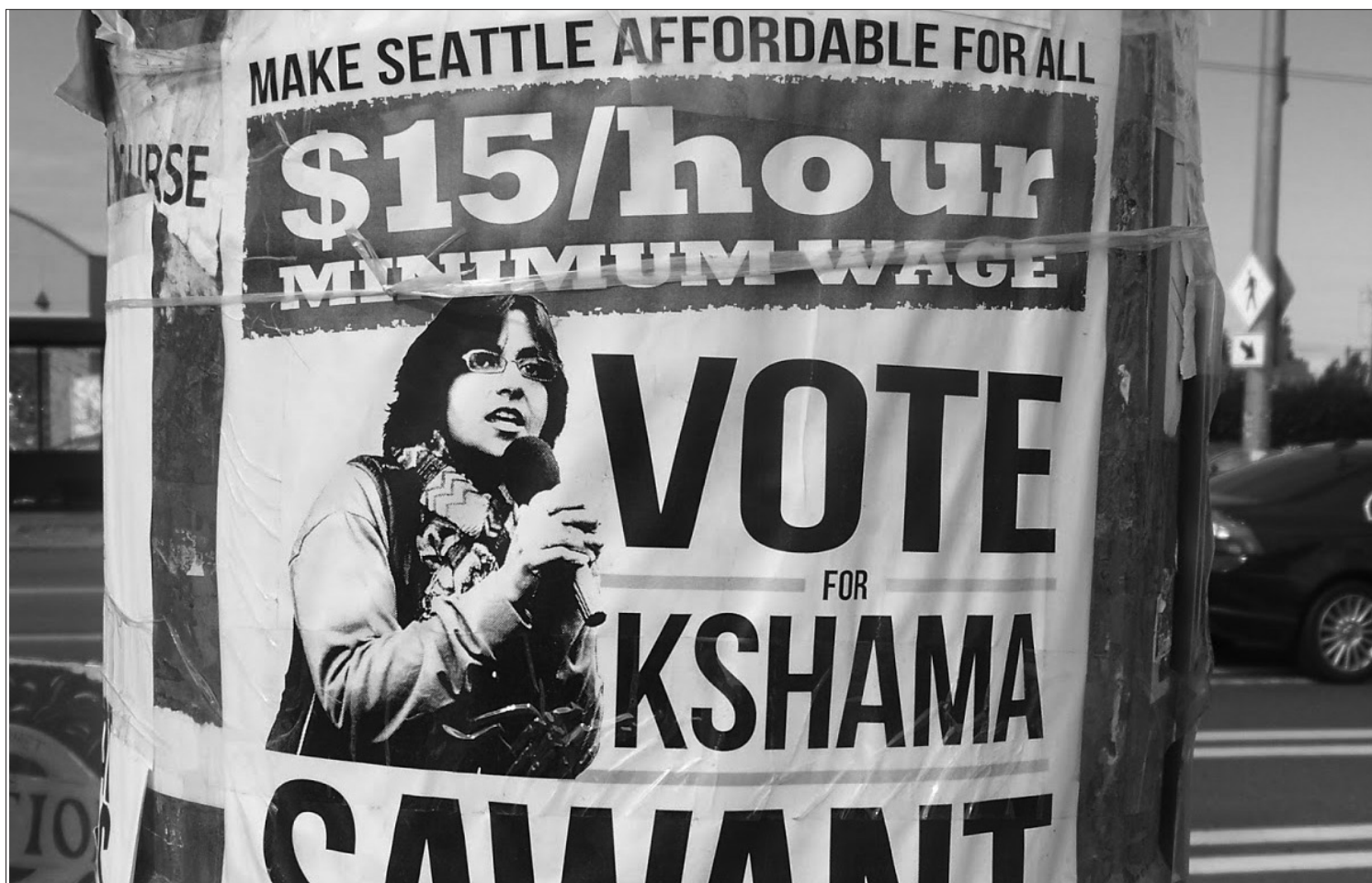
The core message of these results, coming on top of Occupy, the battle of Wisconsin and the struggles for \$15 an hour, is that the US workers are stirring.

What does this say about the appetite for change in the US?

Since the recession started, ordinary people have seen time and time again that the ruling class, and their political parties, operate not in the interests of the voters, but in the interest of corporate profits. Be it bailing out Wall Street and leaving main street to be evicted, incessant attacks on unions and working people's benefits, and a "recovery" filled with poverty wages. In addition, Obama was elected in 2008 on the back of a mass movement that believed in "Hope" and "Change" and millions have been sorely disappointed by the president they got.

Huge anger against the system has built up and was given some expression by the Occupy movement – which pointed out the outlines of class division, the 99% and the 1%. This result is historic because it represents the turn of working people away from the two parties of big business and shows that it is possible to run on a principled program, and WIN.

How has the experience of life under Obama, and movements like Occupy, the Chicago teachers strike and the fast food and retail worker strikes changed people's attitudes to alternative candidates, and how did this shape your campaign?



The election of a Socialist Alternative candidate and the excellent results of our other candidates are historic and show the space that has opened up for radical politics. However, there's more evidence: in Ohio, after facing union-busting Democrats for too long, the central labor council ran independent candidates and took over the city councils in a few smaller towns; and in Jackson, Mississippi, Chokwe Lamumba was elected, still as a Democrat, but on a very radical platform.

As mentioned earlier, Occupy was a crucial development in US society. The framing of the recession as a struggle between the 99% and the 1% blew the ruling class narrative of attacking "privileged public sector workers" out of the water. This created space to the left.

The "lesser-evil" approach results in union leaders and others refusing to criticizing the Democrats from the left. Demands are limited to what is considered acceptable to corporations and their interests. Socialist Alternative candidates rejected this and instead based our demands on what working people need.

What did you campaign on, what roots do you have in social movements, and what kind of support did your campaign receive from labour and social movements?

We put forward an extensive program of demands, all related directly to the actual powers that the city council has (www.votesawant.org/issues). However, we focused on three main demands: the fight for a \$15/hour minimum wage, affordable housing and rent control, and funding mass transit and education by taxing the super-rich. We also highlighted that our candidates, if elected, would not take the inflated wage of councillor but would take

the average workers' wage.

Our tireless campaigning and push on these main issues affected the entire political discussion around elections in Seattle. Both main mayoral candidates felt pressured to support \$15/hour and did so publicly. There was more excitement around our campaign than any other race in the city.

Our campaigns were supported by many community activists, union members and environmentalists. Sawant was endorsed by 6 union locals and the majority of King County Labour Council.

In elections, progressives are often divided between those who place their faith in traditional social democratic parties, and those who dismiss voting altogether based on the results of social democratic parties in power. The only alternative in Canada so far is Quebec Solidaire, which sees itself as a "party of the ballot box and of the streets", which can act as a megaphone for the movements, like its support for the Quebec student strike. What role did you see the election playing with respect to social movements, and how is this different than the traditional approach to elections?

The division between supporting social democratic candidates or not participating in elections is a false dichotomy. There is a long tradition of parties (both social democratic and communist) around the world that contested elections and were also campaigning parties rooted in communities and workplaces. Elections and campaigns were seen as part of the same struggles, strengthening each other. The Seattle election was a continuation of political campaigns and in

turn the election strengthened the campaigns.

The election campaign in Seattle came out of Occupy, where Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant played a leading role in Occupy Seattle, putting forward a strategy to deal with police harassment.

The key election slogan was for \$15 an hour, a demand already being fought for by low-paid workers in Seattle and across the US. The campaign actively supported the demand with solidarity actions and made the demand more widely popular. By the end of the election campaign most candidates in Seattle were forced to at least make polite noises in support. Now that Sawant is elected, we are organizing to make this demand a reality in Seattle.

