

Socialist Worker

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STOP THE CONS!

- threats of war
- election fraud
- attacking Old Age Security
- internet spying
- threats to free speech
- toxic tar sands
- corporate bailouts
- mega-jails



THE ROBOCALL electoral fraud is just the tip of the iceberg of Conservative government scandals. As the economic and ecological crises deepen, the Cons are joining other governments in transferring billions to the 1%, their racist wars and the oil economy that fuels them.

Scrambling to contain the Arab Spring that has shaken US imperialism, Western governments are threatening to hijack the Syrian Revolution and undermine resistance movements in Iran through military intervention. The same governments that arm repressive regimes in Israel, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain are threatening to unleash the same “humanitarian

intervention” that has killed countless across Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

These wars are justified with Islamophobia, which is used to divide populations at home and make us accept billions of dollars being wasted on fighter jets and wars abroad. Meanwhile, governments at all levels are trying to impose austerity budgets, from Rob Ford in Toronto, to Dalton McGuinty and his Drummond Commission in Ontario, to Harper’s federal budget at the end of March.

We’re told that workers must accept job and wage cuts, students must accept tuition hikes, the elderly must accept pension cuts, and that indigenous groups and other environmental “radicals” should

stop protesting Tar Sands.

But people are resisting.

The growing support for Rio Tinto workers in Alma, Quebec shows the potential for the broad solidarity needed to push the bosses back.

Students across Canada united for a day of action on February 1, and now students in Quebec are organizing a growing mass strike against tuition fees. After Harper’s attack on Old Age Security, seniors and workers occupied Tory offices across the country. The Harper regime is also feeling pushback on their privacy bill, their increasingly desperate defence of the Tar Sands, and an explosive scandal around electoral fraud.

This opposition needs to con-

nect with the anti-war movement to stop looming war crimes, build solidarity for genuine liberation movements, and highlight that the money exists for jobs, pensions, health care, education and a green economy.

Solidarity

To get there, we need to occupy the picket lines and support all workers resisting austerity. The lessons of resisting Rob Ford’s austerity regime in Toronto is that mass campaigns can dent austerity budgets, but that governments use attacks on workers to push through their agenda of cutbacks and privatization; when that happens, solidarity is key in building workers’ confidence to fight back.

**Women,
resistance,
revolution**



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BC teachers stand up for education

by TARA EHRCKE AND JOHN BELL

AS WE go to press, BC teachers were considering strike action and high school students were planning walk outs in opposition to the government's attack on education standards and union rights.

On February 28, Education Minister George Abbott introduced a bill, that if it is passed will impose a cooling off period until September. It seems that legislating an end to bargaining is only one objective.

The bill allows the Education minister to appoint a mediator who is required to meet the net-zero mandate, and is also require to reach agreement on many of the governments concessions. In addition to imposing a two year wage freeze, it also stops teachers from bargaining class size and staffing levels. It also introduces stiff penalties for illegal strike action of up to \$475 per day for teachers, \$2,500 per day for union officers and a minimum of \$1.3 million per day from the union itself.

This is very scary indeed—perhaps a move à la Scott Walker, the Republican governor of Wisconsin who made similar attacks on US teachers.

This bill is appalling. It is an affront to the right to free collective bargaining, the rights of employees to job security and due process rights, and the rights of children to a quality education in reasonable classroom conditions.

BC teachers have been without a contract since June, and have been conducting limited job action since September, refusing to meet with administrators, supervise playground activities or prepare report cards. A recent poll found that a majority of BC residents support the teachers, and say that job action has not damaged classroom performance.

Mass opposition to Tory spying bill

by CHRIS BRUNO

ON FEBRUARY 14, Conservative public safety minister Vic Toews introduced Bill C-30 to Parliament—unofficially titled the “Protecting Children from Internet Predators Act”. The bill amends the Criminal Code granting authorities the ability to monitor any and all digital activities of any Canadian without a warrant.

Bill C-30 follows on the heels of Bill C-11, introduced in September 2011, which restricts Canadians’ access to information online by altering the nation’s copy-right laws. Bill C-30 would also require internet service providers to log online activity of all their users and turn it over if requested. The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association has suggested that the measures taken in this bill may violate the constitution and be considered as unreasonable search and seizure. It’s projected that it will cost \$80 million to enforce this bill.

Bill C-30 has garnered enormous opposition amongst a vast majority of Canadians. A poll by the CBC found that 90 per cent of Canadians “oppose the bill in every form”.



Funeral service in Hampstead, Ontario

Tragic deaths expose conditions for migrant workers

by EVAN JOHNSTON

THE TRAGIC deaths of 10 Peruvian farm workers in Hampstead, Ontario has put the spotlight on the working conditions of migrant farm workers all across Canada.

In the last decade, the size of the temporary foreign labour market has grown from 100,000 to more than 250,000, and in spite of how large this sector of the Canadian economy has grown, little attention has been paid to the precarious working conditions that these workers face.

Justicia for Migrant

Workers (J4MW), the group leading the call for an inquest into their deaths, has pointed out that working conditions for migrant farm workers generally consist of 12-to-15-hour shifts without overtime or holiday pay, a denial of breaks, unfair pay-cheque deductions, and the use of dangerous chemicals with no safety equipment, protection or training. Additionally, one should add to this list that the van the 13 Peruvian workers were traveling in, the 15-passenger van, is considered by many to be a “death trap.”

For nearly 20 years, the struggle for the rights

of migrant workers in Ontario has been an uphill battle against the corporate agriculture lobby. In 1994, the NDP government passed the Agricultural Labour Relations Act (ALRA), which gave trade union and bargaining rights to agricultural workers. However, when Mike Harris’ Progressive Conservatives were elected in 1995, they immediately repealed the ALRA and passed the Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act in its place—prompting the United Food and Commercial Workers of

Canada (UFCW) to take the government to court.

After numerous court cases and subsequent legislation, the Supreme Court of Canada sided in April 2011 with the Ontario government’s current ban on farm unions under the current Agricultural Employees Protection Act (AEPA), ruling that the provincial ban was constitutional. However, the right of agricultural workers to unionize cannot be divorced from the struggle against their exploitation on Ontario farms, and will be crucial to preventing the deaths migrant workers in the future.

Quebec economy cracks as job losses mount

by DEBORAH MURRAY

ECONOMIC ANALYSTS paint a dire picture as they describe recent job losses in Quebec: “Quebec’s recent job meltdown...disastrous employment performance ... employment plunge(d)...worst three-month job loss in three decades, unmatched since the exceptionally severe recession of 1981...the impact has been brutal.”

They have been useless at explaining the job losses as they fumble for words in shocked disbelief at the figures.

In the last half of 2011, 103,000 Quebec workers lost their jobs. From October to December alone, employers axed 70,000 jobs, causing Quebec’s unemployment rate to jump to 8.7 per cent in January from 7.3 per cent in September. Workers have lost jobs

across widely different sectors. Since last spring, jobs have been lost in retail, health care and social services, information and culture, business support services, finance, professional services, manufacturing and construction. The situation defies economic descriptors such as “an anomaly” and “a blip.”

Many laid off workers have had full-time jobs stretching over many

years. These workers can’t transfer to other work areas without significant training or accepting extremely low paying and often part-time work.

In and outside of Quebec, workers will need to join together to fight austerity budgets cutbacks, job losses and attacks on pensions and pay as the private and public sectors make a desperate grab for money. The fight for decent jobs is on.

Bad news for pipelines

by JOHN BELL

THE HEARINGS into the environmental, economic and social impact of the Northern Gateway pipeline have been pushed out of the national headlines by “Robocalls” and “Vicileaks”. But that doesn’t mean things are going Stephen Harper’s way.

Literally thousands of individuals, environmental

groups and First Nations have signed up to testify, almost all of them in opposition to the project.

Now the City Council of Prince Rupert, BC has unanimously voted to formally oppose the pipeline. Prince Rupert is the third BC municipality to turn thumbs down on the Northern Gateway, joining Terrace and the Skeena and Queen Charlotte Regional District.

Prince Rupert went further, calling on the government to ban all tanker traffic in the coastal waters.

As February ends, the hearings head to Haida Gwaii First Nation, where most depend on those waters for life and livelihood. Opposition there will be huge.

All this makes a mockery of charges from Harper and his Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver, that opposition is

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agreements.

The Drummond Report is a recipe for disaster—of falling wages, rising unemployment, reduced consumer confidence, and a diminished market for small and medium businesses that, above all else, require customers with disposable

income. The likely result of Drummond’s proposals is a double-dip recession and a worsening fiscal outlook.

Drummond’s every recommendation embodies a strategy of paying workers less.

Some economists have estimated that Drummond’s proposals will result in a quarter of a million jobs lost, pushing the unemployment

rate up to 11 per cent. Such a disaster would worsen the deficit, since it would increase pressure on the social safety net and decrease revenue.

But Drummond’s report does not represent the only solution we have to the economic crisis. He overstates the problem and leaves out taxing the rich as an option.

That’s why the April 21

demonstration at Queen’s Park is so important, as are mobilizations by the federal public service planned for March. Defenders of social justice should mobilize wherever possible for these demonstrations.

The 99% must be heard. Dalton McGuinty must reject the banker’s budget, and instead implement a budget that works for the 99 %.

Harper feels pushback on Old Age Security

by PHILIP MURTON

IN LATE January, in his keynote speech at the World Economic Forum, Stephen Harper spoke of his government’s plans to raise the age for Old Age Security (OAS) to 67 from the current 65. This attack on the basic old age income support program, which has been in place since 1952, would particularly affect low-income seniors. The reaction to Harper’s speech was swift and clear.

Various Tory offices were flooded with phone calls and emails. The opposition in Parliament spoke clearly, suggesting that such an important issue should have been raised during the recent federal election, not at Davos.

The NDP finance critic Peter Julian contrasted the cuts to OAS with the Harper government’s spending priorities:

“A single F-35 costs \$450 million. That would pay Old Age Security benefits for 70,000 Canadian seniors. Its prison plan costs \$19 billion. That would pay annual benefits for 2.9 million Canadian seniors. The Conservatives say costly prisons and fighter jets are their priority. We say seniors are more important.”

Then on February 9, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) organized sit-ins of 21 Tory offices in Ontario to make sure the Tory MPs got the message.

As OFL president Sid Ryan said, from the sit-in at Finance Minister Jim Flaherty’s office: “Prime Minister Harper’s hypocrisy is stunning. He chose to announce his plans to cut Old Age Security in front of the one percenters in Davos, Switzerland when he knows full well that if he were to retire in 2015, he would have a platinum-plated, taxpayer-funded pension of \$223,517 a year.”

On February 21, Human Resources Minister Diane Finley back-peddled, saying the changes would not affect current seniors, and that we will have to wait for details in the 2012 Budget, which is expected in March.

We need to prepare for a major battle with the Harper government around pensions. The labour movement needs to take a lead in this new campaign, as it will affect all Canadian workers—both unionized and non-unionized.

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) once had a good campaign around pensions. It is time to build a new campaign to stop Harper’s old age insecurity plan.

