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# Socialist Worker

\$2 | No 664 | June 2024 | socialist.ca

## ARMS EMBARGO NOW



## End Canadian complicity



Thousands join the emergency response rally after the massacre in Rafah



# Bird flu: capitalism drives more deadly pandemics

by: **Bradley Hughes**

**R**ecent headlines on the accelerating transmission of Avian flu from birds to mammals, including to humans, are rightly causing alarm around the world. But absent is any discussion of how capitalism’s insatiable thirst for profits has brought us to this place. Here we look at the un-natural history of Avian influenza A (H5N1).

## Bird flu

Avian flu has been circulating in wild and farmed birds since 2001. Hundreds of millions of birds have died in the wild or been culled on farms. In the last few years this flu has started to circulate in mammals, and in the last few months it has spread to cattle on dairy farms in the US. As of May 24, Avian influenza A (H5N1) has been detected in 63 dairy herds spread across nine states. Those nine states are scattered across the US; some are on the border of Canada and Mexico, some are along the coasts of four great lakes, and others border the Atlantic Ocean or the Gulf of Mexico.

Flus and other diseases that transfer from one species to another are called zoonotic. These can be more dangerous than mutations of diseases that are already prevalent in a species because they evolved in response to a different immune system. The resulting novel viruses can be much more contagious, or severe, or both, than viruses that mutate while circulating within one species. For example, COVID originated in bats, and the Spanish Flu that infected 500 million people and killed 50 million from 1918 to 1920 was a bird flu. Worryingly, a Nature paper from 2005 has shown that some of the same mutations between that bird flu and the 1918 human version are also present in the currently circulating bird flu.

## Mammals

Avian flu has passed into a range of mammals around the world. Since 2020, it has spread to over 48 mammal species in 26 countries.

Since the beginning of 2022, Canadian Food Inspection Agency National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease has confirmed over 3,000 cases of bird flu in wild birds and mammals across so-called Canada. Over 2,200 of them were birds including ducks, owls, vultures, swans, geese, gulls, ravens, puffins, pelicans and more. The remaining 800 mammals include bears, seals, mink, raccoons, foxes, skunks, and a dolphin. Every province has found bird flu in both wild birds and wild mammals.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has a list of bird flu detections in wild mammals in the US since May of 2022. The list includes twenty species spread over 29 states. The species include red foxes, raccoons, opossums, skunks, river otters.

Brown, black and polar bears along with dolphins, grey seals and harbour seals have also been infected.

In Argentina last fall, 17,000 elephant seal pups, 96% of the season’s juveniles, died of avian flu. In Peru and Chile 20,000 sea lions died the same way. This was alongside the death of 500,000 sea birds. This spread to southern South America risks introducing the virus into bird populations in Antarctica

to spread viruses from bird to bird. The greater number of birds that get sick, the more novel mutations will appear in the virus.

Cattle and pigs are treated the same way. Transmission to pigs is especially dangerous for us because pigs and birds can share flu viruses more easily than people and birds. And pigs also easily share flu viruses with humans.

Workers on farms are treated little better than the animals they work

verifying basic living conditions like running water, occupancy level, and whether workers’ housing was free from serious health and safety risks—the department collected no information in almost all cases but found employers compliant.” They also pointed out the many times before the pandemic that advocates for migrant workers had demonstrated the problems with housing and sanitation, without the department ever implementing the

online teaching not out of concern for the lives of the workers and students on campus, but because there were mass petition campaigns organized by students. In British Columbia, the Education Minister consistently refused requests by the teachers’ unions for safer workplaces. For our ruling class, COVID 19 was a threat to their profits, not a threat to our health.

## The return of measles?

The consequences of the ruling class disregard for our health – coupled with the growth of the far right – is shown in the reemergence of measles, one of the most contagious diseases in humans.

Measles has been around since at least the 9th century. In the first half of the twentieth century, there were 30 million cases with over 2 million deaths each year. Effective measles vaccines were developed in the 1950s and 60s. By 2016, the World Health Organization declared that the Americas were free of endemic measles. In Canada in 2017, 87% of children had received the required two doses of vaccine. By 2021 that number had dropped to 79%. The target is 95%, because measles spreads so easily and is so dangerous. One infected individual can pass on the virus to 9 out of 10 unvaccinated close contacts. This spring there have been measles cases in Ontario and Quebec that are not linked to travel – the disease is once again circulating in the population. The suffering and deaths that will result from this are due to the far-right using anti-vax conspiracy theories to build their movement, helped along of course by provincial and federal governments governments under Liberal, Conservative and NDP leaders.

Profits in agriculture drive factory farming practices that are cruel and dangerous to both the animals and to the workers on farms. As a result, diseases spread rapidly and are given many chances to mutate and/or pass onto farm workers. Canadian agriculture relies on migrant labour that it can exploit to a much larger degree than domestic workers. Migrant workers are forced into overcrowded, unclean living conditions to produce profit for agri-business. When avian flu passes into humans, it will find it easy to travel between farm workers and into the population. Instead of learning the lessons from COVID 19 about how to deal with and eliminate a pandemic, our ruling class has learned how many lives it can sacrifice in the scramble to return to business as usual.

We cannot thrive under capitalism. The only rational response to capitalism’s deadly pandemics, exploitation of workers and cruelty to animals is to overturn the whole system. We need to democratically and collectively control our relationship with nature, eliminate all borders, and build a new world in solidarity with all.



**Factory farms are making pandemics worse**

that have no previous exposure and hence little resistance to the disease. The virus now infects birds and mammals nearly everywhere in the world outside of Australia.

## Humans

Since 2003 there have been less than 900 human cases and those seem to be direct transfer from birds, not from other people. Over 50% of those cases have been fatal. The actual fatality rate of the disease at the moment is likely to be less than this because only people with severe cases would receive medical care and be diagnosed with avian flu. At the time of writing, there is one confirmed case of this flu migrating from cows to a farm worker in Texas, and one in Michigan. A traveler returning to Australia is that country’s first confirmed human case. We know this bird flu will be deadly to humans – we just don’t know how deadly.

## Capitalist agriculture is an unnatural disaster

Viruses and bird migrations are natural phenomena, but the way bird flu has spread and the dangers it poses are entirely a product of capitalism.

