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SOLIDARITY SPRING SOVEREIGNTY SUMMER



"Idle No More has sparked an awakening of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples internationally in support for democracy, human rights and environmental protections."

"In three short months, the movement has succeeded in raising global consciousness through education, cultural resurgence, and democratic political activism. We have shaken the foundations of inequality in Canada, and invited communities to join in a movement for social and environmental justice. We now need many more people to stand with us. The Harper government's agenda is clear: to weaken all collective rights and environmental protections, in order to turn Canada into an extraction state that gives corporations unchecked power to destroy our communities and environment for profit. Harper is trying to extinguish Indigenous Peoples' Inherent, Aboriginal and Treaty rights to their territories, because these rights are the best and last protection for all Canadians..."

"We know it will take a lot more to defeat Harper and the corporate agenda. But against the power of their money and weapons, we have

the power of our bodies and spirits. There is nothing that can match the power of peaceful, collective action in the defense of people and Mother Earth. Idle No More and Defenders of the Land, a network of Indigenous communities in land struggle, have joined together to issue this common call for escalating action..."

"We are calling on non-Indigenous people to join Indigenous communities in coordinated non-violent direct actions in the summer. Alternatives will only come to life if we escalate our actions, taking bold non-violent direct action that challenges the illegitimate power of corporations who dictate government policy."

We are looking at what will be a long, hot summer of indigenous-led actions opposing Stephen Harper's Tories. The founders of Idle No More have formally allied with the Defenders of the Land, a pan-Canadian network of indigenous environmental activists. They have called for a "solidarity spring" and "sovereignty summer" of non-violent civil disobedience, such as road and rail blockades, to oppose Tory attacks on First Nations sovereignty

and environmental protections. The demands of the joint call includes: repeal of Bill C-45, deepen democracy through consultation on legislation affecting collective rights and environmental protection, respect the right of indigenous people to say no to development on their territory, recognize and affirm Aboriginal Title and Rights, abandon seizure of Indigenous Nations lands and wealth, and actively resist violence against women and hold an indigenous women-led national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Just 24 hours later, chiefs and traditional leaders from 10 First Nations—whose territories include the Tar Sands and the pipeline routes planned to carry Tar Sands synthetic crude—gathered in Ottawa to sign a mutual support agreement. They declared that the pipelines will not pass through their lands. The escalation of Idle No More actions is in direct response to Tory attacks on First Nations sovereignty and environmental protections.

Resource extraction driven by extortion

This year the annual transfer pay-

ments from Ottawa to Canada's First Nations contain a crucial provision: money will only be paid if First Nations agree to drop all opposition to the Tory omnibus legislation. This is pure extortion.

Nina Wilson, one of the four Saskatchewan women who launched Idle No More, reported that several First Nations receiving the coercive appendix along with their annual contribution agreements have refused to sign. Many more have signed, but stated that they did so under duress. Any First Nation that does not sign will run out of funds by mid-April.

The Tory omnibus bills contain direct attacks on environmental legislation and indigenous sovereignty, two things that stand in the way of unfettered corporate access to northern resources. It was these attacks that spawned Idle No More. Now their extortion is a desperate bid to smash a growing movement.

That means we are headed for an unprecedented spring of confrontations between the Harper government, which thinks it can turn the clock back to the 1920s, and a resurgent movement for real First Nations self-determination.

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Defend free abortion on demand

by JESSE MCLAREN

THE AUSTERITY agenda is sharpening women’s oppression, but movement’s are fighting back.

Ontario Tory leader Tim Hudak signed a petition to defund abortion, and there was an anti-choice rally at Queen’s Park.

Claiming that “the cost of our current healthcare system is skyrocketing with no apparent solution,” and that “we want scarce money directed toward saving lives, not taking them,” the anti-choice movement is arguing that abortions are not “medically necessary” and so should be defunded.

First, this scapegoats women for the underfunding of healthcare. Canada has a very low abortion rate that has been declining. Our healthcare problems are not because of women’s reproductive choices but because of privatization and cutbacks by right-wing forces insisting cuts are necessary to our “skyrocketing” healthcare costs. Instead of defending public healthcare from billions of dollars of cutbacks, the anti-choice claim there is “no apparent solution” other than blaming women and defunding the small portion of healthcare that provides safe access to abortion. The small and angry, male-dominated rally also revealed the broader bigotry of the anti-choice agenda by passing out transphobic leaflets.

Second, claiming abortion is not “medically necessary” is false on two counts. First, women die if they don’t have access to abortion, making abortion essential to health. Second, it’s entirely up to women to determine what’s a “medical necessity” for their own bodies. Using any other abstract criteria revives the paternalistic and medically-dominant notion of the “therapeutic abortion committee” that was defeated by the women’s movement a generation ago.

Abortion was criminalized in Canada in 1869 along with contraception and homosexuality--as part of capitalism’s drive to impose the heteronormative nuclear family where women do unpaid work raising the next generation of workers. In 1969 hospital abortions were allowed under approval of “therapeutic abortion committees” but clinic abortions were still illegal.

The women’s movement advanced the slogan “free abortion on demand”--putting women at the centre of their reproductive decisions, and challenging economic barriers.

Movements are rising once again—from the October 20 pan-Canadian day of action for reproductive justice, to the January 28 celebration of the Morgentaler decision that recounted the lessons of the past struggle and connected the experience of the previous generation with the new generation of reproductive freedom fighters.

Stopping the defunding of abortion is part of a broader movement for reproductive justice.

Idle No More leads the fight against Harper agenda

by JOHN BELL

IDLE NO More has won its most significant battle to date, but the national media has all but ignored the event.

In Nova Scotia, Mi’kmaq activists Shelley Young (Eskasoni First Nation) and Jean Sock (Elsapogtog First Nation) started a hunger strike in opposition to a renegotiation of treaty rights known as the “Made In Nova Scotia” process. After 11 days on only water, they won.

The Kwilmu’kw Mawklusuaqn Negotiation Office (KMKNO), which was negotiating with the province and the federal government, has withdrawn from the process, at least for now, because of growing pressure from the grass roots.

There is nothing “Made in Nova Scotia” about it. Similar attempts to re-negotiate treaty rights are going on across the country. They offer lump sum cash payments in return for extinguishing land rights, and a watered down form of municipal “self-government” in place of the nation-to-nation relationship enshrined in historic treaties.

“We know our treaties have sustained our people for over 300 years and that they’ll protect our people if we give them the power to,” Young told the Halifax Media Collective. “So we felt that if our treaties are compromised through these negotiations that there’s no turning back. There’s no turning back because these self-government agreements all across Canada have all failed.”

Government documents assessing this process make it plain that “the inherent right of self-government does not include a right of sovereignty in the international law sense, and will not result in sovereign independent Aboriginal nation states.”

Canada: international lawbreaker

Canada has ignored an official request for a visit from the United Nations special rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous People, James Anaya. Anaya first contacted the Harper government in February of 2012, asking to visit to investigate the “human rights situation of Indigenous peoples.” He

has followed up with two more requests. The Tories’ response has been utter silence. A UN rapporteur cannot make a formal visit without the acknowledgement of the government. “If I do not receive a positive response from the government in the coming months, I can explore ways of meeting with First Nations leaders from Canada outside the context of an official visit,” Anaya wrote in a recent letter to the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

We don’t have to ask what Ottawa has to hide.

Harper’s record on dealing with the UN is wretched, especially concerning defence of rights of indigenous peoples. When the UN General Assembly first adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, Canada was one of only four nations refusing to sign (along with fellow settler states Australia, New Zealand and the US). Along with enshrining the right of First Nations to maintain and strengthen their unique cultures, the Declaration “promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that con-

cern them and their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions of economic and social development.” It insists that indigenous peoples must be fully and honestly informed about all the impacts of development in their territories and give their consent before development takes place.

Under domestic and international pressure, Harper’s government signed on to the Declaration in 2010. But in doing so, the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs insisted it was only an “aspirational document”: “Although the Declaration is a non-legally binding document that does not reflect customary international law nor change Canadian laws, our endorsement gives us the opportunity to reiterate our commitment to continue working in partnership with Aboriginal peoples in creating a better Canada.”

Tory actions speak louder than their “aspirational” double talk. They are dedicated to clearing the way for full corporate exploitation of resources, and are not about to let First Nations get in their way.

Doctors and lawyers challenge refugee health cuts

by CATE BESTER

CANADIAN DOCTORS for Refugee Care and the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, along with three ill refugee claimants denied medical services, took the federal government to court in late February in response to decreased health care access for refugees.

In June 2012, cuts made to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) for those not covered by provincial or private health insurance revoked coverage for dental and vision care as well as prescription medications. Now anyone seeking asylum in Canada, including expectant mothers, children, and the chronically ill, are denied life-sustaining medication and preventative health care.

In the case of people arriving from 27 countries that Immigration Officer Jason Kenney has deemed “safe,” no medical services, not even vaccinations or insulin, are available unless a condition that poses a threat to public health is present, even if the claimant has a work visa and is paying taxes to the Canadian government.

The cuts are being challenged as unconstitutional according to the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. Sections 7 and 12 which guarantee “the right to life, liberty, and security of the person” and freedom from “cruel and unusual treatment” have been violated as refusal of care may lead to further health complications and in some cases death.

Canada’s international legal obligations toward children and refugees are being compromised, especially as health issues these claimants face may be the result of the treatment they fled.

Meanwhile, the medical community and refugees are confused about what services are covered and for whom, so that even those that should be receiving treatment under the degraded IFHP are being denied necessary care.

The Immigration Minister claims that these cuts will save taxpayers \$20 million a year. However, as withholding preventative and primary health care services now will cause the health of those denied to deteriorate unnecessarily in the long term, the cuts may ultimately carry a greater cost to provincial health insurance programs.

Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care launched last May with occupations and a day of action, forcing the federal government to make some revisions to their cuts. More action, and not just from doctors and lawyers, will be necessary to reverse the remainder of the cuts.



Idle No More protestors lead the International Women’s Day march in Toronto

Nishiyuu walkers inspire

INSPIRED BY the upsurge of First Nations activism under the banner of Idle No More, six young people and a guide from the Cree Nation of Quebec set out to walk from their home on Hudson Bay to Ottawa, 1500km away. This is the Journey of Nishiyuu, the Quest For Unity.

These are the names of the warriors who left the community of Whapmagoostui on January 17: Stanley George Jr., Johnny Abraham, David Kawapit, Raymond Kawapit, Geordie Rupert, Travis George and Isaac

Kawapit (guide). Their amazing journey was designed to strengthen their connection to the land, and to unite with other First Nations, through whose territory they would pass. Although all but ignored by Canada’s mainstream media, tens of thousands around the world “followed” them as they used the internet to report on their trek.

At each community they passed through more walkers joined them. As they neared Ottawa the walkers numbered in the hundreds.

In an open letter to all First Nations people they

warn of the government’s plan: “Eventually, they will assimilate you and your children will have nothing left for their children.

