

Protests score Trump's hate-mongering agenda



By MARK UGOLINI

On Jan. 20, Donald Trump will be sworn in on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, and a new Republican administration will take control of the U.S. government's executive branch. The election of this bigoted billionaire sent shock waves throughout the communities that were the targets of his racist, sexist, and anti-immigrant diatribes.

Angry demonstrations and student walk-outs took place in a number of U.S. cities immediately following the election. Shouting anti-racist and feminist slogans such as "My body, my choice!" thousands marched on Nov. 9 in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Chicago, Oakland, Portland, Seattle, and elsewhere. In the San Francisco Bay Area, students marched out of several high schools while chanting, "Not our president!"

The popular vote tabulated on the night of Nov. 8 had Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton narrowly edging Trump by .2 percent of the nationwide vote total. But Trump amazed many by winning over large numbers of working-class voters in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and other states normally considered solid Democratic Party territory. By early the next morning, Trump had easily surpassed the

270 electoral votes needed to be declared victor and president-elect.

This year's presidential election was unique in the way that it focused on the unsavory personal characteristics of the candidates, and in the harshly offensive tone of the national discourse. Trump made effective use of Hillary Clinton's anti-working class, "unscripted" and supposedly "private" comments at a fundraising event attended by many of the Democratic Party's richest campaign donors.

For her part, Clinton wrote off supporters of Trump as "deplorable" and "irredeemable," comments that convey her disdain for working people, and the absence of any recognition of the desperate situation they face under the heels of a severely depressed economy.

A big part of Trump's campaign message concentrated on nationalistic and protectionist "America First" appeals to workers, and racist attitudes toward Mexican Americans, Blacks, Muslims, and immigrants. Trump's sexist attitudes and behavior were also prominently on display, including a tape-recorded comment he made admitting his involvement in sexual assault. In one instance, Trump made vicious comments and gestures mocking a disabled reporter.

Early in his campaign Trump tried to provoke his supporters to inflict physical harm on Black Lives Matter protesters.

A young Muslim woman, speaking on a PBS call-in show the night after the election, expressed the fear that the Trump victory has produced in minority communities. She stated, "Everyone here is in shock. ... Even though I was born and raised in this country, it feels as if I am not a full American by Trump's standards. ... His rhetoric has emboldened the racists and bigots."

Trump's campaign drew international attention, particularly its racist aspects. The newly anointed "president-elect" received congratulatory messages from far-right, anti-immigrant nationalist leaders, including Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Front in France and candidate for the French presidency.

However, the notion that Trump's victory reflected deep and growing racist and sexist sentiments among U.S. workers is far from accurate. Virtually the same electorate chose the nation's first Black president four and eight years earlier. Trump prevailed in

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What does PROMESA mean to Puerto Ricans in the U.S.?

By MILLY GUZMAN-YOUNG

President Obama signed the PROMESA debt-restructuring bill into law, imposing a Federal Control Board onto Puerto Rico that is comprised of seven appointed U.S. officials who will be in charge of the economy.

I see PROMESA as a threat to the livelihood of my friends and family in Puerto Rico. It is a blatant disregard for the people of Puerto Rico and a culmination of the sad history that Puerto Ricans have suffered in the hands of the United States from the Ponce Massacre of 1937, where 19 unarmed civilians marching peacefully were brutally murdered by police, to the illegal Mordaza and Law 53 created to suppress the independence movement.

Let us not forget the bombardment and contamination of Culebras and Vieques. The U.S. has been a constant threat to Puerto Rico!

PROMESA clearly shows us the colonial status of Puerto Rico. I realize that this problem is more deeply rooted than just one bill that was passed into law and that the problem stems from U.S. imperialism. The United States has been fraudulently manipulating Puerto Rico's politics and economy from the moment the U.S. military took over the island and made it a colony.

Sure, they gave us the title of U.S. citizens through the Foraker Act but only to hide the true colonial status it has maintained. We are considered U.S. citizens yet Puerto Ricans on the island have no right to vote for the president and have no representation in Congress. If there



Christine Marie / Socialist Action

(Left) No to PROMESA contingent at Sept. 18 Puerto Rican Day parade in Springfield, Mass.

They exist to benefit the U.S. at the cost of the livelihood of Puerto Ricans on the island. PROMESA is part of the big scam, and the only promise PROMESA is keeping is to close more schools down, to make Puerto Ricans lose their pensions, and to reduce their wages. For example, the minimum wage will be lowered for anyone under 25 to a mere \$4.25 an hour! This is not a livable wage. And they plan to make it a federal crime for workers to strike against all of these changes! It is a trap!

PROMESA will further increase the unemployment rate, making even more Puerto Ricans leave the island on top of the 400,000 who have already left. History is repeating itself. As I recall from the past, the U.S. government overly increased taxes on Puerto Rican farmers to the point that they had to take bank loans, which ended up making them lose their lands.

Puerto Ricans in the U.S. have a close tie to Puerto Rico and to our culture. We do not want our families to be forced to leave our beloved island because of the conditions set forth by the United States' corrupt politics and economics, which have not only oppressed Puerto Ricans for decades but also led to the current debt crisis.

How can we survive these conditions? PROMESA threatens the livelihood of our friends and family in Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans on the island and in the U.S must stand together against it! ■

was ever any doubt in the past, PROMESA has made it quite clear that Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States and that the people of Puerto Rico have no autonomy or self-determination.

Since 2010, Puerto Rico's legislature has faithfully fulfilled the demands of creditors and bond-rating agencies: It has laid off workers; raised prices for water, gasoline and electricity; increased property, sales and small-business taxes; cut public pensions and health benefits; raised the retirement age; and closed schools.

The debt amount is questionable too and must be investigated. The United States has created much of the debt through the Merchant Marine Act (Jones Act), which requires all products entering or leaving Puerto Rico to be carried on a U.S. ship, and to top it off, the import fees are paid to the merchant marine, *not* to the Puerto Rican Treasury!

Puerto Ricans on the island and in the U.S. are realizing that political and economic decisions made by the U.S. for Puerto Rico are corrupt and rigged.

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. 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.

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.

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, LGBT people, 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.

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. 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. 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!

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'Solution is Socialism' conference draws students

By CHRISTINE MARIE

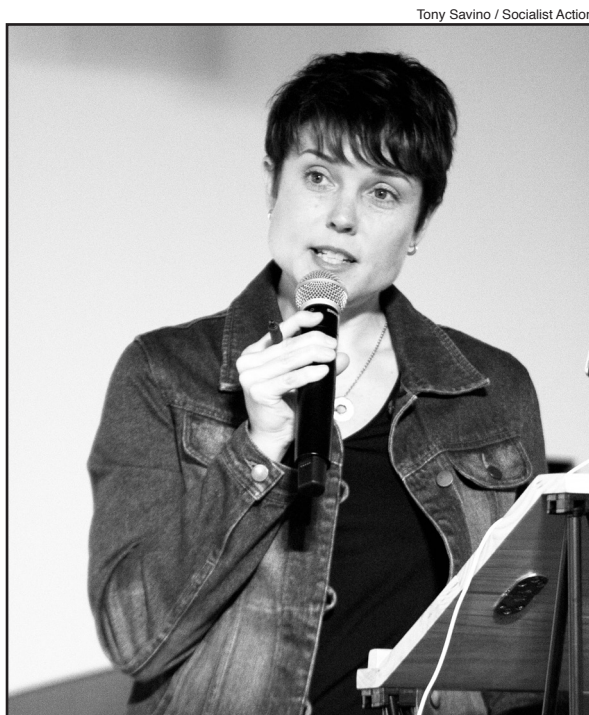
NEW BRITAIN, Conn.—An ambitious Youth for Socialist Action educational conference drew close to 100 participants, including students from at least six different colleges, to Central Connecticut State University on Saturday, Oct. 22.

The conference was opened by the past president of the CCSU YSA, David Kiely, who said that his generation has “grown up with constant war, with the revelations of Snowden and Chelsea Manning, with a minimum wage that was never enough to live on, with huge student debt, and with the 2008 world market crash as a backdrop.”

“For our entire lives,” he said, “capitalism has been a complete disaster.” This conference was called, he explained, because it is clear that many of this generation are ready to seize the tremendous opportunities made plain by the growing resistance to racism, sexism, inequality, and the headless drive toward climate catastrophe, to build a movement capable of replacing the fossil fuel based profit system with something entirely different.

The event opened with a historical look by Professor Charles Post of Borough of Manhattan Community College at the way that capitalism has matured as a disastrous system in North America and the centrality of racism to its operations. Professor Hannah Holleman of Amherst College presented the statistics that a number of Marxist thinkers have been using to begin to develop a full theory of ecological imperialism. She argued convincingly that without an understanding of imperialism, the climate justice movement would be unable to mount the kind of solidarity necessary to build the movement we need.

Dr. Alan Sears of Ryerson University spoke about the ways that capitalist work regimes created gender identities useful for profit and production, the power of queer resistance to those regimes, and the way that an understanding of this dynamic will strengthen the



fight for a socialist future.

These historical and theoretical presentations were complemented by presentations by representatives of two of the most powerful social movements currently on the stage. Alix Shabazz of Freedom Inc. in Madison, Wis., described the thinking and process that went into the development of the Movement for Black Lives Platform, a document that codifies the centrality of the fight for Black self-determination and encyclopedically lists elements of the racist criminal justice system that must be dismantled as part of the process.

Shabazz related, as well, the efforts of Madison activists to find restorative justice alternatives to the destructive approach of the Madison police around

(Left) Prof. Hannah Holleman gave a strategic perspective for the climate justice movement.

cases of sexual violence in the African American and Hmong communities.

Mikhal Rosa, a member of the national leadership of the Movimiento Independista Nacional Hostosiano in San Juan, P.R., spoke about the history of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico and the current fight against the U.S.-imposed austerity regime known as PROMESA. Local Puerto Rico independence activists in attendance gathered with him to discuss the next steps in building links between central Connecticut and the island.

The conference closed with two sessions devoted to the strategy and tactics of building a movement for socialism today. The first, led by *Left Voice* editor Jose Cruz Ferre, a participant in the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas and the Left and Workers Front (FIT) in Argentina, explained how a rejection of lesser-evil politics in the national elections, and the mounting of a united and independent working-class election campaign, led to the growth of the revolutionary socialist movement in that country.

The day ended with a talks by three veteran socialist organizers—Christopher Hutchinson, Ann Montague, and Daniel Belle—on the historic working-class tools of political action independent of the bosses' parties, mobilizations based on a united front of all tendencies in the working-class movement, and a disciplined revolutionary political party. Their union and mass movement experience allowed them to paint a clear picture of the way in which the modest but growing cadres of the socialist movement could make a real difference in the months and years ahead.

In the week after the conference, a new chapter of the Youth for Socialist Action was established on the University of Connecticut campus and the basis laid for the regional collaboration of YSA members at CCSU, UConn, and the University of Massachusetts. ■

Chicago teachers cancel strike and accept contract

By MARK UGOLINI

CHICAGO—On Nov. 1 the nearly 25,000-member Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) announced the results of a ratification vote on a new contract with Chicago's Board of Education and Democratic Party mayor Rahm Emanuel. With all but 60 schools reporting, 72 percent of voting members accepted the new contract, while 28 percent voted to reject the deal and send its leadership back to the negotiating table.

