

‘Leftist’ Sanders seeks Democratic nomination



By DANIEL ADAM

If history records any gains for working people in the coming electoral season, the term “sheepdog” might well appear at the top. Its author (or at least, its popularizer), Bruce Dixon, describes with it those leftist candidates who appear in presidential primaries to corral the radicalizing or disillusioned back to the flock with soaring rhetoric and “movement” trappings. The sheepdogs have an unbroken record of losing the party nomination and then turning their followers over to a more overt representative of big business.

For decades primaries have been used

to help raise the hopes of working people that the parties of their bosses have some place for their aspirations, that corporate party machines are subject to popular control, and even that they can be transformed into instruments of liberation and progress.

The expectations are inflated each cycle by a Eugene McCarthy, Jesse Jackson, Jerry Brown, Al Sharpton, Howard Dean, or Dennis Kucinich. Those who take the bait find themselves without any political vehicle of their own when the show is over. They move from one pragmatic step to another, finally backing the next Humphrey, Clinton, Gore, Kerry, or Obama.

This time around, the position of sheepdog is filled by U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, who is attracting a following with talk of income inequality, calls for economic and political reforms, a slogan of “political revolution,” and a reputation for admiring the great socialist, Eugene V. Debs.

Aside from the socialist identification, there is something more routine about Sanders than his predecessors.

Jesse Jackson, remember, had worked for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., assassinated only 15 years before Jackson’s candidacy. While formally an independent, Sanders has collaborated with the Democratic Party for decades now—

endorsing their candidates, shielding them from social movements, taking their endorsements, their committee seats, and their campaign contributions (\$10,000 from Hillary Clinton’s PAC, no less!), and voting for almost every ruling-class policy.

While taking a few token votes of opposition that never blocked anything of consequence, he has voted for the bombing of Yugoslavia, the war in Afghanistan, funding for the Iraq war, full support to Israel—and he recently makes a point of defending the F-35 fighter jet.

Sanders has even made his non-oppositional role clear from the beginning. Early on he told the press, “If I decide to run, I’m not running against Hillary Clinton, I’m running for a declining middle class.” He has repeated often that he will not be a “spoiler,” and so will not pursue a campaign outside the Democratic Party when he most likely loses their nomination. Tad Devine, a major Democratic Party strategist (who worked for Kerry, Gore, and Dukakis) is running Sanders’ campaign, which indicates a blessing from the party establishment.

Nonetheless, Sanders’ campaign is winning substantial support in its beginning stages, with tens of thousands pledging to volunteer, and millions of dollars in contributions coming through. With its focus on economic inequality, it is likely attracting former participants and supporters of the Occupy movement.

Working-class independence

To better understand how to relate to this campaign, it is helpful to examine the principle of class independence. This principle and its mandate to firmly

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Antiwar conference draws 400 activists

Over 400 antiwar and social justice activists from 29 states gathered in Secaucus, N.J., near New York City, on May 8-10 for a “Stop the Wars at Home & Abroad!” conference that ratified a multi-faceted Action Plan addressing both domestic and international issues.

The conference was sponsored by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC). Founded in 2010, UNAC is now the largest antiwar coalition in the United States, with nearly 120 member organizations opposing U.S. wars in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, South America and the Caribbean.

The conference included leading activists from the British-based Stop The Wars Coalition as well as representatives from Latin American, Canadian, German, Ukrainian, and other organizations opposing U.S. wars around the world.

Conference delegates also included a number of now

U.S.-based activists representing struggles in their home countries—Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Iran, Mexico, Palestine, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Syria, and Venezuela. Solidarity messages were received from Cuba, Ireland, New Zealand and Russia.

A total of 116 organizations participated in the conference. There were more than 100 speakers, more than half of whom were people of color and women. There were six plenary sessions, 31 workshops, and a Saturday night “Tribunal on the Militarization of the Police & Structural Racism.”

While UNAC conferences have always addressed domestic issues, this one was unique in that it was the first



(Left) Black Agenda Report co-editor Glen Ford speaks at UNAC conference.

time a national antiwar gathering so clearly took up the need to oppose the war being waged against oppressed communities and working people in the United States.

In the opening plenary session, Jaribu Hill, founder of the Mississippi Workers’ Center for Human

Rights, delivered a stirring call for solidarity with young activists. Declaring that resistance to the status quo is the only way forward, she called the youth who rebelled in Baltimore “young Steve Bikos and Harriet Tubmans.”

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Banks steal trillions, but no jail

By **JEFF MACKLER**

The “Too Big to Fail” banks, virtually all the major banks in the U.S.—a nearly monopolized few to be sure—were gifted some \$30 trillion in government bailout funds in the years immediately following the historic financial meltdown of 2008. It was sufficient for their ruling-class lobbyists to briefly walk the halls of Congress or put in a call to their congressional guardians to open the government’s financial spigots wider than in any time in U.S. history.

Until recently, the torrential flow of virtually free money continued in the form of “Quantitative Easing” (QE), as additional billions (the actual amount until a few months ago was \$89 billion monthly for the past two years) were poured into the crisis-ridden financial system to keep it afloat.

QE is the ruse wherein the Federal Reserve, supposedly to encourage investment in job-creating indus-

tries, “lends”—a better term would be “gifts”—billions of dollars to banks and related financial institutions at zero interest rates. But instead of these investments, the profit-hungry megabanks quickly turn the government’s free money around and plunge into the stock market and other speculative ventures, driving the Wall Street stock indexes to new and unprecedented heights.

The chosen few get richer than ever. Indeed, 97 percent of all new wealth “created” in the U.S. the past few years went to the top one percent!

Today, rarely a week passes that one or another headline in the corporate press or government official fails to proclaim that justice, if not retribution, is at last being done to the admittedly crooked recipients of government bailouts who crossed the lines of capitalist legality. The CCP Research Foundation, an independent UK-based economic analysis group, added up the fines levied to date against the great banks, which

illegally manipulated currency, interest and exchange-rate benchmarks, illegally sold nearly worthless insurance policies, packaged and sold toxic mortgages, evaded taxes, falsified financial reports, inflated profits, looted pension funds, and otherwise maneuvered to steal trillions of dollars in the panic that ensued with the 2008 crash. While Rome was burning, these corporate looters didn’t fiddle around!

CCP puts the total figure of government-imposed fines levied on the corporate elite at one-quarter of a trillion dollars, (\$250 billion) a pittance to be sure. Bank of America alone was forced to hand over some \$137 billion in fines for its role in its associates’ selling rotten mortgage-backed bonds to unsuspecting investors. To soften the blow, generous government “regulators” allowed B of A to pay their fines with pre-tax dollars, thus allowing them to write off the fines as losses and lowering taxable income.

JPMorgan Chase, the modern-day heir to the Morgan and Rockefeller dynasties, has paid some \$70 billion in fines since 2008 for a whole series of similarly crooked operations. JPMorgan’s fines represented some one-third of its market capitalization of \$220 billion.

Citigroup’s fines amounted to \$38 billion since the financial meltdown, almost 25 percent of its market capitalization. The latter term, market capitalization, refers to the total value of all stocks of a company, that is, the price of one share multiplied by the total number of shares in circulation.

While 25 percent seems like a significant fine, and in the case of JPMorgan, 33.3 percent of its market cap, the figures pale in comparison to the real financial assets of these massive corporations, which are measured in the trillions of dollars, not billions.

Further, the government that represents the interests of their leading corporate entities, has been more than kind. Bank of America is one of the most active stocks on the Big Board. Its stock price rose four times since the crash, from a low of \$3.87 per share in 2009 to around \$16.50 a share today. JPMorgan Chase sold at \$22.31 per share in early March 2009, the market bottom; today it is \$66—a tripling of its price in five and a half years. Citigroup shares have risen during the same period from \$10 to \$50, quintupling its mar-

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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

PHILADELPHIA—Weeks after the deadly May 12 New York-bound Amtrak derailment, the causes of the disaster are still unclear. Authorities are investigating the possibility that the train was hit by some sort of projectile moments before it entered the dangerous curve at Frankford Junction, in Philadelphia's Port Richmond neighborhood.

Unfortunately, while the facts were only beginning to be sorted out, some officials and media commentators were quick to place major blame for the crash on the engineer, Brandon Bostian—charging him with heedlessly speeding through the curve.

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter made the case against the engineer on national television: "Clearly he was reckless and irresponsible in his actions. ... There can be no excuse that can be offered, unless he had a heart attack."

Yet Bostian's colleagues portray him as highly skilled in his job and a conscientious advocate of rail safety. Bostian complained on the internet in 2012, for example, that Amtrak was dragging its feet in putting safety measures in place. He pointed out, "They have had nearly a hundred years of opportunity to implement SOME sort of system to mitigate human error, but with a few notable exceptions have failed to do so."

On another occasion, Bostian laid out the dangers of forced overtime and excessive hours for Amtrak workers: "What will you say when the crew that's been on duty for longer than 12 hours accidentally passes a stop signal and falls asleep and rear ends a loaded HazMat train, killing dozens or hundreds of people?"

Bostian's remarks presaged a disaster in which eight people lost their lives and dozens were seriously injured. There is no doubt that Amtrak management was negligent in its decision to not install Positive Train Control (PTC), or a similar safety device, on the northbound track at Frankford Junction—one of the tightest curves on the route. PTC is an electronic system that would have alerted the operator to dangers ahead and brought the train to a stop if it were running at an unsafe speed.

Amtrak officials explain away their faulty decision by stating that it never occurred to them that a train leaving Philadelphia would have accelerated to a dangerous speed by the time it reached the junction. The engineer must slow down from the posted 80 mph to 50 mph in order to negotiate the curve.

If any location on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor requires careful attention to safety, Frankford Junction is it. This stretch of track—which carries more passengers than any other in the Amtrak system—was first put into operation 150 years ago at the end of the Civil War. Today it abuts a small rail yard, where tanker cars, loaded with heavy petroleum, ethanol, and other explosive substances, are often parked.

In the May 12 derailment, the locomotive barely averted crashing into a line of tanker cars. Such a collision could have destroyed the adjacent neighborhood of residential homes and industrial facilities with a firestorm. The likelihood of such a catastrophe is ever present in Philadelphia, where about 50 trains a week, often laden with over three million gallons of crude oil per train, cross the city to nearby refineries. These oil trains often closely parallel the rights of way used by passenger trains, and sometimes even share trackage with Amtrak.

Gov't ignored safety at train crash site



The lack of advanced safety equipment at Frankford Junction—and on other Amtrak routes—is a direct outgrowth of the refusal of U.S. capitalism to adequately fund our social needs. Citing "budget shortfalls," the semi-public Amtrak joined the private freight-carrying railroads in resisting the provisions of the U.S. Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 to install Positive Train Control throughout their systems by the end of this year.

In 2011, the Obama administration bent to the demands of the rail corporations and slashed by 10,000 miles the amount of track where the PTC safety gear was required to be installed. And in March 2015, a Senate subcommittee voted to delay full implementation of PTC technology for another five years. The bipartisan bill was sponsored by Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), who has accepted over \$290,000 in campaign contribution from the railroads during his career.

