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HANDS OFF UKRAINE

Russia and NATO out!



The current crisis in the Ukraine is a product of decades of meddling by both the West and Russia in the affairs of the country.

After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, NATO countries were keen to exercise as much control as possible over the economics of the former soviet satellites. The initial IMF “shock treatment” for the Ukraine was devastating for the economy and the current EU and IMF sponsored “rescue packages” for the Ukraine will no doubt follow a similar pattern of gutting social services and privatization.

Russia, for its part, was deeply concerned about a NATO drive to surround it, and has exerted what influence it can over the Ukraine and the other former Soviet states. Russia has done this through a series of mechanisms but the chief weapon in its arsenal is the manipulation of gas supplies. In 2006 and 2009, Russia cut off gas to the Ukraine, causing economic crisis.

Ukraine

The result of all this is that the Ukraine is bankrupt and facing a social crisis. Youth unemployment

is at roughly 20 per cent and under employment is also rampant.

The people of the Ukraine have fought numerous times to try and find a government that will do more to take care of the people, but both the Western sponsored opposition and the Russian supported government of Yanukovich were incapable of meeting those demands.

This is the immediate context for the uprisings against the government that have resulted in the current situation.

Inter-imperial rivalry

Russia was not imagining things when it perceived that NATO intended to surround the country. The plans by the US to build missile defence installations in Ukraine were an attempt to isolate Russia militarily.

The end of the Cold War may have been heralded as the “end of history” but it didn’t stop the drive towards imperial accumulation by either the West or Russia. We have seen many flashpoints over the years such as the Russian war to take south Ossetia in 2008. That inter-imperialist rivalry is still going strong.

The US is concerned that a rival economic and military bloc is being created with the Russian and the Chinese governments signing pacts under the Shanghai cooperation organization. The SCO is also expanding and has invited both India and Pakistan to join. This new bloc is the main reason that US president Obama has called for a pivot to Asia to curtail any expansionist designs from the SCO.

At this point it seems unlikely that NATO will use military force against Russia but that may change. The main European partners in NATO have extensive economic ties with Russia, and western European countries are reliant on Russia for 40 per cent of their natural gas. In fact, it seems that western Europe isn’t even interested in sanctions.

But this could change; economic integration isn’t always a deterrent to war but frequently ends up stoking tensions.

It is a central dynamic in capitalism that competition for resources and markets drives conflict between states. As economic crisis continues around the world there will be more flash points.

Neither Washington nor Moscow

For the left in the west our tasks are clear. We need to stop our governments from interfering in the affairs of the Ukraine. We know that when the Johns—that is Baird, Kerry and McCain—speak about bringing democracy and rule of law, that they are only doing so to advance their own states strategic interests.

We also need to support the left in the country that is attempting to build an alternative vision for the future. They are doing so under huge pressure from the far right fascist groups and in the context of the legacy of Stalinism, which makes their jobs even harder.

But they are organizing and the current political crisis provides an opening to advance different ideas. Each of the left groups has their own interpretation of the current events but many have raised the slogan “neither Washington nor Moscow.”

As Russia feels more confidence in challenging the West, and the economy of the NATO countries continue to deteriorate, that slogan will be ever more important.

Colonial FNEA sparks resistance

Page 2

Valerie Lannon examines the “First Nations Education Act” and the resistance it has sparked

Women in Iraq

Page 3

Shayma Bashawieh exposes violence against women in the aftermath of Western intervention

Intersectionality and resistance

Page 4

Faline Bobier looks at the strengths and limits of intersectionality

Quebec election

Page 5

Chantal Sundaram surveys the Quebec election and the left-wing alternative

Anti-oppression

Page 6-7

Hanan Jibril discusses the threat of Islamophobia and the need to build movements against racism and sexism

Motherhouse

Page 8

Pam Johnson reviews David Fennario’s latest play against militarism

Workers rights

Page 11

Carolyn Egan describes the growing campaign to confront the Tories and rebuild unions



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Harper’s “Fair Elections Act”

by ALLAN WOOD

Stephen Harper’s latest assault on democracy is the Orwellianly-named “Fair Elections Act”, which the Conservatives are trying to rush through Parliament with as little (or no) debate as possible. They recently killed an opposition motion to hold two months of hearings on the bill.

Far from making Canadian federal elections more fair, Bill C-23—which Canada’s Chief Electoral Officer has called “affront to democracy”—will likely disenfranchise large groups of voters while preventing the Commissioner of Elections from making full investigations into future cases of vote fraud.

Tory strategy

Opposition groups state that C-23 violates Section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which gives every Canadian citizen the right to vote. Jessica McCormick, National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, states the bill “aims to suppress the vote of groups that may not vote Conservative including students, Indigenous people, seniors, and people on low-incomes by eliminating the vouching system.” The “vouching” system allows people who may not possess the necessary documentation to cast their vote if they go to their polling station with a friend or neighbour. Marc Mayrand, the Chief Electoral Officer, believes at least 100,000 Canadians would be disenfranchised if the vouching system is trashed.

While the Conservatives claim C-23 will “increase democracy,” it would actually prohibit Mayrand from engaging in any public education or democratic outreach to groups that are less likely to vote. It would also eliminate Elections Canada’s civics-outreach Student Vote Program.

After committing widespread voter suppression and fraud during the 2011 election, the Conservatives want to deny Elections Canada the power to compel testimony in fraud cases. C-23 would also place the office of the Commissioner of Elections Canada under the Director of Public Prosecutions, putting the agency’s independent and non-partisan investigative powers under political party control.

Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch says the bill also “hikes donation limits, removes the ban on unlimited secret gifts to election candidates, and allows banks to make unlimited loans to candidates.”

Tory weakness

Harper’s hostility to democracy is a sign of weakness. His pro-war, anti-environment, austerity-driven agenda does not have the support of the majority of people—so he has to resort to suppressing votes in order to get elected. This is masked by the fact that the Liberals share the Conservatives agenda and the NDP leadership has not provided an alternative. But movements across the country can challenge Harper’s agenda and expose the democratic deficit.



Colonial FNEA sparks resistance

by VALERIE LANNON

Stephen Harper’s February 7th announcement of the First Nations Education Act has sparked resistance.

The legislation itself has not yet been shared with First Nations, even though reclaiming authority for education has been at the forefront of First Nations’ demands at least as far back as the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 70s. These assertions are hardly surprising, given the horrific and ongoing impact of government-supported and church-operated residential schools.

Background

The negative educational outcomes continue to this day. In the blog *apihtawikosisan*, Indigenous writer Chelsea Vowel quotes the statistics: 40 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 20-24 do not have a high school diploma, compared to 13 per cent of non-Aboriginal people, with rates of 61 per cent on reserve (which is where the legislation is to apply) and 68 per cent among Inuit in remote communities. Nine per cent of the Aboriginal population have a university degree compared to 26 per cent among non-Aboriginal people. The lack of opportunity is one factor contributing to the epidemic of Indigenous youth suicides.

One of the biggest hurdles has been inadequate funding. Again, according to sources noted in Vowel’s blog, “the federal funding formula for on-reserve schools has been capped at 2 per cent growth

per year since 1996 despite the need having increased by 6.3 per cent per year, creating a \$1.5 billion shortfall between 1996-2008 for instructional services alone.” And, “unlike their provincial counterparts, First Nations schools receive NO funding for library books, librarian’s salaries, construction or maintenance of school libraries, nor funding for vocational training, information and communication technologies, or sports and recreation.”

The funding “commitments” announced by Harper include \$1.252 billion over three years, beginning in 2016-17 (post-election), \$500 million over seven years for infrastructure, and \$160 million over four years starting 2015/16 for an Implementation Fund or Education Enhancement Fund.

Colonial document

The announcement of the legislation was staged at the Kainai High School auditorium on the Blood Reserve in Alberta, featuring Harper, Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development) and Shawn Atleo, Grand Chief of the AFN.

But very few Chiefs were properly consulted. As a result, most Nations are not supporting the announcement because of lack of consultation, lack of certainty about what the legislation entails, and mostly because the announcement says nothing of First Nations’ control over education, to be negotiated through nation-to-nation

(First Nation to Canada) agreements.

According to Chief Patrick Madahbee of the Union of Ontario Indians “The proposed First Nations Education Act (FNEA) is about control and false accountability. It is a colonial document and makes no attempt to close the gap on inequality in education. Firstly, it gives our citizens, parents and students no say in their own education... This is the same mentality as the government-run residential school disaster that had a history littered with genocide and acts of inhumanity. Secondly, it ignores curriculum needs that experts agree are essential to the academic success of First Nations learners—curriculum that talks about our culture and beliefs, and an accurate account of our historical contributions. And thirdly, this government starts their so-called educational reform with a threat to First Nations that if they don’t meet Canadian standards they will be put under third-party management, despite the fact that First Nation schools are largely underfunded and are unlikely to meet standards set by other, better funded schools.”

Blue dot resistance

Tribe member Twila Singer described to CBC how “We were separated at the door and given either a blue dot or a yellow dot. The blue dots were uninvited guests and were ushered to the gymnasium and the invited guests were the yellow dots and they were brought to the auditor-

ium where the dignitaries were.” Singer was ejected for tweeting from the event and within days, a “sacred blue dot” appeared on social media, with people posting pictures of themselves, or historical figures, with a blue dot on their hearts.

Dr. Pamela D. Palmater, a Mi’kmaw lawyer and one of the spokespeople for Idle No More, described the draft legislation within the federal government’s and corporations’ ongoing priority to have First Nations “be the pick and shovel labourers for mining companies and other extractive industries. This is about creating a new kind of dependence for First Nations—dependence on labour jobs from extractive industries to undermine attempts by their leaders to defend their territories and the resources on them.”

As for the “promised” funding, it is not available until 2015/16 (after Harper’s current term); nothing to address the crisis in post-secondary education; nothing to indicate whether the funding will be additional, new monies, or simply reallocations of funds that used to go to much-needed existing programs or other needed services.

As Palmater says, “Remember what was promised today: nothing. But we stand to lose a great deal in supporting this legislation.

*Recognize First Nation jurisdiction over education.

*Implement the treaty right to education.

*Properly fund First Nation education.

*Say not to FNEA.

Primer: Quebec’s oil/gas turnaround

It’s as if suddenly, just a few months ago, Quebec suddenly realized it had struck oil. And this despite making real progress over the past decade in renewable energies, sustainable transportation and mass transit.

How did we get here? Three interconnected strands will help better understand the public conversation on oil and gas in Quebec over the past few years.

Anticosti Island

Hydro Quebec’s oil and gas division owned the exploration rights for this pristine island in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, and sold them to two private companies, Junex and Petrolia. Less than a year later, the companies announced they had found oil, now estimated at about 40 billion barrels (potential gross revenues in the hundreds of billions). Evidence suggests that Hydro Quebec may well have known there was oil on Anticosti, before ceding the rights.