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e-mail: **reports@socialist.ca**
web: **www.socialist.ca**
letters: **letters@socialist.ca**
reviews: **reviews@socialist.ca**
listings: **listings@socialist.ca**
phone: **416.972.6391**

All correspondence to:
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Canada complicit in Saudi crackdown

by JAMES CLARK

Canadian arms companies exported \$4 billion worth of weaponry and ammunition to Saudi Arabia in the last year, including light armoured vehicles (LAVs) that human rights activists believe were used in the Saudi crackdown on Bahrain's democracy movement.

Despite Saudi Arabia's well-documented history of human rights abuses, the Canadian government licensed the sale of billions of dollars of weaponry to the Saudi government, over 100 times the amount that had been approved for sale in 2010. Saudi Arabia was the single largest purchaser of merchandise from Canadian arms exporters, including over 700 LAV-3s from General Dynamics Land Systems

based in London, Ontario.

Since the start of the Arab Spring at the end of 2010, Saudi Arabia has played an aggressive role in undermining the democracy movements that have spread across the region, including burgeoning protests within its own borders.

It also sent tanks and troops to occupy the tiny island state of Bahrain, backing its government's attack of peaceful protesters. Bahrain continues to repress all signs of dissent in the country, abducting and torturing protesters, some of whom have disappeared completely. Its actions have been condemned by human rights organizations around the world.

Fifth Fleet

Meanwhile, the US has ignored

Bahrain's repression of its own people, all the while claiming to support freedom and democracy in the Middle East. Bahrain is home to the US Fifth Fleet, which patrols the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf—all key shipping lanes through which oil flows to the US and its allies.

Saudi Arabia is a key ally of the US and Canada in the region. The Canadian government joined only the Saudis and Israel in backing former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak before his overthrow on February 11, 2011, echoing their claim that "stability" is more important than democracy. Since Mubarak's demise, Saudi Arabia has funneled money and arms to extremist groups across the region, including Salafists in Egypt who are

hostile to the aims of the Egyptian Revolution. The Saudis are also attempting to hijack the revolution in Syria, fearful of a movement that threatens to inspire revolts throughout the Arab world.

Bahrain's government recently escalated its attacks as activists gathered to mark the anniversary of the uprising on February 14. Opposition groups say over 60 people were arrested after trying to gather at the site of last year's protests.

Over 100 were injured after riot police fired birdshot and teargas at protesters. In addition, injured protesters who seek medical treatment face the risk of being detained and tortured. Dozens still face trial by military tribunal, despite claims by the government that their cases have been transferred to civilian courts.

Libya: one year after the revolution

by KEVIN BRICE

ON FEBRUARY 17 Libyans celebrated the one-year anniversary of the revolution that removed Muammar Gaddafi from power after 42 years. On the surface these celebrations seem justified, but under the surface discontent is brewing as many of the aspirations of the revolution have still not been met.

Like the rest of the Arab Spring, the Libyan Revolution emerged to challenge repression and neoliberalism, but NATO hijacked the

revolution to narrow its aims to the removal of Gaddafi (whom it had armed for years). Not only did "humanitarian intervention" result in up to 30,000 deaths, but it also promoted former Gaddafi figures to the leadership of the National Transition Council (NTC)—like Mahmoud Jibril (former head of the National Economic Development Board, which promoted privatization) and Mustafa Abdul-Jalil (former "justice" minister).

As a result, the "new" regime in

Libya is continuing the same old policies. The central bank governor, Saddeq Omar Elkaber, recently announced that "we are working on amending laws to stimulate the private sector," while the NTC has used torture to maintain control.

With the revolution reduced to a military adventure, rival militias who once fought beside each other are fighting amongst themselves, raising the threat of civil war. In the city of Bani Walid, this has taken the appearance of a loyalist uprising that has dislodged the city from the

NTC. Along the border with Mali, brigades once loyal to Gaddafi continue to launch raids against towns and villages.

There will be no peace in Libya until there is justice and the revolution has won its initial aims—which means real regime change and an end to Western military and corporate control.

In the meantime, we need to stop Harper from joining NATO in bringing this "model intervention" of militarism and neoliberalism to Syria and Iran.

'Friends of Syria' push for military intervention

by PAUL STEVENSON

THE US-sponsored "Friends of Syria" meeting has failed to come to a consensus about the nature of Western intervention in the country. The meeting—which is reminiscent of the "coalition of the willing group that launched the attack on Iraq"—met in Tunis to advance the cause of NATO imperial

ambitions in the country.

For all who support the revolutionary aims of the Syrian people, this meeting is an ominous warning of what is to come. The Western powers have over the decades engaged in a series of "humanitarian missions" that, publicly, are designed to stop the bloodshed but in reality, usually cause more death and destruction. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and recently Libya, US-sponsored attacks

have left these nations devastated and in the midst of increasing sectarian violence.

Any armed attack on Syria or armed support by Western or Gulf states will only cause the violence to increase.

The main call for armed support has come from Saudi Arabia, which is no friend of the Arab people. They have spent the last year crushing the democratic aspirations of the people

of Bahrain and are notoriously hostile to dissent in their own country. Once again, the hypocrisy of dictatorships that now profess their love for human rights is staggering.

Real solidarity with the Syrian people requires us to stop Western governments from setting the agenda for the Syrian evolution through military means. The "Friends of Syria" are in it for their own interests and must be exposed.

Khader Adnan, from Palestine, awakened the world

by YUSUR AL-BAHRANI

ON FEBRUARY 21, Khader Adnan, a 33-year-old Palestinian political prisoner, ended his 66-day hunger strike—after winning his eventual release and shining a light on Israel's illegal practice of administrative detention. The Israeli authorities announced that he would be released in two months, following a detention where he has been extremely ill-treated and humiliated.

Adnan was violently arrested while participating in a peaceful protest at the West Bank village of Arraba on December 17 and was placed under administrative detention without charges. He has been shackled to his bed by chains on both legs and one arm at Ziv hospital in the northern Israeli town of Safed. After 60 days of hunger strike, Israeli Physicians for Human Rights warned that Adnan was "in immediate danger of death." Medics say that he lost over 40 per cent of

his body weight during his hunger strike.

Administrative detention is a procedure under which detainees are held without charge or trial for periods of up to six months, which can be renewed repeatedly.

Under administrative detention, a detainee is usually denied rights to fair trial.

Adnan's protest is the longest hunger strike by a Palestinian prisoner. He was successful in spreading awareness about administra-

tive detention procedures practiced by the Israeli authorities against Palestinian activists who are being detained with no charges.

According to Amnesty International, Adnan is one of 309 Palestinians currently held in administrative detention in Israeli prisons, including one man held for over five years and 24 Palestinian Legislative Council members. Hundreds of Palestinian prisoners protested by going on hunger strike in solidarity with Adnan.

US welcomes

Yemen's dictator

by JESSE MCLAREN

WHILE THE US justifies its escalating threats towards Syria and Iran on the basis of human rights and democracy, its royal treatment of Yemen's dictator and support for the dictatorship reveal its true intentions.

On February 5, Yemeni-Americans protested the arrival of Ali Abdullah Saleh to New York. Protesting outside the five-star Ritz-Carlton hotel, the Yemeni American Coalition for Change said: "We are outraged and disgusted with our government's decision to grant the dictator temporary haven and diplomatic immunity."

For 33 years, Saleh ruled Yemen with an iron fist, backed by the West. His regime maintained deep levels of inequality, where child malnutrition and the percentage of people living on less than \$2 a day reached 40 per cent. Then came the economic crisis, which raised unemployment to 35 per cent.

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt inspired the people of Yemen to fight back. As part of the Arab Spring, they have organized mass demonstrations, protest, and street battles for more than a year, which drove Saleh out of the country. In June an assassination attempt seriously injured him, and he was flown to Saudi Arabia for medical care, and then to the US.

Permanent revolution

The Gulf Cooperation Council—a group of Western-backed dictatorships, including Saudi Arabia and Bahrain—proposed a transition plan for Saleh to leave with minimal disruption to him or his regime. The United Nations Security Council—including countries that armed Saleh and the other Arab dictatorships—endorsed the proposal, which guarantees immunity for Saleh and his family, calls for an end to protests, and requires opposition groups form a coalition with Saleh's ruling party.

As a result, Saleh's vice-president, Abd al-Rab Mansour al-Hadi, was the only candidate in the recent election, and the repressive Republican Guard are still controlled by Saleh's family. As in Libya, some opposition figures, like General Ali Moshen al-Ahmar, were in the Saleh regime until just a few months ago and are eager to support a plan that maintains their power.

Despite the ouster of Ben Ali, Mubarak, Gaddafi and Saleh, the issues at the heart of the Arab Spring remain—repression, unemployment, and inequality. The same Western powers who armed those tyrants are continuing to support their regimes—from selling weapons to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt, providing luxury care to Saleh, supporting former Gaddafi elements in Libya, arming Saudi Arabia, and supporting its military initiatives in Syria and Bahrain.

Western imperialism will never bring democracy or human rights to Syria, Iran or elsewhere. Instead we need to support genuine liberation movements across the region, and stop our own governments from interfering.

Women’s oppression: origin stories

Karl Marx died in 1883, with much of his writing unfinished and unpublished. His life-long collaborator, Frederick Engels, turned his attention to editing and completing Marx’s unfinished works. One of the first of these was *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

The subtitle of the book tells the story: “In Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan.” Morgan published a major study of the life and social organization of the Iroquois of northern New York State in 1877, titled *Ancient Society*.

Considered a founder of modern anthropology, Morgan provided a detailed account of an indigenous population where women were not subjugated by patriarchal oppression.

The study sharply challenged the assumptions of Victorian morality that were current in the lifetime of Marx and Engels. But Morgan’s work also claimed that the origins of all contemporary ‘civilization’ had emerged from similar patterns. Changes from one form of social organization to another were traceable to an evolutionary pattern of social and economic transformation. These changes developed according to four characteristics, which Morgan saw as universal to all human societies: inventions and discoveries, government, family, and property.

Ancient society

The publication of *Ancient Society* attracted the attention of Karl Marx. According to a detailed account by Lise Vogel in *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, Engels wrote to German socialist leader Karl Kautsky in February 1884, describing Marx’s enthusiasm for Morgan’s book. *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* was published in the same year, based on Marx’s detailed notebooks.

It has since become a classic in the Marxist tradition, and has also attracted much attention among feminist anthropologists. Many have seen more contemporary findings confirm Engels’ main arguments, even though the work had obvious limitations.

Origin was written prior to first-wave feminism, when women were widely perceived to be below the status of men in every sense. But in this book, Engels made a strong case for women’s emancipation, thoroughly grounded in the historical materialist method he advanced with Marx. As Sharon Smith summarizes (*International Socialist Review*, Fall 1997):

“Morgan’s research ... helped Engels to clarify precisely how women’s oppression arose hand in hand with the rise of class society. Morgan’s careful study of the Iroquois showed two things: 1) that Iroquois women and men had a rigid division of labor between the sexes; but 2) that women were the equals of men, with complete autonomy over their own responsibilities and decision-making power within society as a whole. Women elders participated in the deliberations of the decision-making council.”