A majority vote of teachers was needed for approval. The Chicago Board of Education plans a vote on the contract on Dec. 7, the same day it will vote on major city budget provisions that rely on new contract terms. Prior to the membership ratification vote the union held meetings throughout the city to discuss the pros and cons of the new contract terms.

On Oct. 18, the CTU House of Delegates, in a non-binding advisory vote, tentatively approved the contract agreement. In the advisory vote 68 percent of delegates voted in favor, while 32 percent were opposed—dissent larger than usual for the usually strongly united CTU.

At a press conference following the House of Delegates meeting, the union reported a spirited discussion, with many teachers distrustful of school board promises and intentions. The union disclosed that teachers were still lined up to speak at the meeting when the vote was called to begin.

The total budget outlay for the city over the four-year term is reported at \$8.9 billion, about 100 million more than the proposal offered and rejected by a wide majority of the union negotiating team in January of this year.

“The majority of the concerns are always about ‘How do we trust the (school) board?’” said union President Karen Lewis. “We have been told one thing in the past and it didn't come through, so a lot of people have so much distrust for the board that they wanted to say ‘no’”

After approval by the “big bargaining team” composed of 40 teachers, the deal was struck minutes before midnight prior to the planned Oct. 11 strike date, and teachers reported to work the next day as a result. The CTU had been negotiating with the mayor and the school board for nearly two years. The old contract expired in June of 2015.

The deal places further limits on the school board's obligation to pay the bulk of union member's pension payments, a benefit won under previous contracts. Under the new contract terms, existing members will keep a 7 percent pension benefit paid by the district, but all new employees hired after Jan. 1, 2017, will be denied this benefit and instead receive a taxable 7 percent pay increase and a net loss in pay.

All CTU members hired before Jan. 1, 2017, will pay 2% into the pension fund, with the school board paying 7%. All union members hired after Jan. 1, 2017, will pay the entire 9% into the pension fund themselves, and the school board will pay nothing.

The Oct. 19 *Chicago Tribune* reported: “One CTU member approved of a provision that would maintain the district's practice of picking up the bulk of pension contributions for all current teachers, but said the rest of the proposal is ‘crap.’ Another member worried that maintaining the pension pickup for existing members, but dropping it for new hires in exchange for offsetting pay raises, would drive a wedge in the union.”

In the first two years of the contract the teachers will get no raises, but will receive a 2 percent increase in

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LABOR BRIEFING

By BILL ONASCH

• **“Without Their Brain and Muscle Not a Single Wheel Can Turn”**—For six days, beginning on Nov. 1, over 4700 Philadelphia transit workers, members of Transport Workers Union Local 234, shut down bus, trolley, and subway lines normally carrying more than 900,000 passengers daily.

While more than a dozen items remained unresolved at the strike deadline, it was no surprise the most contentious were pensions and health insurance. The SEPTA employer was demanding more than \$120 a month in additional worker contributions for

a new inferior health plan.

Commuter railroad lines were generally allowed to run during the strike. However, on the first day of the walk out, the strikers picketed the train yards and were able to shut down several lines before management obtained a court injunction to halt the action.

The union charged that SEPTA refused to seriously negotiate, instead seeking a court injunction to break the strike on grounds that it might prevent some from voting in the Nov. 8 election. With the anxious participation of several Democratic Party politicians in the negotiations, an agreement was

forged at 5 a.m. on Nov. 7. Although details of the settlement have not been released, it appears that the workers will receive about a 10.5% raise in wages over the next five years, but they must pay more for medical benefits. Ratification by the rank and file is scheduled for Nov. 18.

• **A Different Health Issue**—*Workday Minnesota* reports, “The University of Minnesota is unjustly disciplining employees who take time off when they are sick, the union representing U food service and maintenance workers says. Joined by other U employees and allies, they held a demonstration Tuesday outside the administration building on the Minneapolis campus.

“This is a public health issue that employees who are sick are being forced to work in cafeterias and other areas where they come into contact

with students and other staff,” said Mary Turner, president of the Minnesota Nurses Association.”

• **Looking for Quitters**—According to the *Albany Times-Union*, “As a strike looms at the Momentive chemical plant, the company has mailed its 700 unionized workers a five-page guide on how to quit the union...IUE-CWA Local 81359 President Dom Patrignani said, ‘The company is absolutely desperate in their efforts ... certifications and knowledge needed to safely operate a chemical facility of this magnitude comes with years of training and experience, which the management team lacks. This proves they need our workers more than ever.’” ■

If you have a labor story appropriate for this column please contact billon-asch@kclabor.org



(Left) Michelle and Barak Obama with Raul Castro at a Havana baseball game in March 2016.

End the embargo against Cuba!

By NICK BAKER

In this year’s annual United Nations vote on a resolution condemning the U.S. embargo of Cuba, the United States and Israel abstained for the first time in the 25-year history of the vote, rather than cast the lone votes against the resolution. The U.S. press celebrated this abstention as a major advance by Washington and an acknowledgement of the need to end the embargo. Cuba gave its measured view of the matter in Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez’s statement, “A change in vote by the United States is a promising signal. We hope it will be reflected in reality.”

Cuba’s main priority in this process of renewed diplomatic and economic relations with the U.S. remains ending the embargo, which has cost the Cuban economy over \$800 billion during the past half-century—a number that is 10 times the country’s annual GDP. Meanwhile, the U.S. government has shown no intention of ending the embargo—despite President Obama’s rhetoric—and has only made the slightest tweaks in ways that primarily benefit American business or are symbolic of U.S. capital’s desires in Cuba.

Two weeks before the UN vote, President Obama lifted the \$100 limit on the value of Cuban cigars and rum that returning tourists can bring back to the United States for personal use. Cuban cigars and rum still cannot be sold in the United States, due to the embargo.

In a Presidential Policy Directive released in October, President Obama outlined some of the methods the United States intends to pursue in its new tactic of pushing for neoliberal economic reforms in Cuba. In addition to its goal of “help[ing] U.S. businesses gain access to Cuban markets,” the document also frequently makes clear the U.S. desire to wipe away the Cuban Revolution because of the country’s status as an icon of the Latin American left, with references to “removing an irritant from our relationships with our allies and partners.”

The presidential directive lays out some of the United States’ array of tactics to achieve its 58-year goal of rolling back the revolution. Among them is the desire to bring the full weight of international neoliberal institutions to bear on Cuba by pressuring it to join U.S.-dominated international groups, such as the Organization of American States (OAS). Cuba has been excluded from the OAS since 1962. That exclusion was overturned by a vote of member states in 2009, but Cuba declined the invitation to rejoin, saying that the OAS is an “instrument of U.S. hegemony in the hemisphere.”

This systematic approach is typical of U.S. hegemony. The document uses the terms “rules-based order” and “international norms and globally accepted standards,” which are shorthand for making a country’s legal and financial system safe for U.S. business by imposing the rules, norms, and standards dictated by American capitalism throughout the world to promote its interests.

Earlier in the process of normalization of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba, a Cuban diplomat speaking to U.S. audiences sympathetic to the revolution asked audience members concerned that increased trade with the U.S. would become a foothold for U.S. imperialism to trust Cuba to maintain their revolution. He said that Cuba would only trade for what benefited the country.

The attempt by Cleber, an Alabama-based farm equipment company, to build tractors for small agriculture in the Mariel Special Development Zone illustrates U.S. attempts to tell Cuba what it needs, based on U.S. interests. After the U.S. approved the company’s permits, and before the Cuban government had even considered the company’s application, Obama began touting the company as a symbol of the new era of economic exchange and announced that for the first time a U.S. company would be building tractors in Cuba.

However, Cuba ultimately rejected the company’s application. Ana Teresa Igarza, director general of the Mariel Special Development Zone, stated that the company’s “Oggún” tractor, which is based on 1940s-era technology, “is not the type of investment that we want to attract in the Zone,” which seeks to attract foreign investment that “uses clean energy and innovative advanced technology.”

Having been celebrated in the bourgeois press when their plans were announced, the company is now depicted as a cautionary tale of an altruistic and idealistic endeavor by the United States that was scuttled by Cuban bureaucracy and economic backwardness. How unfair that an American company can’t do whatever it wants regardless of the wishes of the local people! Cuba’s planned economy ruined the plans of American capital.

As the unfettered economic access that American companies want has not materialized, they have begun complaining in the bourgeois press about the “slow pace of reform” in Cuba, as if it were Cuba that was refusing to lift its embargo on the United States!

These complaints come from a country that, having put Cuba under a vicious and destructive half-century economic blockade, and after 24 years of near-unanimous UN votes condemning the embargo, decides to abstain from voting on the 25th time and calls it a major accomplishment!

While Obama may indeed consider markets and commerce to be more effective ways of accomplishing the goals of American imperialism than the “outdated” embargo, he knows that the embargo, which is a stranglehold on the Cuban economy, is a powerful weapon for him to use against Cuba. And the U.S. government will certainly not give it up for a pittance or unless it is forced to by mass action. In fact, in Obama’s declaration he states that, even if the embargo were “eased,” Cuba would not have the resources to purchase U.S. exports.

End the embargo! Long live the Cuban Revolution! ■

Spain: Socialist Party in crisis as right-wing government is formed

By LAZARO MONTEVERDE

After over 315 days of political stalemate, the right-wing Partido Popular [PP] has regained control in Spain with the tacit support of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party [PSOE]. The vote to form the new government took place in two stages, the first on Oct. 27 and the second on Oct. 29, just days before the Oct. 31 deadline that would have resulted in a mandatory and unprecedented third national election in one year.

In the first vote, the PP needed an absolute majority, which it and its coalition partners did not have. In the second vote, they needed a majority of those voting. After an internal crisis and the ouster of their leader, the socialists voted to abstain in the second vote, thus allowing the Partido Popular to form the government.

The second vote was 170 in favor, including 137 votes from the PP, 32 votes from its coalition partner Ciudadanos, and one vote from the regional Canarias party. As planned, 68 Socialists abstained while 111 voted against, including all representatives from Podemos and all the representatives from the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC), which is affiliated with the PSOE. Shortly before the vote, the former General Secretary of the PSOE, Pedro Sanchez, resigned his seat in the Cortes rather than support the PP.

The PP is now free to push through the austerity plan demanded by the European Union [EU], which states that Spain must cut its budget deficit to meet EU targets. To do so will require more cuts to social services and education.

The EU is also demanding further consolidation of the Spanish banking system and the elimination of certain labor laws that protect Spanish workers. These will not be easy goals to accomplish, given the



(Left) Pablo Iglesias, general secretary of Podemos.

broken two-plus party system in Spain.

Mariano Rajoy, the leader of the PP and the person who was acting president during the last 10 months, has promised to compromise and negotiate with the other parties in the Cortes. In the past, he has shown little interest in compromise and he has pushed through austerity measures demanded by the EU with an iron resolve. The PP also plans on “revising” the pension system, but has presented no detailed plans on how it intends to do so.

The new government faces a resurgent Catalan independence movement. The Catalan government plans to hold a referendum on independence in 2017. The left-populist party Podemos backs the referendum, as does a broad spectrum of the Catalan parties, from left to right. In September, over 800,000 Catalans marched in favor of independence.

