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THEIR UNITY



WAR
RACISM
AUSTERITY

OUR UNITY



PEACE
JUSTICE
EQUALITY

Indigenous women

Page 2

Valerie Lannon explains the factors creating missing and murdered Indigenous women

Iraq War

Page 2-3

Paul Stevneon reveals the arms manufacturers supporting the Iraq War, while Allan Wood calls for support for US Iraq War resisters

Arab Spring

Page 3

Yusur Al-Bahrani exposes the hypocrisy of Arab dictators and their Western allies who marched for freedom while suppressing dissent

Greek elections

Page 4

Dave Sewell reports from Athens on the election and aftermath of Syriza's victory

Cuba

Page 4

Craig Frayne analyzes the shift in US-Cuba relations

Boko Haram

Page 5

Baba Aye, a Nigerian socialist, discusses how to stop the twin terrors of Boko Haram and the Nigerian state

Disability activism

Page 8

Melissa Graham talks with a fellow disability activist about how to build the movement

Labour against austerity

Page 11

Carolyn Egan explains the importance of on-the-ground campaigns, while Pam Johnson discusses OPSEU's resistance to the Ontario Liberals



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Facts & figures

0
Number of negative decisions against war resisters in the year before the latest Iraq War

7
Number of negative decisions aginast war resisters in the months after the latest Iraq War

70
Number of people the French state arrested after the Paris attacks for exercising their free speech

86
Number of the richest Canadians who have as much wealth as the poorest 11.4 million

300
Number of workers Shell has fired after the drop in the price of oil

1,000
Number of workers Suncor has fired after the drop in the price of oil

1,000
Number of lashes Raif Badawi is sentenced to for free speech in Saudi Arabia, a dictatorship armed by the West

\$60-90 million
Estimated cost (Tories refuse to release actual figures)of 6 months of Canada’s war in Iraq

\$15 billion
Amount of weapons sold by Canada to Saudi Arabia

In their own words

“It is no coincidence that so many of us are facing deportation at this very moment. It is difficult to manufacture consent for a new war when we are still here to tell the ground truth of the previous war.”
--US Iraq War resisters

“What I am opposed to is the attempt by political hacks...to distract us from a rise in the uninsured, a rise in the poverty rate, a drop in the median income — to distract us from corporate scandals and a stock market that has just gone through the worst month since the Great Depression. That’s what I’m opposed to. A dumb war. A rash war.”
--Senator Barack Obama on the Iraq War, 2002

“Absolutely an error.”
--Prime Minister Stephen Harper on the Iraq War, 2008

“A strong advocate of women.”
--IMF chief Christine Lagard on Saudi King Abdullah, who brutally oppressed women

“A strong proponent of peace.”
--Prime Minister Stephen Harper on King Abdullah, who beheaded people and armed extremists



Women’s memorial march

by VALERIE LANNON

February 14 marks the annual women’s memorial march for missing and murdered Indigenous women in cities across Canada and Quebec.

The march originated with the vigil held by women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, whose postal code represents the lowest income area in the country.

In Toronto and elsewhere the event is organized by No More Silence, a group working with others to stop the murders and disappearances of Indigenous women. Its Facebook page states: “We stand in defense of our lives and to demonstrate against the complicity of the state in the ongoing genocide of Indigenous women and the impunity of state institutions and actors (police, RCMP, coroners’ offices, the courts, and an indifferent federal government) that prevents justice for all Indigenous Peoples.”

Readers will be familiar with the longstanding calls by indigenous organizations, like the Native Women’s Association of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations, for an inquiry into the murders and disappearances. In January 2015 the same call came from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which, in addition to calling for an inquiry, recommended that the government respond to the social and economic factors leading to higher risks of violence for Indigenous

women. Here is a look at some of those factors.

Colonization

Indigenous women are significantly more at risk of violence because of the impact of colonization. The twin tragedies of residential school (with its attempts to destroy indigenous culture for all time) and poverty (caused by dislocation from traditional sources of living) create numerous sources of vulnerability for Indigenous women, and Indigenous men for that matter.

It is poverty that created the Highway of Tears in northern BC, where Indigenous women cannot afford the bus to travel between towns. So they hitchhike, leaving them prey to violent offenders.

It is poverty that makes “the authorities” see Indigenous children being “neglected” and in need of removal from their families. Such children are often taken into the care of, or adopted by, non-Indigenous foster or adoptive parents. This means dislocation from the child’s family, community, culture and pride in being Indigenous.

Violence Against Women

It is important that recent years have seen women’s groups calling for an end to violence against women. Rape culture is reality, not a fad topic among academics. Those women who are at the bottom of the economic ladder face the most brutal

side of rape culture, and Indigenous women are among the poorest of the poor.

But violence is a requirement for our economic system to survive. War is often the first resort when the scramble for resources is on. To induce people to fight in a war requires the ruling class to try and inculcate us with a tolerance for violence. So, offenders will strike the vulnerable because they feel emboldened by the ruling class’s encouragement to show force.

Racism

Capitalism could not have been created without racism, taking the forms of mass slavery, and the holocaust of Indigenous peoples by the European ruling class’s craving for minerals. Capitalism could not have created its imperial empires in the nineteenth century without the racist de-humanization of the peoples of Asia and Africa.

Capitalism cannot continue without racism, as found today in everything from immigrations policies to police racial profiling. And capitalist Canada would not be possible without the historic and continuing dislocation of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories, as required by extraction industries like oil, gas and forestry.

Racism cheapens the lives of Indigenous peoples and makes the murder and disappearance of Indigenous

women OK in the minds of racists.

Resistance

Harper’s government has rejected the demand for an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, promising “action” instead. As if. Both the Liberals and NDP have committed to an inquiry. But their positions, especially for the Liberals, would likely not be in place were it not for the courage and persistence of Indigenous women’s groups, both historic organizations like the Native Women’s Association of Canada, and more recent grassroots movements like Idle No More.

Allies

Support for Indigenous women has become increasingly visible and vocal from outside Indigenous communities. Faith groups, women’s organizations, trade unions, student unions and others have been happy to participate in marches like the ones on February 14, taking their lead from Indigenous activists.

The continued strength of Indigenous peoples and their values, combined with mass support from non-Indigenous peoples, is the only solution, the only way we will begin to see a society built on peace. Where the murder and disappearances of Indigenous peoples will be things of the past.

Support US Iraq War resisters

by ALLAN WOOD

Since September 2014, seven US Iraq War resisters have received negative decisions in their cases.

After no movement on any cases for more than a year, seven cases — allegedly independent of one another — were suddenly announced as Prime Minister Stephen Harper tried to increase Canadian support for the US’s latest attack on the people of Iraq. The following is a joint Statement by US Iraq War resisters in Canada:

“We are American war resisters. Many of us are combat veterans. All of us came to the conclusion that we could not in good conscience participate in the unjust and illegal war and occupation launched in March 2003 against Iraq.

“Faced with jail time and forced redeployment in support of that disastrous war, we sought refuge in Canada.

“The response from Canadians has been overwhelmingly welcoming and supportive, and has made it possible for us to settle here, raise families and build communities.

“But the Conservative government has directly intervened to deny us access to a fair immigration process.

“We now face imminent removal from Canada. Our removal will tear apart our families and punish us for simply doing what Canadians have already done — refusing to support and participate in an illegal and unjust war.

“Former Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney publicly disparaged us, instructed immigration officers to “red-flag” our cases, and labelled us “criminally inadmissible” to Canada. This has prejudiced any chance of having our cases decided on their merits.

“Yet Canada’s Parliament twice voted to allow us to stay. Canadian courts have acknowledged the disproportional punishment handed to US soldiers who have spoken out publicly in Canada. Those who have been forced back by the Conservative government have been court-martialed and received sentences from 12 to 24 months in jail.

“It is no coincidence that so many of us are facing deportation at this very moment. It is difficult to manufacture consent for a new war when we are still here to tell the ground truth of the previous war. There is still time for Canadians to speak out — but time is running out.”

Visit www.resisters.ca

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Selling the Iraq War

by PAUL STEVENSON

The Canadian Government, military, and their think tank buddies have been waging a public relations war to convince Canadians that the latest war in Iraq is not a war.

Stephen Harper had told the House of Commons in the fall that Canadian troops would not be involved in any on the ground fighting in Iraq. But on January 19, the Canadian special forces commander, Brigadier-General Mike Rouleau announced that Canadian troops had in fact been shot at and shot back against ISIS in Iraq. The Harper government was once again caught in a lie, but claimed that being in a firefight is not the same as being in combat.

A war by any other name

The quagmire that the US found itself in after the illegal and devastating invasion in 2003 is still fresh on the minds of many people. Obama was elected based on opposition to the Iraq War, and Harper had to admit that the Iraq War was “absolutely an error.” Politicians both north and south of the border, therefore, want to convince their own war-weary

people that this will be a more limited war that will be free of casualties.

The problem is that people aren’t stupid. They can see that a firefight is a combat operation no matter how you spin it. But that hasn’t stopped the CDA Institute from trying to come up with a new spin. George Petrolekas, a member of the board of directors for the institute, in an article in The Globe and Mail used some linguistic gymnastics to clarify the situation saying, “It is possible to be in a war, but not at war.”

The reality is that if you are—in an official military capacity—shooting at other people who are themselves a military then you are both at war and in a war.

The CDA Institute seems content however to stick with the ruse. This isn’t too surprising given their recent statements to the media. It appears that their entire plan is to obfuscate and confuse. The same author, Mr Petrolekas has written many articles for the Globe. In one written in October 2014, he states that what is needed in Iraq is a short war. He follows up with an article this January stating that we need to

be patient and that the fight in Iraq will be a long one. Thanks for the clarity.

CDA Institute

Unfortunately, the CDA Institute as become he go-to group for analysis on the war in Iraq. They have now been featured on most mainstream media outlets as the beacons of strategic thought on the issue.

Just who is the CDA institute? Those who have followed the burgeoning Canadian weapons manufacturing and export sector may recognize the acronym. The Conference of Defence Associations is the main organizing and lobbying body of the war profiteers in Canada. Not surprisingly, they’ve yet to meet a war they don’t like.