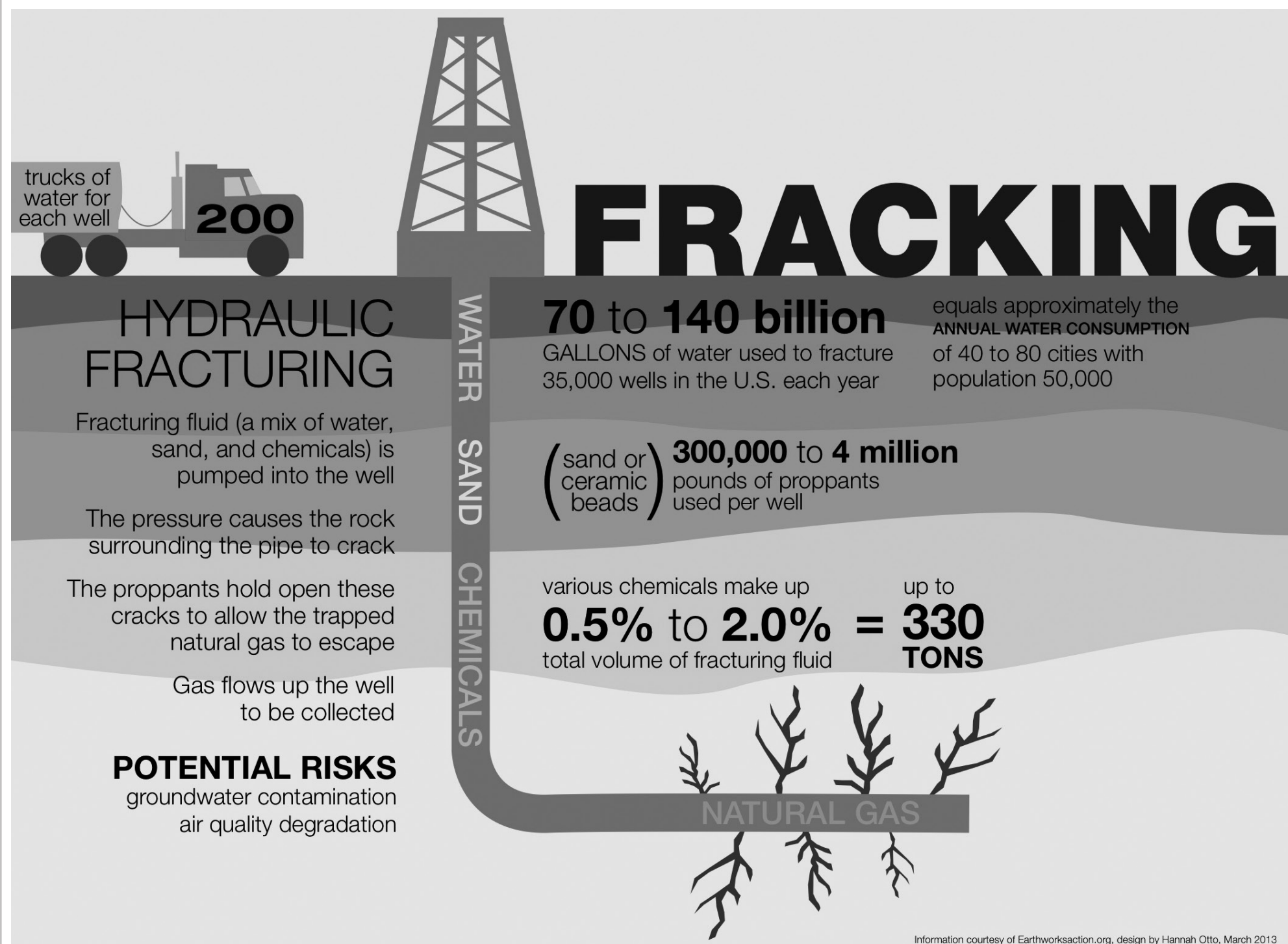
Sawant, and Socialist Alternative, have also been very active in opposition to the plan to run coal trains through Seattle to a proposed coal export terminal in Bellingham. She will use her position on Seattle city council to stop the terminal.

In the Minneapolis election, where Ty Moore lost by just over 200 votes, the campaign came out of Occupy Homes. This grew out of Occupy and worked to protect people against home foreclosures by the banks.

These campaign are very different from the usual campaigns of social democrats. Social change primarily comes through movements; most of the important gains of the past came from mass movements. Having elected representatives who solidly support these struggles can be a big help. Also elections can have an important supporting role to building movements, raising political awareness, and challenging capitalist politics.

For the complete interview visit <http://www.socialist.ca/node/2042>

Capitalism is a fracking disaster



What is fracking?

By Anna Roik

FRACKING (HYDRAULIC FRACTURING) is the process of extracting natural gas—also known as shale gas—by drilling into shale rock formations deep underground. Shale rock geology does not allow natural gas to flow in amounts large enough to be economical unless there are fractures (cracks) in the rock.

Early natural gas wells were sited over natural fractures in shale, but an estimated 60 per cent of new wells are sited where fracking has artificially created wells to allow natural gas flow. Wells are made by injecting a liquid mixture of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure into a wellbore (hole) so that small fractures are created in the shale rocks. Natural gas is a hydrocarbon gas mixture that is primarily methane. It stays in a gaseous state at normal temperatures, which makes it difficult to transport from the source. This is why the gas is liquefied by cooling it, as it takes up less than 1 per cent of the volume.

CO2

Proponents of fracking point to studies that show burning natural gas releases less carbon dioxide than burning coal or oil, arguing that natural gas is “cleaner” than these fossil fuels. However, that applies only to the final consumption. When the fracking, liquefaction and shipping of liquefied natural gas (LNG) is included, it produces more greenhouse gases than coal. It also has a slew of other negative environmental effects.

The liquid mixture injected to create fractures use any of 2500 chemical additives, 650 of which are known or possible human carcinogens either regulated under the US’s Safe Drinking Water Act or listed as hazardous air pollutants. Many fracking companies do not even disclose their entire components list, claiming “proprietary” or “trade secret” ingredients.

Water

Fracking is extremely water intensive. The average well uses 4 to 13 million litres of fresh water in the injected mixture. As more fracking occurs, rapid depletion of rivers and underground aquifers will follow, leading to water shortages for domestic and agricultural use. The injected mixture could also contaminate both ground and surface water and land as a result of spills and flow-back (which will concentrate toxic matter such as salt, uranium and radon).

Earthquakes

Fracking wells also lead to increased and stronger earthquakes. Ohio, Texas and Oklahoma as well as regions of the UK have recorded tremors of magnitude 3 on the Richter scale and higher. Prior to fracking many of these regions had never recorded earthquakes. From the West coast to the Maritimes, fracking operations further destroy indigenous land.

All of this is in pursuit of fossil fuels that we no longer need and whose consumption is adding to the climate crisis.

Myths from the BC government

By Bradley Hughes

The BC Liberals have put forward a plan for massive expansion of natural gas extraction, largely via fracking, and Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) exports via ship to Asia. They have promised government revenues from LNG of between high of \$130 billion and \$270 billion over the next 30 years. The plan involves having at least three pipelines and LNG export terminals in operation by 2020, and having the first one completed by 2015. In January, Premier Christy Clark boldly asserted that BC could one day export four trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year, an amount that would put us on par with the output of Alberta’s tar sands industry. At the same time, LNG is promoted as a clean fuel that will replace coal production elsewhere.

Myth #1: increased revenues

In an analysis of the government’s claims revenues from LNG, David Schreck concludes that the government must double the amount they charge the gas companies in order to make the billions they have claimed: “The calculations demonstrated here indicate that before the election the government assumed it could more than double its take from the natural gas industry.” You can bet that whatever LNG revenue framework the Clark government eventually introduces as law won’t come close to more than doubling its take per unit of production from the industry. Bye-bye “prosperity fund.”

The Liberals have also made revenue cuts that now amount to more than \$3.5 billion per year according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Simply removing these tax cuts would provide ample funding for government programs.

Myth #2: new LNG terminals

According to the Liberals, “The BC Jobs Plan commits to bring at least one LNG pipeline and terminal online by 2015 and have three in operation by 2020, assuming all environmental and permitting applications are granted.” At the beginning of 2014, no construction on any terminals has started, the three projects that have been approved by the National

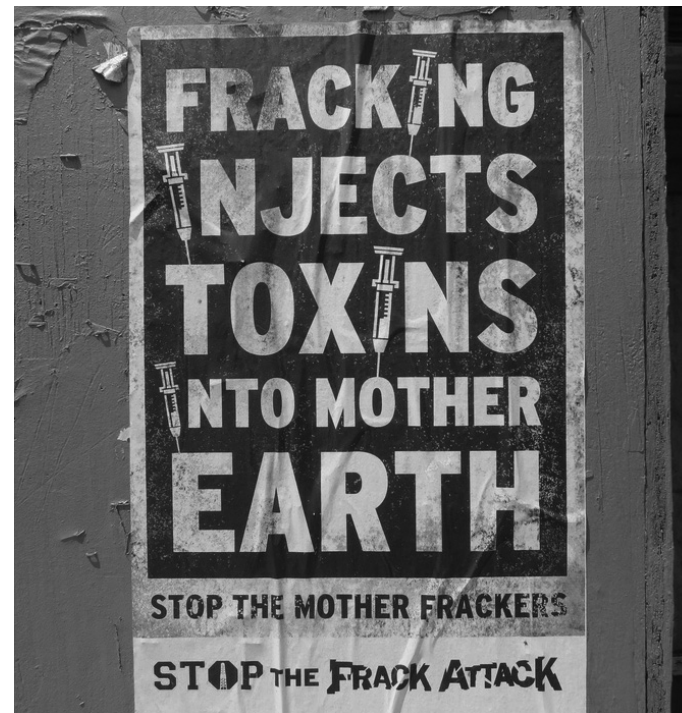
Energy Board are planning to start construction in 2015 and finish in 2018, 2019 and 2020. However, the government’s revenue projections are based on five LNG terminals by 2018.

