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CAPITALISM IS A CLIMATE DISASTER

This summer has seen increasingly extreme weather globally, much higher food prices, and extreme distress for many around the world. As always, those least responsible for climate change are most affected by climate disasters.

The urgency about climate change isn't likely lost on anyone reading this, but in the lead up to the People's Climate March in New York City September 21, here's a brief overview:

A warming planet

According to the National Climatic Data Center in the US, the average global temperature in July made it the fourth hottest July since we've started keeping records in the 1800s. July was also the 38th consecutive July and the 353rd consecutive month where the global average temperature was greater than the 20th century average for that month.

If you were born after the middle of 1985 you have never experienced an average global monthly temperature; your entire life has been on a planet unnaturally warmed by capitalism's excesses, which is producing increasing un-natural disasters

'Natural disasters'

Originally estimated to be a super typhoon and the strongest winds to ever hit Japan, Neoguri was downgraded to a typhoon prior to landfall in early July.

This typhoon held the atten-

tion of Japan's capitalist elite in a tight grip: refiner companies, offshore drilling operations and nuclear reactors were shut down. Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways cancelled 40 flights collectively, affecting more than 2000 travellers. Officials urged nearly 90,000 residents to evacuate Kyushu and 580,000 in 18 municipalities in Okinawa Prefecture.

After the typhoon a heat wave across Japan killed one person and sent 152 to hospital.

Fortunately the worst tropical storm this summer did not hit land. Starting in the Eastern Pacific Hurricane Genevieve later crossed the international date to become Typhoon Genevieve. It created peak winds of 260 km/h

Farm lobby group Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) estimate this July's flood will cost Manitoba farmers \$1 billion. Due to flooding, two million acres are unseeded or lost to water damage due to the floods, and that number was expected to rise to 3.5 million (25 per cent of arable land).

The Rural Municipality of Edwards, in Southwestern Manitoba, declared a state of emergency June 30, before 200 millimetres of rain fell; the oil industry is feeling the pain of closed roads, and waiting for repair work to be done yet again. Road repairs are expected to cost \$4 million this year alone.

Then in August, parts of Winnipeg flooded after 75 mm of rain fell in one afternoon.

In the Northwest Territories thousands of hectares of forest are consumed by natural fires every year, but this year bears witness to the worst fires since the 1990's, due largely to sparse precipitation, temperatures well above historic averages and warm dry air drying out the forest - causing flames to spread faster and further.

Earlier this year, California, Arizona and Alaska all dealt with severe wildfires. Regarding massive forest fires in Washington State in July (and the largest the State has ever seen), Obama stated on July 22, "A lot of it has to do with drought, a lot of it has to do with changing precipitation patterns and a lot of that has to do with climate change."

That might qualify as the most carefully crafted statement of the year. Obama asked Congress for \$615 million in emergency spending to battle the Washington wildfires.

California is currently in its third year of drought - its' worst drought in over a century, with 82 per cent of the state facing extreme or exceptional drought - and researchers at the University of California, Davis estimate the cost will be billions of dollars and thousands of jobs lost. Lake Oroville, the state's second largest reservoir, is at 32 per cent capacity. California's farmers are having to drill deeper into the aquifers for water, and it can take decades for the rain to replenish those.

System change not climate change

Climate change is not natural, nor is it an inevitable result of human interaction with the earth. Rather, it is a reflection of our current profit-driven economic system, based on infinite growth on a finite planet.

The effects of climate change are now occurring daily, disproportionately affecting poor and oppressed communities.

This makes it all the more urgent that we create a movement that can support communities resisting extractive industries like tar sands and fracking, and connected to the immediate demand of climate job alternatives.

In BC, Unifor (the union representing tar sands workers) has signed the Solidarity Accord giving solidarity to Indigenous communities resisting the Northern Gateway pipeline. In New York, the Peoples Climate March will see thousands of people--including Indigenous, environmental and labour activists--marching for climate justice.

We also have to connect these mass movements to the need to overturn the capitalist system that has brought us to this state. We need to challenge corporations and their states, and create a world based on human and environmental need.

The only alternative to climate change is a radical and democratic system change.

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Auditing public discourse

Most mainstream charities are hardly what one could call revolutionary or even progressive. While many do good work, they largely avoid open critiques of power.

Gaining financial donors and social media followers often replaces any kind of analysis or direct action addressing the roots of social, economic and ecological problems they claim to address.

Mainstream charities look and talk like corporations. Most, in their hiring practices, seek vocational skills and marketability over critical thinking. Courting donors and fundraising is preferred over the courage to ask questions or challenge power. Executive compensation at top charities and foundations approaches corporate excess. Like the private sector, employee exploitation through unpaid interns and part-time contracts is the norm.

The tendency of charities being an outgrowth of the establishment is one reason why the Canadian Federal Governments’ auditing of “politically active” charities is of such concern. It indicates there is no space for even moderate voices who challenge the narrative of the power elite.

One could question why so much attention is given to auditing a few, rather marginal organizations. After all, there are hundreds of thousands of charities in Canada, with billions in annual revenue. How does Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) decide to audit a handful?

If government authorities were serious about tax audits, they would pursue the massive amounts of capital in offshore tax havens. They would reign in lawyers who game the system and find loopholes for corporate clients. If they were serious about politically active charities they would target the many well-funded neoliberal “think tanks” and advocacy organizations like the Fraser Institute.

However, this is not the goal. Like the McCarthy era “witch-hunts”, the goal is the destruction of any forum for organization or public discourse that seriously challenges the status quo or presents alternatives. People are free to have their individual beliefs, privately, but organizations must fall within politically acceptable confines on issues such as inequality, climate change and foreign policy. By targeting a few voices, the entire public discourse can be kept within “safe” confines. It is a message directed to “progressives” within the establishment, indicating how far they can go before their funding is cut or they are not invited back as pundits.

If this is indeed the goal, it has been successful. The most recent Ontario election showed how even the NDP is unwilling to present alternatives to neoliberal dogma. The Palestine issue shows how the entire political class is forced to repeat the same clichés.

The result is civic disengagement and an intellectually/morally bankrupt public discourse. But for much of the establishment, that’s exactly where they are comfortable.



Premiers fiddle with their hats while planet burns

by BRADLEY HUGHES

The most dramatic decision the premiers made at the 55th Annual Premiers’ Conference was to pose holding top hats for the final group photo. Their National Energy Strategy is the consensus to stick with fossil fuels regardless of the consequences.

Here is the “Vision” of the Strategy: “Canada is a global leader in providing a secure, sustainable and reliable supply of energy that is delivered with a high standard of environmental and social responsibility, consistent with efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and contributes to continued economic growth and prosperity for all Canadians.” Nearly every word of this is a lie.

In June 2014, the majority of Canadian energy exports were of fossil fuels. According to Statistics Canada, June saw \$11.3 billion of energy

exports. Of that, 73 per cent were exports of crude oil and bitumen and 20 per cent were natural gas and refined petroleum products. All of which is a finite resource, and not sustainable at all.

The “high standard of environmental and social responsibility,” has resulted in cancer-causing chemicals in lakes as far as 90 km away from the Tar Sands, disproportionately affecting Indigenous communities. In July Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) and the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN), in collaboration with researchers from the University of Manitoba, released a report showing the associations between tar sands produced environmental contaminants and cancer and other serious illness in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta.

The oil and gas extraction industries have dramatically increased their production of greenhouse gases. According

Environment Canada’s Greenhouse Gas Inventory, between 1990 and 2012 they increased their production of greenhouse gasses by almost six times. The entire Canadian production of greenhouse gasses (ignoring the burning of all the oil and gas that was shipped to other countries) only increased by 17 per cent over the same time period. So much for their efforts to “reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

This strategy which leaves the oil and gas sector untouched is a bad strategy for “growth and prosperity.” Of all the sectors in the economy, the one that creates the least jobs per dollar invested is the oil and gas industry.

The rest of the strategy is as lacking in vision as this opening statement. Nowhere is there any mention of the massive public spending that will be required to build a renewable energy infrastructure to replace our reliance on fossil fuels. Instead it relies

on lip service to climate change, and puts forward no demands on the fossil fuel industries.

On the website of the BC’s premier Christy Clark, there are several news releases dealing with other issues discussed at the Premiers’ meeting, but nothing on the National Energy Strategy. Even mentioning a document that contains the words “Climate Change” must be too much for her.

The conference is sponsored by a number of corporations including Johnson & Johnson, Coca-Cola, Labatt, TransCanada, Shoppers Drug Mart, CN. To their shame, the sponsors also include Unifor, CUPE and the Canadian Labour Congress. Once again our political leaders want to sound as if they share our concerns about the climate, our health and the need for good jobs, but in practice they will do nothing that challenges the profits of their corporate backers.

FNFTA: transparent hypocrisy

by VALERIE LANNON

It’s hard to keep up with all the examples of Stephen Harper’s hypocrisy as well as his government’s continued colonization of Indigenous peoples.

One of the latest is his First Nations Financial Transparency Act. Egged on by his friends in the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Harper developed this legislation to force First Nations band councils to post their financial information on line, where racists and related trolls will no doubt have fun exploring for financial mismanagement and “outrageous salaries.” The bill was passed last year but most First Nations have not yet complied.

What makes this Act so galling is, among other things, the fact that the Harper government decision-making apparatus is notoriously secret in its operations, even attracting criticism from Tory stalwart Andrew Coyne of *Maclean’s* magazine.

The Act came into effect in March 2013, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

Canada began posting bands’ financial information as of July 2014. Non-compliance could result in a court order or the withholding of federal funds.

Never mind that First Nations have been submitting their financial information to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada for decades. And never mind that many First Nations have been posting their financial data online for years, for example the Namgis Nation in BC. The point is, as First Nations have emphasized, that accountability rests with the communities themselves, not the colonial federal government. In addition, by having to share data that includes business development information, bands are having to expose information that would normally be kept confidential from potential or actual competitors, e.g. in logging or fishing operations.

Tory secrecy

To be consistent, Harper should insist on full disclosure of current and

planned financial decisions by his corporate buddies. Not only does Harper have no intention of doing so, he makes life easy for these industrialists by doing little if anything to stop them from diverting billions of dollars in funds to off-shore accounts. This deprives the public of much-needed tax revenue and sure as heck lets these outfits off the hook in terms of accountability.

All of this is of a piece with Harper’s agenda of shutting down sources of information that we the people need to hold the government answerable for its actions. Don’t forget this is the same government that cancelled the long-form census, which deprives communities of information essential for planning, e.g. data on changes in demographics, education levels, income, housing status, etc.

And Harper has also been busy muzzling government scientists, lest they reveal too much about our seriously weakened environmental protection regulations and processes, and other threats to our

public safety. Even federal departmental libraries have been closing, depriving us of easy access to important research. In spite of government claims that all the information from these libraries will be digitized, according to the Canadian Association of University Teachers, there is no evidence that this has happened in any consistent way.

Self-determination

We need to change all this. We need to respect First Nations’ right to self-determination, including their right to share information with their communities according to the standards of the communities themselves.

Meanwhile we have to challenge the real threat to financial transparency: corporate Canada and their Tory/Liberal supporters, who are wasting billions on militarism and tax cuts while gutting healthcare and education and destroying the environment.

Government ignores Grassy Narrow mercury poisoning

by VALERIE LANNON

CBC has reported on the history of mercury poisoning of the Grassy Narrows First Nation, asking why Japanese researchers are more involved in research there than the Canadian government.

Given Harper’s dislike of First Nations self-determination, science, or anything else that gets in his way, it is not difficult to figure out why.

