

The neo-liberal
legacy of Lyin' Brian
Mulroney
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Trudeau sends record number of weapons to Israel

PROTEST GENOCIDE



Toronto community rally marched to two MP offices to demand an end to arms sales to Israel

As of March 4, more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed in the relentless bombardment of Gaza. That includes some 13,400 children in one of the worst textbook cases of genocide the world has seen.

The Canadian state is complicit and is enabling that genocide. Trudeau has not only sent a record amount of weaponry to Israel since October 7th – his government is also buying weapons from the Israelis, giving them much needed cash flow to continue their brutality. And of course, Canada has joined others in suspending funding to UNRWA for humanitarian aid for the people of Gaza. Trudeau is

literally starving Palestinians while claiming to stand for human rights and decency.

But our political leaders and the Zionist propagandists would have you believe that the “real” criminals are the people protesting that genocide—not those committing it.

They collectively level accusations of anti-semitism on a person dressed as Spiderman who climbed a scaffolding in front of Mt. Sinai Hospital in Toronto, but deliberately fail to mention that there have been literally hundreds of protests on that same route between Queen’s Park and the US consulate over the years. The hospital was not targeted at all.

When a Zionist attacked pro-Palestine

protesters with a nail gun in early March, there is silence from those same politicians and media. The double standard is terrible but not surprising. It is a continuation of the decades long whip-up of Islamophobia that has been central to both the needs of the Imperial powers and has built the far-right across the western world.

As the genocide and the protests continue, the accusations become ever more absurd. On March 2, activists in Toronto shut down a public meet-and-greet with Prime Minister Trudeau and far-right Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. They were protesting both the public appearance of Genocide Justin and the

fascism of Meloni. It was a win for both the pro-Palestine and anti-fascist movements.

But our politicians are turning the event on its head. They are calling the activists who blocked the event anti-semites and terrorists. These same politicians—fresh off of giving a Waffen SS member a standing ovation in Parliament—have now decided that protesting genocide and a literal fascist is hate speech.

As Malcom X said, “If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”

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Measles: right-wing extremism and the return of epidemics

In 2022, 2.9 million Canadians visited Florida, many of them during the Spring Break school holiday. Numbers for 2023 aren't out yet, but 1st quarter data suggested it was going to be an all-time record year.

I visited Florida in the early 2000s and returned with very pleasant memories of winter bird watching, and visiting with a delightful elder living there.

People visiting Florida in 2024 may return with something more than memories. Florida is site for a dangerous outbreak of measles. And every action and decision of the Florida government seems designed to empower the epidemic, not contain and end it.

Measles is one of the most virulent viruses we know. It especially, but not exclusively, attacks children. It is also one of the easiest diseases to contain, since effective vaccines were developed in the 1950s. I can remember, early in elementary school, being led to the auditorium where our whole class was administered oral vaccines (cherry flavoured). It was mandatory, and hugely popular, as were vaccines for other plagues like diphtheria, polio, whooping cough and others. We were taught age-appropriate lessons about public health and science to prepare us.

The scientists who developed these vaccines were celebrated as life savers and people like Albert Sabin and Jonas Salk were household names. Salk was the first to develop the polio vaccine, unveiled the very month of my birth in 1955. He refused to patent or profit from his discovery, shared the science, and within a few years inoculations were available in over 90 countries. In 1961, Albert Sabin further refined the vaccine into an easy oral form, more suitable for kids.

Beside inoculation, measles is easily contained by a period of isolation. Just keeping an infected kid home from school keeps the whole community safe.

Mine was the first generation not to have classmates in leg braces, with limbs deformed for life by polio; the first not to lose friends and family needlessly to the encephalitis often caused by measles.

According to the Center for Disease Control, about 1 in 5 children who become ill with measles end up in hospital. And 1 in 1,000 can develop encephalitis, or brain swelling that can have lifelong neurological and autoimmune effects. Between one and three children in a thousand will die.

Joseph Lapado is Republican governor Ron DeSantis's appointed Surgeon General, a position he won based solely on his opposition to COVID vaccination, and all public health mandates. In January he essentially ended the administration of all COVID vaccines and boosters.

He recently issued a letter to Florida parents concerning the measles outbreaks. In it he not only refused to mandate vaccination and isolation to contain the disease, he went against scientific evidence and over 50 years of safe clinical experience. His office "is deferring to parents or guardians

Pennsylvania city. "This is a state surgeon general saying that he is not going to enforce any of the tenets of public health in the name of freedom. He wants freedom at the expense of putting children in harm's way," he wrote.