Production of poultry on mass factory farms in Canada produced over 800 million chickens and turkeys in 2022. This was done on around 43,000 farms, for an average size of almost 20,000 birds per farm. Many birds are sold as chicks for export, so the total for a year will be bigger than the number of birds on the farm at any one time. Cramming birds in small cages inches away from the next bird is a perfect way

with. In 2023, over 70,000 workers were employed on farms in Canada through the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. Eight thousand migrant workers worked on cattle, poultry or pig farms. A survey by the Migrant Workers Network of Temporary Foreign Workers on farms in 2021 found that more than 15% were forced to live in “houses” with more than twenty people. Nearly half were forced to share a bedroom with four to eight people and 7% shared bedrooms with more than eight people. More than half were required to share a bathroom with six to twelve people, and 8% were sharing with more than 20 people.

In 2021, the Auditor General published a report Health and Safety of Agricultural Temporary Foreign Workers in Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic which found that inspections, “provided little assurance of protection for the health and safety of temporary foreign workers in Canada’s agriculture sector during the 2020 and 2021 growing seasons.” They found that the Employment and Social Development Canada department assessed almost all agricultural employers, “as compliant with the COVID-19 requirements . . . despite having gathered little or no evidence to demonstrate this.”

The report also lists the numerous times the auditor general had reported the problems to the department without any noticeable change in enforcement. They found that, “when conducting inspections of compliance with regularly mandated requirements—such as

improvements that it promised.

## Misery makes profit

These are not flaws in the Temporary Foreign Workers Program – it is designed to allow business owners to exploit migrant workers. Migrant agricultural workers tend to have experience in their home countries and have built up years of experience working on farms in Canada. Employers can request workers by name. In British Columbia, around 80% of migrant workers from Mexico are requested directly by their employers. There are no regular inspections of workplaces, inspections only occur after complaints are made, and the employer controls what the inspectors see.

Minimum wage levels on farms are set lower than other minimum wages in Canada because employers (and the provincial governments that represent them) know that these lower wages are still higher than farm workers’ wages elsewhere in the Americas. This is all possible because the workers know that demanding safe conditions or decent wages will result in them being sent home, never to return. Low wages and terrible housing make great profit.

With the rise of the far-right anti-mask and anti-vaccine movements, and the pandering to them from political parties across the spectrum, any response to a new pandemic will be much slower and more cautious than the response to COVID 19. Remember that that response was driven by mass pressure, not government foresight. Colleges and Universities moved to



# Tax rich polluters for a just transition

by: **Brian Champ**

In 2015 when Trudeau came to power there was a sense of relief for many that the Harper era was over. While Harper attacked Indigenous rights openly, sparking the Idle No More movement, Trudeau set a different tone by stating that “no relationship is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous Peoples.”

In a similar vein, the new government declared that Canada was committed to the Paris Climate Accord promising to keep global average temperatures below 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial average.

But last year’s temperatures broke records and rose slightly above this critical threshold, demonstrating the failure of the climate “conference of parties” (COP) process. During the 30 years that these meetings have been held greenhouse gas concentrations have doubled.

These meetings have failed because they have not confronted the power and wealth of the fossil fuel industry. Instead governments have turned to market mechanisms like carbon offsets, carbon pricing and the like, hoping to push investment to climate friendly alternatives.

The impetus is on individual actors, whether companies or people, to modify fossil fuel consumption rather than confronting their production. Under COP rules, governments are responsible for the carbon emissions that occur within their borders. Emissions from the burning of exported fossil fuels are not included – only those emitted during production.

This provides us with the paradox of a Liberal climate plan that purports to nudge economic behaviour through carbon offsets, cap and trade plans and carbon pricing, while continuing to subsidize the fossil fuel industry and building export pipelines over

Indigenous territories without free, prior and informed consent.

There are tax breaks and subsidies for renewable energy projects, battery production, EV development and for mining “critical” minerals. But private industry is in charge when it is clear that we need large, public programs for the just transition to a sustainable economy.

Climate scientists continue to raise the alarm for a thoroughgoing transition in how our societies produce and consume energy, and mass movements have pushed for radical action to prevent further climate disasters.

But in Canada, the debate on climate action in mainstream politics is mainly centred on arguments for or against the carbon tax.

Tory leader Pierre Polievre (PP) has been making political hay on what he calls “ongoing carbon tax crisis and the financial burden it places on Canadians.”

For PP, this is the real crisis – not a planet on fire, with vulnerable people facing droughts, floods, fires and extreme weather impacting their access to food and clean water.

Behind the pretended concern for ordinary people struggling to make ends meet is the denial of the need for urgent action to address the climate crisis, spreading fear and division to blunt opposition to corporate rule.

While PP has argued that “everybody understands that tax is driving people to the food bank” in an effort to gain from the pain most working people are feeling, he remains absolutely silent on tens of billions in continuing oil and gas industry subsidies.

The “Axe the Tax” messaging connects with the far right politics at the centre of the “Freedom Convoy” movement – at a recent anti-tax encampment PP photo op the far right Diagonale flag and #SaveCanada hashtag were visible.

Federal Tory polling numbers have

been rising since last summer: in 2024 so far, their numbers range from 36 to 46%; Liberals, 23 to 28%; and for the NDP, 15 to 22%.

Underlying these numbers is the rising cost of living that has been a major burden on working people. This is the background behind a rising tide of strikes by workers across the country.

But the carbon tax is not responsible for these price rises. Growing inequality is being driven by falling or stagnant real wages, the privatization of public services and inflationary profit taking and price gouging by grocery chains and oil companies.

When the carbon price rose from \$65 to \$80 per tonne of carbon on April 1st, gas pump prices rose by 3.3 cents per litre and “natural” gas prices rose by 2.9 cents per cubic metre.

But gas pump and “natural” gas prices fluctuated by 34 cents per litre and 21 cents per cubic metre respectively over the past year. These price fluctuations depend on the interaction between supply and demand on a local, regional and global scale.

But there is certainly a kernel of truth in PP’s rhetoric since consump-



tion taxes are regressive, increasing costs for working people. And they target individual consumption habits rather than impacting the profits of corporations that continue to benefit from fossil fuel production.