Members of the Grassy Narrows First Nation have been protesting for years about government neglect into the long-term impact of mercury poisoning and limited support for treatment once the disease takes hold.

Mercury poisoning

The poisoning is a result of a Dryden area pulp and paper company depositing mercury into the Wabigoon River since the 1960s, with the First Nation relying on fish from the river as a major source of sustenance.

Once health effects became exposed in the 1970s, the dumping was reduced and new cases of poisoning have lessened over the years. But the original dumping has never been cleaned up.

But that still leaves the residents from the 1960s and 70s suffering the neurological weaknesses that accompany mercury poisoning. Japanese researchers took an interest in visiting Grassy Narrows beginning in 1975, because in the 1950s 100 people died in Minamata, Japan, and several people experienced brain damage from eating fish contaminated with mercury.

“The current team leader, Masanori Hanada, said what they learn here (Grassy Narrows) can be applied to the Japanese victims back in Minamata and to other victims of mercury poisoning all over the world.”

Compensation and sovereignty

We need to call for adequately compensating those who have been affected by the poisoning; carefully monitoring all those who have ingested the poison; and frequently testing the population for evidence of neurological damage.

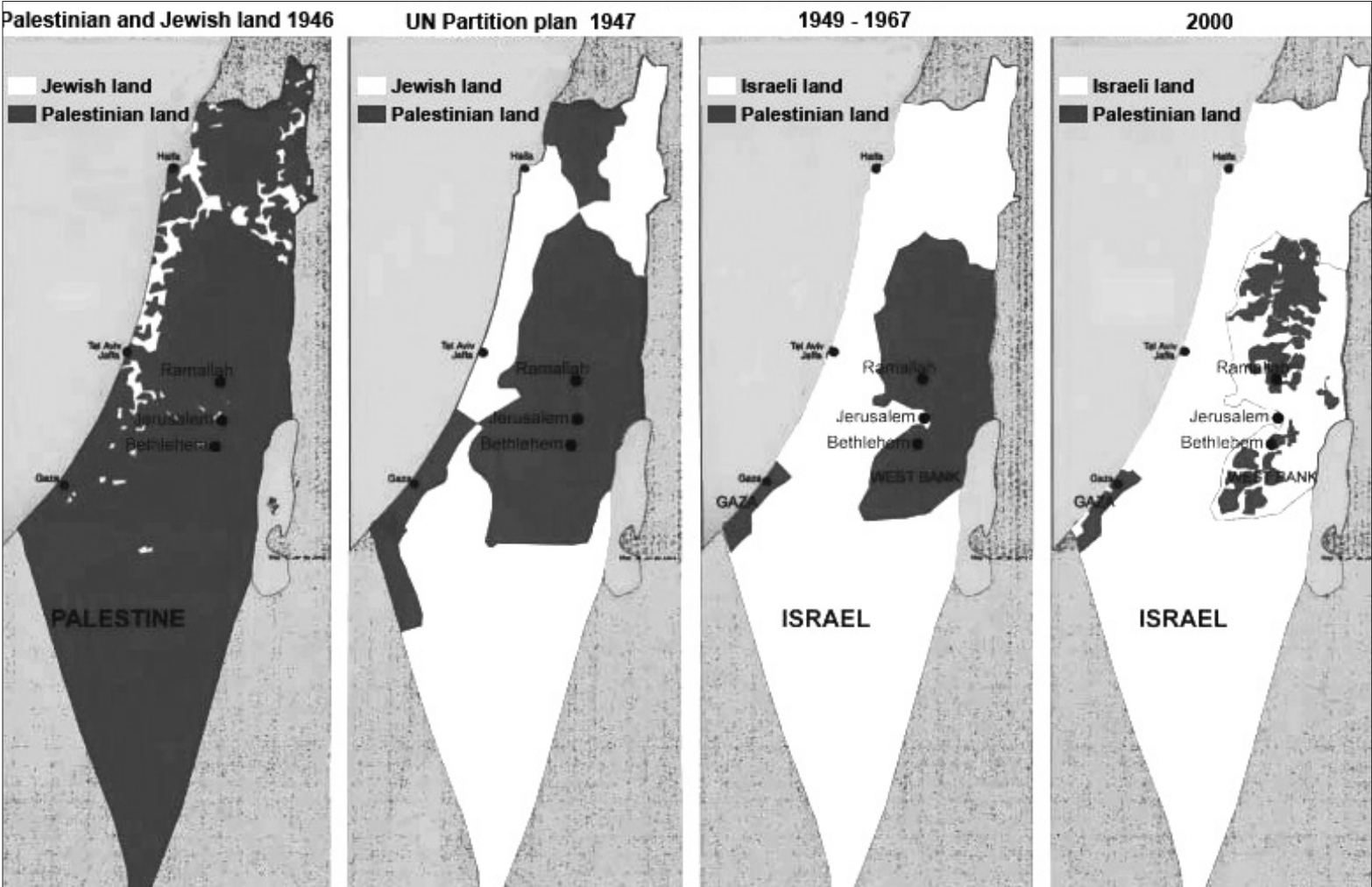
But, ultimately, this shameful situation can only be changed by respecting and properly resourcing First Nations’ approach to identifying and treating their health needs, by acting in true partnership to share scientific knowledge (both “modern” and traditional), and by demonstrating solidarity with the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Grassy Narrows and elsewhere.

Socialist Worker

e-mail: reports@socialist.ca
web: www.socialist.ca
lphone: **416.972.6391**

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Israel’s violence and Western colonialism

by PAOLO BASSI

The Israeli military machine attacked the Gaza Strip for more than a month, killing thousands—the vast majority civilians. Israel is driven by the same savage rationale that created the state in 1948: the need to grab as much land as possible and reduce the Palestinian population.

Invading Gaza means Israel not having to resume settlement talks, possibly for years. What better cover for the land grab in the occupied West Bank to continue?

This is the real objective. With each new settlement, Israel strengthens its grip on this occupied Palestinian land and declares its intent to make the West Bank part of Israel proper. Israel is not building homes for Jewish settlers to hand over to Palestinians in the future. Israel is settling the West Bank to further wipe out Palestinian history.

While land is the real objective, for decades Israel has kept up the shambolic cry that the Palestinians pose a threat. The Palestinians have no organized military, no ships, no planes, no artillery, no drones, no helicopters, no money and no powerful patron like the US. Israel is the regional superpower, armed to the teeth with the latest American military technology and hundreds of nuclear warheads.

Western masters

During this latest invasion of Gaza, even as the Palestinian dead approached 1700, the US cynically topped up Israeli ammunition stockpiles and gave \$225 million in emergency funding to the Israeli military. This is in addition to the \$3 billion plus in direct aid given to Israel annually. The US has 50 million hungry people living in poverty yet finds billions for Israel, a first world economy.

The West is not forced to support Israel by some tiny lobby group. Western imperialism as a whole benefits from the conditions maintained by Israel’s violence.

As the newspaper Ha’aretz wrote in 1951: “Israel is to become the watchdog. There is no fear that Israel will undertake any aggressive policy towards the Arab states when this would explicitly contradict the wishes of the U.S. and Britain. But if for any reason the Western powers should sometimes prefer to close their eyes, Israel could be relied upon to punish one or several neighboring states whose discourtesy to the West went beyond the bounds of the permissible.”

Palestine solidarity

Israel and its Western masters try to distract from its geopolitical role by accusing the Palestine solidarity movement of anti-Semitism or of

singling out Israel.

But the tag of anti-Semite as a means to silence criticism of Israel has worn thin. It is not anti-Semitic to oppose the violence and racism of the Israeli state, but a duty—which increasing numbers of Jewish activists are leading.

As Judy Rebick said at the Toronto rally, “My understanding of ‘never again’ is never again for anyone. So I consider it a responsibility as a Jew to stand against the slaughter. Because when the Nazis slaughtered the Jews no one stood with them except for Communists. No one stood with them: this country turned away a boat load of refugees. We can’t do it again. Whenever a government slaughters civilians we have to raise our voices. We have to raise our voices against Israel who is committing one of the worst massacres we’ve seen. Because our government is supporting them we have a special responsibility.”

Palestine solidarity does not single out Israel but connects Palestinian liberation to resistance movements across the region, threatening the imperial architecture.

As US strategist Zbigniew Brzezinski anxiously wrote in 2006: “The destructive war in Iraq, the hypocritical indifference to the human dimensions of the stalemate

in Israeli-Palestinian relations, the lack of diplomatic initiative in dealing with Iran and the frequent use of Islamophobic rhetoric are setting in motion forces that threaten to push America out of the Middle East, with dire consequences for itself and its friends in Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.”

The Arab Spring, inspired by Palestinian resistance, has shaken all of the Western-backed dictatorships on which Israel depends, and the West has intervened to contain resistance movements—bombing Libya, arming sectarian forces in Syria, supporting the new military dictatorship in Egypt and the old dictatorships in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Jordan.

The West then unleashed Israel to attack Gaza, but this has only further isolated Israel and fanned the flames of Palestine solidarity—which are connecting to indigenous sovereignty and solidarity movements across Canada and the US.

By challenging our own governments in the West we can support Palestinian resistance and the regional movements with which it is connected.

Victory for the Palestinian resistance

The resistance triumphed after an attack lasting 50 days: bombing with all kinds of advanced weapons, thousands killed and twice that number injured and the expulsion of around half a million Palestinians from their homes.

The resistance triumphed in the face of this brutality by an enemy armed with the latest American weapons, some of which were being used for the first time to kill Palestinian civilians and to destroy their homes. The resistance triumphed, despite all the destruction incurred by the Palestinian people in Gaza, in the face of human and material losses which cannot be forgiven or forgotten.

Despite the terrifying disparity in the balance of forces, the Palestinian resistance won when Israel failed to achieve the goals of its offensive, the first of which was to liquidate the resistance and break the Palestinian

people. The Resistance won, because it broke the silence over the Palestinian struggle, which forms an additional blockade alongside the suffocating military and economic siege endured by the Palestinian people.

The voice of the Palestinian cause has once again been heard around the world, with the launch of popular movements backing the resistance and opposing the Zionist attack which is supported by the Great Powers. Israel has become popularly isolated, and even a number of regimes officially announced their opposition to Israel because of the aggression.

The resistance won when Israelis tasted some of the fear and anxiety which Palestinians have experienced for decades, as its rockets reached deep into Israel. Israeli settlements emptied, and Ben Gurion Airport became unsafe for air traffic, while sporting and cultural activities and

tourism ground to a halt. This is in addition to the military cost of the attack, and the economic and civil infrastructure losses which Israel will have to shoulder.

The resistance won when Netanyahu accepted negotiations on new terms, and was forced to announce them to the Cabinet over the phone without even meeting them face to face. And behind Netanyahu stand his big backers – the US and European Union – and his close friends in the West Bank and in Egypt, who were not ashamed to attack the resistance and condemn it openly. They supported the Israeli attack, and pressurised the resistance factions which had united in negotiations over the acceptance of Israeli proposals for a ceasefire.

We will not be surprised when we hear self-congratulatory explanations from Abu Mazen, that obedient servant of Israel, or simplistic analyses claiming that Al-Sisi’s regime

is the protector of the Palestinian cause and that he can claim credit for reaching an agreement.

Stopping the attack, opening the Rafah crossing and ending the siege: these initial terms of an agreement may remain partially-met goals. It is not guaranteed that these terms will be met, but there is no doubt that what has been achieved is a crack in wall of concrete which surrounds the entire Palestinian people, and particularly in that surrounding Gaza. It also confirms that resistance is the only way to deal with Zionist aggression and the regimes which collaborate with it.