It is slightly unfair to single out Florida for allowing the return of

schools is because too many parents have not had their children protected by the safe and effective measles vaccine. And why is that? It's because anti-vaccine sentiment in Florida comes from the top of the public health food-chain: Joseph Ladapo." He should have included DeSantis.

birth, stillbirth and miscarriages.

Whatever the case, the rise of vaccine skepticism is rooted in the rise of a narrow, fascistic definition of "freedom" as a purely private, personal virtue completely divorced from any social responsibility.



Whatever the case, the rise of vaccine skepticism is rooted in the rise of a narrow, fascistic definition of "freedom" as a purely private, personal virtue completely divorced from any social responsibility.

to make decisions about school attendance." He is essentially rewarding the deluded community of vaccine skeptics, many of whom were drawn to Florida by its radical right-wing political response to COVID.

Dr. Paul Offit is director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, which has worked to contain a recent measles outbreak among children in that

measles. Twelve other states have reported outbreaks, and more are certain to follow. Viruses don't respect borders. But Florida stands out by instituting measures and guidance designed not to control the disease, but to deliberately enable it.

John P. Moore, a professor of microbiology and immunology at Weill Cornell Medical College told the press: "The reason why there is a measles outbreak in Florida

Maybe measles is not taken seriously because it is "just" a children's disease. While it primarily attacks kids, unprotected adults are not immune. While adult measles is rarer, it is far more dangerous, with a death rate of about 15%. It can cause a range of neurological problems, seizures, loss of memory and intellectual disability. It is particularly dangerous to pregnant women, causing birth defects, premature

As the experience of COVID has taught us, almost every political jurisdiction is willing to put business-as-usual ahead of public health. Some, like Florida, Texas, Alberta and Ontario seem to embrace the rise of easily preventable death with particular enthusiasm.

They adhere to their "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" ideology. They are devoted to the distorted belief that a cull, even a cull of vulnerable children, is acceptable if it strengthens the "herd". A pediatric measles death rate of 1 in a 1,000 doesn't seem unreasonable to them. Who cares if the deaths are preventable – prevention costs money.

At the time of publication comes news of first measles outbreaks in Ontario and Quebec.

We are seeing the unnecessary return of measles first as it is so contagious, but the re-emergence of other deadly or debilitating diseases will not be far behind. Far-right political opportunists like Pierre Poilievre, Danielle Smith, Doug Ford and Ron DeSantis will continue to amplify the deluded, anti-science ideology of their conspiracy-theory driven followers.

We are in a climate in which political leadership, encouraged and deeply funded by corporate interests, is riding high on "social Darwinist/survival of the fittest" ideology and the denial of social connection and solidarity. They are literally getting away with murder.



Mulroney's legacy: austerity, privatization and graft

Reaction to Lyin' Brian dyin' has been mixed and confusing. A Globe and Mail editorial dubbed him "Canada's last great prime minister." A New York Times obit stated he "reshaped and divided" the nation. The ever weaselly CBC called him "consequential".

In the USA, he was celebrated – his pro-business, pro-Yankee politics was appreciated following the nationalism of some of the policies of Trudeau the elder. Down there, government buildings are flying flags at half mast, which I'm sure will confuse hell out of most Americans who never heard of the old grifter.

Politicians of every stripe joined the queue to heap sugar-coated praise on Brian Mulroney. None was more nausea-inducing than Jagmeet Singh's summation, calling Mulroney a "true statesman" and "great Progressive Conservative". He singled him out for his dedication to environmental protection, and for his ever smiling disposition.

It is true that it is hard to find a picture of him not smiling. Don't be deceived. Mulroney was a vicious class warrior who would smile while sticking the knife in the backs of working people. He made his reputation as a lawyer specializing in opposing unions.

As president and CEO of Iron

Ore Company he excelled as an "asset stripper", dismantling the corporation, selling off the most profitable bits to foreign interests, making the remains appear to be a failing business. He then shut them down. In the process whole towns along a swathe of Quebec's northeast, like Schefferville, were destroyed overnight as he shut down the mines. Thousands of good jobs in mining, refining and transportation were gone.

Shareholders loved him. He was a rising star in the Tory party, and stepped on to a bigger stage where he repeated the pattern of creating a crisis, selling off the plums to the highest bidder without regard for the welfare of ordinary people or long-term national interests.

He rode to power thanks to widespread disgust with the lies and betrayals of the Liberals. His government was elected with the second largest majority in parliamentary history and 50% of the popular vote. Nine years later he was ridden out of Ottawa on a rail, polling as the most unpopular Canadian prime minister ever. On his watch the old "civil" Tory party self-destructed, leaving a rump of Alberta based, socially conservative MPs to form Preston Manning's Reform Party. Under its own PC banner the Tory party won only 2 seats in the 1993 election.

