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'Humanitarian intervention' in Libya, 2011

YET AGAIN, Western nations are calling for war in the name of fighting dictatorship and confronting weapons of mass destruction—this time in Syria. Yet again, the greatest weapon of mass destruction is Western imperialism.

Western military destruction

US Secretary of State John Kerry is justifying war on Syria by stating that “the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, the killing of women and children and innocent bystanders, by chemical weapons is a moral obscenity.” But that’s exactly what the West has done for decades: Agent Orange poured over Vietnam, depleted uranium fired into Iraq, white phosphorus unleashed on Gaza.

The West armed the Taliban, but then in 2001 we were told to support a NATO invasion because Afghani women were incapable of liberating themselves. The result: massacres, torture, NATO kill teams, drone attacks spreading to Pakistan, and a brutal Western-backed regime where women are no better off.

The West supported Saddam Hussein when he used chemical weapons in the 1980s, but then in 2003 we were told to support a US invasion to liberate Iraqis. The only weapon of mass destruction was Western military intervention; following the Gulf War and a decade of sanctions that killed a million people, the new war and another decade of occupation killed another million people—while threatening war on Iran.

Real regime change: protest and revolution

But there were historic protests against the Iraq War that stopped the Canadian government from

officially participating (including Harper, who as then-leader of the Opposition desperately wanted war). The protests also forced the withdrawal of Italy and Spain, and toppled the Spanish government.

The mass movement also exposed inter-imperial rivalry, as France and Germany refused to participate, and gave confidence to the Iraqi resistance who bogged the US down in quagmire. Unable to advance into Iran, the US has resorted to brutal proxy war—unleashing Israel to bomb Lebanon and Gaza, and Ethiopia to invade Somalia—but these wars were also resisted.

In the Arab world, solidarity with Palestine, opposition to the Iraq War and growing confidence in workers’ struggles erupted in revolutions. The Arab Spring toppled Western-backed dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and has challenged repressive regimes in Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, UAE, and Saudi Arabia—all regimes armed to the teeth by the West, including Canada. Revolutions also erupted in Libya and Syria, against dictators that claimed to oppose the West but who had records of repression, neoliberalism and complicity with the West.

Counter-revolution

The Arab Spring has shaken Western control of the oil-rich region, and NATO powers have been desperate to regain control.

Two years ago the West cynically used the brutality of the Gaddafi regime as pretext to launch a war but the West had previously supported Gaddafi with weapons from Europe and prisons from Canadian corporation SNC-Lavalin.

Dressed up as “humanitarian intervention”, NATO—led by a Canadian general—dropped thou-

sands of bombs on Libyan civilians, hijacked the revolution and imposed another Western-backed regime that continues repression and austerity. This is what the West wants in Syria.

While Assad allies himself with Iran, he has provided torture chambers for the West (including torturing Canadian Maher Arar on behalf of the US government and with the complicity of the Canadian government), a naval facility for Russia on the Mediterranean, and has not challenged Israel.

The Syrian revolution—which emerged as part of the Arab Spring, and has included protests and strikes across ethnic lines, along with splits in the military—threatens to destabilize imperial control of the region. As Syrian socialists explained, “These regional players and Western powers are not at all interested in seeing a victorious popular revolution occur in Syria. Such a victory would upset the current balance of power in the region, and threaten to spread the flame of revolution to the other imperialist powers in the region, to the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia on one hand and to the Zionist state on the other.”

Harper: don’t bomb Syria

That’s why imperial powers are intervening. Russia has armed Assad, while the West has tried a variety of interventions to undermine the revolution and bring it under Western control—from calling for a UN “peace plan” that would remove Assad but keep his regime intact, to arming sectarian sections of the opposition through Saudi Arabia, and now planning direct military intervention.

Like Iraq, there’s no proof Assad has weapons of mass destruction.

Like Libya, military intervention in Syria will only make things worse—killing thousands of civilians, undermining the revolution, and installing a repressive regime compliant to Western governments and the corporations they serve.

We need to remember the words of Martin Luther King and challenge “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world: my own government.” In Canada that means exposing and challenging Harper’s warmonger regime, which has promised to be in “lock-step” with NATO—as it has been in wars that have killed Palestinians, Afghans, Lebanese, and Libyans.

Imperialism is central to the Harper agenda. Harper has denied Canada’s history of colonialism while furthering the oppression of indigenous peoples, and wasted \$490 billion on military spending over the next 20 years, just to mention a few examples. But this new wave of imperialism also exposes a weakness. The anti-war movement stopped Canada from going to Iraq and forced Harper to admit the war was an error; Harper was forced to prorogue Parliament the first time to avoid the Afghanistan torture scandal; Idle No More has challenged the colonialism on which Canada is built; and now Harper has prorogued Parliament again, this time to avoid debating Senate scandals.

We need to oppose the war on Syria to prevent further bloodshed, create space for progressive forces in Syria to build their own revolutionary movement based on self-determination, and build our own anti-imperial movements against our own state. We need to rally democracy from below—in our communities, on the streets, on our campuses and at our workplaces—and demand: don’t bomb Syria!

Rebellion in Bahrain

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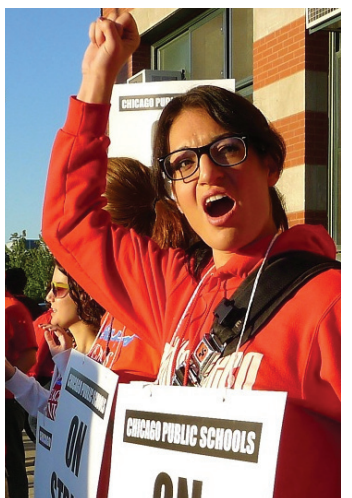
Free Chelsea Manning

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Fast food workers fighting back

Socialist Worker looks at neoliberalism and how the service sector is resisting >> pages 6 & 7



Renew rank-and-file militancy

Carolyn Egan on how we can resist the anti-union laws >> page 11



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Support Idle No More: defend Ron Plain

by JOHN BELL

IDLE NO More activist Ron Plain, from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation near Sarnia, Ontario, is being personally victimized because members of his community dared to challenge CN Rail on their own land.

Courts, acting in the interest of powerful corporations, have fined him over \$16,000. The court proceedings reek of injustice and conflict of interest. Ron Plain needs our solidarity and financial support.

Just before Christmas 2012, Idle No More protests were sweeping the country and Chief Theresa Spence was fasting in opposition to Tory attacks on First Nations sovereignty. The people of Aamjiwnaang blockaded a CN rail line serving corporations in Sarnia’s “Chemical Valley”. This was a grass-roots movement from the community, and well-known activist Ron Plain was not even present at the beginning.

CN applied for and was granted an injunction by Judge David Brown. Before being appointed to the bench Brown had worked as a lawyer for CN, and at one time even testified on CN’s behalf at a US legal hearing.

It was agreed by the blockade group to move the protest to a different location, a section of rail on Aamjiwnaang territory. Plain became the spokesperson for the blockade as it gained national and international media attention.

CN Police—a federally sanctioned corporate force with jurisdiction within one kilometre of any CN line—issued a second injunction on December 27.

A well-attended community meeting saw strong majority support for the blockade and the need for an exit strategy. The blockade came down according to the community’s timetable, not that of the injunction.

Plain was charged with civil contempt, as he was individually identifiable for his role as media liaison. Attempts to argue Aamjiwnaang sovereignty were thrown out of court. Arguments that the judge issuing the injunctions was biased—something of an understatement—were rejected and instead the courts found Ron Plain guilty and fined him over \$16,000 to cover CN’s legal fees arising from the case. [You can hear Plain explain the case in greater detail, and contribute to his legal defense here: <http://bit.ly/1clmhNY>]

Idle No More supporters across the country should be fundraising and taking this appeal to their schools, unions, faith groups and organizations.

The message from the courts and corporations is clear: activism like Idle No More will not be tolerated. We cannot let this intimidation stand. Not a penny of this fine should come out of Ron Plain’s pocket.

To hear Ron Plain and John Bell discuss indigenous resistance and the fight against Harper, watch the video from this year’s Marxism 2013 conference in Toronto: <http://bit.ly/17nUgD>



Ron Plain

More than just dots on a page: the disability community and elections

by MELISSA GRAHAM

CAN POLITICIANS be counted on to support the rights of people with disabilities? That’s the question many are asking after the federal Conservatives showcased their ignorance by using fake Braille on flyers.

Trying to distract from drastic changes to Employment Insurance, the flyers bragged that “our government has been determined to help remove barriers for those who are excluded from the workforce.” The words “supporting jobs for all Canadians” appeared in Braille, implying the government’s commitment to the disability community. But the Braille was simply printed in ink and not raised, making it completely use-

less—and symptomatic of the Tories’ ignorance and lip service to people with disabilities.

Meanwhile, during Ontario by-elections the non-profit group AODA Alliance asked the candidates if they would support the Ontario government to develop new accessibility standards under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) to address barriers in education, healthcare and housing. The AODA Alliance also asked the candidates if they would support the immediate and effective enforcement of the AODA, and to reveal their plans for doing so. In their final question, they asked the candidates if they agree that the government should act now to ensure that public money isn’t used to finance the cre-

ation of new barriers against people with disabilities or to perpetuate existing barriers.

According to the AODA Alliance’s email update on July 29, NDP candidate Percy Hatfield made all the disability accessibility commitments. Liberal candidate, Peter Milczen, responded to all the questions but made none of the specific disability commitments; and no Conservative candidate answered their questions.

What does this mean now that the election has passed? A handful of by-elections have a relatively minor impact on Queen’s Park, especially with the mixed bag of politicians that were voted in. What we do have is a sense of how we can focus our energies in those ridings by knowing who we can hold up to their commitments, and

who desperately needs a beginner course in disability politics. No one else would let a politician off the hook for ignoring their prominent concerns; neither should the disability community.

One thing is certain: we need to continue to keep disability politics on the forefront. While we cannot depend on politicians to give us our rights, or a truly accessible province, these political discussions can change the conversation in society about disability issues.

An opportunity to bring attention to the issues we face is coming up on Saturday, October 5 in Toronto, with the third annual Toronto Disability Pride March. Please visit <http://torontodisabilitypride.wordpress.com/> for details and come march with us!

Parti Québécois continues its dangerous games

by JESSICA SQUIRES

WITH THE announcement that they will table legislation this fall to ban public servants from wearing “ostentatious religious symbols”, the PQ are continuing their engagement in a very dangerous game: a game designed to distract the public from their mismanagement and neoliberal agenda, while taking Quebec down a path of attacking the individual rights of minorities to express their religious beliefs.

The PQ has proven over and over during the past year that it has the same neoliberal agenda as the Liberal government it replaced. And, with a 63 per cent unpopularity rating, and a distant second place in the polls, it could be a short-lived minority government.

Austerity

The PQ has failed to deliver for Quebecers on every important front. Healthcare remains inaccessible and private clinics are springing up for everything from sleep deprivation to blood tests. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been cut from education and post-secondary, resulting in a plethora of user

fees and increased municipal and school board taxes. Meanwhile, Hydro fees are increasing and the healthcare tax remains despite a promise to eliminate it. Welfare payment cuts to women and men between 55 and 58 and to couples with children have also been announced.

In the North, Marois reduced funding on mining infrastructure and investment, but is maintaining the essential core of the Liberal Plan Nord—a plan to gut the north’s resources from indigenous people, while slashing the promised investments in social infrastructure for Northern communities.

Scapegoat

In this context, the PQ “Values Charter”, the specific contents of which, at the time of writing, are still unofficial, is obviously an attempt at drumming up populist support from the worst of the orthodox secularists and the ethnic nationalists. So far it seems that the plan is to ban the wearing of religious symbols by public servants, but to leave the cross hanging in the National Assembly due to its “cultural” significance.

Quebec has a long history of being oppressed by the Canadian state, including claims that Quebec is

more racist or backwards than English Canada. But like Stephen Harper declaring “the greatest threat is Islamism” or Jason Kenney banning women from wearing the niqab during citizenship ceremonies, the PQ is scapegoating Muslim women to distract from austerity.

As Benoit Renaud observed in the previous issue of *Socialist Worker*, “In fact the government’s purpose is not to contribute to the debate but rather to develop a new strategy to counter the decline in their popular support, a logical consequence of their neoliberal governance. Like other Western governments on the ropes in the recent past (for example, Sarkozy’s in France), the Marois regime hopes to rally support around xenophobic panic disguised as a fight for secularism and/or national identity.”

Reaction

There is no question who this “Values Charter” is targeting: immigrant women. But the discussion has evolved in Quebec since the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, which recommended in 2007 that Quebec adopt a policy of open secularism and interculturalism. The racist comments on news sites are now far better balanced by social

media discussion of how inappropriate and unwelcome this legislation is. The response has been quick from some quarters; women who wear hijab and work in subsidized daycare facilities have been prominently featured in news coverage, promising to defy the ban.

The other three parties in the National Assembly opposed it as well, but this could change. However, the idea may already be dead in the water considering the minority status of the PQ. But that won’t stop the PQ from trying to use it to distract Quebecers from the real issues of the day: access to healthcare, unemployment, and the environment.