This “charitable” group spends most of its time lobbying for more military spending. Given the recent attacks on charities in Canada, it is remarkable that this group—so clearly political and partisan—has evaded scrutiny by the Canada Revenue Agency. Of course, the fact that the slideshow at the top of their website features a picture of Stephen Harper standing beside a

saluting Prince Charles and Camilla may have something to do with it.

Harper and his war profiteer friends think we are dupes. They applaud the human rights record of dictatorships such as in Saudi Arabia as they sell them weapons, and they are working overtime to convince us of the moral superiority of their own brand of foreign policy.

Stop the war

What we know is that the horrible situations in Iraq is to a large extent the result of the destruction of that country by western forces intent only on securing strategic resources and markets. This phase in the war is no different, even if the characteristics of the non-combat-combat may be.

All this war is doing is providing ISIS with legitimacy in the eyes of the people the West is bombing. The end result will be more attacks at home that justify more attacks abroad that will result in more war. It is time to stop the cycle of endless war. The only way to do that is to get all the Western powers to bring their planes and troops home now.

Churchill: racist colonizer and war criminal

by PARRY MUDHAR

January 24 marks the 50th anniversary of the death of a great defender of Empire, Winston Churchill. Although he is presented as a hero, in truth he was the racist leader of an evil empire.

Born into an affluent aristocratic family in 1874, Churchill was part of a rulling class that believe that the colonial actions of the British Empire were beneficial to the peoples of Asia and Africa. Like many, he was taught that white supremacy was the natural way of order and was required to bring civilization upon those considered to be “lesser races.” He represented the interests of Britain’s ruling class while in and out of government over many decades and as Prime Minister from 1940–1945 and 1951–1955.

Racist colonizer

An overarching view on Churchill’s attitude on race was plain to see during the 1937 Peel Commission where he stated, “I do not agree that

the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place.”

It comes as no surprise that numerous revolts and uprisings occurred as Britain desperately tried to maintain its hold on its colonies. However, as the people subjected the British Empire fought to be free, Churchill never wavered—saying Mahatma Gandhi “ought to be lain bound hand and foot at the gates of Delhi, and then trampled on by an enormous elephant with the new Viceroy seated on its back.”

Millions died due to Churchill’s contempt for the Empire’s subjects. In the Bengal Famine of 1943

around the latter half of the Second World War, up to 4 million people were intentionally starved to death. Although there were many causes of the Bengal Famine, most notably colonial mismanagement, the British government could have arranged enough aid to keep people fed. As other officials urged Churchill to act, he stated Bengal itself was responsible for “breeding like rabbits.”

War criminal

Churchill supported the creation of concentration camps in the Second Boer War (1899–1902). As Secretary of State for War, he was responsible for war crimes against independence movements—from sending the Black and Tans to attack the Irish, to using chemical weapons against Iraqis. As he said, “I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilized tribes...(to) spread a lively terror.” At the close of WWII, he supported fascists in Greece against the left, and he was Prime Minister while

detention camps in Kenya were used to hold, torture and kill those presumed guilty of supporting independence from Britain during the Mau Mau Uprising (1952–1960). Whole villages were forcibly relocated to detention camps that eventually held 80,000 people. Just last year over 40,000 Kenyans launched a law suit for compensation for the torture they suffered at the hands of British officials in Kenya.

It is no defence to consider Churchill and his governments as just products of their time. There was widespread opposition to the British empire in all the colonies by the subject peoples from the wars fought to establish them, and throughout the brutal methods used to keep them. Churchill should only be missed by those who still yearn for a world where a few rich nations, like our own, can invade and occupy poor nations to guarantee access to their resources.

Unity and the Arab Spring

by YUSUR AL-BAHRANI

The million-strong unity march in Paris exposed the hypocrisy of governments and politicians who claimed defending the right to freedom of speech in France, but suppressing dissent at home.

Not only leaders of the world are guilty of hypocrisy, but international mainstream media is too. For instance, 2000 people killed in Nigeria were not enough to draw the world’s attention when compared to Paris shootings.

The participation of governments’ representatives under the banner of freedom of expression is outrageous. Reporters Without Borders condemned the presence of “predators” in Paris march: “It would be unacceptable if representatives of countries that silence journalists were to take advantage of the current outpouring emotion to try to improve their international image and then continue their repressive policies when they return home.”

Egypt is a place where journalists and bloggers are systematically jailed and persecuted. Egyptian protestors marking the fourth anniversary of the their revolution on January 25 faced a crackdown in which at least 20 were reportedly killed.

Saudi authorities flog Raif Badawi for “insulting Islam” and sentenced pro-democracy Arab Spring supporter and faith leader Sheikh Nemer Al-Nemer to death. He faces imminent risk of beheading over his speeches, while Saudi officials participate in Paris march condemning extremism. Waleed Abu AlKhair, lawyer and human rights activist, remains detained in Saudi Arabia for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression. Several young peaceful pro-democracy activists and protestors have received severe sentences, including death. Many of the political prisoners, such as Al-Nemer, have been in solitary confinement for years. Women rights movements have also been facing oppression.

Bahraini government punished human rights activist Nabeel Rajab for posting tweets and persecuted Al-Wefaq opposition party leader Shiekh Ali Salman for “inciting hatred against the regime.” Many other prisoners of conscience remain in prison, while the Bahraini revolution is marking its fourth anniversary on February 14.

“Je suis Charlie” rally exposed governments and the international community during a time in which revolutionary, pro-democracy protestors and those in solidarity are marking the fourth anniversary of the Arab Spring. While it is important to condemn acts of violence targeting journalists, writers and cartoonists, this should not be an opportunity to undermine governments’ acts of violence, oppression and repression.

The struggle against oppression continues, but a large global mobilization is needed to give a message to those fighting for freedom of expression in the Arab region: we are in solidarity.

Paris: terrorism, free speech, and secularism

Millions of people inside and outside France were horrified by the violent attacks in Paris, and 2 million joined a rally in solidarity with the murdered journalists. But framing the issue as terrorism vs free speech and secularism is misleading.

Terrorism

The motivations of those on the march were not the same. The fact the march was led by political leaders like François Hollande, Angela Merkel and Benjamin Netanyahu and endorsed by Western leaders such as David Cameron, Barack Obama and Stephen Harper, underlines the hypocrisy of these butchers. They are responsible for visiting mass destruction and death on the peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East, and in giving rise to organizations such as Al Qaeda and ISIS by leaving many people in the region with no hope or way forward.

It’s only a tiny minority of the world’s Muslims who look to methods of terror to try and find justice, whereas Western leaders have practiced the politics of terror on a continual and mass basis for centuries.

As socialists we do not support or condone terrorism as a method for change. It is the politics of despair, based on the notion that the mass of ordinary people will never fight for justice and that the brave few must fight on their behalf. It is an elitist and anti-democratic method and it often helps to shore up the power of the very rulers the terrorists claim to be fighting, as it has done in this most recent case. As Trotsky wrote in *Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism*, “individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission... The more ‘effective’ the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education. But the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen.”

Free speech

In some quarters there has been a defence of the publication *Charlie Hebdo*, arguing that it is a leftist publication and that the important question here is the defence of freedom of speech. The French state itself debunked the argument about free speech, by arresting more than 70 people in the aftermath of the attacks—including a comedian—for exercising their freedom of speech in a way that the authorities claimed condoned terrorism.

It may be true that *Charlie Hebdo* began its life as a left publication, springing from the radicalization of the 1960s. However, it is also true that over the last ten years the publication has routinely published racist cartoons and attacks on Islam.

In the context of the war on terror, of ongoing racism and marginalization of France’s Muslim population, the publication of these types of racist cartoons and attacks on Islam have helped to legitimize the racism of the French state. Some on the Western left have defended *Charlie Hebdo* by claiming it is a “left” publication engaged in “satire”. But by putting the religion of an oppressed and brutalized minority on the same footing as the religion that has dominated French society, the left has essentially abdicated any responsibility to challenge the growing threat of racism and fascism across Europe. This turns satire on its head, from challenging the state to joining its attack on a persecuted minority.

Secularism

Marine Le Pen and the National Front, an openly fascist party, are using the recent tragedy in France to try and increase their popularity by pointing the finger at all Muslims, who need to act more “French.” In recent weeks attacks on Muslims and mosques inside France have increased dramatically.

Sections of the French left supported the French government’s attacks on Muslims when they passed legislation, first banning the wearing of the hijab by girls and young women in French schools, and now banning the wearing of the hijab in any public places in France. This legislation was passed under the guise of defending the French secularist tradition.

But secularism is about removing the dominant religion from the state, not attacking the religious freedom of oppressed communities. While France continues to tacitly support Catholicism through funding of private schools, it uses Islamophobia as a means to divide and conquer. In France the attacks on the wearing of the hijab coincided with an attempt to push back huge fightbacks on the part of French teachers and other workers.

As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote: “All they ever teach you here is a stupid anti-clericalism, quite misguided intellectually and politically... There are plenty of bourgeois atheists who make fun of priests and never go to church, yet they are anti-socialist, interventionist and wage war on us.”

As Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin once argued, socialists need to be the tribune of the oppressed. In the current context it should be clear to those who call themselves socialist that Islamophobia is becoming the tool of choice to divide and conquer.

INTERNATIONAL



Greece: from hope to real change?

by DAVE SEWELL, ATHENS

An electoral landslide for the radical left in Greece has sent shockwaves across Europe. The vote will strike fear in the hearts of bankers and bosses. But it will also give hope to workers living under the cosh of austerity everywhere.

The radical left Syriza party won 36 percent of the vote. It humiliated the Tory New Democracy party that ran the last government—and the Labour-type Pasok that propped it up in coalition.

The campaign headquarters for New Democracy and Pasok were moribund and almost empty when voting began last Sunday. Syriza’s were a hive of activity, full of enthusiastic volunteers.

One of them was Mina, who joined Syriza as a student during the university occupations in 2010. She told *Socialist Worker*, “I’m with Syriza because 70 percent of young people and 80 percent of young women can’t get a job. So when we go out campaigning everyone is really friendly—they support Syriza because they want some change in their lives.”

It’s not only the young. At a polling station in Exarchia, a working class district in central Athens, almost everyone told *Socialist Worker* they were voting Syriza.