Supporters of carbon pricing will

point out that it is revenue neutral, with rebates flowing back to households so they can spend them on climate friendly options. But these options are limited precisely because of the failure of governments to develop them directly.

In reality, the sham Liberal climate plan is a cover for the continuing subsidies to fossil fuel production – over \$21 billion in 2022 – that perpetuates rising greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere.

While NDP leader Jagmeet Singh has made some comments that hint at the need to end fossil fuel subsidies, the federal party has chosen to prop up the federal Liberals in return for very little. This leaves the field clear for the “F\*ck Trudeau” politics of the far right that is pushing the whole political spectrum to the right.

This has serious implications for the next federal elections in 2025. Without a left expression of the political polarization it seems clear that disillusion with Trudeau will boost the likelihood of a Polievre government.

While this is a scary prospect, there is hope in the fact of surging movements. This includes continuing strikes and organizing drives by workers fighting to keep their heads above the waters of inflation. It includes 7 months and counting of pro-Palestine protests in cities and towns across the country and the amazing student encampments that have drawn more working class support.

The climate and Indigenous sovereignty movements have fallen from the heights of the 2019 global climate strikes and the early 2020 #ShutdownCanada road, rail and port blockades in solidarity with Wet’suwet’en land defenders. These called into question the inadequacy of the official climate plans and put forward demands for climate justice that linked communities of struggle from below to confront the system that

increases inequality and undermines life on the planet.

The fires of this movement are still smoldering with struggles continuing that could ignite into mass action. But in order to do so we need to be clear that it is the priorities of capitalism that need to be confronted, a system that relies on the exploitation of labour and the expropriation of Indigenous land for the profits of those at the top.

Taxes on consumption, like the carbon tax – even with rebates for most – eat into the already meagre resources of working people. And they take governments and profitable companies off the hook for the crisis that they have created.

There are far more useful options – calling for an end to all subsidies for oil and gas companies and a tax on their profits could generate far more revenue to fund government programs for the just transition to a low carbon economy. A wealth tax, such as has been proposed by taxfairness.ca could also generate tremendous revenue to fund these necessary programs.

And these public programs could provide many climate jobs that would be the basis of a sustainable economy, as well as restoring funding for public services like healthcare and education that are under attack. This would be far more attractive to working people than the existing sham plan that has does not lead to a transition at all.

The task may seem daunting, in the absence of good programs and policies on offer in mainstream politics, but we must draw inspiration from the global Intifada against the genocide in Gaza that is calling into question the Israeli state, US imperialism and the complicity of Canada’s rulers. In the face of overwhelming propaganda from the top, this unprecedented movement is changing the face of the world and drawing broader forces into this struggle for justice.

# Nurses and other Quebec unions slam the CAQ

by: **Chantal Sundaram**

With the criminal dismantling of Ontario’s public healthcare system by Doug Ford, the stand by Quebec unions against Ford’s counterpart in Quebec, right-wing CAQ leader Francois Legault, serves up some inspiration.

On Saturday May 25, outside the general convention of the CAQ, several unions showed their anger at both the stonewalling of workers’ demands and the privatization of healthcare by Legault and CAQ healthcare minister Christian Dubé.

Members of the union FIQ, which represents 80,000 nurses and other healthcare professionals who massively rejected a tentative agreement in April, came out to the convention in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec to remind the CAQ that they still don’t have a deal. The re-

jected deal did not adequately address overwork, mandatory overtime, forced relocation, and decent pay. Although the FIQ leadership had recommended the deal, they are now backing their members’ rejection.

A FIQ media release said their members would be protesting the CAQ to remind them that they are still at the table. FIQ Treasurer Roberto Bomba told the media that “Monsieur Legault has to recognize the expertise of health workers who are mostly women” and that pressure tactics would intensify in the coming weeks and the FIQ would demonstrate all summer.

Treasury Board President Sonia LeBel retorted that balanced agreements were reached with the Common Front (the majority of public sector workers who staged a series of rotating strikes) thanks to “flexibility” on the union side: “We had a similar agreement with the

FIQ, now the FIQ is coming back to the table with demands that challenge that flexibility, and on top of that, they’re adding more wage demands.” Good for the FIQ leadership in backing the will of their members.

Public service and broader public sector members of the CSN, one of Quebec’s major union federations, were also there: its 26,000 members are also in bargaining and have been stonewalled by the CAQ, especially on salaries. Members of the government professional employees’ union, the SPGQ, who have been without a contract for more than year, also targeted the CAQ convention.

But the CSN union federation was also there to target the CAQ’s new healthcare “reform” bill that promises nothing but privatization.

In December 2023, the CAQ adopted Bill 15, “An Act to make the health

and social services system more effective” which creates a provincial agency, Santé Québec, to oversee all activities related to public healthcare, including providing services and facilitating access. The claim by Health Minister Dubé is that this will allow people to access a medical specialist more quickly, but there will be a cost: Bill 15 will allow even more privatization than was already underway. The appointment of Geneviève Biron as



head of Santé Québec – a businessperson who made her career in private healthcare services like medical imaging – leaves no doubt.

Bill 15 is also a divide and conquer strategy to pit health workers against each other. It makes Santé Québec a single employer merging unions and seniority lists, allowing the government to impose mandatory relocation. But the rejection of the tentative agreement by FIQ members of a tentative agreement that did not protect against this shows they are not drinking the CAQ Kool-Aid.

And all the protests outside the CAQ convention show that workers are not buying the need to be “flexible” and they don’t trust the CAQ’s claim that they are only protecting tax dollars and “respecting Quebecers’ ability to pay and be fair to other unionized workers.”



# HORROR IN GAZA

*The vicious attacks on Palestinians in Gaza is creating a blow-back that may spell the end of Israel as we know it. Millions are marching, occupying and demonstrating against the genocide. We analyze recent developments and what you can do to help end the killing.*

**A**fter the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued its latest ruling calling for an end to the assault on Rafah the Israelis have doubled down and are unleashing horrors on displaced Palestinians throughout the Gaza strip.

At the time of writing, the world is watching as dismembered and burned children are shown on live feeds after a bombing of a so-called safe zone. The corporate press in the West is doing its best to downplay the brutality—referencing “explosions” in the refugee camps without mentioning how those explosions happened.