For a decade, ridership has grown every year on Amtrak; it would probably increase by a huge factor if the trains ran more frequently and on schedule, and if trains were restored to cities and towns that no longer have passenger service. The system's failure to run on time is due in large part to deteriorated trackage and the necessity to share its routes and to give way to slow and heavy freight trains run by the big railroad corporations.

But in yet another display of where its priorities lie, the House Appropriations Committee slashed \$250 million in funding for Amtrak on the day after the May 12 disaster. According to Amtrak, by 2019, funding for the Northeast Corridor will cover only a quarter of what is necessary to keep it in good repair.

Since its inception in 1971, Amtrak has received about \$1 billion a year from Congress. Despite inflation, the sum has risen by very little in recent years, and now is slated to be decreased. (A third of the appropriations that Amtrak receives from Congress goes to pay the interest on borrowed money from wealthy bondholders.)

In contrast, the U.S. has allotted over \$700 billion annually for direct military and national security costs in the last few years. According to a 2013 report by researchers at Harvard University's Kennedy School, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq alone had cost over \$2 trillion. Eventually, counting veterans' benefits and interest payments, the costs of these wars will balloon to a figure of between \$4 trillion and \$6 trillion. That is far more than the costs of repairing the entire deteriorated network of roads, railways, bridges, and public facilities in the United States.

In this era of severe climate change, it is essential to improve mass transit worldwide. Unfortunately, the United States lags virtually all industrialized nations in this category. Whereas the discussion should be about expanding the network of passenger railroads, electrifying lines, and making them safer and more efficient, Congress and Amtrak are talking about cutbacks in quality of service, deferred maintenance and repairs, deteriorated working conditions and lay-offs, and eliminating even more rail lines.

And now, as the disaster at Frankford Junction demonstrated, safety and people's lives are being sacrificed to capitalism's demands for austerity in the interests of higher corporate profits. ■

... Banks

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ket capitalization!

Few, if anyone, questions the data above. Sources ranging from *The Wall Street Journal*, *Reuters*, and *The Huffington Post* to *The New York Times* affirm the nature and magnitude of the rip off. The government-aided corporate crooks have also admitted to or been convicted of a host of additional crimes tied to the housing collapse and other financial misdeeds, including aiding and abetting money laundering and tax evasion swindles.

Without exception, all are the richer for their crimes, politely called misdeeds by the corpo-

rate media. Not one has been sentenced to jail! We can only add that the government's generosity to its billionaire and trillionaire patrons comes at the expense of working people across the country.

With the multi-trillion-dollar bailout, an unprecedented austerity has been simultaneously imposed across the board, taking a horrific toll on the lives of the vast majority. The connection between bailing out the rich and the further impoverishment of the nation's working masses is indisputable. Capitalism knows no other way to survive. Its abolition at the hands of the oppressed and exploited working masses remains central to any realistic fightback strategy. ■

Turkish metal workers strike for change

By YASIN KAYA

The Renault autoworkers in Bursa, Turkey, halted production on May 15. Tofaş workers, who produce Fiat cars, stopped working the following day. The wildcat strikes spread to six other factories in the metal sector in Bursa.

Several other factory workers in Bursa, Koçaeli, Ankara, and Sakarya either went on strike or protested against their employers. More than 20,000 workers have taken strike action, and the Renault workers are still not back to work as this paper goes to press.

The striking workers have three major demands: First, they want a wage increase. Autoworkers in Turkey have experienced sharp wage cuts in recent years. The average hourly wage in the sector is 3.38 USD. Real wages (adjusted for inflation) declined by 8.2 per cent since 2009, while productivity increased annually by 3.4 per cent in Renault and by 8.1 per

cent in Ford between 2010 and 2014.

Second, the workers want to expel the bureaucratic, right-wing, and mafioso-controlled Türk Metal trade union from their factories. This union fully collaborates with the ruling neo-liberal Islamist Justice and Development Party. The workers want to elect their own representatives.

And third, they want a guarantee that there will be no punitive layoffs. Retribution is not uncommon, as the right to strike is not well respected in Turkey.

With this series of strikes, the Turkish working class finally dominates the scene politically. In the summer of 2013, protests to challenge an urban development scheme in Istanbul sparked a wave of demonstrations all around Turkey, involving millions of protesters. Despite workers' participation in these protests, working class organizations maintained a low profile, and working-class demands did not surface. Now, on the second anniversary of this popular revolt, the working class is beginning to rise against their corrupt union leaders and their bloodthirsty bosses. ■



Baltimore: Protests bring the first round of a victory

By JOE AUCIELLO

In Baltimore, following the suspicious death of Freddie Gray, who died from a spinal injury sustained while in police custody, almost three weeks of daily protests and marches—plus some incidents of arson and looting—finally culminated in a real and unanticipated break from “business as usual.”

This does not refer to the first major league baseball game played in a stadium closed to fans. Nor does it refer to the imposition of late-night curfews in Baltimore or the deployment of 3000 National Guard troops with armored vehicles to patrol the streets. Nor was it the presence of state troopers and city police, reinforced by police from other cities, fitted out in riot gear while continuing to make arrests, even while numerous previous arrests were being dismissed. Most of these events were entirely predictable.

No. The break from “business as usual” in Baltimore came as police were beginning to be held accountable for their actions, required to obey the laws they had sworn to uphold. Unexpectedly, Maryland State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby charged six police officers with felonies for their role in Freddie Gray’s death.

The charges leveled against the cops ranged from false arrest and imprisonment, violation of police procedures, assault, and manslaughter to second-degree murder. These charges could conceivably result in sentences ranging from 10 to 30 years in prison.

Although State’s Attorney Mosby stated that Freddie Gray’s arrest was illegal and unjustified, and that his death resulted from his treatment while in police custody, she did not accuse any of the officers personally of causing Gray’s fatal injuries.

Death at the hands of police is not a new or unexpected event in Baltimore, and these killings rarely draw a serious consequence. Usually, the internal investigation and the victims of police violence are buried at about the same time. Those cases that are taken

to court have typically resulted in the acquittal of police, even when suspects were shot in the back. The police need only claim that they felt threatened while they were “just doing their job.” It is a tradition upheld throughout America; the uniform of a police officer is a license to kill, especially if the victim is Black, young, and poor.

The police killing of Freddie Gray stunned the Black community of Baltimore, sparking anger and outrage. Spontaneous protests were followed by rallies, marches, and other street actions. Night after night, protests against police violence captured the attention of a nation that has already witnessed a series of police shootings and killings. Demonstrations of solidarity erupted in cities and towns throughout the country. Chants of “We are Baltimore” spread from Boston and New York to Seattle and Los Angeles.

These protests join a series of public actions that have arisen month after month following police violence in Ferguson, Mo., in New York, in North Charleston, S.C., in Cleveland, Ohio, and so on. The cumulative effect of these protests has begun to shake the consciousness of the entire country.

So, for once, something different and unusual happened. Less than a day after receiving the internal police investigation and the autopsy results, the prosecutor vigorously acted against the police. State’s Attorney Mosby made no effort to hide the fact that public protest was a compelling factor in her decision to file charges against the six police officers. “To the people of Baltimore and the demonstrators across America: I heard your call for ‘No justice, no peace,’” the prosecutor said. “Your peace is sincerely needed as I work to deliver justice on behalf of this young man.”

Compared to the recent past, the prosecutor’s stance in Baltimore is a step long overdue. No criminal charges were filed against police in the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson or Eric Gardner in New York. In North Charleston, S.C., the police officer who shot

and killed Walter Scott was initially supported on his claim of self-defense. Only after a private cell-phone tape showed Scott being shot repeatedly in the back was the officer finally charged with murder.

Of course, in the death of Freddie Gray, who died in a hospital, there is no tape to give evidence contrary to the self-serving stories of the six police officers. The only eyewitnesses are the accused. Still, it seems clear that Gray was not securely restrained and suffered spinal injuries while in the police van, injuries that were intentionally inflicted. The prosecutor should find it relatively easy to win an indictment against these officers, but winning a conviction in court is an entirely different and much more difficult matter. Precedent from previous court decisions in Baltimore and throughout the country strongly favors the cops.

Nonetheless, Democratic officials in Baltimore have already claimed victories. Maryland Congressman Eli Cummings speaks of “a new day” in the Black community’s relations with police, one where “the wheels of justice roll.” A *Voice of America* article reports, “Cummings said that many of the people in Baltimore’s poorest neighborhoods have never had any kind of victory, and this announcement was one, because it made them feel as if they were being seen and heard.”

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake went further, suggesting that the familiar practice of police brutality and violence would be left in the past. While asserting her confidence in the majority of Baltimore’s police, she said, “To those of you who wish to engage in brutality, misconduct, racism, and corruption, let me be clear: There is no place in the Baltimore City Police Department for you.”

How such sweeping reforms would take place, the mayor did not explain. Certainly, there will be no cooperation from the police themselves. Their lawyer claimed that the state attorney’s charges against the six officers was “an egregious rush to judgment” that raised “grave concerns about the fairness and integrity of the prosecution of our officers.”

Other lawyers, professors, and police officials throughout the country have spoken out on behalf of the Baltimore police, forming a “united front” of respectable opinion against real justice for Freddie Gray. Better to let the police function as they always do and must do, this reasoning goes, even if it results in more Freddie Grays.

Local residents, who are less given to rhetoric, are not yet certain of these optimistic words. One young man, a resident of Freddie Gray’s neighborhood, stated, “I think they charged the officers just to calm the city down. ... But I don’t think they’re going to get convicted” (*The New York Times*, May 3, 2015). That may well depend on what happens next.

A just outcome will be more certain if protesters continue their rallies outside of City Hall instead of staying home and trusting the officials inside City Hall. The public pressure that won a round in the battle for justice needs to be maintained and deepened until a lasting victory is finally achieved. Those wheels of justice roll more smoothly when thousands are pushing.

The safety of the community requires control of the community and an end to dependence on the Democratic and Republican parties. The Democratic mayor of Baltimore can criticize the police for their corruption and racism, but she relies on their clubs and tear gas to enforce the curfew she imposed.

The state’s attorney, Marilyn Mosby, is even more embedded into the local establishment and of necessity depends on the police in making prosecutions. Because of these ties, she had to reassure the entire police department while filing charges against six of their own, saying that “the actions of these officers will not and should not in any way damage important working relations between police and prosecutors.”

These working relations have allowed the Baltimore Police Department a free hand in its long history of abuse and brutality against Black people, a history that includes shooting and killing unarmed, fleeing suspects.

The Black community can further the struggle for justice by relying on its own strength and its own resources and developing its own agenda. The protest movement that takes to the streets can advance its cause by creating a political movement to take City Hall. In Baltimore, where the majority of the city’s population is Black, an important step forward would be the creation of a local Black political party, independent of the Democratic establishment.

More than anywhere else in America, the Black community of Baltimore is best situated to provide a positive example for everyone throughout the country struggling for freedom and equality by moving from organized, independent protest to organized, independent politics. ■

Los Angeles considers \$15 wage

There is a chance that over one million workers in Los Angeles will see their minimum wages move up to \$15 an hour by 2020. The Los Angeles City Council voted 14-1 for the measure after a raucous hearing in which workers gave passionate presentations about the need for a living wage.