Long live the Palestinian resistance! Down with Zionism and its allies!

This is republished from the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists: global.revso.me

Exporting Israeli repression

As the world witnesses the latest violence in Gaza and decries the death of civilians, there is another humanitarian crisis on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants, many children, mostly from Central America, are fleeing violence and poverty to cross the world’s largest and most dangerous migration route. Despite many distinctions, the parallels between these two crises are apparent. Indeed, protestors at Palestine solidarity rallies in California chant “Emigrantes, Palestinos, Estamos Unidos.” (“Migrants, Palestinians, We Are United”).

In fact, Israel plays a direct role in the massive industry of security, detention and deportation on the U.S.-Mexico border. This is merely one instance of the sharing of repressive security and border control tactics that is commonplace between Israel and other imperialist powers.

In efforts to support Palestinian calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions, one must not forget that war and “homeland security” is itself a big business. Interests in Israel and abroad are profiting from the status quo. Israel is among the top five global arms exporters, remarkable given the country’s size. Some claim (as in the 2013 documentary The Lab) that Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are merely guinea pigs in the growing Israeli arms export industry. Indeed, a shameless selling point for Israeli arms is that equipment has been tested and proven effective in a real conflict.

In a recent interview Shir Hever, author of *Political Economy of Israel’s Occupation: Repression Beyond Exploitation* explains how Israel’s defense industry has evolved to complement, not compete with, military powers such as the US. Hever and other critics explain how Israel’s arms industry has specialized not only in terms of technology and components it sells, but also to whom it sells.

This was particularly the case after 1977 when President Carter’s human rights policy stipulated cutting-off of aid to human rights abusers. Israel supplied South Africa’s apartheid regime, the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, Guatemala and El Salvador during bloody civil wars, the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, among many others in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Beyond equipment, Israel supplied intelligence and counterinsurgency training later used to select death squad victims and target civilians.

The International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network goes further and asserts even Zionist non-profit interest groups are active in surveillance in foreign countries. A 2012 report stated “in addition to the Israeli government, military, and corporations, a network of Zionist organizations provides political and economic support to the state of Israel. For example, in the U.S., these organizations participate in surveillance and facilitate exchanges between the Israeli military and U.S. police forces, federal agents, and armed forces.”

The united Front

Thousands of activists converged in Ottawa at the Peoples’ Social Forum (PSF). The statement issued at the end of the conference encompasses both a call for complete and fundamental change in society and a specific strategy which is about defeating the present Tory government, as a step on the road to that better world we all know is possible.

How can anti-capitalists build broad and united movements around immediate goals that can be won, and at the same time intervene to win people to radical politics and to change from below?

How ideas change

Insisting on some maximum program can never work because it misunderstands the hold of reformist ideas on most people most of the time.

Because we live in a capitalist system, where the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class who control the media and the dissemination of ideas in society, it is very difficult for people to break from those ideas. A partial break to support parties like the NDP and to accept the notion that we can work together to reform the system is an important one, and it’s why revolutionaries can never dismiss the large numbers of people who will choose that option over joining a revolutionary organization.

However, as happened in the post-WWI period, many people came to understand, through their own experience, that tinkering with the system wasn’t enough. Revolutionary organizations were able to grow very quickly in a situation where people could see the bloodthirsty nature of the system.

The theory of the united front was developed from the experience of socialists organizing in the period following World War I—the revolutionary upsurges that followed the mass slaughter of working class people on all sides. This was a period where mass revolutionary organizations operated alongside mass reformist organizations.

The united front

The united front aims to organize the largest number of people in defense of a specific goal—whether that be the defence of trade union rights, to stop an imperialist war, to defend a woman’s right to choose or to stop climate change and environmental destruction—and through the process win people to revolutionary politics and organization.

Leon Trotsky is the socialist most associated with the united front, and elaborated the theory based on the experience of the international revolutionary left after WWI. As he wrote, “there is an urgent need to secure for the working class the possibility of a united front in the struggle against capitalism. For those who don not understand this task, the party is only a propaganda society and not an organization for mass action.”

In a time when revolutionaries are a minority this necessarily involves working with reformists around specific goals. Socialists try to build mass movements around specific goals because this is the best way of fighting for reforms, and through the process winning people to revolutionary politics:

“Sections of the working class belong to reformist organizations or support them. Their present experience is still insufficient to enable them to break with the reformist organizations and join us. It may be precisely after engaging in those mass activities that a major change will take place in this connection... The Communists must not oppose such actions but on the contrary must also assume the initiative for them, precisely for the reason that the greater is the mass drawn into the movement, the higher its self-confidence rises, all the more self-confident will that mass movement be and all the more resolutely will it be capable of marching forward, however modest may be the initial slogans of struggle. And this means that the growth of the mass aspects of the movement tends to radicalize it, and creates much more favourable conditions for the slogans, methods of struggle, and, in general, the leading role of the Communist Party.”

But this is not automatic, so revolutionaries also have to have their own independent organizations: “We participate in the united front but do not for a single moment become dissolved in it. We function in the united front as an independent detachment. It is precisely in the course of struggle that broad masses must learn from experience that we fight better than the others, that we see more clearly than the others, that we are more audacious and resolute.”

Iraq War lessons

The historic movement in 2002-2003 against the Iraq War was based on the united front. Insisting that people accept the “maximum program”—i.e. you must identify as an anti-imperialist and an anti-capitalist in order to be a part of the struggle—would have meant a much smaller, ineffectual and elitist movement.

Instead, socialists and others argued that the anti-war movement needed to build broadly. Many people who became active against the specific war came to see that it was part of a larger picture called imperialism, which laid the basis for the increased Palestine solidarity we see today. The united front tactic remains central to uniting people against capitalism’s symptoms, and through the process winning them to politics and organization against capitalism itself.



Ferguson and the policing of capitalist society

by Gurkirat Batth and Gurnishan Singh

Police in Ferguson, Missouri killed Michael Brown, a youth of colour who had his hands up saying “don’t shoot.”

There have been similar cases all over the US (and in Canada, like the killing of Sammy Yatim) but this led to the largest public reaction—with people taking to the streets in large numbers. Thousands attended Brown’s funeral, including the family of Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, two other black teenagers killed in recent years.

The community response prevented Brown’s death from becoming just another statistic, and highlighted the different methods used by the state to disperse people and bring “order” back to the community—going as far as imposing a curfew, using riot police to fire tear gas and rubber bullets, and calling in the national guard. Such widespread mechanisms of repression are used to protect a system based on inequality.

An unequal system

America is presented as the “land of opportunity” based on free market ideology, where you will be successful if you work hard enough. But the US (and Canada) were founded on colonization and slavery, and persist as racist and unequal societies. The average person spends an excess of 40 hours a week at work pouring their blood and sweat into making a living,

and yet falls short on their monthly expenses. People are made to choose between eating healthy or paying their bills, which leads to deteriorating health on a large scale—especially for racialized groups.

While the whole economy seems to be suffering, one group of individual is flourishing, the same group that was responsible for the economic crisis. The 1% goes great distances to protect its interests, even as far as “donating” millions to all the candidates of corporate political parties. This results in laws that are better at protecting the corporations than people. The mainstream media, funded by the 1%, will always try to take the spotlight away from social and economic issues that plague society—blaming Brown for his own death for allegedly robbing a store, rather than blaming the racist police for killing him.

This distracts from the crimes committed by the 1% that affect the global financial system and leaves millions bankrupt. These types of white collar crimes always go unreported and no one is held accountable; instead millions are paid out in bonuses to CEOs.

Violence

What the 1% can’t gain through the consent of the electoral system or the media, they impose through coercion. Institutions such the police, justice system and prisons are used to create fear among the population, force them

to conform to the 1% and repress any threats; the first SWAT team was used against the Black Panthers. In essence, these institutions are implemented by the 1% to create fear among and control over the 99%, in order for the 1% to maintain their control over the means of production and increase their profits.

Because racism and other forms of oppression are central to increasing profits and dividing solidarity, capitalist institutions like the police are infused with racism. As the austerity agenda cuts jobs and services, there is a parallel increased in prisons, militarized police and domestic spying to increase control—which disproportionately target people of colour.

Even though individual police officers might come from the 99%, their daily experience is to enforce the laws of the 1% and repress ordinary people. The state makes them feel superior, empowers them with a monopoly of violence to defend an unequal system based on racism and private property, and defends them through legal immunity.

If the problems of Ferguson are to be fixed, the whole system needs to be scrapped and the power must return to the people. The 99% must join in solidarity, against police violence and in support of social and economic equality.

Ghana: IMF is the source of poverty

by Dauda Mohammed Suru

The government of Ghana under the leadership of President John Dramani Mahama, after several denials, finally announced it is seeking the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to help heal the ailing Ghanaian economy.

Ghana’s economy

Ghana’s economy is seriously weak, failing and is not working for the majority of the people. The very harsh policies that have been implemented recently—including increases in utility tariffs and fuel prices, increase in value added tax (VAT) and exchange controls rate—are themselves sufficient pointers to the harsh reality the people of Ghana are going through.

The social indicators are not good either: access to sanitation, safe drinking water, health care, education and affordable housing are still very poor for a significant number of the people in Ghana. 28 per cent of the population have never attended school; 34.2 per cent of the main building materials used in the rural areas are mud bricks; 19 per cent of the households have no toilet facilities. These are but a few statistics that confirm the economic hardships of the people of Ghana.

IMF

But going to the IMF for support simply means that the government of Ghana will be begging for some amount of money and a promise to implement painful and harsh measures and policies—through cuts to jobs and services.

The IMF policies—withdrawal of social subsidies, privatizations of state enterprise, job cuts and wage freezes—for the last three decades have not worked and will not work for the Ghanaian economy. Interestingly, on each of the many times Ghana has gone for the IMF interventions, the results have been terrible and the people of Ghana have endured more pain and sufferings.

Should Ghana accept a bailout of the IMF in its current economic situation? My attitude is that Ghana does not need it. In the present state of Ghana’s economic affairs, there is the need for the government to ensure our mineral resources are used for the benefit of the people.

Ghana’s infrastructure is weak, technology is still at the basics and the whole country is heavily dependent on few raw materials that are being exported.

There is the need for mobilizations of the people for the production of goods that will otherwise be imported and also genuine efforts to industrialization. Ghana must shift away from the IMF sponsored policies to policies that place Ghanaians and their welfare at the centre of everything.

Ghana is not poor, Ghanaians are made poor

Potentially Ghana has immense resources: diamond, bauxite, gold, salt, water bodies, sunshine, and many more.

Ghana is far from being labeled a poor country. It is Ghanaians who are poor and they are poor because the country has repeatedly pursued the IMF and the World Bank policies.

The IMF and the World Bank prefer to describe Ghana as a model economy. However, having religiously implemented the policies prescribed by them (IMF/World Banks), the hard reality is that many citizens including pregnant women can still not get the social benefits that were expected.

The poor suffer more pains and very few people get the opportunity to feed on the crumbs.

Solidarity with the Sikh community against racism

Gurkirat Batth condemns the series of anti-immigrant flyers circulated in Toronto, and calls for solidarity against the austerity agenda that is driving racism

The countries in the West, like Canada, always consider themselves superior when it comes to human rights and equality. Canada, the proclaimed immigrant mosaic community, features cities like Toronto, which pride themselves on their diversity and equality. But in the last few months an anti-immigrant group has been distributing racist flyers scapegoating the Sikh community.

In April of 2014 a group called Immigration Watch Canada distributed flyers around the city of Brampton denoting immigrants as the reason for all the problems that “White Canadians” face.