An internal crisis within the PSOE, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party, provided the PP with the opportunity it needed. On Oct. 1 the general secretary

of the PSOE, Pedro Sanchez, was forced to resign by the party’s federal (national) committee. Sanchez had refused to abstain on any votes to install a PP government. While the majority of the federal committee and the national leadership of the PSOE wanted to compromise (read: capitulate) with the PP, Sanchez still retained significant support. In all, 133 members of the Federal Committee voted against his proposal to hold internal party elections for the post of general secretary while 109 members voted in favor of his proposal. The majority feared that a new election would result in continued losses for the PSOE.

After resigning his seat in congress on the eve of the investiture vote, Sanchez said he would get in his car and travel the country talking with party activists. It is clear to all observers in Spain that the PSOE is now in crisis and is split at least three ways. First, the Catalan Socialist Party has broken from the PSOE over its support for the PP and the issue of Catalan independence. Second, there is a split within the Federal Committee. Third, there is a clear split between the party activists, most of whom oppose any kind of support for the PP, and the party leadership.

The PSOE has little internal party democracy and has not had party primaries to select candidates and leaders. A person becomes a candidate or part of the leadership by being recruited by the existing leaders, as in a corporate board of directors. The Spanish refer to the leadership as the “nomenclatura,” a word that was once popular in the Soviet Union to denote the ruling bureaucratic layer. The nomenclatura has acted as a kind of top-down management of

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Labor's Trump Card: Build a Labor Party!

By **BRUCE LESNICK**

Despite predictions to the contrary, Donald Trump has been elected the 45th President of the United States. What does it all mean?

First the numbers: 44.4% of eligible voters (102.7 million people) did not vote. The number of people who opted out is up three percentage points from the last presidential election in 2012. Trump received 47% of the popular vote (59.4 million); Clinton edged him out with 48% (59.6 million). Libertarian Gary Johnson received 4 million votes (3%), and the Green Party's Jill Stein received 1.2 million votes (1%). Other candidates combined garnered some 800,000 votes, or about 0.7%.

So as usual, "none of the above" was the winner by a landslide. Next in line was Democrat Hillary Clinton, who actually won the greatest share of the popular vote. Nonetheless, Republican Donald Trump was crowned the winner, having benefited from a rigged system that substitutes the undemocratic Electoral College for the popular vote.

Still, the fact that Trump did better than many expected begs the question: why? The answer is not that the American

people have bought wholeheartedly into Trump's racist, xenophobic outlook. How do we know? Because if Bernie Sanders had been the Democratic Party candidate, Trump would likely have been defeated by a wide margin. This is so despite the fact that Sanders is a Democratic Party loyalist who only poses as a critic of the establishment.

But however one might criticize Sanders from the left, he is not overtly racist like Trump. A popular preference for Sanders over Trump belies any claim that the Trump vote signals a right-wing, racist turn by the majority of working people.

The large vote for Trump, together with the large vote for "none of the above" and the lower than expected obeisance to the manipulative, big business endorsed, mainstream media promoted campaign to coronate Hillary Clinton signals one thing: a desire on the part of working people to say f**k you to the establishment. It's a way of proclaiming, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" (See the film "Network.")

Unfortunately, electing Trump or any other Democrat or Republican is not going to solve our problems. In a society so clearly divided into the 1% and the 99%, every political institution serves one side

or the other. And there is no ambiguity about which class the Democrats and Republicans serve.

The only way to fight Wall Street and the modern-day robber barons is by tapping into a force that's even more powerful. And there is only one such force: organized labor. Not organized labor as it currently exists, but organized labor as it ought to be. We need to rebuild a militant, fighting labor movement to counter the economic and political offensive of the corporate behemoths and their two pet political parties. Where current labor misleaders are too cozy with the bosses or the political parties they control, those fossilized labor fakers need to be replaced by young, militant activists willing to help lead the fight that's needed.

Fighting this fight means rebuilding unions where they are weak or broken; democratizing unions where they've become bureaucratic and unresponsive; organizing the unorganized; and, once and for all, taking the fight into the political arena by launching a party of labor, beholden to working people and powered by the economic might of revitalized trade unions.

Such a labor party would harness the justified disgust working people feel for

the two corporate political machines, but finally channel it in such a way as to beat back the long-running corporate offensive against working people and the planet.

We know from our own history—from the heroic labor battles of the 1930s and after—that there is only one force that can scuttle the racist, unjust, exploitive agenda of the 1%. That force is class-conscious, militant, organized labor. Revitalizing the labor movement and launching a labor party are key steps on the path to moving the 99% from the defensive to the offensive. A party of labor would demand and fight for:

- Money for jobs, not for war!
- An injury to one is an injury to all! Support for Black Lives Matter. Halt racist killings and prosecute killer cops.
- Guaranteed jobs for all.
- Health care is a right! Single-payer Medicare for all.
- Tax corporations and the rich, not working people.
- A rapid transition to sustainable energy, with guaranteed wages, training and jobs for all workers replaced in the process.

We know from the current election that working people are fed up. It's time to reject the dead end of electoral politics that leaves us begging for crumbs from one or another party controlled by our class enemy. It's time to channel our power effectively. It's time to organize! ■

... Trump

(continued from page 1)

spite of his racist and sexist tirades, not because of them. Seventy-two percent of those who voted on Nov. 8 believed that "the economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful." Sixty-eight percent indicated that "traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me."

Trump's populist demagogy

Vote totals revealed that Trump ended up with widespread support among working people, particularly white workers, some of whom had been voters for Democratic Party candidates in the past, including Bernie Sanders. It appears that a high percentage of the voters were attracted to Trump's populist demagogy—including his anti-politician, "drain the Washington swamp" message that denounced a rigged system designed for the Washington insiders at the expense of the vast majority.

As the campaign proceeded, Trump placed more and more emphasis on populist themes, promising decisive changes in trade, immigration, and health-care policies. He promised to bring back manufacturing and good paying jobs. He promoted a national campaign to rebuild the decaying infrastructure, and he promised to sweep away the job-stealing international trade agreements of previous administrations.

Trump called for an end to Obamacare—with its skyrocketing expenses for working people—and for replacing it with a better system, with priority treatment for veterans. He seemed to promise anything and everything he could, almost always without specifics, to win working-class votes.

At the same time, despite a multi-billion-dollar media offensive conducted by both capitalist parties and designed to attract voters, many millions stayed away from the polls on Election Day. Forty-four percent of all U.S. registered voters (102.7 million people) did not vote at all. This reflected widespread revulsion and distrust with both candidates. Millions felt both candidates were offensive in their personal characteristics and behavior, what they stood for, and in the way they communicated. For a large minority, there was less a sense of a "lesser evil" choice between the two capitalist candidates, and more a sense that there was no *real* choice.

As in most past elections, despite the modest efforts of our Socialist Action presidential campaign and other socialist campaigns, the political voice of the U.S. working class was generally absent in the corporate media. The United States is somewhat unique in this regard, as in many countries a Labor Party, based on the trade unions, or a mass Socialist Party, at least purports to speak for the working class. Without an independent working-class party, the ruling class has a far easier opportunity to convince working people



(Above) Students at the University of Connecticut protest on the day after the election.

into supporting pro-capitalist candidates, policies, and interests in the name of supporting the "lesser evil." That's why revolutionary socialists raise the pressing need for a Labor Party, based on a fighting, re-energized, and re-invigorated labor movement.

Partly due to this void in American politics, a significant portion of white workers in the U.S. chose to support the Trump campaign. Despite the reactionary, racist and misogynist tone underlying much of Trump's message, the broad support that his campaign attracted expressed in a sometimes distorted way the fact that many U.S. workers believe that they are not being heard and their issues and problems are being ignored by the rulers in Washington.

In fact, the anti-working-class actions and policies of the Democratic Party's Obama administration fed into many workers' feeling of betrayal. Obama bailed out Wall Street and the banks to the tune of \$32 trillion, while failing to create programs to create secure jobs with union wages or public works programs to rebuild depressed U.S. cities. He supported anti-working-class trade policies without concealing that his prime concern was to guarantee super-profits for big corporations.

Nowhere to be found under Obama were programs to provide adequate and affordable housing, clean water supplies, or funding for desperately needed public schools and day-care centers in working-class communities. Obama's "Affordable Care Act" ended up as a bonanza for the insurance companies and a cruel hoax for victims of the profit-gouging health-care industry.

The Socialist Action presidential campaign

During the 2016 election campaign Socialist Action candidates Jeff Mackler for President and Karen Schraufnagel for V.P. successfully gained a hearing for revolutionary socialist ideas through speaking tours,

and articles in our newspaper, website, and social media. Supporters around the country also took part in building our campaign, including distribution of thousands of copies of our four-page campaign platform.

Another socialist group, Freedom Socialist Party, called for a vote for Mackler and Schraufnagel because Socialist Action's "far-reaching platform includes abolishing the U.S. war machine; getting rid of racist, sexist and homophobic laws and practices; providing amnesty and equal rights for all immigrants; and defending labor."

A number of prominent individuals supported the Socialist Action campaign, while others invited our candidates to participate in debates around the country with candidates and representatives of organizations representing Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Jill Stein.

We call on all who were attracted to the Socialist Action campaign to continue to work with us in the coming months. During the election period we spoke about the need for working people and the oppressed to rely on their own power, organized independently in united action. This will be our focus going forward.

The reactionary programs promised by the capitalist Republican and Democratic parties underscores the need for all the movements for significant and just social change to redouble their organizing efforts. We must build our struggles on multiple fronts—against U.S. wars of imperialist aggression, for immigration rights and climate justice, against cop violence in minority communities, for full reproductive rights of women, and many other issues.

Join us in building these independent movements, and join Socialist Action! ■

Native American land under siege

All photos on the page: Marty Goodman / Socialist Action



By MARTY GOODMAN

Mni wiconi (water is life)! The siege of the Sioux Nation at Standing Rock, North Dakota, continues the 500-year rape of Native American land, resources, and culture. Driven by a capitalist system in crisis, oil profiteers have thrown overboard any concern over human rights or disastrous climate change.

Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) and Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), the pipeline's developer, backed by a militarized police force, high-tech surveillance, and private security goons, seek to complete a 1130-mile pipeline that will deliver 470,000 barrels of oil per day through four states from western North Dakota to Patoka, Ill.

Costing \$3.8 billion and scheduled for completion by the end of the year, the pipeline will go under the Missouri River, a source of water for the Sioux and some 18 million people downstream. Dave Archambault II, Standing Rock Tribal Chair, states, "We won't step down from this fight. ... This is about our water, our rights, and our dignity as human beings."

Currently, the digging is on "private land" that actually belongs to the Sioux, according to the Treaty of 1851. The pipeline is now within a few hundred yards of the Missouri River.

The attacks have ignited a fightback by the Sioux and over 100 other Native American nations to a degree that has not been seen since the struggle waged by the American Indian Movement (AIM) at Wounded Knee, S.D., in 1973, for which political prisoner Leonard Peltier remains in jail on trumped-up charges. Native Americans have been joined by hundreds, sometimes thousands, of supporters (including this writer) at the Oceti Sakowin camp at Standing Rock.

As of this writing, over 400 overwhelmingly peaceful pipeline opponents have been arrested at Standing Rock, 141 on Oct. 27 alone. Opponents were thrown into cages described by activists as dog-kennels and deprived of blankets in the cold Dakota night. Bail was set at \$1500, but the protesters were released after bail was provided by an anonymous donor.