Almost half of wage and salary workers in Los Angeles, the country’s second largest city, make less than \$15 an hour, according to a report presented by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO.

The vote sent the measure to the city attorney to prepare a wage ordinance to go to the full council and then to the mayor, who supports the ordinance. They had previously passed an ordinance raising the minimum wage for some hotel work-

ers to \$15.37, and the union representing Los Angeles School Workers last year won a floor of over \$15.

This ordinance will raise the minimum wage from \$9 to \$10.50 next year, with annual increases to reach \$15 by 2020. Businesses of less than 25 workers will have an additional year to reach \$15.

San Francisco will reach \$15 by 2018 and Seattle by 2017. Los Angeles is the largest city to increase its minimum wage. The groups pressing for higher minimum wages said that the Los Angeles vote could set off a wave of increases across Southern California, and that higher pay scales would improve the way of life for the region’s vast low-wage work force.

—ANN MONTAGUE

Racism is standard for capitalist America

By BILL ONASCH

“Baltimore: We Have Been Here Before”—that is the title of a perceptive piece by the Rev. Jesse Jackson. Of course, every such uprising like the one sparked by the death of Freddie Gray while in custody of the Baltimore police has some unique features. Perhaps the most bizarre was the decision to play the first Major League Baseball game in history without a live audience (Orioles beat the White Sox 8-2) and the shifting of a series with the Tampa Bay Rays to St. Petersburg, where Baltimore played as the “home team.”

A more substantial—and encouraging—difference was the gutsy move by a young prosecutor to promptly file criminal charges against six cops involved in the “rough ride” homicide of Gray after his illegal arrest.

The Rev. Jackson, aware of the different response in Baltimore, reminds us of the underlying similarities not only to the recent protests against killings of Black men by police in Ferguson, Staten Island, Tulsa, and other places but also a landmark study produced before most readers were born.

He writes, “In 1968, after race riots had erupted in Watts, Chicago, Detroit and Newark, Lyndon Johnson convened the Kerner Commission to investigate the causes of the riots. The Kerner Report described a nation ‘moving towards two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal.’ It called for better training for the police, but also for new jobs, new housing, an end to de facto segregation. Police misbehavior was often the match that sparked the eruption, but there would be no answer without fundamental change.

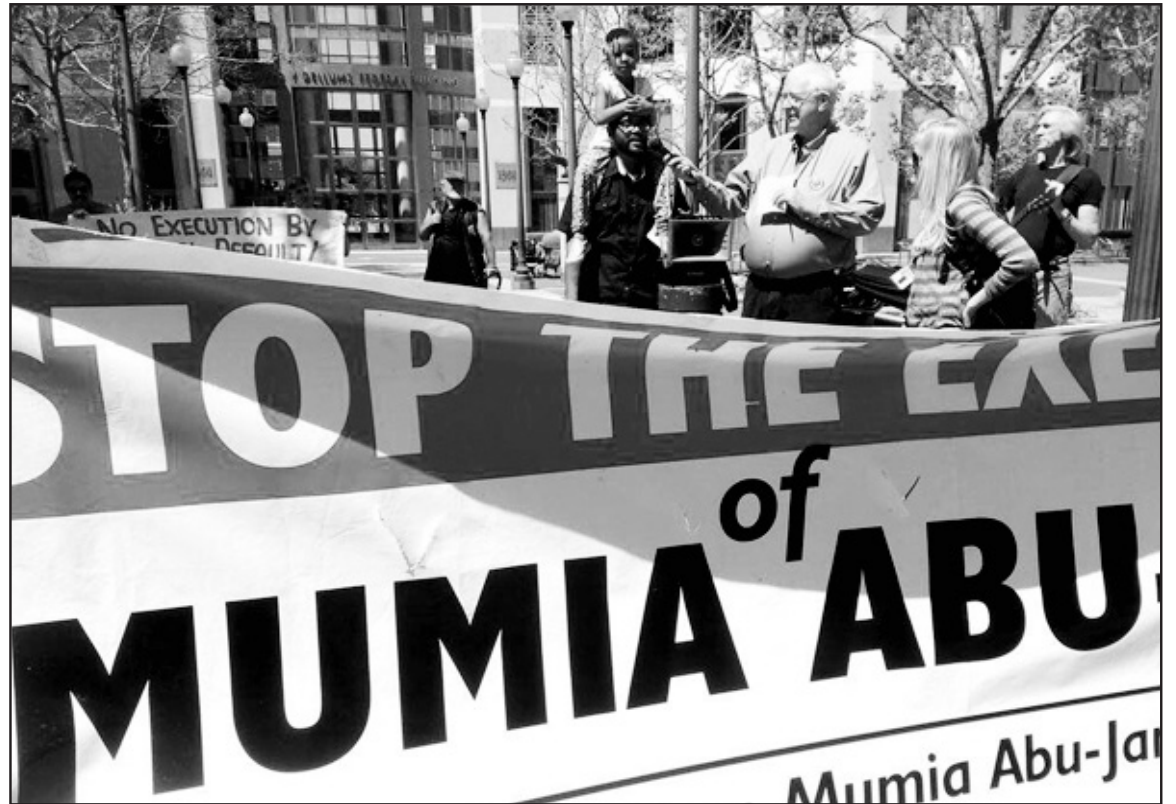
“Baltimore and America have changed, but for too many in our ghettos and barrios, the reality is the same. *The New York Times* reports on 1.5 million ‘missing black men,’ one of every six aged 24 to 54 who have disappeared from civic life. They are either dead or locked away. Jobs have dried up as manufacturing plants closed and were shipped abroad. Mass incarceration—with African Americans still suffering from racial profiling and injustice—destroys possibility. The official black unemployment rate is twice that of whites, but that does not even count those who want a job but have given up trying to find one.”

In addition to the enormous losses in decent paying union jobs once held by African Americans in manufacturing—which more than offset the modest progress for a while under affirmative action in education and employment—not mentioned by Rev. Jackson in this article are the setbacks in the public sector. This erosion of an important source of good jobs for African Americans has accelerated on the watch of the first Black president with massive cuts in the Postal Service and Social Security community offices.

The Obama administration’s attacks on public education have also hit Black educators particularly hard. The pressures of teaching to the test to avoid loss of funding under the rewards and punishments of Race to the Top were dramatically and ruthlessly revealed in Atlanta. Some teachers, with the knowledge of top administrators, allegedly gave improper help to students during testing. If true, while understandable, it was wrong—and reprimands, even suspensions, could have been expected.

Instead, a 2013 Grand Jury indicted 35 mostly Black teachers, principals, and the superintendent on *racketeering charges*. Most took plea deals to avoid the legal expenses of a trial. Two died before they could be tried. Eight were recently convicted and received prison sentences of up to seven years—more than most violent offenders get for a first offense. And a whole lot more than the community service sentence received by the former four-star general and CIA director who leaked secret documents to his non-vetted mistress-biographer.

By just about any important measure you choose—employment, income, savings, housing, health care, accessible transit, accessible grocery stores, quality schools, affordable higher education—African-Americans are worse off today than when the Kerner Report was issued nearly 47 years ago.



(Above) Socialist Action supporters at April 11 rally in Oakland, Calif., for political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Some 120 people demanded, “No execution by medical default!”

A recent report by activist Susanne Ross, who visited Mumia in the prison infirmary on May 28, indicated that he appears to be slowly recovering from health problems associated with acute diabetes. Mumia was still in a wheelchair because his swollen feet and legs make it painful to stand.

Ross reported, “Mumia spoke energetically and his mood was very positive. He spoke of how close to death he had been. Had there not been an international outcry about the lack of appropriate treatment, in fact AGAINST the “treatment” that was bringing him so close to death, he was sure he would not be alive today.”

And the “match of police misbehavior” is now more like a flame-thrower. Dr. Martin Luther King opposed riots for both moral and strategic reasons, but he understood them and recognized their violence was different than that of police and white supremacists. Shortly before his murder—which ignited a wave of big riots—he famously said, “A riot is the language of the unheard.”

We need to do more than just say “we hear you.” This is not just a “Black problem.” African Americans are overwhelmingly working class and that alone makes their injuries our concern. And while Blacks may have claim to being the worst oppressed of all workers, there are plenty of pale pigment that share many of their just complaints.

Not far from the ghetto where Freddie Gray lived is a slum known as Billy Town. The name came from the pejorative “hillbilly” used by Baltimore cops to identify poor whites from West Virginia who came to Baltimore for jobs during World War II. The subsequent deindustrialization of Baltimore left them and their progeny facing similar economic challenges—and relations with the police—as poor Blacks.

Dr. King recognized that such groups should be natural allies and he devoted a lot of attention in his final years to building a Poor People’s movement that could unite them. The Rev. Jackson has undertaken similar projects through Operation Push, including reaching out to not so poor predominantly white unions on occasion.

Last Friday [May 1], several Minneapolis unions organized a May Day march and rally as part of International Worker’s Day. That holiday with American roots has long been ignored by the mainstream labor movement in this country, but Minneapolis is noted for often going against the current, and there were other labor-endorsed actions in several cities.

This year, there was an added dimension, as described by Barb Kucera on *Workday Minnesota*, “Young workers were in the forefront at a Twin Cities

May Day event that brought together advocates of the worker rights, immigrant rights and Black Lives Matter movements. ... The day’s actions are ‘not just about staying alive’ in the face of police brutality, but ‘also about making sure we have the wage to take care of ourselves and our families,’ said Mica Grimm, an organizer for Black Lives Matter.

“Thirty-four-year-old Luke Fahey, wearing a ‘Black Lives Matter’ t-shirt, stood by his bicycle as the May Day marchers gathered. He said there is an ‘intersectionality’ among the issues raised by the demonstrators, which included calls for higher wages, drivers’ licenses for undocumented workers and an end to violence by law enforcement. ‘I believe it goes beyond just police brutality and fair treatment of workers’ to larger concerns like corporate power.”

Such steps are important and need to be expanded. But the fundamental problems require political action that can lead to a government run by worker advocates in the interest of the working-class majority. Dr. King was studiously nonpartisan. Rev. Jackson has devoted his life to reform of the Democrats. And now the “independent socialist” Senator Sanders wants to lead us into the Democrat primaries as Rev. Jackson did in the Eighties.

“No Justice, No Peace” is a popular slogan in movements for social change. We will find neither in the party whose nomination the “socialist” Senator seeks. It is the party of war abroad and attacks on civil liberties at home. It brought us NAFTA and now peddles TPP. It has championed fracking while wrecking the prospects for climate agreements.

It is the party that twice imprisoned Eugene V. Debs, who learned his lesson the first time and did just the opposite of Bernie Sanders—Debs left the Dems to become a Socialist. It has been, in fact, the graveyard of progressive causes for over a century.

Class matters. Our future depends on uniting those who work or seek work for a living on the job, in the streets—and in a party of our own. ■

... Climate

(continued from page 6)

compulsion to indiscriminate growth, but that capitalism turns labor power and nature into commodities. It drives an individualized consumerism that is incompatible with collective values. It is insensitive to the environment. After all, for capital, nature is an input, and the full costs of how it is exploited by any corporation are someone else’s problem.

A system based on private ownership of production can’t support the kind of planning that could avert envi-

ronmental catastrophe. The owners of capital are compelled by competition to look after their own interests first. Any serious central planning would have to override property rights—an action they would resist.