In the dying days of his tenure

he traveled to New York, lobbying hard with his conservative friends to secure him the position of UN Secretary General. Despite (or because of) support from his old pal George Bush, he was laughed out of town. Surely the mark of a "true statesman".

Mulroney reveled in the company of his pals: Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. Together they were the unholy trinity of neo-liberal economics and austerity. But Mulroney was definitely the junior partner of the firm, the Larry to Thatcher's Moe and Reagan's Curly. Photos of the trio abound, with Mulroney inevitably grinning his delight at being in such lofty company

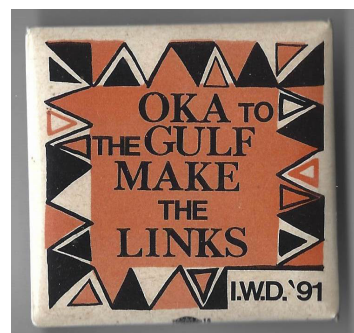
Neo-liberalism in power

As PM his first order of business was selling off Crown Corporations. Previous administrations had "nationalized" over 60 strategic industries, part of a wave of economic nationalism then in vogue. True to form he picked 23 of the most profitable, notably Air Canada and Petro Canada, privatized and sold them off.

His "legacy" achievement was to use his majority to ram through the massively unpopular North American Free Trade Agreement, one of the first big neo-liberal trade deals. Despite huge opposition from unions and workers, the deal,

which was mostly kept secret, decisively shifted power from national government to multinational corporations.

This great environmental champion signed away most of our ability to sue multinational corporations (and Canadian capitalists as well) for crimes against the environment. He kicked open the door for good, unionized manufacturing jobs to flood out of the country. He destroyed the domestic retail industry, unable to compete with international chain giants. He created



an economy based primarily on resource extraction while trading away refining and manufacturing. He relegated millions to low-pay or minimum wage service jobs.

He decided he would be the last Father of Confederation by getting Quebec sign on to the Charter, only to provoke a needless constitu-

tional crisis that almost resulted in separation.

When Mohawk warriors at Kanesatake protested and blocked the building of a golf course on their sacred land his response was to send in the army, coming within a hair of provoking a bloody slaughter.

As veteran abortion rights activist Judy Rebick reminds us, when the Supreme Court struck down the law restricting abortion, Mulroney moved to introduce a new one. Only the threat of a huge, victorious mass movement forced his government to retreat.

And don't even get me started on how this opportunistic grifter used his office to line his own pockets, got caught, and got off the hook with a half-assed apology.

Certainly Mulroney's attacks on the living standards and rights of workers was a continuation of those by the previous Liberal government with its wage and price controls betrayal. And he set the stage for more Liberal dismantling of the "social safety net" under Chretien and Martin. The drive impose corporate rule and austerity is a bi-partisan project. But Mulroney played his part with ruthless glee.

There is no doubt that Mulroney was "consequential". Working Canadians, then and now, are paying the consequences of Brian Mulroney's policies.

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Mulroney introduced a new law criminalizing abortion, but was defeated by the pressure of the reproductive justice movement.

Brian with his long time friend and neoliberal partner in crime, Ronald Regan.



Canada, Palestine and imperialism

by: Rohit Revi

Even before capitalism in Canada, the seeds of Imperial power were laid with the colonial occupation of Turtle Island and the expansion of the British and French Empires to North America. The dispossession of Indigenous peoples here is a precondition, upon which capitalism developed in Canada. First Nations in Canada are not just occupied territories, they are also colonized Nations, with legitimate claims to sovereignty and self-determination. When we truly understand that fact, we will recognize that all operations of Canadian Capital and State on unceded and un-surrendered sovereign Indigenous land – such as the trans mountain pipeline expansion – are imperialist in nature.

Canada's role in NATO

For the last many decades, the Canadian State has for long portrayed itself through a myth of “peacekeeping” and as a conflict avoidant, peace-loving country.