But the world is seeing through Israeli propaganda in a way that we have never witnessed before. These are unprecedented moments in the decades-long campaign to show the world the true nature of the Israeli terror regime.

The ICJ ruling stated that there was a plausible case that Israel is committing genocide and have now called for additional measures. They are specifically calling on Israel to open borders for humanitarian aid at Rafah, end the assault on the city and allow for unfettered access for UN investigators to study the situation on the ground.

Israel is proving that it has no concern for international law. Its main supporters among the western imperialists seem to have reached the same conclusion.

The US has specifically said that they would rather allow Israel to investigate itself. They also, incidentally, said that they would never allow their own sovereignty to be overridden by an International institution. This is rank hypocrisy since the US helped develop these laws and have ruthlessly enforced them on other countries for decades.

Just before the ICJ ruling the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that prosecutors were asking for arrest warrants against both Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, as well as three Hamas leaders.

The US and its allies quickly condemned the request. They also all publicly denounced the ICC for suggesting a “moral equivalency” between Hamas and Israel despite the fact that the ICC didn’t at any time imply that.

Indeed, there is no equivalency between the two. Hamas is a resistance movement that, under international law, has the right to defend itself up to and including armed defence as an oppressed nation under military occupation. Israel, by contrast, is the occupying power which has an obligation to maintain humanitarian norms in the areas that it occupies.

After the international court rulings Ireland, Spain and Norway announced that they would recognize an independent Israeli state. It is clear that the tide is turning against the Israeli state and the ongoing massacres are further isolating Zionists.

We cannot rely on these international institutions to bring about an end to the slaughter or to end the

decades of oppressive Israeli policy. They are beholden to the imperial powers for, among other things, their funding, and there are no enforcement mechanisms for the rulings outside of the UN security council which is under the thumb of US veto power.

It would be wrong, however, to write them off as insignificant. They can be an important tool in the toolbox for activists and they are a reflection of the power and pressure of the global movement for Palestinian liberation.

## Two states?

Likewise we cannot rely on countries recognizing a Palestinian state as a mechanism to achieve liberation. Most states have called for an independent Palestine existing beside Israel. But the two state solution is long dead, having been eroded by decades of Israeli occupation of what was to be the Palestinian state.

The two state solution is being refused by the Israelis themselves and

the US has vetoed any UNSC resolution supporting a Palestinian state.

Netanyahu stated in January that, “I will not compromise on full Israeli security control over the entire area in the west of Jordan – and this is contrary to a Palestinian state”. Meanwhile others in his government have stated that they plan to expel or eliminate the people of Gaza. They have even gone so far as to produce plans for full Israeli control over the strip.

The two state solution is untenable and it fails to recognize the original expulsion of the Palestinians who have the right to return under international law to their ancestral homes in what is now Israel.

The only solution to the current crisis is an end to the ethno-nationalist Zionist state and the development of a single secular state of Palestine with human rights for all who live there.

## Where is Trudeau?

The Trudeau Liberals echoed many of

the talking points made by the US and Israel about the court rulings.

After the announcement he said, “What I will say is troubling though is the sense of an equivalency between the democratically elected leaders of Israel and the bloodthirsty terrorists that lead up Hamas”.

He and his ministers have also refused to clarify if they have continued to send weapons and components to Israel.

Under Canadian law it is illegal to send any weapons to a state that may use them in war crimes against civilians. As the last few months have proven and as has been reiterated by the ICJ and ICC rulings, the Israeli state is definitely committing war crimes.

But Trudeau has refused to answer questions about previously approved arms sales and what measures it is taking to ensure that these sales don’t exploit loopholes in policy.

As an example, the government of Canada under both Harper and Trudeau insisted that light armoured vehicles (LAV) sent to Saudi Arabia were not being used in war crimes because they were being sent to the Saudi’s without weapons attached. The fact that the Saudi state receives those LAVs and then adds the weapons themselves was a giant loophole that they refused to acknowledge.

Likewise, some of the components being sent to Israel could be used for civilian or military purposes. These “dual use” technologies could be helping the Israelis commit their genocide but we don’t know because of secrecy surrounding their eventual end use.

There is a growing movement to stop Trudeau from using these loopholes and to stop him from also buying weapons from Israel which will provide needed funds for the Zionists.

This is a crucial step to end Canada’s support for genocide. Please sign the petition and send a message to your MP calling for an arms embargo now.

You can do so at:

<https://armsembargonow.ca/>



Rally at MP Arif Virani's office in Toronto



# Growing labour support for Palestine encampments

**O**n Monday May 6th, just days after the establishment of the Peoples Circle for Palestine encampment on King's College Circle at the University of Toronto, the Executive of United Steelworkers Local 1998 released a statement in support of the students' demands. The encampment was established on Thursday, May 2nd.

Local 1998 represents 10,000 administrative and other staff at U of T, Victoria University, St. Michael's College and University of Toronto Schools.

The Executive's statement builds on the Local's call for an immediate ceasefire issued in early November 2023. It also endorses the Toronto & York Region Labour Council's call for an end of indirect and direct shipments of all arms, including those from Canada, that facilitate the Israeli state's offensive against the people of Gaza.

The statement stands in support of the demands of the encampment and challenges "the University's weaponization of property rights in its effort to discredit the King's College



Labour activists join the encampment solidarity rally

Circle protesters' goals and actions." You can read the full statement on the Local's website.

With this statement, the Local joins other groups at U of T who are standing in solidarity with the encampment, including CUPE 3902 and the U of T Faculty Association. The statement was released on the same day that Israel ordered over 100,000 Palestinians to evacuate Rafah as it launched its ground offensive.

Encampments on other campuses are also receiving labour support. The Hamilton and District Labour Council released a statement in solidarity with the Palestine solidarity encampment at McMaster University.

Unions have also been supporting the encampment at McGill where striking law faculty have joined the students in solidarity.

This is a pattern that has been repeating across the country and around the world.

It is more urgent than ever for large numbers to take action to stop the genocide that is unfolding.

## Voices from the UofT camp

**O**n Monday, May 27 the Ontario Federation of Labour organized a rally in solidarity with the student encampment at the University of Toronto.