Mining Act reform

In 2011, the NFB released *Trou Story*, about Canada’s mining industry, alongside an interactive website that illustrates how Quebec’s Mining Act works.

Portraying the history of mining and its ravaging effects on the environment and workers, the film appeals to Quebecers to reform the Mining Act and reclaim control over our natural resources.

Maitre chez nous 21E Siecle

Daniel Breton, former Green Party activist, currently PQ deputy and briefly Environment Minister in this minority government, was the spokesperson for this coalition that adopted a detailed manifesto on Quebec’s energy independence

Then Liberal Minister of Natural Resources, Nathalie Normandeau, responded to the manifesto by saying that it was not the job of the government to take risks in the exploitation of our natural resources.

And back to Anticosti?

In February 2014, the PQ announced joint ventures with those private companies allowing them to exploit Anticosti Island and offshore oil and gas potential—with \$100 million in public investments.

But this “turnaround” can be turned around, like it was in the St. Lawrence Lowlands, where popular opposition to shale gas fracking forced the PQ into a moratorium. The same can be true for Anticosti.

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Bahrain: third anniversary of the revolution

by YUSUR AL-BAHRANI

Hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets of Bahrain on February 14, the third anniversary of the revolution.

Faced with international hypocrisy, peaceful protests continue in Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Qatif in Saudi Arabia despite the ongoing oppression.

Resistance in Bahrain
Three years ago, small protests began on the eve of February 14, 2011. The next day, peaceful protestors and activists left their homes at dawn to march in the several cities and villages in Bahrain. On their way to the Pearl Roundabout, they gathered men, women and children.

The number of protestors increased to around 600,000, which is more than half of the population in Bahrain. Authorities demolished the Pearl monument, which was encircled by protestors. Although it was demolished, protestors who camped in the roundabout call their revolution as the “Pearl Revolution.”

Marking the third anniversary, Bahrainis held a general strike

in several cities and villages on February 13, 2014. Stores were shutdown and many workers did not go to their workplaces. On February 14-15, hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets. As usual, they faced attacks. In addition to attacking participants, government forces attacked houses with teargas.

Western weapons for a regime that tortures
Compared to the other revolutions in the Arab region, protests in Bahrain (home to US fifth fleet), have faced silence and fewer condemnations and outrage from the “international community.”

The Western-backed AlKhalifa monarchy has continuously been talking about dialogue with the opposition. However, prominent opposition leaders and other political prisoners, including children, remain detained. Despite the repression, arms from several places, including Canada, have been exported to Bahrain.

While protests remain peaceful, there have been recent incidents of youths attacking armoured tanks with Molotov cocktails that could

hardly cause any harm to armed riot police, army and other members of the government’s forces. The repressive state has used those minor attacks by the outraged youths as an excuse to detain and torture children in the name of “combating terrorism.”

Movements in Saudi Arabia
At the same time, people in the Eastern Province of Qatif are also celebrating their third anniversary of the revolution by continuing to resist the Saudi forces that continue to attack protestors and raid homes. Several activists have been detained and some, including Sheikh Nemer Baqir AlNemer and other political detainees, are at imminent risk of crucifixion by the Saudi authorities. AlNemer remains in solitary confinement, suffering from his injuries. In the past three years, hundreds have been killed, injured and arbitrarily arrested in Qatif.

The protests in Qatif began in solidarity with the peaceful Bahraini demonstrators demanding the Western-backed Saudi government to withdraw its forces from the small island of Bahrain.

However, as the demonstrations became frequent and regular, people in several parts of Saudi Arabia have been demanding an end to the oppression exercised by Al-Saud monarchy. Groups demanding women and minority’s rights have also received encouragement and solidarity by other pro-democracy protestors.

As the Saudi government sense the threat of the pro-democracy movements. In addition to attacking pro-democracy movements in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Al-Saud monarchy played a counter-revolutionary role in several Arab countries such as Syria, Egypt and Yemen. The Saudi state has realised that any real democratic change in the region will shake the pro-Western monarchy.

Solidarity
While being in solidarity with the revolutionaries is essential, it is equally crucial to demand Western governments and other weapons’ exporters halt any arms deals to dictatorships such as the Bahraini and Saudi monarchies

Egypt: strikes continue

Leaders of the bus workers and doctors strikes joined workers’ delegations from Tanta Flax, Shibin al-Kom Spinning, the Egyptian Iron and Steel Company in Helwan, and Samanoud Textiles near Mahalla at a conference in Cairo, 2 March.

Workers who have been at the forefront of recent struggles for the minimum wage and against privatisation packed into the meeting, which was organised by the Freedoms Committee of the Journalists’ Union to voice workers’ demands of the new government.

Tareq el-Beheiry, one of the leaders of the strike by Public Transport Authority workers spoke about the bus workers’ struggle to win the minimum wage.

Mohamed Shafiq, a member of the Revolutionary Socialists and one of the leaders of the current national strike by doctors, dentists and pharmacists, spoke from the platform about healthworkers’ battle to win better pay and conditions and more funding for the health service.

Other speakers included labour lawyer, Khaled Ali, journalist Wael Gamal, and Revolutionary Socialist

activist Haitham Mohamedain.

“Over the next few days we are going to hear a lot about how ‘the wheel of production must start turning’”, said Haitham.

“If you’re talking about the ‘wheel of production’, what about the seven factories which the courts ruled should be re-nationalised and reopened? Why isn’t the ‘wheel of production’ turning at Tanta Flax, Shibin al-Kom Spinning, Omar Effendi and the Steam Boilers Company? If you’re talking about starting the ‘wheel of production’ without reopening these companies and re-

turning their workers and technicians to their jobs, then you’re lying to the people and lying to the workers.”

Workers’ protests are also spreading in other sectors. Employees of the Egyptian Navigation Company were among the latest to take the streets, organising a demonstration outside the Naval Headquarters in Alexandria in protest at the sale of the company.

This is republished from global.revsoc.me, the international version of revsoc.me--the website of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists

Women in “liberated” Iraq

by SHAYMA BASHAWIEH

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report entitled “No one is safe: Abuses of women in Iraq’s criminal justice system” published in February of this year details the arbitrary arrests, unlawful detaining, collective punishment, torture and sexual abuse female prisoners endure at the hands of Iraqi security forces.

Although there are far fewer female prisoners presently in Iraq compared to their male counterparts, HRW says “women suffer a double burden.” The report mentions on a number of occasions that women are arrested not only for the crimes they are suspected to have committed but also for the crimes of male relatives or other tribal and family members, effectively targeting women for collective punishment. Female prisoners are also at a greater risk of experiencing some form of sexual harassment during their detention.

Although the knowledge of the abuse of male detainees in Iraq’s prisons is widespread amongst Iraqis in general, the report states that the current accounts regarding the unlawful detention and abuse of female detainees was shocking to the public--prompting one human rights activist to tell HRW “normally, in Iraqi society, a man beating a woman in public is impossible...What’s happening to women shows that no one is safe.”

The horrific experiences female prisoners have to endure include electric shocks, cigarette burns on their body, a torture method known as “falaqa” (which is when a “victim is hung upside down and beaten on their feet”), beatings and sexual assaults--sometimes in front of family members. The report details accounts of prisoners raped by prison guards during detention, interrogations and arrests.

After beating, torturing and sexually abusing women, the interrogators threaten their loved ones with the same fate.

“Operation Iraqi Freedom”
All this is happening than a decade after Western military intervention--dubbed “Operation Iraq Freedom.” Is this what liberation looks like? Have they been liberated? For one thing the report states that “security forces carry out illegal arrests and other due process violations against women at every stage of the justice system.”

Following mass protests over the treatment of women in detention, Prime Minister al-Maliki announced in January of 2013 that there would be reforms made to the justice system.

But a year has passed and HRW says desperately needed reforms have still yet to be passed while the criminal justice system is as corrupt as ever and women continue to be abused. The report quite accurately states “the failings of the criminal justice system documented in this report show that the Prime Minister al-Maliki’s government has so far failed to eliminate many of the abusive practices that Saddam Hussein institutionalized and the United States-led Coalition Forces continued.”

intersectionality and resistance

In the context of resistance movements--from the anti-globalization movement of 1999, to the anti-war movement of 2003, to the Arab Spring and Occupy movements of 2011 and then the Quebec student strike and Idle No More--A new generation of activists is looking for ideas to guide them in the struggles ahead.

Just as the ideas of postmodernism became hegemonic in the 1980s and 90s, a period where it seemed that the revolutionary tide of the late 1960s and 1970s had failed, the ideas of intersectionality are becoming common currency on many campuses today.

Postmodernism was a set of ideas that basically argued that it was impossible to really understand the world in which we live and that the best we could hope for was a partial description from our own perspective or subjectivity. Many post-modern theorists had been disillusioned by events in Paris after the failure of 1968 to break through and create the new society. Revolution had failed and therefore it was necessary to look to other ideas.

The problem was that much of postmodernist theory was incoherent and inaccessible to most ordinary people. It was also on many levels a new “idealism,” that argued that there was nothing outside the “text” and no basis on which to distinguish between one course of action and another.

Intersectionality

The interest in the ideas of intersectionality in academia, as a way of dealing with questions of oppression, seems to be a much more positive development, in the sense that it is an attempt to give voice to the real experience of oppression.

Intersectionality emerged from Black feminism in the US. The term was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, and several other Black feminist writers (such as bell hooks and Barbara Smith) used these ideas as a challenge to white feminists in the 1970s and 1980s—as the mainstream women’s movement moved further and further away from its radical roots in the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and took on much more of a reformist project. This project appealed mainly to white middle class women, who could hope to gain equality with their white male counterparts, but which would do little to improve the lives of poor or working class women, or women from racialized communities, who faced the double burden of racism and sexism.

As Audre Lorde wrote, “there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” Intersectionality highlights the multiple forms of oppression that interact to shape an individual’s experience. So racialized women experience both racism and sexism, the sexism they experience is reinforced by racism, and vice versa. For example, the Quebec Charter is both racist and reinforces sexism against Muslim women, a fact ignored by some feminist organizations supporting the Charter.

The focus on the intersectionality of various oppressions can bring to light research and experience that has been hitherto ignored by academia, which has often been the preserve of white men. This is an attractive option for young women interested in the ideas of feminism and wanting to connect the fight against sexism with the fight against racism, disability oppression, homophobia and transphobia.

As a theory which can explore and highlight the experience of oppression, intersectionality can be a useful tool. This is no small achievement, given how much of people’s real experience has been marginalized or erased, particularly for those at the sharp end of various forms of oppression.

Class and revolution

However, we must also recognize the limits of intersectionality, in terms of pointing a way forward. While it describes the experience of reinforcing forms of oppression, it does not explain where these oppressions come from come from and how we can end them.

