

Massive protest by low-wage workers



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

By **BILL ONASCH**

“Largest Protest By Low Wage Workers In US History.” That was the British *Guardian* headline above a perceptive story about the 4/15 4 15 actions by Steven Greenhouse and Jana Kasperkevic. They wrote, “Some 60,000 workers took part in the Fight for \$15 demonstrations....”

“The demonstrations were the latest in a series of strikes that began with fast-food workers in New York in November 2012. The movement has since attracted groups outside the restaurant industry: Wednesday’s protesters included home-care assistants, Walmart workers, child-care aides, airport workers, adjunct professors and other low-wage workers. It also sparked international support, with people protesting

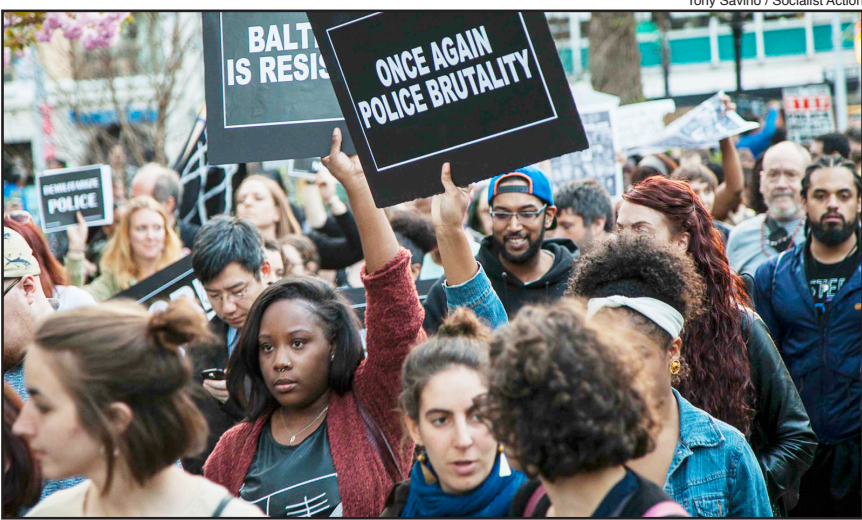
against low wages in Brazil, New Zealand and the UK.”

Before analyzing this historic mobilization, it’s useful to review how it played out in some of the more than 200 cities involved.

Soles on the Ground

Agence France-Presse estimated that 15,000 took part in actions in New York City. Writing in the *In These Times Working* blog, Andrew Elrod described some unexpected augmenting of Fast Food workers: “From Canarsie, Brooklyn to Lincoln Center, workers in New York rallied in support of a \$15 minimum wage on Wednesday. The most recent day of action in the nearly three-year-old Fight for \$15 campaign included protests from racial justice activists

(continued on page 5)



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

Back page: Baltimore explodes after Gray killing.

**INSIDE
SOCIALIST
ACTION**

Bangladesh — 2	NGOs & civil society — 6	Trotsky “conspiracy” — 10
Mumia / Malcolm — 3	Panama Summit — 7	Canada news — 11
Syria / Yemen — 4	Dominican Republic — 9	Freddie Gray — 12



(Left) Rana Plaza victim Mahinur Begum on tour to press workers's demands. She points to clothes on sale that she had worked on as a seamstress.

Protests on 2nd anniversary of Bangladesh building collapse

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Demonstrations took place around the world on April 24 to commemorate the second anniversary of the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, near Dhaka, Bangladesh. The building housed five garment shops, which produced clothing for close to 30 major brands and retailers in the West.

At least 1134 workers, mainly women, lost their lives in the disaster. Children of the workers, who were playing in the factory nursery, were also killed. Some 2500 people were able to escape, but many emerged with crushed limbs and other injuries.

Rana Plaza was owned by Sohel Rana, one of a

number of local gangster capitalists who had gained quick riches by building sweatshops for the international garment trade. When cracks appeared in Rana Plaza's support pillars a day before the collapse, Rana refused to evacuate the building although an engineering inspector had demanded that he order everyone out. Rana fled the area before being captured, and has not yet been prosecuted.

Unchecked expansion of the garment industry in Bangladesh, and the call by retailers for cheap and rapid production, meant that safety regulations were often ignored. The Tazreen Fashion fire in 2012 killed at least 117 people. Since then, at least 68 major fires have ignited in Bangladeshi factories, with 30 deaths.

Workers often toiled in these sweatshops for as little as \$39 a month. In December, the Bangladesh government raised the minimum factory wage to \$68 a month—still below the \$100 demanded by workers. Workers who protest poor wages and working conditions, including safety and sanitation violations, are often victimized and even face physical assault. For that reason, demands by supporters of the Rana Plaza workers include safeguarding the right to unionize.

On the second anniversary of the disaster, many demonstrations took place outside garment retailers such as Walmart, JC Penney, Zara, and Mango—which continue to market clothing that was produced at Rana Plaza. Protesters demanded that the survivors and their families receive full compensation, and that all apparel brands and retailers doing business in Bangladesh sign the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety.

According to the International Labor Organization, more than 2800 claims from the Rana Plaza disaster, relating to over 5000 injured workers and dependents of the deceased, had been received by late 2014. Some retailers have resisted demands that they pay an adequate amount into the fund to cover those claims; at least 15 companies who did business with Rana Plaza have paid nothing. As of last month, about \$24 million had been made available to the fund—short of its \$30 million goal.

In order to press demands for full accountability, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) recently organized a tour of colleges around the United States, which featured former Rana Plaza worker Mahinur Begum and Kalpona Akter, director of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity. Begum, now 18 years old, was completely buried in the building collapse, and had a toe amputated.

After a long struggle against the demands of the workers, their families, and their supporters, The Children's Place, a U.S. clothing retailer, agreed last month to pay \$2 million into the claims fund. ■

Socialist Action: Where we stand

Socialist Action is a national organization of activists committed to the emancipation of workers and the oppressed. We strive to revitalize the antiwar, environmental, labor, anti-racist, feminist, student, and other social movements with a mass-action perspective. In the process we hope to bring activists together from different backgrounds into a revolutionary workers' party that can successfully challenge the wealthy elite—whose profit-driven system is driving down living standards and threatens all life on this planet.

Our ultimate goal is a truly democratic, environmentally sustainable, and egalitarian society organized to satisfy human needs rather than corporate greed. We invite you to join us in the struggle to make the world a better place!

We are active partisans of the working class and believe in the need for independent working-class politics—not alliances with the bosses' parties. That is why we call for workers in the U.S. to break from the Democratic and Republican parties to build a Labor Party based on the trade unions.

We support the struggles of those who are specially oppressed under capitalism—women,

queers, national minorities, etc. We support the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities, including Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. We are internationalists, and hold that workers of one country have more in common with workers of another than with their own nation's capitalist class. We seek to link struggles across national boundaries, and to build an international revolutionary movement that will facilitate the sharing of experiences and political lessons. That is why we maintain fraternal relations with the Fourth International

Recognizing the divisions that exist on the left and within the workers' movement, we seek to form united front type organizations around specific issues where various groups have agreement. In this way we seek to maximize our impact and demonstrate the power and effectiveness of mass action.

Socialist Action believes that the capitalist state and its institutions are instruments of the ruling class, and that therefore they cannot be used as tools of the working class but have to be smashed. That is why we fight for revolution, instead of seeking to merely reform or work within the system. When we fight for specific reforms, we do so with the understanding that in the final analysis real social change can only come about with the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of a workers' government, and the fight for socialism.

SOCIALIST ACTION Closing news date: April 30, 2015
Editor: Michael Schreiber **Canada Editor: Barry Weisleder**

Socialist Action (ISSN 0747-4237) is published monthly by Socialist Action Publishing Association, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Socialist Action, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. RATES: For one year (12 issues, 1st-class mail): U.S., Canada, Mexico — \$20. All other countries — \$30. Money orders and checks should be in U.S. dollars.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of Socialist Action. These are expressed in editorials. Socialist Action is edited, designed, and laid out entirely by volunteer labor.



For info about Socialist Action and how to join: Socialist Action National Office, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610, (510) 268-9429, socialistaction@lmi.net

Socialist Action newspaper editorial offices: socialistactionnews@yahoo.com
Website: www.socialistaction.org

WHERE TO FIND US

- ASHLAND, Ore.: damonjure@earthlink.net
- CHICAGO: P.O. Box 578428
Chicago, IL 60657,
chisocialistaction@yahoo.com
- CONNECTICUT: (860) 478-5300
- DULUTH, MINN.:
adamritscher@yahoo.com.
www.thenorthernworker.blogspot.com
- KANSAS CITY: kcsa@workernet.org
(816) 221-3638
- LOUISVILLE, KY: redlotus51@yahoo.com.
(502) 451-2193
- MADISON, Wis.:
Northlandiguana@gmail.com
- MINNEAPOLIS/St. PAUL: (612) 802-1482, socialistaction@visi.com
- NEW YORK CITY: (212) 781-5157
- PHILADELPHIA:
philly.socialistaction@gmail.com

- PORTLAND, ORE.: (503) 233-1629
gary1917@aol.com
- PROVIDENCE: ADGAGNERI@GMAIL.COM
(401) 592-5385
- SALEM, ORE.: ANNMONTAGUE@COMCAST.NET
- SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA:
P.O. Box 10328, OAKLAND, CA 94610
(510) 268-9429, sfsocialistaction@gmail.com
- WASHINGTON, DC:
christopher.towne@gmail.com,
(202) 286-5493

SOCIALIST ACTION CANADA

NATIONAL OFFICE
526 Roxton Road, Toronto,
Ont. M6G 3R4, (416) 535-8779
<http://socialistaction.ca/>

Subscribe to Socialist Action

Special offer for new readers:
\$5 for 6 months / \$10 for 12 months

Regular rates: — \$10 / six months — \$20 / 12 months — \$37 / two years

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ E-mail _____

— I want to join the Socialist Action Newspaper Supporters Club.
I enclose an extra contribution of: — \$100 — \$200 — Other

Clip and mail to: Socialist Action newspaper, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610.

By JOHANNA FERNANDEZ
and HEIDI BOGHOSIAN

Political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal nearly died—and remains in grave danger—from a diabetic condition that the Pennsylvania prison system failed to diagnose in his decades behind bars. He is not alone. “The Bureau of Justice reported some 40% of prisoners and jail inmates in 2011-2012 reporting chronic medical condition such as asthma, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure—and diabetes.”

“Mumia’s condition highlights the systemic neglect and abuse of prisoners in our nation’s vast and ever growing system of mass incarceration.”

What does it mean for hundreds of thousands of prisoners in the United States when the world’s most famous prisoner faces possible death from medical neglect in a Pennsylvania prison? Often called the “Voice of the Voiceless” for his countless publications and broadcasts revealing the injustices of the criminal justice system, Mumia Abu-Jamal has seen his health slip away in a matter of months.

Thousands of supporters worldwide and frequent visitors could not stop the burning black lesions that covered his entire body or the profound fatigue that, since January, has sucked him into trance-like sleeps, or guards who punished him with denial of calls, visitors, and yard for sleeping through morning alarms and the morning count. What does it say that on March 30, Mumia Abu-Jamal fell unconscious with uncontrolled—and undiagnosed—diabetes?

Mumia’s condition highlights the systemic neglect and abuse of prisoners in our nation’s vast and ever growing system of mass incarceration. A daily diet high in carbohydrates, salt, and sugar has left an estimated 80,000 suffering from diabetes. Compounding the inadequate nutrition is the sub-par medical care provided by a vast for-profit provider that reaps some \$1.5 billion a year in profits from prison health-care contracts. Using an HMO model that puts cost-cutting above all, Corizon Correctional Health-care has paid millions in legal settlements over inadequate or bungled treatment.