The rally was called in response to the threat by the administration that the camp was to be removed by force.

Below we offer a sample of the speeches made on the day.

### Mariam, 4th year undergraduate:

"I am appalled to be a student at this university, to know my tuition dollars are used to fund genocide and bombs and weapons and death and destruction and devastation and heartbreak and grief, and I'm appalled to be part of this institution that is complicit in Israel's genocidal siege on Gaza, on Rafah, the West Bank, the whole of Palestine since October and for the last 76 years.

Yesterday, during our meeting with UofT administrators, Israel dropped seven 2,000 bombs in designated safe areas northwest of Rafah, burning people alive.

Halfway through the meeting, UofT administrators asked to step out for a break to further review our demands. We opened our phones just to bear witness to the horrifying footage and images of beheaded children and charred bodies burned beyond recognition, all in an area that was supposed to be a safe zone.

In the last 48 hours since the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt its genocidal siege on Rafah, Israel has dropped more than 60 bombs. Bombs paid for by my tuition, bombs paid for by this institution, bombs paid for by the University of Toronto. And

in spite of all of this, despite all the horrors, and atrocities we are seeing every single day - the last 234 days, U of T continues to tell us they cannot make commitments and that we must go through bureaucratic committees, that will lead us nowhere. We do not have time for committees. We do not have time to wait.

There is a genocide ongoing right now. We need commitments right now. We need commitments to divest to disclose and to cut ties with Israeli academic institutions."



Beverly Bain

### Beverly Bain, Assistant Professor in the Dept of Historical Studies, U of T Mississauga co-founder, Scholar Strike Canada

"Since October 7th, students and faculty have had to bear ongoing threats from your administration for speaking up for the Palestinian people and against the genocide.

Students from the UTMSU have had their names called out in the Ontario Legislature by the Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities demanding they be sanctioned and many of us as faculty have received various forms of threats from the larger community,

including death threats.

President Gertler and his administration and the university wants us to bow, to bend, to break but we will not. We remain steadfast. We will continue to do so until this university divests from all of Israel's institutions."

### Carolyn Egan, President, Steelworkers Toronto Area Council

"Students have always been leaders in movements for decades and decades. And if you look back to the anti-apartheid movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement it was student who often led the way and workers responded and you are doing that again today.

And you are making your mark on history. When you are doing it you barely notice but decades later you look back and see what you did. You're doing it well and you are an inspiration to every worker in this city and we are here to give you the solidarity you need."

### Fred Hahn, President, CUPE Ontario

"We stand today on campus, where more than 50% of the instruction is done by CUPE members, where the collective knowledge held in our libraries, and shepherded by CUPE members, where everyone of these building functions because of the skill, and passion of CUPE members. Our union is deeply proud of the work that our members and so many others do on this campus. But we are more proud that many of our members are part of this important action.

It is amazing, so critically important, to be joined today by so many of

my comrades in the movement that I have dedicated my life to. Education workers like ETFO and OSSTF are here. Private sector unions like the UFCW and the Steelworkers are here. And, of course, big public sector unions like OPSEU and CUPE are here.

There is one thing we know in our movement, the only power we have is our solidarity with one another. It is the only thing that makes power bend and that makes change.

Violations of international law, horrors, genocide, require our solidarity. Our union is here. We will continue to be here. We will not rest until they disclose and divest from genocide."

### Jim, OPSEU member

"For me, labour rights are human rights and we are all connected and we need to look after each other

wherever we are.

I want to support these brave students who are standing up for the people of Palestine, taking great risks. They have a right to be here, they have a right to be protected and they have a right to speak their voice on behalf of the people of Palestine."

### Judy Rebick - author and activist

"I want to thank the students, Occupy UofT, the space in front of us. I can't tell you, as someone who's been an activist for about 50 years, I've never been so inspired by an action as the action of these students, and students across North America.

And I want all of you to promise right now that as soon as we get a message that the cops are coming to this campus, we're going to be here to stop them."



Decorations at the encampment in Toronto



# “Hey Siri, Are you messing around with the balance of power?”

by: Rohit Revi

**O**n May 14th, the Joe Biden administration announced massive increases in tariffs on hi-tech imports from China, ranging from electric vehicles, batteries, and solar cells to semiconductors and critical minerals. The scale of increase is as follows: 100% on EVs, 50% on semiconductors and solar cells, and 25% on lithium-ion EV batteries. Regardless of the actual impact of these tariffs on the global supply chain, which economists continue to evaluate, one thing is clear: we are witnessing a further deepening of the ongoing trade-war between the two nations, the political content of which occupies center stage in contemporary US electoral politics.

As these tensions continue to escalate, two-steps forward one-step back, the technological industry – more specifically, that of semiconductor design and manufacturing – has become a major frontier within which a shift in balance of power between the United States and China is beginning to play out. With the popular rise in commercial AI programs which require massive computing capacities, and the full incorporation of ‘Artificial Intelligence’ into the war economy, the semiconductor trade-war – or the chip war – is a focal point where inter-imperial competition and rivalry simmers to a brim, threatening occasionally to boil over into a full-fledged conflict. Therefore, it is extremely important today that socialists evaluate the forces of change, disruption, and continuity in the dynamic global supply chain of semiconductors.

## Semiconductors in the Global Supply Chain

Semiconductors, also known as integrated circuits or microchips, are the backbone of the ‘digital economy’, and the basis of almost all technological commodities and devices we use in our daily lives. The global sales value of the semiconductors increased from \$335.2 billion in the year 2015 to \$526.8 billion in 2023, with a decrease between 2022 and 2023 that is largely accounted for by overproduction and a slowdown in consumer spending on technology after the relaxation of lockdown mandates pursuant to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite being relatively newer commodities on the global supply chain, semiconductors already occupy the fourth position in trade value, only behind crude oil, refined oil, and cars.

The supply chain of semiconductors has historically been diffused across the world: from chip design in US, to wafer fabrication in East Asia, and assembly in China. The economy of semiconductor production has today brought together competing countries in a deeply interdependent value chain, entangled in a mesh of economic relations that nobody necessarily wants to be in but is nonetheless needed due to the global nature of the semiconductor ecosystem. Until recently, the supply chain had the R&D and design aspects concentrated around the US sphere of influence, with manufacturing and assembly aspects concentrated around China. In this network, all economies are import dependent at some or the other node in production. If you own an iPhone for instance,



you will probably see the words “designed in California, assembled in China” inscribed somewhere.