This is related to its tendency to conflate class as just another “identity,” and of “classism” as another intersecting form of oppression. But class society and capitalism, based on economic exploitation, is also the source and driver of oppression—from LGBT oppression and sexism to racism. The working class, which unites all oppressed groups, has the revolutionary potential to win real liberation from exploitation and oppression by overthrowing its source.

As Marxists we want to be a part of the new movements that are fighting for social justice. We have much to learn from their experience, and we want to connect this to the revolutionary potential of that class in society which encompasses all of us—women, men, people of colour, LGBT, people with disabilities.

As the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin wrote, “Revolutions are the festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other times are the masses of people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order as at a time of revolution.” The Bolsheviks built a revolutionary organization, not based on the suppression of the many identities encompassed in the struggle (women, national minorities, Jews, Muslims, lesbians and gays), but on the understanding that the only way to win true liberation was to unite these struggles into one powerful enough to overturn the system as a whole, based on the class that could break the chains where they were forged.

INTERNATIONAL



Olympics, politics and resistance

The Sochi Winter Olympic games have wrapped up now and the world’s attention has shifted elsewhere. When the Russian government passed its now infamous anti-gay laws, which criminalized “gay propaganda,” most of the world expressed anger and there were public calls for boycotts of the games.

Many governments sent depleted contingents to the games’ opening ceremonies, with the Obama administration including legendary and openly gay tennis player Billie Jean King as an official representative for the US. There were even public statements from athletes and some sponsors condemning the laws.

Heading into Sochi there was also huge amount of criticism directed to the spectacle. The price tag for the event reached \$50 billion, more than the combined costs of all previous Winter Olympics. Regular articles and news stories pointed out the tragedy of spending so much on the sporting event, when poverty and inequality ran rampant in Russia.

Silence During the Games

Despite the anti-gay laws, however, most of the biggest sponsors kept quiet. Coca-Cola, the largest advertiser condemned the laws but did little to lobby the IOC or the Russian government to take a stand. In fact the IOC warned athletes about protesting. The audacity of the budget for the games was forgotten in the midst of the events. Vladimir Putin has successfully used the games to announce the return of Russia as a major world power and it is no accident that shortly after the games, his government has the confidence to engage in an imperialist adventure in the Ukraine.

After the games had started the once vocal opposition and media acknowledgments of the laws or the costs petered away. Small protests were cracked down on. Pussy Riot members were arrested and whipped by Cossack soldiers. When Vladimir Putin dropped by the Canada House in the Olympic Village, he was greeted like a celebrity.

Athletes took pictures with the Russian President and the Canadian Olympic Committee chief Marcel Aubet heaped praise, stating “fantastic venues, fantastic atmosphere, and great Games, probably the best ever.” That Putin would begin rounding up protestors and opponents once the games were over doesn’t seem to really concern the likes of Aubet.

Olympics Not Political?

So what happened? Part of the problem is this idea that the world of sports and the Olympics is apolitical. The IOC’s charter waxes poetic language about opposing discrimination, but officials regularly speak out against athletes or officials who try to politicize the games.

This of course is a fiction. Governments use the Olympics to ratchet up national chauvinism, whip up the patriotic furor, and get the country behind their national team. Countries have also used hosting the Olympics to announce to the world that they are now (or still are) geopolitical powers to be reckoned with. This was not only the case when Hitler’s Germany hosted the summer games in 1936, but continues to be a common theme. Beijing in 2008, London in 2012, Sochi this year, and the next summer games in Brazil are examples of the Olympics being used as strategic political events.

But try to introduce critical politics, like speaking out against racism, and the IOC cracks down, sometimes to the point of absurd. In Sochi, the IOC went so far as prohibiting freestyle skiers from wearing small decals on their helmets honouring the late Sarah Burke, insisting that it was a political statement. Unfortunately most Olympians, amateur athletes dependent on sponsorship and government funding, sometimes lack the confidence to speak out.

A History of Resistance

This doesn’t mean that there haven’t been valiant acts of opposition that coincided with or were part of Olympic Games.

The 1968 Olympics in Mexico saw mass protests that were crushed by

the state as well as the famous black power salute by medalists John Carlos and Tommie Smith. Pro-Tibetan protestors made several successful attempts to extinguish the Olympic torch as it headed to Beijing prior to the 2008 Olympics. There were also significant protests raising issues of affordable housing during the Vancouver Olympics.

Even in Sochi, Canadian snowboarder Michal Lambert spoke out against the praise that the likes of Marcel Aubet were giving the games: “A perfect Games isn’t someone who blows the budget through the roof for no reason, has people suffer, shuts people up. How is that a perfect Games? Spends ungodly amounts of money and then we are all going to watch it rot over the next 10 years.”

Most amazing, however, is the level of anger and protest that is engulfing Brazil as the country prepares to host the World Cup and Summer Olympics over the next two years. The government has invested billions to host these events, while insisting that workers accept austerity and low wages. Brazil is a country that loves sports but as radical sports writer Dave Zirin points out “This isn’t a movement against sports. It’s against the use of sports as a neoliberal Trojan horse. It’s a movement against sports as a cudgel of austerity.”

Olympic games tend to be a disaster for ordinary people whose countries host the events. Developers walk away rich, while everyone else pays the price. Hopefully Brazil and the history of resistance of protest at Olympic games will show that athletes and workers do not need to be silent.

We don’t need to accept the neoliberal Trojan horse that the Games represent. Sports doesn’t need to be wrapped in a flag of chauvinism to be entertaining. We can offer an alternative that values athletics and sports but doesn’t come with weight of nationalism and austerity.

Join a discussion of “Capitalism, Sports and Resistance” on Sunday, March 30 from 5 pm to 8 pm in West Toronto. For more information contact torontowest.is@gmail.com

Quebec election and the fight against racism, austerity and oil

Chantal Sundaram looks at the politics of the upcoming Quebec election, and the one party that expresses the fight for social justice: Québec solidaire

The current PQ minority government, brought in on a wave of anger that swept the provincial Liberals out at the tail-end of the Maple Spring, is about to fight an election on what defines Quebec.

On the one hand, there is the so-called Charter of Values that aims to prohibit the wearing of religious symbols, notably the Muslim headscarf, by public servants. Playing this racist card has demonstrably boosted the PQ in the polls.

On the other hand, there is the economy. Quebec growth projections are abysmal. The PQ budget, characterized by the opposition and pundits as an “election budget,” is equally abysmal. But because it doesn’t come close to balancing the budget or slashing public spending as much as humanly possible, it’s viewed as a budget to garner votes. PQ Finance Minister Nicolas Marceau himself told the Quebec national assembly that they are not slashing spending because: “Our government prefers prosperity to austerity.”

Killing child care

In fact, it’s a game of smoke and mirrors. No new income tax hikes is supposed to be a vote winner, but the real story in this budget is the end of subsidized daycare in Quebec.

Parents across Canada have marveled at the initial \$5 (and now \$7) daycare. There is in fact a social consensus in Quebec that daycare, like education, is a social good, and should not be subject to user fees. This consensus is what underlies the ongoing struggles against post-secondary fee hikes, which were ultimately supposed to be phased out completely in Quebec.

Similarly, the \$5 parental contribution to daycare was seen as a stepping-stone to a universal system that would be fully paid for by the Quebec government. The PQ has now unforgivably betrayed that consensus by proposing to raise the cost to \$9 over the next two years and then index it to inflation, effectively putting an end to the promise of universal daycare.

In addition to the lie about shunning austerity, the PQ’s “prosperity” proposal is based on oil and gas exploitation on Quebec soil. Like the Values Charter, this election card turns the legitimate demand for Quebecois self-determination into its self-destructive opposite.

Quebec & resources: “Maitres chez nous”?

In 2012, the PQ inherited three supposed “solutions” to the economic challenge from the Liberals: public sector austerity, exploitation of mining resources, and oil.



Hausses des frais de scolarité

Hausses des tarifs de garderie

Hausses des tarifs d'électricité

Coupures en aide sociale

Privatisation du système de santé

Cadeaux aux entreprises

Exploration pétrolière irresponsable

TRAÎTRES CHEZ NOUS.

Like the Values Charter, this election card turns the legitimate demand for Quebecois self-determination into its self-destructive opposite.

The first two were difficult to deliver. The Liberals were booted out in no small part by the rebellion by students against one part of the austerity agenda, the tuition fee hike. The first PQ budget tried to pursue the austerity agenda, but they suffered in the polls until the Values Charter gave them a bounce.

Plan Nord, revamped as “Un Plan Nord pour nous” (a Plan Nord “for us”) attempted to play on the Quebec nationalist “Maitres chez nous” (“Masters in our own House”) slogan with a plan that in fact aimed at selling off national resources to mining companies with very little coming back into public coffers, and with transportation contracts that promised to continue patterns of government corruption with little real job creation and much environmental destruction along the way.

Then, the market collapsed for the mined materials promised by Plan Nord. The only other resource “solution” the PQ could draw on was oil.

This had begun under the Liberals in the form of fracking for shale gas. In their first few months in power, the PQ banned gas fracking for five years in the St. Lawrence Lowlands, largely as a result of popular protest there, but the tide has changed on fracking for shale oil.

Since fracking first emerged in Quebec as a viable source of energy extraction, oil and gas lobbyists have begun to circle like vultures. Now the spectre of major oil exploration on the Island of Anticosti, first raised by the Liberals, has been given new life by the PQ. Although, as some ecologists insist, it is entirely possible that this is yet

another game of smoke and mirrors: there may in fact be little or no oil under Anticosti. But the “Masters of our own oil” argument will have done its damage both electorally and environmentally by the time exploration is done. In the words of Amir Khadir, one of two elected members of the most progressive party in the upcoming election, Québec solidaire, if this pristine island is destroyed it will be “because deer don’t vote.”

The PQ budget suggests partial nationalization of any viable oil and gas supply which might be discovered under Anticosti Island. Finance Minister Marceau also said in his budget speech that “Being masters and prosperous in our own house is ensuring that we Quebecers are the first to benefit from the eventual discovery of resources. Quebecers will benefit from a minimum of 60 per cent of benefits from whatever is discovered beneath Anticosti.”

Some of the old PQ brass who do not support the Charter of Values as too extreme are perfectly comfortable with the oil and gas agenda, such as Bernard Landry, the PQ premier who preceded Jean Charest. In January, a manifesto signed by Landry and other powerful former politicians and employer representatives argued that those who say that oil energy is a thing of the past are “dreaming in colour.”

And yet, the PQ itself commissioned a report that came to opposite conclusions, ironically titled “Maitriser notre avenir energetique” (Masters of our Energy Future), which counsels diminishing reliance on fossil fuels.