Not surprisingly, the Bureau of Justice reported some 40% of prisoners and jail inmates in 2011-2012 reporting chronic medical condition such as asthma, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure—and diabetes.

For three days, Mumia received treatment at the ICU of a nearby medical clinic. His blood sugar and sodium level counts were catastrophically high at 779 and 168, respectively. The last time Mumia was hospitalized was on Dec. 9, 1981, the night of the killing of Officer Daniel Faulkner, for which Mumia was convicted in a trial fraught with constitutional violations.

That same night Mumia was shot and beaten within an inch of his life by police. When he was finally taken to the hospital in a paddy wagon, he was thrown by police onto the floor of the emergency room entrance. After surgery, he woke to a police officer stomping on his urine bag.

Mumia remains in grave danger

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



Mumia now languishes in the prison infirmary facing new assaults—the cut-rate, sub-par care and inadequate nutrition that contributed to his earlier health decline and crisis. With a still abnormally high glucose level, hard-crusted skin covering his body, and a dramatic weight lost of over 50 pounds, he is in dire need of the attention of specialists in both endocrinology and dermatology, and healthful food.

As Mumia’s health deteriorates, he would want us to draw attention not only to his plight but the plight of all this nation’s prisoners who receive a malnourishing diet and sub-standard health care at the hands

of rapacious private contractors. The race and class dimensions of this crisis disprove the notion that race doesn’t matter in the age of a Black president. The majority of U.S. prisoners are African American and Latino males in their childbearing years, imprisoned in a system that regularly violates their fundamental human rights and ravages their health.

Mumia would want us to use his suffering to demonstrate that those relegated to the lowest strata of our society—imprisoned Black, Brown, and poor—suffer not only their sentences but illness and death neglect. ■

Take action!

From Prison Radio, April 24

Mumia Abu-Jamal was seen today by his wife, and his condition has worsened. We are asking everyone to call the prison.

His condition: He is extremely swollen in his neck, chest, legs, and his skin is worse than ever, with open sores. He was not in a wheelchair, but can only take baby steps. He is very weak. He was nodding off during the visit. He was not able to eat; he was fed with a spoon. These are symptoms that could be associated with hyper glucose levels, diabetic shock, diabetic coma, and with kidney stress and failure.

Demand that Mumia Abu-Jamal see a doctor now. Demand that the prison officials call his wife Wadiya Jamal and his lawyer Bret Grote immediately.

John Kerestes, Superintendent
SCI Mahanoy: 570-773-2158 x8102 |
570-783-2008 Fax | 301 Morea Road,
Frackville PA 17932

Tom Wolf, PA Gvrnr: 717-787-
2500 | governor@PA.gov | 508 Main
Capitol Building, Harrisburg PA
17120

John Wetzel, PA DOC: 717-
728-4109 | 717-728-4178 Fax |
ra-contactdoc@poc.gov | 1920
Technology Pkwy, Mechanicsburg
PA 17050

Susan McNaughton, DOC Press
secretary 717-728-4025. PA Doc
smcnaughton@pa.gov.

Malcolm X: His relevance to today’s struggle

By ERA BURKE

The following remarks by Socialist Action member Era Burke were presented at an April 24 Bay Area Socialist Action public forum at the Niebyl Proctor Library in Oakland, Calif., entitled, “Revolutionaries past and present: Their relevance today from Malcolm X, on the 50th anniversary of his murder, to Mumia Abu-Jamal, on his 61st (April 24) birthday, and for his life and freedom now!”

Burke was joined by Socialist Action members and supporters Daniel Delaine Ally, Vanessa Andrews, and Jeff Mackler.

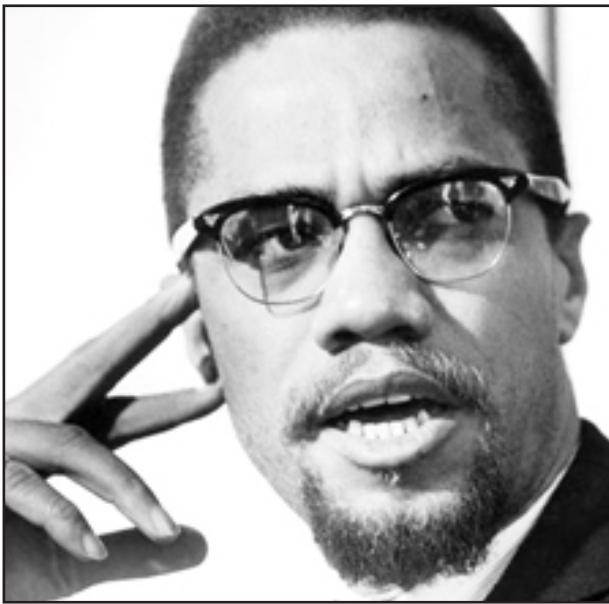
Let’s start off with a number: 368. That is the number of people the police have killed this year.

Another figure: 36. That is the number of police-caused deaths this month alone, nationwide. Let’s go even smaller: 8. The number of hours on average that pass between police killings.

Every eight hours—36 deaths in 24 days. By late April, more deaths than there are days in a year. Think about that.

If the eight-hour trend remains—that is, if the number of hours between police killings does not decrease—we are on track to have 2950 deaths by the end of 2015. That is nearly 3000 people!

So what are we doing about it? Let’s look from the top down. Our president has been silent on the issue. Congress has been silent on the issue. What about the politicians who will spend millions, if not billions, to try and convince you to put a little checkmark by their name at the polls next year? Also silent.



Why? Because helping the poor and marginalized is not in their best interests.

The police have become militarized over the last several decades. Weapons and equipment no longer used on the battlefields of U.S. imperialism are being sold to our city police forces at wholesale, thanks to the military industrial complex.

The military industrial complex can’t sell weapons to police officers if they aren’t able to use them on someone.

So what are we doing about it?

Fifty-one years ago Malcolm X was asked for his thoughts on capitalism, the need for radical political behavior, and what he called “a showdown between economic systems.” He replied: “I believe there will ultimately be a cash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing.”

What we see are the echoes of that conflict. Ferguson and Black Lives Matter have become symbols not only of death at police hands, but examples of what may happen if you find yourself on the wrong side of the power of our police state.

So what are we doing about it?

We cannot depend on the representatives of the power structure that got us here to risk their necks for the marginalized. You only need to look at any court case involving these deaths to see that conviction, at any level, is the exception.

Killing Black people, poor people, marginalized people? That is the rule.

“You get your freedom by letting your enemy know that you’ll do anything to get your freedom.” Malcolm said that as well.

What does that mean? According to Malcolm, it meant radical thinking and action. “They’ll call you an extremist, or subversive, or seditious, or a radical. But when you stay radical long enough, and get enough people to be like you, you’ll get your freedom.”

So what are we doing about it?

We have to be there, to be heard. We have to stand, march, chant. We have to compel the system to change by being the ones who change it ourselves. Because business as usual is killing us. ■



(Left) Destruction near Dammaj, northern Yemen.

Mohammed Mori government in the 2013 U.S.-backed military coup.

The Obama administration recently sent its own armada to enforce the blockade of Yemen, lest the Iranians seek to deliver food and other non-military aid to the now-starving Yemeni people. Iranian ships carrying food and medical supplies have been prevented from doing so.

White House communications director Jen Psaki, aping the Saudi monarch's line that their objective is to defend their own "national security" interests, stated on April 22, "They [the Saudis] are worried about their own security. And of course, we've supported them with their actions." In fact, the U.S. has provided virtually all the intelligence and logistical support for the Saudi bombing.

Both the U.S. and Saudi Arabian military chiefs initially believed that bombing the Houthi rebels to smithereens, reducing the nation to near-starvation and threatening a massive ground invasion would bring the Houthi rebels, long alienated from the political process and victims of the massive corruption of the Hadi government, to the bargaining table. But the U.S. ruling class has once again miscalculated their capacity to impose "regime change" by mere force of terror bombing and military intervention.

Thus, Psaki felt compelled to add to her proclamation of support to the Saudi bombing, "But, again, we're trying to redirect this to a political discussion here." The Houthis, in turn, have agreed to UN-sponsored negotiations on the condition that all bombing raids and the naval blockade are halted.

Once again, U.S. imperialism and its clients, in this instance, the Saudi oil-monarch government, have sought to undertake whatever is required to advance their economic and political interests. For both, the alliance, overt or covert, with terrorist forces, whether they be ISIS or al-Qaeda, is subordinate to imperialism's greater objective—to dominate the world economy in the interest of the elite ruling class in power, no matter the cost in human lives and environmental destruction.

For U.S. antiwar and social justice activists, the fight to end imperialist intervention in the Middle East and everywhere else is a moral and political imperative. The right of oppressed nations to self-determination, free from all colonial and neo-colonial domination, is central to any effective antiwar strategy.

No imperialist power or their clients, or the imperialist-dominated United Nations, has any right to negotiate the future of an oppressed people. The demand "U.S. Out Now!" must be primary to any movement that fights for the right of the poor people of the world to decide their own destiny. ■

U.S. backs Saudi bombing of Yemen — despite casualties

By PAT LYONS

"Once your clients have a quasi-independent military capacity, you lose some control over them," said Gregory Gause III, a military specialist at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A and M University.

Gause was referring to the saturation bombing campaign of Yemen by Saudi Arabia and its "coalition of the willing" Gulf-state monarchies. United Nations reports document that more than 1000 Yemenis have been killed to date and another 300,000 displaced in what all on-the-scene relief workers, at least those who have not been evacuated, describe as yet another humanitarian catastrophe. This one is backed to the hilt by the United States—as are virtually all of the similar assaults in the Middle East.

The Saudi intervention began on March 25 against the tribal-based Houthi rebels, a Shiite-based grouping who deposed their Saudi-imposed dictator, Abdu Rabbu Monsour Hadi, and proceeded to take over close to the entire country.

Although the Saudis were compelled to state on April 21 that the bombing had ceased, it continued with abandon the following day and thereafter. But

for public consumption, the Saudi propaganda machine politely renamed their terror bombing "Renewal of Hope" as opposed to the original "Determination Storm," which conjured up the image of the 1991 U.S. slaughter in Iraq, "Desert Storm."

The Saudi oil dynasty initially projected sending 150,000 Arab oil-monarch troops to re-impose Hadi rule, but after three weeks of widely condemned horror, including the bombing of civilian refugee camps, public buildings, schools, and the like, the Houthis remained essentially in control of the entire nation, minus small areas now occupied by al-Qaeda terrorists.

Al-Qaeda proclaims, along with the Saudis, that the Houthis received major military aid from Iran. Yet not a single source to date has confirmed any Iranian military support. The Houthis received arms that were turned over to them by the defecting Yemeni army, whose ranks almost totally abandoned the Hadi dictatorship—although many troops are loyal to the previous dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Yemen has been subjected to a total naval embargo, enforced by the armadas of its Gulf Cooperation Council (oil monarchies) allies along with the war ships of the Egyptian dictatorship, who the Saudis previously supported when General Abdel Sisi ousted the elected

Imperialism's terrorist war in Syria

By JEFF MACKLER

U.S. imperialism's selective "War on Terrorism" excludes some terrorists that the Obama administration finds more than suitable allies in its effort to bring down the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria.

On April 25, a combination of these "rebels" captured the city of Jisr al-Shoughour, the provincial capital and second largest city of Idlib province in northeast Syria. The previous month, al-Qaeda's Syrian-based Nursa Front, an organization designated as terrorist by the U.S. government, occupied other parts of Idlib.

The Nursa front was joined in this effort by the Islamist "hardline" group, Ahrar al-Sham, and the U.S.-funded and armed "secular" Free Syrian Army (FSA). The latter has been deemed by the U.S. military as a rather ineffective force that more often than not "loses" its U.S.-provided weapons to al-Qaeda and/or Islamic State (ISIS) groups—who do the lion's share of the fighting.

