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END THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WAR

Tell Trudeau: Sign the nuclear weapons ban



SETSUKO THURLOW, a survivor of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, will be accepting a Nobel peace prize this year on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. She has been living in Canada for many decades and has been a tireless advocate for peace and disarmament.

Prime Minister Trudeau was only too happy to heap praise on Thurlow, calling her an “extraordinary” Canadian. Unfortunately, he simultaneously denounced her calls for Canada to sign the Treaty on the Prohibition

of Nuclear Weapons.

This epitomizes the Liberals’ approach to war and peace. There are platitudes and tweets making them sound progressive, but when the time comes they are firmly on the side of western imperialism.

As Donald Trump embarks on a massive upgrade of the US nuclear arsenal, Trudeau will be a willing supporter of US military adventures.

The Liberals aren’t working for peace, they are preparing for war.

The Canadian Special Forces operations in Iraq show just how short sighted their outlook is. Canada was arming and training

both the Iraqi military and the Kurdish people. Then they started fighting each other. In the words of Kurdish diplomat Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, Canada was, from the beginning, “missing the obvious truth of what is happening in Iraq”.

The destruction of ISIS has not stabilized the area but has only opened up a new set of conflicts. Thanks to Canada, those conflicts will now be carried out by better armed and trained fighters.

In Syria and Iraq, the confrontation between US and Russian backed proxy forces is about to get more acute. US

backed forces captured Raqqa from ISIS, but Iranian and Syrian forces backed by Russia have designs on former ISIS territory as well.

This war has not ended, and Canada has boots on the ground right in the middle of it. And it’s not just the Middle East where Trudeau is playing the role of warmonger.

From the Ukraine, where Canada is arming and training soldiers with close ties to Nazi groups, to the Baltic states where our government is supporting aggressive military exercises designed to pen in Russia, the

Canadian government is playing a dangerous game that threatens to spill over into a larger conflict.

With an unstable warmonger in the White House and growing tensions around the world, particularly in North Korea, we need a movement to push back on Trudeau’s support for Trump’s wars.

“I’m more than disappointed...,” Setsuko Thurlow stated. “[He] seems to willfully ignore the fact that the majority of Canadians want a world without nuclear weapons. As a living witness to Hiroshima, I beseech Justin Trudeau to change course.”

An insurgent left can win, even in Canada

BY DEREK O'KEEFE

Vancouver's political revolution has begun. In less than three months a dynamic movement coalesced around Jean Swanson, an incorruptible stalwart of the city's left who was persuaded to run as an independent in a civic by-election.

With no infrastructure, very little support from organized labour, and without even a campaign manager, Swanson pulled off a strong second place showing in the October 14 election. Her campaign was propelled by a grassroots coalition that saw hundreds of volunteers energetically campaigning for policies like a Rent Freeze and a Mansion Tax. Swanson's campaign was derided by centre-left opponents as "class warfare," but it turned out to be just the approach to politics needed in the midst of Vancouver's out-of-control affordability emergency.

The right-wing NPA's Hector Bremner was elected with 27% of the vote. Swanson picked up over 10,000 votes (21.36%), finishing a percentage point ahead of the Green Party candidate Pete Fry. OneCity Vancouver finished well behind at 13%, and the ruling Vision Vancouver finished a shocking fifth place with only 11% of votes. Twenty-one per cent of voters supported a candidate who was not only calling for a political revolution, but also for taxing the rich to raise funds to acquire land and then give it back to the Indigenous people who are the rightful owners.

After nine years, Vision Vancouver seems vulnerable to being swept from power in 2018. The question now is will they be defeated from the left or the right. If it's to be the former, Swanson is well positioned to help lead a reconstituted left heading into next year's elections.

No one can reasonably blame Jean Swanson for "splitting the left" vote. Her strong second place finish—with a collective leadership and organization that emerged ex



Swanson's campaign spoke to the anger and urgency people feel.

nihilo—shows there's a big appetite for a left that is the left, for politics that speak to the anger and urgency people in Vancouver feel over the housing and opioid crises.

Vision Vancouver is done, or at least very stale. With developer money soon to be banned from municipal elections—it better be in time for 2018!—there will have to be more rethinks and realignments. The hybrid model of Vision of union and corporate money, with NDP and Liberal staffing, now makes little sense even on its own terms.

The strategy of pushing the municipal left to ally with Vision Vancouver is over too, and has proven to be a failure. The candidate backed by the Vancouver & District Labour Council got 13% of the vote; the candidate endorsed by the Vancouver Tenants Union got 21% of the vote. On Election Day, my partner got a text message, a robocall and a glossy flyer in the mail from one of the unions she's a member of—the HEU. She texted back, "That's funny, my local is supporting Jean Swanson." Unions have to be reinvigorated from the bottom-up, and that's going to have

to involve reaching out more to new social movements and to organizing taking place amongst low-income and precariously-housed people in Vancouver.

We can have a combative, socialist politics here in Vancouver and elsewhere in Canada too. The things her campaign were demanding got smeared as "too radical" or as "class war" but in fact corresponded to the real things people want and need to have a slightly less precarious and hard-scrabble life.

As Swanson said time and time again, this campaign was about finally saying what we want and demanding what we need. At her election night celebration, there was a feeling of victory in defeat, of a political gamble paying off enough to ante up for a higher stakes game, and something close to certainty that Swanson or someone like her will get elected in 2018. After far too long, Vancouver may finally see the political revolution we desperately need.

• This article has been edited for space, you can read the original version at medium.com/@derrickokeefe

Canada adopts press shield law

BY KEVIN TAGHABON

Canada's media is littered with examples of neglect or misconduct on the part of the state. The prosecution of The Independent journalist Justin Brake for his coverage of Muskrat Falls' hydro project, the RCMP's campaign to force VICE journalist Ben Makuch to hand over communications between himself and a source, and the surveillance of six journalists by Quebec police are just a few examples of Trudeau-era abuses.

As on most issues, the Trudeau government speaks in the language of progress while advancing the dark decade agenda of Harper Conservatives.

This trend has recently received a significant rebuke in Bill S-231, the Journalistic Sources Protection Act. For decades Canada has been one of the few developed nations without a press shield law. On October 4th, Parliament passed Bill S-231. Sustained pressure from grassroots civil society groups as well as high support among Canadians led to this result.

The campaign to have S-231 passed was largely led by Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. Duncan Pike, co-director of CJFE and campaign lead for S-231, told Socialist Worker, "The confidential relationship between journalist and source is crucial to the ability of the press to keep those in power accountable. Without anonymous sources, stories like the sponsorship scandal or graft in the Quebec construction industry could not have been revealed to the public."