Challenge

But with all its strengths, reading Engels’ *Origin* in the 21st century does not make for light entertainment. It is, arguably, not Engels’ best work, in his own words a “meagre substitute for what my departed friend no longer had the time to do.”

The language of *Origin* is a challenge. It reflects dominant European thought, also present in Morgan’s study, about the ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ lives of indigenous peoples. Though Engels does not offer a critique, fortunately neither does he mimic Morgan’s sometimes reactionary language, like seeing the “Aryan family” as “the central stream of human progress.”

Morgan was an American of elite training and he expressed undoubtedly racist views. But unlike his contemporaries, he did not see ‘race’ as a scientific category. Instead Morgan focused on the significance of material conditions—property forms and social organization—as formative in human history. It was this approach that Marx and Engels found to be consistent with their own method of social analysis and consequent call for revolutionary change.

Social theory

Origin stories, as author Joanne Wright explains in her book bearing this title, serve as a central factor in social theory. One of Engels’ aims was to challenge the common sense view of the time that women had always been, and presumably always would be, subordinate to men.

The experiences of the Iroquois families of northern New York became of central importance, and have become part of the canon of the socialist tradition. But this is not the only, or main, strand of critical thought that has highlighted such experiences. Critical race feminism in Canada has also traced its origins to the voices of indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous feminists.

In *States of Race*, a collection marking these contributions by Sherene Razack, Malinda Smith and Sunera Thobani, the authors pose a radical challenge to capitalism through a focus on the experiences of racialized, immigrant and indigenous women. And as Verna St. Denis summarizes in her contribution to *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, edited by Joyce Green: “[A]boriginal women claim that Aboriginal cultures do not have a history of unequal gender relations; in fact...Aboriginal women occupied positions of authority, autonomy and high status in their communities.”

Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1884, was radical for its time. Now, in 2012, capitalism and imperialism have extended their reach. The indigenous peoples who helped Marx and Engels to understand the power structures of their day have continued to challenge these oppressive systems. And they also continue to help activists explain the sexist, racist, exploitative structures that threaten to hold all of us down.

INTERNATIONAL



Somali Prime Minister Abdiweli Mohamed Ali

London Conference: The ‘new scramble’ for Somalia

by FARID OMAR

THE MUCH-HYPED London Conference on Somalia that took place in the British capital on February 23 has set a new militarization agenda including “peacekeeping” operations. The day before the conference, the UN Security Council approved additional troops for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), expanding the current troop level from 12,000 to nearly 18,000.

Convened by British Prime Minister David Cameron, the conference was attended by more than 40 nations and multilateral organizations with the objective of “tackling” Somalia’s security crisis, “terrorism,” piracy and ongoing humanitarian disaster. By seeking a military solution in Somalia, Western powers are bent on escalating the conflict to forcefully secure Somalia’s vital resources.

A couple days after the conference, the *Guardian* reported that Britain was leading the dash for Somalia’s vast untapped oil reserves, natural gas and uranium deposits, adding that Somalia’s offshore oil reserves in the Indian ocean are “comparable to that of Kuwait,

which has 100 billion barrels of proven reserves,” easily “eclipsing” that of Nigeria, which could make the Horn of Africa nation the seventh largest oil producer in the world.

Already, British oil firms like BP are lining up to exploit oil in the north-eastern, semi-autonomous region of Puntland, with extraction scheduled to begin as early as next month.

Oil

“British involvement in the future Somali oil industry would be a boon for the UK economy and comes at a time when the world is increasingly concerned about the actions of Iran, the second-biggest oil producer in OPEC” read the *Guardian*. Last month, Canadian energy firm Africa Oil became the first new Western corporation to drill for oil in Somalia in the last 21 years. US and Chinese oil companies are also seeking to take control of Somalia’s oil.

Western powers are moving quickly to impose the Libyan scenario in Somalia, pushing for expanded military intervention to lay the groundwork for seizing Somalia’s oil and other resources. Already, US-led proxy forces from Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Burundi and Djibouti, backed by air strikes and drone

attacks, are conducting multi-pronged attacks on Al-Shabab’s Islamist forces throughout south-central Somalia.

By turning its attention to Somalia, the West is also seeking to counter the rise of Turkey, which has taken a prominent role in tackling humanitarian crises in places like Pakistan, Gaza and now Somalia—where it has initiated massive reconstruction projects. Turkey’s rising influence in the Muslim world is worrisome to Western powers like Britain that are increasingly jittery of even the faintest hint of a possible re-emergence of a “new” Ottoman Empire.

During the run-up to the London Conference, members of the Somali civil society made it clear that what Somalia badly needs is a political settlement, not another bloody military intervention.

Notwithstanding alleged links to Al-Qaeda, progressive analysts state that the weak and ineffectual Western-backed Transitional Government should open the door for direct negotiations with Al-Shabab. Peaceful negotiations, coupled with an end to Western meddling in Somalia, are the only viable solutions to ending Somalia’s political upheavals.

Greek bailout leaves workers in misery

by PAUL KELLOGG

WORKERS RECEIVING minimum wage in Greece are about to receive a 20 per cent pay cut. Pensioners in Greece are about to see their monthly cheques sharply reduced. Public sector workers in Greece are bracing for 15,000 layoffs.

These are just some of the consequences of the “bailout” of the Greek economy, organized by the so-called troika—the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In return for drastic cuts in services and jobs, the Greek government will receive €130 billion (\$175 billion) to prevent a default on looming payments required to service its debt load of some €368 billion.

But this bailout will not end the misery. Last year, 150,000 jobs were lost in small and medium businesses alone. This year, the figure is expected to be 240,000. The economy

in Greece has contracted every year since 2008. This year the decline was supposed to slow to just three per cent. But a draft of the bailout agreement indicated that the rate of decline this year will be at least four percent and possibly worse.

Damaging

The truth is, the bailout as designed is an extraordinarily clumsy and very damaging method by which to address the problems of the Greek economy. The European Union (EU), of which Greece is a member, has taken some of the steps towards creating a continent-wide economy.

A key part of that process has been the creation, within the EU, of the Eurozone—a currency union whereby countries as different as Greece and Germany share the same currency, the Euro.

Because it has the same currency as Germany, the less productive Greek economy is very vulnerable. It cannot

do what it did in the past—let its currency (formerly the drachma) devalue relative to the former German mark, and so keep its prices competitive with Greece. Locked into a currency union, the inevitable has happened—German manufactured goods pushing aside manufacturing based in Greece.

This was offset for a while by the fact that, in a currency union with richer countries, Greece could borrow at quite low rates of interest. But that process has caused debt to build up to 160 per cent of GDP. To buy the bonds that finance that debt, bond markets have demanded higher and higher interest rates, triggering the current turmoil in the Eurozone.

The bailout will calm this problem for a while—but the structural problems behind the mess are all intact. This is the mess of a Europe designed by capitalists and technocrats. Only a politics of solidarity and resistance can begin the process of building an alternative.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO STOP AUSTERITY?

by **RITCH WHYMAN**

THE RECENT settlements by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) in London over the closure of the Electro-Motive Diesel (EMD) plant and by Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 416 with the city of Toronto have raised questions about how we build a serious fight-back against austerity.

In both cases, the unions had built solidarity and there was broad community support, including mass demonstrations. In the case of CAW, support came from all corners, including business journalists who called for nationalization and retailers who pulled Caterpillar (CAT) products from their shelves. The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) moved quickly to call a mass demonstration in London against the threat of a plant closure. Several thousand mobilized, the majority from the London area, but also from as far away as Ottawa.

Many had seen these struggles—in particular, the struggle against EDM and CAT—as a potential catalyst to turn back the defeats suffered by previous big strikes and lockouts, such as US Steel, Inco and Toronto city workers. There was widespread hope that the CAW members and leadership would take inspiration from the Occupy movement and take over their plant.

Occupy?

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there was never any serious threat to occupy from the CAW leadership; instead, the focus was on gaining more favourable severance terms and accepting that nothing could be done to stop the closure. Hopes were also dashed by the settlement of CUPE 416 with the city of Toronto for a contract that saw job cuts and rollbacks. While not as deep as Rob Ford had hoped, the cuts were nevertheless a blow to the aspirations for a larger union-led fight against Ford.

This has led some to question the importance (and even the relevance) of unions in the fight against austerity, arguing instead that power lies in community groups and small circles of “radical” activists. Others have correctly decried the conservatism of the union leadership and demanded more militant action, making the crucial distinction between the labour bureaucracy and its rank-and-file base.

Even before the settlement at CAT, many activists had criticized the solidarity demonstration in London on January 21 for not going to the picket line and for not attempting to occupy the plant. It’s clear that there would have been broad popular support for an occupation of the CAT plant, much more so than a strike by 416, and that the CAW’s leadership, despite its occasional militant posturing, was not really interested in leading such a fight.

How do we fight back?

Some in the movement have argued that the role of the left is to “expose” the union leadership



Occupy Oakland protest at Oakland Ports

and attack it for refusing to fight against austerity measures in a serious way. Others argue that we need to find ways to “take back” the unions by electing more left-wing leaders. Both of these strategies, however, fall short of what is necessary to build a stronger, more militant fight against the employers’ immediate attacks and the broader austerity agenda.

Both of these strategies locate the potential for a stronger union movement at the top of the unions, and not at its rank-and-file base, among the wider membership. The first strategy is based on shouting at union leaders, simply demanding that they do more—without recognizing the inherently conservatizing role of the union leadership, or the near impossibility of imposing demands on the union from outside the union membership. It assumes that, by denouncing the leadership of unions for not being more radical, activists will make the unions more radical.

This doesn’t mean that activists inside and outside the union shouldn’t make demands on the leadership. Of course, they should! But they need a strategy that creates real pressure from below on union leaders to make them follow through. More crucially, they need a strategy that doesn’t rely solely on the leadership.

Unions under capitalism

Another mistake in orienting almost exclusively to union leaders is the assumption that they can (and should) play the role of a revolutionary organization. The nature and structure of unions under capitalism shows this is not possible. Unions exist to unite all employees of a single work site or workplace, regardless of their individual politics. In addition, union leaders see their role as striking a balance between the demands of

their members and those of the employers. In essence, they see their role as getting the best possible deal within the constraints of capitalism, not as overthrowing it. Trade unions exist to mitigate exploitation, not end it altogether.

The second strategy—simply electing more left-wing leaders—also locates the problem at the top of the unions, assuming that better leaders will automatically lead to a more militant fight-back. Unfortunately, the history of the workers’ movement is filled with left leaders who, once elected, behave as badly as, if not worse than, those seen on the right. The experience of Buzz Hargrove as CAW president is one such example.

Again, this doesn’t mean that militants shouldn’t take union elections seriously, or that they shouldn’t fight to elect and defend left-wing leaders. The recent rank-and-file mobilization at the OFL convention to support the Unity slate led by Sid Ryan, in response to right-wing OFL leaders who were trying to divide and demobilize the labour movement, is a case in point. This was an important victory, but on its own, it’s not enough. Even the best left-wing union leaders are no substitute for a genuinely engaged and mobilized rank-and-file base. In fact, the former can actually do very little without the support and strength of the latter.