Sometimes people think of Canada as just a background member of the NATO, but in reality NATO itself was in many ways a Canadian Idea in the first place. It was former Prime Minister of Canada, Lester B Pearson who wrote the first public proposal for a military alliance of Western powers. This was in the context of growing communist movements in the Global South, because he believed that the UN Security Council may not be able to enforce Canadian and Western Interests globally. He describes the formation of the NATO as the most important thing he participated in. Within 3 years of the creation of NATO, Pearson boasted that his government had given away \$324 million dollars to NATO countries. This was the largest donation, alongside the US. This money was given solely to suppress anti-colonial resistance across the Global South – to suppress Independence movements

in Algeria and in Vietnam, to fund Dutch colonial powers in Indonesia and West Papua New Guinea, to fund Belgians for the same in Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi, and to the British as well. This is story of Canada's central role in the formation and fortification of NATO.

Palestine

It was Canada's Undersecretary of External Affairs who chaired this First Committee on Palestine – which established the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine or UNSCOP. At the First Committee, Lester B. Pearson

Rand was a Zionist, and after his mission to Palestine, he was one of the lead authors of the majority report that supported the partition of Palestine in two ethnically segregated states. In many ways, Canadian Imperialist interests have authored the occupation of Palestine from 1947 onwards. We should also know that a partition agreement, signed by US and USSR, was called the Canada Plan, after the Pearson's role in authoring it.

In 1960, Pearson received the Israel's medallion of Valour, and in 1968 he received the Theodore Herzl Award – named after the

holocaust? The answer is absolutely no. You would be shocked to know that Canada accepted only less than 5000 Jewish refugees between 1943 to 1945. In fact, it was precisely because Canada did not want to accept Jewish refugees that it forced the creation of Israel. In this sense, this was Canadian antisemitism that was one of the big motivators. Another big motivator was that Ottawa, alongside Washington, wanted an outpost in the middle-east for western powers and they recognized the creation of Israel as the creation of that outpost. This is an old idea, dating as far as Theodore

leashed by occupation in 1947 and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, more than 300 Canadian volunteers were recruited to be a part of the Zionist military form. And it is believed that more than 1000 Canadians were on the ground over the years to establish Israel. Ottawa did not interfere with any of these recruitments and looked away, even though they had outlawed the same when Canadian socialists volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

Once the creation of the Israeli state was secured by the Western Imperialist forces, Western Capital – including Canadian Capital – became heavily involved in the settlement of occupied Palestine.

Once the creation of the Israeli state was secured by the Western Imperialist forces, Western Capital – including Canadian Capital – became heavily involved in the settlement of occupied Palestine.

For example, after the 1967 war, there was a Canada Park that was built in the West Bank. This is one of the most disgusting things, where 15 million dollars were sourced from Canadians to create a national park on land that was once occupied by Palestinians, for recreational enjoyment of the settlers. But this is just one example.



UofT students walk out for Palestine

rejected the Arab calls for an independent, democratic country, and insisted that the committee discuss all questions related to Palestine, which means including the future settlement of European Zionists.

The UNSCOP then sent a mission to Palestine. The Canadian delegate was Ivan C Rand, who trade unionists will know as the author of the RAND formula.

founder of Zionism – from the Zionist Organization of America for “his commitment to Israel”.

But why did Canada and Pearson take such a personal interest in the partition of Palestine and the occupation of Palestine by the Israeli state?

Was it because Canada considered it important to develop a safe home for Jewish refugees after the

Hertzel the architect of Zionist who tried to convince Europe back in 1890s about how useful Israel would be to Western Imperialism. In the 1970s, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz published a piece that basically said Israel is to be the watchdog of the West, to punish any country in the region that goes against Western Interests.

During the war that was un-

stine sm



Activists shut down Raytheon in Calgary

Another example, Canadian Highways Infrastructure Corporation was the lead organization that created the private consortium which spent 3 billion dollars in creating a settler-only apartheid highway.

In July 2008, a West Bank village filed a historic lawsuit in Montreal Supreme Court that two Quebec based companies – Green Park International and Green Mouth International, for building an Israeli Settlement in Westbank on land that was illegally seized after the agreements of 1967. The Superior Court of Québec dismissed the claim, asking them

over Israeli diplomacy in Venezuela and became the official representation of Israel in Venezuela. Canada became Israel.

No discussion of Canadian imperialism in Palestine can happen without talking about the arms sales between Canada and Israel. Since Justin Trudeau came to power in 2015, Canadian companies have exported over \$114 million Canadian worth of military goods to Israel. Every year since 2015, the amount of arms sold to Israel has been on the rise. But we don't know the exact numbers because Canada hides behind the US. The 1956's

is perhaps Lockheed Martin, which also operates out of Canada, which leads the consortium that creates F-35 Fighter Airplanes that is used to bomb Gaza right now. Since the late 1990s, at least 110 Canadian-based suppliers have been awarded contracts for this program in excess of C\$3.8-billion. Companies like Pratt and Whitney right here in Mississauga make war plane engines that are sold to Israel.