The real “nous”: vote QS

From “our” values, to “our” North, to “our” oil, there is only one party to support in the upcoming Quebec election: Québec solidaire (QS).

QS is a party that emerged out of the three key movements that address the issues at stake in this election and in Quebec society in general. They are a merger of the movement against globalization/neoliberalism—starting with the Summit of the America protests in Quebec City in 2001 and continuing in the Maple Spring of 2012—with the World March of Women and the environmental movement.

They are a party that wants an indefinite moratorium on all drilling activity on Anticosti, a complete turn to sustainable energy and nationalization of windmill production, not oil drilling; a refusal to use women’s rights as a pretext to scapegoat religious and racial minorities and distract from austerity, along with a principled position against imperialist war; and an active involvement between elections in the fight against all forms of austerity.

They are for sharing the wealth of Quebec with the real “nous”: the 99% of students and working-class Quebecois. Today in Quebec, that’s what being “Masters in our own house” ultimately means: disenfranchising the 1% who are putting the whole house at risk.

On April 3 there will be a demonstration against the Libeals. For more information visit www.manif3avril.org

The fight for women’s liberation

The Triangle Shirt-waist fire: women’s liberation and rank-and-file mobilization

By Octavian Cadabeschi

The history of women liberation, the beginning of North American industrial unionism, and rank and file organizing were all very closely intertwined in the massive strike wave of 1909-1913—motivated to a large degree by the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire.

The textile industry of New York in the first few decades of the twentieth century—and one of the international centres of early industry—relied almost exclusively on immigrant and Jewish women for labour. Whereas in many cases being a seamstress was a position of some prestige for women, the growth of industrialization and the shift to factory-made clothing gradually transformed a highly skilled cottage industry into a largely deskilled industrial process. Many working class women therefore worked in sweatshop conditions in “light” industry.

Women’s resistance

These difficult working conditions, long hours, and low pay meant that women were often at the forefront of early industrial struggles. In fact, women workers of the period very strongly considered their struggles in the workplace intertwined with their struggles for liberation as women.

According to academic Jennifer Gugliemo, some Italian women migrant workers would use the word *femminismo* to refer to their work, but most preferred the word *emancipazione*, because it described the all-encompassing nature of the freedoms they desired.

Even before the fire, rank and file resistance in the workplace was a daily fact for women working in the garment industry. Often, a single woman being harassed by management would result in her co-workers walking off the job, and ultimately to entire spontaneous strikes. Women also shared stories of resistance with one another both in the workplace and in the home, and they stole time from management by coordinating together to slow down their pace of work.

Unions

Trade Unions in the garment industry were quite small to start off with, though unions like the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union and the International Workers

of The World had began recruiting ennergetically, and had already secured major victories against New York employers.

In 1909, the first major strike in the New York garment industry had already broken out under the auspices of the ILGWU called the “Uprising of 20,000” for the number of women who had participated. Considering that just one year before the union had only consisted of few hundred members, this was a major success. At the same time in 1909 there was another major strike in Hoboken, organized under the auspices of the IWW but led largely by rank and file women who had organized themselves and built alliances across gender and ethnic lines with allied textile workers.

Triangle Shirtwaist fire

The strikes of 1909 had specifically identified the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory for hazardous working conditions, and thus, when the building went up in flames in 1910, the response of New York garment workers was overwhelming. This anger was due to the fact that the fire was able to spread because flammable oil that was kept close to fabric cuttings, the fact that every single exit except for one was locked by the employer in order to limit the worker’s movement. The fire escape was also not maintained, and it immediately collapsed when women attempted to climb down it. The factory was essential a death trap.

In the end, 146 garment workers, mostly women of Jewish and Italian descent died in the fire. Dozens of women died jumping out of the ninth story to avoid the flames, shattering the concrete below with their impacts. The charges brought against the owners—who had survived the fire by immediately running up to the roof before things got too bad—resulted only in a fine of a few hundred dollars.

From mourning to organizing

The ensuing rage convinced many women working in the garment trades that joining unions and fighting was the only way to improve their situation. Membership in the ILGWU rose from a few thousand before 1909, to several hundred thousand by 1913.

This mass mobilization was led entirely by rank and file women workers. Though men made up the upper leadership of both the ILGWO and the IWW, they were unable to make

headway with women workers unless they opened the door to rank and file decision making and organizing.

The women making up the organizing teams worked the same jobs as the others, and experienced extreme repression for their actions. They were beaten up, arrested, and thrown down stairs, and often employers would hire thugs from the mob in order to target, intimidate and attack the organizers. But despite these pressures, the women persevered, and developed a reputation as courageous and talented organizers—successfully organizing non-union shops and bringing tens of thousands of new workers into the unions time and again.

As a result, the time period of 1910 to 1913 was a period of major labour uprisings. In Laurence, Patterson, Chicago, etc. Garment workers rose up in tens of thousands in sympathy strikes, and general strikes. Mass demonstrations sometimes consisting of over a hundred thousand workers took place. Not only was the number of participants high, but so was their level of militancy. In the 1913 garment worker’s strike for example, a group of several hundred women attempted to occupy a factory in Manhattan. They broke through police lines armed with umbrellas, and according to the press “fought like furies” once inside.

Aftermath

Ultimately, the strike wave came to an end through a combination of some key defeats, general economic downturn and unemployment, and in some cases, the efforts of upper union leadership to undermine the rank and file process. However, the mass mobilization of 1909 to 1913 irrevocably changed the socio-economic landscape for women, and workers in North America.

It was the birth of industrial unionism in the region, it made the International Ladies Garment Workers Union one of the largest in the country, and brought the IWW the notoriety it needed to successfully organize in the west. Many strikes during the period were won, and conditions for garment workers tangibly improved as a result. Finally, legislative reforms that came out of the period of mass mobilization also significantly improved working conditions and ultimately in 1917 led to woman’s right to vote in New York state, the first state to do so in the US.



Indigenous women lead the way

by Valerie Lannon

Much of the leadership of many civil rights and liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s was male-dominated. Women leaders in the public eye, like Rosa Parks, Angela Davis and Anna Mae Aquash, were the exceptions. But by the 1990s, women like Naomi Klein, Maude Barlowe, Arundhati Roy, and others were prominent in anti-globalization struggles.

This shift is also seen in indigenous struggles in Canada where today we see women playing pivotal roles. The resurgence of pride and confidence in indigenous communities has provided a cultural foundation for women to reclaim their leadership roles, and for indigenous men to support them.

Here are just a few examples of today’s better-known leading activists:

- the founders of Idle No More (Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Sheelah McLean, Nina Wilson), prominent spokesperson Pamela Palmater and, of course, Chief Theresa Spence from Attawapiskat
- Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, which has a case proceeding with the Canadian Human Rights tribunal to expose the federal government’s underfunding of child and family services for First Nations
- Filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin (who has documented everything from “Kanehsatake: 270 years of Resistance” about the 1990 uprising in Kanehsatake and Oka, to today’s “Hi-Ho Mistahey! about the fight for First Nations education
- Chelsea Vowel, whose blog *apihtawisosisan* provides regular commentary on current campaigns.
- Leading activists opposing tar sands and fracking: Eriel Deranger of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Melina Laboucan-Massimo of the Lubicon Cree First Nation, Vanessa Gray of Ammijwnaang First Nation, and Suzanne Patles of the Mi’kmaq Warrior Society

These are in addition to the countless number of women who lead campaigns for justice in their communities, in their trade unions, in health and educational institutions, and in climate justice struggles.

Racism, sexism and the fight for women’s liberation

by Hanan Jibril

Women have been subjected to discrimination and violence for centuries—and this oppression is sharpened by racism and Islamophobia.

Women of colour not only get discriminated against but particularly immigrant women of visible minorities. Between 2001 and 2006, 81 per cent of newcomers arriving in Toronto identified themselves as visible minorities. The unemployment rate for recent newcomer women was more than 50 per cent higher than the rate for new coming men.

As we can see from the Temporary Foreign Worker Program—which allows Canadian corporations to pay migrant workers less and to deny them basic rights—racism is used to increase the exploitation of workers. Racialized (visible minority) immigrant men in Canada earn 68.7 cents for every dollar that non-racialized immigrant men make. Sexism adds to this exploitation, with racialized immigrant women earning 48.7 cents for every dollar that non-racialized men make. One might wonder if education has anything to do with this. Well, it turns out that 40 per cent of female new comers (less than 5 years in Canada) had a university education as compared to a quarter of longer-term immigrants and a third of Canadian-born residents of European descent.

Islamophobia

It is no secret that Islam is constantly scrutinized and under siege by the Western world, and Muslim women are often its most frequent targets. Having to deal with the covert racism but also the overt racism, stares and attacks on religious headwear are more common than ever. This includes France’s ban on the niqab, Canada’s ban on the niqab during citizenship ceremonies, and Quebec’s racist charter of values—which if passed might exclude Muslim women from public sector jobs like teaching, working at hospitals. Muslim women will be even more isolated and put down

To quote, the editorial writer for France’s journal *Le Point*, Claude Imbert, “ One must be honest. I am something of an Islamophobe and I’m not embarrassed to say so I have the right to think, and I’m not the only one in this country to think that Islam and I’m talking of Islam as a religion, not just Islamists is backward looking and unhealthy. It has a way of viewing women, of systematically downgrading women and wants Quranic law to supplant the law of the state. All this makes me Islamophobic.”

Islamaphobia also exists in social movements and even in some organizations that identify as feminist. One well-known example is Femen, who in the name of liberating Muslim women was extremely racist, drawing unbriwos on themselves to depict themselves as Middle Eastern men. The women of femen have recently become well known for Topless Jihad Day, which includes topless protests in front of religious institutions. The group claims that staging protests while topless is the “only way to be heard” in their native country of Ukraine—which recent mass protests clearly disprove. Femen’s ‘Topless Jihad Day’ is said to be in response to death threats that were made to Amina Tyler – a Tunisian woman who posted nude photos of herself on Facebook with the words “I own my body; it’s not the source of anyone’s honor” written on her bare chest. Topless Jihad Day claimed to be a protest against Islam and Islamist “oppression of women”. White women wore towels on their heads, black skinny jeans and scrawled ‘FUCK YOUR MORALS’ and ‘FREE AMINA’ on their bare chests. In Paris, topless protesters burned a Salafist flag in front of a mosque. All of this, in the name of “liberating Muslim women.” The racism was almost too much to bear, from the unbriw to ridiculing of the Islamic prayer.

This Islamophobia echoes the justifications for wars and occupations which have increased women’s oppression. The war in Afghanistan claimed to be liberating Afghan women, but silenced the long history of women’s groups (like the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan), and

current leading women like Malalai Joya. After 13 years of brutal occupation women in Afghanistan are no better off. The same is true in Iraq, which was “liberated” by war and a decade of occupation. The result: huge levels of violence against women.