This is the crucial point, because if we conclude that the environment can’t be regenerated under capitalism, then this is what becomes the great game-changer. Instead of lobbying corporations and states to modify their behaviour within capitalism, we must organize ourselves to replace the system.

We need to fight as hard as possible for reforms that limit environmental damage, but such a battle for reforms must be used to build a movement, led by a party, that can take us beyond capitalism.

Sadly, Klein doesn’t offer a political strategy. She invests her hope in an amorphous movement to replace “extreme,” neo-liberal capitalism with a regulated, benign capitalism. She doesn’t recognize the existence of a class struggle in which the choices are more starkly posed.

To save civilization, humanity, and life on Earth, capitalism must be eradicated. It will take a revolution to do that. There can be no revolution without a revolutionary party. A revolutionary party is not self-proclaimed. It must earn recognition as such by millions of workers. A full programme and sustained revolutionary practice in support of it is absolutely required. Socialism or barbarism—the choice couldn’t be clearer. ■

The climate in crisis: This changes everything!

Alik Keplicz / AP



(Left) Climate justice activists march at UN-sponsored climate talks in Warsaw, Nov. 16, 2013.

By BARRY WEISLEDER

This is an abridged version of a presentation given by Socialist Action (Canada) National Federal Secretary Barry Weisleder at the SA educational conference at the University of Toronto, May 22-23. The entire speech appears at www.socialistaction.org.

“This Changes Everything” is the theme of this conference. But what exactly does it mean?

Firstly, there are the obvious signs of dramatic environmental change. Sea levels are rising. Oceans are warmer and more acidic. Coral reefs are dying, with serious consequences for sea life and shorelines. Glaciers and Arctic sea ice are melting. More frequent and intense heat waves are occurring, along with many more incidents of extreme weather, both super-hot and frigid. There are consequent droughts, loss of food sources, displacement of people, and massive fatality due to forced migration and war over scarcity.

Some folks prefer to close their eyes and sing, “Don’t worry. Be happy.” But that won’t alter the present course of climate change (95% of it is caused by human activity, says the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change).

The other way in which “This Changes Everything” is the way millions of people now look at the root cause of the problem—capitalism. Naomi Klein’s book deserves credit for being an important factor in this change. The environmental movement is certainly the biggest factor. Both have their strengths and weaknesses. That is what I wish to explore.

Naomi Klein’s new book, “This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate,” is the climax of her influential trilogy. It registers how much her perspective has changed over the last 15 years. This shift centers on both her assessment of the movement and her deeper appreciation of capitalism “as the main enemy.” Her book “No Logo,” which came out in 1999, exposed the manipulative and exploitative innards of consumer culture. But it mistakenly distinguished between “good” and “bad” corporations, obscuring the social system in which these companies function.

Klein’s second major book, “The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism” chronicled how corporations and capitalist states pounce on the opportunities provided by man-made or natural crises to “ram through policies that enrich a small elite.” By focussing on crises, Klein underplayed what capitalism does between crises.

“This Changes Everything” concentrates on the system itself—and its environmental consequences. “[O]

ur economic system and our planetary system are now at war,” Klein writes, “and it’s not the laws of nature that can be changed.” The significance of the book lies in Klein’s determination to demonstrate that changing our relationship to nature is inseparable from changing our relationship to one other—by “transforming our economic system.”

The immediate threat to the planet means that just adding “the environment” to our list of concerns is not good enough. The sheer scale of the problem necessitates a programme that confronts capitalism. We must do away with any notions, Klein asserts, that the environmental crisis can be contained and eventually rolled back through policy tinkering, technical fixes, or market-based solutions. After all, it’s silly to expect the market to solve problems it created. A far more comprehensive solution is required.

And it’s not enough to expose the woefully inadequate solutions of the Right. Hard questions must be asked of the environmental movement. While the movement has put the issue on the agenda and attracted many young people to the struggle, its organizational forms simply do not match what we are up against. After decades of engagement, the environmental movement remains relatively marginal, capable of slowing down this or that trend, but not able to reverse and correct capitalism’s reckless trajectory.

Klein is especially critical of those sections of the movement that jumped on the “green capitalism” bandwagon in the 1970s. Like labour unions that became increasingly bureaucratic and conservative generations ago, the environmental movement, she writes, “stopped being about organizing protests and teach-ins and became about drafting laws, then suing corporations for violating them, as well as challenging governments for failing to enforce them. In rapid fashion, what had been a rabble of hippies became a movement of lawyers, lobbyists, and UN summit hoppers. As a result, many of the newly professionalized environmentalists came to pride themselves on being the ultimate insiders, able to wheel and deal across the political spectrum.”

Klein goes on to point out that “so long as the victories kept coming, their insider strategy seemed to be working. Then came the 1980s.” Capitalism’s turn to neo-liberalism exposed the extent to which the environmental movement had become a paper tiger, able to maneuver somewhat within the system, but without the capacity for independent, sustained mass mobilization.

Apart from the opportunism of access to resources and entry into the inner circles, what accounts for the

transformational movements can afford. Despite endless griping, tweeting, flash mobbing, and occupying, we collectively lack many of the tools that built and sustained the transformative movements of the past.”

Second, Klein insists that the struggle against climate change cannot be won by fear alone. Fear can be paralyzing. Fear can also generate support for the short-term false options offered by green capitalism. Similarly, simply calling for a more austere lifestyle only reinforces the austerity pushed by capitalist states. The issue is not just living with “less” but living differently—and better.

Change must be about an alternative society. To the extent that some sacrifices are necessary, there must be a radical equality of sacrifice, with such steps seen as “investments” in transforming society, rather than concessions to preserve capitalism.

It is necessary to point to issues directly linked to the environment—housing, transportation, infrastructure, meaningful jobs, collective services, public spaces, greater equality, and real democracy. Work to convince people that “climate action is the best hope for a better present, and a future far more exciting than anything else currently on offer.”

Building a broad, radical, mass movement against climate change isn’t about de-emphasizing the central importance of the environmental crisis but of thinking about it politically and linking it to wider values. Such a movement needs to be independent of capital, and to be for the transformation of class society, to replace capitalism with socialist democracy.

Klein deserves credit for putting capitalism on trial. Yet she leaves too much wiggle room for capitalism to escape clear condemnation. There is already great confusion among social activists over what “anti-capitalism” means. For many, it is not the capitalist system that is at issue but particular sub-categories of villains: big business, banks, foreign companies, multinationals.

Klein is contradictory on this score. She seems to say that the problem is capitalism, but she repeatedly qualifies this position by decrying “the kind of capitalism we now have,” “neoliberal” capitalism, “deregulated” capitalism, “unfettered” capitalism, “predatory” capitalism, “extractive” capitalism, and so on. These adjectives undermine the powerful logic that the goal isn’t to create a better capitalism but to end capitalism as a social system.

It is not just that capitalism is inseparable from the

(continued on page 5)

European workers resist austerity

By STAN MEUNIER

Stan Meunier is a youth organizer of the Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitaliste in Paris, France, and a member of the NPA's minority current, Anti-Capitalism and Revolution. He gave the following presentation while participating in a Socialist Action-sponsored speaking tour that included New York, Philadelphia, Hartford, Minneapolis, and Toronto.

At some of the tour stops, Meunier was joined on the platform by Socialist Action National Secretary Jeff Mackler; Manos Soufoglio of OKDE-Spartakos, Greek section of the Fourth International; Gabriel Lafleur of the French NPA; and other speakers.

In this time of renewed attacks of the ruling class on a world scale in the name of austerity, I am here to bring you news from the Old Continent. The situation there is of interest not only because of the violence of the attacks but also because of the mechanisms of resistance that it triggered.

The neo-liberal era that was initiated in the 1980s, and the general retreat of the labor movement, greatly weakened the European welfare state, which had its origins in the aftermath of the Second World War. The program of the European ruling class has been clear: In order to maintain its level of profits in a period of crisis, it needs to get rid of the remnants of the welfare state in order to finally address the issue of high labor costs in Europe.

European workers are accused of having led the high life for many years—and it's said that they should make up for their follies. But what high life are we talking about? The money borrowed by the European states was mainly used to bail out banks, and give tax cuts to the rich and to big business. Almost none of this money was used to build roads, schools, or hospitals. In short, the public debt is actually the private debt of the rich and the banks; they are making us pay under the false pretense that we are all in the same boat.

Let us now enter into the heart of the matter—the movements against austerity in Europe. In Northern Europe (Germany, Netherlands, Scandinavia, Britain), the economy has fared better for the capitalist class due to past neo-liberal reforms, the stronger integration of the trade-union bureaucracy within the state apparatus, and the profound demoralization of the working class—which has produced political and social apathy. We saw some struggles against austerity in countries of this region, but they were even more isolated and more easily defeated than elsewhere.

In contrast, you have Southern Europe and Ireland, where austerity is hitting the hardest, and the social movements were not destroyed in the past. In Greece, Spain, and Portugal unions called huge general strikes, and trade-union-based local strikes (the teachers' strike in Greece, the movement against precarious work in Portugal), and sometimes with self-managed factories (like Vio-ME in Greece and Rimaflo in Italy).

There were also very radical movements outside of the workplace (i.e., against the opening of polluting gold mines in the north of Greece), or some that were able to combine activity both inside and outside the workplace, like the *marea blanca*, the movement against hospital closures in Madrid—one of the very few movements that actually won their demands, in part because of strong support from some sections of the bourgeois class whose quality of health would be impacted as well.

But most of these struggles led to defeat. Trade-union bureaucrats, whose grip is still fierce, organized the general-strike days merely for people to vent their anger, and not to truly challenge austerity. Moreover, in Southern Europe but also in France, strong attacks on democratic rights, women's rights, or minorities are being waged by the ruling class to both repress and divide working people.

On the electoral level, there is still no rise of the far left, but in Southern Europe, there are a few interesting developments one has to take into account, mostly in Greece and Spain. Traditional political parties are largely discredited. This is the product of two factors: one is the higher level of fightback against austerity; the other is the rising inability of the different factions of the bourgeois class, whether on a European or national level, to really solve their problem of safeguarding profits. They implement austerity, thus



'A model for Podemos is the [U.S.] Democratic Party, and the idea that the problem of the left is not class struggle but semantics.'

lowering the purchasing power of the workers, who are in turn unable to buy goods and services.

These developments opened an opportunity in which some "left of the left" organizations were able to gain good electoral scores in Spain and even to become the government in Greece.

Greece has been among the countries hardest hit by the crisis. The GDP has dropped 30% since 2008, and the bosses are making the workers pay the bill. On top of the crisis of 2008, the countries that were contemptuously dubbed the PIIGS by the ruling classes (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain) went into even deeper crisis since 2010. This was not only because of the general fragility of their economy, a natural consequence of 70 years of overspecialization (tourism in Greece, construction in Spain, etc.) with the blessing of the National and European ruling classes, strengthened even after the entry into the European Union, but also because of the bailouts plus tax cuts to the rich. For example, in Greece the Orthodox Church, which is the biggest landowner in the country, and the shipbuilders, pay no taxes at all!