Myth #3: increasing extraction

If all the projects that have been approved by the National Energy Board go ahead, the output of natural gas from BC, “ would require increasing BC’s gas production to nearly 50 per cent more than all of Canada currently produces - within less than a decade.” according to a recent report by David Hughes of the Post Carbon Institute. Currently BC produces around 4 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) and the newly approved exports would raise this to 14.6 bcf/d. However raising production by more than three times the current amount requires fracking more than three times the current number of natural gas wells. This is because the production at each well starts high and drops of quickly, so the average gas well in BC after three years produces only around 40 per cent as much as it did when it started.

In one of the most popular areas to frack, the Horn River, only 20 per cent of the initial rate of extraction remains after three years. Because of this, even keeping total production at the same level requires constantly fracking new wells. Hughes estimates that to reach the approved volume of LNG exports BC would need an additional 10,000 gas wells by 2020 and a total of 50,000 new wells by 2039. To put this into perspective the total of all oil and gas wells drilled in BC since the 1950s is only 25,000. So the plan is to do 100 years worth of drilling in a couple of decades. His projections do not include the losses due to the fact that 10 – 15 percent of the gas is CO2 and also the planned LNG terminals will be burning gas to power the refrigeration required to cool the gas to -160oC required to turn it into a liquid for shipping. So the actual number of wells will be higher. As he also points out, each well will require up to 40 million litres of water for fracking.

Socialist Worker *examines the science of fracking, the myths of the BC government, the dangers if they push ahead, and the successful resistance and solidarity in New Brunswick*



First Nations led protests stop New Brunswick fracking—for now

By John Bell
IN DECEMBER, shale gas exploration company SWN Canada withdrew its seismic equipment from rural New Brunswick. They claimed they had completed their tests and promised to return in 2015.

The truth is that a resolute anti-fracking movement—led by Mi’kmaq people from Elsipogtog and Eskasoni First Nations and supported by local Acadian and Anglo working people—stopped or delayed SWN’s testing at every turn. After seven months of blockades, encampments, occupations and mass protests, the movement forced the corporation to withdraw.

Massive armed attacks on protesters by RCMP failed to shut down mostly peaceful resistance, usually led by Mi’kmaq women.

SWN’s retreat occurred shortly after a day of solidarity actions in towns and

cities across Canada showed growing awareness and support for the struggle.

This is an important victory, a battle won in the bigger war to protect the land and water from fracking.

The victory did not come easy. Activists face criminal charges, fines and potential jail time. The RCMP presence was massive and intimidating, and peaceful protestors report being insulted, taunted and threatened.

Court injunctions were granted to break up the camps. The same courts refused to consider legal arguments that, since all the land was unceded Mi’kmaq territory, it was SWN that was illegally on the land.

The fight has also raised big debates within First Nations communities. Initially, the Assembly of First Nations New Brunswick supported government and corporate plans for fracking. An important early victory came when two Elsipogtog activists

used a hunger strike to force AFNNB to reconsider and listen to grass roots opposition voices.

Subsequently three Mi’kmaq First Nations, including Elsipogtog, have withdrawn from AFNNB.

In the face of all this, solidarity from settler communities in New Brunswick and nationally was crucial.

“Often misunderstood by the general public, too, is that the people of Elsipogtog have widespread support from Acadians and Anglos in the area,” wrote Métis activist Chelsea Vowel in the Toronto Star. “In fact, the majority of people living in New Brunswick support a moratorium on fracking, in direct opposition to Premier David Alward’s wholehearted embracing of shale gas exploration. Opposition to fracking is not a fringe position; it is the majority position in the Atlantic provinces and elsewhere throughout Canada.”



Hudak’s “Million jobs plan”: don’t believe the hype

YOU COULD drive a truck through the logic and holes in Ontario PC premier candidate Tim Hudak’s million jobs plan. Yet, it cleverly captures the sentiment and plays on the fears of many people who are unemployed, underemployed or waiting to get a pink slip at any moment.

The plan, according to Hudak, is to boost private sector job creation by cutting corporate taxes and cutting government spending. If this sounds familiar it is because it is the same austerity mantra that we have heard from Steven Harper, Dalton McGuinty and now Kathleen Wynne, Rob Ford and the business community.

Low-wage jobs and attacks on workers’ rights

Nowhere in Hudak’s plan does it say what kind of jobs would be created, but if the current trend continues, the jobs will be low-wage, precarious, part-time jobs with little or no benefits and no pension.

The Ontario Tories opposed the recent move by the Liberal government—following heated public pressure—to tie the minimum wage to inflation. This too-little, too-late move only raises the minimum wage to \$11 from \$10.25, which does not actually move people above the poverty line. But the Ontario PCs opposed even this miserly step saying it would “hurt business.”

Hudak has also vowed to continue his attack on workers’ rights by attacking trade unions’ ability to collect dues and represent members effectively. He recently fired his own PC candidate, Dave Brister, in a Windsor riding for publicly stating his opposition to the attack on trade union rights. So clearly Hudak’s jobs will not be good, unionized jobs.

Attack on public sector jobs and services

His plan to create jobs is really a veiled attack on one of the last places where good, union jobs still exist: the public sector. Hudak is blaming government spending on public services and public sector jobs as the reason for the Ontario government deficit. He would cut public spending by freezing wages and continue his attack on unionized jobs, and then hand that money to corporations in the form of tax cuts.

But the reality is that corporate taxes in Ontario have been going down steadily, now standing at the second lowest rate in Canada (and one of the lowest in North America) at 11.5 per cent. As corporate taxes have gone down, profits have risen to new heights, yet corporations have not used this new wealth to create jobs.

As a result of these tax cuts, government revenue has gone down, creating deficits, even though government spending has stayed nearly the same. This puts the lie to Hudak’s claim that public spending is spiraling out of control.

So, Hudak’s plan would cut good public sector jobs to create low-wage jobs, but only if corporations chose to invest in job creation. It defies logic and it clearly pits public sector workers against private sector workers and those who rely on public services.

Resisting the Hudak attack

Momentum has been building to fight the austerity agenda on two fronts: fighting the low-wage economy and the struggle to maintain workers rights. Workers in both Canada and the US are campaigning to fight for a living wage to challenge low-wage, precarious work. These workers are also demanding trade union representation to be able to act with a collective voice against exploitation. The labour movement has slowly begun to pull together its collective voice, to rebuild unions against Hudak’s attack, spearheaded by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council.

February 15 will be the next opportunity to show your support for raising the minimum wage to \$14/hour. All out 1pm at Dundas Square, Toronto. For more information visit www.raisetheminimumwage.ca.

Social democracy

Ontario NDP sleep-walking to defeat

As shocking as the Ontario NDP leadership’s refusal to support the \$14 minimum wage or oppose Hudak’s threat of “right to work,” it is sadly part of a pattern.

In 2011 Horwath reassured Bay Street she would balance the budget—preserving most of the Liberal cuts. In 2012 she provide a less ambitious tax on the rich than that proposed by Doctors for Fair Taxation, in order to avoid an election, and in 2013 supported the Liberal budget—refusing to challenge Bill 115 that attacked teachers, and refusing to attend the mass rally against the Liberal convention.

Failure to provide for an alternative is building a case for the Liberals—as we’ve seen elsewhere: from the NDP’s failure to beat the massively unpopular Liberal party in BC, to the Nova Scotia NDP’s collapse after one term in office imposing austerity.

A collapse in Ontario’s labour party would embolden the right, so we need to demand the leadership start fighting before it’s too late.

OPINION



Why does Harper love Israel?

AFTER YEARS of defending Israel, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper made his first visit historic: taking a 200-strong delegation, becoming the first Canadian Prime Minister to address the Israeli Knesset, and receiving a ceremonial key and multiple standing ovations in return.

There have been many explanations for Harper’s pro-Israel policy. *The Economist* debunked many popular explanations—the pursuit of ethnic votes or financial deals, or his personal relationship with Israeli president Benjamin Netanyahu—and settled on Harper’s religious faith:

“There are about 329,000 Jews in Canada, compared with just over 1 million Muslims, so the electoral advantages of such a pro-Israel stance are not obvious.