Part of their plan is to remove you from the reservations and place everyone into the cities because they need your land as no one will have the right to decide what happens to land and the natural resources other than the governing authorities. They are ready to do anything to force you off your lands.”

The purpose of the walk is to forge unity, as explained in a press

release: “By facing these challenges that our people are subjected to everyday, our youths will reinforce the traditional bonds that existed between the Cree Nation and our historical allies by restoring the traditional trade routes that linked the Cree, Algonquin, Mohawk and other First Nations throughout Turtle Island for the betterment of future generations.”

Indigenous stewardship of the land, and unity among peoples—both are threats to the Tory agenda and both deserve everyone’s support.

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General strike in Bahrain

by YUSUR AL BAHRANI

MARCH 14 marked the second anniversary of the Saudi troops, with military aid from the United Arab Emirates, invading Bahrain to help the Al-Khalifa regime crackdown on peaceful protestors. While the Saudi troops remain in Bahrain, thousands of Bahrainis commemorated this day by civil disobedience and a general strike, which revolutionaries named “Strike of Dignity 2.”

Civil disobedience
Just like “Strike of Dignity 1” that took place on the anniversary of the revolution on February 14, “Strike of Dignity 2” was very successful. Shops were shutdown and workers refused to go to their workplaces. Many students did not attend their classes in schools and universities. The civil disobedience paralyzed

the regime and reflected the power of the united masses in Bahrain. Outraged by the people’s unity, the regime’s forces used teargas canisters to attack civilians in their homes. Throwing teargas canisters in highly populated areas in Bahraini villages is very dangerous and results in suffocation of children and in some cases their death.

Live ammunition
The regime’s forces directly targeted pro-democracy protestors with live ammunition and bird shot pellets. The AlWefaq opposition party reported that the forces also used gas grenades as live ammunition aiming at the upper parts of the protestors’ bodies in an attempt to kill. The regime’s use of gas grenades as live ammunition previously killed dozens of civilians. In February, two youths, Mahmoud Al-Jaziri and Hussain Al-Jaziri, were killed as the forces shot them directly with gas

grenades.

Resistance and demands
Demonstrators in Bahrain demanded the immediate withdrawal of Saudi troops. While the Saudi troops are responsible for grave human rights violations including killings and arrests, pro-government and Al-Khalifa loyalists waved the flags of Saudi Arabia in an attempt to demoralize the protestors. The attempts failed and until the late hours of the night protestors flooded the streets in several villages and cities.

On the other hand, the Kingdom of Bahrain appointed Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa as the first deputy prime minister. The decision was not based on elections. Although some might view him as a moderate and reformist, he has not shown any serious efforts in stopping the ongoing human rights violations in Bahrain. Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa has

been in his position for more than four decades.

The demands of protestors remain the same, despite minor political changes: the unconditional release of all political detainees and prisoners of conscience; withdrawal of Saudi forces, an end to the ongoing regime’s violations, an end to the discrimination faced by the Bahraini aboriginal population and a true democracy.

Solidarity
We can show solidarity towards Bahraini revolutionaries by calling on Western governments to stop exporting arms to Bahrain, which is the home of US Fifth Fleet. It is necessary to expose Western governments’ hypocrisy (like Canada) that on the one hand supports the oppressive Saudi and Bahraini regimes, and on the other hand claim to be democratizing other parts of the world through militarism.

UAE: trial of activists

by ANTON CU UNJIENG

THE UNITED Arab Emirates are a key ally of the United States in the Persian Gulf as well as a major exporter of oil and natural gas. Like many countries in the regions, the UAE has been affected by the mood of resistance generated by the Arab Spring.

The ruling elite has reacted with a paranoid clamping down on opposition. Around 94 dissidents have been accused of plotting to overthrow the government.

Trial of activists
The accused include judges, human rights defenders, lawyers, teachers, academics and students. Many of the accused belong to a political group called al-Islah (meaning “reform”), whose major demands are regulatory and legislative powers for the Federal National Council (the closest thing to a parliament) and for all members of the council to be elected.

The trial of the 94 continues at the Federal Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi. If convicted, activists face up to 15 years in jail. Most of the political prisoners have been held in secret detention, and many of them have been tortured. The UAE has a history of human rights abuses, and, although it is a signatory of the UN convention against torture, it has not allowed the UN to investigate allegations of torture.

Arms deal
Western powers struggle to direct the attention of mainstream media away from human rights abuses in UAE due to imperialist economic interests. According to The Guardian “In December the UAE signed up for 60 Eurofighter Typhoon jets after a visit by David Cameron. The UAE has signed 17 defence contracts for US-built drones worth \$1.42bn. It is France’s biggest arms export destination.”

It is vital to show solidarity and to expose the double standards of the system that values economic capitalist interests over human lives.

UAE: trial of activists

by CANDACE GHENT

WITH 70,000 dead and millions displaced, the Syrian people’s right to self-determination is more than under threat now. But after two years of repression by President Basar Al-Assad, and two years of the West trying to hijack the revolutionary movements in Syria, the revolution is not over.

There have been reports that the CIA sending arms from Turkey and Arab countries to sections of the opposition in Syria, and Western-backed Jordan is training some rebels in Syria. These are attempts to control the resistance and any future beyond Assad. But this control is not complete. France called for lifting of the arms embargo, in order to arm certain rebels, then reversed course--worried the West will not be able to control who gets the weapons and whether they will be loyal to the West.

For the full article, visit: <http://bit.ly/ZCpsHP>

South Yemen demands independence

by MIRFAT SULAIMEN

HUNDREDS OF thousands of people protested in the port city of Aden in South Yemen on Monday of last week to demand independence for South Yemen.

The demonstrations were also called to show opposition to the “national dialogue” talks launched the same day.

The national dialogue is part of a Western brokered treaty that has stalled the Yemeni revolution.

Abdullah, a protester, said, “The ‘national dialogue’ does not mean anything for us in the South. Our will is stronger than their lies.” Protesters carried placards reading, “No dialogue under occupation!”

Resistance has been building in Aden and the South following a brutal crackdown by president Mansur Hadi last month.

Dozens of protesters were killed and hundreds wounded as Hadi staged a “unity celebration” to mark one year since his election victory.

The protests are called “The decision is ours,” to show the world that the majority in South maintain the demand for national self-determination.

“Young people are the engine of the revolution,” said Aden student activist S Baabad. “We hold protests on Friday after prayers.

“We honour protesters who have been killed.

“We march to the prison and demand the release of activists, which does help to free people.”

In the run-up to the national dialogue, activists flooded into Aden from around the South. The streets filled at night with sleeping people.

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Workers: gravediggers of capitalism

MARXISTS ARE sometimes charged with “privileging” class—that is, with insisting that class is the fundamental division in society. What is assumed to follow from this is that we don’t take seriously questions of oppression—women’s oppression, homophobia, transphobia, racism, disability oppression, national oppression.

This reflects the impact of Stalinism, which presented a “Marxism” purged of the anti-oppression politics that are central to working class self-emancipation. Marx argued that the working class had the potential to become the gravediggers of the system that oppressed and exploited most of humanity—the capitalist system. This was not to claim some moral superiority of workers over the middle class or the peasantry, or to subordinate questions of oppression to class—but to unite struggles against oppression with working class resistance because of workers’ unique position in relation to the means of production.

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes capitalism at its beginnings as a revolutionary system, because it creates, for the first time in human history, the potential for liberation from want. But as Marx recognized, even in his time, capitalism would never achieve this society of plenty for all, because of the way production is organized, with the means of production controlled by a tiny minority of society, the ruling class—“the 1%”.

Capitalism’s insatiable drive has brought us in the 21st century to the edge of climate chaos and environmental destruction. But the Achilles heel of capitalism is that it can only create and re-create itself through the labour of workers.

Marx defined the working class on the basis, not of their salary or self-definition, but on their objective relationship to the means of production. Workers are those of us who can only survive by selling our labour power. So, although we are in that sense enslaved to capital, capital is also dependent on us—and capitalism grows by producing its own gravedigger, the working class.

This dependence on the working class can potentially be the downfall of the system. Profits only come from the exploitation of workers, and because of workers’ relationship to production—we create all the wealth in society, but have no control over what is produced, how it is produced or who it is produced for—workers are constantly thrown into conflict with the bosses over working conditions, wages, questions of democracy in the workplace. When workers withdraw our collective labour power, the gears of capitalism and the profits that flow from it grind to a halt—creating the possibility of reorganizing society on the basis of need.

The changing nature of the working class

Some left academics and others have argued at various times over the past 40 years that the working class is no longer the force for change that it was in Marx’s time. In fact, French philosopher and leftist Andre Gorz argued something very similar to this, only weeks before May 68 when 10 million French workers occupied their factories and French President Charles De Gaulle fled the country fearing that his government was finished. More recently, some have argued that we have entered an information age, a postindustrial society with virtual production—which has removed living, breathing human beings from the equation.

It has often been argued that the shrinking of the industrial working class in western capitalist countries signals the weakening of the working class in general—if “worker” is reduced to white men in overalls. It is certainly true that the traditional manufacturing sector has declined from what it once was. But at the same time we have seen the public and service sectors becoming much more important. As Marx also argues in the *Communist Manifesto*, capitalism, by constantly revolutionizing production, also changes and reshapes the working class at the same time.

There are more workers today in the country of Brazil than there were in the whole of the working class at the time Marx was writing. Although there may be fewer manufacturing workers in western capitalist countries, centres of manufacture have opened up in many countries in the global South—whose workers wield the same power to stop production by downing their tools as their sisters and brothers in the global North. Today most workers are in the global South, and include people from every gender, sexual orientation, faith, ability and nationality.

In the past few years this international working class has started to rise, as central participants in movements for a better world—from Greek workers rising against austerity and fascism, South African workers exposing the ANC government, and workers at the heart of the Arab Spring.

There have also been important struggles in our own backyard. In the US there was the successful Chicago teachers strike against attacks on education, non-unionized Walmart and fast-food workers fighting for rights and unionization.

Quebec saw the strike by Rio Tinto workers in Alma, that built solidarity between Quebec and English Canada. In Canada we had the short-lived but inspiring wildcat of Air Canada workers, the Toronto library workers who pushed back Rob Ford, the recent victory of Homes First workers, and the ongoing strike of Porter Airlines workers fighting for dignity on the job in Toronto.

It’s clear that the only way for workers to win is to unite against a common enemy. To do this it’s imperative to fight all forms of oppression—racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, disability oppression, national oppression—that are used to divide the 99%. From Egypt to Greece to Canada—where rulers are consciously using scapegoating of immigrants and attacks on women’s rights to try and divide the movement—the workers’ movement must take these backward ideas head on, if they are going to win.

Whether the working class overthrows the system that exploits and oppresses us all, will be only be resolved through the struggle.

