

Stop Obama's new 'war on terrorism'!

By JEFF MACKLER

In a short-lived but well-crafted move aimed at hyping President Obama's credentials as a reasonable and democratic warmaker, the president submitted a resolution to Congress in mid-February requesting "authorization for use of force" to proceed full tilt with his administration's now worldwide "war on [Islamic] terrorism."

At first glance, what struck his contentious co-warrior Republican "adversaries" as strange was that the president appeared to be exercising a bit of self-restraint in limiting his request to three years. This was not to mention his asking permission from Congress itself to make yet another war, but this time on a global basis and not directly against any particular nation.

Obama sought to contrast his "democratic" (let Congress decide rather than the president) and time-limited approach to making war to the previous Bush administration's request for blanket or unlimited authority to pursue terrorists everywhere.

As expected, in the circus-like atmosphere that characterizes congressional debate, Republicans beat the war drums even louder—attacking Obama for limiting his war, and thus future presidents' war powers to just three years. But the media-promoted sound and fury attendant to the debate rapidly subsided when it was revealed that Obama's purported self-imposed limitations were a fraud.

The Feb. 26 *New York Times* noted, "Mr. Obama did not ask Congress to repeal a 2001 [Bush-era] measure authorizing force against Al Qaeda and its affiliates, which would mean that he would still have wide discretion to wage war."

Congressional approval of Obama's legacy-burnishing gesture amounted to rubber stamping what he has been doing for the past six months and longer, including bombing Islamic State forces (ISIS or ISIL), or any other organization that the administration deems terrorist, in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, across Africa, and far beyond.

With this in mind, the heated Capitol Hill debate faded into oblivion as the bipartisan warmakers fully understood that U.S. imperialism recognizes no limits to its capacity to proceed with wars anywhere and everywhere in pursuit of power, profit, and global domination. Indeed, overt and covert wars, drone wars, privatized army wars, embargo,



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

blockade and sanction wars, and U.S.-engineered coups and assassinations are the norm among U.S. imperialism's top decision-making oligarchical elite—the .0001 percent.

Presidents, whether they be Obama-bright or Bush-not-so-bright, as well as posturing politicians of all capitalist parties, are mere agents, coated with a democratic veneer but pledged far in advance to fealty to capitalism's exploits everywhere.

The month of February featured almost daily front-page headlines recounting horrific terrorist attacks and the rapid growth of ISIS. On the heels of the terror bombing of France's racist and Islamophobic *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, after which 50 heads of state marched through the streets of Paris with more than 1.5 million misled and enthralled people behind them, one after another of the world's top leaders declared their allegiance to this new war against "Islamic terrorism."

The scene was set for the U.S. to take the lead in this effort. But before bombing "terrorists" around the world with impunity, Obama, the outwardly restrained and cool-headed U.S. imperial head of state, made sure that his

planned warmaking was not perceived as directed at Arabs or Muslims or Islam—at least in the U.S.

His high-profile, three-day White House meeting on "Countering Violent Extremism," attended by representatives of 60 nations in mid-February, heard the president state, "Labeling noxious beliefs and mass murder as 'Islamic' would play right into the hands of terrorists who claim that the United States is at war with Islam itself."

Nevertheless, a number of U.S.-based human right groups boycotted the meeting, including the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, whose spokesperson, "Samer Khalaf, noted, "This focus only on Arabs or Muslims reinforces the stereotype of Arab and Muslim Americans as security threats and thus perpetuates hatred of the respective communities."

Khalaf was undoubtedly referring to the 700,000 Muslim-Americans who had been subjected to FBI or NSA interrogation, surveillance, or arrest, not to mention provocateur infiltration of mosques, frame-up trials, and groundless convictions based on secret testimony of unnamed individuals or government institutions. As with the "great

deporter's" million-plus immigrants thrown out of the country or imprisoned in border detention camps, the president's capacity to square words with deeds has not gone unnoticed by his victims, rhetoric notwithstanding.

The president's disclaimers aside the screaming headlines recounting recent horrific attacks on Danish, Jordanian, Egyptian, and French citizens—as well as alleged terrorists ever mobilizing to join ISIS from England, the U.S., Egypt and elsewhere—consistently lack historical or present-day context.

The Jordanian pilot shot down and beheaded by ISIS, for example, was flying a U.S. aircraft to launch deadly missiles in Iraq to advance U.S. imperial interests. Denmark too, voted war credits to aid the U.S. slaughter. Its pilots fly U.S.-made F-18 fighter jets that bring death and destruction to Iraq and Syria.

When a dozen Assyrian Christian laborers in Libya were murdered by ISIS forces, Egypt retaliated by indiscriminately bombing civilian neighborhoods in the western Libyan city of Derna. Need we recall that the U.S.-backed general and now president, Abdel Fat-

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Who killed Brandon Tate-Brown?

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Why did Philadelphia cops kill Brandon Tate-Brown? Why did police pull over his car, since he had committed no crime? And what were the names of the officers who shot the young Black man?

His mother, Tanya Brown-Dickerson, has been searching for answers. "Brandon was a beautiful and spirited young man," Brown told a reporter for *Roots*. "All he wanted was to laugh and have fun. He didn't want to die. ... He would never be confrontational with police."

More than two months after the Dec. 15 killing, the police department finally allowed Brown-Dickerson and her attorneys to view a video taken at the scene. The footage revealed that the young Black man was not carrying a weapon when he was shot in the back of the head. The video and statements by witnesses contradict the account of the incident that police gave to the press.

The killing of Brandon Tate-Brown appears to fit readily into the pattern that we saw with the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., the strangling of Eric Garner in New York, and similar cases in which police have cut down Black people with abandon. These atrocities have motivated tens of thousands to protest the systematized racism at their core and to raise the call, "Black lives matter!"

There is some justification for the belief that Tate-Brown was pulled over for "driving while Black" with a new car in a mainly white neighborhood. Such arbitrary traffic stops are not out of the question under Philadelphia's stop and frisk policy—the most rigorous of any big city in the nation. A report released last month by the American Civil Liberties Union and other attorneys found that at least 37 percent of the over 200,000 stops by Philadelphia police in 2014 were done without reasonable suspicion of criminal activity. And although Blacks and Latinos make up 54



(Photo) Tanya Brown-Dickerson speaks on Feb. 21 at scene of her son's killing.

percent of the city's population, over 80 percent of the stops involved people from these groupings.

In the early hours of Dec. 15, Brandon Tate-Brown, a 26-year-old employee at a car rental agency, was returning home in a late-model Dodge Charger when police officers pulled him over and asked him to step out of the car. Several minutes later, Tate-Brown was dead.

Within weeks of the confrontation, the still unnamed cops who were involved were exonerated of any blame by the police department and returned to street duty. The police department attempted to

quell public indignation over the killing with a terse statement to the press. They said that the officers had pulled over Tate-Brown's car because the headlights were out. Then, when the cops approached the car, they saw a handgun lying on top of its center console. After they asked the victim to step out, he struggled with them and ran back to the car to retrieve the gun. The police then opened fire, allegedly to protect themselves.

However, Tanya Brown-Dickerson and her attorney, Brian Mildeberg, found from their investigations that the autopsy report, the video, and statements from witnesses all contain major differences from the version of the story released publicly by police officials.

The video demonstrated, for one thing, that the car's headlights were on at the time the police stopped it. Moreover, headlights were not even mentioned in the medical examiner's autopsy report.

The autopsy report stated that the officers had asked Tate-Brown to step out of his car because they had run his plates and found they were registered to a different car-rental agency than the one that the victim had mentioned to them. One of the officers noticed the gun, the report stated, after he and his partner had approached

the car a *second* time—not upon their initial approach, as police officials repeatedly maintained.

According to the head of the city's Police Advisory Commission, witnesses at the scene have stated that at one point the cops and the victim struggled, and that Tate-Brown managed to break free. He was grabbed again by the officers, but was able to escape a second time and was shot from behind as he ran toward the car.

In recent days, Tanya Brown-Dickerson and her at-

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Socialist Action: Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

The danger of direct Western military intervention in Ukraine remains palpable following the rebels' dramatic seizure of Debaltseve in mid-February. The Obama administration, which has already sent over \$118 million in "non-lethal" equipment to Ukraine, is deliberating whether to contribute heavy weaponry, or even troops, to the war in Ukraine's east.

Many in Congress, as well as top Pentagon staff members, are pushing strongly to send weapons. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, told a Senate committee on March 4, "I think we should absolutely consider lethal aid and it ought to be in the context of NATO allies because [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's ultimate objective is to fracture NATO."

The Obama administration, on the other hand, has been more guarded in its responses—at least in public. On March 4, Victoria Nuland, assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, told members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, that the decision to send heavy arms, as well as tightening sanctions against Russia, would depend on whether or not the administration judges that the current cease-fire is being implemented.

While administrative figures have not yet committed themselves to increased military aid, they have prepared the ground with Cold War rhetoric. At a security conference in Munich in February, Vice President Joe Biden lashed out against Russia and warned against appeasement: "This is a moment where the U.S. and Europe must stand firm. Russia cannot be allowed to redraw the map of Europe."

German and French leaders have been less bellicose in their language than their American counterparts. In early February, as alarms sounded that the Obama administration was moving toward arming the Kiev regime with missiles, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande were able to take the initiative in cobbling together a conference in Minsk, Belarus, which agreed to the cease-fire. Merkel told supporters that her country and France would continue to work for the "territorial integrity" of Ukraine, "but we want to do it with Russia, not against Russia."

This more cautious stance reflects the deepening economic crisis in Europe and the dependency of Europe on Russian oil and gas. For example, Germany imports almost 39 percent of its natural gas from Russia. Moreover, Germany is responsible for 30 percent of EU exports to Russia—mainly vehicles and machinery. Merkle's government is afraid that tighter sanctions against Russia, let alone military intervention, might push Moscow to retaliate with sanctions against German exports.

But following the rout of Ukrainian troops in Debaltseve, and flare-ups in other locations that appear to violate the terms of the Minsk cease-fire pact, the United States has refused to back away from the military option.

On Feb. 19, major newspapers in Germany, including *Das Bild* and *Der Spiegel*, leaked the contents of a recent Munich meeting in which top U.S. officials and military generals, speaking in private among themselves, were explicit in advocating that heavy weapons be sent to Ukraine. Victoria Nuland attempted to assuage any misgivings they might have had about frayed ties with Germany and France: "We're not going to send any four divisions into Ukraine, as the Europeans fear. It's only a relatively moderate delivery of anti-tank weapons."

The entry into Debaltseve by troops of the rebel-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republics (DPR and LPR) was a stunning defeat for the Kiev regime and its U.S. backers. Debaltseve is a key junction in the main railway line between the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and his top officers made it a badge of honor to hold the town, despite the fact that their soldiers were surrounded and outgunned. The *Novorossia Today* website stated that DPR authorities had repeatedly asked the Kiev forces to lay down their arms, and had left a corridor open for them to leave the town—but Poroshenko and the military brass would not allow their troops to surrender.