Pipeline opponents, calling themselves "Water Protectors," have been brutalized by potentially bone-cracking rubber bullets, club swinging cops, dogs, pepper spray, tasers, concussion grenades, ear-piercing sound cannons, and high-velocity bean bags. The militarized police force at Standing Rock, supplied with Army equipment to police departments nationwide by the Obama administration, include armored trucks called MRAPs that sit next to the "frontier" between state and Sioux land.

North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple, a top Donald Trump supporter, called in the state National Guard in September. Oil production has increased by 600% in the state, but the poverty rate in Standing Rock is a staggering 43.2%.

The resistance has sparked solidarity actions around the United States and in Canada. Mainstream environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, have lashed out against DAPL, calling it, "Yet another example of an oil pipeline project being permitted without public engagement or sufficient environmental review." Portland's Climate Action Coalition is sending an old school bus to Standing Rock, retrofitted as a refuge and medical care facility. On Nov. 15, the climate organization 350.org has initiated a national day of solidarity with Standing Rock. The First Nation of Canada has issued statements in



solidarity with Standing Rock, as protests break out in Western Canada against a projected 600-mile pipeline that will transport Alberta Tar Sands crude to the Pacific Coast, home to many ancestral Native territories. The Trans Mountain pipeline expansion will more than double output to 890,000 barrels a day.

"Many were hit without warning."

Water protector Erica Gutierrez, a Cherokee, spoke with *Socialist Action* and described the chaotic protest scene she witnessed on Oct. 27: "Women were screaming, 'We love you,' not doing anything, hands up. Cops just grabbed [their] hands. One bean bag hit a woman in the face. Another was thrown on the ground for no reason. They were all doing nothing. Medics with armbands were arrested, their equipment taken away."

Gutierrez's great, great grandmother was on the "Trail of Tears," when Native Americans east of the Mississippi were brutally expelled, beginning in 1838. Some 4000 died as they were force-marched west by U.S. soldiers.

Another witness, Andrea Waitner of Michigan, told *Socialist Action* at the campsite that on Oct. 27 she saw cops arresting 50 water protectors in a prayer circle that she was in, including medics and journalists. Waitner also said that she saw a grandmother shot in the back with a rubber bullet and knocked down. Many, young and old, were hit with clubs without warning, she said.

Chief Arvol Looking Horse, a spiritual leader and member of the Society for World Peace, told *Socialist Action* that he was "in the front of the line" on Oct. 27 with his sacred pipe. The National Guard were pushing back using the "sound cannon," he said. "We had no weapons. The elderly were treated like criminals and all arrested. Over 100 were arrested, numbers were put on their arms and we were denied access to the jails."

Suddenly, he said, one man pointed an AR-15 rifle at water protectors. He was quickly chased by water protectors as he fled in his car. When caught, the man had a DAPL ID and other company identification. Nevertheless, corporate media portrayed the incident as protest "violence."

Obama administration delays and deliberates

DAPL's partners in crime are a slew of big banks such as Chase, TD Bank, and Wells Fargo—even Donald Trump has skin in the game. There was no serious environmental impact statement from DAPL or Energy Transfer Partners as required by law, nor the required meaningful consultation with the Sioux Nation, easing the way for pro-fossil fuel government officials to okay the plan.

Barack Obama, mislabeled a "pro-climate" president, could stop the corporate outlaws in their tracks. Unlike the Keystone XL project, which was finally canceled by the Obama administration last year, the Dakota Access project does not cross an international border with Canada. As of Oct. 28, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is deciding whether to grant the pipeline company an "easement" to build under Oahe Lake, a dammed-off section of the Missouri River.

On Sept. 9, the Obama administration issued a statement ordering the Army to not authorize constructing the Dakota Access pipeline on Army Corps land



bordering or under Lake Oahe until it can determine whether it will need to reconsider any of its previous decisions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other federal laws.

That same day a federal judge rejected efforts of the Standing Rock Sioux to stop pipeline construction, saying the tribe failed to show "it will suffer injury that would be prevented by any injunction the court could issue." The decision will be appealed. The company arrogantly never ceased operation.

On Nov. 1, Obama told news outlet "Now This" that his administration is monitoring the situation and held out the possibility of an Army Corps re-route of the pipeline. But, despite the arrests and brutality, he insisted, "we're going to let it play out for several more weeks and determine whether or not this can be resolved in a way that I think is properly attentive to the traditions of the first Americans."

The Sioux chairman of the Standing Rock, David Archambault II explained to Democracy Now! that "[The] company just destroyed some more sacred sites. And they knew about these sites on Oct. 17, but they didn't inform anyone until Oct. 27. They plowed through it. And, you know, that's cause for the state to ask the company to cease work. That's cause for the Corps of Engineers to say, 'Shut down now. You're not going to get this permit because you continue to violate indigenous peoples' rights.' The Obama administration or the Army Corps of Engineers can release that state-

(continued on page 11)

Mapping the pipeline in Sioux Country

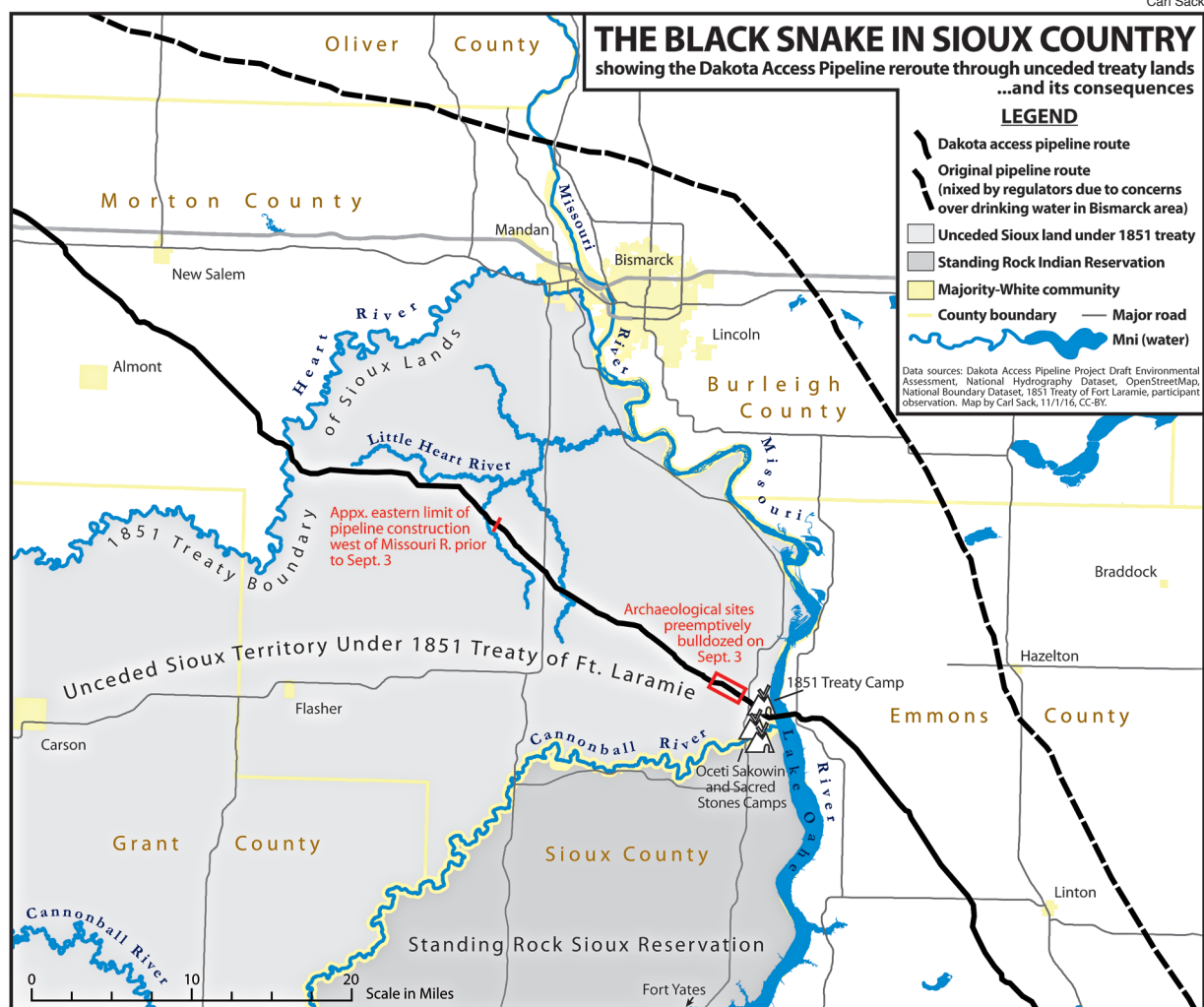
By CARL SACK

Thousands of Native Americans and their allies have gathered on unceded Sioux land delimited by the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie to try and stand in the way of the “black snake” that could poison the Standing Rock Reservation’s water supply. Many have noted that the pipeline corridor was repositioned from its original route north of Bismarck after white citizens spoke up against the threat a spill would pose to *their* drinking water—a threat duly recognized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Yet the Corps failed its federal mandate for meaningful with the Standing Rock Tribe before signing off on a route that moved the pipeline to their doorstep.

This is not to say that the good citizens of Bismarck and Mandan were wrong to protest. What’s wrong with the picture above isn’t the routing of the pipeline. What’s wrong is that the pipeline project exists to begin with. Some say it’s a good alternative to dangerous oil-by-rail shipments of Bakken crude. Those are bad too. We don’t need more fossil fuels making it to market to be burned and burn up the planet in turn (I am typing this in Wisconsin as the temperature nears 70 on the first of November). We do all need clean water. As the Sioux say, *mni wiconi* (“water is life”).

To keep to its construction schedule, the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners, has met non-violent water protectors with private security guards using attack dogs in a scene reminiscent of 1963 Birmingham. It has worked hand-in-glove with law enforcement and the National Guard to create a militarized response straight out of apartheid South Africa or occupied Ireland. It has locked up hundreds of protesters in wire cages like those used early on at Guantanamo Bay. Those on the ground fear something like another Kent State, yet they keep coming, and the worldwide solidarity has gone viral.

Yet for all that, when I went out to camp with the water protectors at Oceti Sakowin on Oct. 13, I had to rely on a friend’s hand-drawn sketch posted to Facebook for directions to the camp. If you Google “NoDAPL map,” you’ll find few maps available to provide visual context for the unfolding drama. The most popular seems to be the company’s own very small-



scale route map, showing a dotted line over highlighted counties on a generic road map backdrop.

This kind of view erases the people affected by the pipeline—quite literally, by covering over their communities with a hot pink gradient fill. It doesn’t tell you that all of Turtle Island (North America) is Indian Country, or that the project runs headlong into international treaties signed between the U.S. and various tribes and then unilaterally violated by Congress. It

doesn’t show you where the frontline communities have set up camp to fight back or where the pipeline company, spurred on by the internal pressure of their \$3.8 billion investment, has bulldozed sacred ground, or where exactly a pipeline break would endanger the drinking water of millions downstream.

Carl Sack’s original blog post, showing his map and others, is available at <https://northlandia.wordpress.com/2016/11/01/a-nodapl-map/>.