"The sources who bring information of corruption, wrongdoing, and fraud to journalists play an essential role in keeping the public informed and our democracy accountable," he said. "With Bill S-231 now the law of the land, these anonymous heroes will have greater assurance that their identity will not become public through a police wiretap or court order, and they will be safe from reprisal. This means that more sources will come forward,

important stories will continue to be told, and Canadian democracy will be strengthened."

Under the new law, journalists will be able to deny disclosing information that could put vulnerable, confidential sources at risk. Law enforcement must now prove to a Superior Court judge that evidence (a journalist's documents, communications, etc.) is needed. It has become more difficult for journalists to be strong-armed into acting as evidence collectors for the state.

While the bill is a welcome development, there is still much to accomplish. S-231 is not sufficiently robust in its definition of who is a journalist. This inevitably skews protection towards old-guard media, more likely to have their employees regarded as "journalists" by the courts.

Additionally, the bill passing into law will have no effect on the state's case against VICE's Makuch, who is currently trying to take his case to the Supreme Court. S-231 only offers protection to sources who request anonymity – Makuch's source did not.

The Canadian state's climate of hostility towards the press has made for shameful headlines. Reporters Without Borders' 2017 World Press Freedom Index highlighted this. Canada fell 14 spots over the course of the last two years, which included Trudeau's first year in power.

Additionally, one of the Liberals' worst campaign promises remains one of the only ones unbroken: Harper's 2015 Anti-Terrorism law (Bill C-51) remains largely intact, if reformed, as the Trudeau Liberals' C-59. Among Bill C-59's carryover is the ability for law enforcement to impersonate journalists and spread false reports, i.e. fake news.

With extremists on the right in positions of power across the world seeking to delegitimize the press entirely, it is crucial for people to rally against these police powers.

'Reverse racism' is backward thinking

BY JOHN BELL

Masuma Khan is the sort of person I'd like to meet. At 22 she is already a well-known activist and outspoken anti-racist. She is a student at Halifax's Dalhousie University and serves as Vice President Academic and External in her student union. She hasn't let two spinal surgeries slow her down.

And mostly she refuses to put up with racism. And for that she is threatened with discipline by her university.

The student union voted not to officially participate in any Canada 150 celebrations. Their motion states, in part: "We recognize that Canada Day and the Canada 150 celebrations are an act of ongoing colonialism that glorifies continued theft from, and disenfranchisement of, the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (Canada)."

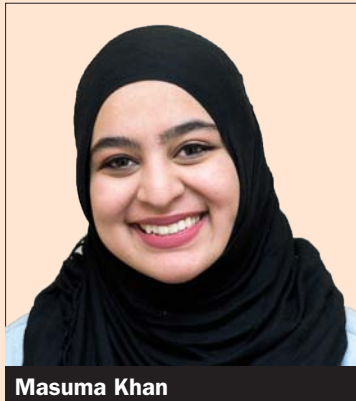
Backlash

Some students were upset

and sent objections. Anyone who has read online comment sections can guess that some of it was explicitly violent, sexist and racist. Justifiably angry, Khan responded through personal social media, complaining about "privileged white people" refusing to celebrate "400 years of genocide", and using "#whitefragilitycankissmyass" and "#yourwhitetearsarentsacredthislandis".

Nova Scotia Young Progressive Conservatives, didn't agree; one member, Michael Smith, spouted his outrage in the National Post. He also made an official complaint against Khan, saying her posts constituted "harassment," essentially arguing that she was being racist against white people.

Rather than toss out the complaint, Dalhousie gave it credibility. Khan was threatened with discipline that could have resulted in sensitivity training and writing a public apology.



Masuma Khan

She refused to comply.

In an interview with Halifax's *The Coast*, she refused to back down from her anger: "A lot of people come up to me and say, 'You should be more like Martin Luther King.' I'm more of a Malcolm X type of gal. He was my role model—an activist who was Muslim, finding his way through the civil rights movement, who had no tolerance for any kind of injustice and really ridiculed

the system. This is the kind of person I want to be."

'Reverse racism'

The complaint comes at a time when white nationalism and far-right ideology claims that whites are under attack whenever oppressed groups assert their struggles. Black Lives Matter is instantly met by a defensive "All lives matter", anything but confront the reality that racism means execution of black people by police. As Anthony Morgan, a lawyer specializing in civil and human rights, put it: "When you're so deeply invested in your privilege, and in this case white privilege, racial equality feels like oppression."

For whites to believe in "reverse racism" they first have to believe that racism toward people of colour has ended, that the playing field has somehow been leveled. That is not true. Despite some gains, every objective measure shows racism

remains stubbornly ingrained.

So, cheers for Masuma Khan for calling Dalhousie on their bullshit. Her very public and Malcolm X-like stand won a wave of support and the University has announced it will not discipline her.

And cheers for her refusing to let the issue drop. As she told the CBC: "It doesn't stop these messages from pouring in. It doesn't stop the conversations that we're having. It doesn't stop the fact that systemic racism happens on our campus, and it doesn't stop that the university still isn't dealing with that."

It is time to scrap backward thinking like "reverse racism," it is time to face up to systemic racism, and it is past time to pay attention to fearless people like Masuma Khan, who reminds us that the issue should never have been about her, but about the colonialist racism faced by indigenous peoples.

Year in Review: Donald Trump

By Kevin Taghabon

It has been a scant year since a 71 year old imbecile bumbled his way into the most powerful office on the planet. In 2015, which now seems like another era, Donald Trump's nativist presidential campaign was launched. His unhinged tirades of anti-immigrant racism and buffoonish ignorance were boosted by morally bankrupt media figures like CBS CEO Les Moonves ("[Trump] may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS.")

The Democrats offered Hillary Clinton, the most unpopular Democratic candidate in history. The Democratic establishment's naivete alongside their malicious campaign against an insurgent Bernie Sanders left them utterly unable to oppose Trump. The 2016 election will be remembered as a series of historic mistakes by the Democratic Party. A real estate fraudster with the intellect and mannerisms of a large toddler now wanders the White House, occasionally wiping grease on his robe to sign an ill-advised executive order.

Erratic and unmanageable

White house staffers reportedly have to contain Trump's wild moods. Trump's idiocy is not a charade. His intelligence briefings have to be as short as possible (think grade-school book report), littered with his name and imagery to keep his attention. James "Mad Dog" Mattis and General John Kelly are now relied upon to act as the proverbial adults in the room. Given Mattis and Kelly's neoconservative legacies, this is terrifying. Equally so is Trump parroting "I love the generals" over and over.