Rank-and-file base

This is the key to building a stronger fight-back in labour: winning rank-and-file members of the union to making change themselves. Without pressure from an organized and active rank-and-file base, union leaders (whether left or right) almost always succumb to the pressure of the employers. But building this base takes patient and regular work. It means cultivating relationships and trust

between militants and their co-workers, engaging them on all the issues the union faces, and involving them in all the decisions about how to fight back. This is not the same as passing “radical” resolutions or regularly denouncing the leadership. Building rank-and-file resistance means building the confidence of ordinary workers to fight back on their own behalf, and not simply to support others to do it for them, whether fellow union militants or “radicals” in the movements.

Greece

In Greece today, the parties of the far left are now polling higher than the Tory and Social Democratic parties combined. There is nothing automatic about this development. Instead, it is the result of organized revolutionaries agitating in their workplaces, not just when struggle is at a high level, but also during periods of relative quiet and on a regular day-to-day basis.

It might seem to some activists that the slow, patient work of building roots inside workplaces isn’t really radical. But it’s actually the most radical thing. The explosion of struggles in the 1930s and 40s in Canada was based on the work of hundreds of dedicated revolutionaries, working both with and against the union leaderships.

If there is one lesson from the revolutions of the last century, it is this: only the mass activity of the working class itself can make radical, sweeping change. The tactics we use will no doubt change and vary, depending on the struggle. But it isn’t the tactic that determines what’s radical. What’s really radical is winning larger and larger numbers of workers to the position that they themselves can collectively make change—the kind we need in the short term to resist austerity, and in the long term to get rid of capitalism.

‘only the mass activity of the working class itself can make radical, sweeping change’

IWD, Russia 1917: When women sparked a revolution



by CHANTAL SUNDARAM
THOUSANDS OF women textile workers celebrated International Women’s Day in Petrograd, Russia in 1917 by going on strike to demand bread. Little did they know they would spark a revolution.

Food was in short supply due to World War I. The women on strike were soon joined by other factory workers, then by women in their homes. It was a groundswell that caught even the Bolsheviks by surprise; in fact, the women ignored the advice of party leaders to “keep cool” to avoid repression.

But once the women took to the streets, the Bolsheviks went all out to build their struggle. Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky would later write, “Women’s Day passed successfully, with enthusiasm and without victims. But what it concealed in itself no one had guessed even by nightfall.”

Workers’ power
By October 1917 workers had taken power and began to enact legislation on women’s rights still unmatched by any government today: free abortion on demand, divorce on demand, paid maternity leave, free govern-

ment-funded childcare, the decriminalization of homosexuality and prostitution. The first few years of the revolutionary government saw the beginning of communal nurseries, dining rooms and socialized laundries.

It was a huge project for a fledgling state facing economic collapse, starvation and a devastating civil war, which threatened the very survival of the revolution. But the Bolsheviks did not see combating women’s oppression as something that could wait for more stable times. They believed that the success of the revolution depended on women playing an equal role.

All of this was reversed with the rise of Stalin in the late 1920s. The very unity between men and women workers upon which the revolution had relied became a threat to the counter-revolution led by Stalin and the new ruling class that emerged from the economic devastation of the Soviet Union. Women’s newly won rights were repealed, though not without a fight by men and women resisting Stalin’s rise.

Defeat was not inevitable, and the years of revolution did achieve an important victory. They showed what’s possible and that the fate of women is inextricably linked to the fate of the working class.

Occupy! Women and the sit-down strike



by FALINE BOBIER

THE 1937 Flint sit-down strike is one of the most famous episodes of US labour history, but the role of women is almost unknown. Without the help of the Women’s Emergency Brigade, the strike would not have succeeded. Its members kept the strike going and challenged dominant ideas about women. In the process, they changed themselves.

When the United Auto Workers (UAW) formed in 1935, it quickly realized that, in order to organize the auto industry, it would have to challenge its biggest employer, General Motors (GM). In December 1936, a sit-down strike began at GM’s plant in Flint, Michigan.

The bosses and the police tried to isolate the workers from the broader community, but women broke through police lines to join the strike, and appealed to other women to join them.

This produced the Women’s Emergency Brigade (WEB), composed of the wives and sisters of workers involved in the strike and led by a 23-year-old socialist, Genora Johnson. *With Babies and Banners*, a 1979 documentary produced and directed by women, tells the

story of their struggle.

The WEB not only ran the union kitchen that provided food for the strikers, but also provided picket defence. Women who, just a few weeks before the strike, had been confined to the home, began carrying clubs in their sleeves to fend off police and scabs, and to break the windows of the occupied plants to provide ventilation when police attacked the strikers with tear gas.

Women were crucial to the sit-down strike, which won in February 1937 when GM recognized the UAW. This triggered a wave of unionization across the auto industry, while the women continued challenging the sexism of the union leadership.

The relevance of the history of the Flint strike to today couldn’t be clearer. In a time of global economic crisis and austerity, the example of real solidarity breaking down the barriers between men and women, black and white, immigrant and non-immigrant workers shows the way forward.

This is the lesson that workers at Republic Doors & Windows, who have re-occupied their plant outside Chicago, are learning again. Women have been, and will continue to be, central to the new struggles of workers worldwide.

Women, resistance and revolution

On the occasion of International Women’s Day, **Socialist Worker** traces the radical roots of IWD, and highlights the role of women in resistance and revolution. From the Russian Revolution in 1917 to the Egyptian Revolution today, women continue to lead the fight against exploitation, oppression and war, and the struggle for a better world.



How women won abortion rights

THE FIGHT for abortion rights is one of the most important victories of the women’s movement in Canada and Quebec. Even though reproductive rights are still under attack, they represent the success of a decades-long struggle for a woman’s right to control her own body.

In 1969 the Canadian government liberalized the law restricting abortion, which had been completely outlawed until then. Even after the change, abortion remained illegal, except in circumstances that threatened the mother’s health. Access to abortion was still highly restricted and almost entirely controlled by male doctors.

In 1970, the Abortion Caravan travelled from Vancouver to Ottawa, mobilizing thousands of people in support of abortion rights before engaging in civil disobedience on Parliament Hill. In the early 1970s, Dr. Henry Morgentaler, a Holocaust survivor who practiced family medicine, began performing abortions on demand in his Montreal office, directly challenging the law. He was soon arrested and jailed, but not a single jury would convict him. Nevertheless, he ended up in prison because the courts kept reversing the verdict. By 1976, the newly elected Parti Québécois government announced that it would no longer prosecute Morgentaler because it thought the law was “not enforceable.”

Morgentaler’s victory came in the context of a growing mass movement in favour of a woman’s right to choose. Trade unionists in Quebec played an important role in the struggle, providing resources for clinics and making it impossible for the government to enforce the law. As pro-choice groups asked Morgentaler to open clinics in other provinces, the women’s

movement mobilized to defend him.

The movement in Canada placed the issue of abortion within a broader reproductive rights perspective. When it spoke of a woman’s right to choose, it referred to a whole range of women’s issues: the right to childcare and a decent job, an end to forced sterilizations, employment equity, birth control services in our own languages, and full access to free abortion—all of which were required if women were to have real choices.

As the movement grew, anti-choice fanatics tried to block access to the clinics. Some were even firebombed. Meanwhile, governments in the rest of Canada continued to harass Morgentaler, charging and re-charging him. In 1984, he won his fourth acquittal, but the government appealed. Morgentaler took his legal fight all the way to the Supreme Court, which tossed out the abortion law in 1988, ruling it unconstitutional.

In 1989, the abortion law was further invalidated in the case of Tremblay v. Daigle, which ruled that a fetus does not have personhood under Canadian or Quebec law, and that a woman could not be bound by an injunction from having an abortion.

The most important lesson of the pro-choice victory is the role that a mass movement of both women and men played in shaping public opinion and mobilizing broad support to secure reproductive rights. The movement even had an impact on the courts, which could not ignore the political climate in the streets. Those lessons remain relevant today as Harper steps up his attacks on a woman’s right to choose, and as younger generations of women respond to the call to defend their hard won rights.

Women at the heart of the struggle in Egypt

by MELISSA GRAHAM

THE LEADERSHIP of women is sometimes left out of Egypt’s revolutionary history, yet without women the events that unfolded would have been far less powerful.

The 2011 revolution would not have happened without the 2006 mass strike in Mahalla, started and led by women. Angered by the high cost of food, women began to strike, and chanted, “Where are the men? Here are the women,” until the men were shamed into joining them. After three days, the workers won. The strike eventually led to a nationwide call for work stoppage in April 2008—this sparked the April 6 Youth Movement, whose leader Asma Mahfouz made the famous viral video that called on people to take to Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011.

Tahrir Square

Women have been central to the repeated occupations of Tahrir Square, from battles with police to treating the injured in makeshift hospitals to providing security and communication. Women have also been central to strikes pushing the revolution forward—like Dr. Mona Mina, leader of Doctors Without Rights.

Women and men fighting alongside

each other began to challenge sexist ideas as well.

According to one activist, “discrimination against women and sexual harassment has been entrenched in mainstream Egyptian culture. It’s treated as a joke. Everywhere we go we face verbal harassment... But from the beginning of the revolution, and throughout the 18 days I spent in Tahrir Square, I did not face sexual harassment once.”

Women’s Day

As a result, the Egyptian Revolution has raised demands for women’s liberation. During last year’s International Women’s Day, a thousand women and men rallied in Tahrir, demanding government-funded childcare and an end to workplace discrimination.

As a consequence of the centrality of women to the revolution, the regime has lashed out against them—breaking up the IWD protest last year, imposing virginity tests on women protesters, and brutally attacking others last December. But in response, 10,000 women and men marched in Cairo against police brutality.

Perhaps there’s another reason for hiding this story: imagine what would happen to the ruling class if women everywhere followed the example of the women of Egypt.

International Women’s Day: A history of victories and struggles

by YUSUR AL BAHRANI

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S Day takes place on March 8 all over the world. It is a day to celebrate the victories won by working-class women, and to take a pledge to continue the fight for freedom, equality and liberation.

Over a hundred years ago, in the early days of the women’s movement, the Socialist Party of America declared the first national “Women’s Day” on February 28, 1909. The date was celebrated in the United States until 1913, when women across Europe recognized “International Women’s Day” on March 8.

March 8 marks the day in 1908 on which 15,000 women working in the needle trade in New York marched to demand the right to vote and better wages. Clara Zetkin, leader of the Women’s Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany, proposed in 1910 that women all over the world should celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8. Since then, it has been the day on which women remind the rest of the world about their legitimate demands.