Groups like Femen often claim to speak for women of colour, but they do not understand their experiences or their perspectives on sexism and racism. Rather than challenging oppression, Femen reinforces it. Muslim Women Against Femen has since been launched to make it clear that Femen does not speak for Muslim women.

Self-determination

Historically, when people talk about feminism, they have focused mainly on the experiences of white middle-class women, often at the expense of racialized women from working-class backgrounds. The fight for women’s liberation must include the experiences of ALL women and must address all forms of oppression. Women of colour from working-class backgrounds have a long history of leading their own struggles and of building the fight for women’s liberation, and can speak for themselves.

Struggles differ from place to place, but it’s important to note that Muslim women have been at the heart of every struggle, like the Arab Spring for example. In Bahrain, if you see the photos of protests, the numbers of women and men protestors are equal. There are women activists and men activists at the same time. Women have been at the centre of the Egyptian revolution—from the women textile workers of Mahalla who started the strike wave leading up to 2011, to Asma Mahfouz who’s video calling on Egyptians to demand their human rights and voice their disapproval of the regime of Hosni Mubarak went viral—helping spark the revolution on January 25.

Women of colour face multiple forms of oppression, and must be able to develop their own demands, and fight their own struggles, but in a way that allows all women and men to join forces in a common cause.

Why vote NDP?

With the potential of a provincial election in Ontario this year, and a federal election in 2015, there is once again growing debates about election tactics. Talk of “strategic voting”—to defeat Harper’s Tories in Ottawa and Hudak’s Tories in Ontario—is again coming to the fore.

Nothing strategic about voting Liberal
“Strategic voting, at least conceptually, is premised on the idea that you should vote for whichever candidate seems to have the best chance of defeating the party you don’t want to win. In practice, however, strategic voting inevitably seems to mean nothing more than NDP supporters casting their votes for Liberal party candidates in the name of defeating Conservatives. The only strategy being helped by this approach is the strategy of the Liberal party—the twin party of Canadian capitalism.

Federally the Liberals imposed massive cuts to social services, launched the invasion of Afghanistan and helped overthrow Haiti’s democratically elected government, and completely ignored the Kyoto protocol on climate change. Provincially the Ontario Liberals attacked teachers, froze the minimum wage for years, and massively increased tuition.

NDP record

Does it then follow that we should all vote NDP? Federally the NDP have been silent on massive military spending, support the tar sands and are increasingly distancing themselves from social movements—from the Quebec student strike to Idle No More.

Provincially, Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horvath has had conspicuously little to say on the issue of raising the minimum wage, a strategic blunder which has allowed Liberal Kathleen Wynne to position herself as the progressive candidate on this issue. NDP provincial governments have a long history of betraying their supporters once in office, with Nova Scotia’s NDP premier Darrell Dexter being simply the most recent of numerous examples of NDP governments reducing spending on education, attacking the rights of public sector workers and imposing austerity politics in order to balance budgets. The same goes for NDP governments in BC (which attacked a First Nations blockade at Gustafsen Lake) and Ontario (which imposed cuts under Bob Rae.

With the record of the NDP in government being so poor and the current version of the NDP in Ontario so lacklustre, should we still vote for them?

Confidence

The short answer is yes, but not because of the NDP’s policies or track record once in office. We vote for the NDP not because of what they say or what they may or may not do once in power, but in spite of it. The crucial reason for voting for the NDP is not what sort of government they might form but rather the effect that a vote for the NDP potentially has on the confidence of ordinary people themselves to fight back against austerity.

The NDP is historically the only mass party in the country that is not explicitly a party of big business. It is structurally connected to the organized labour movement and is seen by people all over the country and across the political spectrum as a party of the political left. So when the NDP makes electoral gains, it is taken as a sign that more people share progressive ideas and want to see change. The “Orange Wave” in 2011, which swept the federal NDP to it’s largest vote in history and status as Official Opposition, was interpreted by many as a rebuke to the politics of austerity. An increase in the NDP vote makes all progressive-minded people in Canada feel more confident, it tells us that we are less alone, and tells the conservative think tanks and opinionmakers that large numbers of people oppose their agenda. An increased vote for the NDP can have the effect of helping convince ordinary working people that we’re not isolated and that we have the power to change things.

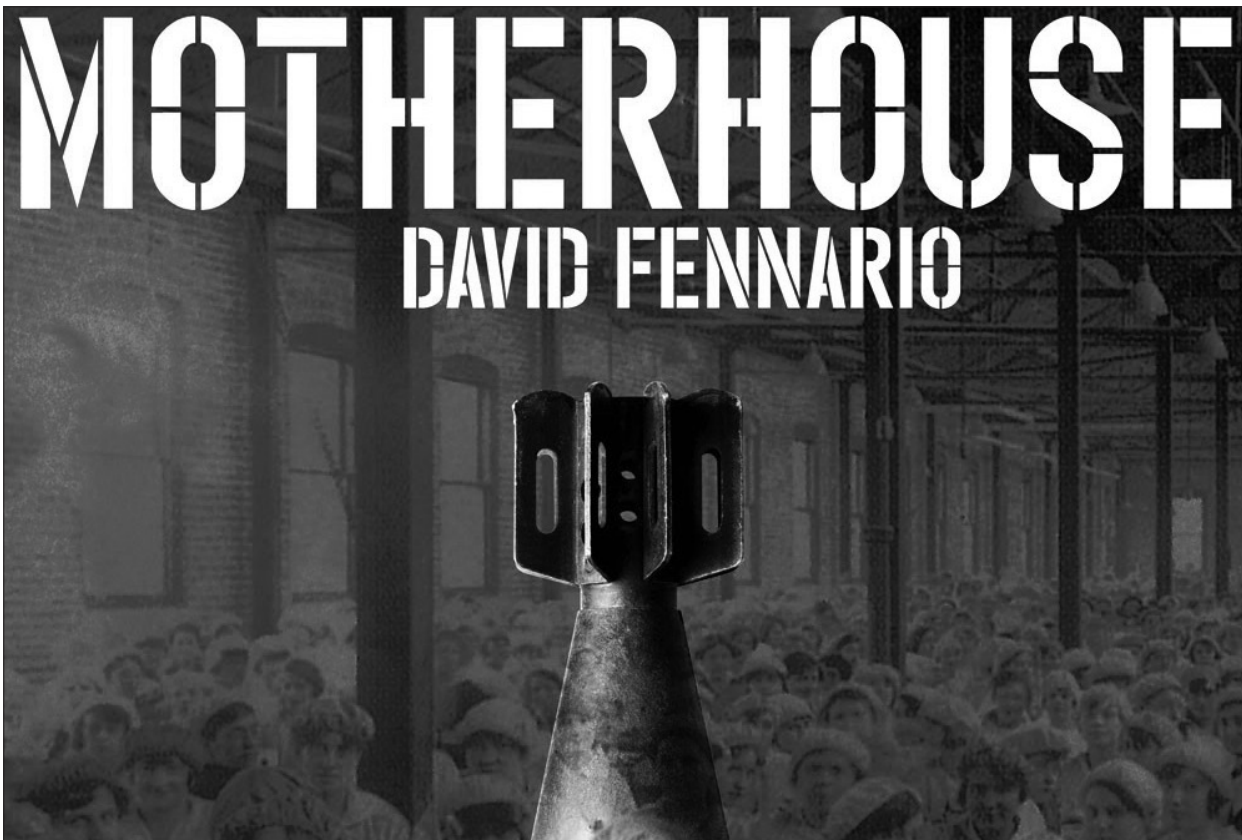
Politics

The common sense on voting is that it is the supreme act of political participation by the population in the political system. One may criticise voting all one wants, but what this means is that for many people, the act of marking their ballot is the one act they feel free to perform that expresses how they see the world and what direction they want society to take. When people have voted Liberal or Conservative all their lives and make the decision that, this time, they will cast their ballots for the NDP, this is a shift to the left. It may be the first time in their lives that they have begun to see society as being divided between the rich establishment and the rest of us. Casting their ballot for the NDP is a way to give that shift in ideas some expression.

Revolutionaries must welcome such a change in people’s ideas, endorse it and work to make it grow. We turn our backs on the potential radicalisation of all sorts of people if we don’t see that, for many, voting NDP is the first step they will take in developing a more progressive and thorough-going critique of society.

A larger vote for the NDP, then, has the potential to strengthen the vital work of increasing the confidence of ordinary people in their own ability to defeat austerity. So vote NDP, but do it with no illusions. Vote NDP because it’s a vote for our class, a vote that will be interpreted as a vote against austerity and the politics of inequality and division. But don’t conclude that the NDP will deliver on any of those things. They will not. Vote NDP, but also be working today, tomorrow and the day after any election to build the networks of ordinary people whose own activity will be the key to building a more just society.

OPINION



Motherhouse: political theatre

by PAM JOHNSON

Motherhouse is designed to be used as a political intervention by the anti-war movement, but it can also hold its own on mainstream stages as a good night-out of entertainment.

Fennario is considered by many the preeminent working class playwright in Canada. He is an anglo-Montrealer from the suburb of Verdun. He is particularly known for writing the first play that featured both anglophone and francophone working class characters, *Balconville*, in 1979. He is a life long revolutionary socialist and activist.

The Quebec student strike happened as he was writing this play. He was attending “casseroles” protests in his working class Montreal neighborhood and writing his play about that same neighborhood one hundred years ago during WWI.

Motherhouse is the story of Lillabit, who works in the British Munitions Supply factory making mortar shells. Two francophone women are killed in a factory accident and because their families are not anglophone, receive inferior compensation. Lillabit decides to protest this and finds herself the leader of her co-workers. She gets thrown in jail for her actions and branded a “Bolshevik.”

It is a profoundly anti-war play intended to counter the glorification of WWI. Fennario brings the story of the radicalization of Lillabit to life by interweaving the unique political history of Quebec and war and the ongoing political division of francophone and anglophones, illuminating both the class divide and the national

divide within Canada.

But, this is no earnest polemic or kitchen sink drama.

Brecht and revolution

Inspired by Brecht’s Marxism and his concept of non-illusionary “epic” theatre, Fennario tells this tale with wit, humour, music and, through Lillabit in particular, the vernacular speech of working class Verdun.

He also intertwines two characters representing the recent Quebec student strike, the Carré Rouge, who only speaks French, and a traditional Quebecois fiddler.

Brecht had a profound impact on Western theatre. His writing, his ideas about how to train actors, and his unique approach to staging and production, have been seminal in the development of Western theatre.

These ideas were formed in a volatile historical period in Germany, when it was in the throws of a revolutionary upheaval, inspired by the Russian Revolution, that birthed a republic after WWI.

The main dynamic in this struggle was the role of ordinary workers struggling in mass numbers to throw off an autocratic government. Many of these workers were socialists who held Marxist politics.