To date all Obama administration efforts to lend a semblance of secular credibility to the Free Syrian Army, via countless conferences overseen by Secretary of State John Kerry in Geneva and elsewhere, have come to naught. Thus, the FSA, which alternately fights alongside the U.S. and Egyptian-sponsored terrorist groups or skirmishes against them, has little or no weight in Syria itself.

ISIS itself, largely a creation of the Saudi Arabian monarchy and otherwise engaged in eastern Syria and Iraq, was not a

party to the recent victories in Idlib. ISIS, yesterday's U.S. secret weapon in Syria, today seeks to remove the newest U.S.-installed government of Haider as-Abadi in Iraq. Yesterday's U.S. rabid dog has today turned to bite the master hand that fed it, albeit with the go-ahead and support of the Saudi oil monarchs.

Observers close to the scene were quick to note that the "key" to the recent "rebel" victories was a combination of "captured anti-tank missiles" (presumably U.S. supplied to the FSA) and the free flow of arms and terrorists through the Turkish border. This flow has been facilitated by the recent rapprochement between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, with the latter monarchy, emboldened by its U.S.-supported saturation bombing of Yemen, feeling less inclined to hide the massive financial and military aid that it provides to ISIS.

Indeed, the Saudi oil barons expressed concern that last month's U.S.-saturation bombing of ISIS forces in Tikrit, Iraq, not take too devastating a toll on its ISIS protégés.

The imperialist-funded and U.S.-Saudi-abetted terrorist military advance in Syria brings these forces closer to Syria's coastal cities, a current stronghold of the Syrian government. The Syrian press agency *Sana* reported that Syrian government forces were "facing the terrorist groups flowing in huge numbers through the Turkish border."

The April 26 *New York Times* reported, "Saudi Arabia and Turkey, longtime supporters of the uprising against Mr. Assad, are prepared to step up aid to insurgents

with or without American support. Saudi Arabia has flexed its muscles lately in the region, most notably with its air war in Yemen to counteract what it sees as dangerous steps toward reconciliation with Iran, its main rival, and the United States."

What began four years ago in the initial stages of the Arab Spring as a popular uprising—undoubtedly with the clandestine encouragement of U.S.-funded NGOs—against the Assad regime's lack of democracy and corruption, and its imposition of neoliberal austerity measures, rapidly devolved into an imperialist assault on Syria with the "regime change" intention of replacing Assad with a more U.S.-friendly capitalist government.

Today, those radical or socialist forces that participated in the earliest anti-Assad mobilizations, which were brutally crushed by Assad, have no significant presence in Syria. We know of no independent forces with sizable social weight

in the country. The construction of a revolutionary socialist party remains a critical, although long-term, perspective and necessity.

The initial short-lived rising of oppressed Syrian peasants and some elements in the working class has today devolved into a U.S. and allied-led reactionary effort, employing even the most ardent terrorist groups, who off and on ally with imperialism to achieve their own anti-social ends, to further globalize U.S. imperialism's reach and control of the people and resources of the region.

Without equivocation, the central responsibility of all antiwar and social justice organizations is to demand and mobilize for the immediate and total end to all U.S. and allied intervention in Syria and to fully support the right to self-determination of the Syria people.

The defeat of imperialist intervention is the prerequisite for the Syrian masses to organize their own independent class-struggle forces for the liberation of their nation. ■

Going to the Left Forum? Don't miss the two panels sponsored by Socialist Action Books!

• **The Unfinished Revolution: South Africa Today:** Patrick Bond, professor at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa; Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, *Black Agenda Report*; Marty Goodman, Socialist Action

• **The Fight Against Austerity in Europe and the United States:** Manos Soufoglio, Organization of Communist Internationalists-Spartacus (Greece); Stan Meunier, New Anti-capitalist Party youth organizer (France); Christine Marie, Socialist Action (U.S.); Christina Palliou, OKDE-Spartacus (Greece).

The Left Forum will take place on the May 29-31 weekend at the John Jay Law Center in Manhattan. For a full schedule: www.leftforum.org.

... Massive protest by low-wage workers

(continued from page 1)

and workers across industries, and ended with a raucous finale in Midtown Manhattan, where an estimated 10,000 construction workers took the streets against the exertions of both police and union leaders ... warehouse workers at a UPS facility in Canarsie hosted their own rally with state and city elected officials to demand a \$15 minimum wage.

“Workers say the Brooklyn loading facility is operated almost entirely by part-timers who earn a starting wage of \$10 an hour.”

The *Chicago Tribune* centered on actions in support of adjunct college faculty: “The Fight for \$15 campaign is rallying to unionize an estimated 8,000 part-time professors in the Chicago area, aiming to expand its initial focus on fast-food workers at chains such as McDonald’s and Burger King, to child care, janitors and other service-sector employees.” A *Socialist Action* correspondent reported that about 5000 participated.

From the *Los Angeles Times*: “Nearly 1,000 fast-food workers, Walmart employees and union members in Los Angeles joined nationwide protests Wednesday calling for a \$15 minimum wage. The protest, which also called for unionizing fast-food workers, started in front of a McDonald’s on W. 28th and Figueroa streets and ended at USC.

“Protesters chanted ‘We want 15’ or ‘Sí se puede’ (Yes we can) to the beat of drums and the music of a full band that played on a truck parked outside the McDonald’s. Many protesters wore brightly colored union T-shirts, and three huge balloons with ‘\$15’ or ‘#fightfor15’ drifted above the crowd.”

Minnesota Public Radio said, “Workers and other supporters of a minimum \$15 hourly wage, paid sick days and other benefits staged protests across the Twin Cities Wednesday, including at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and University of Minnesota. The U event drew an estimated 1,000 people.” Barb Kucera in *Workday Minnesota* described how the action evolved into massive, peaceful civil disobedience:

“At age 17, Keonna Laury attends high school—and works 33 hours a week at Burger King to help support her family of seven. Some nights she does not get home until after midnight, then must do her homework before arising early for school. She earns \$9.25 an hour and has no sick time or other benefits. When she came down with the flu, ‘They told me to come to work or get someone else to take my shift—or I was fired.’ On Wednesday, Laury was on the back of a pickup truck blocking the main intersection in the Dinkytown neighborhood of Minneapolis during the evening rush hour, telling her story to a huge crowd during a national day of protest.

“The demonstrators, who had rallied on the University of Minnesota campus before marching to Dinkytown, chanted and carried signs calling for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage and paid sick leave.”

In my home town of Kansas City, there was an ambitious schedule of action starting at 6 a.m. and ranging well into the night, including strikes at McDonald’s properties, campus protests, a press conference and a mass rally followed by a march. The 5 p.m. rally in Theis Park was the main unifying event. Steady streams of folks getting off work, or picking up kids from child care, were able to grab donated hamburgers or grilled vegetables as they found a spot on the grass of the giant amphitheater.

I estimate there were 600-700 on hand, with people still arriving even at the end. The majority were Fast Food workers and their families, mostly African American and Latino. But at least



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

40 percent were workers and students showing solidarity, many organized by unions and Jobs with Justice. Labor Party Advocates was visible with their signature banner and received many thumbs-up.

At the conclusion, most lined up for a march to the University of Missouri Kansas City campus, where they were welcomed by a contingent of UMKC students as well as adjunct professors explaining why they were getting on board with the Fight for 15.

The 15now.org website featured a round up of reports of April 15 actions in many other cities, including Boston, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Portland, Ore.

15 and a Union! 15 Now!

These two slogans arise from different perspectives of complimentary movements sharing the same goal for a new wage floor. The testimony of the working poor makes clear they suffer not only from unconscionable low pay; they also face terrible working conditions, disrespectful and arbitrary treatment from management—and a high rate of on the job injuries. They need a union to effectively address those issues in addition to winning 15.

The 15 Now movement focuses on establishing city and state minimum wage laws with a floor of 15 for all workers, organized or not. As the UPS workers in Brooklyn made clear, there are union members doing hard work for highly profitable corporations for as little as \$10 an hour.

15 Now came out of successful struggles in SeaTac and Seattle in 2013-14. It is a coalition of union and community groups as well as many individual activists. Socialists have played an important role there, especially after the election of Kshama Sawant of the Socialist Alternative party to the Seattle City Council.

The new Seattle minimum means substantial wage increases for 100,000 workers in that city. Since that victory, 15 Now has established 23 state or local chapters around the country. Recently, San Francisco became the third city to pass a 15 minimum. Both the “15 and a Union” message promoted by organized labor and the coalition effort of 15 Now for minimum wage laws deserve our support.

Will history repeat itself?

U.S. unions went through their greatest period of membership growth and bargaining breakthroughs during the Great Depression, which was marked by mass unemployment. The union successes under such harsh conditions were only possible because insurgent unions came to be recognized as a broader social movement, advancing

the interests of the entire working class.

The newly formed CIO especially went after the low-paid, unskilled factory workers who had been ignored by AFL craft unions in basic industries—building from scratch what became the United Auto Workers, United Steel Workers, United Electrical Workers, United Packinghouse Workers, and others. They were assisted by generous financial support from one of the oldest unions—the United Mine Workers—who had the vision to understand that organized labor had to grow to remain viable.

All talk about the de-industrialization of America is bogus. U.S. manufacturing *production* is second to none. But technology has greatly reduced manufacturing *employment*, and industrial union membership has plummeted. Food and Retail are the dominant sectors of job growth today. Walmart is the biggest private sector employer in the USA—and the whole world. More workers toil under the Golden Arches of McDonald’s in this country than are covered by union contracts at General Motors, Ford, Fiat-Chrysler, General Electric and Boeing combined.

With much more vision and honesty than her predecessor, SEIU president Mary Kay Henry has staked her repu-

tation and the union’s resources on organizing today’s equivalent of Depression-era factory hands—again so long neglected by mainstream unions. Reports filed with the Labor Department indicate SEIU has spent \$25 million so far on the Fight for Fifteen.

SEIU has also reached out to natural allies in civil rights, women’s rights, immigrant worker rights, and student activist groups, giving the Fight for Fifteen the character of a movement for social justice. The *Guardian* article mentioned above quotes Gary Chaison, a professor of industrial relations at Clark University: “In the Fight for \$15, unions are helping to organize on a community basis a group of workers who are on the fringe of the economy. It’s not about union members protecting themselves. It’s about moving other people up. This is the whole civil rights movement all over again.”

To be sure, sister Henry is not a paragon. SEIU is still politically devoted to the Democrats—a concealed lethal weapon of boss rule. But John L Lewis, who used the Miners union to enable the CIO, was no saint either. It’s still early days, but the Fight for 15 is the most promising front for our side in the class war being waged against us today. ■

Enforcing the \$15 wage in Seattle

By ANN MONTAGUE

A look at Washington State illustrates that the working-class struggle for the \$15 minimum wage requires an ongoing independent movement to make sure it is fully implemented.

The victory of Referendum 1 in the city of SeaTac established a \$15 minimum wage. Suddenly, the Seattle-Tacoma Airport said that they are not part of the city of SeaTac because they are under the jurisdiction of the Port of Seattle. However, the budget document of the city states, “The Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, operated by the Port of Seattle, is located completely within the City’s borders.

On April 1, the first stage of the implementation process for the \$15 minimum wage in Seattle is beginning, and all of a sudden, the University of Washington in Seattle is claiming exemption from the new law. A spokesperson for the university stated that because they are a state institution, they are excluded from the municipal wage law. They

even suggested that the cost of increasing the wages of their low-wage workers would be put on the students.