The vapid world of reality television is the only realm in which Trump can be considered an "expert". His administration has repeatedly used distraction techniques to confuse and deflate opposition. Days after the historic Women's March, his administration rolled out their Muslim ban. Trump understands horrific events like wars and natural disasters in the reality TV language of "ratings" and "records". He has threatened genocide against 25 million North Koreans through tweets. Trump spent five days tweeting nonsense about the NFL protests before mentioning Puerto Rico, which the mainstream media ate up.

Media failures

This relationship works in tandem. Trump's obsession with television and his short attention span for politics results in outbursts that make the press dance. These tantrums cannibalize airtime. Mainstream media – asleep at the wheel for decades – has sometimes



Resistance: Protesting Trump in Philadelphia

Photo: Joe Plette [Flickr CC-BY-NC-2.0]

been willing to stand up to Trump in a way they never did under Obama.

This has been coupled with regular cowardly back-tracking. CNN's Van Jones, seen by many as a spokesperson for #TheResistance, praised Trump for simply reading a prepared speech in March. With the slightest veneer of politesse, Trump is able to defang his media critics. Absent this tactic, Trump can always count on bipartisan jingoism through war. Trump has been lauded by MSNBC's Brian Williams for raining "beautiful" missiles down on Syria, and for dropping the "Mother of All Bombs" in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, centrist elites and their allies entertain authoritarian fantasies of being "saved" by a deep state pseudo-coup, or late-in-life heroism from career reactionaries like former FBI Director James Comey. The Democratic establishment invested most of their media capital in theories about alleged Russian election interference, which has not paid off. It is obvious why they would want this to be true. "Democrats are great as-is, Clinton was not a terrible candidate, America is not broken – Russia did it!" This retreat into child-like thinking is amazing in its lack of self-awareness. For the rest of the globe, Americans complaining about foreign interference is ridiculous.

The White House has never been

filled with the virtuous. Nevertheless, Trump's hideous administration indeed represents the ascension of the most retrograde elements of American conservatism into the halls of power. Trump has confirmed Neil Gorsuch, a Supreme Court Justice who's record on women's and LGBTQ rights is horrid. Jeff Sessions, who during Ronald Reagan's watershed right-wing administration was deemed too racist for a federal judgeship, is now Attorney General. Rex Tillerson, the man chiefly responsible for ExxonMobil's unbridled climate denial and destruction, is now Secretary of State. New CIA Director Mike Pompeo used his first speech to repeatedly threaten to shut down a news organization – an alarming display of open hostility to the press.

This is before mentioning hardened reactionaries Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, the latter of whom served as National Security Advisor while wearing Hungarian Nazi medals. While these men have left the White House, their extremist ideas are part of the formative months of Trump's tenure. The list of similar examples is virtually endless.

Monsters

These monsters have each unleashed their own agenda at their respective departments, represented by the triplet snakes of austerity, imperialism, and bigotry. Bannon's bastardized reading of Lenin's Wikipedia page as "the deconstruction of the

administrative state" is underway at the hands of people oblivious or antithetical to the departments they are heading. Meanwhile, resurgent white supremacists have marched en masse time and again, often armed to the teeth with assault weapons, once going so far as murdering IWW and DSA activist Heather Heyer.

In Canada

Canadian politics are undergoing a dramatic lowering of the bar for what is acceptable. Trump's vulgarity has allowed Prime Minister Trudeau to get away with many conservative policies. Trudeau has refused to repeal the Safe Third Country Agreement, which means refugees face uncertainty coming to Canada, despite Trudeau's cheery tweets. Trudeau's record on Indigenous issues is appalling, not to mention the broken UNDRIP implementation promise.

The Trudeau government is prosecuting multiple journalists for simply doing their jobs, and has stuck to polishing Bill C-51 (now C-59) instead of repealing it. Echoing Trump, Trudeau has dramatically increased Canada's war budget and made Canada the world's second largest arms exporter to the Middle East. To their eternal shame, the Canadian government has barred whistleblower Chelsea Manning from entering the country in order to respect the Espionage Act, a 100 year old wartime American law.

Trump's rhetoric has emboldened bigots in Canada. Newly minted anti-choice, anti-same-sex marriage Conservative leader Andrew Scheer has appointed former fringe right Rebel Media director Hamish Marshall to lead his campaign. This eerily echoes Trump's hiring of Steve Bannon for his election campaign. The year opened with a brutal terrorist attack by a white supremacist, who killed six Muslims at a Mosque in Quebec. Neo-Nazis and their supporters have rallied publicly several times across Canada. Counter-demonstrations have had mixed results, on some occasions completely humiliating the bigots with overwhelming popular support.

This is the avenue for resistance and the creation of a better world. It is not enough to be constantly fighting rear-guard actions against austerity and racism. It is not enough to tag every story about Trudeau's shortcomings with "at least he's not Trump." To truly build the world we need it is necessary to build movements on the ground, offline, which engage people in groundwork. This is represented in the Fight for 15, organized labour, local political campaigns, and active Indigenous, anti-racist, and climate struggles. The appeal of emancipatory left-wing politics through the broad, sympathetic layers of society provides a bulwark against the far right, and aspirations for us all.

Hope and Rebellion: A Year of Resistance

Trump's inauguration could have come and gone as business-as-usual (which it did from most Democrats and Republicans). Instead, it was met by one of the largest mobilizations in US history. Indivisible chapters – despite their connections to establishment Democrats – have scored tangible victories, including preventing the Obamacare repeal.

Bernie Sanders' medicare-for-all bill has become a litmus test for progressive politicians. Medicare-

for-all is now more popular than ever in the United States. Even drug industry lackeys like Democrat Cory Booker have been forced to come out for the bill.

Perhaps most promising for socialists, the Democratic Socialists of America has grown five-fold to 30,000 members since this time last year, becoming the largest socialist organization in the US. The DSA is broadly involved in immigration, labour, and anti-racist work, in ad-

dition to local election campaigns. Black Lives Matter and socialist activist Khalid Kamau was elected to city council in South Fulton, Georgia. In Jackson, Mississippi, activist Chokwe Antar Lumumba was elected mayor, promising to help create the "most radical city on the planet."