First the Greek right wing (New Democracy), and then a coalition of the Socialist Party (PASOK) and the right, put the austerity mode on full steam. All public companies were to be privatized, all remnants of the welfare state to disappear, wages to plummet—all in the name of paying the debt.

The workers' movement responded to these attacks with many days of general strikes, which the trade-union bureaucracy called because they had no choice. But these were only scattered days, and no action was taken for a continuous general strike to truly challenge the power of both the Greek state and European institutions. Some radical struggles took place, inside and outside the workplace, but they mostly failed because they were isolated.

With this in the background, a whole section of the PASOK electorate got tired of the old leaderships, as they were seen only as the servants of the European Union (EU) and of austerity. They decided to switch their allegiance to Syriza, a small left formation originating from a Eurocommunist split from the Communist Party in the 1980s, with its young leader Alexis Tsipras promising to resist the EU.

As we know, when elected, Tsipras capitulated to the EU and offered no real challenge to its austerity program. If the movement of the workers towards Syriza was unquestionably a move to the left, it was born out of despair rather than out of self-confidence of the working class in its ability to change things.

Although workers vote for Syriza, the party has weak links to the social movements. The Greek people still feel that Tsipras did his best; at least, that is what the polls show. Will radicalization spring out of disillusionment? It is doubtful.

(Above) Podemos activists, including leader Pablo Iglesias (ctr.), celebrate. The new party has achieved major vote totals in recent elections in Spain.

Furthermore, a national poison is now infiltrating the country, the idea that the cause of the crisis is the German people rather than the Greek and European banks and ruling classes. Following on this trend, some fractions of the ruling class are putting forward the idea that Greece would fare better on its own, with its own currency instead of the euro, and exploiting the Balkans even more than now. Will the left resist this pressure towards nationalism? We will have to see, but the prospects aren't good right now.

Is there more hope in Spain? As in Greece, there is an acute crisis and strong social movements. But the Spanish workers have been able to secure more wins. So their "reformist" experiment, Podemos, is taking a different turn.

There are several thousand members of Podemos in the local circles or "círculos." Most of them are the same ones who took part in the struggle against hospital closures, against layoffs in the sector of education, in the indignados ["Occupy"] movement, and a lot of unemployed youth with no prospects for their future.

Podemos did pretty well in the European elections and in the local elections in Andalucía. But with success, political questions arose. Do we want to take power from above, and facilitate coalitions with existing parties, or take power from below? Do we advocate just for radical democracy, or social democracy as well?

Pablo Iglesias, the leader of Podemos, and his crew act completely independently from the base, giving orders from Madrid. One of their models is the Democratic Party, and the idea that the problem of the left is not class struggle but semantics, that the left is more rational but needs to get the message out.

One day, to keep their radical base, the Iglesias leadership says they are for wealth redistribution; the next day he says on TV that he likes the rich when they are patriotic and responsible. With the next elections coming, local in May-June, national in December, Podemos will show its true face. Will the radical sector of the organization be able to capitalize on the betrayal of the leadership? There might be more hope than in Greece.

France is somewhere in between Northern and Southern Europe, and shares some characteristics of both. In the 1980s austerity was implemented by a coalition government of the Communist and Socialist parties, and then by the SP alone, with the privatization of public companies, etc., but it never went as far as under Thatcher or Reagan. Also, the French economy is more diversified and bigger than those of Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain, with a GDP of around \$3 trillion—50% higher than Italy's and more than two times bigger than Spain's.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Europe in 2008, there have been lots of fights and strikes against layoffs and business closures in France. Auto parts suppliers, car manufacturers, book and disc sellers, retail—all sectors have been impacted, whether manufacturing or services. The rhetoric of the bosses is always the same: we have no money to invest, the

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Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

NDP win in Alberta: A sign of things to come

By BOB LYONS

The electoral victory of the New Democratic Party in Alberta, where Rachel Notley led the labour-based party to a majority of seats with over 40 per cent of the vote, is just the latest in a series of events signaling the process of recomposition of social movements across the Canadian state.

The emergence of the Quebec student movement as a broad and combative force; the growth of the Idle No More indigenous people's movement, which demands a public inquiry to investigate the murder and disappearance of over 1,200 indigenous women; the advancement of First Nations as the vanguard of the environmental movement fighting the destructive practices of Big Oil, mirroring the role of indigenous communities in Latin America; the shakeup of the elected leadership of the Cana-

dian Labour Congress and prospects for a militant, cross-union caucus; and finally the massive May 1 social strike against austerity in Quebec, where over 800 social and trade union organizations participated—these indicators form the backdrop for the unexpected NDP victory.

While the size of the vote for the NDP surprised many pundits, those closely watching the changing nature of Alberta politics saw the clues. They were to be found in major changes to the composition of the working class.

As the concentration of capital in the oil industry grew through the various mega-projects, so did a younger and more combative workers' movement centered in the construction and resource extractive sectors. In addition, the change in ethnic demographics in the main urban centers of Calgary and Edmonton weakened the hold of the

traditional clientelist mechanisms of the provincial Conservative party. For example, Calgary had elected a Muslim mayor, associated with the NDP, in the previous two municipal electoral cycles.

The mildly left-wing program put forward by the Notley leadership team, of increasing corporation taxes by 2% and reviewing the level of oil royalties with an eye to increasing them, combined with popular rejection of the perceived corruption and incompetence of the Conservative government, which had been in power for more than 40 years, was enough to make the NDP a pole of resistance to the austerity budget presented by the Tory cabinet. A vote for the NDP was thus seen as a vote against austerity, and for the continuation and expansion of social expenditures, especially in health and education.

Unfortunately, this vote and the expectations raised by it, will be disappointed by the Notley leadership. Notley, like most of the NDP tops, embraces the neo-liberal mantra "balance the books," which is nothing more than code for freeze or cut social spending. She has already begun to lower expectations by announcing that the finances of the province are in worse shape than the public had been led to believe, and that consequently her election promis-

es would have to be deferred, delayed, and re-examined. This is an old movie, and the re-run is no more palatable than previous versions starring former NDP governments in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The one force able to stop this retreat is the social movement. Socialists in Alberta need to step up and organize to defend the demands of the popular sectors and their expectations that the NDP will be different. Militant trade unionists in particular should pay no heed to the union bureaucrats who will preach wage restraint, social peace, plead for time to allow "their" government to get things in order, and so on.

The Alberta working class, having taken a step forward on the road to political independence from the parties of the capitalists, can take the next step by putting forward its social demands and by organizing around them using the methods of the organized workers' movement — mass action — and press forward to ensure that these demands are satisfied.

Only a resolute struggle against the austerity-lite program of the NDP leadership will guarantee the active and enthusiastic participation of the working class, and its allies among youths, the indigenous people's movement, and progressive self-employed and small business folks, and guarantee that the NDP victory in Alberta will be more than a one-off, like the Bob Rae NDP disaster in Ontario in the early 1990s. ■

Socialism 2015: A big hit!

The international educational conference hosted by Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste at the University of Toronto drew accolades from most of the nearly 100 people who attended one or more of the five sessions held May 22-23.

The agenda featured speakers from Greece, France, the USA, Canada, and (via skype) Mexico. They addressed big issues confronting the international working class—capitalist austerity, anti-immigrant and fascist movements, racism and police violence, deadly climate change, growing social inequality, and the major sources of (state) terrorism in the world today.

A high point of the conference was the debate between Linda McQuaig, author and NDP candidate in Toronto Centre constituency, and SA's John Orrett, firefighter and local NDP leader in Thornhill, Ontario.

Video/audio of all conference presentations is posted on YouTube. Find the link at: www.socialistaction.ca. Literature sales at the conference generated over \$200; a raffle drew another \$130. A number of people asked to join Socialist Action, including a former elected NDP member of the Saskatchewan legislature.

During the weekend, representatives of



(Above) Linda McQuaig, NDP candidate for Toronto Centre, speaks at SA educational conference.

several currents and sections of the Fourth International met. They planned to increase their collaboration, and to strengthen efforts to build revolutionary, Leninist-type parties around the world. — B.W.

Ontario teachers' right to strike violated again

The Ontario Liberal government, re-elected with the thinly veiled support of teacher-union bureaucrats in June 2014, once again violated secondary school teachers' right to strike with back to work legislation in late May 2015. The Conservative Official Opposition voted for the strikebreaking law; the labour-based New Democratic Party voted against it.

The main issues giving rise to job action at three local school boards, Durham, Peel and Sudbury, are the threat of an increase in class size, the loss of teacher in-school preparation time, and four more years of an ongoing wage freeze.

In a vain attempt to economize on strike pay, leaders of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation decided to initiate strike action at only three of Ontario's 31 public secular English-language school districts. But the Ontario Labour Relations Board, on a complaint from Durham, ruled the three strikes illegal because they appeared to address monetary issues that are designated for negotiation at the provincial level. So the OLRB imposed a two-week moratorium on the local strikes. Then the provincial government came down with a legislative sledgehammer, banning strike action for the duration of the school year, through the end of June.

The Liberal government's strong-arm tactic inflamed already frustrated educators and support staff. They watched for months as local talks were stymied by intransigent provincial officials demanding severe worker concessions. This situation makes a province-wide strike in early September by OSSTF, as well as by elementary, French, and Catholic teachers, likely—unless Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne and her Education Minister Liz Sandals decide to make it illegal, as did the previous Liberal government under Premier Dalton McGuinty in 2013.

Ultimately, education workers will have to decide: defy the bosses' law and defeat the austerity agenda, or submit to the death of public education by a thousand cuts. The formation now of a common front of all workers united against austerity would make the choice to defy the bosses much easier, and much more likely to succeed.

— BARRY WEISLEDER

Ontario Federation of Labour in Jeopardy

By JULIUS ARSCOTT

The \$4.5 million budgetary shortfall at the Ontario Federation of Labour, featured in lurid front-page headlines, is mainly the result of unpaid dues by major union affiliates arising from an unprincipled fight between labour bureaucrats. Sectarian actions by leaders of the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, the Ontario Nurses' Association, and the Service Employees' International Union are threatening to destroy the provincial house of labour.

The target of much of the bureaucrats' petty, unbridled acrimony is OFL President Sid Ryan. He is criticized for the OFL campaign in 2014 that focussed on defeating the Tim Hudak-led Ontario Con-

servative Party, which threatened to cut 100,000 public-sector jobs and introduce "right to work" legislation to deprive unions of automatic dues deductions. The concentrated opposition to Hudak and the Tories did detract somewhat from labour's traditional stance of clear, strong support for the union-based New Democratic Party.

Ryan is also renowned for his pertinent criticisms of the NDP leadership's anti-tax populism and its reluctance to join the effort to raise the minimum wage. Ryan is a prominent supporter of controversial but very important campaigns like the pro-Palestine boycott of Israeli apartheid.

On the whole, Sid Ryan is the most progressive president of the OFL in many de-

cadecades. The morally unjustifiable conflict within the OFL is weakening the struggle against the austerity agenda of Liberal Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, and could result in a drastic undermining of unions for years to come.

This is a particularly bad time for this kind of division in the labour movement. The political parties of Bay Street are on the move, attacking workers' right to strike and pushing a brutal austerity agenda by attacking nurses, teachers, and employees in the Ontario Public Service.