Later, President Poroshenko boasted in a taped statement that Ukrainian armed forces in the area had left Debaltseve according to a preconceived plan. "Debaltseve was under our control, there was no encirclement, and our troops left the area in a planned and organized manner with all the heavy weaponry," he said. However, CNN news footage showed a scene that was far different from the president's claims. Shells of burnt-out tanks and armored trucks lined the road. Artillery shells, and even missiles, were still lying in their packing crates where fleeing Ukrainian troops had left them.

Hospitals in Artemovsk, a town to the north that is

Will U.S. send heavy weapons to Ukraine?



(Left) Woman bikes past damaged military vehicles in war zone of eastern Ukraine.

still held by the Kiev government, were filled with wounded men. Interviews with soldiers in Artemovsk revealed that many were filled with anger at their own commanders, while others were in despair. The men told of striving to withstand shelling day and night, enduring food shortages, and feeling they had been left there to die. "We were praying all the time, and already said goodbye to our lives a hundred times," a soldier told a correspondent for the *New York Daily News*.

The Feb. 19 *London Independent* described the scene in Artemovsk: "Many soldiers were in a demoralized and drunken state. Shellshocked soldiers from the battle in Debaltseve wandered the streets through the day Wednesday [Feb. 18], before beginning to drink heavily. By Wednesday evening, gunshots were ringing out on the central square. One man stood, swaying, on the sidewalk mumbling to himself.

"Soldiers who had escaped from Debaltseve after weeks of shelling were commandeering taxi cabs without payment. It was not clear that all of them had been given places to sleep, and one group stood silently, shivering on a street outside the Hotel Ukraine. And at Biblios, an upscale restaurant in Artemivsk, soldiers staggered about in the dining room, ordering brandy for which they had no money to pay, and then firing shots into the ceiling as other guests quietly fled the premises."

These scenes of demoralized Kiev troops emphasize the lack of popular support for the war. In February, Poroshenko authorized a new draft of men under the age of 27. But many families have resisted such call-ups, stating emphatically that their young men will not report for duty.

Since the Kiev government, which came to power in a U.S. and European Union-backed coup in May 2014, has been unable to depend on draftees to fight with any enthusiasm, it has chosen to rely on volunteer formations like the Azov Battalion, which include right-wing ultra-nationalists and neo-Nazis. While the fighting was going on around Debaltseve, the Azov Battalion was spearheading a Ukrainian government drive to take back territory along the Black Sea coast, near Mariupol. Azov and similar paramilitary groups have been charged with rights abuses and war crimes.

Civilians in Ukraine's Russian-speaking east have suffered horribly in the war. As Kiev troops streamed out of Debaltseve, a middle-aged woman near the town told CNN, "Of course, it's better now that we are not being shelled—but we have no pensions." The Kiev government has halted all pensions and budgetary payments to the rebel region.

On Feb. 19 Ukraine deepened the distress of civilians by switching off the natural gas pipeline to the Luhansk area. Kiev had warned in the past that it would cut off gas and electricity to the Russian-speaking region unless it received payment. In this case, however, the Ukrainian state gas company sidestepped taking blame for the shutdown by alleging that it had been caused by "shelling and explosions" that the rebels had fired. Parliament Speaker Andrei

Purgin of the Donetsk Peoples Republic (DPR) said that his government would switch to using gas from Russia, which has agreed to send humanitarian fuel supplies.

Increased military involvement by the United States and its NATO allies in Ukraine will do nothing but prolong the war and increase the country's suffering—while drawing ever closer to a direct confrontation with Russia. Concerned people in the United States must demand: U.S. hands off Ukraine! ■

... Tate-Brown

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torney have been permitted to view the witness statements for themselves. Mildenburg told the *Philadelphia Daily News* on March 1 that the files reveal that none of the witnesses saw Tate-Brown with a gun. One witness stated that as the cops trained their weapons on Tate-Brown and demanded to be told where his gun was, the victim claimed that he had no gun at all.

"We're trying to uncover the truth," Mildenburg told the *Daily News*. "But when the officers are constantly changing the story and the police department is releasing various stories at different points in time, it leads to the question of whether the investigation is being handled with integrity or whether details and embellishments are being added to protect the officers involved and paint the shooting as justified."

In meetings, rallies, and marches, protesters have supported the demands of Tanya Brown-Dickerson and her attorney that the police release all the evidence about what happened on Dec. 15 so they can obtain justice. On Feb. 21, about 100 protesters braved falling snow and freezing temperatures to rally at the site of Brandon Tate-Brown's killing; they then marched to the district police station with their demands.

Tanya Brown-Dickerson spoke at Philadelphia's Martin Luther King Day protest rally on Jan. 19, where she informed the protesters about efforts to obtain justice for her son. One of the key demands of the rally, sponsored by the MLK-DARE coalition, was "End Stop and Frisk!" The coalition's next major event will be an April 4 March Against Poverty; protesters will proceed through a section of Philadelphia's Black community to a rally near Broad and Erie Streets. ■



(Left) Airport worker Kip Hedges addresses Feb. 15 meeting in Minneapolis for 15 Now.

(Below) Socialist Kshama Sawant.

Supporters of \$15 wage hear Kshama Sawant in Minneapolis

By DAVID JONES

MINNEAPOLIS—Two hundred and fifty enthusiastic supporters of a \$15 an hour minimum wage in this city crowded into the Minneapolis Labor Center on Sunday, Feb. 15, to hear from organizers and supporters including socialist Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant.

It was Sawant's upset election a little over a year ago that really put the 15 Now campaign on the map and led to Seattle's successful fight for \$15 just over a year ago, St. Paul *Union Advocate* editor Michael Moore reported.

"Minneapolis is one of the cities that is poised to win \$15 this year," Sawant, a member of Socialist Alternative, told activists. "Let the fight for \$15 in Seattle be your guide, that with only one member of the city council (initially supportive), we were able to get this done."

"Ultimately, what we are talking about are real people," she said. "These are the people who make this city run. Just imagine if all of them decided not to go to work on one day. The city would shut down."

Success in Minneapolis, as in Seattle, will depend on 15 Now's ability to build a broad coalition of support, Sawant said. That means participation by faith groups, community organizations and, of course, labor unions.

Sawant, a delegate to Seattle's central labor council, said that local unions in her city supported 15 Now out of a shared belief that a rising tide lifts all boats. Most union members in Seattle earn much more than \$15 per hour, she pointed out. "They have pensions, they have health care, but they were there in solidarity with their sisters and brothers anyway."



Ty Moore, a national organizer for 15 Now, pointed to an already-successful 15 Now campaign at Minneapolis-St. Paul (MSP) International Airport—where a worker-led rally briefly shut down traffic on a roadway to Terminal 1 in December—as helping "boost the credibility" of 15 Now locally.

"The debate is alive, and big campaigns are moving to help raise up working people's wages and working conditions," Moore said. "We need (Minneapolis) city leaders to play the kind of role of ... Kshama Sawant, to stand steadfastly in the interest of working-class policies."

A recent report by *Seattle Met* magazine says that results of a new poll defy conventional wisdom. "If you thought Socialist Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant was bugging people with her 'Combat Rock' rhetoric and is on her way out: Guess again!" The poll shows her popularity at 50%, only 1% behind the "council all-star," a Democrat. This is at the city level. At the district level, though, Sawant has a 61 percent favorable rating.

The pollsters note, "Sawant has the strongest favorable rating at the district level—her favorable in her district is 11 points higher than it is citywide and her unfavorable is 9 points lower."

Sawant has consistently explained her positions in terms of class against class. "A recent poll," she told a local TV station, "shows that 60% of Americans are convinced that the two big-business parties system is not working for us and we need an alternative."

No matter how broad a coalition 15 Now builds in Minneapolis, Sawant warned, opposition will be fierce and well-financed. In Seattle opponents lamented the impact of a \$15 minimum wage on small businesses—a public relations campaign underwritten covertly and ironically by the city's biggest corporations. "Suddenly, you found Starbucks lamenting the fate of local coffee shops," Sawant said.

In response, 15 Now tapped into popular frustration with a global economy and political structures that seem rigged in favor of corporations and the very wealthy. In that sense, Sawant said, 15 Now builds on the message of Occupy Wall Street and the resistance of fast-food and retail strikers, offering a plan of political action to combat the growth of income inequality. "We have been on the retreat, on the defensive," she said. "That's the beautiful thing about 15 Now—it's the beginning of an offense. ... When we organize collectively around concrete political demands, we can absolutely win."

Other speakers included CTUL (Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha) leader and fast-food worker Guillermo Lindsay, and MSP airport organizer Kip Hedges, who spoke to the effects of poverty wages on their co-workers and the dramatic impact \$15 would have on their lives.

"I want to invite everyone here into a transformational struggle for \$15, like the campaign for the eight-hour day was for workers 100 years ago," said Kip Hedges, a 26-year baggage handler who will soon file a federal lawsuit against his illegal firing by Delta airlines—a case that sparked outrage and galvanized support for the \$15 demand at MSP airport. The company claims Hedges made a "disparaging" comment about the company when he said in an on-line interview in December that a lot of workers at Delta earn less than \$15.

The fight to reinstate Hedges has won broad labor support. The Minnesota AFL-CIO recently presented Hedges with a \$5000 contribution to the fight to get his job back. Non-union Delta's takeover of Minneapolis-based Northwest Airlines in 2008 led to a union decertification vote engineered by management. The maneuver stripped former Northwest workers of their collective bargaining rights and reduced them to so-called "at will" employees. Hedges and others, including mechanics and flight attendants, have been working to reorganize the union in collaboration with the International Association of Machinists.

After a spirited fund-raising appeal at the close of the meeting, 15 NOW organizers reported that \$10,000 had been raised or pledged for the campaign. ■

\$15 wage floor won for some Portland workers

By ANN MONTAGUE

PORTLAND—Oregon is one of many states with a preemption law that prevents cities from having a higher minimum wage than the state minimum wage. In order to work around this undemocratic law, 15 Now Portland has been working to update Portland's Fair Wage Policy (FWP).

Since the state law does not prevent the Portland city council from raising wages of city workers or workers contracted by the city, 15 Now decided to work to update the FWP.

When the FWP was first passed in 1998, city workers and contractors had to be paid at least \$7 an hour. The state minimum wage is currently \$9.25 an hour.

15 Now conducted hearings in conjunction with Jobs With Justice and SEIU 49, which represent city-contracted workers. In February, the Portland city council voted unani-

mously to increase the minimum wage for city workers to \$15 an hour. They amended the Fair Wage Policy, which sets a new floor for 173 full-time city workers and contractors.

The workers covered by the new policy are janitors, parking attendants, and security officers. It will not cover 1800 seasonal and part-time workers, mostly in the Parks Bureau. These workers packed the city council chambers, and 30 of them testified.

15 Now celebrated the victory for those workers who will see an increase and issued the statement: "We still have much more work to do. There are contractors and part-timers who have been left out of the revised Fair Wage Policy that need to be included."