Resistance to Trump's agenda has been consistent. From inauguration day protests through International Women's Day, Black Lives

Matter, the Fight for 15, and many other struggles have done nothing but grow and punch upwards with renewed gusto. Unions have been part of the fight as well. National Nurses United has been heavily involved in the medicare-for-all campaign. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union took a leading role in shutting down fascists in the Bay Area. Local 10 shut their workplace down to openly push back against organized bigots

in the streets. Moments like the January protests at John F. Kennedy airport have happened organically as well, with taxi drivers and immigration activists uniting to shut down a port and welcome Muslim travellers. This is a powerful statement. Americans demonstrated at the gates to the world: "Trump is not America. You are welcome here." International capital, reliant on ports for trade and travel, does not take this lightly.

THE STRUGGLE FOR CATALONIAN INDEPENDENCE



Socialist Worker spoke with Montreal activist André Frappier as he headed to Catalonia to take part in international solidarity actions.

Interview by **Michelle Robidoux**

“Everyone has to know Catalans are not alone,” said André Frappier, a long-time trade-union activist. Frappier represented Québec solidaire in an international solidarity delegation following the October 1st referendum on independence.

What is your reaction to the decision by the Catalan Parliament to declare independence?

It’s a very good decision. I think that [Catalan President Carles] Puigdemont has played all the cards in his hand so far, and there was no other choice. Yesterday, he tried to announce a possible election in December, but this election would have had to be in line with the Spanish Constitution. And in fact, that doesn’t allow any candidate in favour of independence for Catalonia. So somehow I don’t know what other choice he could have in these times. We’ll see now what will be the reaction of Madrid.

There is a lot of confusion on the left around the world, including here in English Canada, about the significance of what happened and need for progressive forces to engage fully to support the Catalan people. What role do you think international solidarity can play?

It’s a major issue for Catalonia. International solidarity is a major factor of support that we



absolutely need right now. First, I must say, it is a matter of democracy. The Catalan people have the right to self-determination, and to decide of their future. Whether or not they support independence, it is their decision, and they have a right to do that.

Also, they have the right to decide without any act of repression or intimidation such as has been done by Madrid so far.

But more than that, the fact that Catalonia wants its independence is not only a matter of culture or language. For the past 4 years, the Catalan government adopted many progressive laws, for example making it illegal to cut the electricity or water services of someone who

doesn’t have money to pay their rent. Many social initiatives were adopted by the Catalan Parliament, but every time they were cancelled by Madrid. So they cannot put in place a social state for the people under this Constitution. This is very important also.

What concretely can the left do in solidarity with the Catalan struggle, in the face of likely repression from the Spanish state?

For right now, it’s very important to try to build solidarity in every city in Canada, and also in Québec. Committees of solidarity with Catalonia which every union, left organisation, women’s organisation get along and say we are asking Trudeau to support the right to self-determination, and to say it publicly. We have to organize the pressure so that the federal government will say that they respect the decision of Catalonia. This is very important. Just as an example, that kind of committee is already in place in Scotland. And yesterday, there was a meeting in Montréal to start such a committee, and it is going to organize in the days ahead. So, we have to do something. And adopting resolutions of support in unions, in organizations, and sending a copy to Trudeau, and to Catalan organizations to tell them “we are supporting you, we are here”. And we need to send a copy to Madrid also. Everyone has to know that Catalans are not alone.



The Russian Revolution and self-determination

By **Faline Bobier**

How can an event that happened one hundred years ago in a very different time and place matter to us today? Activists or people on the left may argue that looking back to the experience of the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution is simply nostalgia for a different world that cannot be recreated.

Or that the outcome of the Revolution – the creation of a state bureaucracy under Stalin which brought back all the old oppressions of tsarism – proves that the revolution must have been fundamentally flawed in the first place.

But the content of the Bolshevik revolution and the methods of that revolution still have much to teach us today. The world that the Russian working class, peasantry and the poor sought to overturn unfortunately has many commonalities with our world today.

Tribune of the oppressed

When Bolshevik leader Lenin argued that the revolutionary party had to be the “tribune of the oppressed,” there was a whole political strategy and world view in that statement.

The Russian ruling class used all manner of divide and rule tactics to keep their hold on power: encouraging and organizing anti-Semitism through vicious pogroms against Jews in Russia; oppression of national minorities, including Muslims, in an attempt to bind Russian workers and peasants to the ruling class through poisonous Greater Russian nationalism and chauvinism; shoring up centuries-old structures of women’s oppression that kept Russian women chained to housework, and suffering violence and harassment at work and at home.

The Bolsheviks argued for unity in order to overturn tsarism but understood that unity could only be achieved by waging a principled struggle against all the oppressions that divided the population against each other.

Lenin referred to Russia as “a prison house of nations” because of the oppression of national minorities. He argued that Russian socialists had to take up the question of national oppres-

sion, not as a side issue, but as fundamental to building unity among the working class and peasantry:

“We nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it.

That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or ‘great’ nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as bullies), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality of the oppressor nation, the great nation, that must make up for the inequality which it obtains in actual practice.”

Self-determination

The Bolsheviks also had to contend with a long history of Russian oppression of Muslim peoples. After the revolution, the Bolsheviks declared that the oppression of Muslims, that had been so central to the Russian Empire, was at an end. “Henceforth your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable.” This attitude was one reason why so many Muslims came to support them during the Russian Civil War.

Unlike so many contemporary “muscular secularists” on the left who end up supporting Western imperialism by their arguments that religion—but particularly Islam—are backward and must be opposed, the Bolsheviks understood that religion has a material basis, which is the misery and oppression capitalism breeds.

The Bolsheviks did not argue against religion or legislate against it after the revolution, because they realized that people’s ideas would only change as their material reality changed.

While the Bolshevik Party’s programme was avowedly atheist, atheism was never a condition of party membership: for the Bolsheviks, religion was the private affair of every citizen. In 1905 Lenin wrote a diatribe against including atheism in the party programme, insisting, “No number of pamphlets and no amount of preaching can enlighten the proletariat if it is not enlightened by its own struggle against the

dark forces of capitalism.”

It’s that much more impressive that the beleaguered Bolsheviks, in a country where women’s oppression was endemic, were able to achieve what they did in such a short space of time in very difficult conditions: the legalisation of abortion, the creation of communal kitchens and laundries to liberate women from the repetitive drudgery of labour in the home, the removal of homosexuality from the criminal code; the creation of a Women’s Department or Zhenotdel, led by women Bolshevik members like Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai, in order to spread literacy and encourage participation in building the new society among the most isolated and impoverished women in society.