“The economic advantages are also slight. Although Canada has had a free-trade agreement with Israel since 1997, total bilateral trade of C\$1.4 billion (\$1.3 billion) is less than what Canada and the United States trade in a single day.

“Mr Harper’s warm relationship with Mr Netanyahu has some appeal as an explanation, but overlooks the long-standing nature of the Canadian leader’s commitment to Israel. He has stuck with the policy while leading two minority governments and a majority government, and through the ups and downs of his own poll ratings.

“The best explanation is the simplest: Mr Harper genuinely believes in the policy (perhaps shaped by his religion—he is an evangelical Christian.)”

But reducing the explanation to votes and faith ignores the broader geopolitical explanations As Harper explained: “The friendship between us is rooted in history, nourished by shared values, and it is intentionally reinforced at the highest levels of commerce and government.... It is also of strategic importance, also a matter of our own long-term interests.”

Colonial history and values

Canada has a long and ongoing history of colonialism. The West, including Canada, turned away boats of Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust in the 1930s but then cynically used the Holocaust to support a colonial project on Palestinian land.

Having previously declared that Canada has “no history of colonialism,” Harper applied the same colonial whitewashing to Israel, which he praised as “the bloom that the desert has yielded”—erasing the catastrophe that this “bloom” has meant for Palestinians. Just as Harper’s commitment to “a strong Canada” undermines indigenous sovereignty, his defense of a “free, democratic and distinctively Jewish state” ignores the lack of freedom and democracy for the indigenous Palestinian population. As Arab-Israeli Knesset member Ahmad Tibi explained after he disrupted and stormed out of Harper’s speech: “When you are controlling, discriminating, confiscating, occupying lands from one side and putting them in the corner without any basic rights, you are by this way ruling and committing apartheid in the occupied Palestinian Territories.”

Commerce and government

Harper also has a long record of supporting Israel: making Canada the first to cut humanitarian aid to Gaza after its democratic elections in 2006, defending Israel’s massacre in Lebanon as a “measured response” in 2009, welcoming Netanyahu to Canada as Israeli commandos were killing peace activists on the Gaza flotilla in 2010.

But Harper labels criticism of Israel as “the new anti-Semitism,” claiming “what else can we call criticism that selectively condemns only the Jewish state and effectively denies its right to defend itself while systematically ignoring—or excusing—the violence and oppression all around it?”

Imperial strategy

But Harper supported Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, Canada has sold weapons to Saudi Arabia, last year John Baird went on an imperialist tour of repressive regimes—from Bahrain to UAE to Qatar—and after visiting Israel, Harper made a stop in the monarchy of Jordan. This shows the West’s imperial architecture in the Middle East—both Israeli apartheid and Arab dictatorships.

Harper sees rising indigenous resistance and solidarity—from the Arab Spring to Idle No More—as a threat to the “long-term interests” of the 1%. His Zionism is part of supporting Western imperialism in the Arab world, defending colonialism at home, diverting attention from austerity, and providing lip service to anti-racism while he attacks refugees, exploits migrant workers and undermines civil liberties.

Dr. Romalis and the struggle for choice

ON JANUARY 31, Vancouver abortion provider Dr. Garson Romalis passed away at the age of 76, after providing reproductive choice for four decades, and surviving two anti-choice attacks.

His life is best summarized in his own words, in a 2008 address he gave to mark the 20th anniversary of the Morgentaler decision that struck down legal barriers to abortion in Canada.

A graduate of UBC medical school, it was his experience at Cook County hospital in Chicago where he witnessed the magnitude of barriers to choice, which disproportionately affected women living in poverty.

“It’s hard to believe now, but in those days, they had one ward dedicated exclusively to septic complications of pregnancy. About 90% of the patients were there with complications of septic abortion. The ward had about 40 beds, in addition to extra beds which lined the halls.

Each day we admitted between 10-30 septic abortion patients. We had about one death a month, usually from septic shock associated with hemorrhage... Today, in Canada and the US, septic shock from illegal abortion is virtually never seen. Like smallpox, it is a ‘disappeared disease.’”

In 1969 the Canadian government liberalized the abortion law, and Dr. Romalis began providing abortions as part of his practice as an obstetrician and gynecologist in 1972. But the law still maintained strict control of the procedure and denied choice to women. It took a mass movement—concentrating opposition to the abortion law based on a broad understanding of reproductive justice—that struck down the law in 1988.

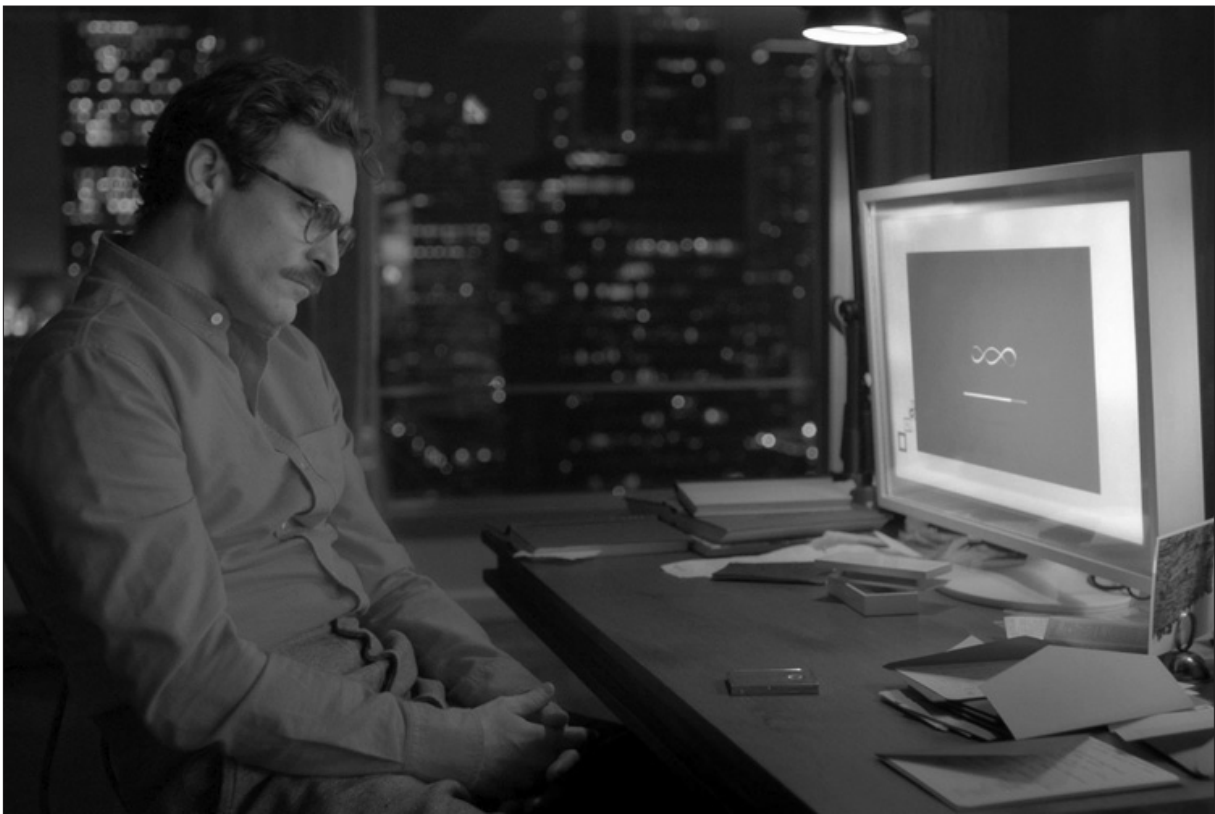
This campaign continued after the Morgentaler decision to challenge the anti-choice backlash—from the Tories trying to re-criminalize abortion through Parliament, “Operation res-

cue” swarming the Morgentaler clinic in Toronto, and anti-choice violence against abortion providers.

Dr. Romalis was shot in 1994 and stabbed in 2000. But the anti-choice failed to stop Dr. Romalis and the movement. He continued to provide abortions and to inspire future generations of providers, like Medical Students for Choice: “I can take an anxious woman, who is in the biggest trouble she has ever experienced in her life, and by performing a five-minute operation, in comfort and dignity, I can give her back her life.”

Dr. Romalis was a courageous provider who risked his life to provide the life-saving procedure of abortion. Though the process he inspired a new generation of reproductive freedom fighters—who continue to challenge the Tory attacks on choice, and to connect access to abortion with the broader struggle of reproductive justice

REVIEWS



FILM

21st century relationships

Her
Directed by Spike Jonze
Reviewed by Jesse McLaren

In an era of facebook friends and internet dating, the Academy award-nominated movie *Her* is a unique and thought-provoking look at relationships, love and technology.