Students, workers, and minimum-wage activists are fighting back. They organized a march and rally demanding that workers and students be paid a living wage. At the rally they produced a list that was 15 feet long with all the names of administrators who earn over \$150,000 a year. The march stopped at a number of low-wage workplaces on campus and informed them of the university’s decision to exclude them from the new minimum wage law.

At the end of the march, socialist Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant, who had championed the passage of the \$15 minimum wage, addressed the crowd: “Our victory is incomplete if we don’t take everyone with us!” She praised the coalition of students and workers for bringing attention to the administration’s decision and encouraged them to keep up the pressure until all UW workers get the raise they deserve. ■

GMOs and the myth of civil society

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



(Left) The NGO-sponsored march in New York City on Sept. 21 lacked a platform to present real alternatives to the fossil-fuel-based economy.

or the independent organizations of the oppressed and exploited working and unemployed masses, has all but been extinguished in the United States, and largely throughout the world. In its place today we are witness to an unprecedented morass of government or corporate-funded NGOs, which range from direct front groups for the CIA, NSA, the U.S. State Department, the military establishment, the world's major corporations, and the U.S. government itself, to an infinite number of social justice, civil liberties, environmental defense, and other organizations.

All are financed by the government or corporations, or their associated "charitable" foundations, for the purpose of advancing *corporate interests* as opposed to those of civil society.

On the government end, untold billions are gifted to "civil society" organizations around the world that specialize in promoting the overthrow of governments seen as unfriendly to U.S. entrepreneurs, as was the case with the Ukraine, where U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Victoria Nuland declared, "Since the declaration of Ukrainian independence in 1991, the United States supported the Ukrainians in the development of democratic institutions and skills in promoting civil society and a good form of government. ... We have invested more than \$5 billion to help Ukraine to achieve these and other goals."

Among the goals was the U.S.-backing of fascist and NGO-mobilized "mass protests" aimed at establishing U.S. and European Union corporate control over Ukraine's vast resources. The "democratic institutions" that Nuland later hailed consisted of a coup regime that included top government ministers of the fascist Svoboda and Right Sector parties, whose militias, today being trained by U.S. troops on the ground, are employed to rain death and destruction on Ukraine's eastern and southern regions.

The promotion of "entrepreneurship" in the Ukraine, as in every other nation, centers on promoting the right of the U.S. corporate elite to extract profits by any means necessary. In the case of Ukraine, the world's largest reservoir of shale oil and gas, the "democratic" goal is to frack eastern Ukraine and simultaneously substitute U.S. oil corporations for Russian as the chief suppliers of Europe's fossil fuels.

This same scenario is endlessly repeated, with U.S.-funded NGOs mobilizing "mass demonstrations" to challenge and overthrow any regime seen as impeding U.S. investment and control—from the "Color Revolutions" of the 1990s to the "mass" middle-class protests in Venezuela today.

It is not "democracy" that motivates the U.S. in Venezuela, among the world's major fossil fuel reservoirs, but the U.S. corporate sequestration of these resources. Need we remind our readers that the U.S. was the first, if not *only* nation that recognized, and likely helped organize and finance, the 2002 military coup that temporarily removed and imprisoned Venezuela's elected President Hugo Chavez.

Only the most naive participants in radical and progressive movements would not think to question any NGO that receives money from U.S. government or corporate interests. All such funds come with strings attached—sometimes very subtle strings, and sometimes ones that directly link the NGO to corporate interests or government policy.

The case of the Nature Conservancy needs little amplification. Here we have the world's largest environmental NGO, whose stated objective is to buy land to preserve nature in its most spectacular and pristine forms. Yet in at least one instance, in Texas, the Con-

BY JEFF MACKLER

There are 1.5 million government and corporate-funded NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) registered in the United States—all *non-profits* to be sure and all doing good things for civil society everywhere! By definition, and despite their funding sources, they are all "officially" *independent* of government and corporate *control*—and none are allowed to contribute to political parties!

The U.S. government's OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) reported that net government disbursements to NGOs reached \$30 billion in 2013, as compared to \$3 billion in 1970 and \$9 billion in 2000. These figures exclude the countless unofficial billions of dollars granted to NGOs operat-

ing "under the radar" via the CIA, the NSA, the U.S. military, and other such organizations that aim to achieve U.S. objectives by stealth as well as by the direct use of force and violence.

In Panama on April 10, President Obama addressed the Civil Society Forum, held as a sideshow to the concurrent Summit of the Americas conference. The head of state of the greatest imperial power the world has ever known—with 1100 military bases circling the globe—expounded without a blush the merits of "democracy" and "civil society." Obama declared that he admired "the ordinary men and women" and "the dreamers—no matter how humble or poor or seemingly powerless—that are able to change the course of human events."

In truth, however, what is posited as "civil society,"

THE ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM

A Vision for A Brighter Future and How to Get There

Hear **Jeff Mackler**, national secretary of Socialist Action (U.S.)
Stan Meunier, a youth organizer for the Parti Nouveau
Anti-Capitaliste (France)

SOCIALIST ACTION EAST COAST SPEAKING TOUR

• **Philadelphia: Thursday, May 14, 6:30 p.m.** Arch St. Methodist Church, Broad & Arch Sts. With Sharon Gramby-Sobukwe, assoc. professor Eastern University & Tony Monteiro, Black historian and activist. philly.socialistaction@gmail.com

• **Hartford, Conn: Friday, May 15, 7 p.m.** The Carriage House, 360 Farmington Ave. <https://www.facebook.com/events/843972089024595/> e-mail VoteSocialistAction@gmail.com

• **New York City: Tuesday, May 19, 6:30 p.m.** Manhattan Theatre Club, 311 W. 43rd St. (212) 781-5157

(continued on page 8)

U.S. set back at Panama Summit

By CLAUDIO KATZ

Mainstream media presented the Panama Summit as if it were the beginning of a new era of cooperation. They pondered the end of the Cold War and painted Obama as a model of detente, as opposed to the hawkish Maduro. They also contrasted the reintegration of Cuba in the region to the isolation of Venezuela and evaluated the encounter as another diplomatic success for the United States. This same balance sheet was presented both before and after the conclave, as if the meeting itself had not made any relevant contribution.

But this narrative failed to recognize that 33 of the 35 representatives present at the meeting rejected the accusation that Venezuela was a “threat to U.S. security.” They all demanded the repeal of the executive order, which blocked goods and restricted visas for citizens of that country. This demand was put forth in emphatic discussions that no friend of imperialism contradicted. Even Obama himself preferred to withdraw from the plenary in order to avoid questioning. The United States should have postponed its agenda in such a negative setting.

The script and the reality

Obama needed to win the struggle unleashed by the decree against Venezuela in order to retake the initiative of imperial hegemony. The consolidation of this domination was the initial objective of the first Summit (Miami-1994) and the previous launch of the ALCA (Quebec-2001). The shipwreck of this project in Mar del Plata (2005) determined the isolation of the giant of the North in the last summit (Cartagena-2012). The creation of new organizations without a U.S. presence (UNASUR-2008 and CELAC-2011) emphasized this retreat and encouraged the recognition of Cuba.

After 53 years David has finally beaten Goliath. The Empire could not break the Cuban Revolution, and Obama was forced to liberate the five fighters [the “Cuban Five”] he had held captive. Raul Castro initiated the country’s return to presidential meetings with a categorical call for the immediate repeal of the order against Venezuela.

All the theories that have counterposed Castro’s “new diplomatic realism” against Maduro’s “outmoded discursive radicalism” ignore the concerted leadership that both governments have assumed in the battle against the Yankee decree. The unanimity was accompanied by strong speeches from other leaders.

None of the rightist presidents (Colombia, Peru, Paraguay) were able to sustain the attack against Venezuela. Even the small Caribbean countries that Obama visited before the meeting rejected being stomped on by the U.S. State Department. The same occurred with Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, which maintain great distance from the Bolivarian process....

All the figures of the anti-Chavez coup mentality arrived in Panama. They made a lot of noise, but had little impact on the Summit. They have become weak because of the failure of the last disturbance, and they were not able to respond with protests against the detention of the conspirators Leopoldo Lopez and Antonio Ledezma.

The leaders of the Cuban counterrevolution also arrived en masse from Miami, wearing their new disguises as “representatives of civil society.” With this makeup, they restarted their project to restore the status of the island as a casino, brothel, or link to the drug trade.

The delegation of gusanos, including the murderer of Che, tested out all kinds of provocations. They promoted political clamoring, shouting matches in front of embassies, interruptions during press conferences, and conflicts with the guards. But they were not able to alter the political climate of the Summit....

Attitudes and arguments

The contrast of projects that flourished in the Summit was signaled by a contrast of attitudes. Obama disembarked in Panama with a great show of planes, helicopters, and armored vehicles. This demonstration was out of proportion to the actual security needs of the politician. It only served to remind us that the destructive potential of imperialism is not a Hollywood fiction.

In contrast, Maduro immediately made his way to the working-class neighborhood of Chorrillos, to pay homage to the victims of the last invasion by the U.S. Marines (1989). He remembered the overthrow of a dictator who was appointed by the United States itself and he waved the Panamanian flag in a place that was



After 53 years, David has finally beaten Goliath. The Empire could not break the Cuban Revolution, and Obama was forced to free the Cuban Five.

forgotten by all the other functionaries.

Evo [Morales] adopted the same conduct during his stay. He proclaimed that “we are better off without the United States embassy” and he refuted the myth of pending U.S. “help” for Cuba. He emphasized that imperialism should compensate the island for the harassment it had imposed for half a century.

The question of the executive order against Venezuela dominated the Summit. Obama himself discounted the portrayal of this country as a “threat” and justified the decree as a bureaucratic formality. But he could not explain the reasons for maintaining this position.

The so-called “danger” of Venezuela is an unsustainable fantasy. The country has not invaded adjoining territories, it does not conduct wars with its neighbors, and it has been an active promoter of peace negotiations in Columbia. But on the contrary, the United States has developed enormous military bases in Peru, Paraguay, Colombia, and the Antilles, controls the seas from its Southern Command in Miami, controls the skies with the latest generation of radar, and nurses the arsenal that the British installed in the Malvinas [Falkland Islands].

Furthermore, the Pentagon shamelessly spies on the diplomats, functionaries, and presidents of the region, intercepts everyone’s e-mails, and keeps surveillance over strategic internet servers. Venezuela has not destabilized any government, while imperialism is the main agent of the parliamentary, judicial and police conflicts and coups of the last few years.

The United States has not renounced its past invasions. Nor has it been “more worried” about the Middle East, China, and Ukraine than about Latin America. The executive order against Venezuela is the first tentative step toward extending its reach [over the region].

The U.S. functionaries justified their aggression with denouncements of human rights violations. But they have not produced proof of any kind. They dictate lessons about democracy while hiding the most recent reports of CIA torture, the continuing use of Guantanamo, and the use of the death penalty in their own country.

The State Department further avoids any comparison between Venezuela and the rightist administrations in the region. No accusation against the Bolivarian government has the same impact as the assassinations in Honduras, the crimes in Mexico, or the persecutions in Colombia and Peru.

The U.S. economic delegation attempted to light up a little tropical Davos in Panama. They proposed that multimillionaires and Wall Street stars take part in

(Above) Obama put on a smile in his meeting with Cuban President Castro (ctr.) but he got little support in his efforts to isolate Venezuela.

the economic forums and presented the slogan of the Summit (“Prosperity with equity”) as a fulfillment of course. Neither did they lack any praise for the transnational companies that exploit the population.

The Yankee experts exalt capitalism while keeping silent about the suffering that this system imposes on all the dispossessed. They counterpose the disadvantages of the “populist” governments to the achievements of the administrations that are guided by the market, without speaking of the precariousness of labor in Peru, the retirement disaster in Chile, or the migrant tragedy in Central America.