Following Zetkin’s proposal, the first

International Women’s Day was established in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Denmark in 1911. In the same month, on March 25, more than 140 women workers died in the tragic “Triangle Fire” in New York. The tragedy drew attention to the exploitation and discrimination experienced by working-class women under capitalism. That same year, women also initiated the “Bread and Roses” campaign. Bread means better wages (in poor countries, it also means an end to poverty), while roses symbolize a better life. These symbols endure in women’s struggles all over the world, as both women and men sometimes carry bread and roses during IWD celebrations or during women’s struggles the rest of the year.

Throughout the last century, women have struggled for much more than just the right to vote or better wages. They have led struggles against war, occupation and all forms of oppression.

All of these struggles have been about creating a better world for everyone. Today, as we mark IWD in 2012, we celebrate the hard won victories of years past, and re-commit ourselves to the struggles that continue in the years ahead.

The fight continues for reproductive rights



by LAURA KAMINKER

WHILE WOMEN in North America enjoy greater equality and social participation than some of our sisters globally, our rights—particularly our reproductive rights—are under constant threat.

In the United States, anti-woman zealots have succeeded in passing hundreds of state laws that drastically restrict access to abortion, contraception and other necessary health care. Exorbitant fees, mandatory waiting periods, mandatory coercive “counselling,” and parental or spousal consent laws all combine to prevent women from exercising their reproductive rights. Naturally, working-class and low-income women are hardest hit by these laws.

Against this backdrop, it was inspiring to see massive numbers of women and men organize to defeat a “fetal personhood” referendum in Mississippi, and to force the resignation of a top official from the Susan G. Komen Foundation. Komen, a breast-cancer advocacy organization, cut funding to Planned Parenthood, a leading provider of women’s health care in the US. Despite reports to the contrary, that funding has not been restored.

In Canada, Stephen Harper’s Conservative government is also trying to turn back the clock on women’s rights. The Tories’ so-called “maternal health” initiative blocked foreign aid for family planning services. Only an international outcry forced the government to include funding for contraception, but pregnancy termination remains excluded.

Health care and women’s rights advocates agree that this could lead to thousands of preventable deaths in developing countries.

At home, Conservative MPs have tabled more than one private member’s bill aimed at treating fetuses as legal persons, which would criminalize abortion and abortion providers. This “anti-choice by stealth” strategy allows the Tories to appear to honour the Prime Minister’s pledge not to re-open the abortion debate—while doing exactly that. As on so many issues, the government’s stance is completely out of step with the Canadian public, who want abortion to remain safe and legal in Canada.

The US anti-choice movement, which has been gaining strength since the early 1980s, has demonized women’s health care providers, leading to anti-abortion terrorism that has claimed eight lives.

It is little wonder, then, that nearly 90 per cent of US counties have no abortion provider. In Canada, there are no abortion services in the province of Prince Edward Island. Women in the north and in rural areas must travel long distances to obtain abortions, an unnecessary obstacle in a country that is supposed to have universal access to health care.

While women’s rights are much broader than abortion rights, without both the right and the means to control our own bodies, women cannot be truly equal citizens. Reproductive rights are the cornerstone of women’s equality. Women and men must join in struggle to keep and expand those rights.

Leadership race:
nobody to endorse

IN THE midst of austerity and war, and the potential for united resistance across Canada and Quebec, there is no candidate that opens up space for movements outside Parliament.

The Orange Wave that swept the NDP into Official Opposition was based on anger at the Tories, disillusionment with the Liberals, and a desire across Canada and Quebec for an alternative. The post-election filibuster in support of striking postal workers showed the potential for the NDP inside Parliament to magnify movements outside Parliament, and the Occupy movement showed how much support exists for challenging the 1% and their world of endless war, austerity and environmental catastrophe.

But no NDP leadership candidate has spoken up for that alternative.

There is growing concern at the prospect of Thomas Mulcair, who has not shed his Liberal and Zionist politics. But Brian Topp and Nathan Cullen have both contemplated alliances with the Liberals—the twin party of corporate Canada who began attacks on social programs in the 1990s and started the war in Afghanistan and attacks on civil liberties that Harper has continued. Much of the left is supporting Peggy Nash, who has a personal history with the labour and social movements, but her campaign has not distinguished itself from the rest of the party.

Where is the “Occupy” candidate encouraging the 99% to challenge the 1 %? Where is the candidate speaking out against the looming war on Iran or Syria and giving voice to the anti-war movement? Where is the environmental justice candidate calling for an end to the Tar Sands and supporting indigenous sovereignty? Where is the candidate supporting self-determination in Quebec? Instead the NDP leadership candidates met in Montreal under the banner “Building a strong, united Canada.”

This not only squanders the electoral chances of the NDP, but also fails to build the movements that are the real hope for change.

This is a symptom of social democracy in general, and its actions during capitalist crisis in particular. Around the world—from the South African ANC, to the British Labour Party, PASOK in Greece and the Socialist Party in Spain—social democratic parties that try to fix a system in crisis end up accommodating it.

There’s no clear candidate to endorse, but we need to keep working with NDP activists to build movements outside Parliament, and put pressure on the party leadership to support them.

ROBOCALLS

Their democracy
and ours

ELECTION CORRUPTION reveals the bankruptcy of capitalist democracy, in the midst of capitalist bankruptcy.

Even though it only allows us to vote for one minute every four years for politicians subservient to the 1%, we’re told that Western democracy and free market capitalism are the highest achievements—so superior that NATO countries have to bomb and invade other countries to spread them.

But for decades of neoliberalism, voter turnout progressively declined as people consistently voted for “change” only to get the same cuts to social programs and living standards.

Then came the economic crisis, which laid bare the bankruptcy of the “free market”, requiring billions of dollars in public funds to be transferred to private banks and corporations to keep them afloat.

Then came the Arab spring, where millions of ordinary people toppled Western-backed tyrants—exposing the rhetoric of “humanitarian intervention”. The Arab spring is not about winning Western-style capitalist democracy but changing socio-economic conditions, which is why it inspired and spread to the West—where low voter turnout was not a sign of apathy but of anger at the inability of the system to provide real change.

The Arab Spring, the Occupy movement and the broader global revolt are fighting to deepen democracy into neighbourhoods, campuses and workplaces of the 99%. But capitalist democracy in a deepening economic crisis is restricting its limited democracy even further. In Greece where the crisis is most severe, the failure of the social democratic PASOK government to impose harsh enough austerity on the majority led to the imposition of a government of technocrats.

Meanwhile, the Harper government had to resort to electoral corruption to win a majority. After years of unstable minority government where the Liberals—the twin party of corporate Canada—had to prop up the Tories, Bay Street was eager for a strong majority mandate to ram through austerity measures.

That this required fraud is outraging millions, and connecting electoral corruption to the undemocratic economic and imperial system it maintains could broaden the revolt amongst the 99% and raise our horizons of a fundamentally different world.

OPINION



Stop Harper’s attacks on
Palestine Solidarity

David Meagher *looks at the attacks on Palestine House and the Harper government’s support for Israeli Apartheid*

PALESTINE HOUSE is the latest target of the Harper agenda, which is increasingly attacking Palestine solidarity and free speech in Canada in order to support Israeli apartheid and US imperialism. But Palestinian resistance, the Arab Spring and solidarity movements continue to raise the hope of a free Palestine.

According to its website, “Palestine House has been providing CIC funded settlement and language instruction services to Canadian immigrants of all walks of life for nearly two decades. The dedicated teachers, settlement workers, childcare workers, and administrative staff have served the community of newcomer Canadians with integrity, professionalism, and compassion.” Mr. Kenney’s decision mostly hurts those newcomer Canadians who will no longer be able to rely on Palestine House services to help them integrate successfully into Canadian society.”

This move on the part of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney, is “entirely political, and part of a broader pattern of government-led censorship and intimidation of anyone who is critical of Canada’s foreign policy, especially in relation to Israel and Palestine,” says the Defend Free Speech Campaign. “This is not the first time Kenney has targeted civil society groups in response to their political views.”

Tory attacks

In a recent visit to Israel, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird provoked the joke of Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz: having heard repeatedly by Baird how good a friend of Israel Canada is, Steinitz suggested, “I think Canada’s an even better friend of Israel than we are.”

Harper made Canada the first country in the world to cut humanitarian aid to Palestine after the democratic election

of Hamas in 2006; defended Israeli war crimes in Lebanon as a “measured response”; was silently complicit in the war on Gaza in 2009; and welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu during the deadly attack on the *Mavi Marmara*, part of the first flotilla to Gaza in 2010. While the rest of the world was supporting the Egyptian Revolution in 2011, Harper was the last one to support Mubarak—whose dictatorship has been central in supporting Israeli apartheid.

Increasingly the Tories have targeted Palestine solidarity groups in Canada—cutting funding from the Canadian Arab Federation, KAIROS, UNRWA and Rights & Democracy; banning British MP George Galloway and Dr. Moustafa Barghouthi from entering Canada; and now defunding Palestine House.

When a shipment of Canadian food and medical supplies to Gaza—on the international flotilla, the *Tahrir*—was seized by Israeli officials last summer, the Harper government snubbed its own citizens by failing to intervene in defence of Canadians on board.

While Harper has jumped on the bandwagon to pressure Iran by economic sanctions, the demands for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israeli apartheid are vilified as anti-Semitic. Liberal and Tory MPs created the so-called Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism to smear Palestine solidarity work, and both federal and provincial Tories have attacked Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) as anti-Semitic. But there is a manifest difference between anti-Semitism and opposition to Israeli border checks, limits on travel visas for Palestinians, detention of Palestinians without charges or trial, the building of settlements on the West Bank, the bombing of Gaza, the blockade of food and medical supplies, and so on.

Arab Spring

The Canadian government is not Israel’s best friend because it is pressured by Israel, or by Israeli or Jewish groups in Canada, but because it supports US imperialism—which relies on Israeli apartheid and Arab dictatorships to control the Arab world.

But Palestinian resistance helped inspire the Arab Spring, and now it is raising hopes for free Palestine. The Egyptian Revolution has targeted its regime’s support for Israel—including storming of the Israeli embassy last summer, and forcing a partial opening of the Rafah border. The ongoing revolution has the potential to remove a key pillar for Israeli apartheid, and the Western imperialism it supports.

The Arab Spring is also shaping politics in Palestine, where resistance has been weakened by factions, while the current Palestinian parliament contains twenty-one members currently detained in Israeli prisons. As the member of the Palestinian Parliament and Secretary General of the Palestinian National Initiative, Moustafa Barghouthi recently suggested in the *New York Times*, “what is needed is a Palestinian version of the Arab revolutions that have swept the region: a mass movement demanding freedom, dignity, a just peace, real democracy and the right to self-determination. We must take the initiative, practice self-reliance and pursue a form of nonviolent struggle that we can sustain without depending on others to make decisions for us or in our place.”

Palestine has also inspired international solidarity, including the BDS campaign and IAW. IAW is an important time to build solidarity for Palestinian resistance and the Arab Spring, and challenge our own government’s attacks on Palestine, solidarity and free speech.

For more information visit apartheidweek.org and www.defendfreespeech.ca.

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REVIEWS



Oscar nominee, *The Help*

Oscar buzz...or biz?

Let’s face it. The Oscars are big business.