Retired teacher and former Pasok voter Elli said, “I believe in Syriza. I don’t have enough money to get by any more. I couldn’t even buy a birthday present for my grandchildren. I’m hoping this will change that.”

The effects of the crisis are visible everywhere in Athens, from the closed shops to the rough sleepers outside them.

In front of one government building eight people shot up heroin in just 15 minutes. Addiction has soared as social care has collapsed and hunger

drives the poorest to desperation.

The blame doesn’t stop with New Democracy and Pasok. The “Troika” of the European Central Bank (ECB), European Union and International Monetary Fund have overseen their budgets. They have insisted that Greece pays the bill for bailing out the bankers. This debt now dominates the Greek economy, and interest payments are as much as the government’s budget. And ECB chief Mario Draghi has insisted that Greece will be cut off from further credit if it doesn’t agree to further massive cuts.

Faced with this blackmail, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras said in his victory speech that the “vicious circle of austerity” is over. The vote had “cancelled out” the memorandum of austerity dictated by the Troika. It’s exactly what many voters wanted to hear.

Nassia has been unemployed for two and a half years. She said, “We want to give someone else a chance, for Europe and for Greece. We don’t have high expectations of Syriza. But if they even do half of what they say it will be a good start.”

Sickening

Her husband Vasilis added, “We want to say no to austerity measures—and to the bankers. It was sickening to see elected politicians in Europe last week waiting to hear what a banker would tell them they could do. No one elected the bankers, so why should they be in charge?”

Syriza’s manifesto includes a number of pledges that, if met, will dramatically improve life for large numbers of people. It has promised to boost the minimum wage to €751 a month—up more than a third—and to invest an extra €11 billion in welfare.

Tsipras’ plan to clamp down on tax

avoiders will raise some of the money for this. But the key question will be whether he takes on the Troika.

Prominent anti-capitalists are part of Syriza, but it isn’t an anti-capitalist party. And Tsipras gave several reminders of this in the run-up to the election, rolling back a number of Syriza positions.

The police are no longer to be disarmed. Instead they are “part of the working class” and will be given new equipment. The right for same sex couples to adopt has gone—apparently there are “contradictory opinions in the scientific community”.

In his victory speech Tsipras never used the word “left” or even “Syriza”, but repeatedly spoke of the “nation”. One leading Syriza MP called the head of the army to reassure him of the “continuity of the state”. And Syriza has no plans to shrink the defence budget or leave the Nato gang of imperialists.

The reason became clear early on Monday. Syriza had to find a coalition partner as it just missed the number of seats needed for a parliamentary majority. Not for the first time Tsipras went for the nationalist Independent Greeks—a racist, ultra-imperialist party that represents everything many Syriza voters hate.

It was a warning of the pressure to compromise that comes with trying to govern a capitalist economy.

There will be many tests ahead, with a deadline for a new bailout deal barely a month away. All eyes will be on Syriza to see if it kicks out the Troika or if Tsipras blinks first.

At the same time workers will have to keep fighting to make sure they get real change.

This is republished from Socialist Worker (UK)

Cuba at a crossroads

by CRAIG FRAYNE

On December 17, 2014, Havana and Washington agreed to normalize diplomatic and economic ties. President Obama called it a “new chapter” and the “most significant” change in US policy towards Cuba in 50 years.

This is widely seen as a gain for the Cuban people and may present new opportunities for struggle from below. However, this new chapter contains many of the old dynamics: ongoing imperialist influence, state capitalism, and the need for civil liberties and political alternatives.

Prior to the Revolution, Cuba was a colony dominated by US mafia and companies, which controlled 75 per cent of arable land and primary industry. US government and business interests backed the Batista dictatorship, which repressed Cuban workers and civil society as a whole. Shortly after the 1959 overthrow of Batista by Castro’s guerilla forces, the US government severed diplomatic ties, tightened the embargo, and attempted a series of failed invasions,

assassination attempts, and sabotage.

Beyond the immediate damage, the US threat provided Castro with a pretext for internal repression and further motivated alignment (material and ideological) with the Stalinist regimes. Rather than advancing the interests of Cuban people, this undermined democracy and human rights on the island and even led to the brink of nuclear war.

Cuba’s relative importance in US foreign policy has diminished since the end of the Cold War, and there has been pressure from corporate interests to normalize relations. There has already been gradual foreign investment in certain sectors, such as agribusiness, resources and tourism (including a number of Canadian companies). In June 2014, a new Foreign Investment Law took effect to prepare for an influx of capital. Opening of trade and foreign investment is seen as an effective way for Cuba to overcome persistent economic challenges of low productivity, capital loss, and lack of

consumer goods.

However, given Cuba’s one-party political system and centralized economy—with suppression of opposition on the left or right—an influx of foreign capital threatens to benefit bureaucratic insiders and corporate interests, not the Cuban people. Facing poor economic performance, the Cuban leadership is pursuing economic liberalization based on the growth model of other state capitalist regimes, such as China and Vietnam.

Therefore, movements and struggles that challenge both state and capitalist repression are crucial. Labour struggle is one area that could resurface.

As Sam Farber, born and raised in Cuba, writes, “with the passing of the historic generation of revolutionary leaders within the next decade, a new political landscape will emerge where left-wing opposition political action may resurface and give strength to the nascent critical left in Cuba.”

Boko Haram, the Nigerian state and resistance

Working class resistance is key to confronting the twin terrors of Boko Haram and the Nigerian state, explains Nigerian socialist Baba Aye (from his blog solidarityandstruggle.blogspot.co.uk)

The fishing community of Baga by Lake Chad in Borno state was under siege for a week at the beginning of January. Amnesty International described the ensuing bloodbath as the “deadliest massacre” by Boko Haram, estimating that some 2,000 persons were killed.

President Jonathan, who condemned the “dastardly terrorist attack” against *Charlie Hebdo* cartoonists within hours of the tragic event in Paris, did not say a word about this tragedy.

Attacks and response

The insurgents overran the headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) of the Chadian, Nigerian and Nigerian armies. Fleeing soldiers, men, women and children from Baga were pursued into the villages and bushes, killed and buildings set ablaze.

Baga and its environs have become ghost towns in the aftermath of the assault. The dead were left unburied, as “bodies lay strewn” on the streets according to widely circulated eyewitness accounts. About 35,000 people have been displaced.

The response of the federal government and its cronies has been offensively insensitive. It started with lies. The Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh initially denied that the MNJTF’s base had been seized and residents killed. For a week, the Defence Headquarters said it could not confirm the number of casualties. Subsequently, Brigadier Chris Olukolade the army spokesman stated that the total number of people killed in the bloodbath, including soldiers was “just” 150 persons.

Prelude

Baga is in many ways a metaphor of the war in the north east. The lies and hypocrisy of the Nigerian state and Western governments, the equal culpability of the army and Boko Haram in shedding blood of poor working people and signposts of changing moments in this bitter war, are critical examples.

This is the second massacre in Baga. On April 16, 2013, Boko Haram fighters killed a soldier during a shootout in the town which had to a great extent come under the sect’s control by 2012. The soldiers reinforced, returning en masse with armoured personnel carriers. Survivors reported that for several days, they shot indiscriminately and torched all houses in sight. The town was then locked down, with journalists and activists denied access to verify what actually happened.

The United States government condemned that massacre and called for the army to respect human rights. These were empty words with which it played to the gallery of global outcry. The Federal Government also announced that it would conduct what it described as a “full scale investigation” into the “allegation” of massacre. Nothing has come out of this.



State response

The 2013 Baga massacre set the stage for the declaration of a state of emergency in the three north eastern states. But the spate of carnage in the north east (and other parts of the north) has worsened with the state of emergency. More people have been killed in the past 20 months than those killed in the 4 years preceding emergency rule.

Kidnapping took on added steam. The case of the “Chibok girls” drew international attention before the presidency spoke on it 3 weeks after the abduction. And #BringBackOurGirls campaigners have been harassed and demonized by the government.

The Federal Government informed the world that it had reached a ceasefire agreement after secret negotiations with (a faction of) Boko Haram in October. Less than 24 hours after this, the insurgents attacked Maikadiri and Shaffa. This raised fears that the war cannot end through negotiations with the “terrorists”.

But a military solution equally appears utopian, not the least because of collaboration between sections of the ruling class and the sect. The low morale of ill-equipped and underpaid rank and file soldiers also contributes to the cul-de-sac of this option.

Instead of addressing their legitimate fears which have led to desertions and protests, the state has sentenced 66 of them to death, for mutiny. The question for working people, particularly those trapped in the warzone of the north east remains, “what is to be done?”

Armed resistance

Inking of the answer to this question can be gleaned in the phenomenon of the Civilian JTF (CJTF). The state (governments, army and other security agencies) cannot be relied upon to salvage the situation. On the contrary, it is part of the problem, utilising institutional terror against non-militant residents and the Boko Haram Jihadists alike. The security services for example killed about as many people as Boko Haram has since the war started, according to credible reports from both local and national NGOs.

The CJTF’s armed resistance has to a very great extent routed Boko Haram from Maiduguri. Similar and aligned groups to it have played central roles in pitched battles where some of the towns seized by the sect were reclaimed, albeit temporarily. But the CJTF cannot but be a shadow of the armed independent self-activity of the working masses in the region required to reclaim its soul, for two related reasons.

First is its class composition. It is made up largely of unemployed lumpen “area” youths. Second is its relationship with the state. While it was formed independently (in the sense of spontaneously) in April 2013, its name would suggest some sense of affiliation to the state’s Joint Task Force.

Working class

The missing link is leadership by the organised working class. With the stature of the unions in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, a more active involvement of the trade unions in the resistance would

help sharpen the class lines of the armed resistance.

There are legitimate fears by union leaders at both state council and shop floor levels that this could make working class activists targets of the sect. But already, hundreds of union members are known to have been killed in the line of duty in the zone, particularly teachers and health workers. Indeed, some of the boldest union leaders I have ever met are in this war torn region.

The trade union leadership nationally needs to take much more decisive actions, not only to inspire working class activists in the region but because the tragedy of war in the north east is a tragedy for the working people as a whole. An injury to one is definitely an injury to all.