The Liberal Government has also lied about Canadian military exports to Israel since October 7th. At first it denied any sale, then it changed its

position to say it has only exported non-lethal military goods. But that doesn't mean anything. Non-lethal military goods just means components and parts, that are fitted into lethal weapons and arms used to kill people. Reality is, Canada has authorized \$28.5 million dollars worth of military sale to Israel since October 7th.

And so for us, here in Canada, it is absolutely crucial to make sure that our movement for Palestinian Liberation maintains its focus on shutting down these companies that produce weapons and military parts,

and an absolute to end the sale of military weapons by Canada to Israel whether it be direct or through the US.

Imperialism is about globalizing capital and globalizing war.

The only way to resist this is by globalizing resistance, and this means to globalize the Intifada.

Shut it down for Palestine

In late February, activists and workers across the country shut down weapons manufacturers who sell their products to Israel.

Below is a report from the action at Safran Electronics in Peterborough.

On Feb. 26th, 2024 members of IS Ptbo/ Nogo were enthused to be involved in direct action at Safran Electronics. This company provides weapons technology to Israel and is therefore complicit in the ongoing genocidal project. Nogojiwanong 2 Palestine organized the event which brought together 40-50 activists.

Arriving before the early morning shift change, both entrances to the property were blocked off. As employees began to arrive, each was greeted by an event marshal who provided information on what was going on and why their company was targeted. It was made clear that the action was against the company and not the employees as we wish to maintain solidarity with workers.

In a gesture of goodwill, employees were offered donuts.

A number of workers left yet some chose to park at other locations and trek overland to get in. Of course the corporate guardians eventually showed up and a decision was made to open one entrance, sort of. One vehicle was allowed in every 3-5 minutes after receiving information from a marshal. The police were relegated to managing the traffic jams -- and no, they did not get any donuts.

The mood among those taking part was bright yet resolute, with singing and chanting hardly ceasing throughout the 2 hour plus time frame. As the flow of employees petered out, pallets and pylons, signs and banners were packed up. Another successful action -- one of seven across the country in a 3 day period. But we cannot let off the throttle. Corporate greed continues to demand all types of suffering and atrocities to slake it's insatiable thirst for more profit and power.



to file with the Israeli High Court of Justice instead.

During the 2008-2009 assault on Gaza, the Harper Government publicly supported Israel and was one of the only votes in defense of Israel at the United Nations Human Rights Committee. During this war, when Venezuela broke off all diplomatic ties with Israel, Canada took

Defence Production Sharing Agreement between Canada and US makes it possible for Canada to sell arms to US without regulation or reporting, and then US can sell this to countries like Israel.

There are numerous companies in Canada that are involved in the business of genocide. The biggest company invested in the genocide of Palestinians



Peterborough blockade Safran Electronics

Egypt's Mahalla workers refuse to give in

Mahalla was the detonator of a major strike wave that fed into the Egyptian Revolution of 2011

by: Charlie Kimber

Bosses are trying to smash a strike by thousands of workers in Egypt's biggest textile factory in Mahalla al-Kubra by blocking payment for work they have already done. But the strikers were standing firm and refusing to give in.

The strike began among women workers and then spread to involve large sections of male workers at the company that employs 14,000 people.

Workers receive their salaries starting on the 25th of each month. But management has withheld the pay workers are owed from before they struck. One worker said, "Instead of responding to our legitimate requests, the company deprives us of our salaries and uses the weapon of starvation as if we were in Gaza."

He added, "A state of extreme dissatisfaction prevails among the workers due to their desperate need for money, especially with the approaching month of Ramadan."

"Our battle is the battle of all those working in the business sector, and we can only win if other companies join us, as the oil company did in Assiut."

Workers at the oils and detergents company in the city of Assiut are striking for the same pay rise as the Mahalla workers.

Egypt's repressive president Abdul Fattah al-Sisi recently announced a rise in the minimum wage for state workers to 6,000 Egyptian pounds—£150—a month. Many workers are paid less than this and are demanding they receive at least this pay.

About 400 temporary workers at Assiut



Egyptian workers rally for fair pay

are also demanding permanent jobs after they spent ten years with the company without being hired.

The Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt say, "The Mahalla strike clearly announces that Egypt's workers reject the current starvation

policies. If these policies have been passed by the sword of repression during the past period, then remaining silent about them is no longer possible.

"We declare our full solidarity with the movement and demands of the brave

Mahalla textile workers and we reject the policy of oppression and terrorism against them.