"We need to win \$15 for all city workers, for all working people in the City of Portland, and for the whole State of Oregon." ■

Connecticut organizes for \$15

By CHRISTINE MARIE

HARTFORD—In Connecticut, activists have been going out two and three times a weekend to meet low-wage workers and urge them to join the campaign for \$15 and a union. Activists meet at a designated time and place and then fan out to the many fast-food joints situated in a certain shopping area, armed with talking points and pledge cards.

Chris, a Hartford Teamster who works at UPS, said that his experience at a McDonald's restaurant was very moving. "Workers we met on their shift change looked tired but were eager to talk about what a pay raise would mean to them," he said.

Some, sensing the watchful gaze of management, were a bit tentative, Chris reported, but others, he said, "showed no fear." Most volunteer organizers decided that it was best to wait around and approach workers when they were outside taking their break or eating their lunch.

One of the talking points was that fast-food employees in Denmark were making the equivalent of \$20 an hour. The folks behind the counter expressed surprise, of course, and once the volunteers had their attention, they went on to tell the

story of the tough five-year campaign that was waged to get the union that won this wage.

All this union talk attracted the attention of some Walmart workers eating at McDonald's on their break. Once they heard the talking points, they announced that they would bring coworkers to the April 15 Hartford action for \$15.

Volunteers did not do all the talking. They also did a lot of listening and heard some powerful stories about the struggle to live on today's minimum wage. Emily, a Connecticut state worker, spent some time hearing the story of a kind female Subway worker who had been employed there for 15 years, made \$10.10 an hour, and had trouble making her rent payment.

A student volunteer, Kevin, was surprised to meet a recent immigrant from Africa at Dunkin' Donuts, who was moved to tears when he realized that someone really cared to hear his tale.

The restaurant canvassing has affected the volunteer organizers as deeply as the low-wage workers they have met. It is turning out to be an addictive and politically empowering experience and volunteers return again and again. ■

... Stop Obama's new 'war on terrorism'

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tah el-Sisi, and his coup government removed Egypt's elected president, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and proceeded to slaughter an estimated 12,000 Muslim Brotherhood followers?

In the same vein, but earlier, the U.S.-NATO "humanitarian war" in Libya, which destroyed that nation's infrastructure and murdered countless thousands, ended in chaos with Libya degenerating into innumerable warring factions, secular and otherwise, backed by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and other predators vying for Libya's significant oil reserves. President Obama cynically noted last year, "We made a mistake in Libya. We didn't have a plan for the day after." (!) Obama failed to mention that the U.S. and its allies had handpicked the entire Libyan Transitional National Council and assigned it to "govern" that stricken nation.

Similarly, following the U.S. invasion, destruction, and occupation of Iraq, U.S. diplomat Paul Bremer was appointed by President Bush as head of state—the supreme authority—to govern that conquered nation until the new Nouri al-Maliki regime [since deposed under U.S. pressure] could be installed in elections supervised by the U.S. military. The Maliki regime proceeded to hound and persecute Iraq's Sunni minority while stealing Iraq's resources for its own business elite—with the largest cut to U.S. oil corporations to be sure.

Times are tough for the U.S. behemoth when its trusted allies, as with the Saudi monarchy, are implicated in the infamous 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center. The Feb. 5, *New York Times* couldn't resist pointing to the still classified 28 pages of a 2002 Senate Intelligence Committee report on the 9/11 bombing that pointed to "high level Saudi government funding" of the al-Qaeda bombers, the large majority of whom were Saudi citizens.

Massachusetts House Democrat Stephen Lynch unsuccessfully placed a motion on the Senate floor to declassify these 28 pages of the government's 2002 9/11 bombing report. George Bush ordered this embarrassing material classified. President Obama today concurs. Senator Bob Graham of Florida, who then chaired the Senate intelligence Committee, observed recently that the classified material "pointed a very strong finger at Saudi Arabia as being the principal financier of 9/11."

One congressional observer noted, "Proponents of releasing [the 28 page] Part 4, titled, 'Findings, Discussion and Narrative Regarding Certain National Security Matters,' suggested that *'the Bush and Obama administrations have held it back for fear of alienating an influential military and economic partner rather than for any national security considerations.'*"

This astonishing statement and the emerging evidence that the Saudis were key funders of the 9/11 bombing blows a gaping hole in the entire U.S. rationale for waging war in Afghanistan and Iraq—a war that has taken the lives of more than a million innocents and a war that was launched under a mountain of lies! Yet in the twisted logic of U.S. imperialism and its loyal media, the truth is subordinate to the needs of the .0001 percent—the unbridled and real leaders of the U.S. "Empire."

Saudi Arabia, with the world's largest oil reserves and a dominant player in setting the world price of oil, is no newcomer to political intrigue. Its elite and top-level business moguls, if not the government itself, were central to the organization, financing, and political orientation of ISIS. The Sunni-based Saudis, with their own policy objectives driving their actions, saw ISIS as critical to their efforts to remove the Assad government of Syria and simultaneously weaken Syria's Iranian ally.

U.S. intelligence agencies originally calculated that Syria's government could be brought down with the small group of defecting Syrian officers coupled with "moderate rebels" consisting of secular and "reliable" sectarian forces that the U.S. organized into the so-called Free Syrian Army—today greatly reduced in its role as a participant in the civil war.

As with Libya, the Obama administration openly orchestrated through a series of meetings in Turkey, with Secretary of State John Kerry present, a coalition of these forces to serve as Syria's post-Assad government. In the end, a combination of both ISIS and its rival al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra or the al-Nusra Front, combined to fight Assad, only to later turn their attention, at least in part, to fighting the U.S.-installed Iraqi government.

Such are the exigencies of imperialist war. No alliance is permanent, and minor players, like the Saudis and their monarchial allies in the Middle East, and as with Zionist Israel, at times and within limits, pursue their own interests separate and apart from the U.S.

To buttress a further escalation of U.S. war moves,



(Above) Protest against U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan. Syria is the latest victim of drone war.

the Feb. 15 *New York Times* headlined information received from U.S. intelligence sources regarding the scope of ISIS operations. *The Times* headline and sub-heads read: "Islamic State Sprouting Limbs; Groups Form in Africa; With New Assessment Some in U.S. Fear Unending War."

The article estimated that ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria numbered some "20,000 to 31,500." With this data in mind and accompanied by the daily demonization of ISIS, imperialism's solution aimed at intensifying the bombings of Iraq by its "coalition partners" while once again sending unknown numbers of "advisers" to lead and direct ground operations by the Iraqi Army and associated Iraqi Kurdish forces for a ground assault on Tikrit and then on to Iraq's second largest city—ISIS-occupied Mosul.

The engagement of U.S. imperialist allies is seen as a critical element in this effort. Last week, for example, an unusual report prepared by a sub-committee of the House of Lords scored the British government for flying only a paltry 3-4 percent of the air strikes launched against ISIS. The French, in contrast, sent an aircraft carrier to Iraq a few months ago to carry out its "duty" to its coalition partners.

Referring to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's declaration last year that ISIS sought to become a caliphate (religious state) formed in the tradition of the prophet Mohammed, who died in 632, one blustering U.S. Congressman retorted, "If they want a caliphate we'll bomb them back to the stone age."

Those who demonize ISIS always fail to mention the present-day religious-based Middle Eastern monarchies that are *allied with the U.S.*, including the Saudi billionaire monarchs, whose record of beheadings—between 79 and 82 a year for the last five years—make ISIS's beheadings seem inconsequential by comparison. Like ISIS, Saudi Arabia imposes the penalty beheading for "crimes" such as homosexuality or religious blasphemy.

Indeed, if one considers the hundreds of thousands—or better, millions—slaughtered with the world's most sophisticated weapons of mass destruction under the direction of the U.S. and its allies, ISIS's actions amount to the proverbial drop in the bucket.

While ISIS's reactionary views and practices can never serve as a model for any serious challenge to imperialist arrogance and mass murder, serious activists must understand that its origins stem from the policies and practices of U.S. imperialism and allied reactionary capitalist forces in the Middle East. We heard no objections to ISIS's methods when its Saudi-provided weapons were aimed at the Syrian government, with U.S. knowledge, if not consent. Similarly, there were no voices raised when the "terrorist" al-Qaeda-associated forces aimed to bring down the Assad government.

Undoubtedly, the U.S. government knows no ideological limitations when it comes to allies, including its support for the fascist-led coup in Ukraine that aimed to ally that nation with the European Union and U.S. imperialism. Need we mention the bloody dictators around the world who were and continue to be armed and financed by the U.S. under every administration for over a century?

ISIS's appeal today can best be explained by the failure of previous mass movements that headed national liberation struggles in a distorted and inadequate manner. These included the struggles of decades past across Africa and the Middle East, where victorious bourgeois nationalist parties, while ending overt co-

lonial rule, continued to uphold capitalist states that defended capitalist property and power as against the interests of the masses who had served as the motor force fighting foreign rule.

ISIS today, as well as a growing number of reactionary forces around the world—including far-right parties across Europe, India, and elsewhere—is the product of previous efforts to reform capitalism rather than to struggle for its abolition.

In times of great economic and social stress, as with the present super-austerity conditions attendant to the world capitalist economic crisis, revolutionary forces are presented with new opportunities to coalesce the growing discontent into significant revolutionary parties and associated formations. But the same holds true, as history tragically demonstrates, for reactionary elements to gain a hearing by employing populist-sounding rhetoric or appeals to religious fundamentalist conceptions that promise salvation from oppression but always in the framework of continued capitalist exploitation.

Today U.S. imperialism is planning a major military offensive to reverse ISIS's territorial gains in Iraq and Syria. Few suffer under any illusions that this will not be followed by renewed efforts to bring down the Syrian government and install a more U.S.-complicit regime. Thus, the new and extended "war on terror" is today seen by the U.S. ruling class as a long-term effort to rid the Middle East of any and all forces that might challenge its hegemony, that it, its freedom to exploit and plunder at will.

For the past 14 years—since the 9/11 bombing provided the pretext for the Afghan War—the entire Middle East region has experienced a state of perpetual war and associated chaos. "Stability," or better, the unimpeded freedom to extract resources and exert total control through imposed client regimes by U.S. war-makers, remains out of reach, perhaps forever.

Yet the endless quagmire remains sufficient for imperialism, even for the longer term. Never-ending wars bring on associated and welcome massive increases in war spending that bloat the banks of the war profiteers with endless trillions while the lion's share of the region's oil, albeit limited in extraction to one degree or another by the restrictive conditions of war, remains under the control of the world's largely monopolized oil corporations, for whom all such wars are fought.

Today's new U.S. global "war on terrorism" is inseparable from its war on working people everywhere. The systematic building of revolutionary socialist organizations, however limited the immediate opportunities might seem, will prove central to providing a lasting and effective alternative to imperialist war and exploitation. This task remains on the order of the day.

A top priority at the same time is the building of united coalitions to mobilize massive protests in the U.S. and around the world against all U.S. imperialist wars and interventions.