Racist flyers

They said Brampton has become a city heavily populated by immigrants and asked “Is this the Brampton you want?” It was a clear attack against all minorities in Brampton, as the IWC seems to prefer the city of Brampton to consist of 100% Caucasian “White Canadians.”

This flyer was especially aimed at the Sikh community as the flyer had a picture from a Sikh parade that takes place twice a year. The Sikh community was outraged by this incident, and responded by coming together to show solidarity at the Sikh Heritage Month Reception at the city of Brampton City hall.

IWC distributed more anti-immigrant, racist flyers in Brampton on August 7, 2014. Similar to last time, these flyers attack Sikhs in particular as the flyers had an image of a man of Indian descent wearing a turban. This time the flyers had a strong message of hatred as they called immigrants in Brampton a “massive third world invasion of Canada”. This flyer claimed, “Mass third world immigration has lowered wages, increased unemployment and poverty, intensified competition for available jobs, made housing less affordable (...) reducing white Canadians to a minority in their own country”.

This angered many in the community, leading to a Brampton United Against Racism Rally the very next day at city hall in Brampton. This rally drew quite a crowd including NDP MPP Jagmeet Singh, Jim McDowell of the Labour Council and former MP and incumbent city councilor Bonnie Crombie.

As Jagmeet Singh said, “Racism has no place in our community. We must stand united and together call for an end to hatred and violence against all people, regardless of faith, creed, colour or ethnicity. As a community we must respond with courage and love.”

Similar flyers were also distributed at York University, claiming that “If mass third world immigration continues, White Canadians will be reduced to a persecuted minority.” Students responded to the flyers with anger. As Mithilen Mathipalan, vice-president, equity of the York Federation of Students (YFS), said, “York is rich in diversity, and it celebrates that diversity. No form of racism or oppression is welcome here.”



Scapegoating for austerity

These racist attacks are symptoms of a failing system which is creating a divide in society. It is capitalism’s economic crisis that as “lowering wages, increased unemployment and poverty, intensified competition for available jobs, made housing less affordable.”

In addition, the austerity agenda of federal and provincial governments have made colossal cuts to social spending. Programs like unemployment insurance are now harder to access, as only 37 per cent of all unemployed Canadians are eligible for unemployment benefits. In short, tax cuts to big corporations, and now shrinking revenue will lead to almost \$15 billion in cuts to social spending by the federal government from the year 2010 to 2017 alone.

Low wage jobs, minimal social services and shrinking of the social safety net have disrupted people’s lives, and the 1% are displacing the anger onto immigrants.

The racist flyers ignore that Canada is on indigenous land that does not belong to “white Canadians,” and ignores that it is the economic crisis and austerity measures that are undermining working and living conditions, not immigrants.

In fact, austerity measures are harsher on immigrants—who have worse employment, housing and health indicators—and yet blame them rather than the 1% responsible.

The Harper government has cut refugee healthcare while blaming refugees for healthcare cuts, exploited migrant workers through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program while blaming migrant workers for job losses, imposed a two-tiered citizenship, and plan

to revoke citizenship from babies born in Canada to those without citizenship.

New immigrants are portrayed as the reason for lack of jobs, increasing costs of housing, and lower wages when in fact all of these things can be attributed to the governments maneuvering to cut taxes for big corporations to help increase their profits and swindling their citizens by cutting the services they deeply need.

Therefore, a failure of the federal and provincial governments has led to a buildup of anger, which is being displaced onto visible minorities—resulting in hate crimes, from the recent vandalizing of a mosque in Thornhill, to racist flyers distributed in Brampton and York University.

Capitalism and racism

Racism is not a reflection of human nature but a conscious strategy used by the ruling class to divide and conquer. As Marx wrote of the anti-Irish racism in the 19th century:

“Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the ‘poor whites’ to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A.. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own

money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland.

“This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.”

Racism is historically specific: while it was aimed against Irish workers in 19th century Britain, today in Canada it is aimed against the Sikhs, Muslims, Tamils and other visible minorities--including the most persecuted minority, Indigenous peoples.

Solidarity

To overcome the problem of shrinking social services and stop this injustice, the 99% must work in solidarity.

The elites that make up 1% have no motivation or intention to stop these hate crimes and messages. It is beneficial for them as it takes the blame for the broken system away from them and deflects it onto immigrants and other minorities. For them, this keeps the system afloat and helps them increase their profits.

The 99% must work in solidarity and raise a voice against the actions of the government, and not be split and consumed in hatred.

We need to challenge hate crimes like the racist flyers wherever they appear, as part of building a united movement of the 99% against the capitalist system that breeds economic crisis and racism.

Low wage jobs, minimal social services and shrinking of the social safety net have disrupted people’s lives, and the 1% are displacing the anger onto immigrants.



The People’s Social Forum call to action

The following is a draft of the call to action, circulated at the Social Movements Convergence on the final day of the Peoples’ Social Forum

We participated in the Peoples’ Social Forum because it is urgent to stop the attacks on democracy, and to free our societies of neoliberal capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, colonialism, racism, heterosexism, and of the domination of large companies on Peoples. The Peoples’ Social Forum process has allowed us to intensify a convergence of an unheard diversity between our movements.

The unified an unprecedented social movement that we build is more necessary than ever to work together to counter the current federal Government and the dominant elites’ savage attacks to our collective and individual rights, our jobs, our pensions, our public services, our environment, to immigrants, the poor, people of color, and, ultimately, to our future and that of future generations.

We do not want a State that supports the Canadian mining companies here and abroad. A State that tramples the rights of Palestinian people by supporting the Israeli regimes’ Apartheid, in spite of the numerous international resolutions. We do not want a State that oppresses the First Peoples. We do not want a State increasing militarization and criminalizing dissent.

During this social forum, we have shared the sprouts of a new vision of society, based on social and environmental justice, self-determination of Indigenous Peoples,

human rights, democracy, equality between individuals and between Peoples, the inclusion of all generations, solidarity, and a new economic paradigm serving people, not the opposite.

We want a society that fights against the disparities between the rich and the poor, men and women, whites and people of color. We want to defend and widen our public services and social programs to respect social, economic and cultural rights.

We know the importance of promoting, loudly and clearly, a different model of society. It is not only a question of opposing the Conservatives, our movement must go beyond this electoral deadline because it is also a question of regaining control over our collective future.

However, in the short run, we must propel the social movements’ current convergence towards an active, non-partisan role and lead a combative campaign against the Conservatives. As long as the Conservatives impose their idea of society, we will not be able to protect our rights and the environment, and we will not be able to carry out an open debate on what would be a society fair, viable and respectful of its Peoples’.

We commit ourselves to maintain dynamic and durable ties throughout the structures that the Peoples’ Social Forum bequeaths us (caucuses, regional commissions, networks created for workshops and convergence assemblies). The fire within us as we leave this meeting must live on!

The systems of oppression and domination are clearly intertwined and that is why it is necessary to fight them all. Each of the attacks against one of our movements is

thus an attack against us all and weakens the movements in general. We are responsible for fighting the oppression within our movements, and for showing solidarity to people at the margins of our struggles. We are also responsible for working together to express our solidarity to all of the other Peoples of the Earth.

This forum has given us hope in our capacity to surpass our limits and ot, together, overcome. We are politically united and shall be active in every corner of the territory where we are present. We call for demonstrations throughout the country, actions, and concerted reactions from various movements to conservative attacks. We must counteract in a creative and massive way. They must understand that we will not leave them to their own devices without reacting. They must feel the weight of our convergence!

We must show that another vision for our society is not only possible, but necessary. The PSF’s conclusions are a collective responsibility. This urgent call for social movements to converge is embodied in action. The solutions belong to us, organizations and individuals. The change we wish to see is our responsibility. The scale of this change depends on our involvement!

Our call is wide and is addressed to all the population and the other movements. It is a call to work together to beat the Conservatives. A call to work together to defeat conservatism ad neoliberalism. A call to rebuild a healthy democracy and to think of another system, not based on oppression and exploitation, but on an economy valuing life and the well-being of people and the earth.



From anti-Harper to anti-capitalism

On August 21-24, thousands of people participated in the Peoples’ Social Forum in Ottawa, on unceded Algonquin territory. The PSF reflects multiple resistance movements—against colonialism, climate crisis, exploitation, oppression and war. These are not bad policies or disconnected phenomena, but rooted in a common system personified by Harper.

Stop Harper, Stop Capitalism

Harper declared that Canada has no history of colonialism, but capitalism is not possible without colonization. As Marx wrote the year the Canadian state was founded: “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder, floated back to the mother country and were there turned into capital.”

Harper’s support for tar sands, despite its ecological implications, reflects capitalism’s incessant drive for infinite growth, regardless of the consequences for the planet.

Harper’s attacks on workers reflects capitalism’s central dynamic of exploitation: by paying workers less than the value they create, capitalists extract profits, that are re-invested in a relentless drive to expand.

Harper’s incessant attacks on oppressed groups also indicates that a system that only benefits the 1% has to continually impose divisions on the 99%, to maximize profits and undermine solidarity. As Indigenous activist Howard Adams wrote, “The corporate class uses racism to subjugate an entire Aboriginal nation; it also exploits the masses of non-Native society... Racism keeps the white workers separate from Aboriginals. The establishment uses it to divide and weaken the working class. It deflects people’s thinking away from class consciousness, thus obstructing working class solidarity.”

Capitalism uses the nuclear family to pay women lower wages in the workplace and nothing for domestic work—all to the benefit of capitalists. To maintain the nuclear family capitalism is obsessed with controlling reproduction, sexuality and gender—through sexism, homophobia and transphobia. Because capitalism is based on exploiting working people for profit, it pathologizes those who don’t conform to rigid standards of productivity because of physical or mental disabilities.

Finally, Harper’s militarism reflects capitalism’s inherent drive to war. While nation states are geographically limited, economic competition is global. Capitalism’s relentless drive to accumulate pushes states beyond their borders, leading to perpetual wars and occupations—from the occupation of Haiti to protect Canadian garment companies, to the bombing of Libya to protect Canadian oil companies.

For all these reasons we need to get rid of Harper and capitalism, but how?

Reform and revolution

Two common approaches counterpose reform and revolution. The dominant approach, reformism dismisses revolution and focuses on achieving reforms through the institutions of capitalism. Because reformism takes the economy as a given and the state as a tool for change, it reduces its horizons to what’s possible within capitalist economy tries to represent all the conflicting interests in society and sees threats to the capitalist state as threats to its potential. So the NDP refused to support the \$14 minimum wage because it upset business, and have a history of hostility to indigenous resistance.

Opposition to reformism can lead some to dismiss the fight for reforms, not recognizing that through fighting for reforms people can radicalize. Despite the limits of Parliament, elections can be a platform to raise political issues, and politicians can sometimes be pushed to act as a megaphone for movements, which can make it easier to mobilize people on the ground.

Sometimes frustration with the low level of working class struggle can lead people to dismiss workers as an agent of change. Workers have been central to major victories—from the minimum wage and Medicare to maternity leave and abortion rights. But unions are not revolutionary organizations: they represent all their members and they are led by a bureaucracy that is separated from the shop floor and that negotiates the terms of exploitation rather than ending it. The bureaucracy often limits struggle or channels it into electoralism, but can be pushed into action, opening up space to mobilize others.

We’ve seen a number of examples of a revolutionary approach to reforms. The pro-choice movement in the 1980s defeated the law against abortion—not by leaving it to lawyers/doctors/politicians, or seeing abortion in isolation but by mobilizing thousands of people—in streets, workplace, communities, and linking access to abortion to broader issues of reproductive justice: challenging forced sterilization of indigenous/disabled women, demanding pay equity and childcare, fighting for LGBT rights.