The neoliberals showcased Panama as a model of success. They pointed to the skyscrapers that ring the city, while omitting mention of their financing by money laundered by narco-trafficking. They praised the growth of the isthmus, without mentioning the social segmentation and the “informal-sector” work of a population condemned to hard labor in construction and the hotel industry....

The limits of the counteroffensive

The United States attacks Venezuela in order to control the world’s largest oil reserves. This powerful nation actually uses its supply of crude oil from shale to destabilize the Bolivarian process, enabling the price of the fuel to depreciate worldwide.

The United States does not tolerate the extra-regional alliances that Chavez and Maduro arranged. Nor does it accept the will to resist the confiscation of petroleum such as was perpetrated in Iraq or Libya.

The confrontation in turn is trivialized by the analysts that present the conflict between Obama and Maduro as a “conflict of vanities.” They accuse the Venezuelan politician of exaggerating the dispute, in order to distract the population from their immediate needs.

With this type of stupidity they attempt to disguise the U.S. project to control the natural resources of Latin America. The appropriation of Venezuelan petroleum profits is the first step in a general recapturing of land, water, and minerals across the continent.

Obama is pushing this plan forward with a new combination of carrots and sticks. In this way, he is able to negotiate with Cuba without abandoning his belligerence. He will reopen the embassy on the island, but make strong demands [on Cuba] in order to lift the blockade.

The U.S. president took a photograph with Raul Castro, but he also met with the gusanos from Miami. He complemented his friendly rhetoric with the protection of the coup-minded politicians who guide Washington.

This policy repeats the strategy of negotiating with Iran without closing the door to a bombing campaign. The same arm wrestling that Obama pursues with the lobbies of Israel and Saudi Arabia he also extends to the ultra-right Cuban-Americans. His strategy is endorsed by Hillary Clinton and questioned by the Republican candidates for the presidency.

(continued on page 9)

... NGOs & myth of civil society

(continued from page 6)

servancy has used such land to drill for oil!

Then there are the major government-sponsored NGOs whose aims are barely disguised. These include The National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity. The last was previously called AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development), founded in 1962 by the leadership of the AFL-CIO.

AIFLD's central purpose, in direct association with the CIA and U.S. military, was the organization and funding of anti-communist trade unions—or better, company unions—in Latin American and beyond for the purpose of undermining governments whose policies ran contrary to U.S. corporate interests. So heinous were AIFLD's CIA associations and operations that the AFL-CIO's largest affiliate in the 1960s, the United Automobile Workers (UAW), led by Walter Reuther, disaffiliated in disgust.

More often than not, NGOs proclaim their “progressive” civil society objectives in liberal terms and deeds, seemingly fighting to protect the environment, or civil rights and liberties, or helping the poorest of the poor, establishing cooperatives, organizing “micro-loans” in the poorest nations, or defending immigrants. The list of civil society causes is near infinite. Indeed, the April 2015 issue of *Monthly Review* includes a major article, “The Nonprofit Corporate Complex: An Integral Component and Driving Force of Imperialism in the Phase of Monopoly-Finance Capitalism,” that provides valuable insights into capitalism's vision of NGO's today.

Monthly Review author Efe Can Gürcan notes that world capitalism—due to its incapacity to resolve its crises through Keynesian government spending on social programs to create jobs and otherwise mitigate mounting social disintegration on multiple fronts—increasingly uses NGOs to substitute for social programs that previously were in the purview of the state itself. Public education and a myriad of other social services are prime examples—where NGOs like the Gates Foundation, headed by Bill and Melinda Gates, among the richest people on earth, are leading advocates of the privatization of public education through charter schools and related encroachments on what has traditionally been free public education.

Of course, the aim here, as with an increasing number of public services across the country, is to funnel state and federal funds from the public to the private sector—that is, to corporate America—yet another mechanism to boost the flagging profits of a crisis-ridden U.S. and world capitalism.

While NGOs are on the rise in the United States, they are relatively insignificant in their reach as compared with some nations, like Nigeria, Haiti, India, and Bangladesh, where NGOs provide a huge percentage of programs that would otherwise be the responsibility of the state.

Haiti, for example, with literally 10,000 NGOs, the highest density (per capita) in the world, uses NGOs to provide some 90 percent of social services—to the extent that these services exist at all! The case is the same with Nigeria, whose social infrastructure is virtually non-existent, whose government is notoriously corrupt, and whose vast oil and other resources are there for the imperialist taking. NGOs there serve to provide only the thinnest veneer of a “civil society;” the charitable NGO expenditures are less than a pittance as compared to the billions of dollars extracted in profits.

In the U.S., a central focus of “civil society” NGOs is to direct into reformist channels, and especially into the Democratic Party, the growing social discontent at capitalism's increasing inability to provide a decent life for ever more millions of people. Indeed, the Democratic Party, the institution that increasing numbers of radicalizing activists call “the graveyard of social movements,” serves a vital social function for capitalism.

While most political-activist NGOs espouse liberal and seemingly progressive values and objectives—otherwise they would not be at all useful to help maintain the capitalist status quo—all operate via an unwritten code of conduct. They all offer “solutions” to social crises based on the capitalist market—on



License to Intervene & Destabilize

what they consider “realistic” market adjustments to the capitalist corporations and the system itself. In some cases, these are little more than what the corporations themselves propose or what their representatives in the Democratic Party, almost always in collaboration with their Republican partners, meekly offer up in legislative form.

While NGOs are legally barred from *formally* supporting any political party, the great majority of them have found innumerable ways to mobilize and garner support for Democrats via focusing their fire on the “greater evil” Republicans” or by pressing the proposed legislation offered by Democrats, etc. The NGOs outward appearance of “neutrality” barely masks their objectives—the election to office of the “lesser evil” Democrats.

Of course, the Republicans have their NGOs as well—some almost indistinguishable from the Democrats’ and others aimed at producing the “think-tank” populist ideologies of conservatives or the far right. The liberal-minded ideology “research” factories established to prettify capitalist plunder, similarly “discover” a less abrasive terminology that nevertheless aims to achieve the same objectives.

Here, we are compelled to note that NGOs are at no loss in finding willing citizens to head or otherwise seek employment in their operations, write their grant applications and develop their “mission statements,” the latter designed to ensure that the grantor fully understands that the civil service to be provided and the associated funding requested, in no way conflicts with the *for profit* reason for existence of the corporation itself.

The myriad of NGOs that permeate the social justice scene in the U.S. today usually hire well-educated middle-class college students or college graduates who, more often naively rather than consciously, promote the reform of capitalist evils as the only possible way forward. Revolutionaries who challenge capitalism at its base are rare in these institutions, to say the least.

The operations of the broad ranging NGO organizations that have emerged to challenge fossil fuel-induced global warming provides some important insights. NGOs centrally involved in this growing movement rarely depart from pressing what are deemed “market solutions,” that is, “solutions” that depend on the capitalist government and corporations regulating themselves. The very corporations whose extraction and use of fossil fuels are the central cause of global warming are called upon to improve their functioning.

A prime example is the mass mobilization in New York City on Sept. 21, 2014, of some 400,000 activists opposed to global warming. The NGOs that organized this mammoth outpouring of rage at the present and impending horrors brought on by global warming and the associated climate and environmental crises failed to present a single demand on corporate America to remedy this impending catastrophe.

There was no rally on Sept. 21 where speakers might have educated the assembled activists and pointed them in the direction of organizing an independent mass movement directly focused on the climate crisis perpetrators and demanding “100 Percent Sustainable Energy Now! Nor was there a platform from which speakers might have demanded the nationalization of the polluting corporations under the control of working people, or an immediate and massive effort to achieve a rapid transition from fossil fuel to safe and sustainable energy production.

Indeed, the mass march was led by an assemblage of film stars, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and some dozen Democratic Party elected officials—including New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and former Vice President Al Gore.

We need but note here that the leading climate specialists around the world have observed, tragically, that the UN's 21st Conference of Parties, set for December 2015 in Paris, has no intention of advancing any proposals to thwart the oncoming global climate catastrophe. Bound by the absolute necessity to extract from the earth the trillions-of-dollars worth of known fossil-fuel reserves, no capitalist nation even considers the cost to all humanity.

Thus, NGOs are fully capable of mobilizing mass forces for profoundly needed social change while simultaneously orienting these forces toward solutions within the framework of predatory capitalism, and all too often accepting or promoting “solutions” that are acceptable to the polluters themselves.

While revolutionaries must never fail to actively participate and build these broad mobilizations, they do so with the intention of encountering the best activists and introducing

demands that are critical to organizing the most effective fight to save the planet. Indeed, the fight for a truly independent mass movement based on principled demands that challenge capitalism's rush to doom is the only way forward.

The reformists face a critical contradiction when they seek to mobilize popular sentiment in powerful mass actions. Despite the limitations of their formal demands, if any, and their less than democratic organizational forms, these actions have the unintended effect—for the reformists—of widening the gap between what the masses want and what the government and corporate America can and will deliver.

These mass actions inadvertently contribute to the radicalizing process wherein reformist illusions give way to revolutionary alternatives, but only if conscious revolutionaries struggle to construct truly independent alternatives where decisions on policies are made by the masses themselves as opposed to the tiny groups of paid NGO functionaries.

The same can be said for the mass mobilizations for immigrant and labor rights that we have seen over the past several years. These are almost always organized by reformist forces, including and especially the bankrupt trade-union bureaucracy, who use them to pressure for social reforms on the one hand while delivering the uninitiated to the hands of the Democratic Party on the other.

The AFL-CIO mass march on Washington prior to President Obama's first election victory was a case in point. Of the 40 speakers selected for the podium that day, not one failed to urge a vote for the Democrats to “stop the right.”

NGOs, whether they be the giant and brutal government outfits that exist to “peacefully,” and sometimes not so peacefully, orchestrate “regime change” to suit corporate ends or the millions of others who employ more subtle means to achieve the same corporate ends, function as an integral element in the workings of the capitalist system.

They are, of course, accompanied by all other institutions of the capitalist state, from the three-tiered U.S. governmental system (legislative, executive and judicial) to the military, police, National Security Administration, and related repressive institutions that exist to advance the capitalist status quo. They are aided in this effort by the cacophony of the virtually monopolized corporate-run media, which daily pounds into the heads of the unaware the carefully promoted ideology and rationale employed by a brutal social system to camouflage its dirty deeds and malicious intentions.

NGOs, in all their manifestations, are not unimportant players in the increasingly Truman Show world* that is capitalism today. ■

*From the 1998 movie “The Truman Show”—a counterfeit or imitation world created to achieve social conformity.

By MARTY GOODMAN

Racist attacks in Dominican Republic

Tony Savino / Socialist Action

There is a new wave of racist attacks on Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent inside the Dominican Republic (DR). The latest was the racist expulsion of 300 Haitians and Haitians of Dominican origin in the Ortega community in Moca.

All Haitians in Moca were blamed for the April 8 death of a motorcyclist, Carlos Jose Gomez Nunez, and driven out of town with sticks and clubs by racist goons.

In a widely circulated video of the Moca incident, a Haitian woman is thrown to the ground by racist goons, Haitians are beaten, a young man's dreads are cut by a mob and a home is totally trashed (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGgGmjNJ-IE>).

The violence followed the hanging, KKK style, of a Haitian shoeshine worker, Henry Claude Jean, last Feb. 11 in the midst of a downtown park in Santiago, the DR's second largest city. The same day, a Haitian flag was burned by a group in another part of the city. In response to the hanging, on Feb. 25, 10,000 angry Haitians protested in the Haitian capital of Port au Prince, attacking the DR embassy and other targets.