But with significant advancements in the R&D sector in China in the recent years, and a significant upscaling of their electronics industry, the ‘know-how’ is now likely to become less and less of an American monopoly, although presently it continues the case. Some recent developments indicate that, we are now seeing the early signs of a movement towards total production of semiconductor-based technologies, from design to assembly, in China and a relative movement of functions away from the US. Such a trend would result in a partial disentanglement of Chinese dependency on imports from the US, with a possibility of increased intensification of the converse. The possibility of this change has been a driving force within US foreign policy in the recent years. For instance, in 2020, the United States imposed sanctions on the Chinese company Huawei accusing the company of “design-theft” as well as of conducting business in Iran in violation of American sanctions. In 2021, the CFO of Huawei, Meng Wanzhou was arrested by Canada upon a US extradition request, at Vancouver International Airport, leading to a new wave of geopolitical tensions. In 2023, Huawei launched its first independent flagship smartphone that was fully designed and manufactured in China, with micro-chip design named Charlotte developed by SMIC, a state-funded technology company. This development reportedly took Washington by surprise. Recent reports also indicate that the SMIC-Huawei collaboration has made further progress and have realistic aspirations to manufacture chips that would be quite close to the current American standards.

With around three-fourth of the total semiconductor manufacturing capacity concentrated in East Asia, and with largest majority of rare earth minerals required for semiconductor manufacturing being currently in China, the United States continues to be heavily dependent on China for the sustenance of its tech industry, and any additional loss of control over the ‘know-how’ would significantly impact its hegemony on the global landscape. This shift in total production of any high-demand commodity necessarily comes with a shift in balance of economic and geopolitical power, which has rendered the United States significantly anxious

in the semi-conductor trade-wars.

This propensity for a reorganization of the global supply chain, and the possibility of a disentanglement between the US and China, has resulted in the emergence of two kinds of vulnerabilities. One, the economic entanglement between China and the US is one of the mitigating factors that currently prevents an open conflict. A break in these entanglements would be akin to lifting the lid from a simmering pot, with the risk of an open conflict boiling over. An extremely volatile site at which this breakdown could happen is Taiwan, which is currently a leading US-allied semiconductor manufacturer whose value to the global tech supply chain is often called its ‘Silicon Shield’ in relation to China. The second vulnerability, which results from the first, lies at heart of the largest economic sector today under Global Capitalism – namely, the Big Tech Industry. The Big Tech industry today is both driving, and being driven by, these inter-imperial tensions. The semiconductor is to the Big Tech Industry what fossil fuel is to automobile industry. It is a fundamental necessity that powers almost all technological products and services that are extensively essential in our social and economic lives. If inter-imperial tensions lead to a disruption in the supply chain, or result in potential microchip shortages, that can disrupt many other forms of production on a global scale.

Joe Biden’s blanket of tariffs must be understood also in this light, as part of a longer-term attempt to recover the hegemonic role of the US in the global balance of power, by trying to move towards technological self-sufficiency as whole, but also ‘semiconductor self-sufficiency’ in particular. But such a ‘self-sufficiency’ is an extremely tedious and expensive affair, and not one that is feasible because of the depth of economic inter-dependence today. The US is far behind in production capacity, and it has been predicted that it would need to invest more than one trillion dollars within the next 10 years if it is to achieve manufacturing self-sufficiency with regards to semiconductors. The call to ‘self-sufficiency’ is also made against the interests of the Big Tech industry. A total national ‘self-sufficiency’ could result in up to a 65% increase in semiconductor prices, factoring in land, labour, electricity, and other capital costs, which would massively increase the overall cost of production in the Big Tech sector. Elon Musk, for example, appears to be aware of this

and he has vehemently opposed the new tariffs imposed by Biden on Chinese imports.

It must be in light of these ongoing economic trends, that we understand the emergence of ‘Artificial Intelligence’ in our socioeconomic and cultural worlds.

## The rise of ‘Artificial Intelligence’ and the Semiconductor Industry

The massive technical advancements in ‘Artificial Intelligence’ that have occurred in the last few years, were precisely made possible and driven by hardware advancements in semiconductor design and manufacturing. Conversely, the growing demand for semiconductors is also directly connected to the massive increase in computing needs that have been triggered by the commercialisation of ‘Artificial Intelligence’.

Among other components, semiconductors are core necessities to fulfill the extensive computing needs of data processing, pattern recognition, and machine learning which are the core functions of commercial AI programs, such as the popular ChatGPT. Even if there is a stagnation in consumption of electronic devices like cellphones and personal computers, as was the case in 2023, the mass commercialisation of ‘Artificial Intelligence’ have already opened a new avenue within which semiconductors are now crucial necessities, adding further fuel to the fire of inter-imperial tensions.

It is believed that the co-development of semiconductor hardware and AI software are going to have profound impacts on all aspects of economic life, from health and banking to transportation and manufacturing. We are told by tech industry CEOs and their podcast hosting minions that we must prepare to witness human progress at a previously unimagined scale. But when we compare these predictions with our own life experiences, we quickly realize that these are only delusions peddled by snake oil salesmen, that serve only to distract us from the concrete and already manifest morbid transformations in other areas: namely the war economy, the degradation of our planet, and the moral deprivation of our social world.

## We deserve better!

It was comedian Bill Hicks who asked why the ruling classes couldn’t use the same technology that they use to drop bombs to instead geolocate a hungry person and shoot them a banana. The answer, whether he knew it or not, lies in the fact that under capitalism productive forces are only ever harnessed to extract value, exploit human beings, degrade human attention, hollow out meaning from our social lives, and fortify military power. The insatiable hunger of capitalism means that Artificial Intelligence, like all technologies before it, is reduced to being the cutlery at the hands of imperial powers to slice up and devour all life on the planet.

We deserve something different. We deserve a system that can instead harness those productive forces under free relations of production, centering human joy, freedom, the beauties inherent to our creative powers, and quality of natural life on the planet. The revolution we need is not a talking refrigerator or smiling bomb.