Brecht embraced these politics—especially the idea that theatre was not something to be consumed by an audience but that it should be an intervention into the politics of the day.

“I wanted to take the principle that it was not just a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it, and apply that to theatre,” said Brecht.

Capitalism and sport

Sports for the average person are something to enjoy—whether they are watching it to relieve stress or playing them to lead a healthier lifestyle. But capitalism’s pursuit of profit has turned sports into a money making machine.

Soccer, the most famous sport in the world, started out as just a game played by school boys in England. When it started, there were no positions or fancy equipment, just normal people playing a game they enjoyed. Originally sports were not competitive, but rather more about culture, healthy living and pleasure.

Competition and profit

During the industrial revolution, companies started many of today’s big clubs—like Arsenal and Manchester United—which pitted workers against each other. Over time, sports have been integrated into a system to promote working class rivalries, competi-

tion and profit-making. Now sports are a stunning \$440 billion dollar venture in North America alone.

We now have people who make their living by playing sports and make more money in a few years than most of us will in our lifetime. The system has glorified these athletes based on the number of goals they score or home runs they hit. Due to incentives attached to this, athletes have adopted steroids and other substances to enhance their performance and make more money. This creates a false perception for the society of what it means to be healthy. But most athletes have very short careers, with little fame or glory, and when they are injured they are tossed aside like used machinery—while the millionaire sports CEOs keep making money.

The Olympics originated from Athens where Greek citizens tested their strength, agility, endurance and mental ability, with minimal gear and

Motherhouse as a political intervention

Fennario sees *Motherhouse* as a revival of the idea that theatre can be a political intervention designed to provoke thought or action and not just something to be consumed.

He has thread politics through the writing, through the environment of rehearsal and the context of performance: incorporating the current political milieu and historical events.

Fennario also sees this play and his method as a challenge to the trend in Canadian theatre training that character is about creating a full illusion. Although this play is very far from “social realism” or naturalism, the actors are encouraged to be non-illusionary to “show what they are showing.”

Fennario has involved political comrades and friends from Verdun in the development of the script and rehearsal process—and done promotional outreach to francophone Cegeps, working class anglophones, and the anti-war coalition Échec à la guerre.

Political theatre has been making a return in this era of war, austerity and climate chaos. Sadly much of it, although well-intentioned, is naïve and anecdotal. What sets Fennario and Brecht apart is a clear set of political ideas that offers a critical analysis of the world we live in and the intention to insert this into the actual political debate and struggle going on today.

David Fennario will be speaking in Toronto at Maxism 2014: Resisting a System in Crisis, June 14-15. Register at maxism2014.ca

by Gurkirat Bath and Amrit Koonar

equipment. These same events now athletes train day and night for four years, and cost the host city billions of dollars—\$50 billion in the case of the Olympics in Sochi. The events that have become more of a corporate spectacle with sponsorships and advertisements all made possible by the taxpayers money to fund the infrastructure to hold the games.

Who pays?

Golden goals are often remembered more than the blood, sweat and tears of the working class that make the games possible. Brazil is hosting the upcoming FIFA World Cup, building stadiums instead of schools, hospitals and accessible public transit. Qatar is hosting the 2022 World Cup, spending \$100 billion to build the infrastructure while paying workers pennies.

We need to challenge capitalism to reclaim sports as a pursuit of pleasure and health instead of profit.



FILM

Reproductive justice and indigenous sovereignty

Directed by Rose Rosenblatt and Marion Lipschutz
Reviewed by Maureen Aslin

Young Lakota documents the tumultuous struggle for reproductive justice in South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Indian Reservation from 2006 to 2008, through the lives of three young Oglala Lakota members; twin sisters Sunny and Serena Clifford, and Brandon Ferguson, their neighbour.

In 2006 the Republican governor of South Dakota signed a bill making it illegal to preform and abortion with the exception of when the life of the woman is in danger. The law was designed as a provocation to force the issue back into the Supreme Court in an attempt to overturn Roe v. Wade.

Cecelia Fire Thunder, the first female President of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council, responded by saying, “To me, it is now a question of sovereignty; I will personally establish a Planned Parenthood clinic on my own land which is within the boundaries of the Pine Ridge Reservation where the State of South Dakota has absolutely no jurisdiction.” She added that the centre will offer abortion to both native and non-native women.

Conflict with the Christian right and anti-choice was anticipated, but internal council opposition acted swiftly as well. Cecelia was impeached by Oglala Sioux Tribal Council and accused of not getting consensus to have a Planned Parenthood clinic on reserve. In addition the Council issued a ban on all abortions on tribal land. Interviews with tribal council members expose

their sexism and the influence of rigid religious beliefs.

In 2008 Law 6 was put to a statewide referendum vote which Sunny and Serena actively campaign to defeat. The film follows Sunny campaigning for Cecelia’s bid for re-election to tribal council.

Sunny resolves to continue to work for better lives for young women and men on the reservation. Sunny says “I’m a woman and a native American too. I am at the bottom of the bottom. Cecelia gave me a feeling of like, you’re not at the bottom, you are someone who deserves to be respected and treated right.”

Young Lakota takes an unflinching look at the intersection of reproductive justice and the fight for indigenous sovereignty.

The first groups to offer assistance to Vietnam War resisters formed in late 1965 and early 1966 in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, publishing pamphlets with information on hostel accommodations, tips on securing cheap housing and finding employment, information on immigration law, and how to apply for landed status in Canada.

In August 1967, Pierre Trudeau’s White Paper on Immigration introduced a new points system for establishing the eligibility of potential immigrants. Applicants were awarded points in a variety of categories, including age, level of education, vocational training, occupational demand, and destination. Even with a system in place that was intended to eliminate bias from the process, there were reports of “conscious and explicit obstruction by immigration officers.” Squires reports that false information was regularly given out at border crossings, airports, consulates, and immigration offices.

In early 1968, proof of military discharge was not required for applicants inside Canada, so deserters would come to Canada as visitors and apply for landed immigrant status once they were inside the country. In July 1968, the Trudeau government secretly ended this practice and allowed immigration officers to use their own “discretion” on whether to consider or disregard military status.

Squires notes that “internal departmental memos indicate that this regulation change was specifically intended to prevent deserters from entering

Canada.” In some cases, after refusing entry into Canada, Canadian officials then called US border guards to inform them that a military deserter was on his way back. After this information became public—and the government was flooded with letters and telegrams of complaint (some of which Squires quotes)—the government relented and made the announcement in May 1969 that military status was irrelevant at the border.

Building Sanctuary also reports that most anti-draft groups were under constant surveillance for years by both the RCMP and local police forces, even after the border was opened in 1969. There were widespread assumptions in the movement that the RCMP shared information with the FBI.

Squires also discusses some of the internal debates within the movement at the time, including whether some men were avoiding the draft because of anti-war sentiment or personal reasons, whether it was a better strategy for Americans to remain in the US and work to end the war from there, and to what extent should resisters assimilate into Canadian society.

The academic writing style of Building Sanctuary lacks the narrative drive of a conventional history, but it’s an important work of Canadian political and anti-war history. As the movement to allow Iraq War resisters from the US to remain in Canada begins its second decade, the hard work and successes of a previous generation of activists in shaping Canadian immigration policies can offer inspiration and hope.

LEFT JAB
John Bell

Dance of the Generals

At first I thought news that the Harper Tories were lambasting a retired general for his exorbitant moving expenses was an internet hoax. The Tories are old hands at screwing retired soldiers, but at least rhetorically they pretend to honour them. Especially generals.

Yet there they were slamming retired General Andrew Leslie for claiming \$72,000 of taxpayers’ money to move from one Ottawa address to another. Leslie had served as general in charge of communications in Afghanistan and then Chief of Land Staff for the Canadian Forces.

The Tory/Liberal dance

Leslie is a “star candidate” for Justin Trudeau’s Liberals, Trudeau’s chief security and military advisor, and a shoo in for cabinet if the Grits win the election. Leslie admits he shopped himself around for a political job. He told a press conference that there were “a variety of discussions between myself and a variety of political parties, of which the Conservatives were one.” The Tories outed his outrageous expenses, he claims, because he turned their offer down.

“Quite frankly, over the course of the last couple of years, depending on what level, people approached me and, as you get higher up the food chain, you’re talking to them and you’re approaching them and it’s a bit of a back and forth, much akin to a dance.”

So Leslie opted for the Liberal lambada over the Tory two-step. So the Tories reacted like a dumped bad boyfriend. So Leslie is right in saying that if he had gone to the prom with Harper we would never have heard a word about it.

Privatization

But it wasn’t just political opportunists inviting the General (Ret.) to cut a rug. Following his 2011 retirement, Leslie hooked up with a private company, CGI Group. CGI is an IT and consultancy corporation specializing in privatized health care information technology.

You might remember it as the corporation at the centre of the eHealth Ontario scandal, when it failed to deliver promised technology, doled out no-bid contracts to friends and consultants, and squandered millions of taxpayer dollars.

How does a retired general fit into such a company? CGI hired Leslie to head up its new “Defence, Public Safety and Intelligence unit.” Privatization of military “services” is a major growth industry.

Contracting out communications and information technology was a major feature of Canada’s invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, with the lion’s share of contracts going to scandal-plagued SNC Lavalin. If Leslie is elected CGI will find doors open to them.

When the Tories raised a stink about Leslie’s \$72,000 moving bill, they took a gamble. How long before investigators began turning over other rocks, to see what other retired general officers had stuck taxpayers with big bills?

Mercenaries

It didn’t take long for the spotlight to briefly fall on disgraced former general Dan Menard. The \$40,000 claimed by Menard to move to the United Arab Emirates is almost a bargain next to the cost of Leslie moving a few Ottawa blocks. But Menard is no bargain.

Formerly Canada’s military commander in Afghanistan, Menard was court-martialed for having an affair with a subordinate and engineering a cover-up. From his new home in UAE, Menard could commute to his job as managing director of the Kabul office of GardaWorld, a “global private security firm.”

Oh, for the good old days when a mercenary was proud to call himself a mercenary.

According to GardaWorld’s website, Menard headed their “commercial, operations and projects throughout the country, including existing and new contracts with the U.S. government, non-governmental and commercial clients.”

While the Tories are loudly critical of General Leslie, they have been less vocal about Menard. Perhaps the reason is that Menard is not a Liberal Party supporter. Or perhaps it is due to his arrest in January by Afghan police on charges of gun smuggling.

Menard spent almost a month in a Kabul jail before being released in mid February. What was going on? As the CTV news story put it, “It is not uncommon for foreign contractors to be jailed due to government corruption.” This is a pretty churlish way to describe Canada’s ally. And we all know that foreign contractors (SNC Lavalin, CGI, et al) are never guilty of corruption.