The movie opens with Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) pouring his heart into a love letter. But as he continues, and the camera pans away, we realize he is at work producing emotions for customers. In this near future, personal letters have been outsourced to writers like Theodore and his coworkers at BeautifulHandwrittenLetters.com, who don't even handwrite the letters but dictate them via computer.

At work Theodore manufactures emotional connections for others, but outside work he is lonely and numb. His only human connection being

memories of his ex-wife, he tries in vain to connect and comfort himself through technology—failing at video games, frustrated with anonymous phone sex, and unsatisfied when he instructs his music device to “play a melancholy song.”

But his life changes when he buys an artificially intelligent operating system (who takes the name Samantha, played by Scarlett Johansson) that has a consciousness and the capacity to develop and express human emotions. Alienated and reduced to an individual consumer, Theodore turns to a mass-produced operating system as a way to resolve his individual loneliness.

Like his previous films—*Being John Malkovich*, *Adaptation*, and *Where the Wild Things Are*—Jonze uses bizarre concepts to explore universal themes: in this case what makes us human, what constitutes love, and the contradictory ways in which technology can

both alleviate and reinforce the loneliness of our lives.

Theodore, played with tender vulnerability by Phoenix, becomes both enamored with Johansson and confused by what this means—vacillating from the opinion of his ex-wife (Rooney Mara), who dismisses his feelings as escape from real relationships, and his friend (Amy Adams) who supports him.

But Samantha's lack of physical form and disembodied evolution makes the audience forget that Theodore bought her. Whereas Joseph Gordon-Levitt's *Don Jon* challenges the way in which pornography reinforces the objectification of women and undermines human relationships, *Her* presents human relationships cleansed of of exploitation and oppression and solved through a philosophical or spiritual evolution.

It is nonetheless a thought-provoking movie that will stimulate discussion.

BOOK

Alexandra Kollontai and women's liberation

Alexandra Kollontai: a biography
Written by Cathy Porter
Reviewed by Jesse McLaren

“It's important to write all this down, not just or myself, but for others, for all the women who'll live later. Let them see we weren't heroes or heroines. Sometimes we were strong, and sometimes we were weak, but we believed in our goals, and we pursued them passionately.”

Cathy Porter follows these words from Alexandra Kollontai in her re-released biography of the Russian revolutionary—which is well timed for the current movements fighting for women's liberation.

Kollontai was a pioneering theorist in women's liberation, as part of a revolution that began putting these ideas into practice. Stalin's counter-revolution buried her ideas and Porter has helped to bring them back to life.

Theorizing sexual freedom

Kollontai connected the fight for women's liberation to the fight against capitalism—including breaking free from the nuclear family that stifles sexuality and controls women's reproduction in order to enforce unpaid domestic labour for women.

Her call for “free love” was inseparable from the socioeconomic changes necessary to allow free love to flourish, while also fighting against economic reductionist arguments that this should wait until after the revolution.

From protest to revolution

Porter shows how Kollontai's theory emerged as part of a mass struggle—including huge International Women's Day (IWD) demonstrations across Europe that she helped coordinate, along with the German socialist Clara Zetkin. Kollontai was one of many Russian revolutionary women largely written out of history, who Porter brings to life—including Inessa Armand, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Konkordia Samoilova, Klavdiia Nikolaeva, Vera Slutskaya and others—who were part of a mass movement for women's liberation.”

On IWD in 1917 the Russian revolution began, and when democratic councils (soviets) of workers, peasants and soldiers emerged, Lenin famously arrived in April to raise the slogan “all power to the soviets.” As Porter shows—in a refreshing rebuke to Stalin's cult of Lenin—Kollontai returned from exile before Lenin, raising the same slogan as part of the fight for women's liberation: “for peace, for the power of the soviets, for fraternization at the front, and for the liberation and full equality of women.”

This was not automatic, and Porter details the many debates that Kollontai and others had on the war, revolution and women's liberation.

Revolutionary Russia

After the soviets took power, there were many historic gains for women and other oppressed groups. Porter

shows the role Kollontai played, and the tens of thousands of women she represented—making a mockery of the claim that the Russian Revolution was a simple coup by Lenin.

Knowing the limits of legal reforms, Kollontai and Armand founded the Zhenotdel—a department organized by and for women, which encouraged participation in the revolution across the country, helped with literacy, promoted communal crèches and kitchens to free women from domestic work, and provided sex workers with education, jobs and free medical care, and provided free abortion on demand.

Counter-revolution

The civil war led to fierce debates about the way forward, which was dominated by increasingly desperate measures. Porter documents the demise of the revolution and the marginalization of Kollontai along with the rise of Stalin, who closed the Zhenotdel and reversed all revolutionary gains. Attacks on her revolutionary ideas combined with self-censorship for reasons of survival.

Porter details the tragic downfall of the revolution and its revolutionaries, but resorts to abstract explanations, ignoring the massive impact of counter-revolution and isolation—which was avoidable if the revolutionary wave that swept the world had succeeded outside Russia, following the lead of Kollontai and the Bolsheviks.

LEFT JAB

John Bell

WWI: over the top

April will mark the 100th anniversary of WWI. That is when Stephen Harper and his army of historical revisionists will commence their battle to claim that imperialist slaughter as a good and just war.

Harper will have allies. Right-wing governments in Britain and Australia are also hard at work gearing up the celebration of war. The trick will be to separate “Empire” from “imperialism.” “Empire” was good guys bringing civilization and democracy to the world, and by a wonderful coincidence the goods guys were mostly English speaking white people. By no coincidence at all, these governments are all in the midst of austerity drives, slashing services in order to deliver tax cuts to the 1% corporate elite. Tories seldom admit it, but believe that the growing gap of income inequality is a good thing.

Occasionally the mask will slip. The ever loathsome Kevin O'Leary thinks the fact that just 85 billionaires have wealth equal to half of the human race is “fantastic.” Evidently our envy for our betters should motivate us to join their ranks. To suggest that income inequality is a problem is to engage in “class warfare.” San Francisco-based high tech capitalist Tom Perkins recently wrote to the Wall Street Journal to “call attention to the parallels of fascist Nazi Germany to its war on its ‘one percent,’ namely its Jews, to the progressive war on the American one percent, namely the ‘rich.’” Warfare good, class warfare bad! Talk about going over the top.

Rehabilitating WWI

Which brings us back to the impending celebration of WWI. Like the millions wasted on commemorating the War of 1812, this new anniversary will try to accomplish two goals: to whip up unquestioning patriotism; and to define Canada as a “warrior nation.” We don't have to look far to know what to expect as the celebration of slaughter heads to a climax in April, 2017, the 100th anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge.

In April of last year, Tory propagandists dug up a blog post by Alexandre Boulerice, written back in 2007 before he was elected to parliament as an NDP MP. In it Boulerice called WWI “a purely capitalist war on the backs of workers and peasants.” Vimy Ridge, rather than the defining moment of national character, was when “thousands of poor wretches were slaughtered to take possession of a hill.” He couldn't have been more accurate. For most of the intervening 100 years there has been broad consensus—among participants, observers and historians alike—that the war which claimed over 16 million lives was a brutal, inhuman waste, a war in service of nothing more noble than imperialist competition.

But facts didn't stop Harper and his party attacking Boulerice and attempting to rehabilitate WWI. Tory spokesman Fred DeLorey called Vimy Ridge “a battle that forged our national identity and marked the beginning of our proud nation.” It seems that to tell the truth about

WWI is “to denigrate and disrespect the legacy of those who served, sacrificed and gave their lives in the defence of freedom and democracy during World War I.”

War for democracy?

Let's be clear. World War I was not a war for democracy or freedom. Arguably, the most democratic nation involved in the slaughter was Germany, where every adult male had a vote. More, the German Social Democratic Party was an openly socialist party with millions of members, and in 1912 it gained more votes than any other party. By contrast, 40 per cent of British adult males were denied the vote in 1914. Only following the war, in an attempt to forestall a rising mood of rebellion, was universal male suffrage granted. With the advent of war absolute press censorship was imposed. Elections due in 1915 were simply cancelled, and a non-elected coalition government installed. In Canada, adult males of British descent were granted the vote. But provinces were free to impose restrictions and conditions on other immigrant communities. As for First Nations, men living on reserves were denied the vote entirely while those living off reserve had to own property to qualify.