The March 18-21 mobilization in Washington, D.C., marking the 12th year of the war against Iraq and called by a broad range of antiwar and social justice groups, is an important contribution to this effort. The events will culminate in a march, beginning at Lafayette Park at noon on March 21, and proceeding to the Capitol. Contact the United National Antiwar Coalition at unacpeace.org for more information. ■

Women and the Climate Crisis



Reuters

On March 8, 2013, International Women's Day, KFAI in Minneapolis presented a program, "Women and Global Climate Change." The speakers were Christine Frank, Climate Crisis Coalition Twin Cities (3CTC), and a frequent contributor to Socialist Action newspaper; Patricia Shepard, Idle No More Minnesota Activist, Ojibwe and Prairie Band Potawatami; and Karen Redleaf (now Schraufnagel), 3CTC activist and Socialist Action Twin Cities member. Christine Frank's commentary follows:

Christine Frank: Greetings, Sisters, on this historically important day for all women around the world. We'll be speaking about women and global climate change.

Because of fossil fuel combustion, human beings are injecting more and more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, causing Earth's temperature to rise. As a result, the planet's ice masses are melting at an alarming rate and sea levels are rising.

At times, warmer temperatures mean more moisture in the atmosphere, which causes heavier rains and snowfalls and more violent storms. These come in the form of paralyzing blizzards, hurricanes and typhoons that flood cropland and communities, and killer tornado outbreaks that blow away peoples' homes and wreck lives. When conditions are just right, you can have a "perfect storm" like Hurricane Sandy.

At other times, warmer temperatures lead to blistering heat waves, droughts that wither crops and threaten food supplies, and wildfires that ravage forests, grasslands, and dwellings. These weather extremes are two sides of an ever-warming world. All you have to do is look out the window and see it. Over the past two decades, the number of weather-related disasters has doubled, and it's women who suffer the most because of our status in society, especially in the Global South, where for masses of people, the daily struggle to survive is tougher and the infrastructure is more vulnerable.

The London School of Economics conducted a study of 141 disasters and found that there was a higher death rate for women than for men. Nearly three times as many female as male lives are lost. This was directly linked to a lack of equality—economic, educational, political, and social. There is a definite gender imbalance with climate change. For example, if a woman isn't allowed to leave the house without a male escort, it's harder for her to flee and seek safety from an approaching tropical storm.

Of course, it's not just a problem in the "emerging"

'We must stop viewing the planet as little more than a mine for raw materials for capitalist production.'

countries. In "advanced" nations too, women tend to bear the brunt of the hardships caused by natural disasters. During the European heat wave of 2003, which killed up to 35,000 people, significantly more elderly women than men died.

Poverty plays a big role. Women make up a shocking 70% of people living in poverty around the world. And 78% of the indigent in the U. S. are women and children under the age of 18. It's understandable that it was they who suffered disproportionately in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast from Hurricane Katrina—especially those in single-parent households.

When you're poor, it's more difficult to pick up the pieces and reassemble a shattered life afterward, especially when your own government ignores you. We all know what a sham Katrina "disaster relief" was under the callous Bush administration. Even the corporate media recognized that to a certain extent. Each of us can remember watching in horror as the disaster unfolded and the people of New Orleans languished due to FEMA's gross neglect and incompetence. But Hurricane Sandy "relief" hasn't been much better under Obama.

When it comes to "disaster capitalism", the priority is to rebuild the "economically important" sectors like those Atlantic City waterfront casinos and hotels, while the needs of ordinary folks with families to care for are shunted off to the side. We can see that the marginalization of women all over the world makes it more difficult for us to cope with the impact of climate change.

Other forms of environmental devastation exacerbate the effects of climate change. There's deforestation due to rampant logging and the "replacement" of natural forests with commercial tree plantations, soy production, and cattle grazing. As a result, our watersheds are destroyed and the climate-regulating aspects of tropical rainforests are lost.

Desertification is a growing problem due to over-

grazing. Soil erosion is another, because of poor land use. Over-irrigation and ground water depletion cause shortages of fresh water so basic to human survival. Over-fishing by commercial trawlers makes it hard for fisher-folk to pursue their traditional livelihood. The pollution of our biosphere from mining and fossil fuel extraction undermines the health of all life.

All forms of environmental degradation combined with climate change make survival, particularly in the Global South, that much more challenging. As Mother Nature is raped by capitalist commodity production, the survival of all life is undermined. The roles imposed upon women, or the ones we choose to assume, can make it more difficult for us to cope with natural disasters.

In the Global South, economic division of labor has men producing the cash crops for export, while women produce the subsistence food crops for domestic use. In fact, women grow 59% of the world's food, and a third to one-half of the agricultural labor in the Third World is performed by women. Crop failures produced by the effects of global warming magnify food insecurity worldwide.

Females are more dependent upon primary natural resources than males.

In "developing" countries, women and girls—girls who could be in school, since females make up 2/3 of the world's illiterate—have to spend long, drudging hours everyday gathering cooking fuel and animal fodder. Deforestation and desertification further their difficulties.

Females also collect drinking water. Growing freshwater scarcities increase the travel distance for female water carriers, making them vulnerable to sexual violence, especially in war zones. Rising sea levels cause further freshwater shortages along coastlines as saltwater intrudes into freshwater bodies. Natural resource depletion means more work for women with less to show for our labor. We are treading water and getting nowhere.

Global warming causes more disease—such as malaria—from mosquito vectors. When there's flooding, water-borne pathogens also increase. Because women are the primary caregivers of children, the elderly, and the sick, the rise of disease places a greater burden on us. Inadequate medical care and sanitation in the "post"-colonial world adds to that load.

Child mortality is on the rise. According to the WHO, 150,000 people are already dying annually due to climate change. Nearly 90% of these are children. Warmer temperatures, combined with industrial air pollution in "advanced" countries, triggers severe asthma attacks, which are on the rise among our children. Warmer weather increases pollen in the air and accompanying allergic reactions. These are just a few of the health problems women as caregivers must contend with under climate change.

As powerful transnational corporations further globalize the world economy, more natural resources, such as water, are being privatized—limiting their use to only those who can afford to pay. The commons formerly open to equal use by all members of the community in many societies are being closed off, preventing access to agro/eco-systems traditionally used by Indigenous Peoples.

In Northern India, during the mid-20th century—where women had traditionally been silva-culturalists who tended the trees, gathered food, fuel, fodder, fiber medicine, and building materials from the woodlands—male-dominated commercial forestry began to encroach. Mono-cultural planting of eucalyptus trees, for the purposes of wood-pulp production, cre-

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ated landscapes devoid of dense understory and diversity. The watershed was being destroyed, causing terrible erosion on the hillsides.

Deprived of natural resources vital to the lives of themselves and their families, women created the famous Chipko Movement of the 1970s. They would threaten to wrap their arms around the endogenous trees to save them from being ripped out. “Chipko” is Hindi for “embrace” or “hug.” These women became the very first “tree huggers.” After a long struggle, with many protests, the women were successful at stopping the devastation. The Chipko Movement is a powerful example of what women can accomplish when we fight back to defend Mother Earth, who embodies our direct interests.

As climate-changed, induced and enhanced natural disasters increase, more and more climate refugees flee catastrophe after catastrophe. Women and girls in flight are more vulnerable to sexual predation, human trafficking in the sex trade. Children of both genders are more easily subjected to forced labor. Under capitalism, there’s always someone around to take advantage of the least advantaged—and it’s women and children last.

Armed conflicts over natural resources add to this problem. America’s addiction to fossil fuels is the direct cause of the wars in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Northern Africa. In the imperialists’ mad scramble for what’s left of the hydrocarbon reserves, forced migrations place females in jeopardy, inflicting rape and other violence, anxiety and depression.

Women bear the brunt of environmental racism around the world. Because most of America’s minerals and energy resources are on Native American lands, their communities have suffered heavily from the contamination caused by uranium mining and processing and fossil fuel extraction. Communities of color are frequently the unwilling hosts to hazardous waste dumps and toxic incinerators. The petro-chemical industry in the South is concentrated around Black communities, where there are cancer clusters in huge proportions. Hence the term “Cancer Alley.” It’s women of color who are often the leaders of grassroots movements that fight against this kind of injustice.

Working people in general are often the victims of industrial waste dumping. Love Canal in New York was built on a chemical waste site. When women like Lois Gibbs realized that their families were getting sick from the toxic exposures, they began to stand up and fight for remedial justice. Currently, the extraction of extreme energies, such as tar-sands bitumen in Alberta, the fracking of shale gas and oil, deep-water offshore oil drilling, and the use of dangerous nuclear power are all adding to the environmental injustices that people suffer.

There are definite parallels between how society treats women and peoples of color and workers and how it treats Mother Nature. Clearly, environmental justice and gender equity go together.

(Solutions Segment)

Christine Frank: It’s not all gloom and doom if we roll up our sleeves, get to work and take action. I think the first step in defending women from the impacts of climate change is to change our attitudes toward nature by simultaneously rejecting male domination of both the natural world and women.

We must stop viewing the planet as little more than a mine for raw materials for capitalist production and bring all aspects of human life into harmony with nature. We need to make an ecological revolution by creating healthy, egalitarian relationships between women and men, and between humans and nature. We must respect women’s traditional knowledge and listen to women’s voices—especially those of Indigenous women. There’s ancient wisdom there to learn from and draw upon in adapting to climate change. This is a basic tenet of eco-feminism.

We should also adopt the policies of deep ecology and recognize that everything on Earth, animate and inanimate, has intrinsic value—from the tiniest grain of sand to the largest redwood. This way of thinking is necessary because not only is all life interdependent, but also the biosphere is intricately connected to the planet’s geological forces. So, that tiny grain of sand is just as important as the living ecosystems we depend upon for survival.

Further, we need to unite all of the many groups in society that are victims of oppression and environmental injustice, while respecting the independence



‘As a revolutionary eco-socialist, I believe that it’s capitalism that’s got to go—not Mother Earth. We must put planetary and human needs before profits.’

of each. Powerful alliances are necessary to build a strong movement to end America’s addiction to fossil fuels and demand fundamental change in how we relate to Mother Earth, the origin of all life, and how we power our society and live upon this planet as a human family. We need to stand in solidarity with groups such as Idle No More who are in the vanguard of the struggle to defend Mother Earth.

It’s obvious that “market-based solutions” are not going to stop global warming, since it’s been business as usual for the last 25 years, and things have gotten steadily worse. Time is running out for Mother Earth and humanity. That’s why we must act now to draw down carbon to a safe 300-325 parts per million

... Leninism

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dynamic and ceaselessly changing. There are always new things to understand, new analyses to be elaborated, revolutionary strategies that must be adapted to new situations, new tactics to be thought through and new ways to apply tried-and-true tactics.

Our situation is not a duplicate of that faced by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and our efforts to do what they did can only be successful if we are critical-minded and creative in our application of their approach. This is a point Lenin often made in discussions with comrades in the various parties that belonged to the Communist International. It is truer now than ever before. In this sense, too, Leninism is—and must be—unfinished.