INTERNATIONAL



A decade on, resisting Iraq War continues

by SARAH BJORKNAS

TEN YEARS ago, the United States redoubled its efforts in the destruction and occupation of Iraq, moving from sanctions back to bombing and killing. Nine years ago, the people across Canada started welcoming a new generation of US soldiers of conscience from another illegal and immoral US war.

The War Resisters Support Campaign (WRSC) is an intergenerational mix of Americans who emigrated during the US war on Vietnam, the Canadians who helped them, and those who have grown up being proud of that legacy. Together the campaign has made every effort to uphold the rights of US war resisters to refuse service to a military (and a country) which will not honour international law and a soldier’s obligation to refuse to commit war crimes and participate in an illegal war.

The struggle to allow US war resisters from Iraq and Afghanistan to settle in Canada has not been easy and is not over. The campaign has successfully engaged this issue in three ways: providing the means for war resisters and their families to economically and socially integrate in their new communities, connecting them with legal

council to navigate the Immigration and Refugee system as political refugees, and become involved in the national political system in order to have the federal government create a provision for immigration for war resisters.

The WRSC has been able to identify and promote broad support for war resisters, quantified in a 2008 poll that said two thirds of Canadians think the war resisters should become permanent residents. Parliament has twice voted to stop the deporation of war resisters and to let them stay. There has also been internatioanal support for war resisters, from Vietnam resister Ron Kovic to Archbishoip Desmond Tutu. But under the Conservative government of Stephen Harper, with Jason Kenney as Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, this democratic will has been thwarted multiple times through ignoring Parliament and unethical interference in the refugee system.

Jason Kenney labelled war resisters as “bogus refugee claimants,” an allegation opposed by the Canadian Council for Refugees as giving “the strong appearance of political interference.” Kenney then institutionalized this prejudice with Operational Bulletin 202, which labels war resisters “criminally inadmissible.”

According to Amnesty International, it is “a violation of international refugee law to suggest that deserters are automatically inadmissible to Canada... Amnesty International believes that Operational Bulletin 202 misstates the law and seeks to intrude on the independence of both IRB members and Immigration Officers.”

The struggle continues through the determination of war resisters, the diligent work of their lawyers, and the ongoing campaign of their supporters. Federal courts have ruled 11 times since 2008 that the IRB have made errors in the cases of war resisters. Most recently, the federal court found that the US court-martial system “fails to comply with basic fairness requirements found in Canadian and International Law.”

At any point, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration can create a provision for a group of people to be provisionally admitted to Canada with permanent resident status. It’s been proven that the US military court-martial system is unfair and that war resisters who’ve been to Canada have been punished more harshly. Join the campaign in defending our collective right to peace and freedom and providing a sanctuary for war resisters in Canada once and for all.

Cyprus: outrage against austerity

by EVAN JOHNSTON

THE WORLD turned its attention to the tiny island of Cyprus this week as it became the latest domino to fall in the ongoing global economic crisis. In the early hours of March 16, the right-wing Democratic Rally (DISY) government of Nicos Anastasiades reached an agreement with the EU and the IMF on the terms of a \$13 billion bailout that has sparked outrage on and off the island.

Rightfully referred to by many as a bank heist, the agreement signaled a qualitative shift in the EU austerity agenda, as it included a controversial proposal to steal money directly out of Cypriot savings accounts in the form of a “deposit levy.”

The bailout plan went through a few different iterations before it was eventually voted down (36 against, 19 abstained) in parliament.

The first plan consisted

of Cypriot bank depositors with less than \$130,000 to see their accounts reduced by 6.7 percent, and accounts with more than \$130,000 reduced by 9.9 percent. The plan also included a mere 2.5 per cent increase to corporate taxes, raising the corporate tax rate up to 12.5 percent.

Until last week, Cyprus was the perfect tax haven with the lowest corporate tax rates in Europe, attracting billions in investments from primarily Russian oligarchs. This puts lie to the claim being made by Anastasiades and the Cyprus Central Bank that there is no other choice but to reach into the pockets of the working class.

The reaction to the proposal by Cypriot citizens was swift: people began lining up at ATM machines to try to withdraw as much money as they could before any reduction could be made. One man parked a bulldozer outside of his local bank branch to express his anger, while some 1,000

protestors gathered outside parliament to throw sheep’s dung and wool at the entrance symbolizing the “haircut” imposed on them.

The proposal that was eventually voted on managed to exclude accounts with under \$26,000, but still consisted of accounts with \$26,000 - \$136,000 reduced by 6.7 percent, and accounts with over \$136,000 reduced by 9.9 percent. As I write this, Anastasiades and his pro-austerity allies in the Troika are currently hammering out the details of a “Plan B,” in which MPs have thus far approved the nationalization of public and private sector pensions and capital controls to prevent capital flight when the banks re-open.

In the midst of all the confusion, two things have become clear. First, some sections of the EU ruling class appear to be interested in using Cyprus as a testing ground for more drastic austerity measures. Until now, the EU bailout pack-

ages have been forcing the working class to line the pockets of bankers through indirect means: regressive taxation and cuts to jobs, social services, and pensions. However, by breaking the taboo against touching private savings, they have attempted to set a precedent for a more direct redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich across the eurozone.

It is important to recognize the amount of disagreement that has erupted between the leaders of EU member states, bankers, and right-wing pundits over the strategic viability of the Cypriot bailout. This signals a crisis of hegemony within the European ruling class, and provides an important opening for the revolutionary left. While the logic of austerity continues to be the guiding principle, the way forward has never been less clear for the EU ruling class, and the working class are rising to reject the demands of the Troika.

Remembering the Paris Commune

Zachary Lohnes *looks at the legacy of the Paris Commune, the world's first experience of working class power and democracy.*



March 18, 1871 was the beginning of the Paris Commune, the first attempt at worker's democracy. Revolutionary in all regards, the Commune radically redesigned the lives of Parisians, giving the world a glimpse of workers' power and democracy in action.

War and revolution

Under the reign of Napoleon III, France, in 1870, declared war upon Prime Minister Otto Van Bismark and his united Prussian lands. But the French army was soon overcome by the better-trained and better-armed Prussian forces. On September 2, French forces were routed, and soon after, Napoleon and his army were trapped and captured. When news of the surrender hit Paris on September 4, Parisian workers stormed the Palais Bourbon and forced Napoleon's Legislative Assembly to proclaim the fall of the Empire. By that evening, the Third Republic—led by the Government of National Defense (GND)—was established at the Hotel de Ville (Paris's city hall).

Established to continue the war effort against Prussia, the GND—led by a small group of conservative bourgeois politicians—feared the Parisian peasant and working classes, and were soon drawing up plans to capitulate and leave the Prussians to destroy the workers of Paris. On September 19, two Prussian armies launched the long siege of Paris. In the 15 days between the GND coup d'état and the start of the siege, France was able to assemble several army battalions inside Parisian walls. These, combined with the lower class masses of unemployed Parisians (who, desperate for any source of income took up arms with the GND, one of the few paying jobs left in the city), equaled approximately 300,000.

On January 28, 1871, after four long months of besiegement, the GND announced the surrender of Paris. The conservative politician Adolf Thiers came to power, paying five billion francs in

indemnities to Prussia while passing an assortment of unpopular laws against the poor majority—including the Law of Maturities (which decreed that all owed rent and public debts within Paris, previously suspended due to the war, were to be paid in full within 48 hours).

Worker's power

On March 18, Thiers sent General Lacomte with troops to disarm the workers defending Paris, attempting to seize the National Guard's cannons that guarded the northern Paris hill Montmartre. Church bells sounded the alarm, and droves of Parisian workers, peasants, housewives and their children mixed with the government soldiers and formed a barricade. When Lacomte gave the order to fire on the crowd, soldiers refused and killed him instead.

Soon after, most of the French bourgeoisie, along with Thiers and his national assembly, fearing for their lives, fled Paris for Versailles. Thousands of National Guard troops soon followed, and it is this day, March 18, on which the Civil War began. The Prussians announced their support and protection of the abdicated National Guard parliament, and announced their renewed assault upon Paris.

In contrast, the masses of Paris became the masters of the city. On March 26, 1871, with the election of a municipal council of workers and soldiers, the Paris Commune—the first workers government in Europe—was elected. A Central Committee of the National Guard (in collaboration the Paris Commune) was elected, proclaiming:

"The proletarians of the capital, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking the direction of public affairs into their own hands.... The workingmen, those who produce everything and enjoy nothing, those who suffer poverty in the midst of the accumulation of products that are the fruit of their labor and toil, will they always be exposed to outrage?... The bourgeoisie, their seniors, which accomplished its emancipation three-quarters of a century

ago and preceded them in the way of revolution, does it not understand that today the time has come for the emancipation of the proletariat?"

Flying the red flag, the committee began organizing the city's two million people. The new government, instead of taking hold of the old state machinery, created new organs of power based on direct workers' control—organizing factories as cooperative societies. It separated church and state, designated a maximum salary for Commune employees and challenged the male domination of institutions. As Karl Marx documented in his seminal work "The Civil War in France":

"Having once got rid of the standing army and the police... The whole of the educational Institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it. The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subservience to all succeeding governments to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable."

Counter-Revolution

Through the remaining days of April, the Versailles army furiously built up its numbers, all the while continuing its skirmishes with the National Guard forces. Protests demanding an immediate march upon Versailles erupted sporadically, but in the Central Committee's refusal to face the problem as the people demanded, their downfall grew nearer. As Marx later wrote: "In their reluctance to continue the civil war opened by Thiers... the Central Committee made themselves, this time, guilty of a decisive mistake in not at once marching upon Versailles, then completely helpless, and thus putting an end to the

conspiracies of Thiers."

On May 21, after several weeks of shelling by troops from Versailles, the counter-revolutionaries began streaming into Paris. Parisian workers and National Guardsmen fought back desperately, but with no planned defense of the city, each city quarter was overcome in turn. Any prisoner in possession of a weapon, or suspected of fighting, was summarily executed. With the refusal by Thiers of any negotiations with the Commune, the following seven days played out as one of the darkest moments in French history. In what became known as the "bloody week", an estimated 25,000-30,000 Parisian workers were slaughtered. With the firing of the last bullet in the late afternoon of May 28 came the bloody cleanup and restoration of Paris. Mass graves were dug across the city. The same ramparts and defense lines that the Parisian population had built up and died upon during the civil war were soon being rebuilt by these same hands, and the city remained under martial law for the next five years.

Lessons

The grassroots movement that sparked the revolution of 1871 grew out of anger at the abuses of the ruling class and unequal distribution of the wealth. The revolution that established the first worker's state uprooted society in a way never previously known, accomplishing in less than 60 days: dissolving the police and other ruling institutions and replacing them with a democratic commune combining executive and legislative powers, with assemblies of delegates subject to instant recall and that paid the wage of the average worker. As one of the Commune members said, "We hear no longer of assassination, theft, and personal assault; it seems indeed as if the police had dragged along with it to Versailles all its Conservative friends." While failing to challenge the Versailles government and paying the ultimate price, the Commune shows a glimpse of what's possible with worker's power and democracy.