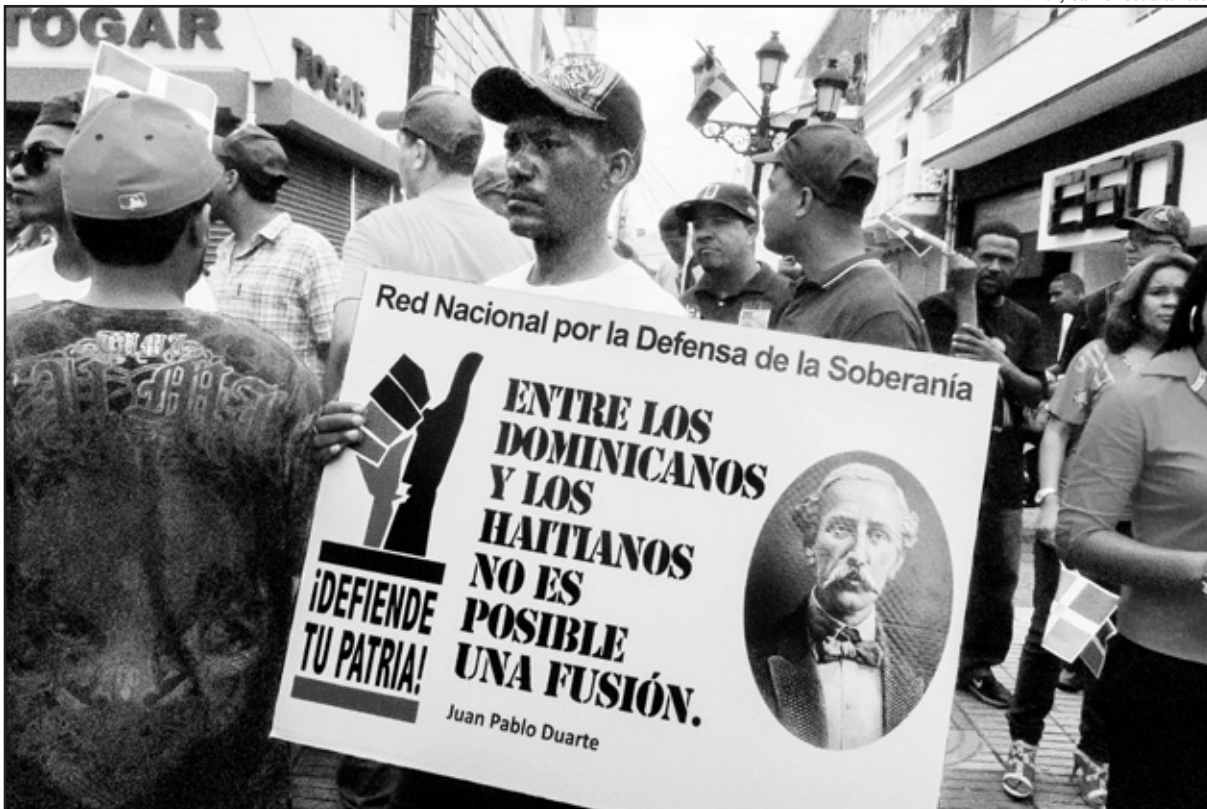
Some 500,000 out of the 9 million population of the DR are considered Haitians or Dominicans of Haitian origin. The Dominican Republic shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with Haiti, situated to its west.

The current wave of racism has been spurred by a series of racist immigration laws and policies that began in 2006. Essentially, immigration rules catch Haitian workers or Dominicans of Haitian origin living in the DR in a deliberate racist Catch 22. Authorities refuse Haitians birth certificates and other documentation, while demanding documents to register as citizens.

A racist Supreme Court decision in 2013 ruled that those without papers—going back as far as 1929!—were “in transit” and stateless. After an international human rights outcry, a 2014 law created a pathway to citizenship. Yet, only 5% registered, others lacked documentation, didn't bother, or perhaps feared retaliation. Amnesty International estimates that as many as 110,000 qualify.

Simply put, Haitians or Dominicans of Haitian origin, face possible mass deportation in June 2015.

Racist violence in the DR has been encouraged by a ruling class that has, for many decades, proclaimed Dominicans superior to Haitians—despite the fact that some 11% of Dominicans are considered Black and that those people are mostly of Haitian origin. Dubbed “anti-haitianismo,” the ideology was first introduced by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961), who was trained by the U.S. Marines during the first U.S. imperialist occupation of the DR (1916-24). He himself was part Haitian. In 1937, Trujillo killed up to 20,000 to 30,000 Haitians in five



days—many with machetes—the most brutal massacre in so short a period in recorded history up until that time.

Trujillo's successor, the U.S.-backed dictator Joaquin Balaguer, a staunch opponent of the Cuban revolution, retained racism as a state ideology. Balaguer, trained by the U.S., fought a nationalist uprising alongside a U.S. Marine invasion in 1965, which drowned Dominicans—and a number of Haitian partisans—in blood. In addition to their deep-seated racism, both Trujillo and Balaguer ruthlessly attacked leftist opponents.

For many years, capitalists and politicians on both sides of the border made big money in the official and unofficial trade in what amounted to Haitian slave labor. Cutting sugar cane, under brutal conditions, was once the single most common occupation for Haitian workers in the DR but construction and service work has gained ground.

Not simply a product of dictatorship, racism is the ideology of Dominican capitalism, dividing the Haitian and the exploited Dominican workers by race. The post-Balaguer “democrats” likewise conducted brutal waves of mass expulsions of Haitians, often accompanied by racist violence and sometimes murder. In the last 20 years or so, 20,000 or more Haitians were expelled from the DR.

(Above) A man in the Dominican Republic holds racist sign: “Defend your homeland! There can be no mixing between Dominicans and Haitians.”

Although the cheap labor they provide is needed by Dominican capitalists, Haitians are scapegoated for the miseries of the impoverished Dominican workers, especially during an economic crisis—just like immigrants in the U.S.!

Both the Haitian and Dominican governments impose an anti-worker austerity economic model sought by the U.S.-dominated World Bank. The Dominican government still enjoys a “most favored trade status,” and receives millions in U.S. military and police equipment and training from Washington's “Merida Initiative,” despite gross human rights violations.

U.S. and international solidarity with the anti-racist struggle in the DR must grow. An anti-imperialist observation of the 50th anniversary of the 1965 U.S. Marine invasion of the DR took place. on April 24 at Word-Up bookstore in New York City. To a full house of mostly young Dominicans and a number of Haitians, speaker after speaker of both nationalities slammed U.S. imperialism and racism in the Dominican Republic. More solidarity activists, anti-racist activists, and U.S. trade unionists need to follow their example! ■

... Summit

(continued from page 7)

Both sides play the same game in the U.S. plutocracy, adapting their politics to the needs of the system. But whichever politician succeeds Obama will be obliged to contend with the same difficulties, in order to recuperate the lost territory in their own backyard.

Internal obstructions

The Summit confirmed the significant level of political autonomy that Latin America has achieved. But this higher level of independence coexists with the stagnation of all the projects for economic integration.

While new seats for regional organizations are inaugurated and a great rhetoric in favor of common action is unfurled, the main initiatives of economic contemplation languish. The ring of energy, the shared infrastructure, the shared management of resources, the coordinated exchange systems, and the funds for monetary stabilization remain simply proposals.

The perpetuation of Latin America's insertion into the world arena as a provider of raw materials is not the exclusive responsibility of the right-wing governments. The same scheme for export specialization, intensive agriculture, open-air mining, and industrial factories can be observed in the administrations of the other side.

Nor is subscribing to free-trade agree-

ments the patrimony of the neoliberal presidents alone. The government of Ecuador negotiated the same type of agreement with Europe, and Uruguay is discussing the implementation of similar treaties (TISA).

Furthermore, everyone agrees on individually forming agreements with China that aggravate primarization [the process in which underdeveloped countries focus on the export of raw materials—oil, mining, and agricultural products—in exchange for finished industrial commodities from abroad]. They accept agreements for basic exports and manufacturing imports that do not include obligations for productive investment or technological transfer. This position preserves the old breaks between countries that privilege the interests of their local bourgeoisie in external negotiations.

This adaptation to the neoliberal global order can lead to traumatic consequences if an adverse economic turn is confirmed on the international scene. Raw materials no longer increase, growth has stopped and the valuation of the dollar stimulates the outflow of capital. Certain governments begin to implement devaluations, which anticipate assaults on the living standards of the people.

More dangerous is the economic turn by various “center-left” governments. In Brazil they have already accepted the agenda imposed by the Stock Exchange, designated ministers selected by the large corporations, and prepared financial adjustment programs designed by the banks.

This course of adjustment to the establishment demoralizes the population and facilitates the rightist channelization of discontent. In some countries these tendencies are already insinuating themselves as a response to the frustrations generated by the vacillations of progressivism. We can also catch a glimpse of a coercive tendency of presidents who confuse popular demands with the right-wing destabilization.

The critical point for Latin America is not actually found in the resistance to the United States. The main problem takes root in the establishment of capitalist models that are adverse to the aspirations of the main population.

The significant political sovereignty that Latin America has achieved in the last few years is not sustainable with regressive economic orientations. Experience demonstrates that aspirations for autonomy decline with the consolidation of bourgeois power. Only the path towards a complete break with neoliberalism, [and the rise of] popular initiative, political radicalization, and confrontation with the capitalist class can pave the way toward achieving the Second Independence.

Joy at the other Summit

The mainstream media also did not register in Panama the occurrence of an important Summit of the People. In this activity, for three days, the social movement came together over an intense program of anti-imperialist debate.

In the inauguration of this event, it

was very clear why Panama is not Miami. There were multiple demands that the Empire beg forgiveness for the 1989 invasion and offer compensation to the victims. In the workshops demands full of information were analyzed, such as the lifting of the Cuban embargo, the return of Guantanamo, Puerto Rican independence, and the end of the British occupation of the Malvin Islands.

The meeting reinforced the world campaign that gathered millions of signatures to demand retraction of the U.S. decree against Venezuela. In many cities on the continent this demand was accompanied by mobilizations and reinforced by the support of noted intellectuals.

The Summit of the People consolidated a tradition of meetings parallel to the presidential meetings. In contrast to the official meeting, the popular event was crowned with an important final declaration. In this closing session an explosion of enthusiasm broke out when the victory against Obama's decree was revealed.

This climate contributed the best barometer to evaluate what happened in Panama. They achieved a diplomatic success that consolidates popular hopes in Latin America. ■

Claudio Katz is an economist and professor at the University of Buenos Aires. His website is www.lahaine.org/katz.

This article was translated from the Spanish by Socialist Action, and slightly cut for space. See the full Spanish-language article at www.socialistaction.org.



(Left) Leon Trotsky testifies before a tribunal looking into the May 24, 1940, armed attack by Stalinists on his home in Coyoacán, Mexico.

Who is behind the ‘Trotskyist conspiracy?’

By ILYA BUDRAITSKIS

Speaking at a meeting of his All-Russia People’s Front a couple of days ago [in November 2014], Vladimir Putin said, “Trotsky had this [saying]: the movement is everything, the ultimate aim is nothing. We need an ultimate aim.”

Eduard Bernstein’s proposition, misquoted and attributed for some reason to Leon Trotsky, is probably the Russian president’s most common rhetorical standby. He has repeated it for many years to audiences of journalists and functionaries while discussing social policy, construction delays at Olympics sites, or the dissatisfaction of the so-called creative class. “Democracy is not anarchism and not Trotskyism,” Putin warned almost two years ago.

Putin’s anti-Trotskyist invectives do not depend on the context nor are they influenced by his audience, and much less are they veiled threats to the small political groups in Russia today who claim to be heirs of the Fourth International. Putin’s “Trotskyism” is of a different kind. Its causes are found not in the present but in the past, buried deep in the political unconscious of the last generation of the Soviet nomenklatura.