Quest.: Finally, a personal and political question. Your writing style in debate is relentlessly reasonable, which is often not the case when writers on the left disagree with each other. I find you are scrupulously honest with assertions, that you do not push a point further than it can realistically go; you give a fair and even-handed assessment of different or opposing ideas, all of which are present-

carbon dioxide by reducing greenhouse gas emissions to zero from all sources as soon as possible. This will allow us to cool down the planet and prevent further catastrophic climate change. This has to be done immediately if our children and future generations are to live a relatively decent existence along with the other life forms with whom we humbly share this world.

To save Mother Earth for human habitation, we need a crash program in this country, funded by the “war budget,” to wean our society completely off both “traditional” fossil fuels and “extreme” energy sources, which include nuclear power, tar sands, shale gas and oil, and deepwater petroleum extraction. Renewable wind, solar, geothermal, and benign micro-hydro power, along with clean mass transit run by the same means, will enable us to do that.

So, let’s get these clean technologies up and running now! In addition, all of industry will have to be re-tooled and converted to green manufacturing to achieve a sustainable economy with a just transition for all workers and oppressed nationalities affected by the shift. This will require the equivalent of a wartime mobilization, as during World War II, when industry was completely re-tooled, and rationing, conservation, and recycling were widely instituted.

Twin Cities Climate Crisis Coalition calls for a public works program to reemploy the unemployed in environmental restoration and remediation projects to make our planet habitable again. Priority must be given to cleaning up tribal lands and lands in other communities of color that have been the victims of environmental racism.

To halt the poisonings of our ecosystems and our bodies, all food production must be changed to chemical-free, organic farming immediately. A vital part of our health-care system must be the detoxification and cleansing of our bodies—especially those of our children. We need to return to natural, plant-based medicines, while abandoning the dubious chemicals of big pharma.

Let’s put an end to waste by scaling and powering down, reducing, restoring, re-

using, and recycling—the four Rs—at the point of production. All of these useful endeavors will provide millions of worthwhile green jobs, allowing people to contribute something meaningful to the environment and society.

As a revolutionary eco-socialist, I personally believe that it’s capitalism that’s destroying the planet, and it’s capitalism that’s got to go—not Mother Earth. To make peace and end the war on nature, we must establish a zero-waste, zero-growth, steady-state, democratically planned, green, eco-socialist economy that puts planetary and human needs before profits. Try to wrap your heart and mind around that vision, because we think it’s worth fighting for. ■

ed accurately. If style and tone represent politics, what do your style and tone indicate about your political outlook?

PL.: The personal here is best understood politically—just as you suggest. Over time I had to recognize that it made no sense for me to copy the styles of Marx or Lenin or Trotsky, because I am certainly not these people, and each of us needs to find our own voice. But especially at this historical moment there is a need not to indulge in more-revolutionary-than-thou pretensions or left-polemical posturing.

We need to do four things. One is to think things through as clearly as we can to figure out, in the real world contexts in which we live. Another is to realize that the effort to do this is not individual but collective. Related to this, we cannot afford to dismiss others who differ with us; while not being afraid to disagree with something we think is wrong, we must reach for the elements of truth in the perspectives of others in order to strengthen our own understanding.

And if we are serious about winning more and more people to socialist and revolutionary perspectives, we must present those perspectives in ways that enable them to understand and embrace those perspectives. ■

Unfinished Leninism

An interview with author Paul LeBlanc

By JOE AUCIELLO

Paul LeBlanc, *"Unfinished Leninism,"* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 237 pp., \$18.

Icons, even revolutionary ones, have a sensible purpose, though the intent is not always realized. The iconic image summons the observer in the present to heed the achievements of the past and thus shape the future. An icon, then, is also an imperative to obey, an imperative often at odds with the rebellious spirit of the figure meant to be celebrated.

In Hanoi, in a park across from the War Museum, stands a large and imposing statue of Vladimir Lenin, main leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and architect of the Soviet state. This statue attracts relatively few people today, though a kind of inscription remains from a past visit. Someone has scrambled up the pedestal to draw, on Lenin's left calf, the universal symbol of adolescent romance—a heart pierced with an arrow and the names of the, presumably, young lovers.

Thus the present pays its own tribute to the past; thus the fate of revolutionary icons. No surprise to Lenin, whose widow "recalled that Lenin had often used the word *ikon* in a derogatory sense, saying of a revolutionary who was honoured but no longer had any influence: 'Well, he is already an *ikon*'" (E.H. Carr, "Socialism in One Country, 1924-1926," Volume Two, page 11).

Lenin's writings have also been made into a kind of icon, a process that began in the months after his death. Joseph Stalin's "The Foundations of Leninism" and "Problems of Leninism" (1924) sculpted the iconic image of a Lenin suitable for the ascendant bureaucracy that oversaw the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. Thus, the theory of "socialism in one country" was proclaimed, as bureaucratic rule in the Soviet Union abandoned revolutionary perspectives worldwide to seek accommodation and stability with its hostile capitalist neighbors.

A false "Leninism" was created that disowned the revolutionary past even while claiming continuity with the achievements of the October Revolution. It was a transformation that drained the life out of revolutionary ideas as they hardened into a set of commandments in the service of those who had the power to impose their interpretation. "Leninism" bestowed a false legitimacy to the rulers who were destroying the revolutionary tradition of Lenin.

A body of work and a set of ideas intended to analyze and transform reality in the service of the oppressed became a set of laws intended to legitimize the rule of a new social layer of oppressors.

For anyone active in the struggle for socialism, this standard view of Lenin constitutes "the heritage we renounce," to borrow a title from one of Lenin's early works. A different and truer understanding of Lenin



is needed, one that does not serve the interests of established authority.

This is the challenge that LeBlanc, among other writers, has taken up—to look past the figure of Lenin-as-icon and instead see him as "a key figure who must be engaged with." Taken as a whole, LeBlanc's essays are a sympathetic "[w]restling with and learning from the actual experience associated with Lenin..." (p. 95).

Of course, LeBlanc is not forced to begin from scratch. In rejecting the "Stalin school of falsification," LeBlanc draws on the revolutionary traditions associated with Leon Trotsky, founder of the Left Opposition within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who in 1923 began a struggle for "The New Course" and continued this fight until his expulsion in 1927. Trotsky defended and extended Lenin's ideas theoretically and practically in the formation of the Fourth International in the 1930s, drawing together cadres on several continents to form the world party of socialist revolution. The International continues its work today, and its sections are involved in social protest and struggles throughout the world.

Within the international left, controversy and debate over Lenin and the Bolshevik legacy are not confined to the distant past. Quite the contrary! Even organizations whose origins lay in the anti-Stalinist left and Trotskyism have undergone political crises in which the theories of Lenin have played a significant part.

Thirty years ago in the United States, the formerly

Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) began to abandon its revolutionary program and the traditions on which it had been built, carried out in part in a series of "Lenin classes." The demise of the SWP—with its expulsions and forced resignations—led many if not most of the expelled to a renewed questioning of the party's heritage. How could so much have gone so wrong?

More recently, in Britain, a widely publicized case concerning allegations of sexual misconduct involving a leader of the Socialist Workers Party there (no relation to the SWP of the United States) led to a set of decisions so controversial that scores of members resigned in protest. The combined effect of these two events, though decades apart, has sparked anew disagreements about the nature and legitimacy of the Leninist vanguard party and have led, in each country, to the creation of new socialist organizations.

Several of the key participants in the current debates were formerly members of the Socialist Workers Party in the United States, as was LeBlanc himself. In Britain, leaders of the SWP there have defended their positions in print and at public conferences they have held.

Paul LeBlanc has emerged as a central figure in these debates, and much of his commentary is gathered in his most recent book. "Unfinished Leninism" is a collection

of (mostly) previously published essays, articles, polemics, and reviews. Also included are the texts of presentations, academic and political, given at conferences worldwide. The accidental nature of this volume is no real drawback, given its objective.

The terrain of this book—its conflicts and controversies—is often staked out by other writers whose opinions compelled LeBlanc to respond. So, "Unfinished Leninism" is not another biography of Lenin, nor an all-encompassing commentary on Lenin's work. The focus of the book, and its unifying thread, is the meaning of Lenin's organizational ideas and the contemporary relevance of what does not (yet) exist: a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class.

This is a book that LeBlanc is uniquely qualified to write. A professor of history at LaRoche College, he is also a revolutionary socialist of some 50 years' experience. With Dianne Feeley, he co-authored the first pamphlet published by Socialist Action, "In Defense of Revolutionary Continuity." He is the author of several books including "Lenin and the Revolutionary Party" and has recently edited anthologies of Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky. He is currently a member of the International Socialist Organization.

"Unfinished Leninism" may be obtained from Haymarket Books at www.haymarketbooks.org.

Question: Is there a "Lenin revival" that is more than the admittedly useful work of academic scholars? Socialist organizations that consciously strive to follow a Leninist model are quite small and have little influence within protest movements today. Several years ago, you suggested that "Bolshevik and Leninist traditions will continue to attract, and be developed by, revolutionary activists of today and tomorrow." Where would you locate such stirrings?

Paul LeBlanc: We can see a marked increase in significant Lenin studies, and related studies, from Lars Lih, Bryan Palmer, August Nimtz, John Riddell, Alan Shandro, Tamás Krausz, Eric Blanc, and a growing number of others. Why is this happening? Such things would not be written or published if they did not speak to the deepening concerns of an expanding layer of potential readers. They would not be appearing if they were not—to borrow a capitalist term—*marketable*.

Such works are appearing in a period of ongoing economic, social, and political crisis, with a decline in the quality of life generating the rise of protest and insurgency. I have personally seen such stirrings, manifesting themselves in different ways, in different parts of the United States, of course, and in such diverse places as England, Australia, Turkey, China, and India. While it is hardly the case that a majority among the rising tide of rebels and activists embrace

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What did Lenin stand for?

Lenin's quite unoriginal starting-point (shared with Marx and others) is a belief in the necessary interconnection of socialist theory and practice with the working class and labor movement. This fundamental orientation is the basis for most of what Lenin has to say. It is the basis of other key perspectives that one can find in his writings:

- An understanding of the necessity of working-class political independence in political and social struggles, and the need for its supremacy (or hegemony) if such struggles are to triumph;
- An understanding of the necessity for socialist and working-class support for struggles of all who suffer oppression;
- A coherent conception of organization that is practical, democratic, and revolutionary;

- The development of the united-front tactic, in which diverse political forces can work together for common goals, without revolutionary organizations undermining their ability to pose effective revolutionary perspectives to the capitalist status quo;

- An intellectual and practical seriousness (and lack of dogmatism or sectarianism) in utilizing Marxist theory;
- An approach of integrating reform struggles with revolutionary strategy;
- A remarkable understanding of the manner in which democratic struggles flow into socialist revolution;
- A commitment to a worker-peasant alliance;
- A profound analysis of imperialism and nationalism;
- A vibrantly revolutionary internationalist approach.

These points are excerpted from Paul LeBlanc's book, "Unfinished Leninism."

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(or even have much knowledge of) Lenin, there are two essential connections.