Trades versus ‘bottom feeders’

By BILL ONASCH

Along with multiple other crucial issues at stake in the struggle at Split Rock Reservation, reported elsewhere in this paper, is a growing polarization over climate and environmental issues in organized labor. Some important national unions have condemned the brutality against peaceful protesters and also oppose the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).

These include the Amalgamated Transit Union; American Postal Workers; Communications Workers; National Nurses United; National Writers Union division of the UAW; Service Employees International Union; and the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers (UE). So have “constituency groups” like the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists; Coalition of Labor Union Women; and Pride at Work, representing interests of LGBT workers.

The NNU sent volunteer RNs from their Emergency Response Network to treat injured protesters at Standing Rock. Most of these groups are part of the Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) and/or Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED).

But literally on the other side of the line drawn at Standing Rock, cheering on the rag-tag company rent-a-cops, police and National Guard units from five states violently attacking and arresting peaceful demonstrators and journalists, is the AFL-CIO—the dominant union federation in the USA.

This reflects the clout of the recently formed North American Building Trades Union (NABTU). This body collaborates with the capitalist American Petroleum Institute, and they’ve never seen a pipeline they didn’t like. Four of their affiliates—Laborers International Union; Operating Engineers; Pipefitters; Teamsters—are especially grateful for the offer of some dues-paying temporary jobs building DAPL.

None of these union bureaucrats are more outspoken than Laborers head honcho Terry O’Sullivan. In a letter to all of his members sent after the riot of the forces of “law and order,” he said, “The facts are on our side, yet in the past month, we have witnessed vocal opposition from groups, including some self-righteous unions, who know little about the project and have no job equity in it. ... These unions have sided with THUGS against trade unionists. They are a group of bottom-feeding organizations that are once again trying to destroy our members’ jobs.”

Since the topic was not aquariums, the bottom feeder reference was clearly a slur directed at low-wage workers. That wouldn’t apply to the NNU, whose members are all well-paid health-care professionals. It was probably aimed at SEIU, which is devoting major resources to organizing the working poor around 15 Dollars and a Union.

While none of the “self-righteous” unions have “job equity” in digging ditches and laying pipe, they know all about the disastrous effects of the DAPL project. That’s why they stand with the Native Americans he calls “THUGS.” They are motivated by principles and solidarity—attributes unfamiliar to brother O’Sullivan.

Neither the Native people nor their solidarity allies are indifferent to job losses in the construction trades. The LNS and TUED advocate programs based on the principle of Just Transition that would guarantee generations of work for the crafts during the necessary economic restructuring to replace climate-wrecking fossil fuels with clean, renewable energy such as solar and wind.

The struggles for class and climate justice have become inseparable. They received little attention during the recent election campaign. But they are beginning to be played out in the only class-based mass organizations of American workers—the trade unions.



MINNEAPOLIS — Close to 1500 people protested on Friday, Oct. 28, outside Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek’s office. The protesters were angered by the use of Hennepin County deputies and equipment brutalizing Indigenous people and their allies at Standing Rock.

Sheriff’s departments from across the Midwest have been sending public resources to aid private corporations in removing water protectors from their own land, so that the pipeline can be built. Citizens from these areas are rising up to protest the use of our tax dollars to attack Native sovereignty in the name of insatiable capitalist greed. Sheriff’s deputies from Madison returned home after successful protests in that city, but deputies and equipment from Minneapolis and surrounding areas remain.

— KAREN SCHRAUFNAGEL

Thousands in Toronto march in solidarity

A river of humanity poured down University Avenue, from the Ontario Legislature, past the U.S. Consulate, then into City Hall Square on Nov. 5. It was an evocative demonstration of solidarity with indigenous people resisting the construction of Dakota Access Pipe Line. Many held signs: “You can’t drink oil. Keep it in the ground” and “We stand with the Standing Rock Sioux”.

The demonstration swelled to well over 3000. At City Hall the mostly young protesters linked arms, and to the sound of drums, moved rhythmically in concentric circles. Sponsors included Occupy Canada, Idle No More Toronto, No One is Illegal, CUPE Locals 3903 (York U) and 3902 (U of Toronto), Hamilton .350, and others

— BARRY WEISLEDER

U.S. imperialist war in Syria: Acid test for antiwar movement



(Left) Girl wounded in Syrian government bombing attack on eastern Aleppo in August.

By JEFF MACKLER

A Sept. 6 *New York Times* article reporting on President Obama's press conference at the end of the Group of 20 conference in China caught my eye. Noting Obama's planned visit to Laos, *The Times* commented: "The United States and Laos have a difficult relationship that dates to the C.I.A.'s undeclared war in the 1960s and '70s, when American warplanes dropped 270 million bombs on this country, many of which are still buried in fields and forests."

Two hundred-seventy million bombs in an undeclared CIA war on a country with only seven million people! President Obama went to Laos to, among other things, apologize. Former president Bill Clinton similarly apologized to Guatemala during his presidency for the CIA's secret war supporting that nation's dictatorship, which slaughtered 400,000 indigenous Guatemalans. There have been no apologies for the 10-year U.S. mass slaughter in Vietnam that murdered four million Vietnamese, mostly civilians and with poison gas, napalm and saturation bombing.

There have been no apologies for the secret U.S.-orchestrated coup that overthrew the elected Iranian government of Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953 and installed the Shah Reza Pahlavi monarchy. No apologies when the U.S.-financed the Saddam Hussein government's 10-year war, 1980-88, against Iran when the Iranian masses overthrew that monarchy in 1979. One million Iranians died in that U.S.-abetted war.

Need we recount further the history of U.S. imperialism's wars of annihilation, conquest, "regime change," covert and overt? Was there one where the U.S. government stood on the side of humanity? One?

"In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War," was the title of an Oct. 16, 2016, *New York Times* article that read: "The Somalia campaign [where U.S. Special Forces bomb "terrorists" with impunity to protect alleged U.S. 'national interests—J.M.] is a blueprint for warfare that President Obama has embraced and will pass along to his successor. *It is a model the United States now employs across the Middle East and North Africa—from Syria to Libya—despite the president's stated aversion to American 'boots on the ground' in the world's war zones.* This year alone, the United States has carried out airstrikes in seven countries and conducted Special Operations missions in many more" (emphasis added).

But maybe Syria today is the exception to this "model." Could it be that the combined forces of U.S. imperialism, NATO, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the rest of the Gulf State monarchies, are on the side of truth and justice in Syria? Are they there, as they claim, to protect the defenseless people of Aleppo from indiscriminate civilian bombing by the Bashar Assad government and Russia? This is the view of the corporate media that daily blares headlines that Assad and Russia are guilty of war crimes, of violations of international law, of starving civilian populations, of bombing courageous rebel fighters and civilians in a civil war with American truth and justice on one side and a Russian-Iranian-Hezbollah cabal of mass murderers on the other.

Tragically, it is also the view of a small section of so-called antiwar activists and socialist organizations who, to date, have failed to mount a single action against the U.S. war on Syria, a war that in all its

fundamentals is indistinguishable from the U.S. wars in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen, and all the others.

But as with any new war, and they seem endless in the lexicon of U.S. atrocities, facts are invaluable in establishing what is actually taking place in Syria today. Curiously, my sources are from the chief propaganda voice and supposedly "internationally respected" *New York Times*. Much of the material, usually buried deep in the general pro-U.S. imperialist *Times* narrative, deals with the "negotiations" between the U.S. and Russia regarding the "rebel" evacuation of the northern city of Aleppo, Syria's largest city and commercial center until it was overrun by ISIS and the Al Qaida-affiliated Nusra Front. The latter is the U.S.-designated terrorist group whose forces, as we shall demonstrate, with the help of the *New York Times*, are inextricably linked to the U.S.-armed and financed "rebels."

- "The rebels involved in the operation [in northern Syria] appeared to be mainly from the groups fighting to unseat Mr. Assad that the *United States, Turkey and other allies support through a covert operations center in Turkey...*" The Aug. 24 *Times* article continues: "Turkish officials were adamant that they would continue operations in Syria until they had neutralized what they see as threats against national security."

Months earlier, *The Times* reported Pentagon figures that the flow of foreign [ISIS] fighters into Syria via Turkish-abetted corridors had been 2000 monthly. Turkey, in collaboration with the U.S., then sought the removal of the Syrian government of Bashar Assad.

- "The fighters attacking the [Syrian] regime from inside and outside Aleppo fought fiercely, knowing that this battle was a fateful one and would lift the siege on their families and children," said Zakaria Malahifi, the political chief of a rebel group backed by the C.I.A. and its counterparts in European and Arab states" (*New York Times*, Aug. 12, 2016, emphasis added).

- "But spearheading the rebel effort were hard-line Islamist groups including the Levant Conquest Front, which has been affiliated with Al Qaeda for years and only recently changed its name and claimed to have become independent. *While American officials dismissed the rebranding, saying the group did not change its ideology or its goal of establishing an Islamic emirate in Syria, analysts said it allowed the jihadists to work more closely with other rebel groups, blurring the lines between them* (*New York Times*, Aug. 25, 2016, emphasis added).

- "The jihadists' prominent role in the Aleppo offensive showed that they remain militarily indispensable to the wider rebel movement and increased their popularity at time when many Syrians [unnamed] criticize the United States for not doing more to protect Syrian civilians" (*New York Times*, Aug. 25, 2016).

- "The Nusra Front has been one of the most effective anti-Assad forces, and because of that United States-backed rebel groups often coordinate their activities with its units. Russia has argued that means that Washington is effectively supporting Nusra, and that the American-backed groups are legitimate targets. *So a joint campaign against Nusra would not only appear to concede Russia's point, but could also bring American firepower to bear against the strongest anti-Assad military force and a sometime partner of Washington's allies*" (*New York Times*, July 14, 2016, emphasis added).

- "Up to now, the United States has carried out occasional strikes against what have been described as senior Qaeda figures in Syria. But it has refrained from systematic attacks against the Nusra Front, whose ranks are heavily Syrian, including many who left less extreme rebel groups because Nusra was better armed and financed" (*New York Times*, July 14, 2016).

- "Faysal Itani, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, was also critical of the proposed military coordination with the Russians. He said that *combined attacks against Nusra would effectively end the Syrian opposition*, cementing Mr. Assad's grip on power and enraging most Syrians" (*New York Times*, July 14, 2016, emphasis added).

- "The Syrian government and its allies have often referred to all rebel fighters as belonging to the Nusra Front, while opposition fighters have said that they will not renounce tactical alliances with the Qaeda-linked group without new arms [from the U.S., Turkey and the Gulf State monarchies] or guarantees" (*New York Times*, Oct. 18, 2016).

- "The new offensive [in Aleppo] was a strong sign that rebel groups *vett*ed by the United States were continuing their tactical alliances with groups linked to Al Qaeda, rather than distancing themselves as Russia has demanded and the Americans have urged. ... The rebels argue that they cannot afford to shun any potential allies while they are under fire, including well-armed and motivated jihadists, without more robust aid from their international backers. ... Those taking part in the offensive include the Levant Conquest Front, a militant group formerly known as the Nusra Front that grew out of Al Qaeda; another hard-line Islamist faction, Ahrar al-Sham; and other rebel factions fighting Mr. Assad that have *been vett*ed by the *United States and its allies*" ("Syrian Rebels Launch Offensive to Break Siege of Aleppo," by Hwaida Saad and Anne Barnard, *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 2016, emphasis added).