The movement against the Iraq War won the majority to “no war, with or without the UN,” which united a broad layer of people, pushed the NDP to oppose the war, divided the Liberals and stopped Canada from going to war.

The Quebec student strike built a mass movement against the tuition hike—not by relying on lobbying or voting or demanding all out strike for free education, but mobilizing broader layers against specific tuition hike, connected to a broader vision of free education and democracy and support for workers and the climate.

Idle No More emerged to oppose Bill C-45, connected to centuries of colonialism by mobilizing thousands though marches, blockades. It has advanced the fight for indigenous sovereignty while radicalizing thousands of non-indigenous people in solidarity.

Activists united large numbers of people regardless of other ideas but also intervened with radical politics.

How should anti-capitalists organize?

These examples show the twin tasks for anti-capitalists: building mass movements and building revolutionary organization. We need to challenge every expression of capitalism—with movements against colonialism, climate crisis, exploitation, oppression, war—and also build a revolutionary current that can link these together.

Building organization separate from building movements is useless, and amounts to a propaganda sect issuing guidelines from the sidelines. But movements without organization is limited.

The PSF had dozens of workshops happening at the same time and people had to chose amongst different movement assemblies, so it was difficult to see how they connected to one another. As individuals we can’t be involved in all struggles, but as part of an organization we can.

Revolutionary organization is also important within each movement. Mass movement are not monolithic, they contain conflicting perspectives on strategy and tactics, leading to different conclusions that can strengthen or weaken the movement. There’s the constant pull of reformism that dilutes politics and builds illusions in the state, or ultra-left politics that substitutes small actions for mass mobilizing. Within each movement revolutionaries need to organize to intervene in these debates, in order to build the movement.

The PSF call shows the potential for a radical approach to fighting Harper, but this could be derailed—either by diluting the movement to an electoral strategy that supports anyone but Harper (either supporting the corporate Tories in building illusions in the NDP) or collapsing the movement down to the anti-capitalist minority cut off from mass struggle.

People’s ideas change through experience so revolutionaries need to build each movement as big as possible on simple demands: \$14/hr now, no line 9, and the siege on Gaza, Save Canada Post. We also need to intervene in debates to push movements forward: connecting fight against Line 9 to demand for indigenous sovereignty and green jobs, connecting Palestine solidarity with exposing Canadian militarism and supporting Egyptian revolutionaries, connecting minimum wage to questioning the wage system.

With socialist organization we can draw together activists fighting on every front, learn and generalize the lessons of each campaign and connect each struggle to the working class. The bigger and better rooted a socialist organization is—in neighbourhoods, campuses and workplaces—the better we can build movements and win people to revolutionary politics.

Capitalism will continue colonizing, exploiting, oppression, and destroying planet long after Harper, until it is overthrown by a mass revolution that combines all liberation movements with working class reorganization of society.

If you agree, if you want to fight for every reform as part of fight for revolution, if you want to build movements and socialist organization, then join the International Socialists.

Bombing will not bring peace to Iraq

The US bombing campaign in Iraq is being touted as the latest humanitarian intervention in the region. What the US fails to mention is that they are responsible for creating the conditions that led to the humanitarian crisis in the first place.

The West is using the bombing campaign to rehabilitate the Iraq War and erase the memory of the anti-war movement from a decade ago. Obama, elected based on opposition to the Iraq War, has used drone attacks to normalize bombing campaigns that now include Iraq. Harper, who failed to push Canada into war in 2003, is supporting the new attacks.

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird stated that “Canada continues to condemn the repugnant killing of innocent civilians, including women and children, from Christian, Yazidi and other religious and minority communities in northern Iraq by the terror group (ISIL). We call on Iraqi leaders to come together to govern for all Iraqis, regardless of religion, and for the sake of the security, democracy and prosperity of the Iraqi people.” This statement is pure hypocrisy.

Iraq War + intervention in Syria = ISIS

The Iraq War was sold with the same logic: Saddam Hussein brutalized people in Iraq, especially the Kurdish minority, so the West had to intervene to liberate Iraqis.

But after a decade of “no-fly zones” and sanctions that killed half a million children, the US invasion in 2003 killed another million people—including the leveling of Fallujah, torture in Abu Ghraib and rape in Mahmoudiya—and left the country in ruins.

It was only a matter of time before those conditions would give rise to some new brutality. Harper refused to condemn these repugnant crimes and instead deported US Iraq War resisters.

Meanwhile the US imposed a political process on Iraq after the invasion of 2003 that undermined unity. As a standard divide and conquer technique, the US occupiers pushed a sectarian political process whereby political power was apportioned out to groups based on religion and ethnicity—alongside arming sectarian death squads. The rise of ISIS in Iraq is, therefore, a direct result of that process and the brutal US invasion which has brought poverty and misery to the people.

ISIS is also a product of Western intervention in Syria. Many of the US allies in the region—particularly Saudi Arabia (which frequently beheads and crucifies dissidents while being armed by the West)—funneled money and weapons to sectarian sections of the opposition to Bashar Al Assad. That provided a strong financial and military base for the creation of ISIS. Again, meddling by the imperial powers has backfired and created a new enemy for the West.

The ironies in this situation are plentiful. One of the stated goals of the 2003 invasion was to wipe out “terror” threat in Iraq. Of course, at the time no such threat existed but now that threat is real for the people of Iraq. And we now see the US bombing its own military equipment and fighting on the same side as two of the regimes it has vilified, Syria and Iran.

Stop the bombing, support war resisters

What this situation shows is that with each brutal intervention in the region, the US has brought more violence and more suffering. A new round of bombing will not reverse that trend and must be opposed.

The anti-war movement made this clear a decade ago: the main threat to peace is Western imperialism, we need to support Iraqi self-determination, stop our government’s drive to war and support war resisters.

The same is true today. True peace will only come with a unity government in Baghdad that embraces all different groups regardless of religious or ethnic background—and it is Iraqis themselves who are fighting against the entrenching of these divisions and for greater unity, but they are doing so under some very difficult conditions.

We need to oppose any further Western intervention, support Iraq self-determination and support US Iraq War resisters.



ANALYSIS



Five exhibits from the 2014 pensions heist

by DOUG NESBITT

Five important pension fights have erupted across the country in recent months. Employers, public and private, are once again going after pensions in what amounts to a heist.

Every generation of worker is facing the attack: new hires, veteran employees, and the retired. In every case, the public and private employers want to replace plans with guaranteed pay outs (“defined benefit”) with pensions that pay out based on stock markets or company performance (“defined contribution”). Check out Pensions 101 (<http://rankandfile.ca/2014/07/30/pensions-101-from-workplace-plans-to-cpp>) for an essential read on different types of pensions.

But pension plans are healthy in Canada. The pensions “time bomb” is being used by government and corporations to get what they want. Corporations want plans without defined benefits so they can use the money to gamble on the stock market, and bust up union power. Governments want to cut spending for the 1% austerity agenda and weaken public sector unions.

Here are the five fights that show us why we need to find a way to rebuild a coordinated pensions campaign for all workers, inside and outside the unions.

Bombardier in Thunder Bay

Toronto’s new sleek streetcars are built here but the 900 workers of Unifor Local 1075 have been on strike since mid-July because Bombardier wants to weaken the pension plan for new hires and push through other concessions. This is another case of a “two-tier” pension, or two-tier contract.

Bombardier has become a lot more aggressive in recent years. The same Thunder Bay workers had to strike for three days in 2011 against the same attack on pensions. Bombardier workers at the La Pocatiere, Quebec plant also struck against attacks on pensions for five weeks in late 2012. Neither workplace had seen a strike or lockout in at least a couple decades.

Bombardier’s attack on pensions is about reaping more profits, not saving a company in hard times. Bombardier made \$572 million in profits in 2013 and its CEO Pierre Beaudoin “earns” \$6 million in annual compensation for never being on an assembly line or in a workshop.

Cascade Aerospace in Abbotsford BC

Over 400 aerospace workers represented by Unifor Local 114 began their strike on June 4. The company wanted not just a two-tier pension system, but cuts to health benefits and vacation time for new hires. The workers were striking on behalf of the next generation of workers: people who don’t even work there yet. The union members recognized that a two-

tier contract was a divide & conquer strategy that would undermine solidarity within the workplace. Like Bombardier, Cascade is benefiting from major government contracts, including repairing the large airlift Hercules C-130 planes.

After a tentative agreement was ratified following mediation, the strikers returned to work on August 25. Gavin McGarrigle, the lead Unifor negotiator, told the Vancouver Sun that the union agreed to changes on vacation and pensions but that it won’t affect workers during the life of the new four-year contract. ““We look at this as a truce and we’ll continue to build Cascade and go back to the bargaining table and seek to deal with those issues next time, long before they impact any members,” McGarrigle said.

ArcelorMittal lockout at Contrecoeur

On August 6, nearly 300 Steelworkers were locked out at the ArcelorMittal plant northeast of Montreal after rejecting a contract offer by a narrow 52 percent. Like Bombardier and Cascade Aerospace, ArcelorMittal wanted to impose a two-tier pension plan. Young workers would lose their a defined benefit pension plan for a defined contribution pension plan, meaning their retirement would be uncertain and based on market forces. The lockout ended in less than two weeks after workers voted 84 percent to accept a contract proposed by a mediator. The employer contribution will remain the same but the union is responsible for any future debt or surplus in the plan.

Regina’s Civic Pension Plan

The Regina Civic Pension Plan covers 4,000 current employees and 2,000 retirees, including firefighters, librarians, bus drivers, teaching assistants, and other city workers for five different employers. The plan offers, on average, a very modest \$1,600/month or just shy of \$20,000/year.

The City of Regina and the Saskatchewan Superintendent of Pensions are putting the plan in jeopardy due to their own mismanagement and failures, not the fault of workers. After the 2008 economic crash, Regina City Council voted to break the terms of its own pension bylaw and provincial law to not increase contributions. The provincial pension regulator then failed to enforce the law and make the city pay its fair share. All the while, workers have continued to pay their share.

In fact, workers have already made concessions by taking on more risk for the plan in order to protect the plan’s defined benefits. Now the City of Regina is trying to run away from a Letter of Intent to protect the defined benefit program. The City wants to turn it into yet another defined contri-

bution plan with uncertain benefits.

Making matters worse, the Saskatchewan Superintendent of Pensions recently announced it was considering cancelling the Regina Civic Employees pension plan.

The unions representing the workers – CUPE, the Amalgamated Transit Union, Saskatchewan Union of Nurses, and the Regina Professional Fire Fighters Association – are now campaigning for the City to Honour Our Deal and defend good pensions.

Quebec’s municipal pension plan

The Quebec Liberals are attacking a province-wide pension plan for municipal workers (municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction according to Confederation). “Loi 3” or Bill 3 will make workers more responsible for a \$4 billion deficit in the pension plan that was not created by the workers in the first place.

Don Pittis, writing for CBC, makes the point that “the pension deficit can be traced back, in part, to a previous attempt to balance the province’s books. Back in the nineties, Quebec downloaded hundreds of millions in costs to the municipalities. To help them deal with those expenses, since pension plan investment returns were strong at the time, municipalities were permitted to take a pension-contribution holiday.”

Once again, workers, not the politicians and their right-wing ideologies of today or the 1990s, are to blame for the mess.