The gains of the Russian Revolution—for national minorities, for Muslims, for women, for lesbians and gays and for the working class in general—were eventually undermined. The enemies of the revolution were external: the ruling classes of 14 capitalist countries, including Canada, that supported financially and militarily the old Russian aristocracy because they feared revolution within their own borders. The enemies were internal as well: the growing bureaucracy under Stalin that needed to reinstate all the old divisions in order to compete militarily and economically with world capitalism.

However, the fate of the Russian Revolution does not mean that the struggles that workers fought and won then have nothing to say to us today. The impact of October 1917 can be seen in the obituary speech that US Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey gave for Lenin in 1924:

“The revolution...took out of the hands of the privileged class the destiny of Russia’s government... For over five years Lenin and Trotsky were able to hold the Russian peasantry together and established for the first time in modern days... a government wherein the people ruled... Russia promised great hope not only for negroes but for the weaker people of the world.”

Now that the dominance of Stalinist politics has passed we should remember that they were a distortion of an earlier tradition with a real potential to sweep aside imperialism and oppression worldwide.

Law on the niqab: is Quebec more racist?

by **Chantal Sundaram**

Quebec’s Law on Religious Neutrality, formerly Bill 62, which denies a range of public services to women who wear the niqab, is a horrendously racist piece of legislation. Some have even referred to it as Quebec’s version of the Trump “Muslim ban.”

In a sense it goes even further than the PQ’s Charter of Values, which aimed to ban religious insignia for some working in the public sector, the Quebec Liberals’ law actually denies public services to women wearing the niqab. This includes things like daycare and public transportation.

But its passing has made possible once again an attack on Quebec as more racist than anywhere in English Canada. While it’s understandable that people both in and outside of Quebec are outraged by this law, a focus on Quebec as the source of racism and Islamophobia risks undermining the collective fight against it.

False secularism

There is no doubt that there is a historical reason for confusion about secularism in Quebec, where the Catholic Church dominated every aspect of life up until the 1960s.

But it’s not the whole story: in Quebec as across the Western world, scapegoating Islam targets religion and masks the fact that Islamophobia, and laws like this one, are not fundamentally about religion but about race. It is precisely the false appeals to secularism that give a progressive cover to racism.

This is a question that has tricked much of the left since 911 across Europe, the US, and all of Canada. In the last federal election in 2015, “niqabophobia” infected the debate not only in Quebec but across the country, in the wake of the release of a poll showing a majority of Canadians, across the entire country, in support of requiring the removal of the niqab during Canadian Citizenship ceremonies.

Stoking racism

It’s true that the “new racism” of Islamophobia has had a particular hearing in Quebec. But not all of it has emerged spontaneously: it was stoked by Quebec politicians of all stripes who have needed to deflect a massive movement against austerity in divisive directions over the last ten years.

The PQ tried this with its racist Charter of Values, but failed – they were thrown out of government after only 2 years when this maneuver failed to buy enough support for them to survive tabling an austerity budget. And now the Liberals are trying to boost their somewhat flagging fortunes with the Neutrality Law. They are not only trying to compete with the PQ but with the right-wing populist CAQ one year before the next election.

But it has never been true, nor is it now, that everyone in Quebec is buying in.

On October 25, shortly after the Religious Neutrality Law was passed, close to 100 people in Montreal got on the Metro together at the same stop as a group and rode together with their faces covered. In scarves, masks, and in some cases full niqab, the protest riders both opposed the racism of the law and demonstrated how impossible it will be to implement. The protest occurred after Liberal Justice Minister Stephanie Vallee’s ridiculous statement: “The obligation to uncover one’s face is not only for veiled women, but let’s also think about others who have covered faces... by balaclavas or shaded glass.”

Quebec solidaire (QS) has been credited

as being the only party in Quebec that has stood consistently against this type of racist identity politics that targets racialized communities and especially Muslims. And yet, there are problems with QS’s path of opposition. Although QS members supported and promoted the Metro protest, the party did not officially endorse it. Instead, QS’s major political response to the law was to table a motion in the National Assembly to remove the crucifix that hangs there.

The crucifix was placed there in the 1930s as a symbol of the close relationship that existed between the Catholic Church and the Quebec state right up until the Quiet Revolution. It is the height of hypocrisy that the crucifix survived that moment of secularization and continues to be defended as heritage symbol by the same politicians who will not tolerate the niqab. But still, focusing on its removal is a problematic response to the niqab law.

Merely pointing out hypocrisy does not get at the racism that is at the bottom of all of this. In fact, it can have the opposite effect of focusing attention back on religion and on false notions of secularism.

The Religious Neutrality law is not about secularism, it is about Islamophobia and racist scapegoating. And anyone in Quebec who doesn’t see this, especially on the left, needs to understand that it is a key issue that is allowing the far right to grow – both within Quebec with fascist groups like La Meute, and outside, allowing anglophones on far-right rallies in English Canada to wave Quebec flags, not because they support Quebec’s right to self-determination but because they support banning the niqab.

Ten years of Liberal failure

Ten years ago the Quebec Liberals commissioned the Bouchard-Taylor Commission on Reasonable Accommodation. Ironically, a conference in Montreal convened on the 10-year anniversary of the commission just as the Neutrality Law was passing. Both affirmed that the law would not stand up to a court challenge. They also said it represented a complete lack of will to implement their recommendations. In the words of Bouchard: “We proposed a true secular regime with all its component parts: neutrality, separation of Church and State, liberty of choice, and equality of religions...we don’t understand why they only took one piece when the four components completed each other.” Said Charles Taylor: “There is too strong a tendency for politicians to opt for electoralism.”

There is also the failure of the Quebec Liberal inquiry into systemic racism: while it can in some measure be blamed on popular pushback, ultimately it too died due to lack of political will. And this is not just a Quebec issue: as Jagmeet Singh said, a similar inquiry on systemic racism should be conducted across Canada.

Despite these disturbing trends in Quebec, the most dangerous lesson to draw is that English Canada deserves a free pass in comparison. It doesn’t.



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 threatens our sustenance through unsafe and unsustainable farming, and kills the earth itself with pollution and unsustainable extraction of oil, minerals, animals, trees, and water. Capitalism leads to imperialism and war. Saving ourselves and the planet depends on finding an alternative.

A system that is killing the planet

Capitalist profits depend on extracting the world's blood and bone. The devastating impact of capital's assault on the planet affect the world's most vulnerable populations and threaten the long-term meaningful existence of humanity. Capitalism cannot regulate the catastrophic effects of climate change. We stand for climate justice, including the concept of "just transition" for affected workers.

Socialism and workers' power

Any alternative to capitalism must involve replacing the system from the bottom up through radical collective action. Central to that struggle is the workplace, where capitalism reaps its profits off our backs.