The most elemental connection is this: at the very heart of the Bolshevik and Leninist tradition is the struggle against oppression. The proliferation of such struggles generates an atmosphere in which there is likely to be a growing interest in the revolutionary ideas and traditions associated with Lenin. That relates to the other connection: Lenin and his comrades spoke to the most urgent concerns of those who hope to overcome oppression. Following Marx, they developed a profound understanding of the interconnection between the nature of oppression and the dynamics of capitalism, the dimensions of class struggle and the way it can develop into effective struggles for reform and revolution, and how socialists can organize themselves in a way to make this so.

The fact remains that, as you say, “socialist organizations that consciously strive to follow a Leninist model are quite small and have little influence.” But *striving* to follow this model and actually doing so are not the same thing. I believe would-be Leninist organizations are unable to “follow this model” in part because of the very different objective reality in which we are enmeshed and in part because there are fundamental misunderstandings of what Leninism means—if we are referring to the “Leninism” of Lenin, his basic orientation and political practice. Perhaps I can explain what I mean as I respond to other questions you pose.

Quest.: Recent social uprisings like the Occupy movement did not evolve in a Leninist direction and have sputtered out. You referred to “the chaos of organizational confusion” that existed within the Occupy movement. That situation reflected a theoretical confusion, as well. In fact, Lenin’s famous dictum, “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” certainly seemed reconfirmed by negative example in the collapse of the Occupy project. But that is little consolation. In terms of building a healthy revolutionary organization, what does Marxist and Leninist theory have to offer at the present time in a more positive way?

PL.: One aspect of the present capitalist reality that we must understand—as Marxists, as Leninists, as Trotskyists—is that our world is quite different from what it was in the time of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. Some things that they emphasized had to do with a very different situation than the one we face. That affects the way I saw the Occupy movement, in which I was quite active.

Lenin and Trotsky lived in a time when there was a massive international workers’ movement animated by a very high degree of class consciousness, with a highly organized and very large socialist (later Communist) component, nourished by a very rich and substantial labor-radical subculture. That disintegrated under the impact of fascism, a second world war, and post-World War II developments.

Proclaiming the truths of revolutionary Marxist theory in the latter years of the 20th century—as many of us were inclined to do—in the absence of a class-conscious labor movement will have a different impact than what was true in the time of Lenin and Trotsky. (In a way, the reality of our labor movement seems to correspond more to that of Marx’s time in the early 1860s—very undeveloped and fragmented.)

Today’s working-class movement (like the modern-day working class) has been in a process of recomposition. The Occupy movement involved large, very broad sectors of what were, for all practical purposes, working-class youth. Their protests against the tyranny of the 1% over the 99% resonated powerfully among a majority of the people of the United States—who are, in fact, working class but largely self-identify as “middle class.”

The inability of Occupy to cohere around a socialist program was inevitable. Those distressed by this had unrealistic expectations. Within this mass upsurge, however, socialists could be supportive, could participate, could help with practical and logistical matters, and could share socialist ideas that some participants would consider further, particularly in the wake of Occupy’s inevitable collapse.

Such mass phenomena as the Occupy movement and the Black Lives Matter movement are part of a recomposition process of working-class protest, struggle, and consciousness building. These are among the *preconditions* for the rebuilding of a working-class movement that can challenge the power of capital and, eventually, bring a socialist future. Instead of being impatient with these developments, we should embrace them as part of the process which will allow for greater numbers to consider and draw strength from the insights of Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, and other revolutionary comrades.

Quest.: Democratic centralism is an organizational principle for a revolutionary party, or for a group that aspires to become a party. A shorthand definition of



(Above) Lenin speaks to Russian workers in 1917.

democratic centralism is “freedom of discussion, unity in action.” Is this guiding idea really a useful guide? In actual political activity, don’t we more typically see a pattern where there is a drop of democracy and a case of centralism, followed by expulsion or splits? Is that problematic pattern a reason why democratic centralism is a crucial part of the current debate about Leninism?

PL.: We need an additional category. We do not have a *revolutionary party* in the United States, although we badly need one, and some of us want to do what we can to bring that into being. There are, as you say, *groups aspiring to become a revolutionary party*—and that often generates, within and between groups, problematical dynamics that create serious obstacles to being able to help bring a revolutionary party into being. In contrast to this, there are *other groups seeking to contribute to the creation of a revolutionary party but understanding that they, by themselves, cannot become such a party.*

Groups in this third category realize that (1) a revolutionary party can actually come into being only when a class-consciousness layer of the working class is prepared to move in that direction; (2) there must be ongoing preliminary processes that will contribute to the crystallization of such a working-class layer; and (3) the group must join with revolutionaries in other groups, with radicalizing activists who are not and will not be in the existing groups, and with people who *at the moment* are neither radicals nor activists, and that together—in the future—we will all be helping to forge the revolutionary party we need.

I agree with how you define democratic centralism—*freedom of discussion, unity in action.* But those words can be understood and implemented in very different ways. For a group viewing itself as the repository of Revolutionary Truth and aspiring to become the revolutionary party, democratic centralism tends to be defined in a restrictive manner, which (in order to preserve the group’s ability to become the unadulterated revolutionary party) create a certain orthodoxy to which all must adhere, that limits discussion and generates a climate in which disciplinary actions and splits become all too common.

A healthy conception of democratic centralism involves a critical-mindedness, an openness, a political courage that characterized the way in which Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, and other such comrades functioned. Shades of difference and outright disagreements are normal and necessary—especially given the complexity of the realities we face. That understood, it remains a fact that *revolutionary socialists need to work together, as a democratic collective,* to be effective in advancing the interests of the workers and the oppressed, creating the possibility of revolutionary party, and building a mass socialist movement that can bring revolutionary change.

Understood in this way, I think democratic centralism is a necessity, but it will be very different from what passes for “democratic centralism” in groups having a stilted understanding of themselves.

Quest.: In “Lessons of October” (1924), Trotsky wrote: “Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the last decade” [since the Russian Revolution of October 1917]. Trotsky was contrasting the failures of socialist uprisings in Germany, Finland, and Hungary to the success of the revolution in Rus-

sia. He was, in other words, grounding his analysis on living history. But, in the 90 years since these words were written, has the sheer quantity of time changed the quality of this argument? Does a century of revolutionary history discount the tradition of Bolshevism?

PL.: The answer to this is yes and no. As you say, “the sheer quantity of time must necessarily change the quality of the argument”—things clearly cannot be just the same as they were 90 years ago. But there are certain aspects of the Bolshevik tradition that, nonetheless, transcend the amazing changes that have taken place over nine decades. Jean-Paul Sartre once said the continued existence of capitalism means that Marxism “remains the philosophy of our time,” since we have not gone beyond the circumstances that brought Marx’s analyses into being. I think similar points can be made about the Bolshevik tradition.

Quest.: Can we truly and meaningfully speak of Leninism as “unfinished”? Certainly “Capital” is unfinished; Marx did not live long enough to complete his masterwork. Lenin, though, lived long enough to build and direct a revolutionary workers party that overturned capitalism in Russia. After 1917, he essentially codified his ideas in (largely polemical) essays and books written against other socialist writers and tendencies. He established the Communist International and wrote the Twenty-One Conditions, adopted at its Second World Congress, which defined the standards that socialist parties had to meet in order to join the Comintern. In short, don’t we really know what Leninism is?

PL.: Who is this “we” to whom you refer? Most people are not familiar with the term *Leninism.* Of those who have heard of it, many cannot give a definition. Of those who could give a definition, there are some who would indicate that it is consistent with the practices and mindset of the bureaucratic-authoritarian and murderous tyranny that arose in Russia particularly with the rule of Joseph Stalin. There are others who would associate it with the practices and perspectives of various left-wing sects proclaiming themselves to be “Leninist.”

A very small number, compared to the others just mentioned, see the “Leninism” of Lenin and his co-thinkers—in contrast to Stalinism and small-group sectarianism parading under the Leninist banner—as representing something important and necessary for the workers and the oppressed.

In this sense, then, when some sincere people on the Left announce that “Leninism is Finished,” the “we” who constitute this small number feel compelled to say: “No, Lenin is not finished.” Since it is our conviction that most people do not comprehend what Leninism actually is, we have a responsibility to explain—including why its history and meaning have been partly obliterated and partly distorted.

As with anything like this, there may be information and insights about this that some of some of us do not have, and differences among us on how best to understand what actually happened in history. There is a collective retrieval process of this historical Leninism that is far from complete, so in this sense, too, Leninism is “unfinished.”

There is yet another way in which it is unfinished, and this relates to Lenin’s methodology. Reality is

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Northern Lights

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Terror bill, MP defection show similarity of Liberals and Tories

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The massive “anti-terror” Bill C-51 that Stephen Harper’s Conservative government is rushing through the House of Commons has been roundly denounced, including by four former Prime Ministers and five ex-Supreme Court judges. It would create a secret police force with powers to spy on Canadians, to break the law in order to disrupt protest groups, and to detain suspects on the thin grounds that a crime “may occur.”

The Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau, after emitting muted criticism, voted for the draconian legislation. Trudeau complained about the speed of passage. That prompted reminders that Jean Chretien’s Liberal government in 2001

curtailed debate on the first wave of anti-terror laws. Even more telling is the like-father-like-son comfort Justin has with repressive statutes. The infamous War Measures Act was imposed by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in October 1970, resulting in the incarceration of hundreds of Quebecois cultural and political personalities who were never convicted of any crime.

The other instance of behaviour grossly bereft of principle was Justin Trudeau’s red carpet, open-arms welcome into Liberal ranks of former Tory MP Eve Adams. She crossed the floor after Harper blocked her re-nomination as a Conservative candidate (citing alleged local campaign improprieties). While Adams claimed she could no longer belong to a party led by “a bully,” or champion policies that favour

the affluent, she is notorious as a long-time enthusiast for Harper’s tactics and a strong advocate of Harper’s income-splitting tax measures that reward the stay-at-home moms of wealthy families.

The likelihood that Trudeau absorbed Adams in order to integrate her evil-genius spouse, Dimitri Soudas, a former top Harper confidante, only adds to the moral turpitude. While crass political opportunism takes a back seat to a vicious assault on civil liberties—in aid of capitalist austerity and permanent war no less—aren’t these actions really birds of a feather?

Some solace can be found in New Democratic Party leader Thomas Mulcair’s finally getting off the fence. For weeks he seemed content merely to demand “more oversight” of the expanding Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Finally, he opposed C-51 in principle. The fact that Mulcair had to be publicly cajoled by aged social democratic icons Ed Broadbent and Roy Romanow, and by legions of social justice activists and civil liberties lawyers, is disturbing. Diplomatically, that’s called “leading from the rear.”

Now the task is for the NDP and its labour allies to win working-class public opinion to oppose the terror law, and the corporate terrorists behind it. There is great need just to make up for lost time. That will entail ensuring that defense of civil rights and opposition to imperialist war are made prominent issues in the campaign leading up to the Oct. 19 federal election. In any case, labour proponents of the spurious tactic of voting Liberal to defeat the Tories have suffered a serious setback. ■

Growing inequality scars Great White North

Last year, Canada surpassed the United States to become the country with the most rapid growth of inequality. The U.S. still has the largest income gap, but Canada is quickly catching up.