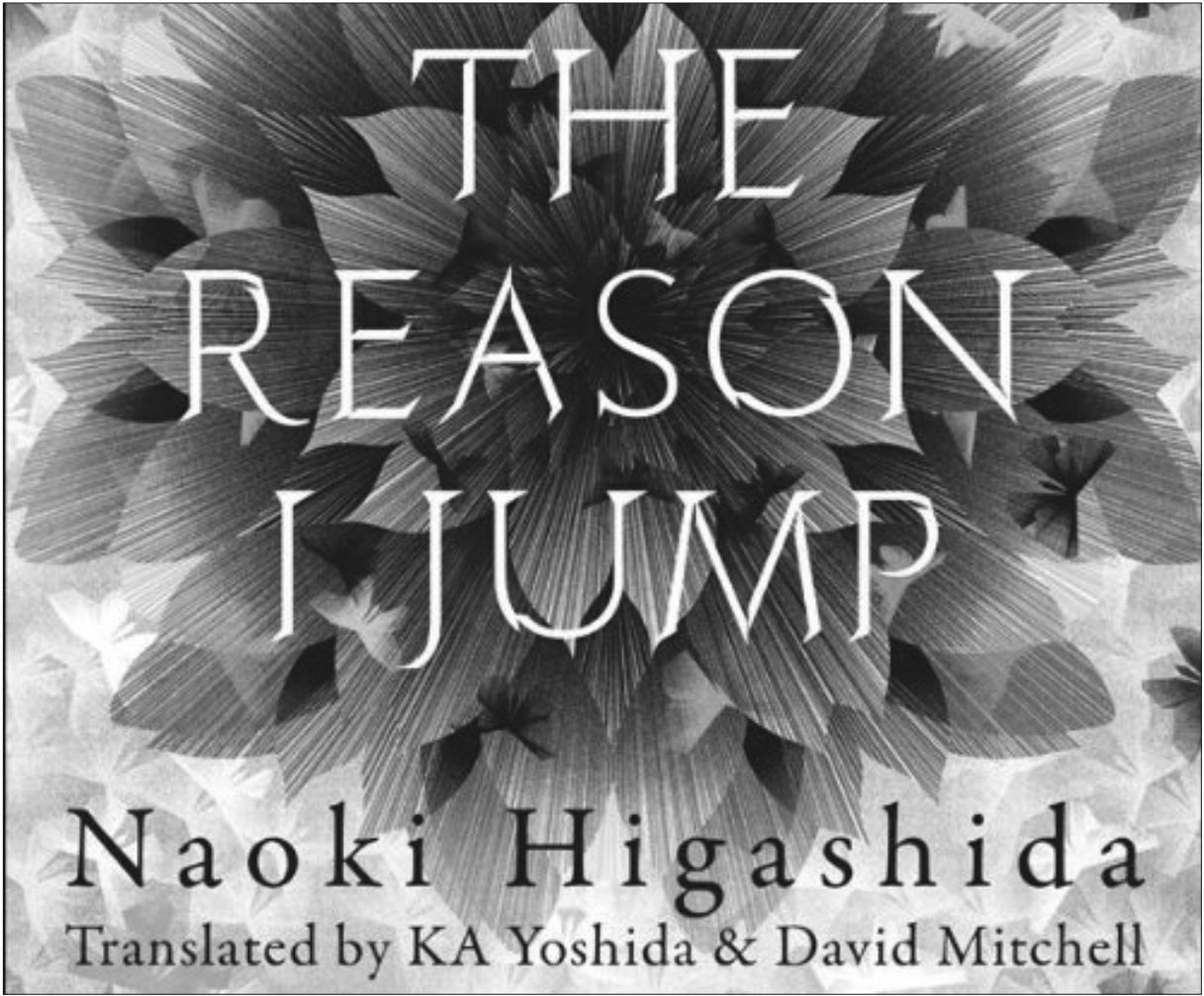
The government is conducting public hearings on Bill 3 but as the unions point out, the hearings are just window-dressing and will likely not sway a government that is already set on offloading the burden to workers.

Workers and their unions have responded with escalating militancy. A number of unions have hounded politicians across the province, while the president of the 10,000-strong Montreal municipal white collar workers union has not ruled out a general strike against Bill 3.

Most dramatically, firefighters stormed City Hall chambers on August 18, threw water at city councillors, tossed their papers, and caused a ruckus with horns and whistles. They carried a banner “Coderre Voleur”, describing Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre as a thief.

Only four months ago, Denis Coderre was allowed a platform to speak at the Canadian Labour Congress convention in Montreal. The CLC has no campaign around pensions right now, as a promising campaign on pensions a few years ago was shut off by the CLC leadership in favour of closed-door meetings with politicians.

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BOOK

Disability and capitalism

In a world where government policy regarding disability (and education for that matter) seems to be more about hollow words and Band-Aid solutions than actually realizing the potential of a child, *The Reason I Jump* gives a first-hand look at the thoughtful insights from one of those children.

The book was written by a then 13-year old boy from Japan. Naoki Higashida’s autism makes spoken communication nearly impossible, but he used an alphabet grid table to point to letters to form sentences and paragraphs which a teacher then recorded to form this 130-page glimpse into a curious, complex and intelligent mind.

The book is organized into chapters based on questions such as “why do you ask the same questions over and over?” and “do you enjoy your free time?” Naoki’s responses dispel some of the common sense understandings

of autism and reveal what it is like to have an incredible desire to connect with other people while hampered by a disorder that makes even the most mild interactions fraught with incredible difficulty.

The Reason I Jump offers something special to all those who know or care for someone with autism; a detailed tour of a mind with so much to offer, yet so few ways to express that unique perspective. As Naoki notes, “normal people think we’re highly dependent and can’t live without ongoing support, but in fact there are times when we’re stoic heroes.”

What might be most interesting for *Socialist Worker* readers though, is the narrative that comes through of a capitalist system unwilling or unable to deal with people with disabilities. In Naoki’s description of life with autism, we hear of family members bearing the weight of raising a child with a disability, ineffective government

supports, overworked support workers and a world that is very inhospitable to difference.

The introduction to the English version puts a fine point on this, as David Mitchell notes: “people with autism must survive in an outside world where ‘special needs’ is playground slang for ‘retarded,’ where meltdowns and panic attacks are viewed as tantrums, where disability allowance claimants are assumed by many to be welfare scroungers, and where British foreign policy can be described as ‘autistic’ by a French minister.”

As governments across the world make cuts to education funding under the guise of “belt-tightening” austerity, shunning the advice of education and disability research, it becomes clear that books like *The Reason I Jump* represent some of the brief moments of heart in a heartless capitalist system.

Nazi threat was from the left wing opposition parties. The SPD, the largest political party in Germany with millions of working class members and supporters, reacted to the Nazi threat by fetishizing elections and parliamentary procedure and discouraging the working class from striking, protesting and fighting back.

The KPD leaders on the other hand, followed in lock-step with USSR foreign policy and sought to expose the SPD as worse than the fascists. This disastrous policy prevented any formal united front between the two mass left-wing organizations.

The political ineptitude of the KPD and SPD leaders was matched by the trade union leadership, who thought if they kept their demands strictly economic and avoided politics at all costs they could survive the Nazi regime.

Resistance

Despite Nazi violence, resistance continued. Early on, German citizens ripped up anti-Jewish leaflets and demonstrably shopped in Jewish shops, breaking the 1933 government boycott. Jehovah’s Witnesses produced illegal propaganda against the Nazis and were martyred in the thousands for their beliefs; youth gangs formed to terrorize and fight in the streets the SA and Hitler Youth; KPD members continued to try and organize in their

workplaces, spread propaganda and launch strikes (though these were typically isolated and violently crushed).

The scale and variety of resistance launched by Jews against their persecution is truly inspiring: “in practically every ghetto and in every labour and concentration camp there existed a Jewish underground organization which kept up prisoners’ morale, reduced their physical sufferings, carried out acts of sabotage, organized escapes, collected arms, planned revolts, and in, many instances, carried them out.”

Read this book. It is incredibly useful for anyone organizing or trying to make sense of politics in this day and age. As Gluckstein notes: “war and the Holocaust cannot be wholly attributed to the insanity of a small group of Nazis, or the mentality of an entire population. They were, above all, the product of a definite historical development—the development of capitalist society and in Germany specifically, a place where the powers of resistance to untrammelled exploitation had been wiped out by counter-revolution. Not every capitalist crisis leads to a Holocaust, but contained within every capitalist crisis is the potential for a Holocaust if the system that treats people as objects, numbers, to be used or disposed of, is not overthrown.”

LEFT JAB

John Bell

The rise and fall of Officer Friendly

In the wake of the execution of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri, it has become clear that the myth of Officer Friendly is dead.

The “Our Cops Are Tops” stereotype has been painstakingly constructed in popular culture. In a 1958 magazine cover illustration entitled *The Runaway*, Norman Rockwell depicted a young boy running away from home seated beside a friendly policeman in a diner. Now, contemporary artist Anthony Freda has reimagined the scene in the era of police militarization.

Police fiction

A mind-boggling number of hours of television time have been devoted to police shows. A few are great. Some are well written and acted. Most endlessly recycle clichés and stereotypes. All but a few reinforce the idea that the cop—even the “troubled” cop—is there to serve and protect good people. TV history includes this cornucopia of cop corn:

Police Story. Adam 12. 21 Jump Street. Reno 911. Car 54 Where Are You? Brooklyn 99. Hawaii 5-0. Barney Miller. Dragnet. Fish. CHiPs. America’s Most Wanted. COPS. Disorderly Conduct: Video on Patrol. The First 48. Hot Pursuit. NYPD. New York Undercover. Brooklyn South. Due South. Southland. The Chicago Code. Memphis Beat. Miami Vice. Walker, Texas Ranger. Las Vegas. Vega\$. The Streets of San Francisco. LA Heat. Hawaii. The FBI. JAG. SWAT. NCIS. CSI (Vegas, Miami and New York). Crime and Punishment. Crime Story. Criminal Minds. Cold Case. Cold Squad. Major Crimes. Murder One. Most Wanted. Alien Nation. Almost Human. Robocop. Foyle’s War. Sgt. Preston of the Mounties. Murdock Mysteries. Hec Ramsey. Midsomer Murders. Jigsaw. Kidnapped. The Killing. Starsky and Hutch. Dalziel and Pascoe. Tenspeed and Brown Shoe. MacGruder and Loud. McMillan and Wife. Hardcastle and McCormick. Rizzoli and Isles. Cagney and Lacey. Jake and the Fatman. The Commish. The Shield. The Third Watch. The Rookies. Rookie Blue. The Blue Knight. Blue Bloods. Blue Murder. True Blue. Pacific Blue. NYPD Blue. Hill Street Blues. Body of Proof. Police Surgeon. Quincy M.E. Bones. Numb3rs. Lie to Me. Psych. The Mentalist. The Closer. The Listener. The Profiler. Cracker. Cracked. Dexter. Silk Stalkings. Unforgettable. Sledge Hammer! Police Academy. Police Squad. Police Woman. T J Hooker. Baretta. Taggart. Wallander. Madigan. McCloud. Hunter. Cannon. Columbo. Kojack. Ironsides. Longstreet. Sue Thomas: F.B. Eye. Highway Patrol. Street Justice. Homicide: Life on the Street. The Strip. The Naked City. The Wire. Between the Lines. The Border. Border Security. Wiseguy. Inspector Morse. True Detective. The Detectives. The District. The Untouchables. O’Hara, US Treasury. The Mod Squad. Law and Order: Special Victims Unit. Law and Order: Criminal Intent. Law and order: Trial by Jury. Law and Order: LA. Law and Order. Justified.

Police reality

Justified no more. We now live in a time when almost everyone has the capacity to record their interactions with the police, and share them with the rest of us.