Ontario unions should find the road to a united fightback by working together to build an effective strategy against the bosses' agenda. That means supporting the ongoing movement for a \$15/hour

minimum wage, saying NO to concessions bargaining, rejecting two or three-tier wage and benefit structures, giving critical support to the labour-based New Democratic Party, and fighting alongside community organizations against privatization of public services.

These efforts should challenge the entire austerity agenda, not just one aspect of it (like the government's plan to sell the majority public stake in Ontario Hydro). To win, the struggle should employ the tactic of a province-wide general strike.

OFL represents and links 48 unions. It has the capacity, with militant, democratic leadership, to turn this province right side up. Labour should unite in action. United we win, divided we beg! ■

... Sanders

(continued from page 1)

oppose the parties of big business (including the Democratic Party) are often ridiculed as purist, finicky, or idealist. But this principle is derived from material relationships between people, not moralistic ideals. It begins with the relationship between a worker and her employer.

On the surface, the relationship between employer and employed is one of equality. The employer freely offers a job, and the employee freely takes it. Beneath this appearance lies direct domination. Once employed, the worker's time and activity is the property of the boss just as much as any other commodity. Unauthorized breaks are literally (not figuratively!) considered "time theft."

The profit of the employer, and thus the existence of his business, comes from unpaid labor squeezed from the workers. This surplus expands the social power of employers and strengthens their hold over society as a whole.

The conflict between owners and laborers does not end with the close of the workday. Without intervention in every aspect of life, capitalists could not expect their employees to return to work every day. They could not rely upon the next generation to enter the workforce, or secure the necessary markets or the needed resources, or fulfill a great many other concerns.

For all this they need a state with a monopoly on legitimate violence, a vast bureaucracy, and an array of other institutions, including schools, churches, charitable foundations, NGOs, and media outlets that are under their control. Thus, workplace struggles do not occur in isolation from the broader political context. Likewise, no political question floats above the struggle between classes.

Elections serve to conceal the role of a state in a similar way that the free market conceals the relationship between bosses and their workers. While elections allow each individual the right

to vote for one politician or another, the state does its real work through the most undemocratic and rigid hierarchies in human history: military and police forces. The commanders of these hierarchies are deeply loyal to the capitalist class and its order—a fact that many, like Chilean socialist Salvador Allende, have learned all too late.

This is why the police can do no wrong in the view of capitalist courts. They are the constant staff upon which the social order rests. Behind the police and military is an apparatus that is also unelected, including numerous judges and functionaries.

With a monopoly of force in the hands of this hierarchy, and a radical monopoly of private property directly in the hands of capitalists, the ability of elected politicians to vote away the power of the capitalist class (should they be so inclined) is nonexistent.

The power of the capitalist class is directly at odds with the power of working people. The social order required by capitalists for their rule is directly at odds with the social order required by working people for their emancipation. Any unity forged between workers and their bosses is like the unity of the proverbial chicken and the roach: it takes place in the belly of the chicken. Every struggle by working people lives and dies on the degree to which its fighters stand on their own strength and act against the interests, values, and institutions of the capitalist class.

No labor movement has ever gained an inch that respected bourgeois property rights or the bourgeois monopoly on violence. The rebellions in Ferguson and Baltimore frighten the establishment because they show disdain for the capitalist monopoly of property and force. The movement against the war in Vietnam succeeded to the degree that it made possible a soldier rebellion that produced half a million desertions, and a fear in the Pentagon of a collapsing command chain.

The recent Chicago teachers' strike won important victories because its leaders recognized the Democratic Party power structure for the deadly

"THE UNITY OF THE CHICKEN AND THE ROACH HAPPENS IN THE BELLY OF THE CHICKEN."



opponent that it is. The fight for a \$15 an hour minimum wage is winning gains because it has been infused with the idea that workers can only win the demand through their own power.

Democratic Party campaigns like Sanders' are so disastrous for our movements not simply because they take up our time, but because they teach people to trust in the power and the values of the capitalist class. Before he convinces supporters to re-enter the Democratic Party, Sanders will teach them to place faith in the bour-

Thanks to cartoonist Stephanie McMillan.

Link to McMillan Kickstarter <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/stephaniemcmillan/365-affirmations-for-revolutionary-militants-desk?ref=card>

geois state and its institutions. These are the ideas he will spread in the coming months. Countering this sophistry is reason enough to oppose Sanders' campaign. ■

Sawant runs for Seattle re-election

By ANN MONTAGUE

Kshama Sawant's re-election campaign is in full swing. The Seattle Socialist Alternative candidate, who won a seat on the Seattle City Council two years ago, is mobilizing her supporters to win again.

Since her election in 2013, Sawant fulfilled her campaign promise to make Seattle the first major city to pass a \$15 an hour minimum wage. And she has taken on a number of other issues that are important to working people. In the city with the fastest rising rents in the country, she has championed the fight for rent control, a Tenant's Bill of Rights, and the demand that the city build thousands of quality apartments to be rented at below-market rates.

Her last campaign was centered on the grassroots \$15-wage movement, which complemented the ongoing organizing of fast-food workers by SEIU. Although Sawant received endorsements from a lot of unions, however, SEIU stuck with the incumbent. But this time, all the SEIU locals in Washington (SEIU 775, 1199NW, 925, 6), representing 86,000 workers statewide and 12,000 in Seattle, have endorsed her campaign—along with some two dozen other labor organizations.

On May 12, Sawant submitted more than 3000 signatures to qualify for the ballot. "It's exciting to be able to run yet another grassroots independent working-class campaign," Sawant said.

This election will be the first in Seattle that moves to elect candidates by district. And this is the first time that prominent elected Democrats have announced their support for the socialist Sawant. These officials include King County Council member Larry Gossett and state Senator Pramila Jayapal—as well as recently retired state Senator Adam Kline. According to the website of the Sawant campaign, Jayapal has praised Sawant as a "powerful and unwavering progressive voice in City Hall."

Seattle Democratic Party activist Jeanne Legault argues, "I think we need to open our tent a little bit, and include other minor party organizations, like the Green Party or the

Socialist Party or whatever, because we are all on the same side and we are stronger working together."

Are socialists and Democrats really on the same side? Apparently, these officials and party workers believe they can gain political advantage by offering support to the highly popular Sawant—despite her socialist program. But working-class activists can never achieve success by campaigning for elected office under the same "tent" as the Democratic Party, which offers nothing to working people but austerity and oppression.

The Democratic Party is one of the two main parties of the capitalist class—unyielding in its policies favoring the billionaire 1%. It is an obstacle to building the mass movement for social change. Unfortunately, by listing Democratic Party officials in its campaign literature, the Sawant campaign needlessly fosters illusions that there are some "good Democrats," an error that we hope will be corrected as the campaign unfolds.

To be sure, Seattle's Democratic Party machine has not looked kindly on the effort to give two more years in city council to Sawant—and they are fighting back. The Seattle blog *Publicola* reported that rich donors held a breakfast fundraiser to set plans in motion for an anti-Sawant campaign. The article reports that "hefty out of state donations are going to be coming in from top-tier donor counterparts from around the country" to defeat Sawant's reelection.

Last month, 37th District Democrats were planning on co-sponsoring a candidates' forum with the 43rd District, where Sawant had been invited to speak. David Corrado, chair of the 37th District Democrats in Southeast Seattle seemed shocked: "Philosophically it's a problem that we've never dealt with before. There has never before been an incumbent who is not a Democrat and who sits so far to the left of the Democratic Party."

There were strong objections when some Democrats realized that they would have to share the stage with a socialist. The Executive Committee of the 37th District pulled out and decided to hold its own forum—without Sawant. They also declined to invite independent Josh Farris, a housing

activist who is running against incumbent Bruce Harrell.

Jeanne Legault stated, "I felt outraged." She drafted a petition to have Sawant included in the forum. It was signed by 76 Democrats in the district. After receiving the petition, the Executive Committee of the 37th District Democrats decided to cancel its candidates' forum entirely.

Veiled attacks on Sawant are also coming from the mayor and city council, who are considering a restrictive bill on electoral campaigning. Goldy, a popular Seattle blogger, wrote a piece entitled, "Politicians with Zero Grassroots Support Aim to Curb Activities of Grassroots Supporters."

Mayor Ed Murray claims his proposed ordinance is not aimed at Sawant but merely to clarify whether or not political activity related to official events organized by city staff is currently prohibited. The proposed legislation would state: "No elected official, or the official's agent, shall engage in campaign activities at, or adjacent to, any official city public event that is organized by that public official or any employee of the official's office. The campaign activities may not occur during the event or at any time that attendees of the public event are present."

It does not define "official's agent" or "campaign activities." Goldy questions: "If a Sawant supporter, on her own initiative were to pass out a Sawant campaign flyer on the steps of City Hall at a Sawant organized public forum, would that make Sawant legally liable for her actions?"

"This ordinance would bar Sawant from organizing any official city public event by making her legally liable for any action taken by any of her 'agents'—whatever that means. This pretty much only applies to Sawant because she is the only elected official who can claim any meaningful grassroots support—a base that is sometimes unruly, undisciplined, and not under anyone's control."

If passed, this ordinance could just be an irritant to the Sawant campaign or it could prompt a legal challenge from Democrats wanting to overturn Sawant's reelection under section 2.04.500: "If the court finds that the violation of any provision of this chapter by any candidate or political committee probably affected the outcome of any election, the result of the election may be held void and a special election held within 60 days of such finding."

If Democrats try to overturn her reelection, they might really find out what the unruly grassroots will do! ■



United National Antiwar Coalition Action Plan

Adopted by UNAC Conference May 8-10, 2015

Political Goals, Objectives & Mission

The United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) opposes all U.S. wars, whether they be in the form of direct military intervention with troops on the ground, privatized death squad wars, drone wars on every continent, sanctions and embargo wars, U.S.-backed military coups, “humanitarian interventions,” the U.S.-backed and -financed Israeli wars against the Palestinian people and the myriad of other modes of intervention and conquest that deny oppressed peoples the right to freedom and self-determination.

We demand an end to it all: the war machine, the weapons of mass destruction, the trillions spent on advancing imperialist interests and the associated devastation perpetrated on poor and working people the world over. We demand: U.S. Hands Off & Out Now—from the Middle East to Africa to Latin America to Iran, Ukraine & Beyond. Bring All the Troops Home Now & Disassemble Weapons of War! Trillions for Human Needs—Not One Penny for War!

UNAC similarly opposes the ongoing and deepening wars against poor and working people at home, including the militarization of the police; the racist mass-incarceration criminal “justice” system; the war-profiteering military-industrial complex; the ever-privatized, for-profit and slave labor prison-industrial complex; the deepening racist attacks and mass deportation of immigrants; racist persecution of Muslim communities; vicious and virtually unpunished racist police murders of African-American, Latino and Native American peoples; massive ever-intensifying austerity—assaults on wages, massive cut-backs of social services, massive student debt, unending tuition hikes, deterioration and re-segregation of public education—union busting; the oppression, exploitation and brutality waged against women; the government-promoted homophobic attacks on the LGBT community; the fossil-fuel, war-induced global warming and associated looming climatic catastrophe; and the wholesale police-state-like surveillance measures that increasingly obliterate civil and democratic rights. The U.S. needs a national urban policy that promotes sustainability of human life, rather than the profits of finance capital.