- The same article reports, "Eleven of the roughly 20 rebel groups conducting the offensive have been vetted by the C.I.A. and have received arms from the agency, including anti-tank missiles, said Charles Lister, a senior fellow and Syria specialist at the Middle East Institute in Washington."

The article continues: "A spokesman for the C.I.A. declined to comment on any armed assistance to the rebels, which, although *it has been well publicized, is also still technically a covert program*" (emphasis added). ... "Mr. Lister and other analysts said the vast majority of the American-vetted rebel factions in Aleppo were fighting inside the city itself and conducting significant bombardments against Syrian government troops in support of the Qaeda-affiliated fighters carrying out the brunt of front-line fighting."

And further: "The unfortunate truth, however, is that these U.S.-backed groups remain somewhat dependent upon the Al Qaeda linked groups for organization and firepower in these operations," said Genevieve Casagrande, a Syria research analyst at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington. In addition to arms provided by the United States, much of the rebels' weaponry comes from regional states, like Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Mr. Lister said, including truck-borne multiple-rocket launcher systems and Czech-made Grad rockets with extended ranges."

Need we say more? Few, if any, informed sources doubt that the U.S. government is central to the organization, arming, financing, directing, and perpetuating the war in Syria to remove the Syrian government. It has been so since early 2012—that is, shortly after the entirely justified mass demonstrations against the Assad dictatorship's imposition of neo-liberal "reforms" that cut deep into the well-being of Syrian farmers and outraged democratically-minded forces. Tragically, in short order, and especially with the Assad government's firing on and arresting en masse peaceful demonstrators, the extremely limited and virtually leaderless mobilizations devolved into a U.S.-abetted "regime change" war, almost immediately involving massive ISIS and Al Qaida forces.

In a matter of a year, the latter well-armed and financed groups had literally occupied and conquered close to two-thirds of Syria while imposing reactionary jihadist-fundamentalist military rule virtually everywhere. Indeed, in October 2015, the Al-Qaida forces came close to conquering the entire Syrian nation—with militarized strongholds deeply established in the outskirts of the capital city, Damascus. It was only in recent months that in Daraya, for example, from which "rebels" daily launched artillery

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bombardments on downtown Damascus, negotiated agreements allowed for the “rebels” to evacuate unharmed. The same with another major Syrian city, Homs. Clearly, the Syrian government-requested Russian intervention had turned the tide.

But today, despite negotiated ceasefire agreements to similarly allow for the evacuation, through free passage corridors of Eastern Aleppo, of “rebels” and civilians alike, Al Qaida forces aimed at continuing the fighting and pressing for more U.S. weapons, have literally resorted to shooting residents who attempt to leave. During one of the several negotiated ceasefire periods, U.S. warplanes, “accidentally,” so U.S. officials claim, bombed Syrian Army soldiers, killing civilians as well.

Syria’s right to self-determination

The intervention of Russia, as well as others invited by the Syrian government to intervene on its behalf (Iran and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah) have been central to the present and often heated polemics issuing from currents on the U.S. left who reject any characterization of the war as a U.S. imperialist onslaught. Instead, these currents stand firmly opposed to united front mass action mobilizations that demand “U.S. Out Now!” and “Self-determination for Syria!” What is transpiring in Syria, they insist, is a civil war between the Syrian dictatorship on the one hand, and a fully justified popular rebellion on the other.

Others in this camp often argue that Syria today is the scene of a “proxy war” between U.S. imperialism and “Russian imperialism.” In accord with this view, the U.S. antiwar movement must condemn “both sides” equally and demand that both leave Syria. Further, they insist that “Down with Assad” must be a central antiwar movement demand.

Revolutionary socialists, on the other hand, stand in unqualified opposition to these views. In accord with our unconditional support to the historic right of oppressed nations to self-determination, we demand “U.S. Out Now!” This unconditional right to self-determination, from the time of and in the revolutionary tradition of the Russian Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky to today, extends to all poor and oppressed nations, including those led by dictators, like Bashar Assad, or to Iraq when the U.S. invaded that nation, then under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. It applies to the U.S. and to all imperialist interventions in Africa and Latin America today, whether or not any of these poor and formerly colonized nations are led by “democrats” or “dictators.” The job of dealing with tyrants, in our view, resides only with the oppressed people of the world and never with imperialist oppressors and interveners.

Whatever “rebel” forces exist in Syria today, and shortly after the earliest stages of the mass anti-Assad protests that began in late 2011 are armed, financed, and organized by U.S. imperialism, NATO, Turkey, and their reactionary Gulf State surrogates, including ISIS

and the Al Qaida-affiliated Nursa Front.

Following the “successful” U.S. slaughter and “regime change” in Libya, where the U.S./NATO “humanitarian war” destroyed the infrastructure of that country and killed thousands, U.S. imperialism set its sights on replacing the Assad government with one of its choosing. As with Libya, the U.S. proved to have no significant “democratically minded” allies in this venture. In addition to its own Special Operation killers, and covertly trained forces, in conjunction with its “coalition” allies (NATO, Turkey and the Gulf State monarchies), it provided massive aid to the “rebels” we have described in detail above. As a direct result, until the October 2015 Russian intervention, the above forces were on the verge of conquering all of Syria.

In our view, the right to self-determination necessarily includes the right of oppressed nations to request intervention from other nations—in the case of Syria, the intervention of Russia, Iran, and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah. This intervention, despite the intentions of capitalist Russia to use their new influence to seek a “negotiated” settlement, perhaps at the expense of Syria’s sovereignty, has had the effect of thwarting U.S. imperialism’s overt conquest of Syria. It has forced the retreat of ISIS, the Nusra Front, and the U.S.-backed “rebels,” all of which ceaselessly demand U.S. imperialist arms and intervention.

There is no doubt that Russian capitalism today has its own objectives in Syria, almost all of which center on a negotiated deal wherein the U.S. and the European Union will lessen the daily-increasing imperialist encirclement of Russia and ease up on the economic sanctions imposed on Russia following its opposition to the U.S.-backed fascist-led coup in Ukraine. While the Putin capitalist government is more than capable of negotiating away Syria’s right to self-determination, today its actions in Syria have had the effect of preventing a direct and immediate U.S. and allied conquest and occupation. This, in itself, however modest but important, is a gain for the Syrian people. It widens opportunities for future Syrian revolutionary socialist fighters to organize their own forces that stand opposed not only to all imperialist intervention but also against any capitalist government in Syria, including Assad’s.

Today, once again mired in a seemingly endless war in the Middle East, despised by all who have the vaguest memory of present and past imperialist wars of conquest and without any “reliable” allies on the ground, U.S. warmakers today seek a “negotiated” variant of their previous insistence on “regime change,” that is, President Assad’s removal.

I conclude this argument with reference to an important Sept. 30, 2016, *New York Times* article entitled, “Audio Reveals What John Kerry Told Syrians Behind Closed Doors.” Its author, Anne Barnard, *The Times* Middle East Bureau Chief, writes: “Secretary of State John Kerry was clearly exasperated, not least at his own government. Over and over again, he com-



(Above) Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

plained to a small group of [20] Syrian civilians [at the Dutch Mission to the United Nations on Sept. 22] that his diplomacy had not been backed by a serious threat of military force, according to an audio recording of the meeting obtained by *The New York Times*.

Barnard explains, “At the meeting last week, Mr. Kerry was trying to explain that the United States has no legal justification for attacking Mr. Assad’s government, whereas Russia was invited in by the government.” Kerry added another reason for his discouraging these Syrian civilians regarding their demands for more overt U.S. intervention. “A lot of Americans don’t believe that we should be fighting and sending young Americans over to die in another country,” he added.

Barnard reports that the secret recording included Kerry’s outlining U.S. plans to press for “free elections” to be supervised by “regional powers and the United Nations” that would include all Syrian refugees. In contrast to President Obama’s longstanding “Assad must go” policy, the “elections” Kerry outlined would allow for President Assad’s participation but, as with all imperialist supervised elections, his assured defeat.

After more than five-years of U.S.-orchestrated war in Syria, marked by an estimated 500,000 dead and nearly half the nation’s people displaced or in exile, the chief U.S. imperialist spokesman revealed today’s updated U.S. policy objectives, presumably to be achieved by further Special Forces operations, continued overt aid to all who seek Assad’s removal, and supplying just enough aid to the “rebels” to “keep the war going,” according to *The Times*, in anticipation of an eventual negotiated settlement.

Needless to say, a principled U.S. antiwar movement must reject any and all “rights” of U.S. imperialism and its “coalition partners” to negotiate any aspect of Syria’s future. Central to the construction of a powerful and united antiwar today, fully capable of staying the hand of the U.S. warmakers and mobilizing tens and hundreds of thousands to do so, are two demands: U.S. Out Now! and Self-determination for Syria! ■

U.S. Hands Off Syria: An urgent message for peace on the eve of wider war

The statement below, initiated by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), the U.S. Peace Council, and others has been signed by over 2000 organizations and individuals in the U.S. and around the world. In anticipation of a wider U.S.-orchestrated imperialist intervention in Syria, the recently formed Hands of Syria Coalition provides a principled basis for antiwar unity in action in the dangerous period ahead. “U.S. Out of Syria Now!” and “Self-determination for Syria!” are the coalition’s main points of unity. Socialist Action urges its friends and supporters to sign on to this important effort via: <http://HandsOffSyriaCoalition.net>.

We raise our voices against the violence of war and the enormous pressure of war propaganda, lies and hidden agendas that are used to justify this war and every past U.S. war.

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, endorse the following Points of Unity and will work together as an Ad Hoc Coalition to help put an end to the regime change intervention by the United States, NATO and their regional allies and the killing of innocent people in Syria:

The continuation of the war in Syria is the result of a U.S.-orchestrated intervention by the United States, NATO, their regional allies and reactionary forces, the goal of which is regime change in Syria.

This policy of regime change in Syria is illegal and in clear violation of the United Nations Charter, the letter and spirit of international law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This policy of forced regime change is threatening the security of the region and the world and has increased

the danger of direct confrontation between the United States and Russia, with the potential of a nuclear catastrophe for the whole world.

War and U.S. and EU sanctions have destabilized every sector of Syria’s economy, transforming a once self-sufficient country into an aid-dependent nation. Half the Syrian population is now displaced. A UN ESCWA report reveals these U.S. sanctions on Syria are crippling aid work during one of the largest humanitarian emergency since World War II. The one third of Syrians refugees in surrounding Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have been hit hard by U.S. cuts to UNICEF. This forces desperate refugees to struggle to reach Europe.

No foreign entity, be it a foreign government or an armed group, has the right to violate the fundamental rights of the Syrian people to independence, national sovereignty and self-determination. This includes the right of the Syrian government to request and accept military assistance from other countries, as even the U.S. government has admitted.

Only the people of Syria have the inalienable right to choose their leaders and determine the character of their government, free from foreign intervention. This right cannot be properly exercised under the conditions of U.S.-orchestrated foreign intervention against the Syrian people.

Our opposition is to forced regime change in Syria by U.S.-backed foreign powers and their mercenaries. It is not our business to support or oppose President Assad or the Syrian government. Only the Syrian people have the right to decide the legitimacy of their government.