We can chart the demise of Officer Friendly to the videotaped beating of Rodney King back in 1991. Then the image of five LA cops abusing the unresisting King was novel, and provoked the same sorts of protests that Michael Brown’s killing has produced.

Now such homemade revelations are common.

In late August a Boston man posted to twitter a photo of a Massachusetts State Police cruiser with a bumper sticker that read “Racial Profiling Saves Lives.” At first the state police accused the man of photoshopping the racist bumper sticker onto the car.

Later officials admitted that the cop had removed the sticker from his car when he was informed about the twitter post. They insist that vandals placed the sticker there.

The racial profiling of St. Paul Minnesota resident Chris Lollie only resulted in the father of two, waiting in a public concourse until time to pick up his kids from school, being accosted by cops. When Lollie, who is black, politely asserted his civil rights and refused to produce identification, he was tased and arrested for trespassing, disorderly conduct and obstruction of justice. Luckily for him, he filmed most of the incident with his cell phone camera, which was confiscated by police and held as “evidence” for six months until after the charges were dropped in court. Only then did Lollie upload the video to YouTube.

Through amateur video and social media, the Officer Friendly is exposed as racist, brutal and at best indifferent to the rights of average people.

Anyone who has ever attended even the most peaceful and lawful protest rally can attest to the over-the-top police presence. Big events like the 2010 G8 protest in Toronto reveal the police in full military regalia, result in the suspension of civil rights, and equate all protest with terrorism.

Long after the beating and illegal detention of peaceful protesters, after the “kettling” and agent provocateurs have been exposed, there is tut-tutting about excessive police violence, but no real accountability. Police forces from Toronto to Ferguson just invest in more military hardware and get ready to squash the next groundswell of public indignation and anger.

One good video of racist, militarized policing wipes away hundreds of hours of Officer Friendly fiction. Communities targeted for racial profiling have always known the truth, but now they can share that truth with the rest of us, winning solidarity and support.

We still have the right to record the deeds of police. As our society becomes increasingly unequal the cops charged with perpetuating the inequality can only become more brutal and unjust. Real video, not carefully sanitized “reality” shows like COPS, is the final nail in Officer Friendly’s coffin.

WHERE WE STAND

The dead-end of capitalism

The capitalist system is based on violence, oppression and brutal exploitation. It creates hunger beside plenty, it threatens our sustenance through unsafe and unsustainable farming, and kills the earth itself with pollution and unsustainable extraction of oil, minerals, animals, trees, and water. Capitalism leads to imperialism and war. Saving ourselves and the planet depends on finding an alternative.

A system that is killing the planet

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

Socialism and workers' power

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

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

Oppression

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

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

Canada, Quebec, Indigenous Peoples

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

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

Internationalism

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

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

Elections and democracy

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

Reform and revolution

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

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

The Revolutionary Party

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

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



Activist calendar
movement events

Save
Canada
Post

Walk with your letter carrier campaign

Saturday September 13

-Scarborough: 8:30am, Scarborough Local Hall,
130 Dynamic Drive unit #12

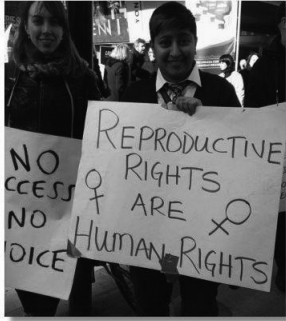
-Etobicoke: 10am-2pm, Toronto local hall,
47 Densley ave, North York

Mass picket to defend Canada's postal service

Saturday September 20

1pm at 511 Lawrence ave (outside Joe Oliver's office), Toronto

Reproductive Justice:
EQUAL ACCESS NOW!



RALLY & MARCH

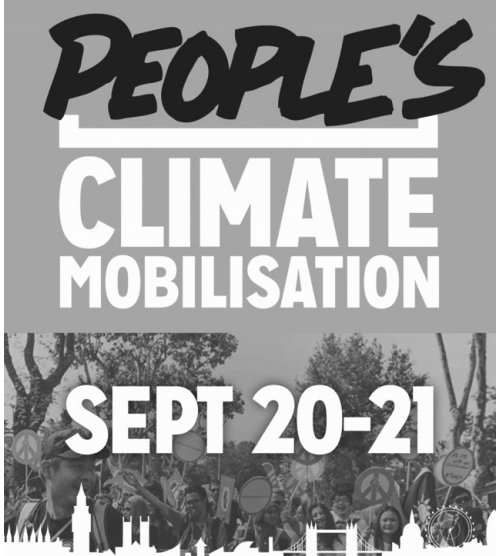
Saturday Sept. 20

We are fighting for reproductive justice for all! We need childcare, decent jobs and other support services to raise our children. Women in P.E.I. have no access to abortion. Women in New Brunswick need consent of two doctors.

The Conservative government refuses to enforce the *Canada Health Act* to stop these inequities, and MPs continue to introduce anti-abortion private members' bills while taking away healthcare for refugees.

- Stop inequity in access! Solidarity with women in New Brunswick and P.E.I.
- Maternal health includes abortion
- Reproductive healthcare for all including refugees
- The right to bear the children we choose, support to raise the children we bear

visit www.arcc-cdac.ca



A WEEKEND TO BEND THE COURSE OF HISTORY

PEOPLESCLIMATE.ORG



Toronto Disability Pride March


Saturday October 4


Queen's Park Circle


99 Welesley Street, Toronto


facebook: 4th Annual Toronto Disability Pride March


International Socialist events


A Rebel's Guide to
MARX
Saturday September 13,
2pm, Trinity St Paul
427 Bloor St West, Toronto


Palestine and the Arab revolutions
Saturday September 13,
6pm dinner, 7pm talk
Toronto-East: call for location:
647-393-3096


**SYSTEM CHANGE
NOT
CLIMATE CHANGE**
Tuesday September 16,
6pm, Trinity St Paul
427 Bloor St West, Toronto


A Rebel's Guide to
TROTSKY
Saturday September 27,
2pm, Trinity St Paul
427 Bloor St West, Toronto


How the US wrecked Iraq
Sunday September 28,
6pm, Steelworkers Hall
25 Cecil Street, Toronto

**Fight on every front:
join the International Socialists**

Do you oppose exploitation, war,
oppression and climate chaos?

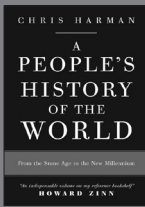
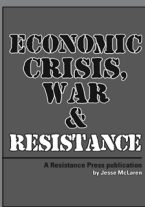
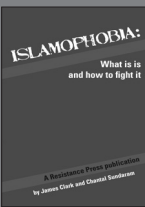
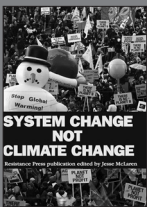
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INDIGENOUS SOLIDARITY

by VALERIE LANNON

Over 150 activists attended the 3-hour Indigenous Solidarity Assembly.

It was opened by Lynn Gehl, an Algonquin author who has written extensively on decolonization. She encouraged settlers to “learn your own indigenous knowledge, wherever you’re from”, to read Volume 1 of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, and to read Indigenous authors as much as possible. (see www.lynngehl.com)

Indigenous filmmaker Clifton Nicholas called for solidarity with Gazans, noting the parallels between Israeli occupation and the Canadian’s state continued colonization of Indigenous peoples. One example is the de-funding of language programs, “but using our own language is a form of resistance.”

Participants also applauded spokespersons from the Unist’ot’en camp in northern BC, on the front-lines of turning back pipeline construction. They pointed out that the natural gas pipelines BC Premier Clark is so keen to promote will, over time, be used for bitumen oil. Their suggestions for decolonization included uniting around common issues like clean water preservation, and joining front-line defence work, since a large presence of settlers can be a deterrent to police arrests. Shannon from the Algonquin Nation of the Ottawa River Watershed also encouraged participants to join their blockade of logging in their territory.

Leah Henderson, a settler, referred to a number of source of information on decolonization and encouraged participants to Google “Indigenous Knowledge Protection Act”, and “Turtles Need Allies Too”. She recommended fundraising as a needed, useful activity, and the requirement for settlers holding one another accountable.

PEOPLE’S CLIMATE MARCH

On Sunday, September 21, the People’s Climate March will flood the streets of New York City to call upon the meeting heads of state to make change on the climate.

Over 950 unions, faith groups, schools, social justice and environmental groups and businesses are working together to organize the world’s biggest climate march to date, committed to principles of environmental justice and equality, and representing the communities that are being hit hardest.

To find buses, trains, ride-boards and creative group transit ideas near you to get you to NYC, visit: <http://peoplesclimate.org/transportation/>

Buses are organized by various environmental groups such as 350.org, Sierra Club, Equiterre and the Council of Canadians and are leaving from Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto.

TORONTO AND THE POLITICS OF MASS TRANSIT



by ALEX HUNSBERGER

With Toronto’s municipal elections approaching in October, public transit has emerged as the key issue for candidates across the political spectrum. The decisive reason is that prominent sections of the business community have declared it a priority.

When and why does business support public transit expansion and when does it oppose it? Which sections of the business community are more inclined to be pro-transit? And most importantly, what are business’ priorities in shaping the transit agenda, and who does and does not benefit from their agenda?

Public transit and postwar capitalist growth

Capitalism requires many things to function smoothly. On the supply side, it needs good access to raw materials, a steady and reliable supply of credit, and a labour force that is sufficiently large, skilled, and compliant. On the demand side, consumers need to continuously purchase enough goods and services to keep the system’s wheels turning. To maintain investment levels – that is, the cycle of capital accumulation at the heart of the system – output must be constantly growing at a reasonable rate and be expected to keep doing so.

The state serves as the mediator and overseer of the system – albeit not a natural one – and needs to raise substantial tax revenue while avoiding placing such a burden on business that it stifles profitability.

Much of Canada’s current urban and suburban landscape first came into being post-WWII. The overriding priority was to sustain demand as government military spending fell, while converting industry from military to civilian.

In North America in particular, the creation of suburbs was central to the spread of mass consumer markets. It was not only homebuilders who profited off the massive expansion of neighbourhoods featuring single-family homes, but also the auto, oil, and consumer goods industries, while banks offered mortgages. Business favoured some expansion of mass transit alongside suburban development, to get workers to work. Toronto got its first subway in 1954.

There was a tension here that remains: business needed mass transit to maintain its labour supply and allow the smooth movement of highway freight traffic, but too much of it could cut into private consumption levels because mass transit is often in public hands and is far more efficient (i.e. results in less consumer spending) than individuals driving their own cars. As the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) grew, transit expanded into the suburbs in a limited fashion, but highways grew more.

Neoliberalism

Fast forward to the 1990s. Mike Harris’ PCs were elected with strong, broad business backing in 1995, promising to crack down on welfare users and public sector workers while slashing taxes and public spending. Part of the PCs’ public spending cuts involved halting capital financing for transit projects while down-loading operating funding for local transit systems to the municipalities.

Business saw lowering taxes and cutting deficits as the overriding priorities, regardless of gridlock. Unlike in the 1960s, public finances were not particularly healthy and business felt it had the political might to enhance profits by pushing for a lower tax bill while also calling for lower deficits.

Contradictions

Taking stock of the results of the vast cuts to public spending that had occurred, businesses are realizing that worsening gridlock was resulting in significant costs for them. With the booming real estate market in downtown Toronto, condo developers became a major political force in favour of transit expansion because it raises land values.

By the 2010s, business began to push back against further delays. In its brief on the 2014 municipal and provincial elections, the Toronto Region Board of Trade listed regional transit expansion as the first of four key priorities for the area.