Apart from condemnation of attacks by Boko Haram and support for military action against it on several occasions, the trade unions do not appear to have a robust position on the war, which grasps the evolution of the sect and its insurgency, the current and worsening situation in the region, and the tasks for the working class nationally and in the zone in combating the twin terrorisms of Boko Haram and the Nigerian state. The forthcoming national delegates’ conference of the Nigeria Labour Congress presents an opportunity to address this.

We cannot allow the Baga massacre to end up as just some other statistics of the war between Boko Haram and the Federal Government of Nigeria.

We must stand up now, against the pillage and plunder, murders and massacres, for #WeAreAllBaga!

“The missing link is leadership by the organised working class. With the stature of the unions in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, a more active involvement of the trade unions in the resistance would help sharpen the class lines of the armed resistance.”

STOP RACISM, STOP WAR

In response to the Paris attacks, Jesse McLaren exposes France’s Islamophobia that masquerades as free speech, while a statement from the International Socialist Tendency outlines the tasks for socialists in challenging racism and war

Don’t let Paris tragedy produce more racism and war

The warmongers and Islamophobes are using the tragic shooting in Paris to further their policies.

Three gunmen stormed the offices of the French weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 12 people and wounding 11. One of the gunmen has turned himself in and the other two are still at large. It is presumably the magazine’s Islamophobia that drove the gunmen, but their reactions are unjustifiable and a gift to the very forces they claim to oppose.

Highjacking tragedy

Before people have had time to mourn the recent attacks, the warmongers and Islamophobes have gone on the offensive. The National Front in France have called for a referendum on the death-penalty, while the German group PEGIDA have ramped up their campaign against “Islamization.”

Meanwhile, Stephen Harper’s response has highjacked the tragedy to support his anti-immigrant domestic campaign against “barbarism” and his foreign-policy support for the Iraq War. As he said, “I’m horrified by the barbaric attacks in France. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families. Canada and its allies will not be intimidated and will continue to stand firmly together against terrorists who would threaten the peace, freedom and democracy our countries so dearly value.” But Harper has been silent towards the barbaric attacks on mosques in France, and the horrific way in which Islamophobia has been used to threaten peace around the world and religious freedom at home.

Je ne suis pas Charlie

The main slogan in French has been “Je suis Charlie” (I am Charlie). But the instincts of solidarity with the slain have become wrapped up in uncritical support for the politics of the magazine—which have shifted from challenging French authority to picking on oppressed minorities, Muslims in particular.

The magazine changed its name to *Charlie Hebdo* in 1970 when the Interior Minister banned it for mocking the death of the French president Charles de Gaulle. While the magazine began by taking on the state and the Church (a powerful institution in France), it has in the past decade become a crude tool to encourage Islamophobia—from republishing and adding to the racist Danish cartoons in 2006, to naming a 2011 issue “Charia Hebdo” dedicated to mocking Islam.

As part of the new breed of “atheists,” the French magazine saw no difference between challenging the religion that has dominated France—and continues to permeate French society—and picking on the religion of the oppressed Muslim minority. So-called “secularists” claim to be following the 1905 law separating church and state. But the purpose of that law was to stop the Church from dominating in order to defend freedom of religion—not to impose atheism or scapegoat Islam. Now the French state does not ban it but encourages it, under claims of “free speech.”

Islamophobia

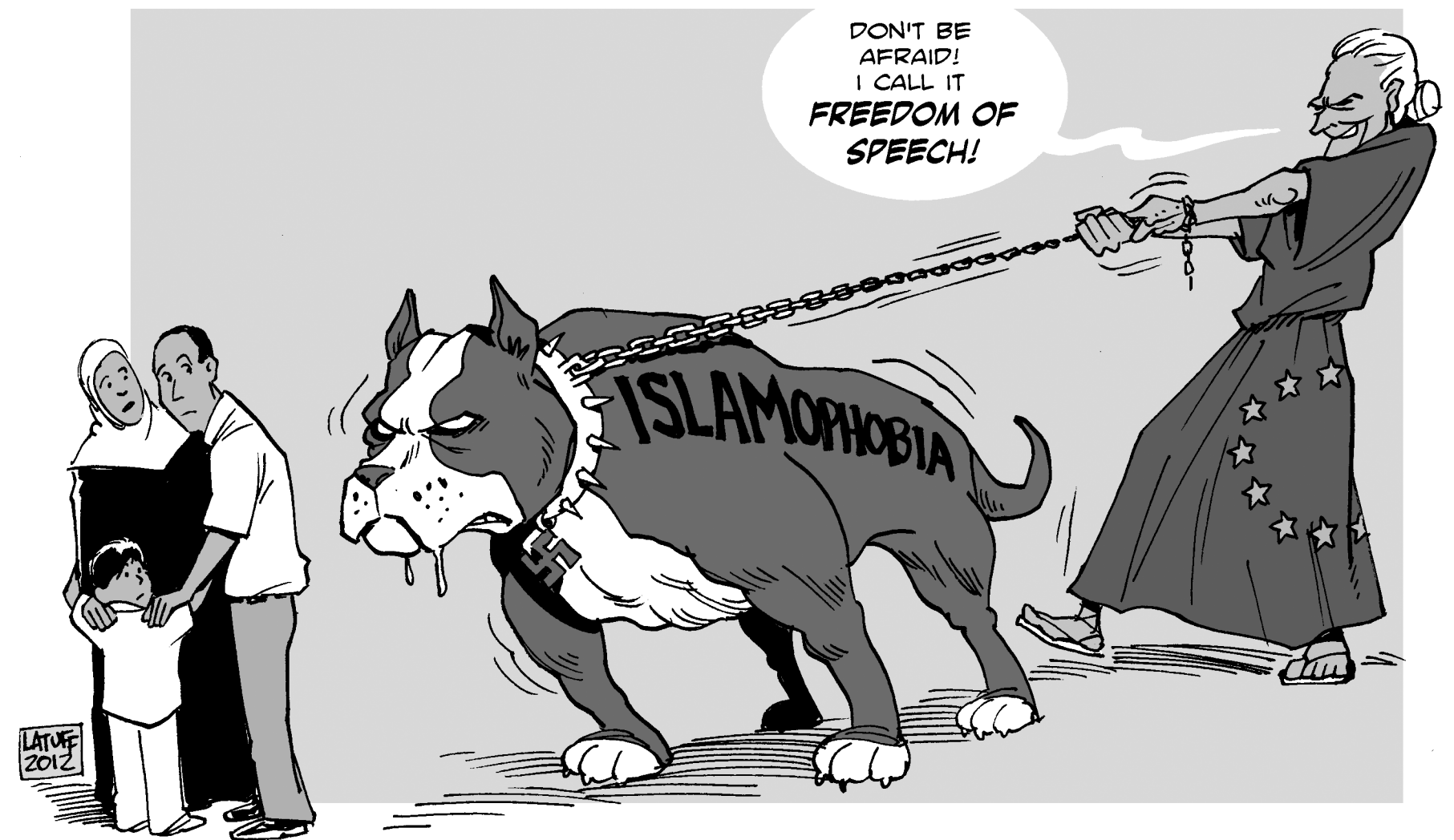
As a colonial power, France has a long history of Islamophobia. Jean-Marie Le Pen, the former leader and father of the current leader of the National Front, served as a paratrooper and tortured Algerians in their war for independence. Post-9/11 Islamophobia has increased, and been part of the justification for bombing Afghanistan, Libya, Mali and now Iraq.

Islamophobia has also been a tool to divide the population within France. The attack on school girls wearing hijab emerged in the 1990s when the government was facing mass strikes against neoliberalism, and the ban came into effect in 2004—two years after the National Front surged in the polls. After his election in 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy tried to outflank the National Front—calling racialized protesters in the suburbs “scum” during the 2005 riots, and banning the niqab in 2010. Islamophobia has further infected society, creating barriers for Muslims in employment, sports accessing public services, and even participating in their children’s school activities.

State-sponsored racism abroad and at home has created the anger and desperation behind the latest attack. France has also joined other Western powers in backing counter-revolution to the Arab Spring, which has spawned ISIS and encouraged individual acts of violence against imperialism.

The social democratic “Socialist Party” of François Hollande were elected in the hopes of an alternative to decades of neoliberalism, but have only brought more austerity and war. This has encouraged the growth of the far right—who have mobilized against immigrants as well as gay rights. Last elections saw the National Front increase their vote, which sparked mass protests, but there’s a real danger fascists across Europe will use the latest shootings to increase their threat. We need to stop racists and war mongers from highjacking tragedy, and keep building mass movements that offer the best alternative to capitalism and war.

ISLAM IS NOT THE ENEMY WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER



Statement of the International Socialist Tendency on the Paris shootings

1. The shootings in Paris at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* on 7 January, followed by the killing of four shoppers at a kosher supermarket in Vincennes two days later, have attracted almost universal condemnation. And of course it is right to condemn them. But the typical manner of this condemnation—as barbarous and irrational acts that violate traditional Western liberties—both refuses to confront the historical context in which the killings took place and serves to underwrite a policy of imperialist war and domestic repression.

2. Ever since 9/11, we have seen the same cycle in which imperialist war in the Muslim world provokes jihadi terrorist atrocities that are in turn used to justify more wars that in turn provoke more atrocities ... The Paris shootings are the latest turn in this cycle. The reaction to them has been stronger because they occurred against the background of the rise of ISIS in the Arab East—a development that is the product of the shattering of Iraqi society by the US and British invasion of 2003 and the counter-revolutionary war waged by the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

3. The Paris killings—and the Madrid and London bombings before them—are a predictable consequence of the Iraq war and its aftermath. To say this is not to justify the killings but to draw a basic causal connection pointed out by many critics and establishment commentators even before the war was launched. To this must be added the way in which the “war on terrorism” has been used to isolate and stigmatize the Muslim population of Europe, already an economically marginalized and culturally isolated minority. Increasingly Islamophobia has become the dominant form of racism in Europe. This has been particularly pronounced in France, where laws have been passed banning the headscarf in schools and the veil in public, and schools legally required to present the bloody history of the French colonial empire in a positive light. In such a climate, it is hardly surprising that a small minority of young European Muslims should be attracted to the armed jihadis of al Qaeda and ISIS.