"We call on all Egyptian political, trade union and student forces to stand in solidarity with them until their legitimate demands are achieved."

"The movement also emphasises that the crisis of increasing wages for workers and employees living below the poverty line is not due to the lack of financial resources. Rather, it's because these resources are in the wrong hands."

"Huge salaries are paid to senior state employees in the presidential office, governors, judges, army and police officers, and advisors to government and public bodies."

"A maximum limit must be set for the wages of these elites to provide the financial resources necessary to set a minimum wage of ten thousand pounds—£250—a month."

Inflation in Egypt—home to over 109 million people—is close to 40 percent, plunging many Egyptians near or under the poverty line.

Mahalla was the detonator of a major wave of strikes which fed into the eruption of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Workers across the country will be watching to see if again it can give a lead to resistance.

Ruling classes everywhere will fear economic and political revolt against imperialism and the Arab regimes' rulers.

Send your solidarity to Mahalla workers via the Revolutionary Socialists.

Go to <https://revsoc.me/contact/>

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...continued from page 1

The police are now taking a cue from the media and political leaders and are curtailing the human rights of protesters at Palestine events, but also at left events more broadly.

They have begun attacking picket lines with the same verve. Alex Silas, a local VP for the Public Service Alliance of Canada, has been arrested and charged with criminal offenses simply for joining a picket line with striking members near Petawawa, Ontario. On March 4th, a striker from CUPE 3903 on legal strike at York University was arrested.

The police and courts are also continuing to use their power to shut down and criminalize Indigenous land defenders like Wet'suwet'en Chief Dsta'hy1 who was found guilty of criminal contempt simply for trying to protect

his land.

This isn't unusual. Land defenders, strikers and protesters have been arrested many times in the past. But the context is different.

As the convoy protests taught us, the police are already wedded to the politics of the far-right. These new protest events are another chance for them to attack those they oppose, but to do so under the guise of protecting human rights of Zionists.

The question of Palestine is sharpening the contradictions in our society. While millions protest the genocide on the streets, the ruling class tightens its grip on power with ever more repression. As the many crises of capitalism worsen, we will need organized forces to both mitigate the worst of the impacts of those crises and to defend those standing up for human rights and the planet. It's time to get organized.



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Territorial Acknowledgement

As settlers, we acknowledge our occupation of lands that are the Indigenous territories of Turtle Island. Furthermore, we support all struggles for Indigenous sovereignty in whatever forms they take by the hundreds of First Nations and Inuit communities that have resided here for many thousands of years, and by Métis communities that have developed in the last hundreds of years.

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Alberta: crisis of fire and drought

There's a new "season" in town, in Canada and elsewhere around our rapidly heating world: now it is spring, summer, fall, winter and fire.

Perhaps we should be a little less specific, and call it disaster season. Wildfires often trigger deadly landslides and floods that choke our rivers with debris, as the plants that anchor the soil and filter the water are destroyed.

And perhaps we should be even less specific. "Season" implies a period of time with a definite end. Fire "season" is now virtually year-round.

In the past, fire "season" extended from March 1 to October 31. In the winter of 2022, Alberta arbitrarily shortened the "season" to 4 months beginning on June 1. That decision was not based on experience or science, but purely to make budget funding cuts.

Now, Alberta has officially declared an early start to fire season." As of Feb. 20, 54 wildfires were burning in the province; about half of them were revivals of the still-smoldering remains of 2023's record number of fires, that have burned all winter. Last fire "season" 22,000 square kilometres went up in flames.

After such a disastrous year, and faced with such an obvious and predictable return to crisis, is the Alberta UCP government of Daniel Smith any better prepared to fight fires in 2024?

Forestry and Parks Minister Todd Loewen says he will ask for extra funding in the next budget, enough to hire 100 new firefighters. The budget is due Feb. 29. Even if the funding is okayed, it is woefully inadequate – 100 new hires will only bring the number of Alberta firefighters up to 1,000.

In 2019, UCP premier Jason Kenny summarily killed the Wildland Firefighter Rappel Program, laying off 65 highly trained specialists. All this was to cut the budget. More budget cuts followed in 2020. Reports say that experienced firefighters are leaving the province to take jobs elsewhere. New, inexperienced hires only fill that gap on paper.

Firefighting used to be a full time, year-round job; down time was spent training, repairing equipment, and recovering from dangerous, high-stress work. Now most of the jobs are contract to contract, with firefighters not knowing if they'll be rehired, or at what pay and conditions.