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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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# Civil War provides no answers for the current political crisis

By wrongly identifying, or rather not identifying, the source of fascism Garland falls back on clichés about ‘extremism’ on both sides being the problem.

by: **Faline Bobier**

There have been a lot of superlatives for British director Alex Garland’s new movie *Civil War*. As the title tells us this is about a new civil war in the US, at some unspecified time in the future, but not too far from our dystopian present. The New York Times reviewer described it this way: [Garland] “presents an outwardly and largely post-ideological landscape in which debates over policies, politics and American exceptionalism have been rendered moot by war.”

But the thing I kept wondering while watching the film was, if you’re going to make a movie about the current moment in US politics and the so-called ‘polarization’ that Garland has talked about in interviews about his new film how can you possibly make sense of it without understanding where the polarization comes from?

It’s not surprising that writers at The New York Times would laud the very non-specificity of Garland’s movie since this is exactly the way main-stream journalism is handling events that they dare not really explore – such as the current genocide in Gaza, being spearheaded by Netanyahu’s Zionist killing machine, aided and abetted by the US ruling class.

*Civil War* opens with the US president prepping for a press conference and rehearsing a vapid speech about how victory is near. This is clearly not the case when we see the opening scenes of violence in the streets, fires raging everywhere, overturned autos on highways and helicopters and fighter jets overhead.

The nature of the battlelines is kept vague. We hear about the Western Alliance (an alliance between Texas and California) which seems to be waging war on the US government and military. It is mentioned at one point that the US president is in his third term, insinuating a Donald Trump-like refusal to give up power.

There are scenes of what look to be almost refugee camps for people who have been displaced because of the conflict, run by something called Global Relief World.

The story is told through the eyes of two seasoned war journalists, trying to get from NYC to Washington to get an interview with the President. Amid the crumbling ruins one thing that remains familiar is the movie’s old-fashioned faith in journalism. Kirsten Dunst, who’s very good in her role, plays Lee, a war photographer who works for Reuters alongside her friend, a reporter, Joel (Wagner Moura).

Along the way they pick up a young aspiring photojournalist, Jessie (Cailee Spaeny) who is in awe of Lee, the seasoned and well-traveled war photographer who has been in many war-torn countries and now finds herself in the same situation in the US.

They are joined by older veteran reporter, Sammy (Stephen McKinley Henderson), who is frail and not as able to keep up with the action. They all pile into a van and head to Washington, although the plan is to leave Sammy and Jessie behind before they reach their destination.

Garland technically pulls off the picture of a country at war with itself where violence seems ready to erupt at any moment – when the group stops at a gas station and finds two ‘hostages’ taken by the gas station owners or when

they run into (literally) a group of militia who demand what kind of Americans they are – targeting two other journalists who are with them and not American-born. Actor Jesse Plemons is chilling as the hard-core racist in this scene.

However, the big problem with *Civil War* is that it gives us absolutely no understanding of how such a situation could happen. When Garland was asked by an interviewer why he had invented the Western Alliance (two states that might seem to be on opposite poles of the political spectrum) he replied that it’s meant to indicate that our political differences are less important than the problem of a fascist

to remain silent in the face of their government’s hypocrisy and murderous support for Netanyahu.

*Civil War* moves us not one iota ahead in terms of understanding how to fight fascism. That can only be done by creating real democratic spaces that challenge the priorities of the existing system, as thousands and thousands of students are doing now at college and university campuses across the US.

Similarly, the notion that main-stream journalism, bought and paid for by the powers that be, will tell us the truth about what’s happening in our world is an illusion. This doesn’t mean

danger of being destroyed from below.

The political centre or so-called liberal democracy is showing its true colours in the current situation of student encampments across the US. At both UCLA and University of Chicago campuses in recent days police stood by while student encampments were physically attacked by anti-Palestinian thugs.

At the University of Chicago, a group of Zionists and Proud Boys (fascists) charged at the student encampment while Chicago police and University of Chicago police stood by for approximately 40 minutes.

It’s no mistake that the agents of the state



president.

He goes on: “I would always have said I would be left wing but now mainly what I am now is a centrist – the function of the government is to not be fascist. The aspiration of centrist democracy is to not be fascist. Some people on the far right and some people on the far left will dislike the portrayal of extremism but you two are screwing it up for everyone else.”

In that sense, *Civil War* can make no sense of the polarization that is happening inside many countries currently because it sees the problem as one of ‘extremism’, of not hewing to the political centre.

The political centre or so-called liberal democracy is what’s gotten us to the current state of affairs in the first place.

The reason young people and others are disaffected with current US President Joe Biden is not because they are too ‘extreme’ or don’t recognize the threat posed by Donald Trump. It’s because they see Biden as supporting militarily and financially the current Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza and they refuse

that independent journalists and others, who often risk their lives to try and get the real news out above the screaming headlines of the invested media, should not be lauded for their efforts.

But the view of journalism in *Civil War*, romanticized and portrayed as being ‘neutral’ and standing above the fray of the raging masses on either side, is a fantasy and a lie.

This was pointed out in reality by demonstrators calling for real and accurate reporting on the massacre of Palestinians when they occupied the offices of the New York Times in March of this year: “Our goal is to unmask the Times and expose the paper for what it is: a tool of empire encased in a liberal veneer.”

As Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote about the origins of fascism in the lead-up to Hitler taking power in Germany: fascism is a form that capitalism can take in extreme crisis. Hitler was never elected to power by a majority of ordinary German voters but was invited by the government of the capitalists to take control when they felt their system was in

choose the side of the fascists. Apart from the racism that is encouraged and integral in the police (the rot starts at the top), the students defending Palestine and Gaza are a threat to the so-called political centre that Garland touts in his interview as the last defenders against fascism.

Biden, although he may do some public hand-wringing about the ‘violence’ in Gaza, will defend Israel to the death because of the role it has always played as the US watchdog in the Middle East, defending US oil interests.

By wrongly identifying, or rather not identifying, the source of fascism Garland falls back on clichés about ‘extremism’ on both sides being the problem.

The real problem is those who will not stand with courageous students putting their academic careers and their safety on the line to protest the horrific genocide being carried out by Israel, with the financial and military support of western governments.

We need to ask the filmmaker ‘Which side are you on?’ because the centre will not hold.