The most urgent issue at present is peace and putting an end to the violence of foreign intervention that has

resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions of Syrians both internally or as refugees abroad.

Based on these Points of Unity, we, as individuals and organizations in an Ad Hoc Coalition agree on the following demands and commit ourselves to working together to help achieve them:

An immediate end to the U.S. policy of forced regime change in Syria and full recognition and compliance by the U.S., NATO and their allies with principles of international law and the U.N. Charter, including respect for the independence and territorial integrity of Syria.

An immediate end to all foreign aggression against Syria, and serious efforts toward a political resolution to the war.

An immediate end to all military, financial, logistical and intelligence support by the U.S., NATO and their regional allies to all foreign mercenaries and extremists in the Middle East region.

An immediate end to economic sanctions against Syria. Massive international aid for displaced people within Syria and Syrian refugees abroad.

Only in a peaceful and independent Syria, free of foreign aggression, can the people of Syria freely exercise their sovereign rights, express their free will and make free choices about their government and their country’s leadership.

We invite all supporters of peace and peoples’ right to self-determination around the world to join hands of cooperation in this effort to achieve these most humanitarian demands. We need jobs, healthcare, education and an end to racist police violence here at home, not U.S. wars abroad! ■

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>



(Photo) Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (left) jokes with EU Council President Donald Tusk during CETA signing ceremony in Brussels, Oct. 30.

investors against sovereign governments and their citizens.

CETA would have grave consequences for the Canadian economy and workers. In the first academic study on CETA, economists Pierre Kohler and Servaas Storm show that Canada would lose 23,000 jobs between now and 2023. Using the credible methodology of the United Nations Global Policy Model, this study depicts the flows of non-scientific reports commissioned by the EU and the Canadian government. It shows that: (1) tax income will decrease by 0.12 per cent of GDP, as countries would reduce corporate taxes to compete for investment. (2) Workers will lose \$2,656 per person over seven years. (3) Canada's GDP would fall 0.12 per cent.

Economist Jim Stanford finds that the trade deal would make Canada's current trade imbalance with the EU incrementally worse. According to Stanford, "the growing bilateral deficit and resulting decline in net demand for Canadian-made automotive products arising from this widening bilateral deficit will negatively affect Canadian production, investment, and employment opportunities." And, under CETA, drug costs to Canadians are estimated to increase by between \$850 million and \$1.6 billion annually.

CETA is very undemocratic. Public consultation about the deal was very limited and the text of the agreement was released late, which severely limited public debate. The deal is also undemocratic due to its pro-corporate regulations about government procurement policies. Currently, Canada's existing commitments covering provincial and local government purchasing under international trade treaties are quite limited.

But CETA promises corporations, in the words of Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives' Scott Sinclair, "unconditional access to government procurement, particularly at the sub-national level. The proposed restrictions on government purchasing would eliminate the flexibility for governments to use their purchasing power to enhance local benefits, even when contracts are competed openly and do not discriminate on the basis of the nationality of the suppliers."

A corporate power grab, CETA can be defeated. Defeating CETA should be followed by sending other pro-corporate "free" trade agreements such as Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA) with China, and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into the trash bin of history. Unions, and the NDP (which has been rather quiet on CETA) should take the lead in this effort. ■

**Toronto Socialist Action's annual Trotsky School
Education for Activists Conference,
Nov. 18-19: *Revolutionary Strategy*
Woodsworth College Residence
321 Bloor Street West, room 20.
More information: Socialist Action / Ligue pour
l'Action socialiste. www.socialistaction.ca**

Canada-EU trade pact still not a done deal

By Y. FIKRET KAYALI

The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, barely rescued from the grave, may yet prove to be one of the walking-dead. The signature of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and those of his European counterparts on the document are, at this point, merely ceremonial. Before implementation, ratification votes must be held in Ottawa and in 28 parliaments across the old continent.

The regional assembly in Wallonia allowed the Belgian PM to sign on because the legality of the Investor State Dispute Settlement mechanism, which permits firms to sue governments over regulations that allegedly affect profits, will first be tested in court.

Canada's trade minister, Chrystia Freeland, frustrated with the Belgian regional parliament that had been blocking the deal, was on the verge of tears as she said, "Canada is disappointed. I am personally very disappointed. I have worked very, very hard. We have decided to go home. I am truly very, very sad," the *Guardian* reported. The head of the European Parliament, however, held emergency talks in a bid to save the deal.

In sharp contrast to Chrystia Freeland, socialists in Canada join millions of people who celebrated the temporary setback to CETA. We restate our commitment to oppose CETA and similar undemocratic, pro-big business, anti-labour so-called free trade agreements.

Initiated in the Stephen Harper years, and en-

dorsed by Justin Trudeau's Liberal government, CETA has been seven years in the making. It stumbled when the legislative assembly of Wallonia, a French-speaking region with a population of 3.5 million, blocked the government in Brussels from signing the deal. Wallonia's vocal and powerful farmers have been central to the region's objections to the investment protection provisions of the treaty. The deal cannot be ratified without European Union unanimity.

There is deep, widespread opposition to CETA, including by European labour unions, environmentalists and human rights groups. On September 17, 320,000 people marched against CETA and TTIP in Germany. The governments of Romania and Bulgaria have said that they will vote against CETA if Canada doesn't change its visa requirements. Citizens in Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and Austria have also expressed grave concerns. In Canada, many social justice organizations, such as the Council of Canadians, have been organizing campaigns against CETA. In June, dairy farmers from Ontario and Quebec drove to Parliament Hill with their tractors to raise concerns about lost income and the slow erosion of supply management under the proposed deal.

CETA is much more than a trade agreement. It is an arrangement to introduce a variety of capital-friendly changes in areas as diverse as intellectual property rights, government procurement, food safety and environmental protection, financial regulation, the temporary movement of workers, and public services. It stipulates strong and fully enforceable protections for

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Precarious employment and shrinking pensions are here to stay, says Canada's Finance Minister Bill Morneau. He told a meeting of the federal Liberal Party's Ontario wing on Oct. 23 that Canadians should get used to a "job churn" of short-term work and many career changes in life. The multi-millionaire ex-Bay Street CEO also demanded "a recognition that people aren't going to have the same pension benefits" as past generations.

Morneau touted small increases to the Canada Pension Plan, along with the new Child Benefit provided by the federal Liberal government. But these measures will not raise many seniors above the poverty line or provide affordable child care for millions of working parents who need it—let alone stop bosses from converting decent-paying jobs into poorly paying ones.

What instead should be done? Legislate a shorter workweek, without loss of pay or benefits. Institute a \$20 per hour minimum wage, massively invest in infrastructure repair, and opt for public ownership of runaway plants. Such moves would be steps towards a solution – though they're not likely to find a spot on the Finance Minister's agenda. *What,*

Morneau: Just get used to it!

instead, does he have in mind?

The real Liberal agenda

Morneau hand picked an Advisory Council on Economic Growth, and it came up with a plan. The scheme centres on privatization, deregulation, public-private partnerships, and user fees. This was clearly reflected in the Minister's Nov. 1 economic update to Parliament.

In the case of new infrastructure projects, such as repairing the damage done to the natural environment, and meeting the needs of First Nations, the panel says government should pay, but the private sector should own.

Morneau's band of Robin Hood-in-reverse experts urge Ottawa to create a new agency to seek foreign investment in Canada, and to foster a "more resilient workforce." The latter would include hundreds of thousands of additional immigrants—that is, already trained workers who will labour for the minimum wage, or less. This plan is old, not bold. It's one that ignores economic reality.

The world economy is stagnant. Many Canadian businesses are profitable, but few are investing their profits in produc-

tion. There is plenty of money—stashed away in negative yield government bonds and offshore banks and dummy corporations. Instead of demanding that government tap this wealth, which was created by human labour and nature, or borrow money at rock-bottom interest rates in order to build affordable housing, green energy technology and public transit, the council says Ottawa should find something to privatize. The fact that privatization usually costs consumers more in the end is not its concern.

Last, but not least, Morneau's minions ask the Liberal government to reduce regulations. If this seems like the kind of environmental deregulation that Stephen Harper's Conservatives applied to pipelines, it's no accident.

So, in case you were still wondering, this is the Trudeau-Morneau agenda. Get used to it? Not.

The best politicians money can buy

In October, Finance Minister Bill Morneau was very busy on another front. He hosted an exclusive \$1500 a ticket Liberal Party fundraiser at the Halifax home of a mining executive-turned-land-developer.

About 15 prominent business people attended, presumably to gain the ear of the man who oversees billions of dollars in public spending.

The *Globe and Mail* newspaper reported that there were at least 20 similar events in 2016 featuring senior Liberal cabinet ministers, among them Infrastructure Minister Amarjeet Sohi, Immigration Minister John McCallum, and Morneau. Federal Ethics commissioner, May Dawson, drew attention to the same issue in her June report. She urged a crackdown on ministers providing access in return for party donations, citing four examples that include Morneau and Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould.

In Ontario, new rules ban ministers and all MPs from attending fundraisers as of Jan. 1, 2017. The law already bars donations to parties by corporations and unions—a false equation if ever there was one, since unions are workers' self-defence organizations, and are not privately owned, profit-seeking, economic dictatorships controlled by a wealthy few.

Trying to curtail corporate influence in politics in a capitalist society is like trying to stop a waterfall with a sieve. It is another reason socialists seek system change, rather than settle for the cosmetic kind. ■

British Columbia survey shows religion is on decline

By HELEN SMITH

The Canadian census mandatory long-form has, for many years, been an important guide for the government to understand the extent of religious belief in the country. The census results are used to assist government in providing social and cultural resources to the population according to greatest need and demographics. Secular humanists, however, have long wondered if the wording on the census was too favorable towards religion and skewed the results.

The British Columbia Humanist Association (BCHA) set out to inquire further into this subject by hiring Insights West, a survey company, to conduct 800 on-line interviews between May 31 and June 3, 2016. The BCHA hoped to find out more detail about people's religious beliefs and practice. The results were quite marked. While 56% of respondents replied that they believed in the existence of a higher power (26% did not believe and 18%

were unsure), when the same people were asked in a separate question if they actually practiced a particular religion or faith, 69% responded that they did not. When asked whether they ever attended religious services at a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue, 55% indicated that they never attended, 23% indicated that they only attended on holidays or for special events, 4% attended once or twice a month, 5% only several times a year, and only 11% attended once a week or more.

The results indicate that religious observance, through attendance at a religious institution, is low regardless of whether people profess to believe in a higher power.

Sixty per cent said they supported charitable status for religious groups. However, when this question was broken down into separate questions about specific government subsidies (tax exemptions and income tax credits) for houses of worship, parking lots, and clergy residences, support dropped significantly with 51%, 68%, and 58% opposed, respectively. The support for subsidy to institu-

tions such as religious hospitals also dropped significantly if these institutions were seen to discriminate in human resource decisions against a job candidate or employee based on the person's religious beliefs (56% strongly opposed and 19% somewhat opposed), and support for government subsidized religious hospitals significantly dropped if they refused to provide specific services to the public such as abortions or doctor-assisted dying (52% strongly opposed and 19% somewhat opposed).

Ian Bushfield, the executive director of the BCHA remarked that "Religion is on the wane in BC. In its place is an increasingly secular and non-religious constituency that politicians and policy makers will need to pay attention to. ...