James Gault of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees reminded the media the many of last year's hires were students who

won't be available until April, will leave in September, and may or may not want to be rehired. He also stated that, as of Feb. 20, many experienced workers had not yet received new contract offers.

"We are still talking about Band-Aid solutions to a serious issue that we know is going to



happen."

In addition, Alberta is talking about introducing night time firefighting, to take advantage of cooler temperatures and lighter winds. Such a plan greatly increases dangers faced by firefighters, requires specialized equipment which isn't yet available, and new training which hasn't yet begun.

Perhaps if Premier Smith had spent less time this winter touring the country, crusading for anti-trans, homophobic bigotry, and more time reading the science and planning for a disaster everyone knows is coming, the province might be in better shape.

Climate change, El Nino and drought

Forest fires occur at the best of times, and are normally part of a process of renewal. There is nothing "normal" about the severity of 2023's

fire "season." Nor is the disaster limited to Alberta. So why so much focus on that province?

Fires are in part a symptom of a severe drought that has afflicted Alberta, especially the southern region, for years. Last year saw farmers unable to produce adequate feed supplies

flows of northern rivers will seriously impact Indigenous communities that rely on them.

There is no doubt that the El Nino – periodic warming of Pacific currents that affect weather patterns across the country – is partially to blame for fall and winter precipitation shortages and for the worse conditions yet to come. But normally these warm, dry seasons are followed by El Ninas, equally cool, wet ones.

As climate change worsens and land and sea temperatures rise, El Nino years become more severe and El Ninas provide less relief. Hopes that worsening drought will end with the El Nino are unrealistic.

Science vs Ideology

The Alberta tar sands is one of the world's biggest single producers of greenhouse gas emissions. The "oil patch" produces as much air pollutants per day as the rest of the country's industry, transportation and agriculture combined. In 2022, the oil industry used 1043 million cubic metres of precious water. Much of it ends up in unusable, toxic holding ponds of liquid waste.

To say such destruction and waste is unsustainable is a massive understatement.

Every Canadian party is devoted to the oil industry, but none more loudly and proudly than Danielle Smith's UCP. Dominated by libertarian "free market" extremists, they almost always double as climate change deniers. Faced with a choice between their ideology and the science exposing and dealing with the drought and climate crisis, they choose big business every time.

There are means at hand to reduce climate change – shut down the tar sands and invest heavily in renewable energy. Means to mitigate drought conditions are no secret – mandate water rationing, impose high costs on big industrial users, expose the true severity of the crisis to mobilize the public – but the UCP will be unlikely to support any of these. They will issue reassuring statements, appoint talk-shops, and avoid any tough decisions that curtail industry profits or bump up against their twisted notions of personal "freedom".

As long as the short term needs of capitalism outweigh the long term needs of people and the planet, places like Alberta will careen towards becoming hellscape of fire and drought.

Capitalism is a death cult: exhibit 143

Major corporate investors are abandoning whatever paltry measures they were employing to mitigate climate change. Forget about the fact that measures like carbon trading didn't work – greenwashing cost money and was getting in the way of profits.

In recent weeks, a number of major corporations (Blackrock) and investment funds (JP Morgan, Pimco, State Street) have joined a parade of businesses quitting an organization called Climate Action 100+, which is based on the fantasy that capitalism can fight climate change and still maximize profit.

According to its website CA100+ has over 70 corporations and 700 investment groups as members. Its mandate: "Climate Action 100+ is an investor-led initiative to ensure the world's largest corporate greenhouse gas emit-

ters take necessary action on climate change."

Of course it was always a fantasy, a membership corporations could put on their websites to show they cared. As Britain's always polite Financial Times put it: "After all, the idea that investors could have their climate cake and eat it in its entirety was always slightly dubious..."

A spokesperson for Blackrock put the blame for their defection on CA100+. In response to worsening climate change



and extreme weather disasters, the organization had begun to put pressure on corporations to move beyond symbolic, token efforts and actually convert to renewable energy sources. But that would cut into shareholders' profits, or what Blackrock calls its "fiduciary duty to prioritize economic returns."

It matters not that 2023 was by far the hottest year on record. It matters not that the insured costs of extreme weather caused disasters rose to \$3.1 billion (actual total costs are much higher). Profits won out.

Capitalism cannot capitalism its way out of this crisis. Insatiable need for profit will always outweigh the needs of people or the planet. The system cannot change its essential nature. Capitalism is a death cult.

Support York University workers on strike

Contract faculty, graduate assistants and teaching assistants are on strike at York University fighting for a fair deal, better wages and working conditions.