## Ford's beer bamboozle

by: Pam Johnson

**O**ntario Premier Ford is fast-tracking his “alcohol everywhere” plan that will make beer, wine and cider available for sale at convenience, grocery, and big box stores starting in August.

The fast track ends the deal that was negotiated by the previous Liberal government with the Beer Store private owners, including the giant corporate brewers like Molson and Labatt. Although this would appear to break up the monopoly of these corporate breweries, it is actually a triple boondoggle for the brewers and the giant grocery chains, like Loblaws—as the opposition parties are loudly pointing out.

The giant beer companies will not only have a new revenue stream from expanded beer sales, but they will get \$225 million to compensate them for the early end of their monopoly. Grocers will get a 10% percent discount on bulk purchases from the public Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO), currently the sole distributor of wine and spirits—undercutting LCBO prices which currently brings millions



into Ontario coffers.

That's hundreds of millions in the pockets of big brewers and grocery store chains that should go to fixing healthcare, education and other public services.

The biggest impact of this change will be on the jobs of unionized workers in both The Beer Store, organized in United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW), and the LCBO, organized in the Ontario Public Services

Employee Union (OPSEU).

The Beer Store owners must maintain the current stores only until the end of 2025. The 7,000 members of the UFCW local have begun a “Save the Beer Store” campaign stating, “These changes could lead to major job losses and higher beer prices for consumers, in addition to reduced product selection.”

LCBO workers are currently in bargaining with the Ford government. They are fighting for better working conditions but, they are also campaigning against Ford's stealth privatization of the LCBO.

OPSEU president JP Hornick said, “Earlier this spring Ford promised he'd never sell the

LCBO, yet he's clearly trying to sell us all down the river with this move. Expanding private alcohol sales is just the latest scheme to transfer public funds into the pockets of CEOs and Ford's friends while further gutting our public services.”

Once again Ford is using beer to distract from his destruction of public services and jobs, while lining the pockets of his corporate friends.

## Stop gas plant expansion

by: Brian Champ

**O**n May 15th a packed house attended a public forum at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre in South Riverdale on “Portlands Gas Plant Expansion – Opposing Health Risks in our Community”.

Organized by a grassroots group, Toronto East Residents for Renewable Energy (TERRE), it featured local MPP Peter Tabuns and city councilor Paula Fletcher, both long-time opponents of the Portlands Energy Centre (PEC) - a methane gas fired electricity generation plant they dubbed the “mistake by the Lake” in the early 2000s.

PEC's proponents argued that we shouldn't worry - it would only operate during periods of peak electricity demand - and under the McGuinty Liberal government the plant was built, despite the local opposition, and began producing electricity in 2009.

As predicted by the critics, however, once the plant existed there would be pressure to utilize the plant more and more. Last year it operated on average over 14 hours a day, and during the summer it operated close to 21 hours a day.

### Health impacts

This is not only a problem due to the expansion of carbon emissions driving global heating, but is an immediate and local public health problem.

The keynote speaker at the event was Dr Mili Roy, a practicing physician who is also a member of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) and a co-chair of the Ontario Climate Emergency Campaign (OCEC). Her presentation demonstrated the health risks from climate change and air pollutants as well as specific PEC health impacts was both informative and alarming.

Planetary heating contributes negative health impacts on populations throughout the globe, regardless of where the greenhouse gases were released. This is a global climate justice issue.

These health effects include heat related illness, asthma from wildfire smoke, flood related deaths and damage, food and water insecurity, increased severity of allergies, tick-borne dis-

ease and anxiety and PTSD following evacuation and displacement.

Climate change aggravates many human pathogenic diseases and is increasing antibiotic resistance. Depression, additions and suicide are all on the rise, particularly affecting youth.

Globally almost 7 million people die prematurely each year due to air pollution; in Canada, this amounts to over 15,000 people - almost 7,000 in Ontario. 91% of these deaths globally are in low and middle income countries, and disproportionately affects low-income and racialized communities in higher income countries.

Air pollution from burning fossil fuels in-

cludes particulate matter, ground-level ozone, nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>). These all contribute to lung disease, skin ageing, strokes and other brain disorders, heart disease, high blood pressure, insulin resistance, diabetes, blood clots and impacts on reproductive and pre-natal health. They also increase the risk of lung, leukemia, breast and other cancers. It has also been shown that viruses can hitch a ride on particulate matter, increasing infection, transmission and mortality risks.

Gas-burning plants like PEC produce NO<sub>2</sub> directly out of the stack and contribute to increases in ground level ozone. In moist envi-

ronments NO<sub>2</sub> can form nitric acid that directly damages lung tissue. They also contribute to autoimmune and inflammatory diseases and can alter immune cell functions leading to increased infection risks. There is no safe exposure level for NO<sub>2</sub>.

PEC is the GTA's single largest emitter of NO<sub>2</sub>, and the emissions have more than doubled over a decade, as have the greenhouse gas emissions from the plant.

In 2012 air quality models suggested NO<sub>2</sub> from PEC was a health risk only at over 30 stories, which the plant uses to justify their increased operations.

New modeling suggests that, depending on the wind direction and speed, humidity and temperature on a given day the local, ground level NO<sub>2</sub> levels poses a threat to community health. The exact threat level is not known, however, because there is no air quality monitoring.

But new housing developments in the portlands area will put tens of thousands of new residents directly in the path of these pollutants, even violating the 2012 guidelines.

As part of the Ford governments' gas-fired electricity expansion, Atura Power that operates PEC is investing in new turbines that will extend its life to 2034 and likely beyond. The local campaigners in TERRE have pushed back against this plan, instead demanding a just transition to low carbon electricity generation, conservation and grid load management and many jobs ensuring that buildings are more energy efficient - ready for electric heat pumps.

On May 25th, PEC participated in Doors Open Toronto, where visitors are invited to tour building sites across the city as interesting or historic buildings. TERRE showed up at the entrance to the plant and distributed information and questions for visitors to counter the greenwashing going on inside the gates. PEC maintains a pollinator garden at the site and activities during the tour included the earth rangers childrens group while contending that burning methane is climate friendly. Look for more events this summer by TERRE to oppose the extension and expansion of this fossil gas burning plant.