The trend to “private security contractors” is not new. Corporations like Blackwater used the Iraq war to hit pay dirt. Even at the occupation’s height, there were as many former special forces mercenaries on the ground as those serving in the actual militaries. These are highly trained killers, in on a global market worth \$100 billion per year.

And while Canadian military privatization has tended to specialize in communication and intelligence, former members of commando force JTF2 are in demand. Those with long memories will recognize Joint Task Force 2 as the repackaged Airborne regiment that was disgraced in Somalia in the 1990s: deliberate murder of civilian children and evidence of a culture of racism and white supremacy forced a name change.

The shuffle of generals from the national military service to private boardrooms is no accident. There is even a government body, the Canadian Forces Contractor Augmentation Program, designed to facilitate the process. General Leslie just wants to add a stopover in elected office to the revolving door. Harper is anything but opposed, as long as that revolving door leads into his own caucus.

From a general’s exorbitant moving expenses to corruption in the multi-billion dollar market of military privatization in a few easy steps. This is the real dance of the generals, a military ball. We may pay the piper but they call the tune.

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.



Spy palaces in the age of austerity

by EVAN JOHNSTON

The revelations over the past year about the US government's global spy network has provoked intense reactions from individuals and governments around the world, and has sparked a critical debate on the status of privacy in the age of social media.

Thanks to documents leaked by NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden, we also know that the Canadian state has been operating its own independent spy agency, Communications Security Establishment Canada, which has worked closely not only with the United States, but with the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand as part of the "Five Eyes" surveillance network.

Many have rightly drawn attention to the role played by new technologies in facilitating the transfer of private data to government agencies, but have left unanswered the question as to why our governments have been expanding their surveillance infrastructure. What is the relationship between austerity and the drive toward an expanded security state? And what role does fear and racism play in justifying that expansion?

A spy palace of one's own

While spying on First Nations, environmentalists, and anti-war activists has been a favourite pastime of CSIS and the RCMP for decades, what is striking in these new revelations is how widespread the practice has become.

In June, the Globe and Mail broke the story about the Canadian government's secret "metadata" surveillance program run by the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC). CSEC and the defenders of its spy program claim that the collection of metadata does not constitute an invasion of privacy. However, as several commentators and human rights experts have pointed out, phone records, IP addresses, and other online data can reveal patterns of who knows whom, and how well.

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association and OpenMedia have filed a lawsuit against CSEC, charging that the spy program violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms' protections against unreasonable search and seizure and infringe on free expression.

As the most recently leaked document reveals, CSEC has set up spying posts around the world – "approximately 20 high-priority countries" – and has conducted espionage against trading partners at the request of the NSA.

Former Guardian journalist Glenn Greenwald – the collaborator of Edward Snowden who first broke the story of the NSA spy program – has stated that there is still more information on CSEC's spying operations to come. Considering Harper's decision to build a new \$1.2 billion spy palace for CSEC in Ottawa, information exposing how CSEC operates can't come soon enough.

Rise of the neoliberal security state

So how did we get here? We could start by looking at the RCMP spy operations against communists (and their suspected sympathizers) during the cold war, or at the surveillance of Muslim communities that resulted from the state-sanctioned Islamophobia in the post-9/11 period.

Or, at the most basic level, we could start by analyzing Canada as an imperialist nation-state with its own set of economic and geostrategic interests. As a state looking to maximize investment opportunities for its own capitalist class, the move toward cooperative spy operations is a logical way to remain included in the circulation of valuable information, and to remain positioned as a key ally to the United States.

However, the expansion of the surveillance apparatus externally cannot be divorced from the changes to the Canadian state internally, specifically those changes that relate to the repressive state apparatus as a whole. We need to contextualize the growth of spying in relation to the growth of prisons, police, the military, and – most of all – to the changes in social provisioning that have been the hallmark of the neoliberal period.

This double movement of decreased social spending, on the one hand, and increased funding for the security state (prisons, the military and spying) on the other, is exactly what the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu meant when he contrasted the "left" and "right" hands of the state. As the left hand of the state becomes weaker, the right hand grows in importance.

As the capacity and reach of the

social safety net is reduced, capitalism creates a crisis of legitimacy: if the state is not there to provide social provisions, how does it maintain the consent of those it claims to govern? Increasingly, it does so by relying on force in order to justify its very existence, and we can see this most clearly in the increasing militarization of Canadian police forces, more draconian crime bills, and the expansion of its surveillance infrastructure.

Crucially, this expansion of the security state relies heavily on the production of fear: fear of immigrants, fear of "Islamicism," fear of racialized youth. Internationally, we are made to fear China, Iran, or Russia. Most recently, we have seen the resistance of the Elsipogtog First Nation labeled as "domestic terrorism," which serves to delegitimize their struggle, justify an increasingly militarized response to their demands, and to re-inforce the notion that First Nations communities are suspicious and deserving of surveillance.

Austerity and resistance

We are living through an age of austerity – an age of cuts, privatization, and fundamental attacks on the rights of workers. From the G20 to Elsipogtog, from Bill 78 in Quebec to Bill 42 in Alberta, we are witnessing an aggressive clampdown on resistance that requires an ever greater capacity on the part of the Canadian state to police, monitor, and imprison. As we continue to learn more about Canada's role in international spy networks, it is important that we be able to read the \$1.2 billion price-tag associated with CSEC's new spy palace as representative of Harper's overall strategy: the rich get richer and the police get a palace, and you can't have one without the other.

But in spite of the fear and atomization that the security state seeks to impose, people have been fighting back in large numbers. Hundreds of thousands of Quebec students defied the anti-protest laws of Bill 78 and took down a government, and the Elsipogtog First Nation continues to defend their land from fracking in the face of RCMP intimidation. As journalist Glenn Greenwald reminds us, "courage is contagious," and it is by generalizing from these courageous actions against surveillance and state intimidation that we can break through the climate of fear.

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5 pm to 8 pm
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* march 1pm
* info fair at Ryerson, 55 Gould Street
For more information visit <http://iwtdtoronto.ca>

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY TORONTO
SATURDAY MARCH 8, 2014 OISE, 252 BLOOR ST. W.
RALLY 11AM, MARCH 1PM, FAIR 130AM @ RYERSON, 55 GOULD ST.



Powershift Atlantic

March 28-31
Halifax/K'ijipuktuk,
Mi'kmaq Territory
For more information visit http://www.wearepowershift.ca/powershift_atlantic



2014 budget: the rich must pay their fair share

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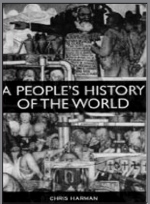
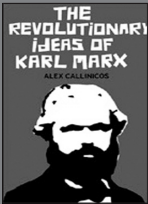
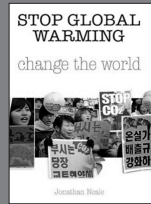
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SAVE ROSARIO MONTANA

by YUSUR AL-BAHRANI

On February 16 people from the Romanian community and their supporters in Toronto celebrated 1882 years of Rosia Montana, a proposed UNESCO site, and raised awareness of the threat of Canadian mining.

Historic Rosia Montana in Romania will soon be exploited if the mining project is passed. Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC) is owned 80 per cent by Gabriel Resources, a Canadian mining company that is planning to implement the greatest opencast mine in Europe.

According to Save Rosia Montana, the project will permanently endanger 6000 people from the neighbouring areas, four mountains will be blasted away, 2064 private properties will be relocated, 975 houses will be torn down (out of which 41 houses are considered national heritage sites), seven churches will be demolished (blown up or covered by the cyanide pond), 11 cemeteries will be relocated and 12,000 tons of cyanide will be used annually.

At the beginning of the event, Celebrating Rosia Montana, at Beit Zatoun, the organizers (who are leading members of Canada Save Rosia Montana) screened short videos of locals sending messages to those in solidarity with them. The messages were showing the strength of those resisting in Rosia Montana— “Rosia Montana will exist and we will not leave.” Save Rosia Montana, one of the largest social and environmental movements in Romania, has been successful in attracting hundreds of thousands of active members, supporters, and protestors in Europe and different parts of the world.

Solidarity with people in Rosia Montana means exposing the plans of the Canadian mining company and showing support towards those resisting there. Helping to make Rosia Montana to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site is one tactic to stopping the destructive mining project.

MARXISM CONFERENCE

From recession to climate disasters, it’s clear capitalism is a system in crisis, and the response of the 1% is to make the rest of us pay for it—with austerity, oppression, and imperialism. But there are also resistance movements resisting uniting people for climate justice, economic justice, and liberation.

On June 14 and 15 in Toronto, join us for a weekend-long political conference of ideas to change the world. Topics include anti-imperialism, workers’ struggles, climate justice, indigenous sovereignty and resistance, combating oppression, socialists and elections, understanding capitalism and more.

Register now so you can join the discussion about how to build a better world, and so you can help us organize the conference.

Visit marxism2014.ca to register online today!

ARTICLE TITLE



‘14 now!’ Fight continues for minimum wage hike

By Athar Khan

There is a burgeoning labour movement in Ontario, and one key component of it is the Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage.

On February 15, hundreds of people attended the Rally for a \$14 Minimum Wage at Yonge-Dundas Square in Toronto. This was just one rally among many held all around the province to demand a \$14 minimum wage.

Anti-poverty and labour groups have been organizing this province-wide campaign for almost a year now. Although the Wynne government has promised to unfreeze the minimum wage, proposing to increase it by only 75 cents to \$11 and tie it to inflation starting June 1, these measures fall short of the central demand for \$14. A \$14 minimum wage would put full-time minimum wage workers 10 per cent above the poverty line, whereas the proposed \$11 still leaves them about 16 per cent below it.

Demonstration

The lively Toronto demonstration took to the streets to deliver a message that workers deserve a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work. After marching down Yonge Street, the demonstrators took their message to the Eaton’s Centre – a centre of retail activity and a site where hundreds of low-

wage workers earn their living. Protesters occupied the mall to chant, explain the campaign, and leaflet.

“We’re here to continue fighting for the working poor,” said Beixi Liu of the Workers’ Action Centre. “Eleven dollars is a good direction but is not enough,” said Liu. Tim Vining said: “People work and play by the rules and end up living in poverty.”

It is also important to note that certain groups are disproportionately affected by low wages. Hailey King pointed out that most of the people on minimum wage are women. Marcelle, who works in a factory, stated: “Most people of colour have less opportunity.” Nadia, currently unemployed, recalled working at Wendy’s a few years ago on minimum wage. “I used to cry and say to myself, what am I working for?” She also said she sometimes went hungry because she had to pay the bills and rent.

Liberals and NDP

As Andy Lomnicki, Vice-President of the Elementary Teachers of Toronto said: “We’re here to protest the minimum wage not going up to a level where it should. The Liberals have suggested that \$11 is a good place to land, but I think a lot of people that are out here today are saying that that’s not anywhere near close enough.”