These workers who do most of the actual teaching at the University, have seen stagnant wages and deteriorating working conditions for years. Doug Ford's bill 124 which capped public sector wages along with intransigence by the university administration have led to this impasse.

The workers are now in precarious positions with many living below the poverty line in Toronto. This directly affects the conditions for undergraduate students and all who are part of the York U community. Unless the admin agrees to the wage demands of the workers, the situation will deteriorate even further.

Other university workers such as those at UofT have recently been able to gain new deals. CUPE locals 3902 and 3261 just recently agreed to new terms with the admin including a 12% raise over 3 years. This is still below the rate of inflation for that time but is much higher



than the 1% offered under bill 124.

That bill was ultimately overturned as it is blatantly unconstitutional but the effect lingers in lower wages for the public sector.

Pickets have been set up around the York campus and have been under surveillance by private investigators and police. On Monday, March 4, one of the members was arrested on a picket line. A rally was held outside the police station until they were released.

The administration has been trying to divide the workers asking members to sign a declaration that they will continue to work during the strike.

The workers are not buying it. There has been a sea change in the way working people view their bosses over the past few years with an increased understanding that the bosses need the workers more than the workers need the boss.

York workers are showing the way by walking out and joining picket lines. It's right to strike!

Sign the online petition and share with friends and colleagues:
<https://weareyork.ca/>

Saskatchewan Teachers take job action to save public education

by: Christine Wiercinski

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) has been seeking long term solutions to the cuts to education for at least the last ten years.

The STF is demanding better funding for education, smaller classroom sizes, more support for students with complex needs and better support for teachers in dealing with the multitude of increasing duties.

Recent anti-trans, anti-LGBTQ+ legislation forces teachers to notify parents if their students want to be identified by other pronouns, reducing trust between teachers and students. Samantha Becotte, STF's president wants to rectify this through bargaining.

Now teachers can be teaching in classroom sizes that are 30-50 students with usually at least 2 complex needs students. The optimal classroom size is 25 students with no complex needs. One teacher said she had to hold one student on her lap to keep him calm while teaching reading to the rest of her students. A music teacher posted that in 2006 he had \$15,000 for a music program for 190 students but now he only has \$700 for 145 students.

Drastic funding cuts force schools to function by organising numerous fundraising events to continue as best as can.

Becotte stated the STF wants long term solutions, not band aid approaches that let the government take away funding as it sees fit. The STF wants funding mandated in the Collective Agreement so education can move forward. Their opening proposal is to get

decent classroom sizes, more support for students with complex needs and teachers' salaries tied to CPI (Consumer Pricing Index) inflation measure, the pay scale that members of the Provincial Legislature gave themselves

Last April, after pushback from the teachers, educational support staff organized under CUPE and the public, the Provincial government was forced to put \$40 million back into education.

Jeremy Cockrill, Minister of Education says he will not bargain with the teachers over conditions, only wages. They also only want to increase teachers' salaries by 7% over 3 years with no inflationary increase. Inflation rises in the past few years outstrip that figure and amount to a big pay cut in real terms.

The government just ignores the problems in education with students having complex needs. Michelle Kramer, a mother of a second year student with autism illustrates the problem. First she is a single parent that needs to get her son tested. There is a 7300 students (under the age of 18) waiting list for the tests.



Saskatchewan teachers on the line

He is in the classroom with no support and creates problems so she is often called to pick him up. This has resulted in her having to work part-time and face more financial problems. Without the confirmation from the test, she and the school are not eligible for any extra help in the classroom.

Kramer supports the teachers totally and wants to see better mechanisms in place to support her son, and others with special needs. The government states it has \$20 million for support for schools to help students who need it. However, without government changes, access is very difficult.

The teachers have not given up. They had

2 provincial-wide two day strikes. They also are doing rotating strikes. Recently, it was the Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Humboldt and Melfort areas that shut down. They plan to stop supervision of lunchtime or extracurricular activities in the Saskatoon and Northern part of the province. The school divisions have already decided to cancel the afternoon classes. This will affect 65,000 students.

The public has shown support by joining the picket lines and sending texts to the government on "Tell Them Tuesday" events. Cockrill is now responding to media interviews where before he just sent statements that he

couldn't get involved in the labour dispute, and all issues of classroom sizes and resources for complex needs were the jurisdiction of the local Boards of Education.

The two sides are a long way from coming up with an agreement. After a decade of funding cuts and decisions to privatize education via more funding for often unregulated religious schools, teachers and parents are in the fight for the long haul. They have shown determination to win better conditions for kids and better working conditions for themselves – the two things are connected. Public Education in Saskatchewan is at stake.