So it shouldn’t really be a surprise when the lineup of nominees leavequite a bit to be desired. In fact, that one year—you know the one—when it seemed Hollywood had gone socialist (or at least small-L liberal) was the real surprise.

This year was no exception. The only nominee for best picture that can remotely be considered politically progressive is *The Help*—and that’s a very, very big stretch, given how the film reproduced stereotypical conceptions about women of colour in the US. The most you can say is it gave some women of colour actors good jobs—and several of them were nominated for acting awards, with Octavia Spencer taking Best Actress in a Supporting Role. A mixed bag at best.

Now, that doesn’t mean there weren’t some excellent films on the list, and in the end there is a lot to be said for good art, as long as it isn’t outright offensive (like this year’s too-bad-to-be-believed *Atlas Shrugged*, or Mel Gibson’s 2004

Passion of the Christ—one of the worst movies ever made). *The Artist*, for example, is a very well-made film, using an old medium in ways that are completely new, and took the most awards. But don’t look to *The Artist* for positive depictions of gender relations.

Movies like *The Help* and *Tree of Life*, another nominee, are either escapism or nostalgia—both of which, as Marx-influenced playwright Bertolt Brecht observed, act to pacify audiences through promoting cathartic experiences.

Hollywood this past year seemed bent on distracting people from their problems, not drawing attention to them or promoting action to change them. No *Milk* this past year; the closest thing to a progressive political drama was the cynical *Ides of March*, and the two most recognizable political figures are two of history’s most conservative figures: J. Edgar Hoover (no nominations) and Margaret Thatcher (for which Meryl Streep won Best Actress).

It’s a good thing the James Agee Cinema Circle (JACC)—“the first

progressive critics organization, [believing] that idealistic perspectives, voices and diverse ideological visions in film criticism that speak with social conviction and consciousness, are sorely lacking”—issued its own annual awards. Their (awesome) blog is at <http://politicalfilmcritics.blogspot.com>. Not everyone will agree with their nominees. But the concept is right on the mark.

Their best picture award is called the Trumbo, after Dalton Trumbo, a member of the Hollywood Ten, who was imprisoned for his beliefs after refusing to turn informant against other blacklisted Hollywood figures during 50s McCarthyism. The JACC also have a category reserved for the year’s worst: The Elia Kazan Hall of Shame.

The JACC award for best anti-capitalist films is the Bound for Glory award; and it’s a bit of a relief to see that no fewer than seventeen films made the list, mostly documentaries; so if the JACC is reliable, that’s where to look for your progressive entertainment from 2011.

-Jessica Squires

LEFT JAB

John Bell

The Robocall rogues gallery

THE GROWING RoboCall scandal is being likened to Watergate, and Stephen Harper to our own Richard Nixon. I used to run home from school to watch the Watergate hearings. My pal Stu and I collected tapes of Nixon speeches: we would marvel at the evident gap between Nixon’s self-righteous sincerity and the weasel words issuing from his jowly mouth.

I think the comparison is valid. Stephen Harper may lack the jowls, but I believe he shares Nixon’s honest belief that he has license to break any law because the cause he serves is right—in more ways than one.

Harper says he is shocked—shocked, I tell ya—that anyone in the Tory ranks would stoop so low as to use pre-programmed phone calls to try to prevent voters in crucial swing ridings from getting to the polls. This must be the work of a lone, rogue zealot.

And behold, Michael Sona, a young staffer for Tory MP Eve Adams, has resigned. Sona was a campaign worker in the Guelph riding where many of the misleading automated calls were sent.

The calls didn’t just come to Guelph. As many as 41 ridings across the country are being investigated for similar incidents. It simply defies belief that one 23-year-old Tory nerd could have engineered such a widespread and costly dirty tricks campaign. Can you say fall guy?

Even pro-Tory columnist Andrew Coyne isn’t buying the lone pimply gunman story: “But, well, let’s say it fits a pattern—if not of outright law-breaking then certainly of close-to-the-wind tactics and ends-justify-the-means ethics.”

Outlaws

To see what Coyne means, just Google the name of a Tory cabinet minister and the word “scandal” and see what happens:

Bev Oda: the Minister of International Cooperation cut funding from interfaith social justice group Kairos, back in 2009. First she said it was slashed on the recommendation of the Canadian International Development Agency. In fact CIDA recommended that funding should continue, and someone in Oda’s office wrote “not” in between the lines. Oda denied lying, saying that she was “confused” by sloppy paperwork on the part of her staffers. Then it was proved she had ordered the “not” to be inserted. So Oda lied to Parliament and then lied to Parliament about lying to Parliament. No wonder Harper backed her to the hilt.

Peter MacKay: our Defence Minister is a well-documented flying fool. His misuse of government jets and search-and-rescue helicopters is legendary, and has cost taxpayers a fortune.

Not only did he abuse military resources to pick him up from his fishing holiday; he further abused those resources to try to find dirt on a particularly dogged Liberal critic. What was supposed to be MacKay’s “gotcha” moment backfired—it seems the Liberal MP actually went through channels to book a full day with the search-and-rescue team.

Lisa Raitt: now Labour Minister, she had the Natural Resources portfolio when she fired respected civil servant Linda Keen because she dared to order the Chalk River nuclear facility shut down over safety violations. Chalk River produc-

es Canada’s supply of medical isotopes for cancer treatment. In a mistakenly recorded conversation, Raitt declares that she will score political points because cancer is a “sexy” issue.

Tony Clement: the Treasury Board boss abused his office and funneled G20 funds into the pockets of developers and small town politicians in his own Muskoka riding.

Jason Kenney: the Immigration Minister and Deputy Prime Minister is Harper’s right hand. In 2009, it is alleged, his office illegally interfered with plans by British anti-war MP George Galloway to visit Canada. Kenney’s chief aide, Alykhan Velshi, resigned. Weep not for Velshi: he went on to set up EthicalOil.org, propaganda wing of the oil industry and the Conservative government. Velshi now works directly for Harper, as director of planning in the PMO.

Mr. Kenney detained a boatload of Tamil refugees in 2010; several court rulings declared the mass detention was illegal. Kenney displayed his respect for law and order by simply ignoring the judges.

From the slime to the ridiculous: it was Kenney’s office that staged the phony citizenship ceremony live on Sun TV. Kenney denies any involvement.

Gerry Ritz: perhaps inspired by Kenney’s respect for the courts, the Agriculture Minister broke the law by summarily disbanding the Canadian Wheat Board, then thumbed his nose when the courts sided with farmers.

Their way or the high-way: First there was Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver saying that anyone opposing the Tar Sands or the Northern Gateway Pipeline was an economic traitor. Canadians responded by flooding environmental groups with donations and support.

Spying

Then Minister of Public Safety Vic Toews seized his Dubya moment and declared that you are either with the government’s internet spying bill or with the child pornographers. His senseless hyperbole drew massive opposition and forced the Tories to scrap the bill, at least temporarily.

I could go on, but I invite you to Google the names of Tory Ministers Maxime Bernier, Helen Guergis, John Baird and Julian Fantino followed by “scandal.” Or for real fun look up Bruce Carson, one of Stephen Harper’s closest and longest serving advisors for a sordid tale of fraud convictions, abuse of office, illegal lobbying and a penchant for prostitutes.

So far they have ridden it all out by stalling, lying, finding some fresh young staffer to sacrifice, and then changing the subject by announcing some headline-grabbing story usually involving illegal immigrants.

But maybe that is being unfair. Maybe it is true, as junior cabinet minister Pierre Poilievre said on CBC News: “The Conservative national campaign functioned in a clean and ethical fashion. That’s how our party operates in all cases.”

Maybe Michael Sona is an evil mastermind worthy of a James Bond movie.

Oh, here’s a story about how Jason Kenney is going to crack down on that flood of illegal immigrants flying here to have their “passport babies”.

Tory business as usual?

BOOK

Occupy, resist, produce

Ours to Master and to Own: Workers’ Control from the Commune to the Present

Edited by Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini

Reviewed by Peter Hogarth

RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY Leon Trotsky, writing on the workplace occupations in the US in 1937, wrote that “every sit-down poses in a practical manner the question of who is the boss of the factory, the capitalist or the workers?” For this reason, Ness and Azzellini’s collection of essays is an incredibly valuable resource for people thinking about what another world could look like.

Ness and Azzellini’s collection takes a detailed look at instances where workers took over their workplaces and ran them collectively, making demands from the routine to the revolutionary. It features examples drawn from a range of experiences including revolutionary movements in Europe in the early 20th century, the role of mass workers’ movements in anticolonial

struggle, and even a chapter on how BC telecommunications workers operated the BC telephone system under workers’ control for five-days in 1981.

Whether focusing on Poland or Portugal, Indonesia or Chicago, what comes through clearly in this collection is that workers the world over will resist. As Sheila Cohen points out in her chapter, when they resist they continue to independently adopt a near identical committee-based, delegate-led, directly democratic structure for their most powerful expressions of resistance. The forms which this resistance takes points to the potential for a new society based on equality and democracy. But why does the working class, often with no explicit socialist consciousness or political strategy, consistently organize itself in such a way as to challenge the very logic of capitalism and the world we know? And why do socialists insist on the centrality of the working class in toppling capitalism?

Donny Gluckstein, in his chapter on workers’ councils in Europe,

makes the point that “an effective challenge to capitalism must be based in a numerous group of people—a class. This class must not be driven by the pursuit of private gain as are the capitalists, but by a collective, shared interest. It must possess the power to defeat capitalism...only the working class meets these criteria. It cooperates in workplace units and produces the necessities of life.”

The workplace occupation points to this alternative and it disrupts the business as usual of normal employee/employer relations. Call it a book for its time, but it is obvious that employers today are holding nothing back in their vicious attacks on the working class. The old patterns of labour negotiations and symbolic strikes will not stop the offensive or even maintain the standards of yesterday. Instead, Ness and Azzellini have assembled an argument that bold, creative action that challenges the bosses, in which workers can commandeer both the shop-floor and the community, cannot only win, but also inspire.

WHERE WE STAND

The dead-end of capitalism

The capitalist system is based on violence, oppression and brutal exploitation. It creates hunger beside plenty. It kills the earth itself with pollution and unsustainable extraction of natural resources. Capitalism leads to imperialism and war. Saving ourselves and the planet depends on finding an alternative.

Socialism and workers' power

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

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

Reform and revolution

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

But the fight for reforms will not, in itself, bring about fundamental social change. The present system cannot be fixed or reformed as NDP and many trade union leaders say. It has to be overthrown. That will require the mass action of workers themselves.

Elections and democracy

Elections can be an opportunity to give voice to the struggle for social change. But under capitalism, they can't change the system. The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary developed under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers. These structures cannot be simply taken over and used by the working class. The working class needs real democracy, and that requires an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates.

Internationalism

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

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

Canada, Quebec, Aboriginal Peoples

Canada is not a "colony" of the United States, but an imperialist country in its own right that participates in the exploitation of much of the world. The Canadian state was founded through the repression of the Aboriginal peoples and the people of Quebec.