Building rank-and-file resistance

How can we stop the attacks on unions, wages, pensions and public services?

Socialist Worker looks at what it would take to stop austerity.

How we won union rights

by PAUL DENISON

THE THREAT of so called “right to work” legislation looms. But right to work is actually an attack on the right of workers to collectively bargain. By passing legislation that allows “free riders” to opt out of paying union dues while still enjoying the benefits of union membership, Hudak and Harper hope to weaken and eventually eliminate unions in Ontario.

Strikers: 1937 Oshawa GM Strike

The requirement that all employees in a unionized workplace benefitting from the presence of a union must pay dues was set out in a legal ruling called the Rand Formula. Although ostensibly a legal decision, like all concessions extracted from employers, it was not granted out of the good will of the employing class, but was a right that previous generations fought long and hard for.

The modern Canadian labour movement came of age during the great depression of the 1930’s and the war years of the 40’s. During that time union membership increased dramatically and the modern system of union rights was won through a series of militant strikes, culminating in the Rand decision on January 29, 1946.

In April 1937, inspired by the famous “sit down” strike in Flint Michigan, 4000 workers struck at the GM plant in Oshawa. Their demands where for an 8 hour day, seniority rights, better wages, a grievance system and recognition for their union, the UAW.

The strike enjoyed almost unanimous community support. On the evening of April 12, 5000 people gathered at a public union meeting, farmers donated milk and food and shopkeepers extended credit to the strikers. Ontario premier Mitch Hepburn started to organize a special police force to put down the strike. They were popularly known as the “Sons of Mitch’s” and he accused the strikers of

being “not good Canadians”. In response 500 strikers who were veterans of World War I marched in the street.

After 15 days the company capitulated and the UAW was recognized in Canada for the first time. This represented the birth of industrial unionism in Canada.

Despite this victory, over the next few years union growth slowed and even declined in Canada, but started to rise again a few years later in the midst of World War II.

By 1945 the war was ending and Canadian workers were impatient for the same labour rights that their American brothers and sisters enjoyed.

Windsor, 1945

On Sept 12, 1945, auto workers struck in Windsor, Ontario. The strike went on for 99 days and the workers faced fierce opposition from the employer and the Canadian state. The high point of the campaign came on November 4, when a joint force of RCMP and OPP were to be

sent in to violently break the picket line. In response the auto workers parked 2000 cars to reinforce the picket line.

On Nov 5, City council demanded that the barricade be removed or they would call in the armed forces; the federal government started to ready an armoured tank unit to break up the barricade. The union called for solidarity and Chrysler Local 195 walked out in sympathy. Thousands of workers from other workplaces came down to the picket line and there was extensive solidarity across the country.

The strike was settled on Dec 10th, but in the arbitration proceedings of Jan 29, 1946, Justice Ivan Rand established the “Rand formula” which stated that anyone who benefits from a union in a given workplace must pay dues to that union.

The lesson for us today demonstrated in the Windsor strike is that militancy and solidarity are the key tools the union movement can use to win our demands, even against seemingly overwhelming opposition.



Photo by Ontario Federation of Labour

Rebuilding unions to confront right-to-work

by CAROLYN EGAN AND MICHELLE ROBIDOUX

ON MARCH 2 there was a gathering of over 700 trade unionists at a workers’ rights Conference held by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council. Most were grass roots activists wanting to learn how to fight back against the possibility of “right to work” legislation coming to Ontario.

Tim Hudak, the leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives, has made it clear that if elected he intends to implement anti-union legislation as we have seen in the United States. Workers could choose not to be a member of the union at an organized workplace and opt out of paying union dues. They would become “free riders” having the protection of the union, the benefits of collective bargaining, but not having to support the union through dues or in any other way.

Employers would also not have to collect dues through payroll deduction. That burden would fall to the local union. It would create a bureaucratic nightmare for union representatives and be an extremely time-consuming endeavor, taking stewards away from defending members and organizing on political issues.

The state of Michigan, which had been viewed as the heart of the trade union movement in the US, recently passed such legislation over the strong objection of workers. It is a northern state just across the border from Canada and the shock wave has hit Canadian unions hard. There is no doubt that unions would be weakened if anything of this sort was passed in Ontario. This is one more assault on working people and has to be fought and defeated.

Anti-union propaganda

Huge sums of money have been spent on public relations campaigns to bring the anti-union message to the public. We have seen the insidious attempts to divide union from non-union workers, public sector from private sector. There have been successful campaigns to elect conservative

governments as in the state of Wisconsin. Scott Walker, a Tea Party stalwart, ran successfully for governor and introduced legislation stripping public sector unions of their most basic rights.

In spite of a massive fight back, including the sustained occupation of the state legislature which inspired workers across North America, Scott Walker was narrowly re-elected in a recall election. Through the “politics of envy” fueled by the millions donated by right wing business leaders, they were able to separate people from their own self-interest. The right demonized public sector workers with their supposed “gold plated pensions”, decent wages and benefits. It is a race to the bottom pitting those who are struggling to survive against unionized workers who have fought for a reasonable standard of living, obscuring the real enemy--the corporations and the governments that they control.

The tactics they use are very slick, talking about “choice” and “freedom in the work place.” “Why should unions grow rich on your dues while you are struggling to provide a decent life for yourself and your family,” they ask. Sadly in right-to-work states in the US, often over 50 per cent of workers make the choice to stop paying their dues. This shows both how wide the impact is of the employer tactics and how unions have not connected to the rank-and-file, and have not listened to the needs of workers or defended their interests. The statistics would not be very different in Canada for the same reasons.

Rebuilding from the bottom up

The fact that the Toronto and York Region Labour Council has taken the initiative to kick start a campaign to go deep into our unions and connect face to face with every member is an important step forward. Its intent is to inoculate workers against the anti-union message but it also provides an historic opportunity to rebuild our unions from the bottom up. For too long the members have been a stage

army to be called out when needed but not expected to take a role in determining the direction of their unions.

They have not been involved in building the activist base necessary to fight back against the austerity agenda and the attacks on jobs, wages and working conditions. Unfortunately, concession contracts have been the name of the game.

This campaign is an excellent opportunity for activists to fully engage with their fellow workers. We know the role of the organized working class in winning critical gains for workers and the poor. It has shaped society in so many ways including winning the eight hour day, the weekend, parental leave, health and safety legislation etc. Workers have to remember the incredible working class legacy that exists and how their collective strength outweighs the power of the corporations.

In order to show the lies of the anti-union forces and collectively work through why unions are so important in a workplace, activists have to listen to the concerns being voiced, the criticisms that exist, and take on the arguments of the right. In every workplace we have to understand who are the strong union supporters, who is against the union, and the large grouping in the middle and how it breaks down. We have to win the hearts and minds of our fellow workers.

Where we work we have to, along with others, have meetings in the lunch rooms, do plant gate leafleting and have face-to-face conversations with every worker. We have to tap into their issues, their need for a voice and help to organize along side them a potent force in every workplace.

Our unions have to change from the bottom up and we have to be part of that change. Our role is to help make every worker feel that they are the union, and that there is something very concrete to be won or lost. Workers must feel that they can rebuild a member-controlled union that will make a difference in their lives.



Striking Ford workers in Windsor, 1945

What next for the Orange Wave?

THE HISTORIC Orange Wave that catapulted the NDP into Official Opposition emerged from outside of Parliament: the economic crisis, years of anger at the Harper agenda, disillusionment with the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois, and inspiration from the Arab Spring. Millions voted for the NDP for the first time, hoping for an alternative.

If interpreted that way, the obvious way forward for activists both inside and outside the NDP is to magnify the movements opposing corporate Canada, using the ballot box as a megaphone for the streets.

But the NDP leadership drew the opposite conclusion based on their experience in Parliament. In 2005, the NDP supported the Liberal budget that included a massive increase in military spending. In 2008 the NDP leadership proposed a coalition with the Liberals that sacrificed opposition to the Afghanistan War and corporate tax cuts in exchange for a few seats in power. Then in 2011 the NDP unanimously supported the war in Libya, and their platform called for maintaining military spending. The Orange Wave rose in spite of NDP policies, not because of them, but the NDP leadership drew the opposite conclusion.

The ballot box and the streets

As a result the NDP leadership has counterposed the ballot box and the streets, trying to play to the respectable middle.

Mulcair has supported sanctions against Iran and imperial intervention in Mali. The NDP has been silent on Harper’s \$490 billion military spending, and each time Israel adds an assault to its illegal siege on Gaza and thousands pour into the streets in protest, the NDP leadership’s response is to appeal for “restraint” from all sides.

As the historic Quebec student strike was gaining momentum, with support from the left alternative Québec solidaire, Mulcair instructed his MPs to not vocally support the students and then announced that the NDP would run candidates in the next election—against Québec solidaire.

As the historic Idle No More movement was launching a movement for indigenous sovereignty and solidarity, Mulcair called on Attawapiskat Chief Spence to end her hunger strike. There are growing movements uniting indigenous and non-indigenous people against tar sands and pipelines (including inroads into the labour movement), but Mulcair is pushing for refining tar sands domestically and sending it eastwards.

The Quebec student strike and Idle No More are breakthroughs that have laid a groundwork to challenge the Harper agenda. The NDP should be using every opportunity to support them, calling for the \$490 billion in military spending to go towards eliminating tuition fees and massively investing in green jobs so we can shut down the tar sands, while respecting self-determination of First Nations and Quebec. To make the most of the hope that produced the Orange Wave we need to build movements outside Parliament that replace the rule of the 1% with the 99%.

Getting clarity on Quebec

WHEN FORMER NDP MP Claude Patry crossed the floor to join the Bloc Québécois in late February, the brief buzz in the media quickly died down. But it would be a mistake to think that this defection is just a blip.

The issue over which Patry left the NDP was the introduction of a bill by the Bloc Québécois to repeal the Clarity Act, which sets rules for future referenda on Quebec’s separation from Canada. After a whipped vote against repealing the Clarity Act, the NDP leadership congratulated itself that no other members of its Quebec caucus broke ranks. This short-sighted read of the situation is the product of wishful thinking and the very shallow roots of the federal NDP in Quebec.

The 1,628,000 people in Quebec who voted for the NDP in 2011 did indeed feel that this was the best way to fight Harper. But this sentiment is wrongly being merged with the notion that Quebecers no longer care about the national question. This was expressed most unambiguously by NDP stalwart Stephen Lewis, who claimed that the Orange Wave in Quebec was “a repudiation of sovereignty.” Whether or not people feel at any given time that the national question is a priority, recent history shows how quickly that can shift.

The decision by the NDP to introduce a private members’ bill to counter the Bloc’s bill has been hailed by some on the left as a deft attempt by the NDP to walk a line between the Clarity Act and the NDP’s own Sherbrooke declaration which says the party would recognize a majority decision of 50 percent plus one in a referendum on sovereignty.