The strange myth of the Trotskyist conspiracy, which emerged decades ago, in another age and a different country, has experienced a rebirth throughout Putin’s rule. Sensing, apparently, the president’s personal weakness for “Trotskyism,” obliging media and corrupted experts have turned this Trotskyism into an integral part of the grand propaganda style.

Until he died, the indefatigable “Trotskyist” Boris Berezovsky spun his nasty web from London. Until he turned into a conservative patriot, the incendiary “Trotskyist” Eduard Limonov seduced young people with extremism. Camouflaged “Trotskyists” from the Bush and, later, the Obama administrations have continued to sow war and color revolutions. Unmasking “Trotskyists” has become such an important ritual that for good luck, as it were, the famous Dmitry Kiselev decided to launch a new media resource by invoking it. So what is the history of this conspiracy? And what do Trotskyists have to do with it?

Conspiracy theories are always conservative by nature. They do not offer an alternative assessment of events but, constantly tardy, chase behind them, inscribing them after the fact into their own pessimistic reading of history. Thus, in his “Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism” (1797), the Jesuit priest Augustin Barruel, a pioneer of modern conspiracy theory, situated the French Revolution, which had already taken place, in the catastrophic finale of a grand conspiracy of the Knights Templar against the Church and the Capetian dynasty.

Masonic conspiracy theories became truly powerful in the late 19th century, when the peak of the Masons’ power had already passed. Finally, the idea of a Jewish conspiracy acquired its final shape in “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” fabricated by the tsarist secret police at the turn of the 20th century, when the power of Jewish finance capital had already been undermined by the rising power of industrial capital.

Conspiracy theories have always drawn energy from

this distorted link with reality, because the fewer conspirators one could observe in the real world, the more boldly one could endow them with incredible magical powers in the imaginary world.

In keeping with the reactive, belated nature of conspiracy theories, the myth of the Trotskyist conspiracy emerged in the Soviet Union when the Left Opposition, Trotsky’s actual supporters, had long ago been destroyed. Unlike, however, the conspiracies of the past, generated by secret agents and mad men of letters, the foundations of the Trotskyist conspiracy were tidily laid by NKVD [the Stalinist secret police] investigators. The distorting mirror logic of the Great Terror dictated that, although the “Trotskyists” skillfully concealed themselves, and any person could prove to be one, the conspiracy must necessarily be exposed. An unwritten law of Stalinist socialism was that the truth will out, and this, of course, deprived the conspiracy theory of its telltale aura of mystery.

After Stalin’s death, when the Purges were a thing of the past, and Soviet society had begun to become inhibited and conservative, the conspiracy myth took on more familiar features. The stagnation period, with its general apathy, distrust, and societal depression, was an ideal breeding ground for the conspiracy theory. No one had seen any live Trotskyists long ago, and it was seemingly silly to denounce them, but everyone was well informed about the dangers of Trotskyism.

During meaningless classes on “Party history,” millions of Soviet university students learned about the enemies of socialism, the Trotskyists, who had been vanquished long ago in a showdown. Millions of copies of anti-Trotskyist books were published; by the 1970s, this literature had become a distinct genre with its own canon. Its distinguishing feature was a free-form Trotskyism completely emancipated from any connection with actual, historical Trotskyism.

In fact, the Trotskyism of Soviet propaganda was structurelessness incarnate, a misunderstanding. It was “lifeless schema, sophistry and metaphysics, unprincipled eclecticism, [...] crude subjectivism, exaggerated individualism and voluntarism.” Unlike the classic monsters of conspiracy theory, the Masons and the Elders of Zion, the Trotskyists did not run the world. They were failed conspirators: they were always exposed, unless, through their own haste and impulsiveness, they managed to expose themselves.

In keeping with Stalinist socialist realism, their inept evil deeds caused seizures of Homeric laughter among the people and the Party. And yet, recovering from each shameful defeat, they kept on trying. The Trotskyists had no clear plan for establishing global domination, but without a clear purpose, they were dangerous in their passionate desire to instill chaos in places where harmony, predictability, and order reigned.

In their work, these Trotskyists were guided by the crazed “theory of permanent revolution” (which had nothing in common, substantially, with Trotsky’s theory* except the name). Its essence is that the revolution should not have any geographical or time constraints. It has no aims, no end, and no meaning. It raises questions where all questions have long been solved. It instills doubt where all doubts have been resolved long

ago. A normal person would never be able to understand anything about this theory except one thing: it was invented to ruin his life.

Mikhail Basmanov, author of the cult book “In the Train of Reaction: Trotskyism from the 1930s to the 1970s,” quoted above, noted, “Unlike many other political movements that had the opportunity to confirm their ideological and political doctrines through the practice of state-building, Trotskyism has not put forward a positive program of action in any country in all the years of its existence.” It is so destructive, that “with its cosmopolitanism, carried to the point of absurdity, which excludes the possibility of developing national programs, Trotskyism undermines the stances even of its own ‘parties’ in certain countries. [...] Trotskyism is entangled in the nets of its own theories.”

It is important that the idea of the Trotskyist conspiracy against practical reason, reality, and stability was never popular in late-Soviet society: it did not grow, like the “blood libel,” from the dark superstitions of the mob. It remained a nightmare for only one segment, the ruling bureaucracy, which transmitted the myth of the senseless and merciless “permanent revolution” to future generations in Party training courses and KGB schools.

The Soviet theory of the Trotskyist conspiracy reflected the subconscious fear of ungovernability on the part of the governing class. Devoid of any personalities, the legend of Trotskyism was something like the “black swan” of “actually existing socialism.”

This, by the way, is its fundamental difference from the version of the Trotskyist conspiracy popular among some American conservatives. In America, it is merely one of many varieties of the “minority conspiracy,” a small group of people who have, allegedly, seized power and are implementing their anti-Christian, globalist ideas from the top down. The fact that the anti-Trotskyist conspiracy theory of the so-called paleo-conservatives has become popular in recent years among Kremlin experts and political scientists only goes to show that the old Soviet “Trotskyist conspiracy” has suffered a deficit in terms of its reproduction.

When he confuses Bernstein and Bronstein,** Vladimir Putin, however, is not unfaithful to the Soviet anti-Trotskyist legend. Yes, “the goal is nothing, the movement is everything.” The chaos generated by the movement is inevitable, as inevitable as time itself. It moves inexorably toward “permanent revolution,” which cannot be completed and with which one cannot negotiate.

In a recent interview, former Kremlin spinmeister Gleb Pavlovsky, while skillfully avoiding the issue of “Trotskyism,” nevertheless had this to say about Putin:

“He has frightened himself. Where should he go next? What next? This is a terrible problem in politics, the problem of the second step. He stepped beyond what he was ready for and got lost: where to go now? [...] The gap between [the annexation of] Crimea and subsequent actions is quite noticeable. It is obvious that everything afterwards was an improvisation or reaction to other people’s actions. People who are afraid of the future forbid themselves from thinking about which path to choose. When you have not set achievable goals, you begin to oscillate between two poles: either you do nothing or you get sucked into a colossal conflict.”

The worst thing is that the specter of Trotskyism, as has happened with many other specters in history, is quite capable of materializing. The post-Soviet system has entered a period of crisis, in which the ruling elite has fewer and fewer chances to manage processes “manually.” For the Trotskyist nightmare of the elites to become a reality, there is no need for live Trotskyists. The need for them arises only when hitherto silent and long-suffering forces come to their senses and raise the question of their own aims. But that is a different story. ■

Ilya Budraitskis is a leader of Vpered (“Forward”), Russian section of the Fourth International, which participated in the founding of the Russian Socialist Movement (RSD).

*The theory of permanent revolution, first developed by Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky as early as 1904, explained that in an underdeveloped country in the epoch of imperialism, the national capitalist class is inexorably tied to imperialist interests and thus unable to carry out the major historical tasks of the bourgeois revolution (political democracy, land reform, rights of oppressed nationalities, etc.). For that reason, the working class must lead a movement to take power into its own hands and to abolish capitalism—a socialist revolution.

**Leon Trotsky was born with the name Lev Bronstein.

This is a slightly abridged and edited version of an article by UNIFOR union chief economist Jim Stanford.

1) Timing. With great economic uncertainty in Canada (arising from the sharp decrease in oil prices and growing evidence of serious economic trouble), the government chose to heighten the uncertainty by delaying its budget for several weeks. Not because of uncertainty about oil prices. The delay was actually to wait until the fiscal year started, so they could sell the government's shares in General Motors, and use the net proceeds to help achieve the politically all-important "balanced budget." A shameful and reckless exercise.

2) Selling the Silverware. Speaking of the GM shares, the \$2.1 billion net proceeds from the sale were indeed essential to the government's declared small surplus (\$1.4 billion). The shares fetched \$3.3 billion, but the government had to deduct their "book value" (which was artificially low anyway due to the government's ultra-cautious accounting in 2009 that they might not get much at all back from the GM rescue).

The fire-sale (*instead of retaining public ownership and implementing democratic control of the company, to reorganize production to meet human needs* - Editor) was widely interpreted in the automotive media as a sign that Canada was "giving up" on the industry (and was accompanied by another spate of stories about the migration of auto investment to Mexico). More fundamentally, selling an asset to balance a current budget is utterly phony: the state is poorer, not richer, because it no longer has that asset.

3) Phony Balance. Speaking of the "balanced budget," it is entirely dependent on a fiscal sleight-of-hand. There is a \$1.4 billion reported surplus. But that's only because the government diverted \$2 billion out of its normal \$3 billion contingency reserve (apparently things are so stable in the world economy these days there's no need anymore for so much symbolic "protection").

They siphoned \$2.1 billion from the GM shares. And then perhaps most offensively of all, they raided \$3.4 billion from the annual operating surplus of the Employment Insurance system. (That surplus is created by the denial of benefits to over 60% of unemployed Cana-

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

Five most outrageous things about the federal budget

ans; the appropriate response, especially with growing layoffs around the country, would be to fix that problem — not raid the EI cookie jar.) That makes a total of \$7.5 billion in shell game transactions.

Without those three fiscal tricks, the reported balance would be a \$6.1 billion *deficit*—not a \$1.4 billion surplus. The emphasis placed on achieving balance is misplaced anyway, as many economists of all stripes have pointed out. But to attain this inappropriate "victory" in such an underhanded and misleading way sets a new low for the politicization of fiscal policy.

4) Public Transit. The opposition parties have argued that this is the moment for government to invest heavily in overdue infrastructure; this view is fully and loudly endorsed by economists around the world, who correctly identify secular stagnation (not public debt) as the greatest threat to prosperity and stability.

The argument must be having some effect on public opinion (a recent poll indicated Canadians preferred infrastructure spending over tax cuts by more than 2-to-1 as the top priority for budget policy), so the government has responded with some mostly token infrastructure initiatives. The most token of all is its ballyhooed "Public Transit Fund." This "innovative" measure merits several pages of text in the budget plan. But you have to wade through many tables until you realize it doesn't get any money at until 2017-18, at which point it gets all of \$250 million. Given the cost of transit investments, and the desperate need for them (for economic, social, and en-

vironmental reasons), this is offensive, and I am amazed that Conservative Finance Minister Joe Oliver could announce it with a straight face.

5) More Stealth Austerity. Even critics of the government are describing the budget as a "tax cut budget" full of "election goodies." I think this is a mis-characterization. The tax cuts are what is "new," and hence will be reported. And costing \$5 billion in just this year, they are too expensive. (Many others have written about their perverse impact on equality, labour force participation, and other variables.)

But the real thrust of the budget won't make the headlines: because it's "more of the same," not news. The budget confirms the path of grinding, disguised austerity that dominated fiscal policy under this majority Conservative government. The government has reduced federal public administration employment by over 50,000 positions since mid-2011. It has imposed incremental, badly understood spending cuts that cumulate to \$14 billion per year.