The U.S. wars abroad and the wars at home are inseparable aspects of a society that requires the subordination of human needs to the private-profit interests of the bailed-out and enriched (at public expense) banks, corporations and multibillionaire elite. We hail the emergence of new anti-racist and working-class forces that have demonstrated vibrant leadership capacities, from Black Lives Matter and the myriad of other anti-racist fighters to the ever-resurgent Palestinian community mobilizations against the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians, to the recent International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 work stoppage in solidarity with their Black and Brown sisters and brothers who have been the prime victims of rampant police brutality and murder.

Our method of struggle looks to the broad mass of working people and their allies as the primary agency of social change. The history of all social movement victories is a history of the unification of the working masses and op-

pressed to advance their own needs and interests. UNAC strives to advance the unity of the antiwar and social justice movements in united, independent, inclusive, and democratically planned mass actions to demonstrate the power of the working masses and achieve fundamental social and political change. We support a broad range of actions, including nonviolent direct action, lobbying, and petitioning, and we stand in solidarity with community resistance and rebellion against race and class oppression.

UNAC-initiated actions

- Oct. 4-10 National: UNAC will initiate and collaborate with all interested organizations and groups in organizing a week of united and broadly sponsored local and regional activities (rallies, marches, teach-ins, vigils, etc.) to advance the above goals and objectives during the week of Oct. 4-10 and culminating on Saturday, Oct. 10.

This time period corresponds to the beginning of the now 14-year-old U.S. war against Afghanistan, which with the U.S. wars in Iraq, Libya, and so many other countries have caused enormous suffering abroad while draining this country of the resources critically needed to address problems here at home

In this effort we welcome the emerging and critical layers of youthful anti-racist activists who have served to revitalize today’s social struggles and who will be planning campus and community-based actions in collaboration with UNAC.

- UNAC tour to Cuba: UNAC will consider organizing a tour to Cuba to exchange ideas with Cuban and international antiwar and social justice activists.

- UNAC National Tour: UNAC will explore possibilities of organizing a national tour of prominent antiwar and social justice leaders, as we did with Malalai Joya in 2013.

Actions endorsed by UNAC

- May: UNAC offers full support to the Red Crescent Society of Iran sailing a rescue mission to Yemen to bring urgently needed supplies of medicine, rice and flour to the people of Yemen under siege and blockade by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries and fully backed by the U.S. The ship’s crew of 50 men includes internationals from the U.S., France, and Germany. We demand that the ship be allowed to reach the desperate Yemeni population to deliver its supplies intact and that the ship and its crew are allowed to arrive safely. Any interference and/or violence would be a criminal act in violation of international law.

- May 12, Orange, N.J.: UNAC calls for the reinstatement and contract renewal of Marilyn Zuniga, the Orange, NJ teacher suspended from her third grade classroom at the behest of the Fraternal Order of Police for forwarding her students’ get well letters to Mumia Abu Jamal. We endorse and encourage efforts to this end, including a mobilization at the May 12 meeting of the Orange Board of Education.

- May 13, Philadelphia: UNAC will support the program and mass rally to mark the 30th anniversary of the police bombing of MOVE. Sponsored by the MOVE organization, which is still fighting for the release of the MOVE 9. <http://onamove.com>.

- May 19, Detroit: UNAC endorses the Michigan Emer-

gency Committee against War and Injustice and other groups’ action at the shareholders meeting of the JPMorgan Chase Bank and other actions targeting the Bank. JPMorgan Chase is playing a leading role in home foreclosures nationally, causing senseless destruction in Detroit most of all.

- May 21, National: Black Lives Matter and others anti-racist youth and social justice groups have set May 21 as a national action day for women, trans and LGBTQ victims of police violence. UNAC will help publicize and support these events and will continue to support other actions against racism and police violence.

- May 26, National: UNAC supports the demands raised by people in Germany that the German government close the Satellite Relay Station at the U.S. Air Base Ramstein in Germany, which plays an essential role in all U.S. drone surveillance and drone strikes in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Africa and elsewhere, and close the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Stuttgart, which is the Pentagon’s central command responsible for planning and carrying out all U.S. interventions, including drone killings, in Africa. UNAC will endorse the German call for vigils (on May 26 in the U.S. and on May 27 in Germany) in solidarity with the bin Ali Jaber family of Yemen, two of whose members were killed by a U.S. drone in 2012; the family has filed a court case against the German government for allowing Ramstein to be used for the illegal U.S. drone strikes. UNAC will also support further actions in the Ramstein/AFRICOM campaign in coordination with German activists.

- May 30, New York City: March and rally to free Oscar Lopez Rivera, beginning his 34th year of imprisonment on that day for his participation in Puerto Rico’s independence movement. May 30th Coalition to Free Oscar Lopez www.freeoscarnycmay30.org.

- July 25, Newark, N.J.: Million People’s March Against Police Brutality, Racial Injustice & Economic Inequality. Sponsored by the People’s Organization for Progress. UNAC will endorse and support this mobilization. <http://njpop.org/wordpress/?p=1896>.

- September, Richmond, Va.: UNAC will support the local call for a national presence in Richmond to demand the reclamation and memorialization of sites central to the U.S. slave trade. Sponsored by the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. <http://www.sacredgroundproject.net>.

- September, Cincinnati: UNAC supports the call for Justice for Palestinian-American community leader Rasmea Odeh. The appeal of her conviction will take place in Cincinnati in September. We join with the Committee to Stop FBI Repression, the U.S. Palestinian Community Network, and the Rasmea Defense Committee to pack the courthouse when the appeal occurs. www.stopfbi.net; www.uspen.org.

- Oct. 4-10, National: UNAC will support the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space that has set the same week, Oct. 4-10, for coordinated protests. <http://www.space4peace.org>.

- November – December, International: International actions are being planned to protest the expected and tragic failure of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21 or Conference of Parties) set for Paris, France, where no binding agreements are anticipated to stop Planet Earth from reaching a 2-degree Centigrade mean temperature rise, wherein the disastrous results will be irreversible. UNAC will support and help build U.S.-based actions on this critical question and will speak to the endless oil wars being fought over the very fuel whose continued use spells doom for humankind.

Ongoing actions endorsed by UNAC

- National: Support campaign to stop the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, which threatens jobs, wages, the environment, and more in our communities and around the world. Tell Congress NO on Fast Track!

- National: UNAC supports the courageous efforts by low-wage workers fighting for \$15 and a union, and will help mobilize for the next Fight for \$15 general strike and all efforts to win a livable wage, both domestically and internationally. UNAC realizes that a true livable wage would exceed \$15 per hour.

- National: UNAC will continue its solidarity with Mumia Abu-Jamal in his struggle for freedom and for the immediate medical attention required to remediate the prison medical neglect that has placed Mumia’s very life in immediate jeopardy. UNAC supports the work of organizations working to free all U.S. political prisoners.

- National: UNAC will support and participate in acts of resistance in immediate response to police murders and anniversaries of murders.

- National: UNAC acknowledges the role that media plays in political organizing and calls on all supporters to find ways to coordinate their activities to amplify the value of them and to make the media more useful to the efforts of the movements we support.

- National: Support actions calling for an end to the Cuba embargo blockade and to close the U.S. base in Guantanamo. ■

... Antiwar

(continued from page 1)

Lawrence Hamm, founder and chair of the People's Organization for Progress (POP) in Newark, N.J. urged united opposition to "all U.S. boots on the ground, defeat the Trans-Pacific Partnership, solidarity with the fight against union busting and other attacks on the working class at home, and a united challenge to the ceaseless racist attacks on Black and Brown people!"

Opposing the wars abroad

On the international front, conference participants heard from longtime antiwar activist Kathy Kelly of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, who recently completed a three-month prison sentence for protesting U.S. drone warfare.

Other keynote speakers were Kazem Azin of Solidarity Iran, Medea Benjamin of Code Pink, Maurice Carney of the Friends of the Congo, Bruce Gagnon of Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space, Malachy Kilbride of the National Campaign for Nonviolent Resistance, Ed Kinane of the Upstate (N.Y.) Drone Action Network, Ray LaForest of Haiti Support Network, David Swanson of WarBeyondWar.org, and Kevin Zeese of PopularResistance.org.

The conference also heard from retired U.S. Col. Ann Wright, former CIA analyst Ray McGovern, and former U.S. State Department official Peter Van Buren, all of whom are now prominent opponents of U.S. wars.

Solidarity with struggles at home

On Saturday evening, the "Tribunal on the Militarization of the Police & Structural Racism" heard from Michelle Kamal, whose son was murdered by police. Other tribunal presenters included Manzoor Cheema of Muslims for Social Justice in Raleigh, N.C., Larry Holmes from the People's Power Assemblies, and the Rev. Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou from Ferguson, Mo.

Clarence Thomas of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 spoke about how his local shut down San Francisco-area ports this past May Day in support of the urban rebellions against police killings.

Other speakers for workers' rights included John Dennie of National Postal Mail Handlers Union Local 300, a founder of the Postal Defenders coalition and an organizer for the "Stop Staples" campaign; Charles Jenkins, president of the New York chapter of the National Coalition of Black Trade Unionists; Shafeah M'Baliala of North Carolina-based Black Workers for Justice; and Rolandah Cleopatra McMillan of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, representing Virginia Raise Up and the "Fight for \$15 and a Union" campaign.

Recently elected Boston bus driver and Steelworker Local 8751 President Andre Francois addressed the conference, surrounded by union members. Local 8751 recently defeated a company-inspired frame-up of several of its

members. Marilyn Zuniga, a teacher from Orange, N.J., who was recently fired after some of her students wrote get-well cards to ailing Mumia Abu-Jamal, won support from the conference for her fight to regain her job.

Other speakers addressing important domestic issues were Gerry Condon, Veterans for Peace; Glen Ford, *Black Agenda Report*; Imani Keith Henry, Equality for Flatbush (N.Y.) Project (E4F); Cheri Honkala, Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign; climate change author and activist Antonia Juhasz; and John Parker, a leader in the Los Angeles ballot initiative to win a \$15 minimum wage.

As in past UNAC conferences, Muslims fighting for social change played important roles. These included Malik Mujahid of the Muslim Peace Coalition and chairman of the Parliament of World's Religions; Sharmin Sadeque of the National Coalition to Protect Civil Freedoms; Manzoor Cheema, founder of Muslims for Social Justice; as well as members of Project SALAM, which works on issues of preemptive prosecution of Muslims. Joe Iosbaker, a member of Antiwar Committee-Chicago, himself a target of FBI repression, spoke about the case of Palestinian-American political prisoner Ramea Odeh.

Also speaking on this panel was attorney and former political prisoner Lynne Stewart. Pam Africa spoke about the 30th anniversary of the bombing of the MOVE commune in Philadelphia and the continuing case of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. The conference endorsed MOVE's rally on the bombing's anniversary, May 13.

A Message from Cuba

On Saturday afternoon, UNAC Administrative Committee member Jeff Mackler read a message to the conference from Kenia Serrano Puig, President of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples. The message opened by stating, "The work UNAC does in USA in the struggle for social justice and against military interventions in other nations is a topic of utmost importance."