We support the struggles for self-determination of Quebec and Aboriginal peoples up to and including the right to independence. Socialists in Quebec, and in all oppressed nations, work towards giving the struggle against national oppression an internationalist and working class content.

Oppression

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

The Revolutionary Party

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

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



15 years on: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

by **VALERIE LANNON**

In a recent issue of *Socialist Worker*, we reported on the highlights from the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which included recommendations for restructuring the relationship between Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian state. The Report also called for significantly more resources to enable Aboriginal Peoples to close the gaps with non-Aboriginal people in terms of economic, judicial, social, education and health outcomes.

Now, slightly over 15 years later, we are compelled to ask: "What, if anything, has changed for Aboriginal peoples since 1996?"

One need look no further for our answer than the Harper government's reaction to the housing and infrastructure crisis in Attawapiskat or its branding of indigenous opponents of the Enbridge pipeline as "radicals."

What do the numbers say?

In 2006, the Assembly of First Nations (a pan-Canadian organization) issued a "report card" on RCAP. Most of the findings below are from that report card, unless noted otherwise. One can assume that the gaps in outcomes between First Nations and non-indigenous people have only been exacerbated by the impact of the financial crisis starting in 2008.

First Nations communities rank 76th out of 174 nations when using the UN Development Index 2001. This compares to Canadian communities who rank 8th.

Population – The indigenous population increased 45 per cent between 1996 and 2006 (the latest census date for which data are available), to 1,172,790, or 3.8 per cent of the total population of Canada and Quebec. Almost half of the indigenous population is under the age of 25. There is a continuing trend of fewer First Nations peoples living on reserve, down to 40 per cent in 2006.

Housing – In November 2011, the CBC noted a federal report from earlier in the year that stated 20,000 to 35,000 new housing units are needed just to meet current demand. The Assembly of First Nations puts the total much higher, at 85,000. The CBC report went on to state that 41.5 per cent of homes on reserves need major repairs, compared with seven per cent in non-aboriginal households outside reserves. Rates of overcrowding are six times higher on reserve than off. A third of First Nations people see their drinking water as unsafe to drink, and 12 per cent of First Nations communities have to boil

their drinking water. Six per cent are without sewage services, and 4 per cent lack either hot water, cold water or flushing toilets.

Income and employment levels – Unemployment is over 50 per cent and rises to over 60 per cent for those without high school completion. A quarter of First Nations children live in poverty, compared to one in six Canadian children. Over 10 per cent of First Nations children are in care with child welfare agencies, compared to 0.67 per cent of all other children.

Health outcomes – Life expectancy for First Nations men is 7.4 years less, and for First Nations women 5.2 years less than others. First Nations are more likely to require health care services than others, with rates of diabetes three times the national average, and tuberculosis rates eight to ten times higher. In a revealing 2007 report on the health of "status Indians" by BC's Provincial Health Officer ("Pathways to Health and Healing"), it was noted that of 57 health indicators, 18 had shown some improvement, 10 had worsened, and 8 had shown increasing rates of chronic disease. One of the most significant concerns was with the widening gap for HIV/AIDS disease "which is reflective of both increased vulnerability and a lack of access to...therapy."

Education outcomes – By 2011, according to the AFN, high school graduation rates for First Nations students are around 50 per cent, which means a dropout rate far higher than others.

Government response

With caps in spending becoming the norm, indigenous people on and off traditional territories have seen their already undersized benefits continue to decline. For example, the two per cent cap in AANDC (former INAC) funding means that since 1997 communities have essentially lost billions of dollars.

By 2005, the Liberal government entered into the "Kelowna Accord" with provincial and territorial governments and a number of national First Nations organizations. The Accord would have seen an increase of \$5 billion in spending over 10 years. But the Harper government was not willing to agree to the funding, however inadequate it was to meet the needs of indigenous peoples.

Instead, in 2008 Harper formally apologized for the state's role in creating residential schools and the havoc they created. While the apology was something long sought by indigenous people, many considered it meaning-

less without the resources so desperately needed. Similarly, in 2010 Canada endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a symbolic victory only.

And for those First Nations involved in treaties, particularly in BC, there is continued exasperation with the process of "modern" treaties that began in 1991. There have been only three settlements and the pace is unacceptably slow. Chief Commissioner Sophie Pierre said recently, "We know in the next few years we could have 13 treaties done. And if we can't do it, it's about time we faced the obvious—it isn't going to happen, so shut 'er down."

How Indigenous communities are fighting back

But against this backdrop of government neglect, indigenous communities have continually fought back. There have been court cases with some success, such as the Nuu-chah-nulth (BC) victory regarding fishing rights.

As we have seen, there have also been continued negotiations, but for the most part these have not been successful in terms of new treaties.

And so the third option, "assertion" has become much more prominent. Examples in Ontario include the initiatives of the Haudenosaunee Nations of Grand River to assert their rights to the Haldemand Tract, which has become known as the Caledonia crisis. From 1999 to 2001 the Burnt Church First Nation of the Mi'kmaq in New Brunswick fought for their rights to catch lobster "out of season."

While many of these struggles attracted support from non-indigenous people, the more recent battles around the Tar Sands and its related pipelines (Keystone, Enbridge) have truly succeeded in uniting indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in both Canada and the United States.

What should socialists do?

In the context of indigenous environmental activism, the Occupy movement, and local fight-backs such as the anti-Ford struggles in Toronto, these are great opportunities for solidarity. Socialists need to be strongly involved in all solidarity actions, following the lead of indigenous partners. We need to continue to influence trade unions and student groups to take up indigenous campaigns. With 2012 shaping up to be a year of continued fight-back, prospects for indigenous victories have never been better.

international socialist events

TORONTO

Che Guevara: The man behind the image
Wednesday, March 14, 6pm
York University Student Centre, room 311C
Info: yorkusocialists@gmail.com

Education and alienation

Wednesday, March 14, 5pm
Location: UofT, room TBA
Info: international.socialists@utoronto.ca

Quebec workers fight against austerity: Eye-witness report from Rio Tinto picket lines

Tuesday, March 20, 7pm
Bahen Centre, 40 St George St
Info: torontosocialists@gmail.com

The Shock Doctrine film screening

Wednesday, March 21, 6pm
York University Student Centre, room 311C
Info: yorkusocialists@gmail.com

The Shock Doctrine film screening and dinner

Sunday, March 25, 5:30pm
USW Hall, 25 Cecil St
Suggested donation: \$7-12
Info: torontosocialists@gmail.com

Queer liberation and socialism

Wednesday, March 28, 6pm
York University Student Centre, room 311C
Info: yorkusocialists@gmail.com

Does activism work?

Wednesday, March 28, 5pm
Location: UofT, room TBA
Info: international.socialists@utoronto.ca

OTTAWA

International Socialists organizing meetings
Mondays at uOttawa
Info: gosocialists@yahoo.ca

VANCOUVER

Politics of Malcolm X
Wednesday, March 7, 12:30pm
Langara College, room A333
Info: vancouver.socialists@gmail.com

peace & justice events

PAN-CANADIAN

No War on Iran
Rallies and Marches throughout Canada
To find an action in your area: www.acp-cpa.ca/en/

GLOBAL CRISIS. GLOBAL RESISTANCE.

May 25-27, Ryerson U
marxism2012.com

You can find the I.S. in:

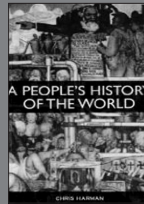
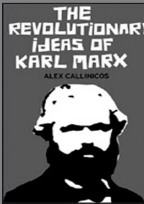
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J'Accuse!
by AMELIA MURPHY-BEAUDOIN

IN FEBRUARY there was a reprise of the fundraiser event for Hassan Diab titled “J’Accuse.” This recent performance was different because Diab and his partner were in attendance and Diab read his own poems. The effect of hearing him reading his own writing about his jailing and subsequent house arrest was quite poignant and chilling at the same time.

Also at this event was attorney Barbara Jackman who specializes in immigration and refugee law with particular emphasis on cases involving national security and human rights issues. She spoke on measures that Canada has taken in this post-9/11 climate of Islamophobia to target Muslims and people of Arab descent. Barbara Jackman is also the attorney in the case between the Canadian Arab Federation and Jason Kenney, and was able to speak from this experience and from the understanding of Canada as a security state complicit and guilty when it comes to human rights abuses.

The statement “J’Accuse” has become a generic statement of outrage and accusation since French writer Emile Zola used the term to title his open letter to the French government in 1894, accusing the government of anti-Semitism and unlawfully jailing Jewish French soldier Alfred Dreyfus.

Like Dreyfus, the case of Diab rests on fraudulent, discredited handwriting analysis. Dreyfus was convicted in a climate of anti-Semitism and Diab one of Islamophobia. Though there is nothing linking Diab to the bombing of a synagogue in Paris in 1980, France has asked Canada to extradite Diab for the crime, where he faces an unfair trial that could land him in jail for life.

The performance in February comprised music, and readings from Diab, Zola, and others who have spoken out about the injustices they face. Since Diab must pay for his own GPS anklet at over two thousand dollars a month, the event raised funds towards this.

For more information, visit www.JusticeForHassanDiab.org.

STOP THE WAR OF 2012: DON'T ATTACK IRAN

by DEKA OMAR

ON FEBRUARY 23 a rally was organized to protest the looming war with Iran and the possibility of Canadian participation. More than 60 protesters gathered at the Human Rights Monument in the City of Ottawa and marched toward the Château Laurier where the Conference on defence and security was taking place.

Key elements of the global military-industrial complex, the Harper government, and military commanders from Canada, the UK and the US converged on Ottawa for their annual general meeting. The anti-war rally organ-



FLOOD OF SOLIDARITY WITH RIO TINTO WORKERS

by MICHELLE ROBIDOUX

Since they were brutally locked out by Rio Tinto Alcan (RTA) on December 30 780 workers in Alma, Québec have been building a global wave of solidarity against a ruthless employer.

The workers, members of Steelworkers local 9490, were locked out 24 hours before their collective agreement expired. A hundred and fifty security guards—many of whom spoke no French—kicked the workers out, not even allowing those who had been exposed to toxic beryllium to decontaminate themselves before being forced out.

The fight at RTA’s Alma plant is about contracting out. The company wants to move two-thirds of the 780 jobs to sub-contractors, who will be paid half of what the current employees receive.

The company is using scabs to keep the plant at about one-third capacity,

and has obtained an injunction against picketing. But the workers have said “No” to contracting out, in defence of decent jobs for the region and for the future. And they have been spreading the message far and wide—and gaining inspiring support.

Solidarité

Workers have pledged support from ABI in Bécancour, US Steel in Hamilton, RTA’s port installations and its operations in Kitimat, BC—where workers voted to give \$60,000 per month to the Alma workers.

Union president Marc Maltais and several other workers at the Alma plant began a world tour in February—getting labour support from Los Angeles to Utah, and from Australia to Europe. In Quebec, they have joined striking students in Montreal, visited iron and titanium workers

in Sorel-Tracy, and protested the Quebec Liberal government’s failure to act in support of the locked out workers.