Sid Ryan, President of the Ontario Federation of Labour, criticized Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath for not supporting the campaign to raise the minimum wage. “If we are the party of working people, why are we not speaking up to raise the minimum wage? That’s not acceptable.”

Good for business?

Horwath is not supporting the campaign out of concern for small businesses, though Liu argued that increasing the minimum wage to \$14 would not only be good for individual workers, it would be good “for the economy, the community and business.” A \$14 minimum wage would generate about \$5 billion in economic stimulus. As Liu notes, when workers have more money, they spend it in local businesses.

Next steps

The upbeat demonstration sent a clear message that union and non-union workers will continue to mobilize for decent work and fair wages. Next month, the Campaign will be mobilizing its members and supporters to join all those marching on International Women’s Day on March 8. One of the slogans for this year’s march is “\$14 minimum wage now!” along with “Public services are women’s services!” and “GenSqueezed: We demand our future!”

MI’KMAQ WARRIORS SPEAKING TOUR COMES TO TORONTO

On February 20 member of the the Mi’kmaq Warrior Society spoke to a packed crowd at the Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre, the latest stop on their tour that started on the west coast.

The evening began with a welcome and drumming, and heard from activists about the impact of poverty on the Downtown East Side what people are doing to resist. Then members of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network talked about the impact of environmental destruction on women’s bodies, and the way climate and reproductive justice are intertwined.

An activist from Grassy Narrows spoke via skype about the recurring threats of logging on their territories and the need for solidarity, and Vanessa Gray from Aamjiwnaang described the environmental racism

imposed on her community, surrounded by petrochemical companies.

“Normalize resistance”

This became the backdrop for the Mi’kmaq warriors, highlighting the importance of their resistance in Elsipogtog against fracking. Suzanne Patles (who will be a keynote speaker at next month’s Powershift conference in Halifax) described the generational continuity of resistance, from her parents and grandparents who had resisted residential schools, to her and her children who would resist ongoing colonization. As she described the media portrayal has tried to isolate resistance when in fact it was the whole community that was united against fracking. As she said we need to normalize resistance, and demand those Mi’kmaq Warriors still incarcerated be released.

“If we all work together we can defeat the oppressor”

Coady Jipol described how colonization affected him personally—from drugs and incarceration to his friends’ suicides—and the urgency of changing the world. As he said, “I don’t want my son burying his friends.”

First inspired by the Mi’kmaq blockade at Burnt Church in 1999, he joined the blockade at Elsipogtog and described how it renewed cultural pride and stopped the fracking company despite police brutality.

He described the process of radicalization, where the more people get involved the more they see injustice, and appealed to people to join the struggle: “if we all work together we can defeat the oppressor.”

Suzanne Patles will be a keynote speaker at Powershift Atlantic.

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

Steelworkers against Hudak

Over 160 Steelworker activists crowded into their union hall in downtown Toronto checking their state of readiness if Tim Hudak, leader of the Tories, becomes the next premier of the province. Even though he has backed down on his threat to role back the Rand Formula, which would have allowed workers to opt out of paying union dues, no one felt that they could trust anything he said.

These members came from primarily private but also public sector work places and discussed how Hudak’s policy paper on creating “One Million Jobs” was a frightening outline of his intention to declare all out war on public sector workers. He promised to do away with 10,000 education jobs, and freeze wages for every government worker.

A recent article in the New York Times showed the devastation that has taken place in the state of Wisconsin. State employee unions now can only negotiate wage rates and this is tied to inflation. Seniority provisions, grievance procedures, just cause for termination, health and safety regulations have all been gutted. Members have to pay a much greater share of their benefits and in most instances this as resulted in a 10 per cent reduction in wages.

Hudak is trying to drive a wedge between public and private sector workers by denouncing defined benefit pension plans and other hard won gains. He recognizes that trade unions are the strongest defence that working people and the poor have to fight back against the so called “austerity agenda.” Hudak’s plan is to smash the union movement.

Only 15 per cent of private sector workers are unionized in Ontario and the corporations are doing all they can to demand concessions and bring in two tiered wages. We have seen long fights at Vale Inco, U.S. Steel and other corporations

where workers stood their ground for many long months before they were forced to take the roll backs, primarily affecting new and younger workers.

Steelworkers have been on strike now at Crown Packaging in Toronto for over six months. Recently they rejected by 100 per cent another concessions agreement and are standing firm not only for their own future but for every working person in this country. Whenever a company wins it is a blow against the entire working class. Solidarity is crucial.

The reason that Hudak should not be believed is that he made it clear he is ideologically committed to doing away with the Rand Formula. He wants to make sure in any way he can that workers do not have union protection in their work places. He backed down because there has been a real push back on his proposal, even from within the ranks of the Tory party. This same scenario took place in Michigan where the present Republican governor promised that he would not introduce such legislation if elected. Surprise, surprise once in power it was introduced and is now law.

We have to listen to the concerns of workers about what their issues and concerns are, and talk about how we can change our unions from the bottom up. We have to talk about the need for rank and file controlled unions where the members are setting the agenda. We have to have the face to face conversation with our fellow workers about the need for union representation and how their union must represent their interests.

Working people and the poor could loose the only organized force that could push back the “austerity agenda,” working along side community movements. We need to rebuild our unions in every workplace and use the collective power that is our as workers to build a better world.

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SocialistWorker

Powershift, divestment and ecological revolution

by ANNA ROIK

On March 28-31, hundreds of youth will join the Powershift Atlantic conference in Halifax/ K'jipuktuk, Mi'kmaq Territory, to build the climate justice movement.

Since Powershift BC, in October 2013, there have been many developments/ On the one hand there is more proof of climate chaos, from Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines to the ice storm in Ontario. There is more that the officially sanctioned methods of addressing climate issues are failing—

with approvals for the Northern Gateway and Line 9 pipelines. But there is also increasing resistance and solidarity—from the Elsipogtog blockade, the Solidarity Accord against the Northern Gateway pipeline, and a growing campaign of divestment.

Divestment

Students at hundreds of Canadian and American universities have started fossil fuel divestment campaigns, demanding their universities divest from companies with holdings in coal, oil and gas reserves.

Divestment means getting rid of stocks, bonds and investment funds that are unethical or morally ambiguous. As fossil fuels are a direct cause of environmental destruction in both their extraction and burning, they are damaging the health of humanity and the planet.

These campaigns follow the model of the anti-apartheid divestment campaigns of the 1980s, the tobacco divestment campaigns of the 1990s, and the current boy-



cott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign to pressure Israel to end the occupation and colonization of Arab land.

The fossil fuel divestment campaigns are based on current climate science that says in order to limit global temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius approximately two-thirds of fossil fuel assets must remain in the ground.

The movement has three

demands on the approximately 200 publically traded companies holding the majority of fossil fuel reserves (which in 2012 spend over \$500 billion searching for fossil fuel reserves): to immediately stop exploring new hydrocarbons, stop lobbying governments to preserve special considerations, and to pledge to keep 80 per cent of current reserves underground forever.

Websites like gofossilfree.org show divestment campaigns on over 400 university campuses worldwide. According to a January New York Times article the divestment campaigns have seen numerous successes in the US as 17 foundations, “22 cities, two counties, 20 religious organizations, nine colleges and universities and six other institutions have signed up to rid themselves

of investments in fossil fuel companies” to date.

According to Fossil Free Canada there are active campaigns to get Canadian universities and colleges to divest from fossil fuel companies including at McMaster, SFU, UBC, UVic, Lakehead, Laurentian, the University of New Brunswick, U of T, the University of Ottawa, Langara College and McGill.

Green jobs now

These campaigns are an excellent way to get more people involved in the climate justice movement, to publicize the need to shut down the fossil fuel industry and to discuss alternatives.

Today the technology, knowledge and will of the people exist to implement policies that can lead us on the path towards minimizing environmental damage. However, these policies would challenge the profits, wealth and position of the ruling class. This is why a campaign that calls for government spending on climate jobs which can reach out to working people, including those in the fossil fuel industry, is a must.

As we build the divestment campaigns we must continue to build the broader campaign for climate justice, that is, a campaign uniting the 99% in favour of eliminating the fossil fuels industry, building renewable alternatives, and supporting indigenous sovereignty.

Revolution

These campaigns can be incorporated as part of a wider struggle against climate change with even more radical demands.

The roots of the current climate crisis lie within the capitalism system driven by growth and profit, true solutions can only lie with the elimination of this system. There must be debate on how we can organize the world in a different way and use its resources rationally.

We must fight to create a truly sustainable society that will preserve the planet, not destroy it. It's either system change, or climate change.

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From Keystone XL to Line 9: stop pipelines!

by JESSE MCLAREN

February 2013 saw the largest climate justice protest in US history, as 50,000 people surrounded the White House to oppose the Keystone XL pipeline. A year later this movement has not gone away, as 400 youth were arrested in front of the White House.

Students from over 80 colleges joined the largest youth sit-in in a generation, including a mock oil spill and people chaining themselves to the White House fence. *Democracy Now* spoke with Deirdre Shelly, one of the students who was arrested, who explained the growing climate justice movement on campuses:

“The student divestment movement has spread to over 400 universities. It’s an inter-

national movement now. And it is about getting our universities and the institutions that we belong to to remove their endowments from holdings in the fossil fuel industry, because it’s wrong to profit from climate change. It’s wrong for anyone to profit from climate change, and that’s exactly what our universities are doing.”

Keystone XL

Obama will soon announce his decision on Keystone XL, following the State Department’s ridiculous report claiming the pipeline will have no major climate impact.

This takes for granted that the tar sands will continue to be developed, but opposition to pipelines is part of stopping the tar sands.

Keystone is being sold as a job creator, but as Shelly explained, “even Obama has admitted that the jobs that are purported are temporary and are very few. And there’s no reason that those jobs have to be in dirty and expensive oil. This isn’t an issue. You know, America is ready for a clean, green economy, and we need to start somewhere. And the place to start is saying no to this dirty pipeline.”

Line 9

After Harper shredded environmental regulation and the Ontario Liberals have refused an environmental assessment, the National Energy Board—a rubber stamp for pipelines—is supporting the Line 9 pipeline that will pump toxic tar sands through the most heav-

ily populated corridor in the country, including through more than a dozen First Nations that have not given consent. Toronto activists have written a comprehensive report, “Not Worth the Risk,” exposing the risks of Line 9, and opposition will continue—uniting indigenous, environmental, faith and labour groups.

But federal NDP leader Tom Mulcair has called pumping tar sands east a “pro-business, common sense solution,” and former NDP Premier of Manitoba Gary Doer now pushing Keystone XL as Canada’s ambassador to Washington.

We need to continue building the climate justice movement, and demand the NDP speak out against pipelines and the tar sands themselves.