As the war dragged on enthusiasm waned, so did recruitment. Tory PM Robert Borden was forced to impose conscription in 1917, to replace the more than 10,000 casualties taken at Vimy Ridge. The draft was unpopular across the country, especially in Quebec where it was greeted with mass protests. Fearing electoral defeat, Borden used his parliamentary majority to force through electoral “reforms” that took away the right to vote from groups considered likely to be anti-Tory—like conscientious and religious war objectors. And they temporarily granted the vote to some women—the wives and relatives of men living or dead who served in the military. As well, any immigrants from “enemy” nations were denied the vote. Especially in the west, tens of thousands Canadian citizens lost their democratic rights with the stroke of a pen.

War against veterans

So don't buy the coming wave of crap that will claim WWI is war for freedom and democracy. And don't buy the nonsense that today's Tories are standing up for veterans. Look no further than the savage budget cuts to veterans' health and social services. Witness the insults Tory Minister Julian Fantino dumped on veterans when they dared to speak out. And witness the tragic wave of suicides by vets, traumatized by their participation in point-less wars, all but abandoned by their government.

In 2006, British PM Tony Blair tried to stage a photo op with Harry Patch, the last surviving WWI vet. Harry told Blair: “Politicians who took us to war should have been given the guns and told to settle their differences themselves instead of organizing nothing better than legalized mass murder.” Blair fled.

Who are you going to believe about WWI: Stephen Harper or Harry Patch?

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.

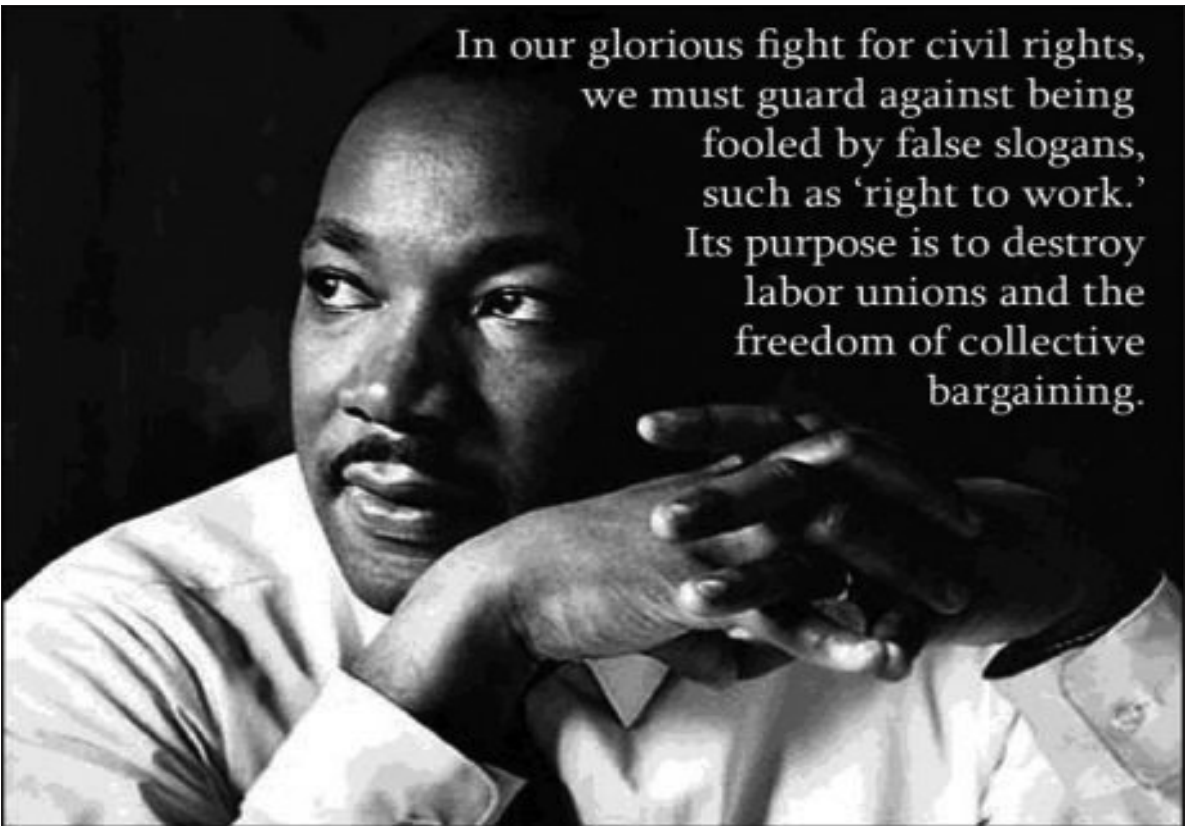
Oppression

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.



Black history and “right to work”

by ALEX HUNSBERGER

ONTARIO PROGRESSIVE-Conservative leader Tim Hudak has made no secret of his wish to assault organized labour if elected premier, something which could happen as early as this spring. The most significant of his proposed reforms is the promise to enact so-called “right-to-work” legislation.

Despite its Orwellian name, right-to-work has nothing to do with providing full employment, but rather is an attempt to denude the province's labour movement. The legislation would repeal the Rand formula, which ensures stable union financing by requiring all those covered by a collective agreement to pay dues to the union that is legally required to represent them regardless of whether or not they are union members.

Hudak's key talking point is that right-to-work legislation is a way to “modernize” Ontario's labour laws. In fact, it is nothing of the sort. An examination of the history of right-to-work reveals both that it is many decades old and that its origins lie in one of the “liberal democratic” world's most despotic, repressive, and racist political regimes.

Right-to-work laws are largely a product of the US South in the era before the repeal of formal legal racial segregation. The link between the two is not at all coincidental. The conservative Southern political and economic elite felt threatened by both labour and civil rights activism, and above all feared that the combination of the two, along with other left activist currents, would topple its stranglehold on power.

Labour and the fight against Jim Crow

The elite's hold on power rested on the massive, violent economic and political repression of the South's African-American population.

By the end of World War II, the civil rights movement was gaining steam. Brutal police repression remained part of daily life for Southern blacks, but they nevertheless engaged increasingly in forms of defiance and resistance.

Strikes and labour organizing picked up rapidly across the US. A huge strike wave swept the nation in 1945 and 1946 as the tight post-war labour market boosted workers' confidence.

Most dangerously for the Southern segregationists, many unions—especially those in the industrial trade union confederation, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)—were organizing across racial lines. Industries like tobacco and steel employed both black and white workers, and successful organizing and strikes required interracial solidarity. In other cases, black workers formed their own unions as tools of economic and political resistance—like the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, organized by the socialist A Philip Randolph.

We should be very careful not to whitewash this history, as plenty of trade unions remained covertly and/or overtly racist and some supported segregation. We should also avoid narratives that paint white workers as the saviours of their African-American counterparts, for it was largely the actions of black workers and activists both inside and outside unions that brought segregation to an end. Nevertheless, it is impossible to miss the significance of black and white workers politically cooperating in the workplace in a region characterized by a long history of deep-seated, brutal racism.

The fraud of “right to work”

In response to the surge in labour activism, Southern Democrats allied with Republicans in Congress to override the opposition of Northern Democrats and President Truman's veto to pass the Taft-Hartley Act, which remains to this day the most significant piece of federal anti-union legislation in the United States. It included provisions outlawing closed shops, banning secondary picketing, and preventing Communists from holding union office, among others. Most significantly, the Act allowed states to pass right-to-work laws.

The laws had the effect of seriously arresting union progress in the Deep South in the years following 1947. Massive state repression of democratic movements—and the African-American population in general—sustained the Jim Crow system in the US South for nearly two more decades.

Fight for jobs and freedom

Jim Crow ended in the 1960s with a series of legal rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court and legislative acts by

the U.S. Congress. That is not to say all forms of state-sponsored racism in the region ended at that time—far from it—but the end of formal legal discrimination based on race was nevertheless an enormous victory.

Of course, the judicial and legal action that finally ended segregation did not occur due to the courage or benevolence of the country's political elites, but because of decades of struggle by African-Americans and their allies, both of whom increasingly participated in the labour movement.

The struggle today

The context today in Ontario is different in fundamental ways from the segregationist US South, of course, and this analysis should not be seen as an attempt to equate the two historical junctures. The purpose of examining right-to-work's history is not to say that it is solely a tool to advance racial segregation. It is, however, important to highlight that its purpose is inevitably to suppress one of the main forces in society capable of fighting social injustice if it chooses to—organized labour.

In order to impose austerity, the ruling class is attacking workers through racism and attacks on unions—and Hudak epitomizes both. Last election he attacked “foreign workers,” and if he wins this election he wants to push through “right to work” laws. We must cut through the Ontario Tories' misleading rhetoric to reveal that the true intent of their agenda is to protect elite power from democratic challenges.