Capitalist monopolies control the earth's resources, but workers everywhere actually create the wealth. A new socialist society can only be constructed when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution to satisfy human needs, not corporate profits—to respect the environment, not pollute and destroy it.

Oppression

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

We oppose environmental racism. We oppose discrimination on the basis of religion, ability and age.

Canada, Quebec, Indigenous 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 Indigenous peoples and the people of Quebec.

We support the struggles for self-determination of Quebec and Indigenous peoples up to and including the right to independence. In particular, we recognize Indigenous peoples' original and primary right to decide their fate and that of their lands, heritage, and traditions. Socialists in Quebec, and in all oppressed nations, work to give the struggle against national oppression an internationalist and working class content.

Internationalism

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose everything that turns workers from one country against those from other countries. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The 1917 revolution in Russia was an inspiration for the oppressed everywhere. But it was defeated when workers' revolutions elsewhere were defeated. A Stalinist counter-revolution, which killed millions, created a new form of capitalist exploitation based on state ownership and control. In Eastern Europe, China and other countries, a similar system was later established by Stalinist, not socialist, parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

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 protect the ruling class against the workers. These structures cannot be simply taken over and used by the working class. The working class needs real democracy, and that requires an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates.

Reform and revolution

Every day, there are battles between exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed, to reform the system—to improve living conditions. These struggles are crucial in the fight for a new world. To further these struggles, we work within the trade unions and orient to building a rank and file movement that strengthens workers' unity and solidarity.

But the fight for reforms will not, in itself, bring about fundamental social change. The present system cannot be fixed or reformed as the NDP and many trade union leaders say. Nor can the system regulate itself to prevent environmental destruction and climate injustice. It has to be overthrown. That will require the mass action of workers themselves.

The revolutionary party

To achieve socialism the leading activists in the working class have to be organized into a revolutionary socialist party. The party must be a party of action, and it must be democratic. We are an organization of activists committed to helping in the construction of such a party through ongoing activity in the mass organizations of the working class and in the daily struggles of workers and the oppressed.

If these ideas make sense to you, help us in this project, and join the International Socialists.

Jagmeet Singh's victory: race, class and criticism

by Alia Karim & Kevin Brice-Lall

Jagmeet Singh is the new leader of Canada's New Democratic Party—an undeniable victory for racialized and young grassroots organizers in his campaign, and a victory for his supporters across the country.

Singh is the first person of colour to lead a major Canadian political party by winning 35,266 votes out of total 65,782 cast by NDP members. For everyone who's ever been on the receiving end of a racist slur or experienced systematic discrimination against brown-skinned people, the fact that a Punjabi man is now a major Canadian political leader is extremely important.

The fact that Singh gained support of the NDP party brass is significant too, although to what extent the party's centrists will be calling the policy shots, and how Singh will handle this, will be crucial in the coming months.

Backlash

Singh's candidacy stirred up racist sentiment in Canadian media commentary media, as was made painfully clear by The Tyee in a recent article where former NDP MLA in Manitoba, Don Scott, lamented about the "anti-democratic" nature of instant memberships. He commented: "The only people who can really take advantage of this the way it is are the ethnic groups," Scott said.

"It's a group of people who are orchestrated. Some groups are more open to being manipulated than others."

It's clear that the media, and broader Canadian political commentators, are targeting Singh because of his appearance and religion, and we need to challenge such racist assumptions.

Race and class

In the course of struggle, race and class can appear as unrelated concepts but they often co-exist as a dance. Trinidadian Marxist CLR James described this dance as the "race question".

He explained: "The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to



Jagmeet Singh

neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental."

We can't ignore the race question because the ruling class creates and deepens racial constructions to further exploit certain groups of workers and to further oppress their communities.

For example, when food service workers (members of Unite Here Local 75) at York University, went on strike for a \$15/hour minimum wage and a fair contract they laid bare the racism of management who used racial divisions to try to prevent workers from organizing together for better working conditions.

When the working class recognizes these false constructions of race and they decide to struggle together for shared goals they can begin to overcome racism.

While we mustn't rely on the election of racialized people to advance struggles against racism and Islamophobia, electoral politics can play a highly influential role in inspiring racialized activists to lead movements for true liberation against oppression.

If Singh rises to the occasion and presents a more left-leaning platform than he has demonstrated so far, this will further raise the confidence and activism of progressive racialized activists that we must take seriously.

Criticism

We should keep in mind, however, that Singh has been centre-leaning enough to gain strong support of most of the NDP party brass, including Thomas Mulcair's former principal secretary, Karl Bélanger.

The party brass played a crucial role in Singh's bid for NDP leadership, and it has hindered the support of NDP members who want the party to be outright left (and thus voted for Niki Ashton).

Additionally, like all of the leadership candidates, Singh did not challenge Mulcair's centrist agenda (particularly his call for a balanced budget which further sunk the NDP in the last federal election), and went along with the Ontario NDP's flat and uninspiring 2014 election campaign.

For these reasons, we must be aware of Singh's limitations that he has already shown in mainstream politics.

These are not personal flaws of his, they are flaws in social democratic parties that by their very nature seek to accommodate to capitalism and limit movements to electoral politics.

The inherent limitations in social democracy won't be overcome by racist arguments against "ethnic groups," but only by building multiracial working class movements in the streets and workplaces.



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Why unions do politics

by Carolyn Egan

Trade unions have historically taken up issues outside the economic and working conditions of their members. We have seen unions in Catalonia call a general strike to protest the repression of the Spanish state against people taking part in the referendum on independence.

Catalans were beaten and bloodied as they attempted to cast their ballots. Polling stations were shut down. Activists were arrested. Some unions had positions supporting independence, others did not, but most all of them joined together and participated in a work stoppage taking on the brutality and anti-democratic attacks of the government in Madrid.

This working class solidarity in support of a people's right to self determination is critical. Recently a meeting took place in Montreal at which unions such as the Canadian Union of Postal Workers took part in initiating a campaign in support of self determination of Catalonia. Other unions should take this up as well.

Recently members of the United Steelworkers in Toronto took part in a rally protesting an alt right demonstration that gathered at city hall square intending to march through the city.

It drew the Golden Dawn, the Northern Guard, the Proud Boys and other neo-Nazis. They held placards which said, "No to Globalism, No to Communism, No to Feminism, No to Islamism" and "LGBT Agenda at War with Free Speech". They were spewing hate and actively provoking counter protesters.

A member of the union was at the event supporting the right-wing demonstration called under the guise of being anti-Trudeau (signs called out "Jihadi Justin" objecting to the compensation given to Omar Khadr).