Several mass organizations in Quebec have decent positions on the issue of “religious symbols”, including the Fédération autonome de l’enseignement (FAE, the teachers’ union in Montreal and Gatineau); the Fédération des femmes du Québec; and Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé (FIQ, the main nurses’ union), as well as Québec solidaire and a grassroots group called Association des Musulmans et Arabes pour la laïcité (AMAL). We can hope for action, or at least reaction, from those fronts in coming days.

Invasion of the sea squirts

by ANNA ROIK

THE MARITIME mussel aquaculture industry is in crisis.

Some mussel farmers have seen production cut by up to 90 per cent due to an infestation of sea squirts. At least five species of sea squirts—three of which are invasive—are over-running mussel farms. The Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia says they have “probably lost about 50 per cent of the industry at this point”.

Sea squirts, also known as tunicates, are filter feeders that attach to rocks or other suitable surfaces on the sea floor. Although each individual is only a few millimeters long, they grow in colonies that can spread over large areas. Recently they have attached to the ropes hanging for the mussels to grow on, and to the mussels themselves. They arrived in east coast waters attached to boats and fishing gear, or in the ballast water of ships.

Those sea squirts attached to the mussels themselves take away nutrients so the mussels are unable to grow or the weight of the sea squirt colonies pulls the mussels from the ropes. Either way, the mussels are lost.

According to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, sea squirts have been present since around 1900, but it is only within the past 10 years that they have been multiplying and creating the colonies affecting the aquaculture industry. Once a sea squirt population has taken root in an area, it is nearly impossible to eradicate. At first, mussel farmers could remove sea squirts from the ropes and mussels, but populations have grown too big. It is now too difficult and expensive a problem to deal with.

There are a few reasons why sea squirts are so successful: they can withstand many different environmental conditions, they have few known predators, and they are very prolific. A single sea squirt can produce 10,000 offspring.

Possibly the most worrying reason for the recent proliferation of sea squirts comes from the Bedford Institute of Oceanography, which has been monitoring ocean temperatures and sea squirts since 2006. Their data shows that the sea water no longer is as cold in winter as it used to be, with spring temperatures two to three degrees higher than it was six years ago. Where the sea squirt populations once used to die off in the winter due to the cold water mitigating growth, this is no longer the case.

If air and sea temperatures continue to increase as they have, more situations like this will be seen worldwide. Climate change is destined to have serious effects on the security of our food supply, from both the land and the sea.

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Protests in Saudi Arabia

INTERVIEW

Resisting the Western-backed Saudi regime

by YUSUR AL BAHRANI

MASSIVE PROTESTS continue in the oil-rich Eastern Province of Qatif, despite the Western-backed Saudi regime's brutal attacks on activists and their families.

Abbas Al-Mezra is one of the activists who was recently arrested, along with his brothers, in Al-Awwamiya city in Qatif. *Socialist Worker* spoke with his sister, Ruqayya Al-Mezra, an eyewitness to the Saudi regime's attack on her family's home on July 29 and the arbitrary arrest of her brothers.

Abbas Al-Mezra is an activist who was speaking, writing and protesting against the oppressive Saudi regime. "He was demanding rights for all. The case of Abbas is the case of the entire community. It's the case of the injustice that people face here," said Ruqayya.

Armored fighting vehicles surrounded al-Mezra's home and

the neighbourhood. According to Ruqayya, security forces were shooting young men in the street, and armed men in civilian clothes raided the home at dawn. They held women and children captive in their rooms, brutally beat and arbitrarily arrested Abbas and his brothers, and confiscated their laptops and mobile devices. During the raid and the hunt for Abbas, Saudi forces burnt the house and caused destruction in the neighbourhood in addition to burning civilians' cars.

"We were about to die from fire or shooting," said Ruqayya. The Saudi authorities claim the family members used arms to resist attack. But eyewitnesses say no one had any arms at home. As Ruqayya explained, "The place was surrounded by armored vehicles. How could we resist?"

Security forces then packed people into an armored vehicle with their hands tied behind their backs and took them to the police station to

see the brothers. The police officers photographed drugs and weapons to claim that the brothers were all drug dealers. This is not the first time in which such claims were made to prosecute and defame activists in Qatif. Soon after the incident, the Interior Ministry announced that the authorities had arrested "armed drug dealers."

"We were barefooted. We stayed in the police station for one hour. A police officer said that a drug car would drive us back home. We refused and walked back," Ruqayya said. The brothers were detained, while the women and children were released after a few hours. Abdullah Al-Mezra, Abbas Al-Mezra's brother, was arrested six months ago, when he went with his wife to the hospital for a medical check-up, because of his solidarity with other political prisoners.

Despite the brutality of the incident, people surrounded the Al-

Mezra home and tried to save them. People from different parts of the city continue to visit the family to show solidarity. According to one of the local activists, hundreds of families have visited the Al-Mezra family, in solidarity against the oppressive regime.

There are many like Abbas Al-Mezra and his family. According to Amnesty International's annual report, around 155 men and 20 children from Qatif Province were held without charge in connection with protests at the end of 2012. Protests continue and the numbers are increasing to tens of thousands during major occasions and calls to demonstrations.

These attacks bring to light the brutality of the Western-backed Saudi regime. Solidarity with pro-democracy activists and their families includes exposing the hypocrisy of the West (including Canada) that claims to promote democracy while backing oppressive regimes.

Tamarod: ongoing civil disobedience in Bahrain

by YUSUR AL BAHRANI

AUGUST 14, 1971 marks the day when Bahrain gained independence from Britain. August 14, 2013 marks the day when a new wave of protests started under the name "Tamarod" (rebel)—inspired by the latest phase of the Egyptian Revolution. This sparks a hope that Bahrain will also gain independence from the Western-backed Al-Khalifas.

The Tamarod protests, sit-ins and rallies have been going on since the eve of August 14. When the Tamarod campaign was announced in early July, most of the organizers were young activists and radical revolutionaries. However, the campaign attracted masses of people and prominent opposition groups like Al-Wefaq, making it very successful. Men, women, children and elderly participated in the events. While some attended rallies and protests, others organized sit-ins in their neighbourhoods.

While demonstrators were in the streets, political prisoners were showing their solidarity by protesting in prisons. According to members of their families, violations escalated as political prisoners continued to protest while in detention. Despite the arbitrary arrests, house raids and the lethal tear gas attacks, Tamarod continues. The campaign turned from protests, rallies and sit-ins to an ongoing civil disobedience. This shakes the ground under Bahrain's ruling family.

Counter-revolution

The government of Bahrain has banned all unauthorized protests, rallies and sit-ins, making it legal for the forces to attack any protestor choosing to participate in the sit-ins near their homes, including the elderly and children. Prior to Tamarod, troops from Jordan had reportedly arrived in Bahrain to help the government crackdown on peaceful protestors. In addition to those, Western-backed Saudi Arabia has not withdrawn its

forces from Bahrain.

Meanwhile, the Western-backed monarchies claim to support the Egyptian Revolution, taking advantage of a weakness of the Tamarod movement there. The latest phase of the Egyptian Revolution saw millions of people protest and strike against the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood for going from opposition to complicity with the Western-backed military regime. To try to contain the movement, the military regime removed Morsi (just as it was previously forced to remove Mubarak), and has launched an offensive against Brotherhood activists as part of a broader counter-revolution. The Egyptian Tamarod movement was part of the massive movement from below that forced the military to remove Morsi, but has gone on to support the counter-revolution from above.

Now other Western-backed dictatorships are claiming to support the Egyptian Revolution by supporting the military's offensive against "ter-

rorism." Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which participated in the crackdown on pro-democracy protestors in Bahrain, pledged along with Kuwait a total of \$12 billion in aid to Egypt. In a statement that was read on state TV on August 16, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia said, "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, its people and government stood and stands by today with its brothers in Egypt against terrorism."

Solidarity

While the recent events have further exposed the ruling class in Bahrain and the Gulf region, it is necessary to always be in solidarity with revolutionaries in those countries. Being in solidarity with people in Bahrain means supporting their rights to self-determination and exposing the Western governments that continue to back the Gulf's dictatorships. For the people of Bahrain to oust Al-Khalifas, there should be no US Fifth Fleet nearby, and no Western arms sales to repressive regimes.

Saudi-Russian meeting tries to control Syria's future

by AHMED ELBASSIOUNY

VIOLENCE IS escalating in Syria with recent allegations of chemical weapons attacks on civilians in towns outside Damascus. The entire world wonders why the Syrian situation is getting worse everyday.

In addition to the brutality of the Syrian regime, the inter-imperial rivalry intervening in Syria is worsening the situation, with Russia arming the Assad regime, and the US and its puppets in the region arming sectarian sections of the opposition to undermine the revolution. This, more than the internal conflict, is pushing Syria towards civil war. Recently Saudi Arabia, backed by the US, has tried to bribe Russia into abandoning Assad's regime.

The Saudi deal

At the beginning of August the Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, had a four-hour meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Reuters and other sources confirmed that the meeting was about the Russian stance towards the Syrian situation. The Russian president was asked to abandon supporting the Syrian President, Bashar Al-Assad. In return, Saudi Arabia will sign a deal of approximately \$15 billion in Russian arms and weapons. On top of that, the Kingdom will ensure that Russia remains the top gas supplier to Europe by eliminating the Gulf competition.

Counter-revolution

While the corporate media claim that Russia is re-considering its support for Assad based on chemical weapons, the real reason is a deal on arms and oil. While removing one source of imperial intervention (Russian arms to Assad) would be good for the people of Syria, it won't help if it's driven and replaced by another source of imperial intervention (Saudi Arabia and Western imperialism). While Assad's regime has committed grave human rights violations and war crimes with the aid of Russian arms, the Saudi regime has also used US and Western arms to attack pro-democracy protestors in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The Saudi government has played a counter-revolutionary role, representing indirect Western intervention. Saudi Arabia and its allies, who are pushing for the ousting of Assad's regime, would support a replacement that is compliant to Western states and corporations. Since Saudi Arabia tops the list of American allies, it takes the lead on trying to bribe Russia out of the equation.

While the world's imperialist forces are competing to control Syria, it is important to be in solidarity with the Syrian people—supporting their right to self-determination, and saying "no" to imperialist intervention.

Tunisia's revolution continues

by HANAN JIBRIL

PROMINENT TUNISIAN opposition leader and member of the People Movement Party, Mohamed Brahmi, was assassinated in front of his home on July 25. This has caused further anger among the opposition and revolutionary movements that demand real democracy and social justice.

Six months ago another promi-

ent secular leftist opposition leader, Shokri Belaid, was assassinated. There have been speculations that the same radical group has been involved in both crimes. At the same time, the opposition accuses the Ennahda ruling party of using intimidation as a means to stay in office after it had pledged to leave office within a year. Ennahda has been in power for nearly two years.

Rached Ghannouchi, Ennahda party chairman, presented to form

a national unity government if all parties take part, but also said that a non-partisan party could not "manage the delicate situation in the country."

The Arab Spring first emerged in Tunisia when Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouaziz set himself on fire after constant harassment from officials and not being able to make ends meet. This sparked a wave of protests and strikes that toppled the Western-backed dictator, Zine El

Abidine Ben Ali, in January 2011, further sparking revolutions across the region and hope around the world.

The current opposition and revolutionary movements in Tunisia have been organizing and calling for Tamarod (rebel) by collecting signatures against the government's institutions. The revolution in Tunisia is ongoing and it will continue until the demands of the people are met.

The police: serving and protecting the 1%

WITH THE recent shooting of 18-year-old Sammy Yatim in Toronto, the whole question of the role of police in society is brought to the fore, once again.

Yatim was on a streetcar in Toronto. He was exhibiting erratic behaviour and he had a small paring knife in his hand. Yatim allowed passengers and the streetcar driver to exit the streetcar. He was alone in the streetcar when police fired three times. Sammy fell to the floor and then police fired off six more rounds, as well as tasering Sammy where he lay.

Thousands marched through the streets of Toronto demanding justice for Sammy, led by his family and friends. Under the weight of public pressure, the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) charged Toronto Police Constable James Forcillo with second-degree murder. Forcillo was suspended with pay (over \$100,000 a year) and he was out on bail almost immediately after being charged, which is not what would happen with any ordinary citizen charged with second-degree murder.

The role of the police

The question of police violence is not just a case of a few bad apples or of the individual failings of particular police officers, although these officers should definitely be held accountable for their crimes. Although Toronto Police are supposedly there “to serve and protect”, we need to ask: to serve and protect whom or what exactly? There is a reason that the victims of police violence are overwhelmingly young, black, people of colour, recent immigrants and First Nations.

It has to do with the racism of the larger society, which cannot be solved by hiring more black or aboriginal police—or more women officers, in an effort to combat sexism within the force—although, of course, we would argue that all these groups should have the right to join the police force, should they so decide.

The police cannot be reformed in this way because they are an integral piece in maintaining class rule in a society that is based on inequality.

Class society

In Frederick Engel’s groundbreaking work *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State*, he points out that it’s only through the division of society into classes that it becomes necessary to create a so-called neutral state that seeks to mediate between contending classes.