Bill C-470, dubbed the “Unity Act,” was co-drafted by Mulcair and NDP MP Craig Scott. While it argues that 50 per cent plus one represents a clear majority, it is a step backward from the Sherbrooke declaration, allowing Canada to decide what constitutes a “clear” question in a future referendum.

This will inevitably undermine any steps forward in building a united fightback in Quebec and English Canada against the devastation being wrought by Harper and his goons. Whether it is challenging EI inspectors or defending public sector workers, there is much to unite around. But meaningful unity is built on the highest common denominator, which includes recognizing the full right to self determination, whether for Quebec or First Nations. Anything less will likely mean a short-lived Orange Wave in Quebec.

OPINION

Le réseau écosocialiste: toward new ways of organizing

Nora Loreto reports on a new initiative by socialists and other anticapitalist activists within Québec solidaire to unite environmental action with other social justice issues

THERE SEEMS to be a growing consensus on the left that the environment is ground zero for our work. The capacity for capitalism to destroy the earth through mining, fracking, consumption, waste, destruction of watersheds and other natural elements seems to know no reasonable limits.

While activists have long targeted environmental degradation, placing eco-justice at the centre of organizing that isn’t solely focused on the environment has taken some time. With analyses that have emerged that frame environmental destruction in terms of environmental racism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, activists are making more appropriate and fundamental links to the way in which ecological destruction is at the core of the oppression we fight locally and globally.

This focus on eco-justice is especially pertinent now as Idle No More protests have broadened the awareness of the most pressing environmental issues in Québec and Canada. The relentless campaign has helped to tie eco-justice to other progressive struggles and re-frame discussions about sovereignty, self-determination and settlers’ responsibility to be in solidarity with Indigenous activists.

In Québec, many socialists and anti-capitalists see ecosocialism, the junction of socialism, Marxism and critical ecological justice, as a necessary framework under which to organize. Ecosocialism is an analysis that correctly identifies capitalism and the pursuit of profit as the driving force behind environmental destruction and climate chaos.

On March 9, more than 70 activists from regions across Québec gathered in Montreal in what many called an historic meeting. Together, unaffiliated

anti-capitalists and members of the socialist collectives that exist within Québec solidaire: Gauche socialiste, Alternative socialiste, Mass critique and the International Socialists passed a statement of unity and statutes that form the basis of the new organization.

The meeting started with four presentations that outlined local and international political contexts. The rest of the day was spent debating and discussing a basis of unity and statutes that had been drafted and circulated in advance of the meeting.

The Réseau écosocialiste’s statutes establish a membership structure, open to members of Québec solidaire and people in solidarity with the party’s goals. The new steering committee was elected at the end of the meeting and is comprised of five women and three men, myself included.

The Réseau’s coordinating committee will spend the next few months setting up regional and local networks, general assembly structures and implementing a plan to reach out to potential members of the group.

Bernard Rioux writing at Presse-Toi à Gauche, summarized the network’s tasks:

*Become a centre to express ecosocialist perspectives to actively participate in the debates, policy and tactical development of Québec solidaire,

*Propose campaigns against austerity, environmental destruction, patriarchy and class domination

*Defend and deepen democracy at the heart of Québec solidaire

*Build and consolidate the presence of Québec solidaire in social movements and create structures that facilitate this task

*Host debates and workshops on ecosocialist perspectives

*Create and maintain links with ecosocialist organizations around the world.

While I’m still new to progressive organizing in Québec, I’m no stranger to the struggles and challenges that exist in trying to unite activists on the left around a common vision and set of goals. The ease with which the group debated, modified and passed the basis of unity and the statutes signaled a readiness of everyone present to work together under this new banner.

Québec solidaire is the only progressive, anti-neoliberal political party in Québec but is not free from the conservatizing forces that electoral pressures can place on any progressive structure, especially one with two members elected to the National Assembly. One of the tasks of the Réseau will be to engage Québec solidaire members and supporters to ensure the party maintains its progressive core.

If Québec solidaire is truly going to be a party at the ballot box and in the streets, a phrase used by many QS activists, the Réseau will be critical to more formally link the party with social movements. As was clear during the student protests last year, the power of people in the streets is much more significant than the power held at the National Assembly.

Québec solidaire is the only political party that can amplify the voices of activists among social movements, though the connection needs to be strengthened; no small task, but perhaps a task just as large as getting a room full of socialists to agree to unite under a common set of statutes and a basis of unity.

This is republished from Nora Loreto’s blog, noraloreto.ca

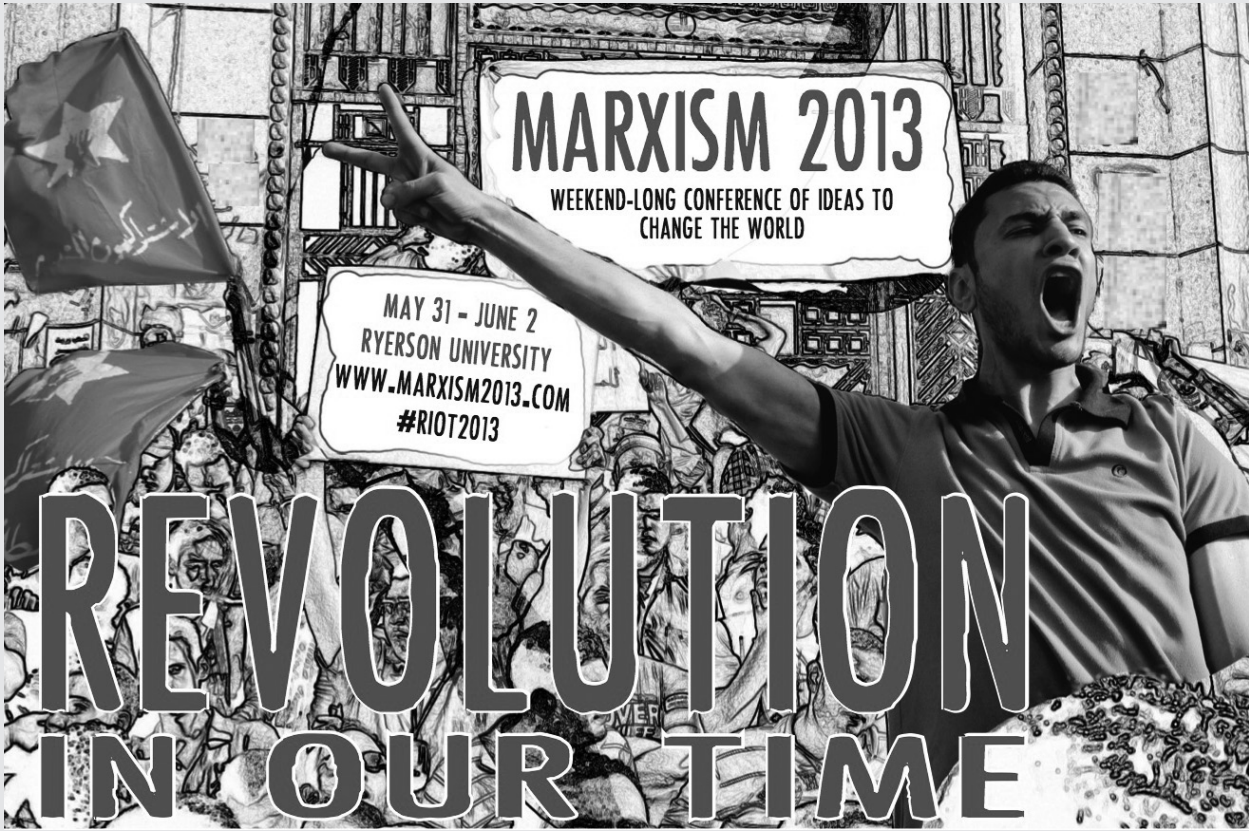
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REVIEWS



BOOK

Anger and uncertainty about the 1%

Plutocrats

Written by Chrystia Freeland
Reviewed by Peter Hogarth

PLUTOCRATS SHOWS a clear influence from the Occupy movement and laments the rise of such intense income inequality around the world between the 1% and the 99%. However, Freeland posits few, if any, ideas to reverse the growth of inequality. Instead *Plutocrats* is focused mostly on describing the demographics of the 1% and how they got there.

This doesn’t mean that the book is not useful for socialists and activists of the 99%. In many ways it is. *Plutocrats* makes some of the arguments that Marxists have been insisting on for years.

Most forcefully, she emphasizes that the Plutocratic class “are becoming a trans-global community of peers who have more in common with one another than their countrymen back home.” This is important to emphasize because just as today’s super-rich are an international class with an interest in maximizing profit, the working class of the world too has a common interest in usurping the power and privilege of the 1% whether they maintain primary residence in New York or Hong Kong, Moscow or Mumbai. While the Plutocrats of the world are international, their metaphorical gravediggers are too.

She also provides statistical evidence that contradicts the argument that workers in America benefit from some kind of labour aristocratic position compared to workers in the less-developed countries. She notes that “the big winners from Apple’s innovation were the 6,101 engineers and other professional workers in the US who made more than \$525 million. That’s more than double what the nonprofessionals in the US made, and significantly more than the total earnings of all of Apple’s foreign employees.”

Freeland continuously emphasizes the importance of class struggle and

the fight for political and economic reforms in making life bearable for the 99%. She refers to Lenin and the Bolsheviks throughout the book (usually as a good idea gone too far) and recognizes that “the victorious communists were influential far beyond their own borders—America’s New Deal and western Europe’s generous social welfare systems were created partly in response to the red threat. Better to compromise with the 99 percent than to risk being overthrown by them.”

Freeland’s work also emphasizes other points that the activists of the 99% would be happy to hear. She identifies the way in which market liberalization, deregulation and privatization have created more billionaires and widened the gap between the highest income earners and everyone else, noting: “Russia’s oligarchs have done so well for themselves that inequality today is higher than it was under the tsars.” She also points out the effect that the plutocrats have on passing legislation and even quotes numerous plutocrats stating their disdain for the lower-classes and acknowledging that they would have to pay the price for society’s “progress.”

No alternative

But *Plutocrats* is a frustrating book to read. Freeland, who spent years as a journalist for the Financial Times, sees few alternatives and presents almost none in this book. Very early on the book she states “today, the evidence that capitalism works is clear, and not only in the wreckage of the communist experience.” Because she takes for granted that capitalism and some form of market system is the only way the world can operate, the book’s main debate is how free should markets be. Consequently, *Plutocrats* resides in a strange space where it chronicles in great detail the problems with today’s capitalist system and its recurrent crises, while simultaneously defending it tooth and nail.

Much of the book is spent describ-

ing the 1% and 0.1% as self-made billionaires, who are innovative, mathematical geniuses who have the creative vision and talent to take advantage of changing situations. This becomes a bit too nauseating when you realize what her definition of self-made is (consider that she describes former Prime Minister Paul Martin as a “self-made multimillionaire”) and after about the millionth reference to the “knowledge economy”—while failing to acknowledge that the “creative genius” of the Steve Jobses of the world would be nothing without the thousands of Chinese and Filipino hands that actually build his iPods.