4. Therefore to present the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* primarily as an assault on freedom of speech is thoroughly deceptive. *Charlie Hebdo* is a magazine whose origins lie in the post-1968 left but that in recent years has devoted much energy to provoking and insulting Muslims. Comparisons with the 18th century Enlightenment’s assault on the Catholic Church are absurd. To this day, the Vatican continues to enjoy enormous institutional power and behind the scenes influence. Islam is the religion of a poor and marginalized minority in

Europe. *Charlie Hebdo*’s caricatures of the Prophet of Islam angered and humiliated vast numbers of European Muslims who nevertheless have no time for terrorism. The government of François Hollande in any case rapidly undercut its loudly proclaimed support for free speech by arresting growing numbers of people for what they have written online. But the slogan ‘Je suis Charlie’ helped Hollande and the other leaders of the European ruling classes to mobilise unprecedented numbers of ordinary people behind them in Paris on 11 January.

5. We stand in the revolutionary Marxist tradition that, from the time of Marx and Engels and the Fenians, and Lenin and Trotsky and the Narodniks, has rejected terrorism as a political strategy. Our target is the capitalist and imperialist system. This can only be overthrown by mass working-class action. The jihadi groups pursue, by contrast, a classical terrorist strategy, fundamentally dividing an elite of fighters from the masses, who remain passive. Indeed, undoubtedly one aim of the killings in Paris is to provoke a repressive and Islamophobic reaction that will drive more Muslims to support the terrorist organizations. There is therefore a complicity between these tactics and the methods of divide-and-rule practised by the ruling class.

6. We, by contrast, stand for the unity of the oppressed and exploited against capitalism and imperialism. Already before the shootings, racism and Islamophobia were on the rise in Europe. The effects of the economic crisis and the austerity policies of European governments, combined with the corruption and arrogance of the neoliberal political elite, have created an opening for the parties of the racist and fascist populist right—the Front National in France, Pegida in Germany, UKIP in Britain, and the like. The mainstream parties have pandered to the far right with attacks on migrants, Muslims, and other minorities, helping to make open racism more legitimate. The atmosphere of outrage and fear created by the Paris killings is likely to make the prevailing climate of racism and Islamophobia even worse. Meanwhile Hollande and David Cameron in Britain are demanding yet more powers for their bloated security apparatuses.

7. The most urgent task of revolutionary socialists in this situation is to build the broadest possible movement against racism and Islamophobia. What this will involve in different countries will vary according to circumstances. Where racists and fascists take to the streets they must be met with mass

counter-mobilizations. Racist demagogues must also be challenged by mass protests. But the International Anti-Racist Day of Action on 21 March offers an opportunity for all those who want to stand up against racism and Islamophobia to come onto the streets. It is will be particularly important to involve Muslims in these mobilisations. But it is essential to understand that many of those participating in official demonstrations such as the “republican marches” in France on 11 January wanted to reject the terrorist atrocities but also to express their opposition to racism and the scapegoating of Muslims. It will be important to involve as many as possible of them as well.

8. At the same time, we must continue to campaign against the imperialist military interventions in the global South. As the bulk of the Western occupation forces has been slinking beaten out of Afghanistan, the military campaign against ISIS continues to build up in Iraq and Syria. Despite Barack Obama’s promises, the number of US “boots on the ground” in Iraq is growing. French imperialism has a long history of military intervention in its former African colonies, most recently in Mali. We must oppose these military adventures, and all attempts to expand the imperialist machinery of surveillance and repression in the name of fighting terrorism.

9. The Paris killings and their aftermath represent a major challenge for the radical and revolutionary left. Too many tendencies place the state and the Islamists on the same level, as equally dangerous enemies. But the Western imperialist states buttress the global capitalist system of exploitation, exercising vast power to oppress and to destroy. All too often treating the state and the Islamists as the same can slide into standing with the state against the Islamists—as much of the left in Egypt has done, for example, backing the counter-revolutionary regime of Field Marshal el-Sisi against the Muslim Brotherhood. In Europe, the support that substantial sections of the radical left have given to *Charlie Hebdo* amounts to the abandonment of the Muslim minority. But revolutionary socialists are tribunes of the oppressed. All our activities must be subordinated to the aim of promoting a working class united across gender, religion, colour, and nation, fighting to rid the world of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

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How do we vote strategically?

With a federal election in 2015, there are increasing debates about how to stop Harper, and as election day approaches this will focus on so-called “strategic voting” at the ballot box. Usually this means voting for the Liberals to stop the Tories—a strategy fuelled by fear of the Tories, hope in the Liberals and disillusionment with the NDP.

Fear of nasty Tories

After nearly a decade of Harper’s in power, attacking every conceivable section of the 99%, the appeal of “anyone but Harper” is understandable. But the sheer hatred for Harper can personalize his agenda, rather than explaining it.

The first half of his reign (the minority government 2006-2011) was only possible because of Liberal support, and the second half has been driven by the global economic crisis—which has seen Obama launch more drone strikes and deportations than George Bush. As Idle No More has helped to explain, Harper’s agenda is the latest extension of centuries of colonialism and capitalism, and electing “anyone but Harper” won’t change this.

Hope in opportunist Liberals

Like the Democrats in the US, the Liberals in Canada only offer tactical differences to their corporate counterpart Republicans/Tories, offering the 1% a variation on how to impose their policies. So voting for one does not stop the other. If we oppose Harper’s wars, we shouldn’t vote for the Liberals who invaded Afghanistan and overthrew democracy in Haiti. If we oppose Harper’s austerity, we shouldn’t vote for the Liberals who imposed massive cuts in the 1990s. If we oppose Harper’s tar sands, we shouldn’t vote for the Liberals who subsidized it while ignoring the Kyoto protocol.

In 2011 this record of complicity led to the Liberals’ welcome collapse, and in 2015 they are trying to reverse this trend—using the fear of Harper to erase their own record and create false hope that they offer an alternative. Justin Trudeau is trying to replicate at the federal level what Kathleen Wynne did in Ontario—use a new leader to tack left, erase their prior record, absorb progressive votes and rebuild themselves to rule again. The Liberals are rebuilding themselves on both the hatred of Harper and the disillusionment with the NDP, who are also shifting right under the economic crisis.

Disillusionment with reformist NDP

The NDP is the only party affiliated with the labour movement and connected to social movements, and its vote has increased alongside movements outside Parliament. The mass anti-war movement pushed the NDP to speak out against the war in Iraq in 2003, which in turn helped build the movement that stopped the Liberals from going to war. In 2011, years of anger at the Tories, disillusionment with the Liberals and Bloc Québécois, and hope from the Arab Spring led to the collapse of the Liberals and the Orange Wave for the NDP—despite their centrist platform. The NDP’s subsequent filibuster against the attack on postal workers showed what’s possible when an opposition inside Parliament becomes a megaphone for the opposition outside Parliament.

But the NDP has been more interested in vying for votes so it can win the next election and manage the capitalist economy, and this electoralism and reformism has led it to subordinate the movements to its own ambitions. The NDP elected ex-Liberal Mulcair, who refused to meet with Chief Spence during the start of Idle No More, instructed his MPs not to support the Quebec student strike, and has followed a Blairist path of centrism.

This has paralleled the experience at the provincial level: in BC the NDP lost by failing to provide a real alternative to the hated Liberals, in Nova Scotia the NDP were thrown out after imposing austerity on workers and students, in New Brunswick the NDP failed to pick up a seat after turning its back on the climate justice movement, the Ontario NDP refused to support the \$14 minimum wage and lost the balance of power, and in Toronto Olivia Chow’s centrist campaign allowed the millionaire John Tory to portray himself as an alternative to the millionaire Rob Ford.

Dreams of a new party

In response to the NDP’s disappointments many activists hope to “reclaim” the NDP from the likes of Mulcair and Horwath. But as a social democratic party, the NDP has a long record of following capitalist priorities—attacking Indigenous rights at Gustafsen Lake in BC, ignoring LGBT rights in Ontario, and attacking paramedics in Nova Scotia.

As we saw in Ontario, anger at the NDPs rightward shift can lead people to shift their own votes to the right by voting Liberal. Disillusionment with social democracy can lead to the right: in Britain years of Labour Party brought back the Tories and now the racist UKIP, while frustration with the Socialist Party in France has seen a rise in the National Front.

But disillusionment with social democracy combined with mass movements can also radicalize people to the left: in Greece 30 general strikes are pushing Syriza to victory, mass strike in South Africa have led to a break with the ANC, the \$15 minimum wage movement elected Kshama Sawant in Seattle, and Québec solidaire is growing alongside mass movements against austerity.

If we really want to strategically vote, we need to reject the twin parties of the 1%, use election campaigns to raise broader issue, push the NDP as far left as they can go, and through the movements lay the basis for a left alternative to emerge.

ANALYSIS



Solidarity: the common factor in New York and Quebec for disabled people

by MELISSA GRAHAM

Here in Canada we have a lot of struggles to secure access for disabled people. Some of us put our energy behind legislation and governments, pointing to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States as an example, but no legislation can achieve social justice.

The following is from a conversation with Laurence Parent, a disability activist in Montreal. She travelled to New York for a month looking at issues surrounding access to space as part of her PhD research. Laurence documented her experiences in her blog, Wheeling NY City. Over the course of the conversation it was easy to see that access has less to do with legislation, and more to do with position in terms of physical location and class.

Attendant services

One of the key components of access Laurence focuses on is attendant services. In her blog post on Alejandra and Nick, she writes about how Nick moved to New York hoping to have access to the care he needed and to live with Alejandra. But things didn’t happen that way. They had to fight for a whole year to get the services Nick was legally entitled to. Alejandra, who is also disabled, was considered unfit to be Nick’s respondent in case of an emergency. They made a video about all the setbacks they have encountered on their road to 24/7 home care. He eventually won the fight, but not before spending time in a nursing home.