Before the rise of class society, when human beings mostly lived communally in hunter-gatherer societies, there was no need to have a body sitting on top of society to essentially protect the wealth and property of the tiny minority who came to control the resources. This was because in hunter-gatherer societies the clan or group shared equally the food they collected.

With agriculture and the creation of a surplus, a ruling class emerged to control and dominate society. This is where we see the creation of the “armed bodies of men” that Engels referred to: the state and the institutions that defend that state—the army and the police. The state must appear to be neutral, otherwise why would people give it any legitimacy?

To serve and protect the 1%

Capitalism as a system uses the tools of racism, homophobia and sexism to divide and conquer. It’s no accident, then, that these same tools are used by those institutions charged with propping up the capitalist state. These cases of murder by police, and countless others that have been documented, point to the overwhelming brutality required in order to keep capitalism safe for the wealthy.

If you look at prison statistics in the US and Canada, it’s overwhelmingly poor, black, Hispanic and First Nations people who are incarcerated. None of the wealthy who stole millions from ordinary people during the economic meltdown has done time in jail, nor will they, because they are protected by the system that they serve and perpetuate.

Police are also routinely used to break occupations, strikes and protests—from the killing of indigenous activist Dudley George, to the mass arrest of G20 protestors, to the attacks on striking Quebec students.

Socialism

It’s only with the dissolution of class society and capitalism that we will be able to rid ourselves of these bodies that serve to keep class rule intact. When Marx wrote about the Paris Commune, where for a few brief months ordinary people took over the running of the city and all people were made equal, he notes that the police and army were replaced by a people’s militia, whose role was not to beat down ordinary people, but to defend the Commune from the capitalist army that wanted to restore “order.” In fact, armies “separate and apart from the people” were declared illegal.

In a socialist society, where there is no need for hunger or want and where we can turn the vast wealth that already exists in our world to meet human need, there would be no role for an armed force to defend the wealthy with brute force.

INTERNATIONAL



Free Chelsea Manning

by LAURA KAMINKER

WHILE GEORGE Bush roams free after launching a war that killed a million Iraqis, Chelsea Manning has been sentenced to 35 years in jail for blowing the whistle on Bush’s war crimes, through her leaks to Wikileaks.

The verdict should not have been a surprise, as Manning was not given an actual trial. In a court martial, the accusers and prosecutors also serve as judge and jury. Under a military proceeding there can be no justice for a war resister.

Collateral murder

Manning is the US soldier and war resister who released thousands of US military documents to the public through WikiLeaks. Among those documents was a video—called “Collateral Murder” on the internet—showing the complete disregard for human life inherent in the US’s occupation of Iraq. The documents also proved much of what peace and democracy activists have long known or suspected, including: an official US policy to ignore torture in Iraq; that US officials covered up evidence of child abuse by US contractors in Afghanistan; that torturers in Egypt were trained by the FBI; that the notorious concentration camp in Guantanamo Bay holds mostly innocent people; and other damning evidence of US imperialism. Manning released these documents at enormous personal risk because once she learned the truth about the US’s imperialist wars and occupations, she could not be silent.

The Obama administration has zealously persecuted Manning from the beginning. Manning spent more than three years in prison before her court martial,

including nine months in solitary confinement—conditions that are widely recognized as torture. During those nine months, Manning’s cell was stripped; eventually even her glasses and clothing were taken away. At night, guards would wake Manning every five minutes and she was not allowed to sleep during the day. This was done despite the military’s own psychiatric staff’s insistence that there was no medical justification for this treatment.

Persecution

Only worldwide public outrage pressured the military into improving the conditions of Manning’s confinement. Charging Manning with the most serious of military crimes, “Aiding the Enemy”, was part of this persecution. It can still carry a death sentence in the US.

Although the US’s treatment of Manning stands out for its brutality, the persecution of war resisters can be seen in historical context. The Espionage Act under which Manning was charged was passed in order to silence opposition to the US’s entry into World War I. Socialist leader and war resister Eugene V. Debs was sentenced to ten years in prison, and served nearly five years of that, for speaking out against the war in Europe. (Debs ran for President from prison and received nearly one million votes as a write-in candidate.)

Under the same law, the US government persecuted socialists, trade unionists, pacifists, and other democracy activists. During the “Palmer Raids”—named for US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer—the Espionage Act was invoked to charge not only those advocating revolution, but people engaging in legal, supposedly protected

activities like writing letters, circulating petitions, speaking in public, joining a group, organizing meetings, and carrying banners and flags. Hundreds of immigrants, including the revolutionary Emma Goldman, were deported, and thousands of US citizens were arrested and imprisoned.

Similar incidents are peppered throughout the history of both Canada and the United States, as the ruling class tries to silence dissent with demonstrations of power. Most recently in Canada, more than 1,000 peaceful protestors at the G20 Summit in Toronto warrested, detained, and abused by police.

Support war resisters

Crackdowns on free speech and dissent are especially common during wartime, when the ruling class needs working people to carry out its plans for war and profit. Now that we live in a state of perpetual war, punishment of those who challenge capitalist wars has become even more common.

Chelsea Manning revealed truths that the US government wants to suppress. Similarly, the US has punished war resisters who speak out against the invasion and occupation of Iraq much more harshly than other soldiers who went AWOL without speaking out—and the Harper government encourages this persecution by deporting war resisters.

Chelsea Manning and other US war resisters need and deserve our support. For more information, please visit the Private Manning Support Network: <http://www.bradleymanning.org/>

Since the writing of this article, Bradley Manning has declared “I am Chelsea Manning. I want to live as a woman.” The names and pronouns have been changed to reflect this.

Putin’s homophobic Olympics

by SAUL BLAKEY

IN JUNE the Russian Parliament, with the support of President Vladimir Putin, adopted what the LGBT community is calling “some of the most regressive, discriminatory and overtly homophobic/transphobic legislation that we have seen in recent years.”

The Russian law now bans “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations”, which means it threatens prison time and heavy fines for people who acknowledge the existence of LGBT people in public forums such as the internet, classrooms or on the streets.

Interviewed on CBC Radio’s *Day 6*, Masha Gessen, author of the Putin biography, *The Man Without a Face*, said the Russian leader is waging a culture war on the “quintessential other” for political power. Gessen said, “On the one side of this war is his shrinking constituency, which he views as Russian traditionalists in every sense. So they’re nationalists. They are socially very conservative. They identify as Russian Orthodox, and they buy the line that Russia is surrounded by enemies who are out to destroy it and who were also behind the protest movement last year.”

The international reaction has been swift. Harvey Fierstein, a longtime LGBT rights activist, wrote a scathing editorial in the *New York Times* pointing out that Russian lawmakers are threatening LGBT Olympic competitors and

fans with arrest.

Canada’s Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird outlined to the CBC details of eight meetings since January where Canadian officials pressured Russians to not sign the bill. Baird does not support a boycott of the Olympics but said, “It provides a spotlight on this mean-spirited and hateful law.” These are good words, but hypocritical coming from Tory mouths. As a committed member of the NATO alliance, Baird is repeating the pinkwashing rhetoric he used last year against Iran. This distracts from the Tories own homophobic and transphobic policies—from cutting funding to Pride Toronto, removing references to gay rights and equal marriage from the citizenship guide, and opposing the trans rights Bill C-279. While opposing the repressive Russian regime, Baird does not want anything to interfere with Canadian corporations who want to join in the profit-making from the Olympics.

The Olympic Games have a long history as a site for governments to make a political stand. Some were motivated by civil rights: the 1964 Tokyo Olympics’ ban on South Africa for its apartheid regime; and the boycott by 32 African countries of the 1976 Montreal Olympics for its refusal to ban New Zealand, whose rugby team had toured in South Africa. Other boycotts were more motivated by inter-imperial rivalry between Washington and Moscow: at the

1980 Moscow Olympics, the US led a boycott of 65 countries over the USSR’s invasion of Afghanistan; and at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics the USSR and 13 allies boycotted in retaliation.

But often the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has maintained a stance of “neutrality” that makes them complicit with attacks on civil liberties—from holding the Olympics in Nazi Germany in 1933, to suspending Tommie Smith and John Carlos in 1968 for their black power salute. For the upcoming Olympics the IOC only made assurances to athletes that they will not be discriminated against, warning that they do not want any demonstrations in one or the other direction. This “apolitical” stance is worrisome in that it accepts the double-standard offered to the Russian people.

Russian sports minister Vitaly Mutko made things quite clear when he said “an athlete of non-traditional sexual orientation isn’t banned from coming to Sochi. But if he goes out into the streets and starts to propagandize, then of course he will be held accountable.”

What kind of Olympics is this going to be? “This isn’t an Olympics,” writes Dave Zirin, sports editor at *The Nation*, “It’s more like a heist. The almighty Putin is . . . attacking the LGBT community in a cheap effort to turn attention away from rampant corruption and growing inequality, symbolized sharply by what’s happening in Sochi.”

Socialism and Islam

*In the midst of ongoing revolutions in the Arab world, **Jessica Squires** explores how we understand Islamist organizations and asks how we can best build solidarity with those resisting Western imperialism.*

It's been a dozen years since the "war on terror" and two years since the start of the Arab Spring—including the latest phase of the Egyptian Revolution that toppled President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. While Prime Minister Stephen Harper has claimed that "the major threat is still Islamism," others have uncritically supported the Muslim Brotherhood and denounced the revolutionary wave against Morsi. How do we explain Islamist organizations and how can we best build solidarity with those resisting Western imperialism?

Imperialism and Islamophobia

Like other religions, Islam is incredibly diverse. The idea that Islam is dangerous is simply Islamophobia—which exists in order to divide people in the struggle and to justify colonial oppression and war. The backdrop is the decline of US power in relation to other world powers, and its continuing struggle to remain on top economically and militarily.

During the first phase of the "war on terror," Islamophobia was used to justify the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq—claiming Islam is a monolithic and reactionary religion that led to 9/11, and that Muslim women are incapable of fighting for their own rights. In the second phase of the wars, Islamophobic ideas were used to justify the continuing occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq based on the notion that Muslims are incapable of self-determination, and Islamist groups are a greater threat than NATO.

Now, in reaction to the Arab Spring, Western governments have paid lip service to revolution while trying to hijack it—from "humanitarian intervention" in Libya, to trying to contain the Egyptian Revolution through the Muslim Brotherhood or through military rule.

Marxism and religion

Islam is a religion and as such is a set of ideas—an ideology—about the world and how it works. As Marx wrote, it is not consciousness that determines people's reality, but people's reality that shapes their consciousness. This is not a static or one-way process: people's ideas influence their activity, and when people collectively act to change the world their consciousness changes through the process. Actions and ideas have a dialectical relationship which has shaped human history.

Some claim Marx dismissed religion as the opium of the people. But the actual passage reads, "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of the people." At the time opium was widely used to ease pain and help people cope with suffering, and that was what Marx meant. The political conclusion was not to denounce religious ideas that people turned to, but the capitalist system against which they were reacting. The Russian Revolution put these ideas into practice, defending national and religious minorities



from oppression and supporting religious freedom.

Stalinism and Islamism

But the Stalinist counter-revolution crushed the Russian Revolution, installed a state capitalist regime, and turned revolutionary theory on its head—advocating alliances with the "progressive bourgeoisie" and condemning religion. Under pan-Arab nationalism, dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, the influence of Stalinism saw the identification of state control and power with socialism, leading to the repression of working class and socialist organizations (and Islamist organizations) under Nasser and Gaddafi.

The failure of Stalinist-influenced pan-Arab nationalism to confront imperialism increasingly led people to see Islam and Islamism as sites of resistance. Islamism is a term that often refers to political Islam—a perspective held by some Muslim groups that seek to control or influence state power and in some cases to convert the state to one they would consider Islamic. There is a wide range: from extremely conservative Wahhabi Islam of the Western-backed Saudi monarchy and the reactionary and fringe forces of Al Qaeda, to the Islamist forces who have mass support based on resisting Western imperialism while providing social services—like Hamas in Palestine, Hizbullah in Lebanon, or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

But a feature of Islamism—like pan-Arab nationalism—is its cross-class alliances trying to control the capitalist state, rather than working class organizations trying to overthrow it.

port the repressive Assad regime, and the Muslim Brotherhood vacillate from opposition to complicity with the military regime in Egypt.

Egypt: strategy and tactics

Hosni Mubarak was a key Western ally to enforce neoliberalism and support Israeli apartheid, and under his rule the Muslim Brotherhood was the largest opposition force. For this reason many of its activists were persecuted under the Islamophobic "war on terror." While Stalinists supported these attacks on civil liberties, the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists (RS) defended Islamists.

The Brotherhood formed part of the Egyptian pro-democracy movement, although it was not consistently allied with workers and the poor who wanted economic reforms. During the 2011 revolution the Brotherhood played a limited role; it was only when many of its youth joined the revolution that the leadership was pushed to eventually support it.

However, once Mubarak fell the Brotherhood moved quickly to negotiate with the new regime, because its goal is not economic or social reform but political influence in the Egyptian state. RS continued to support strikes and protests against the military regime, working with Brotherhood activists while pointing out their conservative leadership. When the Egyptian state cracked down on the RS and the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood supported the campaign, Brotherhood activists defended the RS because of its history of defending civil liberties.