"As B.C. becomes increasingly irreligious, it is up to religious groups to justify the entitlements they continue to enjoy at taxpayer's expense. ... The state doesn't need to continue to privilege religious world views over secular ones."

... Teachers

(continued from page 3)

the third year, and 2.5 percent in the fourth year. Teachers will retain "step-and-lane" pay hikes for experienced teachers based on seniority, special skills, and training, but will start paying higher health insurance costs in 2019 and beyond. The union negotiators agreed to initial member payment of nearly 1 percent of annual total pay.

The contract eliminates a no-layoff provision from the earlier contract, and thereby acknowledges school board plans to lay off members in coming years. It would give teachers with years of service a cash bonus if they resign or retire and leave the school system by next summer.

Under the pact, some tenured teachers impacted by layoffs can be given the option to fill temporary vacant positions for up to 10 months while earning full pay and benefits.

Also, teachers of kindergarten through second grade with a class size of 32 or more students can receive an assistant to help with classroom instruction. However, such assistance will not

be provided to special education teachers and clinicians who were especially dissatisfied with the agreement.

Clinicians face extreme challenges, and with community activists had been demanding relief. Currently, there are only 300 social workers to handle a CPS student population of over 350,000. Union leaders are telling their members and the community that this issue is not "strikingable," and public pressure and lobbying will be necessary to build awareness of these issues in the future.

During negotiations the mayor finally agreed to tap the \$175 million Tax Increment Financing Account surplus. To support the deal roughly half of this fund surplus is scheduled to be allocated to the Chicago Public schools. The CTU had been demanding use of these funds that have traditionally gone to new business development projects. The contract and local budget assumes that the state legislature in Springfield will come up with \$215 million in pension relief money due in January 2017. If the state fails to meet this obligation, additional teacher layoffs may be implemented to pay for the resulting budget deficit.

... Spain

(continued from page 4)

the Socialist Party and forms its most conservative and authoritarian segment. In light of the abstentions, the PSOE has lost considerable standing as an opposition party to the PP.

The big winner is perhaps the left-populist party Podemos. Podemos refused to negotiate with the PP. It proposed an electoral coalition in opposition to austerity with the PSOE and Ciudadanos, an anti-corruption capitalist party. But both parties rejected the proposal, and Ciudadanos formed a coalition with the PP.

Podemos has been clear on its support of regional autonomy and the right to independence for the Basque Country and the Catalan region. Podemos is now only a few percentage points behind the

PSOE in polls, and has positioned itself as the only significant political force opposed to austerity and the attacks on workers rights.

But Podemos may not be able to take advantage of the crisis within the PSOE, as it faces its own internal crisis. Currently, there is a power struggle between Pablo Iglesias, the general secretary of Podemos, and the number-two leader of the party. In addition, a significant dissident current has emerged from within Podemos that is demanding greater internal party democracy and inclusiveness.

The situation remains fluid, and only time and the Spanish people will determine the outcome of the current political crisis. While the right has regained control, their power has never been more fragile since the end of the Franco dictatorship 40 years ago.

... Native American land under siege

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ment today, and then the construction will stop."

Labor for Standing Rock

An important development is the establishment of the rank-and-file "Labor for Standing Rock" (LSR), which is challenging AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka's support for DAPL (see Facebook Labor for Standing Rock). Trumka described DAPL as, incredibly, "providing over 4500 high-quality, family-supporting jobs." But, as the saying goes, "There are no

jobs on a dead planet." An on-line statement opposing Trumka's "business unionism" was issued by "Labor for Palestine," which garnered over 12,000 signers.

Michael Letwin, a co-founder of LSR, is a veteran of the Wounded Knee support movement in 1973 and former president of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys, UAW Local 2325, in New York City. Letwin said, "Escalating police attacks against unarmed water protectors at standing rock on behalf of the oil and gas industry evokes images of Wounded Knee in 1890 and 1973, brutality against the civil rights movement,

and state violence today from Ferguson and Baltimore to Palestine." He continued, "The labor movement has faced similar violence throughout its history, and from the same forces of greed and injustice."

Over the weekend of Oct. 28-29, a dozen LSR members established a campsite at Standing Rock with a flag that stated "Union Camp."

As Water Protector Dallas Goldtooth said in a recent video, "Colonization hasn't ended. This process of imperialism where we are regulated in our ability to decide what happens to our land, our water, our bodies, our futures in an overtly militarized law enforcement, we stand strong and committed to peaceful disobedience and to stop this pipeline."

... Women strike

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women's pay is equal. Women are saying that is not acceptable.

In the capital, Reykjavik, thousands of women gathered in the central square when they had walked out of offices, shops, factories, and schools. There were similar but smaller actions all around the country.

Women in Iceland have a long history of resorting to strikes as their favored tactic of protest. While in other countries women may demonstrate, organize rallies, or just decide to lobby for law reform, in Iceland they usually decide to withdraw their labor power from the economy. The tactic has gotten some results and empowers women for their next struggle.

On the same date, Oct. 24, in 1975, 90% of the women in rural and urban Iceland went on strike, which they called a "day off." They left their jobs, refused to cook or do housework, or take care of the children. Many industries had to shut down, newspapers were not printed, there was no telephone service, and most schools were closed. They wanted to illustrate the importance of women, and protest their lack of political

power and equal pay. At the time, women made 40% less than men.

In 2005, women left work at 2:08 p.m. the time at which they said they would have started working for free. In 2008, they went on strike at 2:25 p.m.

This year, a 20-year-old striker talked about how disheartening it is to see the continuing pay gap: "We know that no country in the world has reached gender equality, but today reminds me that not even the country that is supposed to have the most equal rights pays women the same as men."

United States

Many feminists in the United States have been marveling at the amazing pictures of the strikes and marches in these three countries. But how is it possible to look at what has happened there and not look at what happens here? What are the basic differences?

All three countries had an element of militancy rarely seen in the U.S. In every country the organizers spoke about the actions empowering women. That is what strikes and mass actions achieve. In Argentina every year women organize marches with 50,000 or 60,000 women in the streets, and there are conferences with thousands of women who strategize how to move forward the struggle for women's rights.

When you look at the United States the women's movement looks tranquil. What is the difference? One thing is that the movements in Poland, Argentina, and Iceland are independent of political parties. In the United States the Democrats undermine, control, and manipulate grassroots movements. They promise incremental change, which becomes meaningless. No wonder those pictures of strikes and mass actions captivated feminists here! Notice that in Poland after the women's strike the ruling party did not say that they would "make changes" to the hated legislation. They said their members should vote against it.

Also, compare the tactic of the strike to the main tactic of most U.S. women's organizations—lobbying. Lobbying politicians for small reforms is the most disempowering activity for any movement. Strikes are the most empowering.

Feminists in the United States who want a movement that empowers women should take the first step; they must cut the chain and start building a movement independent of Democrats and Republicans.

We need to learn from the militancy of other countries and not just admire their pictures. It's time to build the independent power necessary to move forward our struggle for women's rights.

Women strike around the world for equal rights



Pall Stefansson

By ANN MONTAGUE

Mass protests linked with strike activity by women have taken place in several countries over the last month, and the movement appears to be spreading. The feminist strike demands have been unique to each country and an indication of increased militancy around demands that address issues women have been fighting for year after year. In one of the latest actions, on Nov. 7, women in France walked off the job at 4:34 p.m. to protest being paid less than men for equivalent work.

Poland: Abortion

On Oct. 3, seven million women throughout Poland turned out to defend their basic reproductive rights. They were protesting a proposed law that will force women to give birth and will include a prison sentence of up to five years for any woman who terminates a pregnancy. There could be a formal investigation of any woman who has a miscarriage.

The introduction of this legislation in March sparked a massive women's rights movement that is the largest movement focused on women's rights in Polish history. Besides opposition to this oppressive law, there has been a strong wave of support for the liberalization of the present abortion law, which was passed in 1993.

Tens of thousands of women went on strike and students boycotted classes throughout Poland. Some 30,000 women dressed in black gathered in the rain at Warsaw's Castle Square, chanting, "we want doctors not missionaries!" and carrying signs, "My Uterus, My Opinion" and "Women Just Want FUN-damental Rights."

Activist Agnieszka Graff was ecstatic. She told the British *Guardian*, "The protest was bigger than anyone expected. People were astonished. Warsaw was swarming with black. It was amazing to feel the energy and the anger, the emotional intensity was incredible." Since the rally was too large for the square, organizers led the march towards parliament, paralyzing

traffic in the center of the city for two hours.

As a result of the strikes and mass marches, the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) urged their MPs to vote down the controversial bill. Former Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz told reporters that the PiS had "backtracked because it was scared by all the women who hit the streets in protest." Recent polls show that public opinion has shifted since the protests with nearly overwhelming opposition to the proposed ban and increasing support for the liberalization of existing laws.

Krystyna Kacpura, an organizer of the actions, reflected, "This victory on abortion has empowered Polish women—we'll never be the same. After our Warsaw protest, something has snapped in us. Our struggle with politicians and the church is not over, but we'll keep fighting for our right to choose. There is so much solidarity among Polish women right now. I have never been so proud of all the empowered women. We will never be the same again."

Argentina: Femicide

On Oct. 19, tens of thousands of women walked off the job to protest gender violence and economic inequality. This was the first women's strike in Argentina, although Argentine feminists organize massive marches every year in connection with the annual National Women's Conferences. In fact, a little over a week before this massive action, the 31st National Women's Conference brought thousands of women together to discuss how to move forward in the struggle for women's rights.

There were massive marches against gender violence in 2015 and 2016 under the slogan "Ni Una Menos" (Not One Less). This year the marches and strikes came after a particularly brutal gang rape and murder of a teenaged girl. Women carried signs of missing and murdered women and chanted, "We won't forgive, we won't forget."

The organizers called for women to strike in the streets between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. and to wear black as a symbol of collective mourning over the killing of

(Above) Women walk out in Reykjavik, Iceland, on Oct. 24 to protest the pay gap with men.

16-year-old Lucia Perez and other victims of femicide. The women who walked off their jobs wanted to show the crucial role of women in Argentina's economy as well as a reminder that they are the first victims of the massive layoffs in the public and private sectors being carried out by the administration of President Mauricio Macri. Feminist activist Maria Florencia Alcaraz made the connection in speaking with the *Buenos Aires Herald*, "Behind femicides there is an economic frame that makes women more vulnerable to violence."

Women workers pressured their unions to support the one-hour general strike. It was endorsed by all of Argentina's major unions. However the CGT (General Labor Federation) refused to call it a "general strike" and just called it a "day of struggle and reflection." Activist Luciana Perker ridiculed this reaction. "While the CGT is drinking tea with Macri, we take to the streets. We are striking because we earn less, we face more unemployment, we are hit harder by precarious life and poverty."

The march comes as Macri's government promotes a bill that will eliminate the special prosecutor focused on violence against women and femicide. According to data from human rights organizations, every 30 hours a woman in Argentina dies from domestic violence.

Iceland: Pay gap

In Iceland, women went on strike to protest the pay gap between women and men. Women make between 14-18 percent less than men, and unions and women's organizations say that means women basically work for free, starting at 2:38 p.m.

On Oct. 24 thousands of women walked out. Current estimates say that if the pay gap continues to shrink at its current rate, it will be 52 years before men's and

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