Who controls Canada’s wealth? The richest 20 per cent (the top quintile) of the population commands 67.4 per cent of the country’s wealth. Those in the bottom quintile own almost nothing; in fact, they are in negative territory.

Wealth distribution among the other segments of the population is as follows: the near-top 20 per cent control 21 per cent; the middle quintile hold 9 per cent; and the near-bottom quintile account for only 2.2 per cent. Thus, 88 per cent of

Canada’s wealth is in the hands of only 40 per cent of the people—with overwhelming economic control concentrated at the tiny summit of the social pyramid.

Based on an on-line poll of 3000 people, the social democratic Broadbent Institute reported that 80 per cent of those polled favour higher federal income tax rates for the richest Canadians. Almost the same proportion want to see higher corporate taxes.

But the tax trend has been going in the opposite direction. Canada’s general corporate tax rate has dropped from around 22 per cent to 15 per cent under the Conservative Stephen Harper government.

To make matters worse, the Conserva-

tives have reduced spending on social programmes, and capped transfers to the provinces (thus taking a bite out of health care, education, and social assistance). They’ve restricted eligibility of employment insurance (less than 40 per cent of the jobless now qualify), and introduced a series of tax breaks that mainly benefit the affluent.

What are the results? According to a report by the charity United Way, income inequality in Toronto ballooned by 31 per cent between 1980 and 2005. On average, the gap across Canada grew by 14 per cent. Previous research by United Way and McMaster University revealed that almost half of all workers in the

Greater Toronto Area are in precarious employment.

One might think that these facts, combined with the popular appetite for change, would make growing inequality a prime target in the political arena. But the big business-backed Liberal Party will not bite the hands that feed it. And Tom Mulcair, leader of the labour-based New Democratic Party, still intones the right-wing populist mantra “no new taxes.”

The demand for equality has always run counter to the logic of the capitalist mode of production. Thus the movement for economic democracy starts in the streets and work places, travels through the main working class organizations, and can be fully realized only by the socialist transformation of society. — B.W.

By JULIUS ARSCOTT

Employees of the Ontario Public Service are getting ready to hit the bricks. Negotiations for a collective agreement for the 35,000 workers, members of the Ontario Public Service Employees’ Union, are stalled. The old agreement expired on Dec. 31. Management is pitching take-away demands, the likes of which have not been seen since the days of Conservative Premier Mike Harris.

The union began mobilizing its members in late 2014. The bargaining team received a 90% strike mandate—unusual for a public sector union. The early vote was a gamble by the union leadership. The high level of support resulted from the major cuts brought to the table by the employer. These include a 4 year wage freeze (on top of the 2 year wage freeze from the last round of bargaining), the continuation of two-tier compensation with a 12-step wage grid that begins 5% below the current rate, and major attacks on health benefits, long-term disability, and seniority rights.

In addition, the employer unilaterally imposed a 50% premium increase for post-retirement health benefits; workers have to pay thousands of dollars every year after retirement.

Union activists continue to push for “no concessions bargaining” to buck the trend of losses that has taken place for decades. Toronto area activists led the effort to prioritize “No concessions bargaining” prior to demand setting. Already the Corrections division of the OPS has clearly stated it will not accept any concessions. OPSEU President Warren ‘Smokey’ Thomas has publicly repeated his commitment to this position.

Mobilization efforts come on the heels of bargaining by AMAPCEO, which took its first ever strike vote. OPSEU, ALOC, AMAPCEO, and PEGO have engaged in a united front of solidarity against cuts. This is a tactic employed locally by some activists, including this writer, in the previous

OPS workers prepare strike

round of bargaining, in the absence of a formal agreement by the leaders of the unions concerned.

Efforts continue with information pickets at MPP offices and elsewhere, unit meetings in the workplace, “wear blue” days, and large public demonstrations. On Feb. 17, in the frigid early morning after a long weekend, over 800 members and supporters demonstrated in front of the Ontario legislature in Toronto. OPSEU has generated a public campaign focussing on the fight to protect public services, a popular idea.

There are growing signs of solidarity with public sector workers, with one journalist asking Ontario Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne after the demo why she would not increase OPSEU member wages—a question unheard of in recent memory, implicitly supporting public sector workers.

At the time of writing, the employer has put “Essential Services” on the table, a process designed by law to determine who gets to strike and who stays on the job in the event of a strike. This typically takes several months to complete. It is expected to take even longer thanks to a recent federal court ruling that benefits organized labour. A delay in negotiations is good for OPSEU, providing time to mobilize the membership after more than a decade of members being put to sleep by the labour leadership. The latest strike took place in 2002. It also gives members time to prepare financially for a strike.

The coming of warmer weather helps too. The PanAm and ParaPan American games set for Toronto in July will put this struggle in the global spotlight, highlighting the fight against capitalist austerity here, and connecting it to similar fights around the world. A big battle with public sector unions is something that the Liberal Party does not want. The more pressure on Premier Wynne, the better. Federal Liberal

leader Justin Trudeau needs votes in Ontario to do well in the October federal election. The provincial Liberals have never faced a strike by the OPS.

Union activists should remain vigilant in backing their demand for no concessions. The union leadership has been all too willing to accept major concessions in past rounds of bargaining. The tone this round is a product of a membership outcry. The OPS

is the largest provincial public sector bargaining unit in the country. A defeat could be catastrophic for all public sector unions.

The reason the proposed cuts go so deep is that management thinks it can get away with it. That underlines the importance of building the united front with other unions, including the Ontario Federation of Labour, which OPSEU should rejoin immediately. The way to win is to protect public services, in unison with community and social justice groups, culminating in a province-wide general strike against austerity. ■

University workers walk out

Strikes for social justice have taken hold of Canada’s two largest universities. Some 6000 members of Local 3902 (unit 1) of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) are on legal strike against their employer, the University of Toronto (U of T).

“We are poor, precarious, and need improvement in our standard of living,” union chair Erin Black said after her members overwhelmingly rejected U of T management’s terms at the end of February.

The 3700 members of CUPE Local 3903 hit the bricks on March 3, taking on their bosses at York University. At a special membership meeting held a day earlier, members voted 71 per cent to reject the university’s last offer and to commence strike action. They want protection against tuition hikes and an end to precarious, one year at a time, teaching contracts.

“Now that the two largest universities in Canada are on strike, the funding crisis of post-secondary education can be better identified and addressed,” said Yasin Kaya, Secretary of CUPE Local 3903 and a leading member of

Socialist Action. “The government at Queens Park believes that education is a privilege that only the rich can enjoy, not a right for all. Ontario should immediately increase funding for education rather than subsidize big business and the super-wealthy.”

University workers face dire circumstances. Thirty years ago, about 80 per cent of university operating budgets were covered by government funding. Today, government spending comprises only about 50 per cent of costs. To make up the difference, universities have forced students to pay higher and higher tuition fees—creating massive debt for students, at the same time as undermining the quality of education.

Management chooses to employ precarious academic labour to reduce labour costs. For example, contract faculty do over half the teaching at York University, but enjoy almost no job security. Contract faculty must apply for their jobs every 12 months, regardless their length of service to York U.

These strikes show the way forward—that workers need no longer accept sub-poverty line income and disrespect. ■

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meet all obligations to its creditors “fully and timely.”

The deal outraged some 10 members of SYRIZA's Left Platform, who voted against it in a Central Committee meeting. A World War II national hero of the Greek Resistance against the Nazis, Manolis Glezos, now a SYRIZA parliamentarian, wrote in his blog, “I apologize to the Greek people because I took part in this illusion.” There will be a vote in parliament sometime soon.

Socialists say, “cancel the debt” as the only method to get out from under the boot of the Troika! And nationalize the banks in order to stem the flight of capital funds from the country.

What does SYRIZA promise?

SYRIZA's current platform does not advocate socialism, contrary to what some may believe. Moreover, it is a considerable come-down even from its 2014 “Thessaloniki Program,” which vaguely looked to the possibility of nationalizing the banks and ex-public services and utilities in strategic sectors such as railroads, airports, mail, and water. The program also called for restoration of the minimum wage (up to 751 euros, a 30% raise); the restoration of all labor laws and of collective bargaining; a 12,000 euro tax-free threshold; free health care for the uninsured; abolition of socially unjust taxing; free electricity for 300,000 households; and a program for 300,000 new jobs in the public and private sector.

But even before the Feb. 20 deal, SYRIZA began to shift to advocating policies that are more to the liking of the world's capitalists. Today, there is no more talk of nationalizing the banks; instead, it calls for banks to run on sound commercial-banking principles. Privatizations that have not yet been launched will be reviewed.

SYRIZA agreed to raise minimum wages in a manner that “safeguards competitiveness and employment prospects,” and in consultation with its “partners.” It will identify cost-saving measures through a thorough review of expenditures; review spending for non-wage benefits across the public sector; and control health costs while improving the quality of medical services and granting universal access. It will take measures to unify and streamline pensions.

The agreement with the Troika makes it clearer than ever that working people should not support SYRIZA's capitalist government.

Break the coalition with ANEL!

Allowing the right-wing pro-capitalist ANEL to share the government with SYRIZA will ensure that basic demands of the working class can never be met. The rights of immigrants, national minorities, women, and LGBT people will be sacrificed to ANEL's reactionary precepts.

As the Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky warned, hitching the workers' movement to a capitalist government can only end in disaster, never socialism. Examples abound of these multi-class governmental coalitions, often known as “popular fronts”: Spain and France in the 1930s, Indonesia in the 1960s, Chile in the 1970s, Haiti in the 1990s, etc. All ended in massive defeats at the cost of many lives.

The wild card in Greece is the fascist goons of the Golden Dawn Party (6.3%), whose racist attacks on immigrants and leftists have made them notorious. Their tactics and goals are modeled on the racism and anti-Semitism of Hitler's Nazi Party. Six of its leaders

... Euro-banks bully Greece



(Above) Greek premier Alexis Tsipras leading a march of SYRIZA supporters.

were out of the race, imprisoned for running a “criminal organization.” Ever seeking to divide the Greek working people into “them” and “us” with anti-austerity rhetoric, Golden Dawn remains the third largest vote getter. Formed from within Greek police units, GD is a deadly enemy for the labor movement to confront and defeat in the streets. Lawyers and court suits cannot eliminate the menace of fascism.

After the 2013 murder of the popular radical rapper, Pavlos Fyssas, by Golden Dawn killers, a united front of most of the left marched 30,000 strong in Athens. However, SYRIZA took part in few anti-fascist mobilizations.

A united mass workers front is desperately needed in Greece. Without decisive action against Golden Dawn and a winning strategy against capital on the economic front—such as mass marches, strikes, occupations, and nationalizations—the stranglehold of international capital will not be broken and the fascists will be emboldened.

Greek workers need jobs, and the youth needs a future, free of the Troika and its own corrupt ruling class. While fighting for reforms shoulder to shoulder with other Greek workers, class-conscious worker activists must strive to build a mass party with a revolutionary socialist program. Only socialist revolution, properly organized over time and led by a revolutionary party, can defeat international capitalism and its collaborators!