When the 2012 presidential run-off pitted the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi against Ahmed Shafik from Mubarak's regime, the RS called for a critical vote for Morsi as a vote against the counter-revolution. But from the start the RS was part of the organized opposition to Morsi's failure to implement the demands of the revolution, adherence to neoliberalism, and complicity with Israel.

The experience of the Brotherhood in power drove another revolutionary wave of millions of people in June 2013. Fearing the deepening of the revolution from protests to mass strikes, the military regime removed Morsi and revived Mubarak's Islamophobic campaign against the Brotherhood—as the thin edge of a broader counter-revolution. Many are divided between supporting the state's counter-revolution, or defending the Brotherhood's betrayal of the revolution. The RS, on the other hand, is defending the Brotherhood from state violence, defending Christians from attack from reactionary Islamist forces, and pushing for a deepening of the revolution against the military regime.

Solidarity

What does this mean for the left and progressive forces in the West?

The greatest threat is imperialism and we need to unconditionally support movements against it, which means challenging Islamophobia at home and the war it justifies abroad. Failure to do this has led some to support state oppression of Muslims (especially Muslim women) in the West, in addition to Western military occupations and the counter-revolution in Egypt.

But this doesn't mean uncritical support for Islamist organizations. Because we want anti-imperial movements to win, we can be critical of their strategies and tactics. While defending Islamists from state repression, we can criticize the vacillations and betrayals and their cross-class leadership, and support movements from below that challenge the capitalist state regardless of which party is in power.

Finally, what we need here and everywhere is independent working class organization that has the capacity to bring the capitalist system to its knees. That is the lesson of Egypt and its revolutions—and many other examples throughout history.

Neoliberalism and the working class

Socialist Worker *looks at the rise of the neoliberal era in capitalism and the changing working class.*

by **PAM JOHNSON**

THE ECONOMIC period since the 1970s has been referred to generally as the neoliberal period both by the right and left wing. In the simplest terms it is characterized by the “market must rule” mantra of the leaders of the Western world: British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, US President Ronald Reagan, and now our own Prime Minister Stephen Harper picking up the gauntlet. Privatization, layoffs, attacks on trade unions and social services were the order of the day and this logic has had a lasting impact on the organization of society today.

The 2008 economic crisis saw banks deemed “too big to fail” rescued as the foundations of the market system. There was a 180-degree turn and suddenly capital was begging to be bailed out by governments. However, just as suddenly, we saw a return to the “market must rule” mantra. The logic of austerity has seen the very governments that used public money to prop up dying banking firms and corporations crying bankruptcy insist that we need to get rid of government (i.e. public services) so the market can bring us back to economic health.

This flip-flop has raised the bar on taking a clear-eyed look at the capitalist economic system in order to figure out how to effectively fight for a better system. It will also give us an opportunity to see some of the contradictions with what is being presented to us as “reality” and “common sense.”

There is also the notion—mostly coming from the left but certainly encouraged by the right—that capitalism has altered its structure in the neoliberal era; the development

of the finance side of capitalism has fueled this. There is also the claim that neoliberalism is an unnatural ideology forced on capitalism from the outside, that the problem is not capitalism but neoliberal capitalism or disaster capitalism. How we see the system has huge implications for how we will be able to fight.

Boom to crisis

Facing the Great Depression of the 1930s, capitalism returned to growth by the end of the 1940s through the barbarism of world war that created an arms economy and carpet-bombed countries that had to be rebuilt. This period has been characterized by one of the longest booms, highlighted by continual expansion of the world economy. Some economists began to believe that capitalism would never return to the boom and bust cycle.

The situation for workers, mostly in the advanced industrial countries, improved. Nearly full employment, the need for skilled labourers, etc. meant that workers could get something from employers without a huge struggle.

Public sector workers unionized in massive numbers without the bitter battles of the previous period, when industrial unionism had to be fought for with blood. What people did fight for in this period was expansion of the social wage, including things like social security, healthcare, greater access to education and public services and so on. It was in this period that the anti-Vietnam war movement and civil rights struggles in the US and the fantastic May ‘68 struggles in Paris occurred.

The tide turned in the 1970s when capitalist growth slowed and there were a series of crises around oil that changed the terrain. The classic problem of overproduction—too

many goods and not enough buyers at the right price—returned. Economists argued that this time the problem with capitalism was too much regulation, taxation and government involvement as well as greedy trade unions. Their solution was a “return” to a truly unfettered “free market” system that would rev up growth and expansion again.

Neoliberalism’s ‘solution’

In 1947, 39 scholars—mostly economists, with some historians and philosophers—were invited by Professor Friedrich Hayek to meet at Mont Pelerin, Switzerland to discuss the state and possible fate of classical liberalism and to combat the “state ascendancy and Marxist (read Stalinist) or Keynesian planning sweeping the globe.” The group also stated that it is “difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved” without the “diffused power and initiative” associated with “private property and the competitive market.”

A classical notion of liberalism, the primacy of the individual and individual choice, was at the core of the professed new turn. The notion, especially how its most famous members, Friedrich Hayek (Austrian economist) and Milton Friedman (American economist), express it, is an almost libertarian, almost Social Darwinist view of the market: the idea of individual freedom without fetters from the state. Margaret Thatcher famously stated there is no society, only individuals. It would be Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US who would articulate and amplify the neoliberal agenda.

Neoliberalism was not a right-wing conspiracy imposed on capitalism, but an attempt by the 1% to deal

with very real problems of capitalist crisis by attacking public services and workers’ wages—in the name of free and unfettered markets. But the myth of the free market doesn’t match the reality of the structure of capitalism in the neoliberal era.

Capitalism in the neoliberal era

Despite the mantra of smaller government, there has never been more direct involvement in the economic system by governments than there is today: control of the money supply and interest rates through central banks, corporate subsidies and tax breaks. There was no clearer example of the failure of neoliberalism to save capitalism, and of the ongoing relationship between capitalism and the state, than the 2008 economic crisis and the reponse of governments to bail out corporations. The questions about why the crisis happened were not directed at the perpetrators but at US Federal Reserve Bank president, Alan Greenspan. He said he didn’t know.

The professed foundation of neoliberalism has also effected analysis by the left. There was a popular notion during the rise of the anti-globalization movement in the late 1990s that the power of global capital in the neoliberal period had become so great that it made nations and states irrelevant; that the economic system had in effect decoupled from the political system and was operating in its own sphere. The 2008 economic crisis and corporate bailout (not to mention the “war on terror”) have effectively demolished this argument.

It is true that in this period capital has become more internationalized, but this has not separated corporations from states; it has actually created more complexly intertwined rela-

tions between them, with the states as arbiters for their home-grown corporations.

There is also the idea that the development of the financial side of the capitalist economy has supplanted the productive side (manufacturing). Sub-prime mortgages and the exotic debt packages—asset-backed derivatives and collateralized debt obligations—that were being bought and sold by banks looked like something new. But there is nothing new about it. Speculation—betting on prices—has always been an intrinsic part of capitalism. What is new is the areas in which this betting is happening: the debt market.

What are also new are regulations that have in effect made it possible for any corporation to be its own bank. Big corporations like GM have financial capital divisions that are now making more profit than their car production business. Loblaws is in the game with its own financial products in addition to groceries.

The globalization of markets, where for example parts of cars are made in five different countries and sold in a sixth, means that production is globally interdependent. Despite the internationalization of capital, its relation and organic connection to states continues. This connection between the state and capital is explained by Karl Marx : “The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

So while the mantra of small government continues, the capitalist class wants the state to intervene on its behalf.

This will be continued in Part II: Can neoliberalism save capitalism?

Without our brains and muscles not a single burger can flip

by **PETER HOGARTH**

ON JULY 29, hundreds of workers at Wendy’s, McDonald’s, Domino’s Pizza, KFC and other restaurants walked off the job in New York City, spearheading a week-long series of one-day strikes in seven US cities: New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, Milwaukee, Kansas City and Flint.

Most of the strikers earn close to the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. At the forefront of workers’ demands is a minimum wage of \$15 per hour for fast food workers, and the right to unionize and collectively bargain.

The advocacy group Fast Food Forward, made up of labour and community organizations, faith-based groups, and others concerned for the interests of low-wage workers, has helped to coordinate the demonstrations and

give expression to the demands. Their petition for a raise in wages and living standards for fast food workers has collected more than 125,000 signatures, while the message of low-wage service workers is spreading far and wide (watch John Oliver trumpeting their demands and chastising their detractors on *The Daily Show* for a great laugh).

The series of strikes has made it possible to quite broadly dispel some of the myths associated with the service/retail sector; taking on the common misconceptions that fast food workers are teens getting a bit of extra cash, that the companies cannot afford to pay their employees more, and so forth. The campaign has highlighted that the average salary of a fast food worker in New York City (NYC) is \$11,000 per year while the average salary of most fast food CEOs is \$25,000 per day; the median age

of a fast food worker in America is 29 years old; McDonald’s made \$5.5 billion in profits last year; many fast food workers are forced to work two jobs or go on some kind of public assistance to afford basic necessities like groceries, rent, childcare and transportation.

These high profile strike actions come after a couple of years that have seen: strikes in New York and Chicago in November and April; a spontaneous walkout in a McDonald’s in New York over extremely hot working conditions; job action by Walmart warehouse workers, and pickets by Walmart customer service staff; La Senza, Macy’s and Victoria Secret’s workers walking off the job and occupying their workplaces; baristas organizing for better wages and collective bargaining; and a plethora of other labour disruptions in workplaces that fall outside the traditional area of the

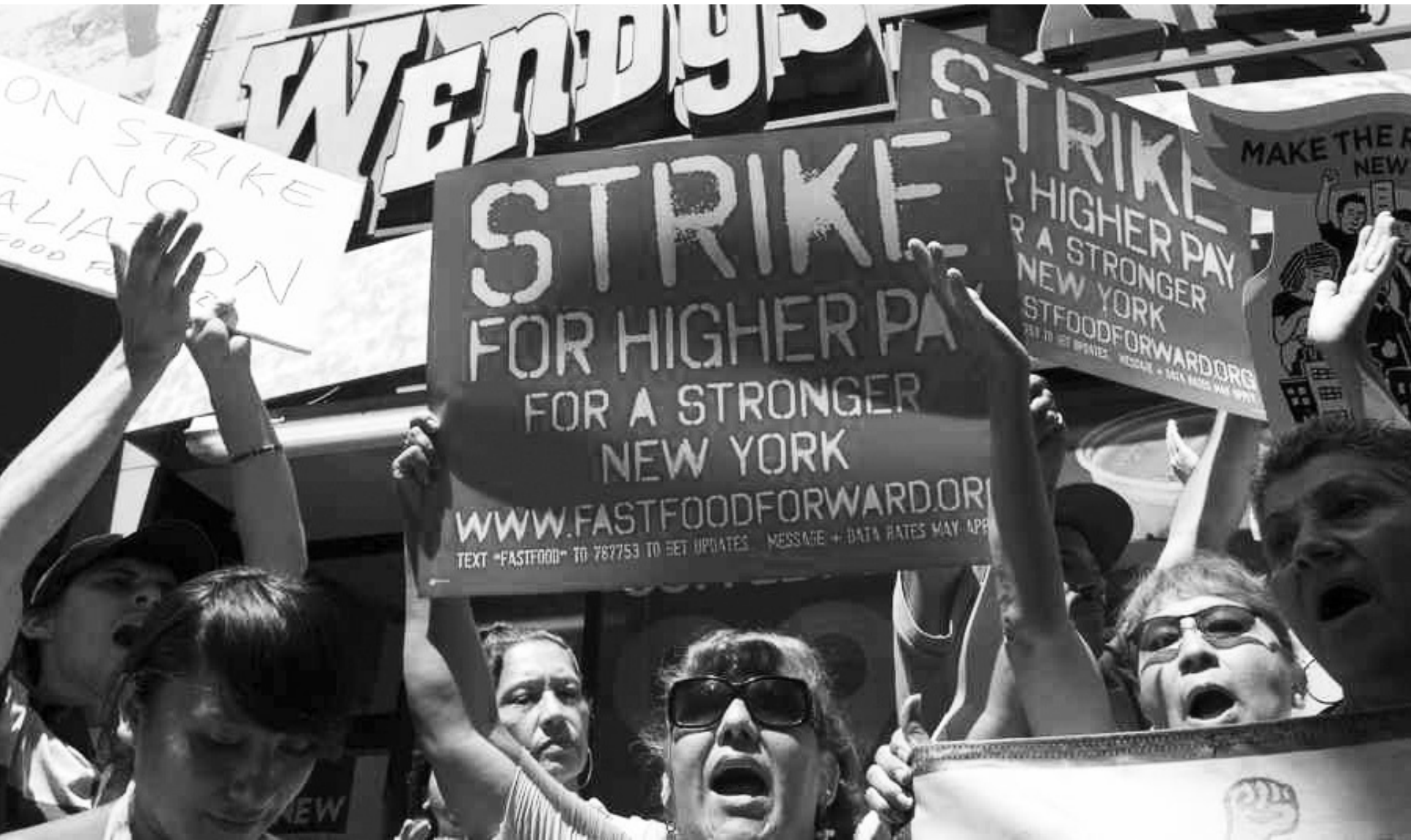
organized labour movement.