In Quebec people who need services are struggling to stay in their homes. It is a very political thing. Activism around attendant services doesn’t get enough attention. As Laurence said, “it is political, but it’s not made political...people are scared to lose the services that they have...they won’t really want to talk about it. The media doesn’t get it right. It is still seen as normal if disabled people live in rehab centres rather than at home.” People who don’t need services don’t tend to know they exist. Nursing homes don’t have the same negative reputation in Quebec as they do in other provinces; there is not the same history of disabled people fighting to live at home.

New York is one of the only cities

in the United States with 24 hour attendant services; this is a significant factor in why physically disabled people move there, but at the same time there is less access than other cities, and people who make this choice are less mobile.

Accessibility

Despite the difference in legislation, there were some shared experiences with regard to transit and access to space as well. Laurence has visited a couple of cities in the United States where the ADA seemed to be changing the physical accessibility of the city, but this was not the case for New York. There are still only 25 per cent of transit stations with accessibility; primarily in the tourist areas. “You need to live in cities to get a good picture (of access),” she says.

Laurence was able to find out about the accessibility of voting stations during the American election in November. For people who are not activists, voting is how most people exercise their political agency. We might assume these would be accessible because of the ADA legislation and the role that voting plays in American culture. In Manhattan, where access was better, there were signs everywhere indicating accessible stations, but this was not consistent across New York. Laurence reflected on how class divisions affect disabled people: “There are so (many) inequalities (in the US) and this is reflected in access.”

Access to spaces is a major component of Laurence’s research; though often we don’t think of access in terms of right to space for disabled people. In her blog she mentions a fine that’s being discussed in Quebec. A rule forbidding people to wheel their mobility aids side by side on sidewalks, could dramatically impact the way disabled move and communicate with each other. If it passes, people may be subjected to a \$60 fine. She doesn’t know if this is will actually come in to effect, but she is surprised by the amount of money researching and reporting on it. Often disabled people are told that it is a privilege for us to access space “because we use a vehicle, as if it was something separate from our bodies.”

There are a lot of challenges to fighting back against these types of

legislated ableism. There are physical barriers occasionally, but social media cab counter this and build connections between people. The bigger challenge is that there remains a perspective in society that disabled people are still people that need to be cared for; and it can be difficult for people to break though that to find their voice. “It is hard to be an activist, sometimes people just want to get on with their lives...be acknowledged as human beings.”

Disability activism

Laurence sees history and community as important factors in the development of disability activism. We know very little about the accomplishments of disabled people throughout history. We should be worried. We need more disability history. We need it to be able to better fight for our present and for our future. This allows “the access and culture to inform each other” and she hopes that as more people learn about disability history “(They will develop) a sense of pride and a sense of community that disabled people don’t have in Montreal and Quebec. Maybe a sense of hope too.” People don’t often recognize that they can use their existing skills to fight ableism.

There is much to be done; there’s always the big fight for access to transportation, and we need that in order to do everything else. Budget cuts and austerity are impacting disabled people harder, and this is often overlooked. We have to connect with unions and left groups, but we also still face a lot of ableism from those areas. As Laurence says, “it is a lot about learning and being open to learn from each other...I really feel that it is the key. Some people working in disability activism seem to believe they know what access means. I believe it is dangerous to claim such a thing. What really matters is to be open to disabled people’s needs, thoughts and opinions.”

There are many disabled people across Canada who recognize the need to work together towards access, and to stop waiting for those in power to do it for us. Laurence’s trip to New York shows us there are many opportunities for solidarity; we need only to reach out to each other.



MOVIE

From Selma the march to Selma the movie

Reviewed by Jesse McLaren

This year is the 50th anniversary of the historic civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, where hundreds of Black people resisted state violence to win the right to vote. Half a century later, the fight to recognize the movie Selma, as part of #BlackLivesMatter, shows the struggle continues.

Mainstream history often reduces the Civil Rights Movement to a kind American president responding to Martin Luther King’s simple dream. Selma detonates that myth in the first five minutes. Beginning after MLK has made his famous speech and after President Lyndon B Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, shows a stubborn LBJ patronizingly explaining to King that “this voting thing is just going to have to wait”—despite Black people being terrorized and humiliated.

Selma shows that the President had to be dragged kicking and screaming to support civil rights—preferring to strategize against it with FBI director J Edgar Hoover who considered King to be “political and moral degenerate,” or appealing for non-violence from “both sides” ie between unarmed and non-violent Black marchers, and armed and violent white police. As King says in the film, “the President could stop this (violence) with a stroke of his pen; he chooses not to.” Johnson’s former advisor lashed out against the film Selma by ludicrously suggesting that “Selma was LBJ’s idea,” to which the director Ava DuVernay, tweeted, “Notion that Selma was LBJ’s idea is jaw dropping and offensive to SNCC, SCLC and black citizens who made it so.”

BOOK

EP Thompson and the Making of the New Left

Reviewed by Peter Hogarth

EP Thompson became a great figure of the post-Second World War Left. Known best for his masterful history of the Industrial Revolution in England, The Making of the English Working Class (1964), was a historian and activist who worked tirelessly to make true the words of Karl Marx: “the emancipation of the working class will be the act of the working class.”

Coming from very non-working class roots, EP Thompson joined the Communist Party of Britain during the World War II while he served in a tank unit. After the war, he and his wife, Dorothy (also a Communist) settled in Halifax in the north of England and began working in adult education in the working class area.

Thompson left the Communist Party in 1956, repulsed by the USSR’s invasion of Hungary. Remaining dedi-

Self-emancipation

As Selma shows, it was Black people themselves who won their right to vote. Local activists, joined by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, had been organizing a voter’s registration campaign in Selma, and called on King and other activists of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to join them. After police beat protesters and murdered activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, activists organized three consecutive mass marches toward the state capital of Montgomery against the racist governor George Wallace.

The film shows the constant harassment and violence to which they were subjected: random acts of violence, FBI surveillance and harassment, and police brutality—most notoriously the police using horses, tear gas, clubs and whips to drive protesters back across the Edmund Pettus Bridge (named after a leader of the KKK).

Selma shows civil rights were not granted from a white savior, or won single-handedly by a saintly Martin Luther King—but rather won through organizing, training, marching, protesting, and going to jail. The film explores debates on strategy and tactics within the movement. It shows King’s stress and self-doubts, and features numerous other movement activists.

Given this wide cast it’s surprising not to see Ella Baker (who co-founded both SCLC and SNCC) or Stokely Carmichael (who was part of the frustration with non-violence that led to the Black Power movement). This script’s downplays these politics and the link between civil and economic rights, but it does anticipate the rising anti-war movement—contrasting the millions spent on “liberating” Vietnam while

denying basic democratic rights for African-Americans.

And the Oscar goes to... racism

While Hollywood is obsessed with films about America “liberating” people (including five nominations this year for Sniper, a film about a US soldier who massacred Iraqis), it doesn’t like films about people liberating themselves from America. It has taken Hollywood half a century to make a film about Martin Luther King.

Selma not only humanizes King and shines a light on other civil right heroes (and villains), but it does so with a star-studded cast. But the only Oscar nominations were for best picture and best song—in a year where every nominee for director or any actor are white.

It’s ironic that a film highlighting the exclusion of Black people from voting would be excluded from the Oscars—voted on by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, a group that is 94 per cent white (with three quarters men and the average age of 63—born before the Voting Rights Act the film celebrates). By refusing to nominate DuVernay, the Academy has maintained its segregation of Best Director—a category that has never nominated a Black woman, and only three times nominated a Black man (though none have won).

Symptomatic of racism in wider society, the Oscars’ refusal to celebrate Black people portraying the Black freedom struggle shows the ongoing fight for liberation—half a century after Selma—and the importance of #BlackLivesMatter.

cated to the Marxist tradition, he became a founder of a New Left, uniting dissident Communists in Britain and around the world looking to fight for a real socialism—unlike the one they saw in the USSR.

Thompson created and directed the Centre for the Study of Social History at Warwick University, a labour historian specializing in “history from below,” writing numerous books, before turning to full-time peace/anti-nuclear activism. He founded the European Nuclear Disarmament (END), a movement that connected with dissidents in the Soviet Union to oppose nuclear armament by competing blocs. Thompson died at the age of 69, but left behind an incredible body of work that attests to his life-long commitment to social change. This collection of essays and polemics is an important part of that legacy.

In *EP Thompson and the Making of the New Left*, editor Cal Winslow has compiled a collection of essays

brimming with optimism of the will and pessimism of the intellect, to paraphrase Gramsci. Thompson attacks the quiescence of Communist Party leaders in the face of Soviet injustice, exalts the validity of people as the active agents in history and social change, reasserts the centrality of the class struggle in the tensions of oppression. Thompson proposes a way out of apathy, which he describes as “an expression of the impotence of the individual in the face of contemporary institutions,” by steadfast allegiance with the rank-and-file of the Labour Movement and young people opposing the system. Throughout, Thompson demonstrates an aversion to dogmatism and emphasizes the need to resist the deep-rooted prejudices and assumptions of the old left in building the new one.

Thompson’s essays seek to raise the horizons of what is possible and what people should insist on.

LEFT JAB
John Bell

Harper bids farewell to kindred spirit

Blood is thicker than water, and oil is thicker than either. In the oiliest sense, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia were kindred spirits, brothers if you will.

Who can forget that soon after he became Prime Minister, Harper travelled to the G8 meeting in Britain where he declared his intention to turn Canada into an energy superpower, the Saudi Arabia of the 21st century. From this we can only extrapolate that Harper was acting out his ambition to be an absolute dictator, a King Abdullah for the 21st century.

Much as he might wish to, Harper can’t deny women the right to drive or take away their vote. But he has defunded over a dozen women’s support and advocacy organizations. Recall that in 2010 Tory Senator Nancy Ruth warned a conference of women’s groups to “Shut the fuck up” about abortion services. Women can drive; but in most parts of this country they just can’t drive to get the health services they need.

Harper may have envied Abdullah’s power to order beheadings. He certainly is noticeably silent on the subject. But if he lacks the ability to literally swing the axe, he is compensating by slashing spending for public services, including health care. He has dismantled the Health Council of Canada, the organization that regulated health care to national standards. Provisions hidden deep in the 2014 omnibus budget will cut about \$36 billion in federal health funding transfers to the provinces over the next 10 years.