He sent a letter to his local objecting to USW flags being present and arguing that the union should not be taking this type of political stance. The racist and Islamophobic nature of the event was pointed out in a response to him and the union will continue to take an active role in confronting racists and bigots.

It is not lost on the 'alt-right' that unions representing the organized working class bring a lot of social weight to a struggle and they do not want labour to be an active participant in opposing their right-wing ideology.

If you look at other struggles the role of labour was very significant. In the anti-war movement, it was a step by step process building a consensus against the war. Activists brought resolutions first to local labour councils where the issue was debated and one after another council took a position against the war.

This then moved on to union conventions where once again discussions took place on the floor and motions were passed. The next step was to move on to provincial federations of labour across the country and then the Canadian Labour Congress. All the while groups such as Trade Unionists Against the War were actively engaging rank and file members broadening the understanding of the issues at stake and became actively involved in the debates.

These groups built union contingents in the anti-war demonstrations. It was also union locals that put resolutions forward to the federal New Democratic Party along with riding associations which led to the party taking an anti-war position. This process was extremely important in building a broad anti-war movement in this country.

Trade unions must continue to play a role in the political struggles that working class people are dealing with every day of our lives.

We must not allow those who are opposed to a just and better world for all to pressure our unions into silence on such critical issues.

REVIEW

Unsettling Canada: a national wake-up call

by Valerie Lannon

Arthur Manuel (Neskonlith First Nation, BC) died earlier this year and will be remembered as a fierce defender of Indigenous rights.

His book *Unsettling Canada* is a political autobiography that describes campaigns undertaken by Manuel and shines a light on other actions with national and international implications. By sharing the details of ongoing struggles, Manuel provides useful lessons for campaigners in any progressive movement.

Red Power movement

Manuel cut his activist teeth during the time of the 1960s/70s Red Power movement. He acknowledges the influence of other social justice and liberation movements of the time.

In Alberta where he lived for a period in his youth, along with other activists he initiated practical actions like drop-in centres, political workshops, prison visits, and organizing sit-ins at government offices.

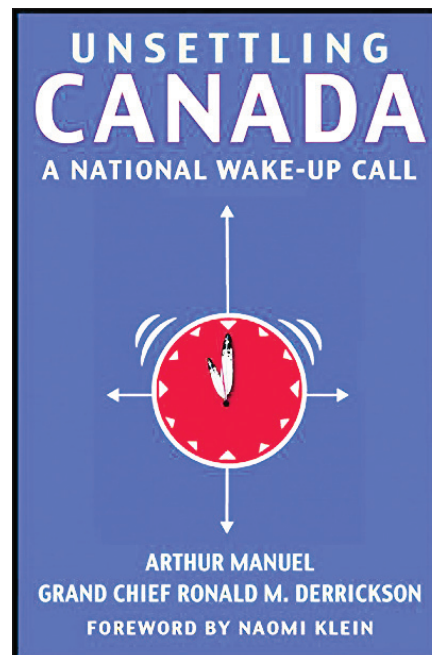
At the same time, First Nations began a series of court cases to try and win their rights, the most basic one being the recognition of title to their territory. 1973 saw the Calder decision regarding Nisga'a territory in northern BC. This was the first time "Indian title" had been recognized in law.

Returning to live in BC during the 1980s (after almost completing a law degree), Manuel became involved in actions that asserted indigenous control of fisheries and child welfare. Then he joined his father in the struggles of the 1980s associated with enshrining indigenous rights in the repatriated constitution.

Constitutional rights

In "The Constitution Express: a Grassroots Movement", Manuel takes us beyond the mainstream's fixation with suits in Ottawa to the community frontlines.

"My own role in the protest was minor, but I was at the Ottawa Central Station when the train pulled in on the morning of November 28, 1980. Two trains, with more than a thousand protesters on board, had left Vancouver...



...In BC hundreds of Indians had met the trains as they passed through the towns and cities along the route. In Alberta, the crowds reached the thousands." This groundswell was caused by the government's plan "that did not include a word about Aboriginal title or rights."

The situation also created an opportunity for allies to show their support. Manuel praises Ottawa Mayor Dewar's call to residents to billet the protesters, which succeeded in providing more than enough spaces!

Protest worked, resulting in Section 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982 "The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed."

Rights ignored

Manuel describes the hugely important, precedent-setting Delgamuukw decision (1997), Tsilhqot'in decision (2014), and others. But these legal successes were never respected by provincial or federal

governments who used every delay and obstruction to continue to withhold justice.

Most recently, there was a decision by the national Human Rights Commission that agreed with the case brought forward by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, which ordered the federal government to fund child and family services to First Nations on par with what they provide provincial governments. Three years later the government has yet to pay up.

Because of this obstruction, Manuel and others turned to other tactics, for example meeting with major investment institutions to persuade them against investing in projects like pipelines that threaten indigenous territory.

They also look to wins like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as another way to influence government policy.

But Manuel always supported assertion ("direct action") as a key tactic and describes the many battles of the Secwepemc people (of which his community is a member), who are currently building "Tiny Houses" to stop construction of the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

How will indigenous rights be won?

Even when favourable decisions are made by the courts, or when something like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is ratified, there still needs to be "negotiation" with the state to implement these decisions. But the state ensures that these hard-won rights will not be achieved beyond what is on paper.

What is the alternative? Struggles for indigenous rights will always be led by Indigenous peoples; however, given their relatively small numbers it will be up to the mass organizations of non-Indigenous peoples – like trade unions, student unions, civil justice groups, etc. – to take indigenous struggles more seriously and with greater numbers than shown to date. Ultimately, we must overthrow capitalism to save our planet and to achieve justice for all, including the First Peoples of Turtle Island.

Ten days that shook the world

by Bradley Hughes

"One hundred years later, socialists, activists and organizers of today are still inspired by the October Revolution, and we are celebrating its achievements this evening."

These opening words helped launch the staged reading of Ten Days that Shook the World in Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver. The performance was written and organized by the International Socialists. Over one hundred people turned out to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

The text was developed from John Reed's classic eyewitness account of the Russian revolution. It included poetry from Vladimir Mayakovsky and reactions to the revolution from activists and politicians across North America, recorded in the years immediately after the revolution.

The true story of democracy and liberation that the workers and peasants of Russia were able to achieve during the revolution has been buried by supporters of the Stalinist counter revolution and supporters of the capitalists regimes who were happy to defame the revolution by equating it with Stalinism.