These developments are incredibly important for a number of reasons. For years, many have rightly criticized the labour movement for not organizing the retail and service sectors, leading some to falsely counterpose organized and unorganized workers. However, these initiatives in fast food and Walmart—combining unions, workers fighting to unionize, and community groups—show that it is possible to unionize these sectors. This is an argument for unions to organize more of the emerging working class, rather than clinging to a dwindling membership while giving out concessions to employers, and for people outside of unions to see the importance of broadening and strengthening organized labour.

Despite all the academics who have made a living out of declaring the working class dead and

buried, or replaced by a precarious class with different class interests and different methods of organizing, the working class exists and it wants better wages, better working conditions and the right to join unions. These are the traditional demands of the labour movement and now in the service sector, which is adding jobs faster than any other sector of the North American economy.

Finally, the strikes demonstrate the power of the working class when it decides to withdraw its labour. That \$200 billion a year that comes in to the big fast food chains is only made possible by the brains and muscles of the workers cooking the food, ringing up sales, cleaning the floors, and driving the produce. A class-conscious service sector with the language of the Occupy movement and the power of the 99% is a force to be reckoned with.



‘Sharecroppers on wheels’: port truckers are organizing and winning

by **LAURA KAMINKER**

WHEN IS an employee not an employee? The answer to this riddle is rapidly becoming the true face of employment in North America today.

In her brilliant investigative book *Bait and Switch*, Barbara Ehrenreich writes about jobs that require scare quotes. These “jobs” provide no salary, no benefits, and no workplace. In most cases, the “employee” finances the most basic tools of the trade out of their own pockets. Real estate agents, insurance salespeople, and cosmetic salespeople often fall under this category. You might be surprised to learn that many truckers do too.

They are called “port truckers”, and they haul freight from ports to stores like Wal-Mart and Starbucks. Since the deregulation of the trucking industry under US President Carter—a Democrat—port truckers have been classified as independent contractors. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters says that the majority of port truckers (more than 80 per cent) are wrongfully denied employee status.

Employee status would lift port truckers out of poverty, and—perhaps most importantly—give them the right to unionize. Is it any wonder the companies that profit from the truckers’ labour use the fiction

of the independent contractor?

Josh Eidelson has been writing about this on *AlterNet*, *The Nation*, and *In These Times*: “As I’ve reported, port truckers charge that their status comes with all the downsides of employment—the companies they work for set their compensation and regulate their work—and little of the upside. Most port truckers pay for their trucks (sometimes leasing them from their bosses) and the fees and upkeep costs that come with them, get paid nothing for the extra time they spend idling in traffic and have no legal right to unionize. Such a “Who’s the boss?” problem has become increasingly prevalent for US workers, as increasing numbers are cast among the ranks of temps, informal workers or independent contractors lacking the legal rights of employees—including collective bargaining.”

Citing a series of public and private sector studies, a spokesperson for the federal Department of Labor told *The Nation* in an email that the “numbers suggest that misclassification occurs in significant numbers and, across the country, workers are finding themselves without the basic protections that Congress has enacted to ensure they receive fair pay, safe workplaces, and necessary supports when they are hurt or lose

their jobs.”

The old sleight of hand called independent contracting keeps each individual trucker powerless against the mega-corporation that pays him. Teamster Vice President Fred Potter calls them “sharecroppers on wheels”.

The Teamsters and organizations like Change To Win intend to change that. Change To Win’s campaigns include Wal-Mart workers, warehouse workers, port truckers, and farm labourers—an increasingly huge portion of the North American labour force, most of whom also wear that unconscionable label: the working poor.

Port truckers are determined to change their working conditions, and to reach out to their sisters and brothers in the same situation, and help them change their lives too. Eidelson reports: “The same day that the Teamsters won their New Jersey election, workers at the Port of Los Angeles filed the latest in a slew of wage and hour claims against port trucking companies operating in California. The claims allege that companies have illegally misclassified workers as independent contractors, denied them the wages they would legally have been entitled to as employees, and subjected them to payroll deductions that could not legally be

required of employees. Following know-your-rights meetings organized by the Teamsters and the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, over 400 such claims have been filed in California—some by the Teamsters, others by private attorneys. Combined with eight potential class action lawsuits, the union says the industry faces a potential liability of \$100 million.”

These organizing, legal and political efforts are designed to reinforce one another. Potter said that legal action “puts pressure on them to change their business model, and not misclassify workers. That will open the door for the workers, properly classified, to then seek union representation.” He predicted that evidence of rampant lawlessness would also hurt trucking companies’ relationships with the major chains that hire them. Votes to unionize by port truckers could also strengthen the case that members of the allegedly misclassified majority should have the chance to do the same.

The most dramatic attempt at such synergy took place in 2011, when port truckers staged a strike in Washington state, driving off the job in protest of alleged retaliation, and massing at the state capitol to demand passage of an anti-misclassification bill. While

the drivers successfully slowed the pace of Seattle’s port, the bill died in the State Senate after passing the House. Asked about that defeat, Potter said, “The industry showed up in force.” However, he said, “That bill is not dead to us.”

As new union members in an overwhelmingly non-union industry, Toll workers in California and New Jersey now have the opportunity to help organize peers at other companies. The campaign acknowledges that the higher standard it has achieved in the Los Angeles Toll contract—which it says doubles workers’ hourly pay—won’t be sustainable unless some of Toll’s competitors follow suit. Indeed, that contract has language committing the Teamsters to organize currently non-union workers at other companies as well.

Schmitt told *The Nation* that as he and other Toll employees run into drivers from other companies at the Port of Newark, “they’re asking us questions. People are congratulating us on the victory. I guess once we get a collective bargain agreement, and the word is out, don’t be surprised that they would probably want to form a union too.”

This is republished from wmtc: http://www.wmtc.ca/

by **DAVE BUSH**

THE UNION movement in Canada faces a number of challenges. Not only has the economic crisis given the excuse to employers and the state to rail on organized workers, but labour’s difficulties in successfully organizing in the service sector could lead to a continual fall in union density in the private sector—which spells trouble for the working class. So the question is: how can the union movement begin to turn the tide and organize in the low-wage service sector?

In the US we’ve seen the inventive and exciting organizing with the Fast Food Forward campaign—where workers in the biggest fast food chains are organizing to demand higher wages and unionization. Closer to home, the Baristas Rise Up (BRU) campaign (which I had the good fortune to be a part of as a contract organizer) in Halifax, Nova Scotia is a modest attempt at organizing the low-wage service sector.

Just Us café organizing
This spring and summer, coffee

shop workers at several businesses in Halifax started to come together to transform the low-wage, precarious work of baristas into something better by forming unions with the Service Employees International Union, Local 2. This past spring, workers at a Just Us café, a fair trade workers co-op, attempted to organize a union. The workers were less than pleased about how this supposed workers’ co-op (only 15 of 70 or so workers were in the co-op), which prided itself on the mantra of fair trade and ethical practices, fell short when it came to treating its own workers with dignity. During the union drive, the employer fired two workers who were involved in the organizing.

Just Us workers began a period of public agitation, which culminated in the employer caving to public pressure and recognizing the union. The Just Us workers at the Spring Garden cafe are now in the process of negotiating their first contract. The other Just Us locations in Halifax will also be granted card check neutrality.

After this victory it was quickly recognized that a single unionized

coffee shop was by itself not going to achieve gains at the bargaining table. Also, because of the high turnover in the industry it was quite possible that the union would not be sustainable over the long-term in a non-organized sector. So it became necessary to think about how to organize the entire coffee shop sector in order to transform it.

Baristas Rise Up

The BRU campaign, which is a worker-led effort, was launched as workers from two Second Cup stores organized union certification votes. At least one of those stores won their vote; the other vote count is pending. However, these victories came at a price. At one Second Cup, the owner fired four workers and cut the hours of the rest after finding out about the union drive. The workers in BRU held multiple rallies and pickets outside the store to show that they weren’t intimidated and that they weren’t going away.

BRU is currently looking to expand its organizing campaign with a coordinated drive in other coffee shops. However, this is not an easy task. The high turnover,

the lack of union tradition, the small workplaces and the virulent anti-union climate of small businesses present unique hurdles in an organizing drive. Organizing a small workplace with an ever-present owner or manager who has developed personal relations with the employees makes it harder for workers, even if they have multiple complaints about their work, to cut through the small business ideology of “we are all in this together.” The hands-on nature of small business owners makes them particularly anti-union.

Baristas in Halifax are for the most part young, but unemployment in Nova Scotia hits young workers especially hard. Nova Scotia’s unemployment rate of nine per cent, which is well above the Canadian average, swells to over 18 per cent for workers under 25. This disadvantages young workers and means that so called “transitional jobs” such as coffee shop work are fast becoming the permanent new normal for young workers.

Lessons

The explosion in public interest

across Halifax and the rest of the country about the coffee shop workers’ union drive speaks to the potentials and problems facing unions. The union movement must figure out ways to effectively organize in the low-wage service sector to remain a vibrant and relevant force for the working class. This means modest campaigns such as BRU should be replicated on a grander scale across the country.

If we are truly to win substantial gains for the working class we not only have to unionize individual workplaces, but we need to aim in the long-term to transform precarious low-wage service jobs into something better. This requires having a strategy to increase density and moving to implement city-wide base contracts to under-cut the competitive pressure on labour costs used by capital. The only way this can happen is for unions to pour resources into these types of long-term union drives and for the rank-and-file to ensure that these campaigns remain worker-led.

Dave Bush is a member of Solidarity Halifax and a co-editor of Rankandfile.ca

DISABILITY RIGHTS

Join the third annual Toronto Disability Pride March

AS SUMMER draws to a close, the time is once again approaching for another Toronto Disability Pride March. Since 2011, this march has been bringing attention to issues faced by people with disabilities in Toronto, by calling on them to take to the streets and unite against the oppression we face.

This year the need for this action is blatantly clear. Incidents like the hate letter sent to the family of an autistic teenager, the numerous incidents between Toronto Police and people with disabilities documented in the mainstream media, the disregard towards people with disabilities shown by politicians in this latest by-election, and of course the ever present threat of cuts to our quality of life. As discouraging as all of this may seem, events like the Toronto Disability Pride March serve as a reminder of the power that people with disabilities have when we unite together.

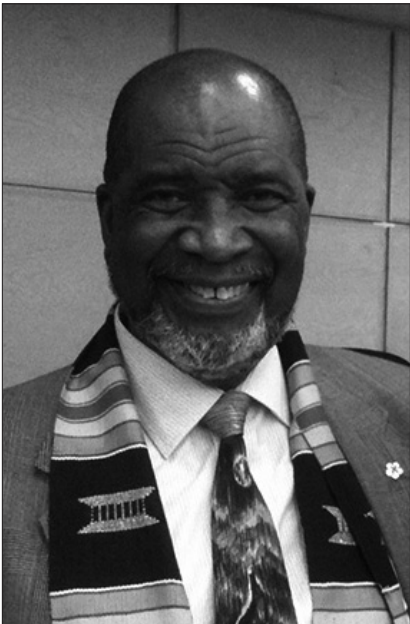
It is worth noting that similar marches and events have taken place in the UK and across the United States, as people are beginning to recognize the power of collective action in the disability movement. These events are changing the conversation about what it means to be a person with a disability. We are no longer a special interest group, or people just trying to blend in to an able-bodied world. We come from all walks of life, as diverse as the communities we come from, and together we can unite to fight against the oppression that impacts us, one and all.

Be loud, be proud, and come march with us on October 5, starting at 1pm in Queen’s Park. For more information, please visit: <http://torontodisabilitypride.wordpress.com/>

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OBITUARY

Remembering Rocky Jones



WE ARE tremendously saddened by the news of Burnley “Rocky” Jones’ death.

Rocky was a tireless fighter for the achievement of a better, fairer world and his passing marks a great loss to this city and province. While a friend to many of our members, Rocky was also an inspiration to all of us. Indeed, much of the work done at Solidarity Halifax owes a great debt to his astute political and social analysis of the intersections of race and capitalism developed over a lifetime of fighting for justice, and to the examples of success he has set along the way. He will be greatly missed.

For links to recorded lectures and interviews Rocky gave, as well as a tribute by George Elliott Clarke, please visit: <http://www.socialist.ca/node/1858>

This is republished from Solidarity Halifax.

OPINION



Workers at Fisher Auto Body occupy the plant in Flint, Michigan in 1937.

The missing piece: the far-left in the workplace

Dave Bush on the role of working class activists in reviving rank-and-file union struggle.

AS THE Canadian labour movement stumbles from defeat to defeat in this crisis period it is worth asking why this is the case.

What accounts for the trade union movement’s inability to mount an effective political resistance to austerity? Is it the poor and unimaginative leadership? Maybe it is the ossified and inward-looking culture of trade unions? Is it the poor objective conditions of the crisis? Or perhaps it is the culture of docility and defeatism amongst rank-and-file members resulting from the regular drubbing the working class has taken over the past two decades that explains the current state of labour?