We also need to resist reducing this challenge to the ballot box, and instead expand it to fighting racism and rebuilding unions. As Martin Luther King reminds us, “The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, government relief for the destitute and, above all, new wage levels that meant not mere survival but a tolerable life. The captains of industry did not lead this transformation; they resisted it until they were overcome. When in the thirties the wave of union organization crested over the nation, it carried to secure shores not only itself but the whole society.”

international socialist events

Langara branch meeting
“**Capitalism & Pipelines: How do we get rid of them both?**”
Wednesday February 29
Langara college

Toronto-west branch fundraiser
The 3rd Anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution: What's happened and what's next?
Sunday February 9
4pm near Bloor/Dufferin
Email torontowest.is@gmail.com

Toronto centre branch fundraiser
Revolution in Tahrir Square film and dinner
Sunday February 23
5:30pm at United Steelworkers Hall
25 Cecil Street

Toronto district forum
“**Yes to \$14/hr, No to Hudak**”: the fight to raise the minimum wage and rebuild unions
Monday February 24
7pm at OISE room 2286

York branch conference
High debt. Low wages. No future? Is there an alternative to capitalism?
York Student Centre room 307
12pm Opening meeting:
The case for a \$14 minimum wage
1:30pm Meetings 2 & 3
How can we win free tuition?
- or -
Racism, sexism and the war on women
3pm Meetings 4 & 5
A brief history of neoliberalism
- or -
Retail workers of the world, unite!
Resistance in the service sector
4:30pm Closing meeting:
How does the 1% stay in power?

peace & justice events

Nous sommes féministes et contre la charte
dimance 9 février, 10-12h
Centre St-Pierre, Montreal

Session d'information sur le pipeline Trans Canada
Dimance 9 février, 13h
Cegep de l'Outaouais

Women's Memorial March
February 14 in cities across the country
womensmemorialmarch.wordpress.com/

Rally for a \$14/hr minimum wage
Saturday February 15
1pm at Yonge/Dundas

Mi'kmaq Warriors - West Coast/Prairies/Southern Ontario Speaking Tour
January 24-Feb 18
For more information visit www.facebook.com/events/1403354923241928

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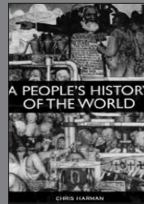
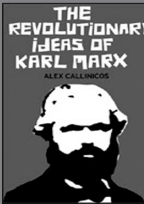
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THE PENSIONS FIGHT

by PHIL MURTON

WHAT DO Canada Post job cuts and the end of home delivery have in common with the city of Detroit's declaration of bankruptcy? Pensions.

In December 2013, Canada Post announced that it would end home mail delivery to over 5 million households and lay off 6,000 to 8,000 postal workers, supposedly to save money due to a short fall in pension contributions. In a more extreme example, Detroit Michigan declared bankruptcy in July 2013, claiming that its insolvency is due to pentions.

Pensions cuts have increasingly become a method of attacking workers living standards and their unions. It is another way of blaming workers for economic problems that they did not create.

Why are pensions in trouble?

The business media emphasizes that smaller workforces and the higher costs lead to reduced contribution. They also pit younger workers with no pensions against older ones who have them. Employers and governments want to use the pension issue to fight their political and ideological battles against workers by suggesting that the time of the "gold-plated" pension is over.

But, they don't emphasize what has really created the pension fund problem. One key reason is historically low interest rates and the slow growth of the economy. Central banks have kept interest rates low to "bribe" business to invest. Another reason, as in the case of Detroit, is mismanagement of pension funds and outright corruption.

Harper's attack on the public sector

The attack on postal services in Canada is part of a larger plan by the Harper government to reduce public services and layoff public sector workers.

In response, Denis Lemelin, the national president of Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) said, 'Enough is enough. We're cutting the public service, we're cutting the health services, we're cut public servants and people are losing their jobs everywhere. Now it's 6,000 to 8,000 jobs in the postal service... We have a call to the public to say, OK, you don't want to lose your door-to-door delivery, so you have to say something.'

New Democrat MP Olivia Chow said Canada Post should be focused on expanding revenue through offering more services, rather than cutting existing ones.

CUPW has launched a campaign to fight for services and jobs. The fight to defend public services and postal workers jobs is an important one that we all need to be part of.

Visit cupw.ca for information and to download a sign for your window.

ARTICLE TITLE



RICHTREE WORKERS WIN LEGAL VICTORY, THOUGH STRUGGLE CONTINUES

THE NEW year has started off with a solid victory for 50 Toronto workers still engaged in a year-long labour dispute with Richtree Restaurant, as the Ontario Labour Board released their ruling in favour of their union Unite Here Local 75.

Just over a year ago, 50 unionized workers were laid off by the Richtree Restaurant's Eaton Center location on the grounds that the restaurant was permanently closing down and so the entire staff had to be let go. Just a few months later however, in September 2013, the company reopened in the same mall with an entirely new - non-union - staff.

Union busting

The restaurant claimed this was somehow an entirely new restaurant with no union ties. Many, however, have recognized this as a blatant attempt at union busting.

This was a case where a company took advantage of the ongoing anti-worker economic climate to effect a particularly ruthless attack in order to see if it could push the bar further and crush its union. Had they succeeded and been supported in this claim, it would have opened the door to any company being able to rid itself of its union by simply closing down for a few months to renovate.

Resistance and solidarity

Recognizing the stakes of this struggle, the resistance to Richtree's attack on work-

ers has been truly inspiring.

From September through January, Unite Here has organized a number of loud and spirited rallies outside the Eaton Center.

Even more impressive was the solidarity received from outside the local. Rank and file groups from countless other union locals, as well as student unions and activist groups have not only supported existing rallies and actions, but have also independently engaged in delegations to management and direct actions inside the restaurant. This has kept up the pressure on management and supported the morale of the laid-off workers.

A well orchestrated media campaign has kept the struggle in the public eye, and worked to further embarrass the restaurant.

Legal victory

Finally, on January 7 the Ontario Labour Board came out with its ruling stating that Unite Here still represents the workers at the renovated restaurant. This means that Richtree's attempt to portray the re-opening as a different restaurant has failed.

Though an important ruling, this is still only a single legal victory and is limited in scope. The struggle must continue as the company itself has refused to change its anti-worker attitude. Furthermore the ruling does not say anything about the 50 laid off workers, who have yet to be either given their jobs back or offered reasonable compensation.

Another factor at play in

the situation is that this entire labour struggle has been taking place during contract negotiations at three different Richtree locations in Toronto. While the Eaton Centre location has been at the centre of this dispute, the company has shown some indications that it is considering a lockout of the other two Richtree locations.

Ongoing struggle

Socialists understand that while the capitalist state sometimes comes out in favour of workers in order to maintain labour peace, it ultimately exists to support capital. Thus we know that labour struggles are not so much won in the courts, but rather on the streets and in the workplace.

This dispute is still far from over. It enters now into the most important phase, where workers have to come together for one last push and pressure the company to fulfil their obligations: to bring back the unjustly laid off workers, to accept a good contract and to stop threatening the rest of it's workers.

As important as this first victory may be, the struggle of the laid-off workers continues in earnest and will require more support then ever in the upcoming weeks.

But so long as the workers continue showing the same determination to fight, and as long as the solidarity from other groups continues to be as strong as it has been, there is every reason to believe that this struggle will soon resolve into a major victory.

NEIL YOUNG TOUR BUILDS SOLIDARITY FOR ATHABASCA CHIPEWYAN FIRST NATION

PROMINENT SINGER Neil Young's recently completed Honour The Treaties tour struck a chord with allies and opponents alike.

Along with well-known jazz musician Diana Krall and accompanied by First Nations spokespersons, Young recently used this tour as a benefit for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation - the community so far hit the hardest by oil sands development. Proceeds, estimated at over \$500,000 from the four concerts, are in aid of the Nation's Legal Defence Fund, to support Treaty 8.

The First Nation is gearing up for a major legal fight after the federal government approved Shell Canada's Jackpine mine expansion despite an

environmental assessment that said the development will cause irreversible environmental damage.

At each concert, Young has been airing a 15-minute version of Petropolis: Aerial Perspectives on the Alberta Tar Sands, shot for Greenpeace. The video shows "probably the most devastating thing you will ever see...It's the greediest, most destructive and disrespectful demonstration of just something run amok that you could ever see," he said about the tar sands development, which he compared to Hiroshima.

Industry-backed EthicalOil.org launched NeilYoungLies.ca urging people to "help us fight back against foreign celebrities and their slander." The group's founder,

Aalykhan Velshi, is tied to Harper's office.

Neil Young joins a list of Canadian artists who have supported the Idle No More movement and its related campaigns for climate justice.