It is time for workers and activists in all countries to actively support the struggle in Greece. In the United States today, as we defend union rights, fight for the \$15 an hour minimum wage, defend the environment, and protest killer cops, international solidarity will pay off in the end. Their fight is our fight! ■

SYRIZA: A closer look

SYRIZA was founded in 2004 and its fortunes have jumped sharply from its humble beginnings. SYRIZA's founders, like Tsipras, came from rightward splits from the Communist Party (KKE) of the 1980s. Known as “euro-communists,” they were mainly followers of latter-day Stalinism practiced by figures such as ex-Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Euro-communists advocated a gradual strategy to achieve socialism—when they bothered to mention it at all—to be achieved in the dim future and primarily through the ballot box.

The Euro-communist tendency has melted away over decades as radicalized European workers found it too tame and too willing to join corrupt capitalist governments, losing much of its identity as radicals. SYRIZA today is led mostly by intellectuals, frequently in universities.

SYRIZA's ties to the working class are mostly ideological, with estimates of union influence at just 5% to 10% and concentrated in the public sector more than in private enterprise.

SYRIZA is unique, however, in that it consists of a coalition that includes Trotskyists, Maoists, and anarchists from the Greek Occupy movement, as well as Euro-communists. Collectively, this radical wing constitutes the “Left Platform” within SYRIZA. The Left Platform is about 30% of SYRIZA's Central Committee and has nine ministers in the new government.

A study of SYRIZA voters indicates that 31% identify themselves as socialists, 11% as “anti-capitalists/anti-authoritarians,” 11% as social-democrats, 8% as communists, and 6% simply as leftists. Yet, for a party that won 2,250,000 votes, its membership is only 35,000, a dangerous weakness that is attributable to a focus on elections and not on building a fighting party on the ground. —M.G.

‘Right to Work’ battle in Wisconsin

By CARL SACK

MADISON, Wis.—As many here expected, so-called Right-To-Work legislation has come to Wisconsin. Republicans, who control both houses of the legislature, announced on Feb. 20 that they would seek to fast-track a Right-To-Work bill over the following two weeks. Governor Scott Walker, who had previously called the legislation a “distraction,” announced that he would sign the bill when it got to his desk.

The introduction of Right-To-Work in Wisconsin follows the same pattern as its passage in Michigan and Indiana in 2012. Both of those states' governors pretended to be uninterested in Right-To-Work while they sought to woo the votes of socially conservative white workers, but predictably threw working people under the bus once they were securely in office.

“Right-To-Work” is a gross misnomer; the legislation attacks unions by prohibiting so-called “fair share” dues, or slightly lower dues paid by workers in a union shop who aren't full union members but receive the benefits provided by the union.

Removing unions' right to a closed shop divides work-

ers between union and non-union members in the same workplace, weakening the union and making it extremely difficult to organize a strike.

Median wages for workers in states with Right-To-Work laws are almost \$6000 a year lower than in states without them.

Anti-bill rallies organized by the AFL-CIO drew 2000-3000 on Feb. 17 and 18 and about 10,000 on Saturday, Feb. 21. There have also been protests in Milwaukee, Superior, and other cities around the state. Many of those mobilized have been from building trade unions, some of which had strongly supported previous anti-environmental legislation pushed by right-wing legislators and now feel betrayed.

The protests have been significantly smaller than in 2011, when hundreds of thousands flooded the streets of Madison and the state capitol to fight union-busting legislation targeting public workers. That legislation eventually passed and has decimated the membership of the state's public worker unions and the wages and benefits of public workers here.

The overall tone of the fightback is pessimistic, reflecting the sense of defeat inflicted on workers here since 2011.

Rather than electing to call for a general strike at the time, statewide union leaders instead pushed for a recall election to funnel the energy of the uprising into votes for Democrats. The subsequent recall failed to remove Walker from office.

More recently, Walker has openly boasted of defeating massive labor protests, comparing protesters to Islamist terrorists for the benefit of his prospective presidential campaign funders. Private-sector unions could call for a work stoppage to fight the bill, but have so far failed to do so.

The reactionary legislation comes on the heels of the governor's release of his proposed budget, which deals out serious attacks on public education, the poor, and the elderly. The budget includes a \$300 million, or 13%, cut to the University of Wisconsin system, the largest single cut of state funding in the university's history, and restructures the system as a “public authority” that will have unlimited power to raise tuition.

The budget also cuts funding for public broadcasting by \$10 million, cuts prescription drug coverage for seniors by \$15 million, removes the cap on enrollment in the state's school voucher program that gives public money to private and religious schools, decimates the science arm of the state's environmental regulatory agency, and requires drug testing of unemployment benefits recipients. ■

Euro-banks bully Greece Will SYRIZA fight back?

By MARTY GOODMAN

On election day, Jan. 25, working people in Greece stood up to the bloodsucking European banks and said, “No more!” The 36.3% vote for the SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) party made it the highest vote getter in a crowded field. For the first time in many decades, an ostensibly anti-capitalist party won a national election in Europe. The election victory raised hopes in many countries, particularly among youth, for a showdown with Europe’s rulers.

Post-election analysis showed that SYRIZA was the first choice of Greek workers, receiving 35% to 40% in the Athens area, where some one-third of Greeks reside. SYRIZA’s new Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, pledged an end to austerity and the dictatorial rule of the big banking institutions known collectively as “the Troika,” which has brought misery to millions of Greeks.

Because SYRIZA was 2% short of a necessary majority, its leaders felt compelled to ask the right-wing populist Independent Greeks party (ANEL, with 4.8% of the vote), which maintains its opposition to the “moratorium,” to form a majority government.

ANEL is a racist, anti-immigrant, homophobic capitalist party that supports NATO, a sore point for many Greeks who remember Western aid to Greek dictatorships, much of it from the U.S. Incredibly, the ANEL leader, Panos Kammenos, was given leadership of the Defense Ministry!

An election night crowd of 5000 celebrated outside the parliament building in Athens, the nation’s capital. In Spain that night, a joyous crowd of 10,000 poured into the streets of Madrid to show their solidarity with SYRIZA. The SYRIZA message resonated with Spain’s fight against poverty and joblessness, a condition that affects much of Europe, particularly in the South. The Madrid demonstration was called by the newly formed left-of-center Podemos Party, which will challenge the neoliberal People’s Party in an election later this year.

Today, unemployment in Greece is over 25%, comparable to the aftermath of the 1929 U.S. stock market crash. The economy has shrunk 25% in the last five years. Unemployment for youth is a devastating 50%. Public jobs have been slashed; the minimum wage has been cut by more than 20 percent. Half of the Greek people live in poverty. There’s a lack of electrical power for thousands without jobs. Homelessness is rampant. The sight of people eating out of garbage cans is not uncommon.

Greece is a member of the 28-member European Union (EU) and trades in its currency, the “euro.” The EU was established formally in 1993 as an imperialist alliance of European states. The German government is its most powerful member, rigging conditions in favor of the northern EU nations over the less prosperous South—Spain, Italy, Greece, etc.

Greece is way behind in its loan payments. Tax arrears have reached \$65 billion, rising by nearly \$1 billion a month. The new SYRIZA government needs to pay out about \$19 billion in several payments, with the main deadlines in March, July, and August. Greece is in line to receive an over \$6 billion loan installment in May, in time to meet the \$6 billion of repayments that are due in July and August—or possibly to default. Everything depends on the Troika’s satisfaction with the implementation of SYRIZA’s economic plan.

Default could lead to an exit from the EU or “Grexit,” as it is often called, leading to a crisis of the EU as an institution, not to mention a far deeper crisis within Greece itself. Prime Minister Tsipras has pledged to stay within the EU, although left critics of Tsipras within SYRIZA argue that not using the Grexit threat was a major capitulation.



DPA / ABACA

The SYRIZA leadership agreed to a four-month extension of the bailout—something they’d rejected during the election campaign.

The Troika represents the European bankers and their politicians, who have economically ravaged Greece with a massive bank bailout that went mostly to pay off bad (that is, crooked) loans. The Troika’s financial elite consists of the European Union (EU), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF is the enforcement arm of the U.S.-dominated World Bank, despised worldwide for imposing its starvation economic plans on millions—often at gunpoint.

Some 80% of Greek debt is in the hands of the Troika; the deal is commonly referred to as the “memorandum.” Extravagant weapons purchases, the highest percentage of any government in Europe, and the waste lavished on the Olympic Games, only added to its debt. Greece now has a national debt of \$270 billion, 177% of its yearly Gross National Product, the highest in Europe.

Greece’s bank bailout was similar to the \$16 trillion bailout by George Bush and Barack Obama in the United States, virtually none of which went to help working people. Both bailouts were funded mainly by working taxpayers as hundreds of billions in both countries went to pay off inflated price tags on bank loans and rip-off deals.

The international nature of this crisis shows that the capitalist system, an inhumane system based on private profits, remains in deep trouble. It is a huge laboratory for European and international capital to see how far they can push working people into a hole.

The international capitalist crisis reached a head in Greece beginning in 2010, with the shock waves of the recession and the first Troika loan of about \$100 billion. Public spending was slashed, public workers fired and taxes increased in accord with the Troika’s

(Above) Large SYRIZA rally in Athens several nights before the Jan. 25 election victory.

austerity plan, i.e., spending cuts and massive poverty. What followed were dozens of general strikes of mostly short duration and innumerable protests, some resulting in death.

Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, SYRIZA’s chief negotiator with the Troika, called the misery imposed on Greece by Europe’s banks, “Fiscal waterboarding that has turned this nation into a debt colony.” Even the establishment journal *Financial Times* called Greece a “quasi slave economy.” Corporate media prefers to shift discussion of the Greek crisis away from the ruthless, corrupt banks to a discussion of “debt” and “over-spending.” Greeks are even slandered as “lazy.”

Capitulation to the Troika

Unfortunately, for all the celebration over the SYRIZA victory, including a 100,000-strong solidarity march in Athens on Feb. 11 in support of SYRIZA during negotiations, the SYRIZA leadership agreed on Feb. 20 to a four-month extension of the bailout, something they had categorically rejected during their election campaign. In negotiations they sought “a bridge” lasting six months.

Despite the “reasonable” demands from SYRIZA, the Troika showed no meaningful flexibility. The European capitalists wouldn’t budge, hitting the middle-class SYRIZA leadership right in the jaw. They discovered that there are no reasonable, humanitarian capitalists—just the bottom line! Meanwhile, Greek banks are losing \$1 billion a day in so-called capital flight by nervous capitalists.

The Troika was re-named “the institutions” in the February agreement to take the sting out of the deal for working-class Greeks. Later, Yanis Varoufakis, who calls himself an “erratic Marxist” and who served in a previous capitalist government, bragged that he had employed “vague language” to entice the Troika into a deal. It was a hollow boast. Every step of the way the Troika will oversee the implementation of the loan and *then* determine whether to disburse funds!

The austerity deal is a threat to jobs and wages and poses the potential threat of further privatizations of public institutions, although SYRIZA says there will be no new privatizations. SYRIZA agreed that it would

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