When Abdullah said, “Heads will roll” he was being literal. When Harper said it he was being metaphorical, at least as far as we know. In July 2013 alone, 74,000 public servants lost their jobs but kept their heads.

Brothers in arms deals

Of course “brothers” like Harper and Abdullah can have the occasional falling out, especially “warring brothers”, as Karl Marx described capitalists. However fond of each other they were, they were also in competition for oil markets. Saudi Arabia has increased production of late in order to drive down the price of oil, making “unconventional” petroleum sources (tar sands, fracking, etc.) uneconomical.

“If I reduce, what happens to my market share? The price will go up, and the Russians, the Brazilians, US shale oil producers will take my share,” Abdullah’s oil minister Ali Al-Naimi told the Middle East Economic Survey last month. The Saudis are willing to swallow lower prices in order to crush their brothers. All this must make Harper very angry, but he’d pull the same trick. What’s a brother to do?

Well, he can let bygones be bygones and sell his brother \$15 billion worth of armoured cars. This is particularly appropriate since, as Harper

eulogized, King Abdullah was a “strong proponent of peace” in the Middle East. In okaying the deal Harper may have violated Canada’s laws, which prohibit arms trade with countries having poor human rights records. No less an expert than Ezra Levant, author of *Ethical Oil: the Case for Canada’s Oil Sands* refers to the “medieval human rights abusing Saudis”. Levant’s “ethical oil” thesis has been vigorously defended at one time or another by the Harper government’s starting line-up: Jason Kenney, Joe Oliver, Peter Kent and the PM himself.

But its hard to claim the moral high ground (even with as preposterous an idea as “ethical oil”) when there is cash on the line. Yesterdays medieval human rights abuser is today’s strong proponent of peace.

A statement from the office of International Trade Minister Ed Fast (heretofore to be known as Fast Eddie) says the deal is “consistent with Canada’s foreign and defence policies.” This is true. Canada also unequivocally supports other strong proponents for peace in the Middle East such as the dictatorship of Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi in Egypt and Israel’s apartheid government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

Business is business

So we know why Harper is joining in the farcical international chorus of mourning for this brutal dictator: whether competitor or client, Abdullah was a good man of business. Besides a “strong proponent for peace”, Harper said Abdullah was “passionate about his country, development and the global economy.” Evidently that last trait makes up for a lot of sins.

Perhaps that will be some comfort to Raif Badawi, suffering in a Saudi jail since 2012, waiting for the next installment of his sentence of 1,000 lashes. He is guilty of criticizing Abdullah’s government. The best way to celebrate the passing of Abdullah would be to support the international campaign to free Raif.

Harper is not alone in honouring this tyrant. Obama’s White House outdid itself in fawning hypocrisy, and Britain’s Tory government ordered flags to be flown at half mast. Contrast this to Harper’s statement on the death of Venezuela’s democratically elected president, Hugo Chavez: “At this key juncture, I hope the people of Venezuela can now build for themselves a better, brighter future based on the principles of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.”

Freedom, democracy, human rights? To paraphrase Inigo Montoya: You keep using those words; I do not think they mean what you think they mean.

It all leads one to speculate how Harper would respond to the passing of some other monsters: “Hannibal was a man of passionate appetites and great taste,” said Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who dined frequently with Mr. Lecter. “Bottom line, he really liked people.”

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.

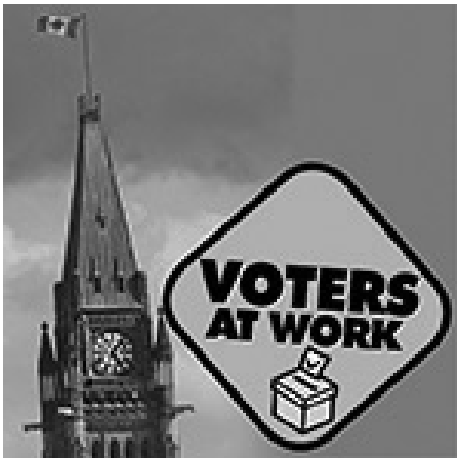
The Revolutionary Party

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



Election preparation conferences

January to March in cities across Canada
Organized by Canadian Labour Congress
www.canadianlabour.ca



Anti-war teach-ins

February 15
visit <http://canadianpeace.org>



International Women's Day

Saturday March 7
<http://iwdtoronto.ca>

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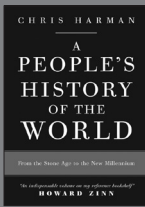
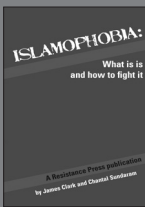
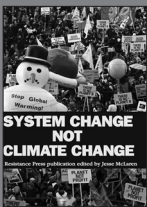
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SPACE TRAVEL

by PAOLO BASSI

Since 2009 the number of billionaires has doubled to over 1600. This tiny international ruling caste hold about half the world's wealth, as they sit atop a pile of global misery they have helped create.

Collecting yachts, islands, mansions in major capitals and hoarding art is expected from the super-rich, but can become common-place for the 1%. What about a two hour flight just to peek at the planet they rule from sub-orbital space?

This is the latest contribution to human civilization from Virgin Galactic—a company under the ever-hip Richard Branson's Virgin Group. For \$250,000 per seat, Sir Dick proposes to fly some of his richest, most beautiful friends in a space-plane about 60 miles above the Earth and notch yet another experience that—other than a handful of astronauts—no-one else may claim (buy).

Should Virgin's project come to fruition, each of the 700 would-be space tourists, who have signed up for their short flying experience in the dark, will spend about 300 years wages for one of the three billion people existing on \$2 a day. Having this kind of money to burn—literally and figuratively—is a symptom of the late capitalist age. Branson is simply offering the wealthy a new, very expensive experience to consume—a ride on a gas guzzling space toy—as pointless and vacuous as its destination it may be.

Branson's customers will have to wait though. The latest fatal test flight on October 31, 2014, raised serious questions over Virgin Galactic's touted technology, leaving Branson red-faced and fuming. Technology aside, the real question is why 700 people, even with truckloads of cash to burn, feel compelled to buy into this fantasy experience?

Alienation

The world's wealthy elite are separated—physically, culturally, spiritually and psychologically—from the great mass of humanity, more than at any time in human history. They live in a world of self-delusion and intellectual dishonesty—unable to come to terms with their exploitative nature and the brutality of the economic and political systems their wealth is derived from.

The contradictions of capitalism can be rationalized through the self-serving belief that inequality results from pre-determined human nature and self-worth. The alienation thus is accepted by the rich—nestled by the belief they live authentic lives based on unchangeable realities not of their making. Only such people could choose to burn \$250,000 on a two hour ride with the rich and famous, to watch a planet their oil economy is burning to the ground.

Should Virgin ever get their space plane to work, a \$250,000 per head ride into empty space would be a perfect metaphor for the elite's separateness from the other 99.9% back on earth.

CORPORATE PUPPET WYNNE: OPSEU WORKERS SAY ENOUGH



by PAM JOHNSON

Ontario Public Service (OPS) workers, members of OPSEU, have said enough to Wynne's attempt to cut wages, jobs and push through concessions on public sector workers.

Wynne has vowed to enact austerity measures for public sector workers and public services. Following in the footsteps of her predecessor, Dalton McGuinty, she has kept the door open to privatizing public services—most recently IT services—and continuing public private partnerships.

Wynne has also promised to continue to play hardball in public sector bargaining, maintaining wages freezes and pushing concessions. Her current contract offer to OPS workers includes two-tier wages, starting

new hires at 5 per cent below the current rate, cuts to health benefits, and changes to working conditions. This, along with zero wage increases on top of two years of wage freezes, means public sector workers are rapidly losing ground and public services are being eroded.

Corporate Puppet

OPS workers voted 90 per cent for a strike mandate in December 2014 and are currently mobilizing for potential strike action. In a series of pickets and rallies, OPSEU members, have targeted Liberal MPPs and dogged Wynne at recent public appearances, especially in Toronto. They are calling out Wynne for continuing corporate tax breaks and for blaming the public sector workers and

unions for budget deficits.

Wynne, Harper and Trudeau

Wynne's majority victory last June was precipitated by the thumping of anti-worker, anti-union PC candidate Tim Hudak. It was Wynne, sadly, not the NDP who was able to strategically tack left, with support for an increased minimum wage for example. Wynne has been able to project a left face through progressive positions on some social issues. She has been publicly challenging Harper and it is no secret that her progressive profile will bolster Justin Trudeau's current leftward lean going into a federal election campaign. OPSEU workers are challenging her real agenda and exposing her hypocrisy.

2014 the warmest year on record

by ROSI HUNTER

It's not news to anyone that the planet is heating up, but clear, quantifiable data can be hard to come by in the controversial cross-fire around climate change.

More and more scientific organizations have put forth the “yes, it's actually happening” sort of data, and it has our attention. NASA, The National Climatic Data Centre at NOAA, and the Japan Meteorological Agency all agree that 2014 has had the highest global average temperature in the 135 years we have kept records. John Grunsfeld, associate administrator for the Science Mission Directorate at NASA said of the data, “the ranking of 2014 as the warmest year on record reinforces the importance of... understand the role and impacts of human activity.”

Nine of the 10 warmest years on record, have occurred since 1998. Since 1880, Earth's average surface temperature has warmed by about 0.8 degrees Celsius and the majority of that warming has occurred in the past three decades.

We have seen evidence of climate change before, in the form of droughts, (un)natural disasters, and rising global temperature trends, never mind the basic science behind greenhouse

gasses. So why is this recent development so important?

“This is the latest in a series of warm years, in a series of warm decades. While the ranking of individual years can be affected by chaotic weather patterns, the long-term trends are attributable to drivers of climate change that right now are dominated by human emissions of greenhouse gases,” said Gavin Schmidt, director NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. But how have we let it get this far when we have long known about climate change?

There is a popular argument given in the title of Harvard professor Cass R. Sunstein's article, “People Don't Fear Climate Change Enough.” David Suzuki summarizes it beautifully: “People look to readily available examples when assessing danger, focus ‘on risks and hazards that have an identifiable perpetrator,’ and pay more attention to immediate threats than long-term ones.” In other words, humankind is procrastinating on a global scale.