Young is no stranger to using his music as a platform for protest, in his lyrics, his on-stage commentary and, especially in this case, his offstage media interviews done jointly with First Nations spokespersons.

Donations to the Legal Defence Fund can be mailed to:

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation
Legal Defence Fund
Box 366
Fort Chipewyan, Alberta
T0P 1B0

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

International Women's Day

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S Day has long been celebrated in the trade unions as well as the women's movement. It was originally put forward at a socialist women's conference held in Copenhagen in 1910 in commemoration of immigrant women garment workers who had earlier struck for dignity and respect in New York City.

It's roots are tremendously important for us today because they point to the importance of building solidarity with women who are fighting for their rights in the workplace today. Governments and corporations around the globe are enforcing the neo-liberal agenda. The gap between rich and poor is widening. Women, particularly racialized women, are bearing the brunt of these attacks.

Jobs and services

There have been huge layoffs in the manufacturing sector in Ontario. Good unionized jobs have been replaced by contract and precarious work. More and more are going into the services sector without union protection. Over 4,000 home care workers struck in December demanding higher wages and better conditions from a for-profit company.

Organized workplaces such as Zellers have been bought out and Target, a non-union company, has taken over. Anti-union labour laws have made organizing much more difficult, with intimidation and harassment occurring when workers try to unionize.

Privatization has been imposed in the public sector accompanied by significant job loss. Canada Post is planning to reduce its work force by 6,000 to 8,000 if its plans to stop home delivery are not stopped. Veterans services are being cut back across the country, with those providing services losing their jobs.

Toronto IWD

Toronto has been celebrating International Women's day since 1978 with a rally and march highlighting women's key demands. A coalition of unions and women's organizations has been meeting to determine the critical issues facing women both young and old in this city.

The theme this year is "Women Taking Power." The issues women have prioritized are "\$14 minimum wage now!", "Public services are women's services" and "Generation Squeezed: We demand our future!". These speak to the reality of women's lives as well as the need to mobilize the anger that is felt by so many due to the conditions they face.

A march of thousands is expected to wind its way through the streets of the city, hopefully giving women and their allies the confidence to continue the fight. The province of Ontario has refused the demand for a \$14 minimum wage, with future promises only to raise it to \$11/hr. It is turning its back on those who most need a wage increase, working for below poverty line wages.

The attack on public services is putting a huge burden on women to take on more responsibility for family and children. Seniors can't afford to access services that now have user fees. Children can't access swimming and other recreational facilities for the same reasons. Subsidies for childcare are hard to come by and after school programs are more expensive. It goes on and on.

Young women are under and unemployed and feel their futures have been stolen from them. All of this has created huge anger.

Hopefully International Women's Day this year will express more visibly and forcefully than ever that women are rising with their allies and fighting back for a better world.

Join the International Socialists

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Yes to \$14/hr, No to Hudak: raise the wage and rebuild unions

by MICHELLE ROBIDOUX

WITH A provincial election likely this year Ontario Conservative party leader Tim Hudak has vowed to introduce anti-union legislation if his party forms the next government, and the arguments are being given a test-drive in the by-election.

“Worker choice” and the “Million Jobs Act”

Hudak’s legislation, which he has dubbed “worker choice,” is modeled on laws in place in 24 US states—preventing workers who benefit from a union collective agreement paying union dues, making illegal all clauses in collective agreements that require workers to join a union, outlawing dues check-off in the public sector, and interfering in the internal affairs of unions by requiring that strike votes and ratification votes be supervised by the government.

Hudak hopes to tap into anger and insecurity caused by the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs and the lack of decent jobs, to convince workers they will be better off if they aren’t required to pay union dues.

Behind Hudak’s bogus “worker choice” claims lies the real agenda of driving down wages to boost corporate profits. As a result, Hudak has run into friction in his own party as Conservative candidates find it hard to camouflage the anti-worker intent of these policies.

Cue Hudak’s “Million Jobs Act” (see page 8). Far from creating living-wage jobs, the bill will actually cut 10,000 public sector jobs. It is a Trojan horse hiding Hudak’s deeply anti-worker policies under the promise of jobs.



Workers rights campaign

In response to Hudak’s attacks, union activists across the province are organizing in defense of their rights. Workers’ rights campaigns by several unions including CUPE, USW, Unifor and SEIU are mobilizing and arming union members with information about the threat posed by Hudak’s policies.

One of the reasons Hudak’s arguments about “worker

choice” can gain a hearing is because of the distance many ordinary union members feel from their union. Too often, union structures are geared towards talking to management rather than talking to workers. For many union activists, the Workers Rights campaign is the opportunity they have been waiting for to engage members in a discussion about the value of unions.

In the context of unprecedented and relentless attacks by employers and governments on working class living standards, this campaign is vital. Workers’ ability to fight will be greatly weakened if Hudak’s arguments are not challenged in every workplace and every community.

A layer of the full-time union bureaucracy is completely disconnected from

the real and present danger confronting workers’ ability to fight if Hudak’s policies are brought in. Another layer of the bureaucracy does see the danger, and wants the mobilization to defeat Hudak but only so that things can go back to ‘normal’. This is not an option. We need to seize this opportunity to transform how we organize to make our unions stronger from the bottom up.

NDP AWOL

While Hudak pushes to weaken worker’s rights by attacking unions, labour and community activists are pushing to raise the minimum wage to \$14. This fight, along with the campaign to save Canada Post, creates a strong pole away from the individualism of Hudak’s ‘worker choice’ and towards the collective power of workers.

Disgracefully, the NDP has deserted the field of battle. They have been silent on both “right-to-work” and on raising the minimum wage.

Liberal Labour Minister Yasir Naqvi, meanwhile, has challenged Hudak’s anti-union policies as “the right-to-work-for-less as we have seen in the United States,” saying it will result in a net loss of jobs. The irony of the union-busting Liberals posing as friends of workers is only outdone by the irony of a “labour party” not fighting for an increase in the minimum wage.

Demand the \$14 minimum wage, save Canada Post, and rebuild unions

To defeat Hudak, we can’t leave it to the election. Pushing for the \$14 minimum wage, fighting to save the post office and organizing in every workplace against Hudak’s anti-union policies is top priority. As soon as the writ is dropped for the provincial election, every union will try to shift into the “business as usual” election mode.

Especially given that the NDP is not speaking out about Hudak’s proposals, and that it has handed the minimum wage issue to the Liberals, it would be disastrous to drop the workers’ rights campaign.

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February 14: Women’s Memorial March

SINCE IT was initiated in 1991 by women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, Coast Salish Territories, the Women’s Memorial March has gathered every February 14 to honour missing and murdered women. This year there are memorial marches in Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Thunder Bay, London, Owen Sound, Toronto, and Montreal.

As Marlene George, Memorial March Committee organizer explains, “We are here to honour and remember the women, and we are here because we are failing to protect women from poverty and systemic exploitation, abuse and violence. We are here in sorrow and in anger because the violence continues each and every day and the list of missing and murdered women gets longer every

year.” This includes high profile cases—like the Pickton murders, 18 of which occurred after the police and courts released him for attempted murder of a sex worker—and anonymous cases.

Indigenous women

Violence against women disproportionately affects indigenous women, tied to the colonial assault on indigenous communities and their land. As Melina Laboucan-Massimo, climate justice activist and member of the Lubicon Cree First Nation, said at last year’s Powershift conference, “violence against the earth begets violence against women.”

The Native Women’s Association of Canada has documented over 582 cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. According to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of

Discrimination against Women, “hundreds of cases involving aboriginal women who have gone missing or been murdered in the past two decades have neither been fully investigated nor attracted priority attention.”

Harper’s drive to develop the tar sands and destroy environmental protection goes hand in hand with his denial of Canada’s history of colonialism and complicity with violence against indigenous women. In 2007 Harper made Canada one of only four countries to vote against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in 2010 he cut funding to the Sisters in Spirit database—run by the NWAC—and instead handed over database funding to the RCMP. According to indigenous activist Ellen Gabriel, former President of the Quebec Native Women’s Association, “The

RCMP are the ones, the culprits, who have, through their apathy, done nothing to improve this situation.”

The day before last’s years march, Human Rights Watch released a report detailing police failures to protect indigenous women from violence and police violence towards indigenous women. Ten days after the report, an indigenous girl in Edmonton went to police bruised and bloody from a rape, and the police arrested her instead. Since last year’s, three more indigenous women have been killed in Toronto, including Laboucan-Massimo’s sister.

But indigenous women’s resistance is shining a light on this colonial violence, and inspiring people to challenge the system that produces it. For information visit womensmemorialmarch.wordpress.com.