Anger and uncertainty

So *Plutocrats* is a book that very much expresses the times we live in: a time that is simultaneously mired in capitalist crisis, but without the kind of working class fightback needed to make the rich pay and provide a clear alternative.

Plutocrats expresses both this anger at the super-rich for their profit at the expense of the rest of us, but it is also unsure about what can be done about it. Freeland attacks the “philanthrocapitalists” for their charitable solutions to inequality, but she also identifies aspiring billionaires as the social force motivating protests in Egypt and Russia. Clear ways forward are hard to come by, but Freeland seems to be making the case that the bankers and lack-of-regulation have put us in this mess in what could otherwise be a healthy capitalism. She suggests that by regulating and mitigating the effects of the profit-motive, a more equal and just capitalism can be obtained.

Read this book, but read it critically. Read it knowing what famous plutocrat Andrew Carnegie knew, that “capitalism...required employers to drive the hardest possible bargain with their workers.” This conflict, between the workers producing the wealth and the Carnegies taking it, provides the framework for looking at the rise of the plutocrats and the people who can collectively stop them.

Tsar while trying to build a society run by the majority.

The mass demonstrations that made up the revolution are wonderful to behold. There is a great scene of Russians in support of the revolution marching with rifle and bayonet on their shoulders, and when you look closer you realize they are all in civilian clothes.

This is the working class of Petrograd armed in defense of their revolution.

The coverage of the civil war shows the horrors inflicted on the world’s first workers’ state by external invasion and internal support of the old order.

This footage was recovered by Herman Axelbank who made the film. The narration is provide by Max Eastman, an American radical, who, among other things, translated Trotsky’s definitive History of the Russian Revolution into English. Originally released in 1937 the movie has been almost impossible to see since then.

Immediately after it’s premiere in

1937 the Stalinist USSR government and the American Communist party began to try to stop it from being shown. The movie, truthfully, shows Trotsky’s great importance to the revolution and leadership in building the Red Army that was able to win the civil war.

Despite their efforts, Eastman and Axelbank could not find any film of Stalin during the revolution, presumably because nobody thought he was important enough to film. Showing the relative importance of Stalin and Trotsky to the revolution was too much for Stalin to bear.

The American Communist party newspapers called for a boycott of the the theatre showing the movie. Behind the scenes, the Russian government threatened American movie distributors that if Tsar to Lenin continued to be shown, they would not allow Russian films, especially those of the very popular Sergei Eisenstein to be distributed in the US.

This combination succeeded and the movie has been rarely shown in the last 75 years.

LEFT JAB

John Bell

Harper’s anti-immigrant infomercial

THE HARPER Tories are not getting enough bang for their buck. They spent \$21 million on self-congratulating advertisements in 2011-12. But polls show support has sunk steadily since they won their majority.

Government advertising spending has increased every year since Harper became prime minister. So far the Tories have spent well over \$548.6 million on advertising. You know those signs for “Canada’s Economic Action Plan” that dot the landscape like mushrooms in a cow pasture (for all you fabulous urbanites, that’s a lot), the ones that tout “Jobs, Growth, Prosperity”? What they don’t say is most of the jobs, growth and prosperity are being enjoyed by the advertising industry.

Our friends at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives helpfully point out that in 2011-12 the Tories spent more shilling for the “Economic Action Plan” than they did supporting equality for women (\$21 million vs. \$18.9 million for Status of Women). Yet, spend as they would, Canadians just didn’t seem to be buying the Tory wares. Worse, even their core constituency was becoming disenchanting. Their privatization agenda has been too cautious for the Ayn Rand apostles, and “social conservatives” grumble over the lack of action on outlawing abortion, reinstituting the death penalty and the like.

But advertising can take many forms, from stealth advertising through product placement to the late-night infomercial. The line between TV program and advertisement is not just blurred, it has long since been erased. So imagine the excitement around the PMO when the producers from Force Four Entertainment came knocking, selling the idea of *Border Security: Canada’s Front Line*. The concept is a straight rip-off of an Australian TV show that has been a ratings hit down under since 2004.

Border Security is essentially an infomercial for the post-911 security state, broadcast here on the National Geographic cable channel. Cameras show the exciting “reality” of our brave men and women at the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA) as they keep us safe from the threats of terrorism, smuggling, and so-called illegal aliens. The show, and its intimate connection to the Harper Tories burst into the news recently when a CBSA squad, with camera crews filming all the action, raided Vancouver construction sites and arrested undocumented migrant workers. It then came out that Minister of Public Safety Vic Toews had personally signed a contract authorizing Border Security to film CBSA operations.

Just don’t call *Border Security* a reality show. This from a Force Four Entertainment press release: “There have been complete mischaracterizations and false information reported this past week about *Border Security: Canada’s Front Line*. *Border Security* is a documentary series—not a reality series and in absolutely no way are any situations orchestrated for the cameras.” This is pure semantic nonsense. Admitting cameras to an event changes that event, no matter what the intentions of the filmmakers. A “documentary” is not unvarnished fact or truth. Choices are made in shooting, editing, narration and adding post-production details like music that all deliver a point of view. In this case the POV is not just that of Force Four Entertainment. It is that of the Harper government. Not only did Vic Toews give his approval, but so did the Prime Minister’s office, senior CBSA bureaucrats and government legal advisors.

This anti-immigrant infomercial is designed to appeal to bedrock Tory supporters, not so subtly harking back to the racism that was intrinsic to the emergence of Reform. It also attempts to win people worried about their own economic security, repeating the fiction that evil foreigners are stealing our jobs.

Temporary foreign workers

So don’t expect any government sponsored infomercial/documentary/reality show about the federal government’s own temporary foreign worker programs. Thanks to changes enacted last year by Tory Human Resources Minister Diane Finley, corporations can import foreign workers on temporary contracts that pay them 15 per cent less than average wages in those industries. These workers are forced to work for just that employer and denied any but the most basic protections and rights. In practice, any who complain about their treatment are deported in a hurry.

There are now over 300,000 such ultra-exploited workers in Canada. In an interview with Vancouver’s *Georgia Straight*, sociology professor Gerardo Otero said:

“Since 2006, there is a trend—and it is no coincidence that it is the Harper administration that is doing this—where there are more guest workers accepted to Canada than immigrants. What this indicates, is rather than a country of immigrants, Canada is becoming a country that systematically generates this noncitizenship class of workers, who are separated from their families and who don’t have the same rights as the rest of the Canadian workforce.” Otero is not shy about applying the word “apartheid” to this labouring under-class. If the shoe fits...

Clearly the Tories are not opposed to foreign workers getting jobs, they just don’t like those workers to be paid decent wages, get access to services, or have a chance of winning permanent status.

Reality TV

You know, I’m not philosophically opposed to reality TV shows. I even have a bunch of Tory-related “documentary” story ideas:

Penashue Boo Boo: the adventures of an adorable but corrupt cabinet minister trying to tap dance his way back into the hearts of Labrador voters.

The Acts-Like-He’s-A-Bachelor: who will get the rose as Vic Toews chooses a new babysitter?

Canada’s Next Top Parliamentary Budget Watchdog: the cross country talent search for a number cruncher who will just repeat the government’s phony figures and not rock the boat like that nasty Kevin Page.

The Amazing Race To The Bottom: different branches of the government compete to see who can drive down wages, pensions and union rights the fastest.

Who can deny the entertainment value of these. And any of them would contain a lot more reality than any Tory infomercial.

FILM

From Tsar to Lenin

Tsar to Lenin

Reviewed by Bradley Hughes

TSAR TO Lenin is an astonishing record of the Russian Revolution of 1917. It is made completely of footage recovered in the 1920s and 1930s of the events before and during the revolution and subsequent civil war.

The Russian Revolution was the first of the world’s great revolutions where audio and video technology existed to record events. You can see some events of the revolution in this film, and if you poke around the internet you can find audio recordings of a speech or two by Lenin and Trotsky.

The movie starts with coverage of the Tsar and his family, including a scene of the the Tsar and his court skinny-dipping in a lake. Immediately we are shown pictures of ordinary Russians living in the poverty of early twentieth century Russia.

Then into the trenches of the first world war. The war and poverty make clear the need to depose the

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 capital-ism 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 collect-ively 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 op-pressed, 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 move-ment 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 capital-ism 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 dif-ferent kind of state—a workers’ state based upon councils of workers’ delegates.

Internationalism
The struggle for socialism is part of a world-wide 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 social-ist parties. We support the struggle of work-ers 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-determin-ation 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 suf-fer from specific forms of oppression. Attacks on oppressed groups are used to divide work-ers 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 discrimina-tion 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 democrat-ic. We are an organization of activists commit-ted to helping in the construction of such a party through ongoing activity in the mass organiza-tions 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 Inter-national Socialists.



International Women’s Day and the Communist Women’s International (1921-1926)



John Riddell *continues his look at the fight for women’s liberation after the Russian Revolution in this second installment.*

THESE WOMEN advanced a program seeking “to secure for all women complete and unrestricted social rights, so that ... they can develop every aspect of their full human personality.”
The Comintern’s program for women’s emancipation included “total equality of rights in law and practice,” integration of women into political life, the right to free educa-tion and medical care, social mea-sures to ease the burden of house-work and childcare, and measures to “do away with the sexual double standard for men and women.”
Given the depths of women’s subjugation at the time, this might seem pure utopia. The Commu-nist women, however, pointed to women’s dramatic gains in Soviet Russia, where women had been legal slaves of husbands and fathers before the revolution. I set aside a summary of these gains and their limitations for separate discussion.

‘Our bodies belong to us’
The Comintern’s manifesto for women’s emancipation omits mention of women’s reproductive rights. Nonetheless, Communist women campaigned on these issues with success.
Communist women in that period viewed childbearing as a social responsibility, and sought to assist “poor women who would like to ex-perience motherhood as the highest joy.” At a time when birth control was advocated by many as a means for population control and eugenics, they resisted attempts to browbeat women for having either too few or too many children. They regarded abortion as a symptom of social evils related to women’s poverty and subjugation. But anti-abortion laws, they held, brutally punished innocent women. The Communist women denounced the dreadful toll of illegal abortions and demanded abolition of all anti-abortion laws.
In Germany, Communist women led a massive campaign against the anti-abortion law under the slogan, “Your Body Belongs to You.”
Violence against women is rarely mentioned in Communist women’s literature. However, they pointed to Soviet Russia’s measures to as-sure women freedom to marry and divorce at will and to work outside the home as steps toward freeing them from violent and oppressive relationships.
Absent from this literature, how-

ever, is any discussion of rape and sexual harassment.
The Communist women opposed punishment or harassment of pros-titutes. They favoured removing the economic causes of the sex trade through homes for jobless women, vocational training and employ-ment.