However millions have marched in the streets to demand action on climate change. The real reason for the lack of action is that dealing with climate change

is a threat to profits and capitalism.

Capitalism is innately exploitative. This includes not only the workers, but also natural resources like oil and gas deposits, mineral deposits, forests, and wildlife. The key to stopping climate change is intertwined with stopping capitalism.

The ecological economist Herman Daly advocates the importance of protecting what he calls, natural capital: natural resources that have lucrative potential. The raw materials for production must be respected and all economic pursuits must be approached with sustainability, not profitability, at their forefronts. Principles like taking no more than we need, and allowing resources to replenish before extracting them again are integral to protecting natural capital.

These and other socialist principles of making decisions democratically and to the most benefit of the people would result in the protection of our environment. The bottom line: capitalism is the perpetrator, the people are the victims, and the outcomes of inaction are currently threatening humanity. Let's act now by supporting socialist, environmental movements.

STICKING WITH THE UNION

Carolyn Egan

Build on-the-ground campaigns

The next federal election is around the corner, most probably in the fall, but it could be earlier.

The Harper government has been decimating social programs, attacking unions and destroying the environment. Capital has been overjoyed at its approach of deregulation and privatization. The ruling class will be throwing a lot of resources into the election to keep its interest front and centre on any federal government's agenda.

Learn Greek

As we saw recently in Greece, Syriza took power and grew out of strong social movements protesting against the harsh conditions imposed on the working class and the poor. Immigrant communities fought alongside trade unionists and students standing up to the neo-liberal apologists. We will have to see as time goes on what the new government will do. Activists must keep the pressure on but its victory gave hope to millions.

Campaigns against the austerity agenda are critically important in Canada in the lead up to the federal election. In Greece looking back a few years we saw the real hesitancy of the trade union leaders to take on the government particularly when PASOK, the social democratic party, was in power. When the labour leaders wouldn't call workers out, it was groups of activists in the hospitals, schools, universities and other work places who began to move.

They connected with like minded workers and started out with small, local actions which were inspiring to those around them. These actions grew from work place to work place and the pressure on the leadership became greater and greater. They were forced to run to catch up with mood and this led to the series of general strikes which electrified not only the Greek working class but workers around the world.

Mobilizations

We have an opportunity in this pre-election period to ramp up the struggle here. We have seen in the past few years Idle No More, the Occupy movement, the Quebec student strike which mobilized hundreds of thousands. Our union leaders have not put out a call for mass fight backs but there has been a lot happening on the ground.

The environmental movement won against Kinder Morgan on Burnaby Mountain, huge demonstrations have taken place in Quebec against austerity, 6,000 activists came together in Ottawa for the People's Social Forum.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) campaign to maintain door to door delivery is having a huge resonance. It's taking place all over the country. The work being done in London, Ontario is a model with Londoners for Door to Door being formed. Senior organizations, community groups and labour have all come together. They are going to the postal depots talking to workers and leafleting homes talking about what the Federal government is doing to destroy their services and take away good jobs. In British Columbia the federation of labour has called “the fight for \$15” which is gaining strong support.

The anti-Hudak campaign leading up to the Ontario provincial election was begun by the labour leadership because they were afraid of the “right to work” program the Conservatives were promising and the threat of losing union density. Activist assemblies took place across the province. It allowed for activists to connect with fellow workers to talk about the issues at stake. The result in some workplaces has been groups of rank and file members connecting and demanding accountability and action from their leaders.

We have to use the opportunities that are presented to us when the leadership provides openings to organize for change. The Canadian Labour Congress is sponsoring “workshops on issues that matter” in cities across the country. It's calling activists together to discuss key issues in the federal elections and how to engage with our fellow workers in creating effective campaigns. There is an electoral focus to pull the vote but in the same way that the anti Hudak campaign connected rank and file members in workplaces through discussions and actions workers can use this to do the same.

We can use these conferences to develop the on the ground campaigns and draw support from working class people to fight the austerity agenda. We should do all we can to bring fellow workplace activists out. Committees on issues such as the CUPW door to door campaign or the “Fight for \$15” can be formed in workplaces to bring activists together for discussions and actions. Lets take advantage of the openings that are there to build the campaigns and engage in discussions about a real alternative to capitalism and the devastation we are seeing all around us.

Socialist Worker

Canada Post: save door-to-door delivery

By Pam Johnson

The Community Mailbox (CMB) implementation to replace door-to-door mail delivery has been a disaster. The hasty change was done with no public consultation and no planning.

Canada Post gave no specific site information and many residents near mailbox locations were not informed until crews arrived to install them.

Safety Hazards and Frozen Mailboxes

In Kanata, Ontario a local community association reported that only a month after installation of the CMBs there are significant safety issues and property damage.

Increased parking congestion, no snow and litter removal and access problems were all cited. Communication with Canada Post to ask for information or give feedback is almost impossible.

In Oakville, Ontario mailboxes have frozen up in the cold and become inaccessible with people waiting for days to get their mail. One woman who lives across the street from the CMB reported getting her mail “directly from the postal truck” because her box was frozen.

Brampton city council asked Canada Post to pay the costs of maintenance at mailboxes. Canada Post has refused.

Harper's slash and burn

Despite Harper's claims that it is obsolete and unaffordable, Canada Post is a success story. Canada Post has paid over \$1.5 billion



to the Federal government since 2000.

Canada Post is a profitable corporation, with \$39 million profits in the first three quarters of 2014, and that's exactly why the Canadian Tories want it privatized—just like the British Tories did with the Royal Mail.

Close to two thirds of households get home delivery. Ending home mail delivery is a major attack on public services and decent jobs.

On top of 8,000 jobs that will be lost, the Harper government is demonstrating no concern for the serious lack of accessibility to mail for seniors, people with dis-

abilities and all those with mobility issues.

Medical associations have expressed concerns at Canada Post's attempt to do damage control on accessibility to mail by forcing people to get doctor's notes if they assistance or can't get to a CMB.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and allies, such as The Disabled Women's Network and the The National Pensioners, have launched a major Federal court challenge. It argues that the drastic decisions over the elimination of door to door delivery are outside of the jurisdiction of Canada Post and must be made by Parliament,

highlighting that Harper's government is ignoring the hardships and lack of a democratic process by ending home delivery.

Save door-to-door campaign: Postal workers fight back
CUPW has launched a Save Door-to-Door campaign focusing on PC-held ridings. At a recent canvas in Etobicoke, sixty postal workers and supporters from CUPE and OPSEU visited 4,000 households on a Saturday morning.

Many people are not aware that it is their own MP supporting the end of home delivery. One canvasser said, “Where I was, the

commitment at the door to phone up the conservative MP about this was quite strong.”

Londoners4door2door

In London Ontario, labour and community members have gone a step further and developed a local campaign, Londoners4door2door

London Labour Council President, Patti Dalton, said, “I think what is unique about our approach is that we have gone right to the postal depots with our community folks. It is community members who are asking for more information and want to tell postal workers that they are supported.”

The campaign action plan

includes outreach to workers at postal depots, outreach to the community going door-to-door, lobbying city council, social media, and training for door-to-door by pairing experienced canvassers with new people.

The group also wants to connect this campaign to a broader critique of the Harper government and their attacks on unions and democracy. They hope to connect with trade unionists at upcoming Canadian Labour Congress workshops to organize for the upcoming federal election.

They want to expand the activist base in the community as well. They are planning direct action training and planning for sit-ins and a letter writing campaign to the mainstream press.

Federal election: taking it to the Harper and his MPs

Harper's arrogance and unwillingness to listen to his own supporters is showing. It is the policies of Harper Conservatives that are forcing the end of home delivery and creating the problems of the new system. The problem is not public services or public sector workers or their unions.

A clear majority of people across Canada and Quebec oppose the end of home delivery, including many Tory voters. This makes it a vulnerable issue for Harper and Tory MPs and they need to hear from their own supporters who oppose this move. The save door-to-door campaign is critical opportunity to connect directly with these voters.

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BC launches fight for \$15

by MICHAEL FENN

Following in the footsteps of a successful campaigns in Seattle and San Francisco to raise the minimum wage to a “living wage” of \$15 an hour, labour activists in British Columbia (spearheaded by the BC Federation of labour) are gearing up for a year-long campaign to raise the BC minimum wage to \$15 from the current paltry \$10.25 an hour.

Most workers stuck at the minimum wage are not high schoolers simply wanting to earn a little extra cash. In BC, 47 per cent of minimum wage earners are 25 or older, including nearly 10,000 over the age of 55. Two thirds are women, and 55 per cent of these workers have been on the job for more than a year.

And many (14 per cent) have university degrees.

At the current minimum wage, neither individuals nor families (for example a family of four in which both parents work), make enough to elevate them over the poverty line.

Currently there are 120,400 British Columbians earning minimum wage. And the 517,749 earning less than \$15 an hour, make up 25 per cent of the total labour force in BC. As a result of such low wages, poverty rates are high in BC (and across the country), with one out of seven adults and one in five children (169,420) living in poverty in BC.

Apart from these sobering facts, the argument from the BC federation of labour, from activists, and 80 per cent of BC residents polled on the subject, is simple;

“It's only fair!” Given the current cost of living, for someone working full time (usually in the most undesirable forms of work), \$15 is the “minimum” standard of fairness.

Especially when one considers the affluent nations like Canada and indeed the enormity of wealth that exists in the modern world. In Canada, the top earning 10 per cent make 10 times that of the bottom 10 per cent. They take home more than 40 per cent of national income. The wealthiest 10 per cent of Canadians own more than 50 percent of national wealth and the richest 86 Canadians own more wealth than the bottom 11.4 million.

The defenders of the rich and their business interests claim that raising the minimum wage will hurt us

all. Often they claims to be defending small business owners, but 44 per cent of minimum wage workers are employed at firms with a labour force of 500 or more. Studies that have looked into this question reveal that there is no consistently significant statistical effect between raising minimum wages and unemployment, nor inflation.

As opposed to the business community demands that we sacrifice our wages for their profits, we need to set labour standards high and force the business community to live up to them. Under capitalism we need them to take from and exploit us or we starve to death, despite the fact that we are the source of their profits.

Visit www.fightfor15bc.ca to get involved.