Early in the evening Lenin explained what was at stake: "[power must be] transferred to the hands of the revolutionary workers, soldiers and peasants; and in that case, it will mean a complete abolition of landlord tyranny, immediate check of the capitalists, immediate proposal of a just peace."

Followed by Trotsky: "we are going to



found a power which will have no other aim but to satisfy the needs of the soldiers, workers, and peasants."

Reed also recorded the words of soldiers speaking to the Congress of Workers and soldiers' deputies: "When the land belongs to the peasants, and the factories to the workers, and the power to the Soviets, then we'll know we have something to fight for, and we'll fight for it!"

And then the words of a Petrograd worker: "I speak for the Petrograd proletariat. We are in favour of insurrection. Have it your own way, but I tell you now that if you allow the Soviets to be destroyed, we're through with you!"

The rest of the performance was equally stirring, as was fitting for the 100th anniversary of such a momentous occasion.

After Energy East, stop Kinder Morgan

by Jesse McLaren

Amidst widespread climate disasters, a ray of hope: the Energy East pipeline, which threatened to pump more than a million barrels of oil a day, adding hundreds of millions of tons of carbon to the atmosphere each year, is dead. TransCanada announced to the National Energy Board that it was withdrawing its application for the pipeline.

'Business decision' or climate justice victory

Reading the mainstream press headlines you wouldn't know this was a victory for the climate justice movement. According to the *Globe & Mail*, "Donald Trump killed the Energy East pipeline" by reviving the Keystone XL pipeline, while the *Toronto Star* claimed the pipeline was "killed by the markets." Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr called the canceling of the project a "business decision." But it was neither the invisible hand of the markets nor the small hands of Donald Trump that forced this decision.

Neither was the decision purely technical. TransCanada withdrew its application after the National Energy Board announced it would consider upstream and downstream climate impact. But this climate test was a product of the climate movement. The NEB has rubber stamped many a polluting pipeline, and it was only under pressure that they expanded their criteria—which was a sign that Energy East



Rally to stop Kinder Morgan in Victoria

was leaking support.

Trudeau fails, where's the NDP?

When Harper failed to ram through unpopular pipelines, Trudeau opted for another tactic: lip service to Indigenous right and environmental protection, while continuing the same policies. So he went to the Paris climate conference but continued to subsidize tar sands, undermining the climate goals. He promised to support the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples (UNDRIP) but then supported Kinder Morgan over Indigenous rights. But the defeat of Energy East shows that Trudeau's rhetoric is not working.

Now would be a great time for the NDP to embrace the climate justice victory and correct its past mistakes. In 2015, Mulcair nonsensically counterposed opposition to tar sands on the west—like Northern Gateway and Kinder Morgan—with support for Energy East. As a result there was no climate justice party to vote for,

and Trudeau's rhetoric prevailed.

Since then, Mulcair has been ousted, NDP activists have pushed a discussion of the Leap Manifesto, and Jagmeet Singh has been elected party leader a platform that better reflects the climate justice movement: opposing Kinder Morgan and Energy East, along with supporting UNDRIP.

But so far the loudest NDP voice is that of Alberta Premier Rachel Notley demanding more pipelines, which ignores Indigenous communities poisoned by tar sands and workers asking for green job alternatives.

A world beyond oil

After stopping the Northern Gateway pipeline, the climate justice movement has stopped Energy East. This can give momentum to stop Trump and Trudeau's other pipelines—from Kinder Morgan going west, Dakota Access and Keystone XL going south, and Line 3 and Line 9 going east.

As Kanehsatà:ke activist Ellen Gabriel explained, "This is a victory owed to all Indigenous peoples and civil society groups dedicated to a healthy and prosperous environment for present and future generations. This should be seen not solely as a victory, but an opportunity to rethink capitalism and how sustainable energy is not only more economical, but creates a more promising legacy for present and future generations; a future in which it is clear that our human rights are interrelated and intertwined with the rights of Mother Earth and all our relations."

College faculty strike for quality education

by Pam Johnson

12,000 full-time and partial load college faculty in 24 colleges in Ontario are on strike. The union (OPSEU) demands are focused on three issues: equal pay for equal work and job security for partial load faculty; a 50-50 full-time to contract faculty complement; and more say in academic decision making.

The College Employer Council (CEC) that acts as the bargaining agent for the colleges, has refused to discuss these issues at the bargaining table. They have tabled an offer that includes modest cost-of living wage raises and nothing else.

The employer's initial strategy was to paint college faculty as highly paid and greedy in the hopes that public opinion and the students would refuse to support them.

Students support faculty

But this strategy is backfiring spectacularly as students, their parents and general public are outraged that 70% of college faculty are precarious workers on 4 month contracts with minimal to no benefits.

Student support has been tremendous. Students have been on picket lines, organized rallies and petitions and are all over social media with messages of support. Overwhelmingly, the students see the College Employer Council as the focus for their anger, not the faculty.



Students join the rally for faculty at Humber College

Striking to end precarious work

This has become a strike about precarious work and it is resonating broadly. New research on jobs in Ontario found that 50% of all workers regardless of their rate of are precarious workers. This strike, and campaigns like 15 and fairness are pushing precarity into the spotlight.

Students, who see their parents in precarious work or who have precarious jobs themselves, understand this issue. Students attend college in order to get decent secure jobs but, what an

irony that the people teaching them are precarious workers.

What is also ironic is that Wynne's Liberals are currently trying to pass legislation, Bill 148, to address precarious work. Yet, they have been unwilling to put pressure on the College Employer Council to negotiate fair conditions at the bargaining table. Wynne's government also has the distinction of funding post-secondary education at the lowest level, per capita, of any province.

Despite Wynne's labour friendly legislation, her government is not getting the labour peace they hoped for in the lead up to the next election. The Liberals tepid attempt to appear worker friendly is being exposed as a thin veil covering underfunding and lack of interest in demanding employers treat workers with respect.

Why this strike matters

A victory in this strike, especially gains on job security and equal pay for equal work for contract faculty would blow a big hole in the notion that precarious work is the 'new norm' that we all must accept. It would give confidence to workers to fight this battle in their own workplace.

Whatever the outcome, this strike changes the discussion around precarious work and shows the power of workers to put their interests on the agenda when they act together.

What can people do to support it?

Picket lines are up at all 24 colleges and many colleges especially in the GTA have multiple picket locations that people can visit. Write a letter or email your MPP to demand that the get the employer back to the bargaining table.

• On Thursday November 2, striking faculty from across the province will take the fight to Wynne with a mass rally at Queen's Park, 12 noon.