While all these explanations contain a kernel of truth, I think they miss a key element in explaining why the trade union movement has become a paper tiger. The objective conditions for the left and the labour movement in Canada are far from ideal. Over the last 30 years governments and employers have become increasingly emboldened in their anti-union tactics. The neoliberal assault on working people has seen the rollback of social benefits and the power of unions. The changing nature of work in Canada and the restructuring of the global economy has put labour on the back foot—one need only to look at the fall off in strike activity to confirm this. Add to this the depreciation of the US labour movement and this goes a long way in explaining the weakness of the Canadian labour movement.

However, we should be very careful about subscribing to an explanation of labour’s current predicament as primarily a function of unfavourable objective conditions. This view can too often be used as an excuse by labour leaders and other leftists to make peace with the status quo through various forms of collaboration or resignation from struggle. Yet, we cannot just hunker down and simply weather the storm of the crisis waiting for things to magically get better. That is a fantasy.

Radicalism

The truth is that the explanation for labour’s weakness is much more complicated. Yes, labour leaders share some of the responsibility for labour’s recent defeats. Yes, the bureaucratic structures of unions have been more than problematic in stifling creative and strident rank-and-file activity. But simply locating the problem at the level of bureaucracy is in effect mirroring the explanation put forth by some of the most regressive labour leaders; it is the bad economy, it is external conditions. We should not expect structural reforms and rank-and-file radicalism to benevolently flow downwards. There is a real danger in having a persecuted mentality if we simple think that the problems facing trade unions are the result of corrupt labour leaders and bad economic conditions. Undoubtedly there is a lot of truth in that analysis, but it more often than not serves as a deflection.

The problem with the objective conditions explanation is that it only goes so far. The labour movement in North America was in many ways facing a much worse set of prob-

lems in the early 1930s. Unionization rates were minuscule and unions were primarily organized along craft lines, making them fairly conservative. The Great Depression created seemingly impossible conditions for workers to organize and push for gains in their workplace. However, over time, workers did organize industries that were previously impervious to unions, such as auto, and small unit service industries with multiple employees, such as trucking.

This was made possible by the growth of active rank-and-file networks within workplaces. Successful and strategic organizing drives in key industries such as trucking, rubber, shipping and auto were built from the shop floor up. An active rank-and-file using creative tactics on the shop floor and in the broader community was what made working class gains possible. It was the rank-and-file pushing up against the existing labour movement that drove labour leaders and the union movement to adopt a more militant and effective stance.

Rank-and-file organizing

The question we should be asking is what accounts for vibrant rank-and-file networks and movements? The conditions of struggle were certainly different in the 1930s than they are today (though not as much as we would like to think). For instance, the working class was less fragmented geographically within cities themselves. But explanations such as this miss the most important factor: the activity and orientation of the left.

Far-left militants, communists, Trotskyists and fellow travellers, were the key driving force in building and sustaining rank-and-file organization that achieved substantial gains for the working class. This was not something that was unique to the old left of the 1930s and 1940s, but can also be seen in the rising workers militancy in the 1970s and early 1980s in Canada.

The far-left, for a variety of reasons has largely abandoned a practical orientation towards workers’ movements in Canada over the past twenty years. Largely this is a capacity question, membership in far-left organizations has dwindled and thus there is an organizational inability to carry out a concerted strategy within workers’ movements. Implicating oneself in workers’ movements is hard, unsexy work that requires time, resources, and patience. It is the type of work that only really produces results in the long-term and thus only groups with a long-term sense of struggle can engage in it.

The Canadian far-left since the mid-nineties has largely shifted away from organizing long-term strategic struggles. This shift, when coupled with the sustained attack on working people in the neoliberal era, has resulted in ossified unions, weak rank-and-file movements, concessionary contracts and emboldened state action in support of employers.

Of course, rank-and-file networks continue to exist and organize. For instance, in Nova Scotia the paramedics in Local 727 of the

International Union of Operating Engineers rejected three contract offers from their employer, EHS. Two of those were in defiance of their own union’s recommendation. This was done through a loose rank-and-file network that extends across the province. Rank-and-file paramedics, many of whom were shop stewards, also self-organized pickets across the province to protest the NDP’s stance and EHS’ inability to move at the bargaining table. While the paramedics have had their right to strike taken away, they continue to organize which may result in industrial action if they see no results through arbitration.

In Ontario, the Rank and file Education Workers of Toronto (REWT) were active in organizing the fightback against the Liberal government’s Bill 115. REWT and informal networks that have yet to be consciously organized, were key in pushing the OSSTF to not just passively accept Bill 115. While REWT was Toronto-based it reflected broader sentiments that existed in the OSSTF outside Toronto. A number of OSSTF districts were critical of Ken Coran’s leadership during the Bill 115 fight, rejecting tentative contracts against Coran’s wishes and forcing the union to follow ETFO’s lead in escalating its tactics. OSSTF districts and members even organized to help humiliate Coran’s election bid as a Liberal in the London West provincial by-election. REWT is currently looking to expand its network across the province and link up with the networks of dissidents across the province and across union lines.

There is a role for the left to play in this current moment of rank-and-file reconstitution. Left-wing organizations should be offering their energies, capacities and analysis while also humbly recognizing and understanding it is a learning process for the far left. This does not mean whole-hearted agreement with every step, but it does mean making engagement with rank-and-file movements a strategic priority. It also means we need to encourage, facilitate and organize rank-and-file activity where it does not exist.

It is important for left-wing activists to have a nuanced understanding of the problems facing the labour movement. It is not a matter of simply railing against labour leaders or writing off the union movement’s weakness as a product of the bad economic conditions. We must understand our own responsibilities. If we are serious about challenging capitalism and injustice in Canada and winning real gains for working people the left must organize itself in a manner that can orient itself to building and enriching rank-and-file movements. This means we must build organizations capable of sustained political struggle that connects anti-capitalist and left militants within the workplace.

While this may seem like a herculean task, it only takes a few successful and well-organized rank-and-file movements to change the mood of large sections of the working class. Confidence is infectious.

This is republished from Rabble.ca

Socialist Worker fighting fund

Thanks to the support of our readers, we have received \$14,000 for the 2013 Socialist Worker Fighting Fund Drive. That means we’re over half-way toward our \$25,000 goal. We thank all our readers and supporters for helping us get this far. If you haven’t done so already, we hope that you’ll consider making a contribution. We appreciate every dollar we receive, so help us extend the reach of Socialist Worker by making a pledge or contribution!

Cheques, money orders and pledges can be sent to the Socialist Worker Fighting Fund, % Box 339, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, M6H 4E3.

\$25,000

REVIEWS



#Sexism: stop blurring those lines

Blurred Lines
Song by Robin Thicke
Reviewed by Jesse McLaren

WITH 125 million views on Youtube, Robin Thicke’s song and video “Blurred Lines” has become one of the most popular songs of the summer. But it has also sparked outrage for degrading women and promoting rape culture, reinforced by the arguments that Thicke and his supporters use to defend the song.

The song features a catchy melody and collaboration with well-known singers Pharrell and T.I., and Thicke claimed that they “were just trying to make a funny song and sometimes the lyrics can get misconstrued.”

But the lyrics flow from the sexist premise of the song. As Thicke explained in an interview, “We were walking around the studio like old men hollering at young girls from the porch, so it would be like ‘hey girl, come here, you know you want it.’” Out of this premise emerged the song’s constant and creepy refrain, “I know you want it”, that serves as the backdrop for the song’s title: “I hate these blurred lines, I know you want it, but you’re a good girl, The way you grab me, must wanna get nasty.”

As Katie Russell, a spokeswoman for Rape Crisis, explained, “The lyrics of ‘Blurred Lines’ seem to glamourise violence against women and to reinforce rape myths, which we strive to dispel. Both the lyrics and the video seem to objectify and degrade women, using misogynistic language and imagery that many people would find not only distasteful or offensive but also really quite old fashioned. More disturbingly, certain lyrics are explicitly sexually violent and appear to reinforce victim-blaming rape myths, for example about women giving ‘mixed signals’ through their dress or behaviour,

saying ‘no’ when they really mean ‘yes’ and so on.”

Thicke’s defense only reinforced it, saying the “blurred lines” are “between a good girl and a bad girl. Even very good girls have a little bad side. You just have to know how to pull it out of them.”

Not about nudity

In the video, models chosen to conform to the young thin look the corporate media demands are stripped of their clothes and completely silenced (except for a solitary “meow”), as the fully-clothed male singers ogle and cat-call them, and at one point blow smoke in their face.

As video blogger Aimme Davison responded, “I don’t have any problem with nudity. However, I have a problem with power imbalances. And in this video, the women are clearly being used as objects to reinforce the status of the men. In the video, the men have all the control and status because they are not vulnerable, they are completely covered. Whereas the women have no status and are totally open to being exploited and ogled and used.”

Robin Thicke’s wife, Paula Patton, defended the video, saying, “I think it’s such a shame that nudity and the human body is seen as offensive, yet violence is totally cool to show to children all the time.” But the problem with this song and video is that it blurs sex and violence, with lyrics like “You’re an animal... You’re the hottest bitch in this place... I’ll give you something big enough to tear your ass in two... Nothing like your last guy, he too square for you. He don’t smack that ass and pull your hair like that.”

Not liberating

This is obviously not the only sexist song (Justin Timberlake’s recent “Tunnel Vision” is similar, singing “I know you like it” to women stripped of their clothes), but Thicke went further to de-

fend his song as “a feminist movement within itself”, while video director Diane Martel claimed the women in the video are empowered: “I directed the girls to look into the camera, this is very intentional and they do it most of the time; they are in the power position. I don’t think the video is sexist.” But as JH, a contributor to the feminist blog Vagenda, wrote, “The only real irony is when Thicke sings ‘tried to domesticate you/ But you’re an animal, baby it’s in your nature’, because the whole video is about domestication. It is not about girls exposing their bodies for their own amusement but for Thicke’s.”

As Thicke explained, “We tried to do everything that was taboo. Bestiality, drug injections, and everything that is completely derogatory towards women... People say, ‘Hey, do you think this is degrading to women?’ I’m like, ‘Of course it is. What a pleasure it is to degrade a woman. I’ve never gotten to do that before. I’ve always respected women.’ So we just wanted to turn it over on its head and make people go, ‘Women and their bodies are beautiful. Men are always gonna want to follow them around’... Right now, with terrorism and poverty and Wall Street and Social Security having problems, nudity should not be the issue.” This is similar to reactionary “men’s rights groups”, who claim to be progressive while reinforcing sexism—trivializing rape and turning people’s anxieties about neoliberalism and austerity into a backlash against the women’s movement based on conservative notions of gender roles.

For a recent video hit that challenges oppression instead of reinforcing it, see Macklemore and Ryan Lewis’ “Same Love”, and for a sex-positive parody of “Blurred Lines” that promotes consent, see the video “Ask First”, which contains lyrics such as “No way to know I want it unless I say I want it, consent is sexy, shows you respect me.”

Civil War), Quebec politics and racism. The TWP production, *Summer ’76*, was a critique of the Olympics mounted in the same year as the Montreal Olympics.

Actor R.H. Thomson, who worked with Luscombe, wrote in the book’s preface, “The politics of the powerless interested George. The feel of the street, the world of the factory, ordinary Canadians fighting fascism in Spain... the unemployed men and women in the soup kitchens of Canada of the dirty thirties, all of these were George’s passion.”

Themes of class, power, capitalism and resistance vibrated with political sensibilities of the day but managed to sidestep boorish polemics. In a tribute, Theatre Director Ken Gass said “Luscombe proved that strong socialist themes were not incompatible with a highly theatrical style.”

Sadly, many of the plays have been lost and the history sanitized or trivialized as the alternative theatre of the 1960s and 70s radicalization became the more mainstream theatre of today. TWP did not survive this transition and closed in 1989 against Luscombe’s wishes. Other alternative theatres inspired by the TWP and Luscombe have continued including Theatre Passe Muraille, Tarragon Theatre and Factory Theatre. Theatre director and critic Urjo Kareda (now deceased) summed up the current situation in a tribute in Bush’s book: “We no longer have so definitely a political theatre, and that is our loss.”

LEFT JAB

John Bell

A very Canadian genocide

RIGHT-WING ranter Ezra Levant is outraged about the history of Canadian genocide against indigenous peoples. Specifically, he’s outraged that anyone would dare call it a genocide.

When Bernie Farber, former head of the Canadian Jewish Congress, used the term Levant went on the attack, tweeting, “@berniefarber says Canada committed genocide against Indians. He’s profaning the Holocaust for a client.” Farber does work as an economic advisor with some First Nations groups. But anyone acquainted with the facts—the reduction of the indigenous population of North and South America from an estimated 10 to 18 million at the time of contact to far less than half a million by the end of the nineteenth century—would have a hard time finding a more accurate term.

In the words of David E. Stannard, a historian at the University of Hawaii, First Nations people suffered the “worst human holocaust the world had ever witnessed, roaring across two continents non-stop for four centuries and consuming the lives of countless tens of millions of people.”

Sanitizing genocide

In school I was taught that despite some clashes and problems, First Nations people were treated far better in Canada than in the USA. Stephen Harper upped the denial ante in 2009 when he told a press conference at the G20 summit, “We also have no history of colonialism. So we have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them.”