United front
The Communist Women’s Move-ment noted that the “demands of the bourgeois women’s movement” aim merely at “reforming the capitalist order for the benefit of wives and daughters of the possess-ing classes.” However, it stressed that radicalization among women reached into all social layers.
“[F]emale employees, especially intellectuals ... are growing rebel-lious.... [M]ore and more house-wives, including bourgeois house-wives, are awakening.... [W]e have to utilise the ferment,” Zetkin told the Comintern’s Fourth Congress.
A year earlier, Zetkin explained to the previous world congress that “as long as capitalism rules, the stronger sex will threaten to deprive the weaker of livelihood and the means of life.” Bourgeois women, she insisted, can assist the struggle – fighting skirmishes, while sowing unrest and turmoil in the bourgeois camp. In this spirit, assessments of non-proletarian women’s gatherings highlighted points of agreement that could be utilized for common action.

In another context, the journal predicts that through the united front, many women, both working-class and privileged, who still shy away from slogans of proletarian dictatorship, “will be present, in joy and determination, to assert their rights as mothers to social wel-fare, health, and the lives of their children.”
The Communist women devel-oped a new term for the victims of capitalism that made a subtle point regarding women. They spoke frequently of “die Schaffenden,” a German word combining the mean-ing of “producers” and “creators.” The Schaffenden, Zetkin says, are “all those whose labour, be it with hand or brain, increases the material and cultural heritage of humankind, without exploiting the labour of oth-ers.” Although Zetkin does not spell this out, the Communist women’s term implicitly includes household and childrearing labour, as well as

the labour of childbirth, attributing to it productive significance.

Dissolution of the women’s International
Born in 1921, the Communist Women’s International flourished for two and a half years, and then was thrust into sharp decline by the rise of Stalinism.
In 1924, Comintern veered in an ultraleft direction, away from the united front policies, and Commu-nist women leaders lost influence. In mid-1925, publication of their journal was cancelled, supposedly because it was too costly. In 1926, the Communist women’s leadership was moved from Berlin to Moscow, and it was downgraded from an autonomous secretariat to a depart-ment of the Comintern executive committee.

In the next few years, most of the Communist women leaders joined the anti-Stalinist oppositions lead by Leon Trotsky, Gregory Zinoviev, and Nikolai Bukharin.
The Soviet Zhenotdel, spearhead of women’s advances in the Soviet republics, was shut down in 1930. Women’s commissions elsewhere lasted a few years longer. By the middle of that decade, however, Stalinism imposed a return to pa-triarchal values both in the Soviet Union and in Communist parties abroad.

Legacy of a revolutionary generation
The Communist women stood for the consistent pursuit of militant unity of the workers’ movement. They sought to unite women from all social layers who were prepared to actively oppose evils of capital-ism. They favoured an adroit search for common ground with non-Com-munist currents among women and in the labour movement. In doing so, they played a significant role in shaping the leadership of the Com-munist International as a whole.
This is perhaps their most impor-tant legacy to us. The Communist Women’s International prefigures the leading role of women in move-ments for social progress both today and tomorrow.

Following last month’s issue of Socialist Worker, this text is an adaptation of a longer text, prepared for presentation to the Historical Materialism conference in New York, January 18, 2010.

international socialist events

TORONTO
What next for the Bolivarian Revolution? Venezuela, Chavez and Socialism
Sat, April 13, 6:00pm
307 Student Centre
Join the Toronto West IS for dinner and a film montage that shows a glimpse of the last 10 years of the Bolivarian Revolution and then a discussion on what’s next.
Suggested donation \$10-20
For info: torontowest.is@gmail.com

Marxism 2013: Revolution In Our Time
Weekend-long conference of ideas to change the world
May 31 - June 2
Ryerson University
55 Gould St.
www.marxism2013.com
#riot2013
Info: reports@socialist.ca

YORK UNIVERSITY
Summer socialist discus-sions
On-going throughout the summer
441 Student Centre
Info: yorkusocialists@gmail.com

VANCOUVER
Lower Mainland socialist meetings
Info: vancouver.socialists@gmail.com

peace & justice events

TORONTO
No Tar Sands in Toronto- No Line 9! East-end meeting
Sun, April 7, 2:00pm
East York Civic Centre
850 Coxwell at Mortimer

No Tar Sands in Toronto - No Line 9! West-end meeting
Mon, April 8, 7:00pm
Davenport-Perth Neighbour-hood Health Civic Centre
1900 Davenport Road, west of Symington

Latin America solidarity month
Mon, April 1 - April 30
For list of events: lacsn. weebly.com/events-even-tos.html
To host an event, contact: lacscanada@gmail.com

OTTAWA
The Million First People’s March
Fri, June 21
Parliament Hill
For info: http://on.fb.me/14Htjes



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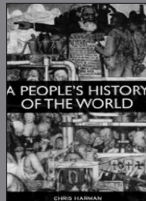
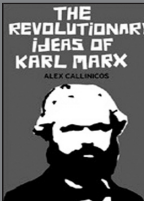
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RESISTANCE PRESS BOOK ROOM



THOUSANDS MARCH FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



WORKERS' RIGHTS

by PAM JOHNSON

HOMES FIRST strikers have a victory after four brutal weeks on the picket line. These workers in OPSEU Local 540 are front-line staff in buildings that house the most marginalized Toronto citizens, many who are just making the transition from the street into housing when they arrive at Homes First.

The workers turned down two previous contract offers that included major concessions, which would have undermined choices in scheduling and overtime. The strike was very solid despite the employer bringing in scabs and intimidating strikers with intense surveillance by security. In the end, the employer was pushed back, all of the concessions were taken off the table and a few minor improvements were gained.

George England, striker and strike organizer calls it a "huge victory" for these workers. This was the first strike for this local. England said that initially workers were afraid. He also said that there were low points when it became clear the employer was intent on breaking the union. England said, "We never thought we could come together and be this strong."

England also said that critical to the success of the strike was solidarity by other OPSEU members and especially the Greater Toronto Area Council (GTAC), others in the labour movement and Porter Airline strikers who visited the picket line on several occasions. Homes First strikers also returned the favour. This public sector/private sector solidarity points the way to the kind of solidarity that can build the capacity of the labour movement.

Victory

It is a victory for these workers and for the clients they serve. It is also a lesson for the labour movement that strikes can effectively push against employer attacks and the austerity agenda. Like the Toronto library workers, the Chicago teachers and the Quebec students, the Homes First workers fought and won.

ON SATURDAY, March 9, thousands marched through Toronto for International Women's Day.

Last year's march focused on fighting the austerity agenda. This year the anti-austerity struggle across the country has been radicalized by Idle No More, led by indigenous women. That was a major theme of IWD this year -- with indigenous women leading the march under the banner "fires are burning, we are rising."

Recently Human Rights Watch issued a damning report on police abuse of aboriginal women. Challenging violence against women was the second major theme -- with people chanting "stop the silence, end the violence." There were also demands for pay equity and childcare.

While the Harper government has ignored violence against women, pay equity and

childcare, its backbenchers claim to address discrimination against women through Motion 408, scheduled for debate in Parliament later this month, which attacks abortion rights. The fight for reproductive justice was the third major theme of IWD, and the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics mobilized -- including their banner "maternal health includes abortion" which led the G20 protests in 2010.

From the G20 protests in 2010, the Egyptian revolution beginning in 2011, and Idle No More that began at the end of 2012 -- women are at the heart of the fight for a better world. As the motto of IWD says, "the rising of the women is the rising of us all."

This article is republished from from a photo essay on Rabble. Visit the original to see more photos from IWD Toronto

ONTARIO LIBERALS TRY TO DIVIDE DISABILITY MOVEMENT

by MELISSA GRAHAM

ON FEBRUARY 19, 2013, the Ontario Liberal Government announced that it is shifting lead responsibility for implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act from the Community and Social Services Ministry (where it has resided since 2005) to the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment.

The throne speech included this statement: "It calls on the private sector to increase the number of people with disabilities in the Ontario workforce. As a demonstration of its commitment to this goal, your government will shift the Accessibility Directorate from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. Because men and women with disabilities deserve a level playing field."

At first glance, this might sound like great news, as is often the case with speeches like this. Most people with disabilities in Ontario live in poverty, and this change will certainly benefit some people, but an important question we need to be asking is who will benefit and how.

Social assistance cuts

This announcement was made right around

the same time that recommendations to overhaul social assistance in Ontario were released. These recommendations will have serious impacts on people with disabilities who depend on social assistance for their survival.

It is not clear how they will determine who is employment-ready under this new program, or whether they will have to take the first job available.

It was also recommended that there be corporate "champions," making it likely that some companies will be subsidized or prioritized for taking on employees with disabilities. The Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, that was just charged with the task of overseeing the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act works extensively with Ontario's private sector.

Solidarity against austerity

Before we commend Premier Wynne for her announcement, we need to keep in mind what other people with disabilities are facing. While the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act will benefit people with physical and sensory disabilities, people with mental health issues are likely to be hurt the most by social assistance recommendations.

We cannot let the ruling class divide us; it's time to fight for the rights of us all.

RAISE THE RATES PROVINCIAL STRATEGY DAY

by REG MCQUAID

Close to 50 anti-poverty activists from across Ontario gathered in Toronto on Saturday, March 16 for a strategy session around the upcoming provincial budget and beyond.

The full-day event was sponsored by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) and the CUPE-Ontario Social Service Workers Coordinating Committee. PSAC and OPSEU members also took part, as well as anti-poverty groups from Kingston, Kitchener-Waterloo, Sudbury and Toronto.

The Raise The Rates Campaign, which is widely endorsed by social service organizations, calls for a res-

toration of the 21.6 percent in social assistance rates implemented under Mike Harris in 1995, plus upward adjustment to compensate for 16 years of inflation. This would bring the single person rate up to \$936, an increase of 55 percent over the present \$606. The campaign also calls for lifting the Minimum Wage freeze, and raising the rate to \$14/hour (the official poverty level).

The Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) was downloaded to the municipal level last year, with a cap on total funds available. A number of the smaller municipalities have yet to set up CSUMB programs. Raise The Rates wants the CSUMB to be restored to its previous form and level. The Special Diet Allowance, which is be-

ing eliminated to offset the \$100/month increase in the Ontario Works (OW) rate, must also be restored.

In February the new-look Liberal government of Kathleen Wynne revealed its "smoke-and-mirrors" response to last year's Social Assistance Reform Commission report. Their proposal would see an additional \$100/month for single employables on OW, and the right to keep up to \$200/month of income (before clawback) for every one else. The estimated cost of these proposed increases to social assistance is put by OCAP at \$302 million.

However, these improvements are more than offset by cuts elsewhere in benefits currently available to people on social assistance. These in-

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

Sex selection abortion and the attack on unions

THE HOUSE of Commons has passed a bill which would force unions to make financial disclosures that are not required of corporations. This is a clear attempt to silence labour organizations and put pressure on them not to involve themselves in political campaigns. It has yet to be voted upon in the Senate.