Another prominent business lobby group, Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance (headed from 2010 until earlier this year by businessman John Tory, now a candidate for Toronto mayor) has launched a region-wide ad campaign to build public support for transit expansion.

Transit for whom?

What are the key components of business’ transit agenda, and how have they worked their way into GTA transit policy?

1) A disproportionate focus on weekday commuting.

2) High fares mean workers bear the brunt of the cost of operating the transit system.

3) Traditionally, transit projects have been designed and financed, operated, and maintained by public agencies, with only construction contracted to the private sector. With the push for so-called “public private partnerships” (P3s), an increasing number or even all of these functions are being contracted to private consortia.

4) Transit governance structures are increasingly unaccountable, with members coming overwhelmingly from the private sector.

A democratic alternative for transit in the GTA

The question is how to expand and reform transit in ways that improve service to all residents while cutting inequality, air pollution, and carbon emissions and providing good jobs for transit workers. What would a progressive agenda for transit look like?

1) Demand a much more ambitious expansion, allowing those in the suburbs to give up their cars. Olivia Chow’s promise to improve TTC bus service is a start but is far too timid, costing only \$15 million out of the agency’s \$1.5 billion budget.

2) Paid for through taxes, and lowering fares, which is fairer to those with low incomes and encourages ridership.

3) Transit should be designed, funded, operated, and maintained publicly. Public ownership allows for control of costs, the protection of good quality working conditions, and above all for public accountability.

ATU 113, representing TTC workers, has launched a campaign to critique the privatization agenda. If the links can be solidified between these efforts and the movement for green jobs, the activism of transit riders, and the broader left mobilization around the upcoming municipal elections, the possibilities for a transit system serving people above profit will be substantially enhanced.

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

Steelworkers on Labour Day

As hundreds of Toronto Steelworkers marched along Dundas St to meet the annual labour day parade a middle age couple standing in front of the Art Gallery raised their fists in support.

The man ran up to us and said that they were from Ohio and it boosted their spirits to see workers proudly taking the streets.

He explained that they had been through tough battles in their state and was shocked to hear that we had spent the last year fighting off right to work policies of the Conservative Tim Hudak.

“How could this be happening in Canada too!” He spoke about how they mobilized in their workplaces and communities to overturn the anti-worker legislation put in place by their Tea Party legislature. They won the referendum which was an inspiration to workers across the US.

Rebuilding unions

More workers turned out for the traditional labour day march than we have seen in years.

In the Steelworkers members felt that one of the reasons was the Saturday courses that had been going on since June 2013, “Workers Rights and Their Unions.” It was part of the campaign by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council to rebuild our unions from the bottom up, connecting to the membership.

We took advantage of this opening and hundreds and hundreds of rank and file members, those who rarely partake in union activities came out. So many of them told us that they never really understood much about the union and they have now become much more active. They’ve become “proud to be union” as one said.

There are huge battles ahead because the corporate powers have been running roughshod over workers.

BC teachers

It is inspiring to see the teachers in British

Columbia standing up to the Liberal government. They have followed the example of the successful Chicago teachers strike a few years back, putting the needs of the students first.

Class size is one of the key issues and this is rallying the support of parents as well as students. The teachers have been in negotiations since June to avoid a strike but the government has refused to move on the important questions at stake. The bringing together of jobs and services is a successful strategy to win broad support.

Save Canada Post

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has taken up this same tactic in their fight to stop the Harper government’s attempt to do away with home delivery.

A recent financial report has shown that Canada Post has made a significant profit in the last period. This shows that they are trying to cut both services and 8,000 jobs in an ideologically-driven campaign against workers and the public

Support Crown workers

September 6th was the one year anniversary of the strike by 120 Steelworkers against Crown Holdings in Toronto.

They have held strong through a tough winter fighting against a two-tier system which would penalize new hires, the next generation of workers. Because they have stood up the company has now said that it will only bring back a small number of the strikers and keep the scabs at work. It is absolutely outrageous.

The line is strong and an international campaign has been building support. The union is urging everyone to buy their beer in bottles not cans to put pressure on the company.

We have to support the Crown workers, CUPW and the BC teachers. Any win by workers today can give confidence to others that the austerity agenda can be pushed back.



Socialist Worker

LABOUR AGAINST AUSTERITY

by RITCH WHYMAN

Going into Labour Day is always a good time to take stock of what state the working class of Canada and Quebec is in. It has been six years since the economic crisis broke and employers doubled their efforts to make workers and the poor pay for the crisis.

It has been far from a quiet year, despite claims by pundits that the labour movement is dead and unions a relic of the past. However it was also a year in which potential breakthroughs were curtailed and gains were partial and mixed with many defeats. As we go to press several strikes and lockouts are looming and other ongoing.

Strikes

Workers at the IKEA store in Richmond BC have been locked out for over a year and a half for resisting concessions. Teachers in BC returned to the picket lines demanding a fair contract after being pushed out last spring. Workers at Crown in Toronto have been on the lines fighting against a tiered contract, in Thunder Bay workers at Bombardier have continued their strike against tiering and concessions by rejecting a second offer by 81 per cent.

In Saskatchewan steelworkers at Cameco mines just voted overwhelmingly to strike if needed in early September. In Quebec municipal workers have been staging ongoing rallies and occupations against threats to roll back pension benefits. Players in the Ontario Hockey League are struggling to form a union. Baristas in Nova Scotia and now a store in Toronto have formed unions in the past year. CUPW continues to mobilise broad public and worker support for defending and expanding the postal service.

There have also been defeats including the ongoing crisis of plant closures. Kelloggs in London by the



end of this year will close up completely with hardly a fight. Heinz in Leamington, US Steel blast furnaces in Hamilton, Unilever in Brampton, Saputo in Alberta and Quebec. The list is sadly a long one.

Days lost to disputes (1.5 million work days) were up 66 per cent in 2013 over 2012, and wage increases on average were also higher than inflation. But the days lost to disputes were as much based on the dramatic increase in the length workers are out on strike as due to the number of strikes against cuts. This could mean that employers fought harder to ram concessions through or that workers refused to accept any deal without a lengthy fight.

Ontario election

In Ontario unions from across the province mobilised and defeated the Tory agenda of bringing in right to work laws. Had the Tories won it would have meant massive

attacks on workers rights in not just Ontario but across the country. The Tories attempted to blame unions for the economic crisis and failed after being confronted by a massive campaign inside workplaces and communities by union members.

Despite this vital success several union leaders have blamed this mobilisation for getting the Liberals re-elected with a majority. These leaders stupidly risk undermining the unity that was built in cities across the province to stop Hudak. Further they miss the fact that the Ontario NDP must take the blame for running a campaign that emphasised tax breaks for business over increasing the minimum wage. It was the ONDP that lost the election due to its refusal to address and link up with the anger at cuts and austerity and the growing anti-Hudak mood. Instead the ONDP actively courted Tory voters and said little about the attack on unions.

CLC

The Candian Labour Congress convention marked the first time an incumbent was defeated in a vote. Anger at the same old policies of Ken Georgetti and his allies in various unions led to a challenge to his presidency by Hassan Hussieni, a PSAC staffer under the slogan “take back the CLC”. This struck a chord with activists across the country sick of union leaders refusing to mount any campaign against austerity.

In the end Hussieni withdrew allowing Hassan Yusef of UNIFOR, who had been a CLC executive member for 10 years, to narrowly win.

Critically, the convention defeated policies meant to strip local labour councils of any real decision making ability.

Most importantly the defeat of Georgetti showed that union leaders couldn’t control their delegations which they had pledged to support Georgetti; instead hundred

of delegates voted for candidates against their leaderships wishes.

Despite pledges to mount more effective resistance, the CLC has done little in the past five months to unite the series of strikes that have broken out against attempts to tier contracts.

Workers at Crown in Toronto, Cascades in BC, Bombardier in ThunderBay, and elsewhere have all stood up and fought against attempts to drive down standards for young workers.

This is a dramatic change from a few years ago when several unions backed down without a fight and agreed to open tiering, or in the case of the CAW at the big three tiering masquerading as “grids”.

Sadly in the face of this perfect opportunity to raise the possibility of wider united fight for pensions, the labour leadership has generally been silent despite valiant efforts by the members on the lines.

Upcoming fights

The fall and spring 2015 have the potential offer a specter of larger fights against austerity if pressure is put on leaders to mobilise and fight.

In Ontario, the teachers and public service’s contracts expire. The possibility of defeating the Liberals and austerity exists in both these potential fights, especially if at the grassroots level activists between these unions start exploring joint actions.

In Nova Scotia healthcare workers go into negotiations facing a government that has stripped their right to strike. In Quebec municipal workers continue to face attacks on their pensions. At the federal level PIPSC and units PSAC have contracts expiring or are still in negotiations.

On the industrial front key groups of workers have contracts expiring, including workers at US Steels’ Hamilton and at Vale mines in Thompson, Manitoba.

Workers in several trades at CN and CP rail go into negotiations under the constant threat of the Harper Tories’ threats to undermine collective bargaining. This at a time when the lack rail safety is at an all time high and derailments are occurring weekly. Any strike action by the rail unions could provide an opening for building unity between those fighting against the transfer of unsafe materials and workers fighting for better safety on the job. Further it could open more space for the left and movements to help sink Harper in 2015.

Possibilities abound in the latter part of 2014 and 2015 to fight austerity and cuts—like the fight to save Canada Post, which can build solidarity between workers in Canada and Quebec. But it will take more than changes at the CLC or words from union leaders, and we can’t rely on the NDP. We will have to mobilise and fight at the base, and develop ways to build solidarity with every worker fighting back.

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BC teachers strike: protecting education

by TARA EHRCKE

Holding the line for as long as it takes. This should be the disposition of not just teachers, but also parents, students and citizens who care about public education.

With the latest failed talks between the BCTF and government, it is clearer than ever that the government objective during this round of bargaining is to eliminate class size language for ever and ever. And with the loss of class size language comes the permanent underfunding of public education, constant downward pressure on teacher wages, and an open door to more private schools and worsening conditions in public schools.

Class size

Class size is the most important bargaining issue for teachers, parents, students and all working people. And not just

because smaller classes are essential for quality teaching and learning (which they absolutely are).

Class sizes have profound implication on the rest of the system.

They are the greatest determinant of funding levels (small class sizes force higher funding).

They are the biggest influence on teacher workload, which in turn impacts teacher turnover. Heavy workload and high turnover are in turn substantial impediments to quality teaching.

With large class sizes and higher teacher turnover also comes a glut of teachers on the market. This puts downward pressure on wages as there are more teachers available than jobs to fill. It also leads to a scarcity of work for newly graduating teachers. Both these factors in turn lower the status of the

teaching profession, which discourages new entrants into the profession.

All of this opens the door to increased privatization as those who can afford better look to the private system.

One need only look to the US to see these factors at work. Class sizes in the US go up above 40 in some jurisdictions. In many schools, teachers stay an average of one year. Teachers are demoralized. Wages are so low in some states one wonders why anyone would accept the responsibility or stress for such a low level of pay. Schools are over crowded, and children with special needs receive inadequate services. Parents with money increasingly send their children to private school.

This is precisely the outcome the Liberal government has been hoping for in BC, and after twelve years, it is

starting to work. Parents with money are indeed leaving the public system.

A recent article in *The Tyee* explained well why teachers should not return to school before we have a fair deal. We also need to prepare ourselves to stay out as long as it takes for a deal that not only treats us fairly, but protects and reinstates class sizes.

This is the key to protecting public education. And we will need parents, students and workers supporting us in this goal to make it happen. But history has shown that when we are united together, we can be successful. I have no doubt that if we hold the line, we can be successful this time too.

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