Steelworkers from Toronto will be in Alma on March 5 to deliver solidarity. On March 31, the locked-out RTA workers will host a global day of action in Alma.

The support being generated by the strong determination of the Alma workers is reminiscent of the movement that developed around the strike by Inco miners in 1978. This fight deserves the support of every trade unionist in this country. Workers have taken punishing losses in recent fights at US Steel, Vale Inco, Electro-Motive and elsewhere. If these workers are given the means to outlast and out-organize RTA, whose Alma plant is one of the most profitable plants it owns, then workers everywhere will gain.

FLOTILLA EXPOSES CANADA’S ROLE IN ILLEGAL GAZA BLOCKADE

by AMELIA MURPHY-BEAUDOIN

THE FREEDOM Flotilla II consisted of ten ships carrying 1,000 activists from 20 different countries. The Canadian boat—the *Tahrir*—attempted to sail from Greece to Gaza in June 2011, but was foiled when Israel blackmailed the Greek government to stop the boat in exchange for promises of friendship and an economic boost.

The *Tahrir* attempted to break the siege on Gaza again in November 2011, and Tahrir delegates Ehab

Lotayef and David Heap were on board the boat when it was seized by the Israeli military in international waters. In February 2012 they completed a week-long speaking tour across Canada, addressing Canada’s role and its complicity in the illegal blockade of Gaza, and highlighting the demand that Canada put pressure on Israel to return the boat and its contents, which includes \$30,000 in medical aid.

“Israel has never found, or even claimed to have found, anything dangerous or prohibited on the *Tahrir*” said Lotayef, “Even according to

Israel’s own arbitrary list of blockaded items, our vessel and its contents should be allowed to reach Gaza without delay. Yet this theft is added to the countless reckless actions for which Israel is being granted impunity by the Harper Tories.”

Just as we continue to call out Israel on its human rights abuses and violations of international law, we must continue to expose the Canadian government for condoning apartheid and ethnic cleansing.

For more information on the Canadian flotilla, visit www.tahrir.ca

LIBRARY WORKERS VOTE TO STRIKE

by J.Y. HODGE

TORONTO PUBLIC Library workers voted in favour of strike action in late February. On the heels of a 91 per cent strike mandate, CUPE 4948 filed for a ‘no board’ report with the Ministry of Labour that, if approved, will set a strike deadline of March 17th. Both sides continue to bargain.

In the wake of the settlement with city outside workers in CUPE 416, the city management is seeking similar deals from all other city unions; deals that would severely weaken job security and scheduling rights secured over 15 years of bargained agreements. Unlike 416 however (which opted not

to vote for strike action and so negotiated from a weaker position), library workers have expressed very loudly and clearly that we are not interested in concessions for the sake of concessions. The library is a substantially different work environment to many city departments, and the language of the library contract has always reflected that.

After last summer’s effective campaign (ourpubliclibrary.to), prudence would dictate that Ford look to other, less well-organized and loved targets. Prudence however, was never something Ford could be accused of, so it will come as no surprise if we are in fact on the streets come spring.

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

IWD Toronto: women fighting for jobs and services

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S Day is being celebrated in Toronto this year on March 3. Women representing the diversity of the city from unions, community and student groups have been organizing for the past number of months.

They have been inspired by the fightbacks and uprisings that have been taking place around the world against the austerity agenda and the particular effects it is having on women. In this city women have been in the heart of the campaigns against the mayor and his allies on city council who have been trying to slash services and municipal jobs.

The majority of public sector jobs are held by women. Women and children are also the largest recipients of services. At the mass demonstrations that have been held, the many public meetings, and deputations made to city councillors, women have been in the forefront.

The library workers are in a countdown to a strike or lockout and CUPE 79, which represents the inside municipal workers, are in hard bargaining with the city. A thousand cleaners who are employed with decent wages, benefits and pensions are in the process of being contracted out. Decent jobs will become poverty jobs with wages being reduced to just above the minimum wage.

Neoliberalism

This is part and parcel of the attacks we are seeing on working people around the world. The neoliberal mantra is to reduce services, contract out jobs and privatize everything possible. In the name of “efficiencies,” working people are being made to pay the price.

In this city Mayor Rob Ford won a strong majority promising to cut the “gravy” but without reducing services. A KPMG report which showed that there was very little gravy nonetheless made harsh

recommendations of what services and jobs could be cut.

The mayor and his allies on the executive committee began to slash ruthlessly, but much to their surprise, city council didn’t buy it. Organizing had been going on ward by ward. Union members were going door to door talking to their neighbours. People were fighting back in every area of the city .

Trade unionists and ordinary citizens packed city council chambers and committee meetings, some that lasted until morning, demanding that the services and jobs were vital to the quality of life in their city. When the vote on the cuts came the vast majority were pushed back. Councillors were receiving hundreds of calls from constituents and they listened in the end because residents were demanding that they represent their interests.

Fight continues

But the fight is far from over and the support for services is stronger than the support for public sector jobs among city council members. That’s why it is so important that the International Women’s Day march is being led by city workers including the cleaners with thousands marching behind them.

The support and solidarity that city workers are feeling from the women’s movement and the community at large is strong and growing. It has to be made absolutely clear that a cut to jobs means a cut to services. Women and men are going into the streets making that point loud and strong.

This harkens back to the origins of International Women’s Day when immigrant women workers demonstrated for higher wages and better working conditions for all. As we have seen in Egypt and so many other places around the globe, women are standing and fighting and Toronto should be no different.

Join the International Socialists

Mail: P.O. Box 339, Station E, Toronto, ON M6H 4E3
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QUEBEC STUDENT STRIKE SHOWS HOW TO FIGHT FEES

by CHANTAL SUNDARAM

AS WE go to press, over 72,000 striking Quebec university and college students have shut down their campuses to protest Quebec government plans to raise tuition fees by \$1,625 over the next five years. They are motivated by some important past victories won through the determination and organization of the Quebec student movement.

From 1968 to 1990, tuition fees in Quebec were frozen at \$500 a year. After a hike of about 150 per cent from 1990 to 1993, a PQ government introduced a new freeze in 1994. But that same government opened the door to a new increase in the name of deficit cutting in 1996. It faced a Quebec-wide student strike with mass street protests and gave up that idea. Fees have also increased by \$100 a year over the past five years under the Charest government.

Today's strike comes only seven years after the last one. In 2005, an unlimited student strike shut down nearly every post-secondary institution in Quebec to protest the cutting of \$103 million from bursaries to convert them into loans. The students won, forcing the government to backtrack on a policy it had already passed. That strike received massive public support and was the source of the "red square" badge, worn by thousands of students and supporters, which is also in use today.

Strike organization

The strike of 2005 was, like all student strikes in Quebec's



history, organized through mass student assemblies to hold strike votes. In January and February of this year the strike was voted on in mass assemblies, faculty by faculty in some universities, and at colleges (CEGEPs) across Quebec.

Quebec students use a strike vote threshold approach (first used in the 1986 strike) to establish an official start of the strike on each campus. A threshold of 20,000 students in at least seven student unions and on at least three campuses was established for many stu-

dent unions, and that threshold was met on February 9. Strike votes have continued since then in other faculties and on other campuses, and other, more ambitious thresholds have been met and triggered additional walkouts (for details, see bloquonsla-hausse.com).

But all of the walk-outs, no matter when they start,

are unlimited (or renewable, usually every three days). So the ranks of the strike continue to grow, and will reach its height over the course of March.

The strike votes were initiated by the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE), with over 40,000 members, but the

strike will soon be joined by members of the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ, which has 125,000 members) and the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ, which has 80,000 members).

On February 23, about 1,000 students shut down the Jacques Cartier Bridge in Montreal during afternoon

rush hour, as part of a demonstration of 15,000 people. As they made their way to the bridge, the police aggressively confronted the march, breaking it up with pepper spray, and arresting at least one student.

Solidarité

The success of all of the Quebec student strikes to date has involved not only walk-outs but public demonstrations of strength—whether it be picketing in front of campuses, staging mass demonstrations in the streets, launching sit-ins or occupations of the Ministry of Education and other government offices, and other direct action like street blockades. These actions have received wide support by the Quebec population in the past as a legitimate part of making the strikes a success. But the English Canadian media, including the CBC, has undermined the students' message and defended the police repression at the Bridge blockade.

We have a responsibility to show visible support outside Quebec for the students' struggle. There is a call for solidarity actions with the Quebec strike on March 13: contact your local student union and voice your support for some kind of action on that day. Our support could make a difference to the outcome, and a victory for Quebec students could inspire resistance to tuition hikes across the country.

Fight McGuinty's austerity agenda: Stop Drummond's 1% solution

by PAM FRACHE

ON FEBRUARY 15, the much anticipated Drummond Commission issued its 1% solution for the rest of Ontario.

Ten months ago, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty appointed former TD Bank Economist Don Drummond to head the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, to deal with a projected (and likely overestimated) debt of approximately \$16 billion.

Ontario's deficit was a result of the global economic crisis, triggered by the gang of banking bandits to which Drummond belongs, but Dalton McGuinty asked the same gang to suggest remedies.

It is therefore not surprising that the Commission's recommendations are heavily biased in favour of the 1%. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the pain will be absorbed by the most vul-

nerable in society and ordinary working people, because McGuinty directed Drummond to keep revenue generation off the table, including increasing taxes for profitable corporations for the 1%.

Instead, Drummond proposes a host of new or increased user fees, including post-secondary tuition fees, which would hit low- and modest-income earners hardest.

Drummond admits his recipe for balanced budgets in 2017-2018 entails sharper and deeper cuts than those meted out by former Conservative Premier Mike Harris in the mid-1990s—and for a much longer period of time.

Drummond estimates that spending cuts will be the equivalent of a permanent 16.2 per cent cut for every man, woman and child in Ontario. And, of course, not every Ontarian relies on such services to the same extent,

guaranteeing that those at the bottom of the economic hierarchy will experience the sharpest cuts.

But Ontario is already at the bottom of the heap in terms of provincial per capita spending on social programs, a fact even Drummond is forced to acknowledge. Clearly public sector workers and social programs are not "out of control" as the rest of the report would have us all believe. It is McGuinty's huge tax giveaways that are out of control—\$4.5 billion annually when fully phased-in. Drummond's report is really proposing a way to pay for those tax cuts.

In order to maintain existing services in line with inflation and population growth, public spending would need to increase by about 3.1 per cent annually. Instead, Drummond wants to limit spending increases so low that the effect would be deep cuts ranging from 0.6 to

5.5 per cent.

To meet these devastating targets, Drummond recommends measures that, while avoiding legislated public sector wage freezes, will have the same effect. He calls for:

The further privatization of service delivery, reducing staff;

Greater management rights to discipline, dismiss and move employees;

Funding envelopes with no wage increases, resulting in harsher negotiations;

Restructuring of the arbitration process to allow maximum flexibility for employers while imposing arbitrators on workers;

More performance pay for management (with no recommended pay caps).

Throughout the entire 543-page report, Drummond takes shots at "public sector pay," pensions, and supposedly inflexible collective

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