The Tories rewrote the *Discover Canada* handbook for prospective new Canadians supporting this sanitized and fictitious version of history: “The arrival of European traders, missionaries, soldiers and colonists changed the native way of life forever. Large numbers of Aboriginals died of European diseases to which they lacked immunity. However, Aboriginals and Europeans formed strong economic, religious and military bonds in the first 200 years of coexistence which laid the foundations of Canada.”

This doesn’t even qualify as a caricature of real history. Gone is the extinction of the Beothuk people, through disease, yes, but also through systematic violence from settlers and trappers. Gone is the systematic betrayal of First Nations allies, the destruction of their cultures and theft of their lands. Gone is the Riel rebellion, the fight for a homeland for First Nations and Métis peoples.

And most notably, gone is any mention of the primary instrument of genocide against First Nations—the Residential School system. Government records recently obtained by the Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission have revealed a story of racist experiments that cut the legs out from beneath the Harper version of history.

Residential Schools

From 1942 to 1952, the Canadian government deliberately starved thousands of First Nations children in experiments designed to study the effects of malnourishment.

In 2008, Stephen Harper “apologized” for the shameful history of the Residential Schools. Beginning in 1876, 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were removed from their homes and families and institutionalized in an effort of forced assimilation. Part of Harper’s apology was a promise to provide all the records in government archives dealing with that history to the Commission.

For five years the federal government dragged its feet and withheld the majority of its documents. In January of 2013, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was forced to take the government to court, where the judge ordered them to hand over more of the records.

For its part, the federal Aboriginal Affairs ministry contends the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had documentation on the Residential School experiments as early as 2010. Newly minted Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt brushed aside calls for an official apology. He insisted Harper’s 2008 apology covered all crimes.

In the experiments, First Nations people, mostly children in residential schools scattered across the country, were deliberately malnourished to study the effects of vitamin deficiency. According to Ian Mosby, the University of Guelph researcher who pieced together the story by examining the records, “In the 1940s, there were a lot of questions about what are human requirements for vitamins. Malnourished aboriginal people became viewed as possible means of testing these theories.” In addition, children were denied dental health services to study the effects of gum disease.

Canada’s Tuskegee

The use of First Nations children as guinea pigs recalls experiments in Nazi concentration camps, and the Tuskegee experiments in the US. Beginning in 1932, researchers from the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama deliberately withheld treatment from more than 300 black men suffering from venereal disease. They wanted to study the long-term effects of the disease. The men were deceived about the nature of the study they were part of. The experiment continued until a whistleblower went to the press in 1972.

Deliberately withholding treatment is a violation of the most basic medical ethics. The choice of black men in Alabama and First Nations children in Canada as laboratory rats was not accidental. It was the fruit of deep-seated institutionalized racism in both countries.

That racism has taken a new form but it hasn’t gone away. It is there in the Harper government’s attack on First Nations sovereignty; in the “slow industrial genocide” of the Tar Sands; in the refusal to provide justice for missing and murdered aboriginal women; in the deliberate underfunding of education and welfare services on reserves; in cutbacks and layoffs in frontline government staff; in the callous and purely colonialist response to the central demand of the Idle No More movement, for direct and respectful nation-to-nation dialogue.

The Residential Schools—and the horrifying experiments they concealed—are not ancient history. They were part of a deliberate campaign to wipe out aboriginal cultures and languages. This cultural genocide followed in the shameful footsteps of actual genocide through disease, violence and neglect.

How many more horrors are yet to be revealed in the hundreds of thousands of documents the government has not yet made available? One thing is certain: Harper’s phony apology and public denial of colonialism as the very core of Canadian history is the modern face of genocide.

Remembering a pioneer of alternative theatre

Conversations with George Luscombe

Written by Steven Bush
Reviewed by Pam Johnson

“I DON’T train actors, I train citizens.” Such was George Luscombe’s reply to a query about his profession reported in Steven Bush’s new book, *Conversations with George Luscombe*.

Luscombe was the pioneer of alternative theatre in Toronto and a seminal figure in the development of contemporary Canadian theatre. Bush’s book with accompanying CD of recorded conversations with Luscombe before his death, is an important and unique contribution to Canadian theatre history.

Luscombe, who died in 1999, left a legacy that, because of its political and often controversial nature, has been both praised and maligned. His lack of deference to the art “establishment” of government granting bodies and corporate boards likely led to the consequence that his contributions remain poorly documented in the annals of theatre history. Bush’s book is a welcome corrective to that situation.

Life and art

Luscombe was born into a working class family in Toronto during the Depression. He made his way to Britain and became an actor in Joan Littlewood’s Workshop Theatre, a physical theatre-based, left-wing company. Inspired by her training

and her politics, Luscombe returned to Toronto and with Tony Ferry founded the theatre company, Toronto Workshop Productions (TWP) in 1959, eventually housed on Alexander Street—the current home of Buddies in Bad Times theatre.

He eschewed the naturalism of much contemporary Western theatre in favour of a physically based, Brechtian style. He employed a rigorous training approach he called “The Efforts” which his ensemble of actors practiced daily. He was way ahead of his time in working with the actors to develop plays through kinetic exploration and interaction instead of working exclusively from scripts.

Author Steven Bush, who arrived from Ohio as a Vietnam war resister in 1969, describes walking into TWP and being transformed by Luscombe’s approach and passion. A large part of the book is interviews with Luscombe describing the philosophy and technique of his training and ensemble creation.

Political theatre

Luscombe was also a self-proclaimed Marxist, although he followed no particular tradition. His main theatrical interest was the development and production of plays whose subject was the working class. TWP’s political themes resonated with the radicalization of the 1960s and 70s. The plays tackled topics that no other theatre in Canada would touch: the 1973 coup in Chile, the Mac-Paps (a battalion of Canadians who fought in the Spanish

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.



Egyptian socialists speak out

ON AUGUST 15, the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists issued a letter to their comrades on the latest phase of the revolution. Here is a condensed version of the letter.

Revolution or military coup?

Whoever dismisses the intervention of the gigantic mass movement which launched the new wave of the Egyptian Revolution is fleeing from dealing with its inherent contradictions, and thus from both the new challenges in front of the Egyptian Revolution, and the opportunities that the future holds.

After Morsi's rise to power last year—with the blessing of the US, the military establishment, and a large section of the business elite—he failed to achieve the objectives of the ruling class in aborting the Egyptian Revolution. Morsi was initially a better option for the majority of the ruling class, as he adopted the neoliberal project and aligned himself with the interests of business. He had no qualms about alliance with the US and was careful not to disturb the Zionist state, in addition to being the first elected president after the revolution. Most importantly, he had a base in the largest mass organization in Egypt, an organization that works on the ground with hundreds of thousands of members, sympathizers and supporters.

They would be able to absorb the anger of the people and convince the masses of the neoliberal project and the cruel plans for austerity that accompany it, sparing the ruling class the danger of a mass uprising during its attempts to deal with the economic crisis.

Instead, the economic crisis and the failure of Morsi to implement the demands of the revolution (or more accurately his explicit challenge to these demands and objectives) led to a decline in his popularity and the popularity of his organization to the extent that the ruling class and its institutions could no longer rely on them in the face of the masses.

So we have witnessed the mass wave of protest on June 30 and the few days which followed, and seen the

military riding on the revolution after July 3 in order to cut the road to the development of the mass movement.

The mass movement could have developed greater and more radical dimensions, in particular with the beginning of partial strikes in the Public Transport Authority, the railways, in Mahalla, and among the civil servants at the Cabinet Offices and many others.

We are also seeing the return of the ruling class with its military symbols and old leaders in full force, after the expulsion of the Brotherhood from the state, in order for the military to lead the ruling class and the forces of counter-revolution to achieve what Morsi failed to do. That is, to abort the revolution and a hugely confident mass movement, which was however full of contradictions in consciousness and organization.

In the face of Morsi's overthrow, the Brotherhood and their Islamist allies sought to escalate their mobilization on the ground with sit-ins and marches in order to restore the "legitimacy" overthrown by the masses, along with their failed project hostile to the goals of the revolution. In the process they have committed heinous crimes that cannot be forgiven in many areas and provinces, as well as their sectarian rhetoric and their incitement against Christians, by pouring their anger out on them and attacking churches. As Revolutionary Socialists we must stand firmly against this aggression and any attack on the Christians of Egypt: this is a matter of principle for us.

The crimes of the Brotherhood have led most factions of the left to take an extremely opportunistic stance and to ally themselves with the military and support the repressive state, even repeating the same lies of the bourgeois and feloul media, and completely abandoning any revolutionary or class position. This perspective is built on a catastrophic analysis that considers the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies to be the greatest danger to the Egyptian Revolution, while in reality, if the Brotherhood poses a danger to a certain extent, the institutions of the state that monopolize the means of violence represent a far greater danger

to the revolution. This is manifested in the return of the repressive state in all its brutality.

These massacres are a dress rehearsal for crushing the Egyptian Revolution, and will be repeated tomorrow against any genuine opposition force that appears on the scene, particularly the labour movement. This is what we saw a glimpse of in the attack on the Suez Steel strike. The massacres against the Islamists are only the first steps along the road map towards counter-revolution, and we must expose this in sharp and principled attacks on them.

In these circumstances, we must directly and boldly and clearly and without any hesitation raise the slogan, "Down with military rule... no to the return of the feloul ... no to the return of the Muslim Brotherhood".

Are we afraid of isolation?

The masses have genuinely imposed their will and overthrown two presidents and four governments since the beginning of the revolution. This confidence which lies under the crust of contradictory consciousness is what prompted the masses to rise up against Morsi in the first place, and it is this which allows some to prepare gradually to complete the struggle against the new government, as its economic and political policies opposed to the demands of the masses becomes progressively clear.

Our principled position may result in our temporary isolation in the midst of the masses. Our message will not generally find a wide reception in the masses, despite all the efforts we will expend in work and activity in the workplaces, the university campuses and the local neighbourhoods. But we must not allow ourselves to give into any degree of frustration. The real content of the repressive regime now in power will be revealed before the eyes of the masses who will gradually begin the struggle against it.

In the weeks and months to come, we have the opportunity to attract and win some of these revolutionaries to strengthen our ranks, in order to play a more vibrant and stable role in the coming waves of the revolution.

international socialist events

TORONTO

Austerity, youth & the low-wage economy: why is capitalism in crisis?

In Canada, the economy lurches from job loss to job recovery and back again, while youth unemployment is 14% and the only work available seems to be low-paying "McJobs." The figures are even worse in other parts of the world, but there is hope. Unemployed young people and migrant workers have been significant to the fierce resistance to austerity in Greece and Spain; we've seen incredible strikes by fast food workers in North America and militant protests from those seeking regular hours and steady pay in Africa and Asia.

Join us for a day-school on the crisis affecting capitalism and what we can do to fight back.

Saturday, September 14

Schedule:

11:30am: Registration

12:00pm-1:00pm:
Austerity, youth & the low-wage economy: why is capitalism in crisis?

1:15pm-2:30pm
(choose one):
•A brief history of neoliberalism
•Austerity and the war on women

2:45pm-4:00pm
(choose one):
•Retail workers of the world unite! Fighting back in the service sector
•Is free education possible?

4:15pm-5:00pm: How does the 1% stay in power?

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)
252 Bloor Street West
rooms 8200 & 8201

For more information, selected readings and to register: <http://austerityandyouth.wordpress.com/>

VANCOUVER

Book club, reading The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth

Sunday, September 8, 2pm
BG Cafe, 4575 Central Blvd.
(just east of the Metrotown skytrain station)

Radical solutions to climate change (are the only solutions)

Friday, September 13, 7pm
Langara College
100 W. 49th Ave.

For more info: vancouver.socialists@gmail.com

peace & justice events

TORONTO

Disability Pride March

Saturday, October 5, 1pm
Queen's Park
<http://torontodisabilitypride.wordpress.com/>

VICTORIA

PowerShift BC

October 4-7
<http://www.werepower-shift.ca/>

You can find the I.S. in:

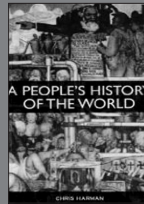
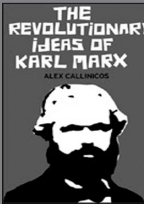
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COCA COLA WORKERS

by PETER VOTSCH

ON JUNE 27, shortly before a midnight strike deadline, Coca Cola Canada locked out over 700 workers at their Brampton plant. The members of Canadian Auto Workers, Local 973 had not even begun to negotiate economic issues, such as wages, shift premiums, etc.

Coke had put in front of the local's bargaining committee a long series of concessions, including: the elimination of pensions for new hires; the end of a defined benefit plan for those already working, to be replaced by a defined contribution plan; contracting out of skilled jobs, including a whole department; refusing to allow temporary workers access to full-time work; eliminating the right of laid off workers to transfer to other facilities in the region; dismantling of traditional seniority rights, affecting promotion, transfer and recall from layoff; reduction of benefits, and forcing of workers into a co-pay arrangement...and the list goes on.

All this from a company that made over \$9 billion in profits last year, and paid its CEO \$30.5 million.