This is one more attack on the labour movement in this country. We have seen the federal government legislating airline workers, rail workers and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers back to work, and more recently the imposition of collective agreements on teachers in Ontario. These moves to take away the right to strike as well as the right to collective bargaining are intended to further constrain any attempt by working people to defend themselves and to take on the fight against the austerity agenda.

Trade unions have played an important role in many campaigns for women's rights. The struggle for reproductive justice is one example. During the fight to overturn the federal abortion law one of the first organizations to come on side was the Ontario Federation of Labour. After a strong floor fight the delegates overwhelmingly voted to support a woman's right to abortion. This led to many unions following suit and they provided material and financial resources.

Recently a committee of the House of Commons voted not to allow a Conservative private members motion to come to the floor, deeming it to be "unvotable." Motion 408 was an attempt by anti-choice MPs to have the House take a stand against sex selection abortions. It was the most recent of many private members motions or bills attempting to create barriers to women's access to abortion.

A strong response from the pro-choice movement and allies in the trade unions exposed the real intent of the motion by anti-choice MPs. The pro-choice/reproductive rights movement in this country has been gathering strength in recent times: a pan-Canadian Day of Action in the fall, significant celebrations across the country in January on the 25th anniversary of the Morgentaler Decision, and a movement in Prince Edward Island demanding access to abortion.

Recently Canadian Auto Workers Women's Committees and other unions rallied against an anti-abortion caravan across the country, contributing to its failure.

The strength of this reemerging movement and the role that it has played in pushing back private member's motions has not been lost on the Harper government. A split has developed in the Conservative caucus with anti-choice MPs criticizing the Prime Minister because of our success.

The Harper government would like nothing better than to muzzle the unions and stop them from throwing their organizational weight behind progressive movements. The sex selection issue is just the most recent example of how we have been able to resist attempts to roll back gains won by the women's and trade union movements.

Join the International Socialists

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clude eliminating the Special Diet Allowance (\$240 million); cutting the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (\$70.6 million); cap on discretionary benefits (\$20 million); elimination of Home Repairs Benefit (\$3 million); non-indexation of rates (2012 increase of 1 per cent, vs. cost-of-living increase of 3 per cent). Total cuts to assistance are estimated at \$334 million, not counting for inflation.

On March 16 OCAP and its labour allies outlined a 12-month strategy around the poverty issue. Key dates are the provincial budget (expected April 28), a possible (spring?) election, and the OFL convention in November. Pressure will be put on the NDP to demand significant improvements in the social

assistance proposals currently being put forward by the minority Liberal government. If the government falls, the anti-poverty issue will be kept front and centre in the election campaign. At the OFL convention, efforts will be made to broaden labour support for the Raise The Rates program.

The capitalists want to drive people on social assistance into precarious below-poverty-level jobs, adding to the downward pressure on wages throughout the economy. The employed and those on social assistance have a common interest in resisting this austerity agenda. The OCAP/CUPE alliance is a hopeful example of concrete action to this end.

For more, visit www.ocap.ca and www.cupe.on.ca/raisetherates.

Socialist Worker

BUDGET FOR THE 1%

by JESSICA SQUIRES

FINANCE MINISTER Jim Flaherty's 2013 budget, dubbed Economic Action Plan 2013, is a familiar Harper-style feat of smoke and mirrors. This budget is one more in a line of budgets since 2010 and earlier, in which the government is taking a boil-the-frog approach. Through apparent small-scale tinkering, the Harper Conservatives are presiding over a wholesale shift in the governing approach of the Canadian state.

Attacks on workers

First, promising a public service that is “affordable, modern and high-performing,” Flaherty committed to “examine overall employee compensation and pensioner benefits and ... propose changes to the labour relations regime ... following the lead of other public and private sector organizations.... In addition, the Government will be examining its human resources management practices and institutions in a number of areas, including disability and sick leave management, with a view to ensuring that public servants receive appropriate services that support a timely return to work.”

Many in the labour movement fear this is code for bringing in a sick leave regime close to that forced on Canada Post workers.

The aims of that scheme, which eliminated sick leave and replaced it with a private insurance plan called short-term disability leave, were to save money by bullying workers out of taking leave at all. The regime places the onus on doctors to issue a statement that the employee is “totally disabled” and unable to work, and on workers to appeal a decision by Canada Post and a private insurance company. The plan



will make people work when they are sick, but not too sick to move; discourage people from taking leave when they are sick; and privatize the remaining cost of sick leave to private insurers. Workers will work while sick, thus making themselves even more sick, possibly making others sick, and ultimately resulting in their needing to take time off, resulting in yet another claim cycle.

The public sector unions have signalled they will fight any such manoeuvre, which will require broad rank-and-file resistance.

Corporatization and militarization

The budget also continues the freezing of spending on programs and on direct spending to individuals. The net result is in fact a decline in program spending as a proportion of GDP over time. There are more hidden cuts as program and departments and agencies are being slashed or eliminated without being announced publicly, let alone listed in the budget.

The erosion of spending accompanies an ideological shift to an intervention style that benefits the 1%, with the politicization and militariza-

tion of governance. Harper has announced that Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will be rolled into Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Presumably this is to ensure that international aid decisions are made closer to cabinet. We can expect “aid” to translate into “subsidization of private corporate interest abroad”—in other words, imperialism.

Research funding continues to shift to benefit the needs of business and industry. The much-touted training plan announced in the budget is another example: training dollars are dependent on willingness of businesses to pay one third, and on forcing provinces (especially Quebec) to relinquish their autonomy over those dollars.

While Department of National Defense is supposedly cut, no figures are in the budget to attest to this. It's true those cuts are expected to the tune of \$2.7 billion. But the department will still

receive about \$19 billion per year, and remains by far the largest discretionary item in the budget. Infrastructure spending, supposedly increasing but in fact going down this year by about \$1 billion, is tied to public-private partnerships.

Other, more culturally-focussed politicization and militarization measures can be expected through the CIDA merge, and through the Ottawa Winterlude festival—now to be run by the Cabinet department, Heritage Canada. Canada Day is also moved there from the National Capital Commission. Those festivals can be expected to be politicized, and probably militarized.

Colonial

Worst of all, this budget responds to demands for a transformed relationship between the Canadian nation and Aboriginal peoples by unleashing more unilateral program decisions, enforcement, and attacks.

Promises to resolve claims faster are actually about forcing aboriginal groups, within parameters set by government, to fight private interests for control over their own lands and resources.

Along with measures to erode collective land use and management, these actions are designed to force a creeping assimilation on aboriginal peoples, and to deliver the conservative ideologically-driven goal of permanently undermining aboriginal resistance for generations.

Rather than answer calls for housing and education investments, the budget promises funding for police on reserves. The announced funding for income assistance is contingent on mandatory participation in youth training programs. In other words, the measure is workfare for Aboriginal youth.

These measures were imposed, once again, without the constitutionally required

consultation. Meanwhile, on environmental issues the budget is so insignificant as to be laughable.

Secrecy

Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page spent his last week in his job arguing in court that the government must reveal to Canadians what has actually been cut. Even conservative commentators have remarked on how little of substance is actually revealed by the 2013 budget documents. One of the main commitments in this budget is to eliminate the deficit by 2015. However, the actual success of this measure will not be known until 2016 — the year after the next election.

This budget is part of a pattern: denial and decisions based on ideology and not facts. This is based on ignoring the billions in corporate tax cuts and military spending that produced the deficit, ignoring earlier claims that Canada under Harper's rule was unaffected by the economic crisis, balancing the books on the backs of the 99%.

Idle No More

This budget is a boiling pot of water in which the Harper government hopes the 99% are being lulled into complacency. We need to rise up and overturn the pot, and the Idle No More movement shows how accumulated grievances can explode, sparking solidarity across the country.

We need to build solidarity for the indigenous sovereignty movement and connect it with the anti-war and labour movement, so we can strike back at the 1% behind Harper's budget.

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Another pipeline, another spill: No Line 9!

by JESSE MCLAREN

THE VIRAL video of Canadian tar sands oil running through a residential neighbourhood in Arkansas has shows the threat of Line 9 and the need to shut down the tar sands.

ExxonMobil reversed the flow through its Pegasus pipeline in 2006 to pump tar sands bitumen from Illinois to Texas, and then increased the flow in 2009. On March 29 the pipeline burst, sending over 300,000 litres of toxic tar sands bitumen through a local neighbourhood in Mayflower, Arkansas—causing an evacuation.

This is the latest in an unending series of spills. Between 1999 and 2010 there were 804 spills from Enbridge pipelines alone, including the mass contamination of Michigan's Kalamazoo River in 2010. Last year a leaking pipeline spilled 1000 barrels

into a Wisconsin field, and last week a train derailed and spilled 15,000 gallons of Canadian tar sands oil in Minnesota. Meanwhile Suncor, which didn't even bother reporting a three day spill into Alberta's Athabasca River in 2010, had another spill just last week—spilling another 2200 barrels of toxic tar sands.

According to Mayflower resident Warren Andrews, “I didn't even know the oil pipeline was there” until his wife saw the spill. “She called me and said ‘Honey, something's wrong.’ I came out and smelled it. Then I saw it coming down the street.”

Environmental racism

This could be the experience in Toronto if Enbridge is allowed to reverse the flow of Line 9 in order to pump tar sands bitumen from Sarnia to Montreal. Line 9 avoids going through

Bay Street or the wealthy neighbourhoods of Rosedale or Forrest Hill, but it passes right through poor and racialized communities like Jane and Finch.

Even without a major spill, tar sands are built on environmental racism. As Eriel Deranger, a band member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN), wrote, “Tar sands have been widely recognized as one of the most destructive projects on earth because of the serious impacts on treaty and aboriginal rights, ecological destruction and global green house gas emissions (GHG).” Domestic refining also contaminates indigenous land like the Aamjiwnaang First Nation near Sarnia.

That's why it is nonsensical to propose domestic refining of tar sands, or sending bitumen east rather than west—as the NDP's leader Thomas Mulcair has done. Millions voted for the NDP to provide a real alterna-

tive to Harper's petro-state, and the Official Opposition have the potential of acting as a megaphone for the movements. Tar sands and pipelines violate indigenous sovereignty, destroy the planet, and waste resources that could be spent on the green jobs urgently needed to transition away from the oil economy. Trade unionists mobilized for last year's indigenous-led sit-in in Victoria against pipelines, and the Hamilton labour council recently passed a motion against Line 9. Stopping Line 9 would not only prevent an oil spill in Toronto, but could be part of a broader movement for indigenous sovereignty and good green jobs for all.

To learn more about Line 9 and how to help stop it, join community forums in Toronto's east end (Sunday April 7, 2pm at East York Civic Centre, 850 Coxwell) and west end (Monday April 8, 7pm at Davenport Perth Community Centre, 1900 Davenport)—both events featuring guest speaker Ron Plain from Aamjiwnaang First Nation.