It has underfunded veterans' offices, Coast Guard facilities, meat and railway inspectors, EI processing, and many other services that are essential to the quality and safety of Canadians' lives. It will unilaterally reduce health transfers to the provinces beginning in 2017, by \$36 billion over a decade. It will force Canadians to work until age 67 to collect Old Age Security.

For these reasons I hope Canadians will forcefully reject the Harper Conservatives in the coming election. ■

Ontario budget is austerity by any other name!

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Remove the Liberal smiley face and the Ontario budget delivered on April 23 is the companion piece to its regressive Conservative federal cousin. Both are austerity plans, in the sense that a false panic to balance the books is used to accelerate the transfer of wealth from the working class to the capitalist class.

Ontario Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne and her finance minister, Charles Sousa, signalled that, over the next three years, spending on health care will suffer a real cut, once inflation is taken into account, and that education, training, justice and agriculture will be hit even harder.

Instead of taxing corporations and the wealthy, Queen's Park aims to freeze public sector wages, slash workers' benefits, along with services, and sell off profitable assets like Hydro One, the public electricity transmission utility. Ontario Public Service Employees' Union President Smokey Thomas said the government has declared war on

its workers. The result is: nurses up in arms, teachers on strike at a number of schools boards, with a strike by 40,000 Ontario public service workers represented by OPSEU imminent.

"Premier Wynne's budget sells more than just Ontario's public assets, it sells false choices," said Ontario Federation of Labour President Sid Ryan. "She is telling Ontarians to choose between public transit and public hydro; municipal infrastructure versus hospital closures; good jobs or a balanced budget. It is a sort of budgetary 'Hunger Games' that pits public priorities against vital public services instead of addressing the most obvious choice: asking corporations and high-income earners to pay their fair share."

The OFL pointed to the 370,000 Ontario children who live in poverty; the one million workers who earn at or near the minimum wage; the one in five Ontarians who receive help from a food bank or charity; and the nearly half of all residents in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton who are working

in precarious, part-time and insecure employment. All of this stands in stark contrast to Canada's highest paid CEOs, who today make 171 times the average Canadian income at a time when the Ontario corporate tax rate is the lowest in North America.

Wynne's earlier decision to fight climate change through a so-called cap-and-trade carbon-credits system is ineffective, except for generating government revenue by saddling the population with another regressive tax, which will be felt first at the gas pump.

As for her promise, two years ago, to cut auto insurance rates by 15 percent, not even half that goal has been realized.

Money earmarked for transit, highways, bridges and waterworks is grossly inadequate and agonizingly slow-tracked. Extending beer sales to some big supermarkets could be labelled a pure distraction, were it not part of the overall privatization agenda, accompanied by an added regressive tax on beer bottles.

Ontario New Democratic Party Leader Andrea Horwath warned that the Liberal budget "weakens social services" because funding does not keep pace with inflation.

"Ontarians didn't vote for a platform of cuts and privatization," said Horwath. It "cuts education and closes schools, cuts health care and fires nurses."

But this is the government Horwath propped up until the May 1, 2014 budget when she pulled the plug on the then-minority Liberal regime. That triggered the election in which Horwath presented a fiscally conservative platform, which helped the Liberals win a majority of seats in the June 12, 2014 vote.

With a provincial election more than three years off, the only option now is for workers to demand that their organizations form an *anti-austerity common front*, like the one taking shape in Quebec.

Sorely needed is a *general strike* to break the bosses' agenda, and pave the road to a *Workers' Government*. ■

SOCIALISM 2015: This changes everything!

An International Educational Conference

MAY 22-23 at Woodsworth Residence, U of Toronto, 321 Bloor St. W., Room 20 (lower level) @ St. George. www.socialistaction.ca (647) 986-1917

• **Friday, May 22, 7 p.m.: Europe Rising Against Austerity** — Christina Palliou: Organization of Communist Internationalists of Greece (OKDE)/Spartacus; Gabriel Lafleur, railroad worker near Paris, Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, France; Tyler Mackinnon, young retail sector worker, Socialist Action / LAS Canada.

• **Saturday, May 23, 10 a.m. Capitalism vs. the Environment** — Jaime Gonzalez, leader of LUS (Socialist Unity League) Mexico; Prof. Patricia Perkins, York U., Environmental Studies; Barry Weisleder, federal secretary, Socialist Action / LAS Canada.

1 p.m. From Ferguson to New York to Toronto – Disarm the Cops Jeff Mackler, National Secretary, Socialist Action USA; Ellie Carlson, representing the Network for the Elimination of Police Violence; Peter D'Gama, anti-racist activist, and SA member.

4 p.m. The Growing Inequality — Linda McQuaig, author and NDP candidate Toronto Centre; Prof. Louis-Philippe Rochon, Laurentian University; John Orrett, firefighter, member Socialist Action – Thornhill, Ontario.

7 p.m. Who are the Terrorists? — Gabriel Lafleur, railroad worker, NPA France; Manos Soufoglou, OKDE – Spartacus, Greece; Jeff Mackler, National Secretary, Socialist Action USA.

Co-sponsored by: Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste (Canadian state), Socialist Action (USA), and Liga Unidad Socialista (Mexico).

... Freddie Gray

(continued from page 12)

over the extent to which police in Baltimore have adopted a highly militarized approach to policing residents of our city," Sonia Kumar, an ACLU staff attorney told *The New York Times*.

Baltimore, a city of over 620,000 people, is 63 percent Black. More than 23 percent of the population is below the poverty line, according to official statistics. Close to 17 percent of Baltimore's housing stock is abandoned; in some neighborhoods entire blocks of row houses are burnt or falling down.

The official unemployment rate among Blacks is over 11 percent, not counting people who have "stopped looking," young people who have never had a job, ex-prisoners who cannot find a job, etc. Recently, the city began shutting off water service to 25,000 residents who were behind on paying their water bills after a hike in rates.

Clearly, the murder of Freddie Gray, and the refusal of police and city authorities to quickly bring the killer cops to justice, has lit a match under a powder keg. And people around the world are responding. ■

Samuel Corum / Anadolu Agency / Getty Images



Freddie Gray killing: Baltimore explodes

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Baltimore has become a symbol of rebellion against the rampant police brutality, racism, and poverty that pervades America's cities. In late April, Maryland's governor called in the National Guard, and Baltimore's mayor imposed a "state of emergency" over the city as protesters clashed with police.

Outraged citizens, mainly youth, filled the streets for days, demanding justice for Freddie Gray, the 25-year-old Black man who died on April 19 from injuries sustained while in the custody of Baltimore police. Gray's spine was 80% severed near the neck and his larynx crushed.

The protests have spread around the country, as thousands have raised the call: "Black lives matter!" Gray's death was the latest in an epidemic of police killings in the United States. Only days before, Walter Scott was shot down as he ran from a police officer in North Charleston, S.C.; the videotaped murder horrified people around the world.

Anger steadily escalated in Baltimore as police and city authorities delayed on conducting an investigation that could lead to prosecution of the cops who were involved in Gray's death. Many challenged the police version of the events. The demand rang out: "Freddie Gray didn't have to die. Tell the truth! Stop the lies!"

Protests reached a peak on Saturday, April 25, when close to 2000 people marched from the Gilmore Homes—where Freddie Gray lived—through downtown Baltimore to a rally at City Hall. Baltimore Police Commissioner Anthony Batts praised his cops as being "scary good" in policing the demonstration. But some of the rally speakers stated that police were overreacting and acting provocatively toward the demonstrators, buzzing the rally with a helicopter and deploying at least 1200 cops on the ground—including state troopers.

Later that evening, a small grouping split off and marched to Camden Yards, where the Orioles were about to play the Boston Red Sox. Reports said that the protesters surrounded a police van, similar to the one in which Gray had been transported when he was injured, broke shop windows, and threw objects at the police.

The big-business media downplayed coverage of the main, peaceful demonstration, preferring to fill the airwaves and newsprint with coverage of what they termed "a riot." Meanwhile, Gene Ryan, president of the Fraternal Order of Police, compared Freddie Gray protesters to "lynch mobs" who were denying officers their Constitutional right to due process.

On April 27, some 2500, including politicians and other

Baltimore has become a symbol of rebellion against the racism, police violence, and poverty of U.S. cities.

dignitaries, filled New Shiloh Baptist Church for Gray's funeral. In the afternoon, however, the seething anger erupted as protesters and police stood off against each other. Several officers were injured by thrown bricks. According to the media, the city was in "chaos."

Why did the cops stop Freddie Gray?

Although Police Commissioner Batts is now playing "hard cop," he sat down with some of Gray's family members not long ago to hear their concerns. At that session, he reportedly was "listening to their pain and expressing sympathy." Nevertheless, the police department has been less than forthright in revealing what actions police officers took that led to Gray's death.

Gray was arrested on April 13 near the Gilmore Homes. The housing project has been the scene of a number of drug busts in recent years, and the cops who arrested Gray were apparently on a similar mission.

However, the exact reasons that Gray was stopped have been left murky. A police spokesman stated that an officer began pursuing Gray and another unnamed man, after "making eye contact" with them. The written police report states merely that the cops pursued Gray in "a brief foot chase" after he had "fled unprovoked upon noticing police presence."

David Gray, a University of Maryland professor who teaches criminal law, pointed out in the Baltimore *Sun* that the Supreme Court has ruled that running away from police, by itself, is not justification for an arrest.

The police maintain that after searching Gray, they put him under arrest when they found a switch-blade knife inside his pants pocket. Yet even Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake has issued a statement questioning police tactics in the case, observing that possession of a knife is "not necessarily probable cause to chase or arrest someone."

The police report states that Gray "was arrested without force or incident." However, cell-phone video taken

toward the end of the confrontation shows Gray crying out in pain as police grapple with him. It is obvious that he is hardly able to stand. Police prop him up, drag him to a van, and shovel him in. Witnesses reported that they saw Gray being beaten, and that he repeatedly asked for medical aid.

The police have admitted that Gray had asked for an inhaler and medical aid, and that his requests were ignored. It took over half an hour to carry Gray to the Western District Police Station and over 45 minutes from his arrest to when paramedics were called. The cops said that at one point they stopped the van to put Gray into leg irons. And it was revealed on April 30 that the van detoured to pick up another prisoner and made another unauthorized stop as well.

"I know when Mr. Gray was placed inside that van, he was able to talk," said Deputy Police Commissioner Jerry Rodriguez. "When Mr. Gray was taken out of that van, he could not talk and he could not breathe." Later, Gray lapsed into a coma, from which he never emerged.

Police also admit that Gray was not given a seat belt in the van, as required by the police department's protocols. There has been widespread speculation that he received what Baltimore cops call a "rough ride"—a wild and bumpy ride that cops use on occasion to punish their prisoners.

A lawyer for the family of Dondi Johnson says that Johnson died from such a ride after his arrest for public urination in Baltimore in 2005. Attorney Kerry D. Staton maintains that Johnson was cuffed with no seat belt to restrain him, and that he broke his neck after being thrown into the opposite wall. Johnson's family won a \$7.4 million judgment that was reduced to \$200,000, the legal cap for such cases.

A long list of police victims

Freddie Gray is only the latest in a long list of victims of the Baltimore police. Documents obtained by the Baltimore *Sun* show that 249 lawsuits alleging police brutality were filed against the city of Baltimore from 2011 through late 2014 and that over \$6.2 million was paid out in damages.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 31 people died in the city of Baltimore after encounters with police between 2010 and 2014. At the same time, however, just one Baltimore police officer has been prosecuted for killing a civilian since 2010. The officer was convicted of shooting a Marine Corps veteran outside a bar when he was off duty.

"This is part of a decades-long, growing frustration

(continued on page 11)