Coca Cola is following a trend throughout both private and public sectors to demand concessions from their workers and, when they (the union) balk at the bargaining table, to lock them out. Some of Coke's demands will sound familiar, especially when it comes to different (reduced) conditions for new hires, and the transfer from a stable, predictable defined benefit plan to one driven by the market (i.e. defined contributions). Most of us will be quite familiar with demands to contract out work, especially from the unionized public sector to low-wage, non-union private firms. The money saved by employers do not benefit the public, let alone improve efficiency, as study after study has noted—it is simply a way to boost corporate profit.

Another attack by Coke on its workers that will sound familiar to many trade unionists is its attempt to enforce "precarious" work, by refusing to allow mobility from temporary to full-time employment. Precarious, insecure employment is everywhere in the economy: we see it from workers forced to sign employment contracts year after year, to workers who are hired as part-time workers, but who see their hours jump to full-time, only to find them reduced to below an acceptable amount needed to earn a living wage.

That makes it crucial that we support the members of CAW Local 973, who are holding strong on the picket line. The workers—many with high levels of seniority—have known plans were afoot by Coke since April to lock them out. On June 27, hours before the strike deadline, workers were told to gather their belongings and leave the plant, clearly indicating that Coke did not want to negotiate with its workers. When the workers



Baristas picket a Second Cup in Halifax
Source: rankandfile.ca

ONTARIO COMMON FRONT ASSEMBLY DRAWS HUNDREDS AGAINST AUSTERITY

ON AUGUST 19, over 250 activists participated in the third general assembly of the Ontario Common Front.

Taking place in Toronto, the Assembly was part of an ongoing process of building community-labour alliances to combat austerity. Delegates from across the province included members of the Canadian Federation of Students, anti-poverty networks, retiree groups, First Nations organizations, trade unions, local labour councils and more. Notably, the Assembly also drew labour participants from Montreal.

Among the guest speakers were: indigenous sovereignty activist Melissa Elliott, who is Haudenosaunee, Tuscarora Nation Turtle clan from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory; Deena Ladd, coordinator of the Workers' Action Centre in Toronto; Michael Harrington, from the Chicago Teachers' Union; Bridgett DePape, the former page who, in 2011, raised a "Stop Harper" sign in the Senate Chamber during the Throne Speech, and who is

now with ShitHarperDid; Henry Giroux, Chair in Communications and Cultural Studies at McMaster University; spoken word artist Ritallin (a.k.a. A. Gregory Frankson) and Pam Frache, currently a graduate student at McMaster University.

All speakers emphasized the need to build long-term networks, better engage new and existing members of trade and students' unions and develop frameworks that can challenge the neo-liberal agenda locally, nationally and internationally. At the same time, speakers emphasized the need to challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia and xenophobia as part of meaningful solidarity. Melissa Elliot highlighted the importance of the Idle No More movement, as well as the campaign to stop Enbridge's Line 9 from pumping Tar Sands oil east. Henry Giroux emphasized neoliberalism's war on youth, citing high levels of youth unemployment, expensive post-secondary education and unprecedented levels of debt.

The Assembly also fea-

tured breakout groups tasked with fleshing out an alternative vision for social, economic and environmental justice. Workshops focused on the Ontario-wide \$14.00 minimum wage campaign, the Peoples' Social Forum, deep organizing strategies (led by ACORN) and educational resources.

The upbeat mood and energy of the participants reflects an appetite to challenge austerity and a determination to rebuild the alliances and networks so crucial to the struggles ahead, though after surveying the political landscape and the state of membership engagement expectations were sober.

On September 27, the Ontario Federation of Labour, Canadian Federation of Students—Ontario, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—Ontario, Canadian Auto Workers, United Food and Commercial Workers, Canadian Labour Congress, and Workers United Canada are sponsoring a Youth Un(der) Employment Forum at the Ryerson Students' Union Centre.

SOLIDARITY FOR LGBT

AFTER AN initial march to protest Russia's new anti-gay laws, activists in Toronto attended a town hall meeting a few weeks later at The 519 to discuss and coordinate plans to build international support for LGBT people in Russia.

The three-hour meeting was well-attended, the conversation was broad-ranging and a few breakout groups were formed to focus on specific issues that seemed the most pressing and actionable.

This campaign is just beginning but is encouraging nonetheless for planning to take advantage of the Olympic spotlight and to build solidarity across Canada, Quebec and beyond for Russia's LGBT population.

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

Renewing rank-and-file militancy

LABOUR DAY in Toronto usually draws 20,000 to 25,000 workers into the streets. Workers' rights and the fightback against the ongoing attacks on unions is the focus this year. The austerity agenda has many faces and one that has been showing itself more and more across North America is the attack on union rights.

Austerity

There is a real attempt to break the spirit of organized workers—trying to enforce a notion that fighting back is not worth the risk. The ruling class is trying to instill the view that there is nothing we can do against the power of governments and corporations, and a strike or lockout will have devastating economic effects on workers and their families. The intent is to enforce a strict discipline on the working class so that concessions can be wrested from it and a low-wage economy will become the norm.

Attacking unions

We have seen the federal government take away the right to strike from postal workers, airline workers and rail workers. We have seen the Ontario government enforce collective agreements on the teachers' unions. We are hearing the threats from the Ontario Conservatives that they will follow the example of state governments in the US by attacking the membership base of our unions, hoping to weaken them to the point that they would be unable to defend their members.

Every level of government has determined that attacks on unions will help them move forward the austerity agenda and strengthen their assaults on the working class and the poor.

Workers' organization

We have seen a decline in union density, particularly in industrial unions, due to plant closures and layoffs. There is a real need to organize precarious workers, many of whom are women and from racialized

communities. They make up more and more of the working class. We have seen the fast food walkouts in the US and the organizing of independent cab drivers in Toronto, which show the possibilities.

Chicago teachers

Organized labour has the capacity to organize and fight back with its collective power and potentially defeat many of the attacks, particularly when it connects with community, as we saw in the Chicago teachers' strike. Students, parents and a highly organized membership, which had been building its capacity for years, took on the city government, which was determined to close schools and push concessions, and won.

Renewing workers' militancy

The ruling class is well aware of the potential strength of unions and is targeting them for that very reason. The labour movement has initiated a workers' rights campaign to fight back against the anti-union threats of the Ontario Conservative Party. It gives a tremendous opening for activists to connect with fellow workers in face-to-face conversations about renewing their union structures so that they, in fact, represent the needs of the membership and become a real voice for every worker.

This is what is needed to push back and win against attacks, just as they did in Chicago. The workers' rights campaigns have different approaches in different unions but activists in every union can take advantage of the possibilities that are there to talk about renewing our unions with real rank-and-file involvement. The attacks are hard but if we take the opportunities that are there to rebuild within our workplaces we can connect through campaigns and solidarity actions with other like-minded activists. We can be part of renewing a worker militancy that could make a huge difference in the fight against the austerity agenda.

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SocialistWorker

Capitalism: a climate disaster

by **ANTON CU UNJIENG**

THIS HAS been a summer of capitalist disasters.

The most horrific was the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic that killed 47 people and contaminated Mégantic Lake and Chaudière River. According to Quebec's Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks, the train was carrying 7.2 million litres of oil; of that, the Ministry estimates that 5.7 million litres of oil was spilled. Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway (MMAR) has already categorically stated that it cannot afford to pay the cost of cleaning up its mess—estimated at \$8 million by the end of July but which could well climb up to \$1 billion.

With permission from the Canadian government, MMAR used trains that the US National Transportation Safety Board said have “high incidence of tank failures during accidents” and which the Transportation Safety Board of Canada judged prone “to release product at derailment and impact.” These cars, which have no double hull, are widely and legally used to transport petroleum products. Furthermore, the number of carloads of crude oil moving across Canada is drastically increasing: from 500 in 2009 to an expected 140,000 this year. This is staggeringly and criminally irresponsible.

Neither train nor pipeline

Pipelines are no alternative. In late June, about 750 barrels of synthetic oil spilled from an Enbridge owned pipeline. The leak occurred in a portion of the pipeline that can only be accessed by helicopter and all-terrain vehicles. Plains Midstream spilled 950 barrels of natural gas by-product in northern Alberta in early June. On June 1, Apache Canada Ltd. spilled 9.5 million litres of waste water in the same region. This is not an exhaustive list.

Apache Canada has been responsible for 949 spills since 1975; of these, 517 were waste water spills. In all, there were 23,484 waste water spills in Alberta between January 1, 1975 and February 4, 2013. According to Global News, Alberta has had “28,666 crude oil



spills in total, plus another 31,453 spills of just about any other substance you can think of putting in a pipeline—from salt water to liquid petroleum” in the past 37 years.

Unwilling and unable to be safe

After each of these accidents, we are told by dutifully apologetic press releases that safety is everyone's top concern. Obviously, nothing could be further from the truth. Enbridge's track record is atrocious and well known; this is the same company that asserts “that doing nothing is a possible response to a spill.”

After its most recent spill, Plains Midstream is now under audit for failure to comply with a number of Alberta's regulatory requirements, but the same company has received 19 high and low-risk deficiencies and non-compliances since 2011 and in April of that same year released 4.5 million litres of oil north-

east of Peace River. It currently faces three counts under the provincial Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, but the maximum fine for these is only \$500,000.

There were two oil rig fires in the Gulf of Mexico in July, one of which leaked 250 gallons of natural gas. The associate director of the Tulane Energy Institute in New Orleans called the most recent fire a small “blip on the horizon”—an easy enough claim since his standard for comparison was BP's massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, which leaked 780 million litres of crude oil and took 87 days to stop.

Commenting on the recent accident, Michael Bromwich, former chief of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), observed that offshore work is “inherently risky” and that blowouts “aren't that infrequent.” The BSEE is the same bureau which

failed utterly to stop BP's criminal negligence in the lead up to their spill.

The centrality of oil for global capital means that this reckless abandon is mirrored wherever there is oil to be extracted.

Even if companies wanted to be safe they could not. Tar sands by its nature is highly corrosive to pipelines, and once it leaks its carcinogens evaporate into the air or sink into the ground, making clean up impossible. Three years and a billion dollars of clean up after an Enbridge spill contaminated the Kalamazoo River, there is still oil on the river floor—poisoning the environment on which our life depends.

Canada = climate criminal

Canada's drive to become a major petroleum producer has meant that fossil fuels are a particularly unsupervised sector of the economy.

The very scale of the capital investment involved and the urgency of exporting as much petroleum as possible before other countries, particularly the US, achieve greater fuel independence has meant that these corporations are encouraged to take risks in order to make as much money as they can as quickly as possible. Risks are carried almost entirely by First Nations, workers, and the environment and never by CEOs or government ministers.

Even if no pipeline ever spilled, the Tar Sands would still devastate indigenous communities and serve as Canada's fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions.

Capitalism: an environmental disaster

Industry under capitalism is always dangerous, and risky behaviour is abetted by government. In addition, the drive for businesses to always produce more and more means that all industries, not just oil, are trying to increase their size.

Total cargo handled at Canadian ports and marine terminals increased by nearly 20 per cent between 2001 and 2011. The weight of shipments by truck in Canada increased by eight per cent between 2004 and 2011. The total weight of cargo carried by rail in Canada increased by 14 per cent between 1999 and 2012. With more trains, ships and trucks there will be more accidents. The disaster in Lac-Mégantic is a preview of what's to come.

The obvious conclusion is that we had better transition to safer and less environmentally damaging sources of energy as quickly as possible. But capitalism lacks this basic rationality. In a single auction in March, the US Interior Department gave 307 leases for energy work on 38.6 million acres offshore Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Naturally, energy companies working in the Gulf of Mexico assure us that safety is their “number one priority.”

The truth is that our safety, and that of the planet we live on, can only become the number one priority after we have overthrown the rule of the capitalists and established a system in which production exists for the sake of human beings and our environment, and not the profits of the 1%.

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PowerShift comes to British Columbia

by **BRADLEY HUGHES**

THIS OCTOBER over a thousand youth will converge on Victoria, BC for PowerShift 2013.

In the words of the organizers, “Together we'll build the movement to fight fracking, stop the carbon corridor, divest from fossil fuels, build a clean energy future, and stop the climate crisis.” The event will feature workshops, panel discussions and more to train youth to be the next generation of climate leaders.

There have been national PowerShift events in Ottawa since 2009, and last year's attracted over 1,500 participants. The organizers say the conference “aims to build an environmental and climate justice movement that can transform our society, so that our future can



be enjoyed by everyone, not only those who can afford it. PowerShift is organized by youth for youth and aims to mobilize passionate youth from affected communities and various sectors of civil society to explore multiple

ways of taking action and work to develop each other's capacity and abilities.”

PowerShift has a strong anti-oppression stance based on the fact that the most wealthy and privileged members of our society

are making the decisions that result in climate chaos, while the effects of climate chaos are disproportionately experienced by oppressed groups. Last years conference included “in-depth discussions on the role of frontline and indigenous communities, environmental racism, dependence on oil, economic inequalities that stem from the extractive and carbon industries, as well as solutions to these crises such as food sovereignty, renewable energy, and public transportation.”

The PowerShiftBC event will be the first in a series of regional conferences. It takes place at the University of Victoria from October 4 to 7. To register and get involved in organizing, please visit: <http://www.wearepowershift.ca/register>