Mackler expressed UNAC's joy at the release of the Cuban Five and recounted UNAC's consistent opposition to all forms of U.S. intervention in Cuba. To the thunderous applause of the packed conference session Cuba was approved as an honorary member of UNAC.

Several Ukrainian activists attended, including three from Odessa who brought a photo display of the murderous, right-wing attack on the House of Labor in that city. The Ukrainians spoke at a plenary session and in a workshop on the expansion of NATO and the situation in Ukraine. Their central message to the conference was a ,



Socialist Action Books sponsored two panel discussions at the Left Forum in New York City on May 30. Well over 50 attended our panel on prospects for revolutionary change in S. Africa to hear (from left) Patrick Bond, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, S. Africa; Marty Goodman, Socialist Action; and Margaret Kimberley, *Black Agenda Report*.

plea against U.S. war and intervention.

Other speakers at the conference included former U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, Born King Allah of the Nation of Gods & Earths, "Addicted to War" author Joel Adreas, Palestinian author and activist Susan Abulhawa, Johnny Achi of Arab Americans for Syria, Abayomi Azikiwe of the Pan-African News Wire, William Camacaro of the Alberto Lovera Bolivarian Circle, Dr. Ghias Moussa of the Syrian American Forum, and U.S.-based Honduran activist Lucy Pagoada-Quesada.

International speakers included Elizabeth Byce of the New Democratic Party of Canada, Socialist Caucus; Chris Nineham of the U.K. Stop the Wars Coalition; and Elsa Rassbach of the German National Drone Campaign, which is demanding the closing of the Satellite Relay Station at the U.S. Air Base Ramstein and the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Stuttgart.

Also speaking were UNAC leaders Judy Bello, Upstate (N.Y.) Coalition to Ground the Drones & End the Wars; Ana Edwards and Phil Wilayto, Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality; Bernadette Ellorin, BAY-AN USA; Sara Flounders, International Action Center; Joe Iosbaker, Committee to Stop FBI Repression; Margaret Kimberley, *Black Agenda Report*, and UNAC Co-ordinators Marilyn Levin and Joe Lombardo. ■

This article is an abridged version of the report on the conference issued by UNAC. For the full report and list of speakers, see <http://UNACconference2015.org>. Videos of many of the sessions can be found at <http://nepajac.org/conferencevid.htm>.

... Europe

(continued from page 7)

bank vault is empty, we need to downsize—even though they have been piling up money for years.

Unfortunately, these struggles remained isolated and ultimately failed to achieve their primary goals. Some, like the 1100 Continental workers, who conducted their struggle through a self-managed general assembly, waged a six-month strike and were able to get compensation money up to 100,000 euros for workers with seniority.

Unfortunately, only the revolutionaries (in the broad sense) fought to build a national movement against layoffs. Especially since the so-called "left," that is the SP, is in power, and the trade-union bureaucracy bows toward a social partner-

ship with the state and the bosses, with the added argument, "if we fight against the Socialist Party government, it will only reinforce the far right."

In 2013, the movement against layoffs in Brittany underlined some contradictions of this period. There were thousands of layoffs in the region's meat-packing industry. Local strikes were taking place, and the situation was ripe for an effort to bring all these struggles together.

But at the same time, a petit bourgeois movement sprang up of truck company and business owners against a new environmental tax on trucks. The movement was called the Red Hat, a symbol of the French Revolution.

This far-right movement managed to put itself into the leadership of the movement of the workers against layoffs, with the aid of some local unions penetrated

by the National Front. Its platform for the workers was "Romanians and Bulgarians steal our jobs; keep our jobs French."

Some people in the unions do vote for the National Front, whose discourse on the union switched from "destroy the unions" to the attempt to infiltrate them, but it was the first time they were able to play such a role in a struggle.

The non-revolutionary left—the CP mostly and the main union it used to control, the CGT—decided to denounce the struggle as being controlled by the fascists and organized separate protests.

The NPA, however, decided to go to the main union protests and to wage a political fight against the far right. The NPA had its own section in the protests under the banner "Forbid the layoffs," while the trade-union leaders controlled by the National Front were yelling: "Down with Romanians." The NPA local com-

mittee maybe had a dozen activists, but thousands of workers joined our section in the protest because they refused to let their protest be hijacked by the far right.

The idea here is not self-glorification. It is that the far right is evolving from an extra-parliamentarian, anti-Semitic fascist group to an extremely conservative political party. They are less radical in their discourse (which we call "de-evilization"), but their reactionary ideas are clearly penetrating the working class more than before.

I want to thank you again for inviting me to speak. It is also an opportunity for me to learn about the movements of the great American working class—whether it be Ferguson, Baltimore, or the Fight for 15 movements. You are fighting against one of the most powerful, racist, and violent ruling classes in the world, and your dedication is an inspiration to us all. ■

... U.S. bombing

(continued from page 12)

of his opponents exposed before the entire population, Shiite and Sunni alike.

The U.S.-trained Iraqi Army, mostly Shiite, has today all but disintegrated. The persecuted Sunnis have largely chosen to support or step aside to the reactionary ISIS fundamentalists. Many Sunnis see them as the "lesser evil" to the new U.S.-installed regime of Haider al-Abadi, who is ironically dependent on Iranian-linked Shiite militias and U.S. airstrikes to preserve the corrupt and dictatorial Iraqi government.

Few Middle East nations have escaped the chaos following the U.S. wars of intervention and conquests. From Syria and Iraq to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and beyond, the bloody hand of U.S. imperial might twists and distorts everyday life. Aside from the hyperbole of the U.S. kept media, few in the region believe that U.S. troops and weapons of mass destruction are there to preserve or advance democracy and freedom. The tragic memory of colonial rule, past and present, remains imbedded in mass consciousness.

At stake for the U.S. plunderers is the question of who will secure control of the Middle East's vast fossil-fuel and human resources, and how many additional trillions of dollars the endless wars in the region can gen-

erate to be funneled into the coffers of the military-industrial complex. Endless wars are good business for capitalists. Endless bombing and mass destruction create new markets to exploit for profit.

For the people of the Middle East, with no exceptions, the starting point in achieving the basic right of self-determination is the absolute and total withdrawal of all U.S. troops and weapons of war. Freed from imperialist plunder and mass murder, in time, the vast array of workers and farmers are fully capable of forging new, democratic, and genuine mass revolutionary parties aimed at wresting power from their local tyrants and exploiters and proceeding to rebuild their nations in the interest of the vast majority. ■

U.S. uses 'restraint' in bombing ISIS in Syria



BY JEFF MACKLER

It is often said that “politics makes strange bedfellows.” Such was the case, for example, during the eight-year 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, when the U.S. corporate media demonized the Iranian government following the 1979 Revolution that had removed the U.S.-imposed dictatorship of Shah Reza Pahlavi. The U.S. imperial overlords’ hyper-concern was the new Iranian government’s nationalization of the country’s massive oil reserves at the expense of the U.S. oil corporations that had stolen Iran’s oil after the 1953 CIA coup that removed the elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh.

But the chief U.S. ally and feted hero in that war was none other than Iraq President Saddam Hussein, whom the U.S. armed to the teeth to unleash a conflagration that took the lives of a million Iranians and a million Iraqis.

Since both nations were destroying their opponent’s oil refineries and pipelines, U.S. officials were more than content to have competition from its fossil fuel competitors reduced to naught. But when the gains of the U.S.-abetted war began to tilt toward Iraq, at President Ronald Reagan’s instructions, the CIA ordered National Security Adviser Oliver North, of Watergate infamy, to secretly sell Tow missiles to the demonized Iranians at \$1 million a crack to re-balance the battlefield at the expense of their alliance with Hussein.

In this context, a May 27 *New York Times* headline is instructive. It reads “With ISIS in Cross Hairs, U.S. Holds Back to Avoid Civilians.”

With regard to the takeover of Raqqa and other Syrian cities in recent weeks by the Islamic State (often called ISIS), *The Times* reports: “The air campaign has averaged a total of about 15 strikes a day,” in contrast to 50 per day during the 2011 U.S.-NATO war against Libya, 85 daily strikes during the 2001 Afghan War, and 800 daily strikes in the course of the U.S. slaughter in Iraq during 2003. We should note here that in all these “wars,” the “enemies” had no air power of their own. The United States, “heroes” that they are, bombed with impunity.

The Times, quoting a number of top-ranked U.S. military officials and Obama administration spokespersons, attributes the government’s “restraint” in Syria to a concern over “civilian casualties,” a novel twist indeed given that the U.S. has raised little apprehension about the current Saudi saturation bombing of Yemen, where the vast number of victims have been civilians. In Yemen,

Today, the target in Syria is supposedly ISIS. Tomorrow, the Assad regime will be placed in the U.S. crosshairs.

the U.S. provides all satellite and drone intelligence for the mass murder, while in Syria U.S. officials complain that lacking spotter forces on the ground, ISIS targets cannot be confirmed.

Other government lie fabricators postulate that Syrian sandstorms prevented accurate targeting, or perhaps it was ISIS’s habit of co-mingling with the local populace!

However, the truth lies elsewhere. It begins with the proverbial 800-pound gorilla in the room—the fact that Syria has never approved any U.S. bombing of its own country! U.S. warplanes have targeted supposedly ISIS-controlled Syrian oil refineries, weapons depots, command bunkers and communication centers. What were purportedly off-limit targets with regard to these facilities yesterday are fair game today.

According to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, U.S. and “coalition” airstrikes have killed 132 Syrian civilians. In a recent strike at the Syrian village of Bir Mahli, more than 60 were murdered, mostly women and children. U.S. officials claim they were ISIS combatants; the Syrian Observatory states otherwise.

Notwithstanding its use of the most advanced aerial bombing equipment in the world, coupled with top-grade precision guided missiles, the U.S. has bombed nations indiscriminately in all its endless wars, with Iraq in 2003 being a prime example. Over a million Iraqi deaths, mostly civilian, were recorded in that war against “weapons of mass destruction” that did not exist!

“Restraint” aside, U.S. commanders don’t want to give the impression that their bombing efforts have been insignificant in Syria and Iraq today. They have assured doubters that the U.S. air campaign has achieved several “successes.” Some 4200 air strikes that dropped 14,000 bombs and other weapons and killed 12,500 “fighters” have been recorded. These U.S. statistics fail to note how

many of the “fighters” were civilians.

The claimed U.S. “restraint” against ISIS in Syria has nothing to do with newfound U.S. concerns over civilian casualties and everything to do with the U.S. objective of removing, in due time, the repressive regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. To this end, any and all means are considered legitimate, from early on collaboration with the Saudi government to arm and finance ISIS and the al-Qaeda associated al-Nusra Front for their attacks on Syria to organizing, financing, and directing the so-called Free Syrian Army, which regularly collaborates with the U.S.-designated terrorist ISIS and al-Nusra reactionary fundamentalist groups.

So long as all of the above, including the U.S., bomb Syria to smithereens and undermine the Assad regime, “all is fair in love and war.” Today, the target in Syria is supposedly ISIS, give or take some “mistaken” hits of Syrian vital infrastructure facilities and civilians. Tomorrow, as with Libya’s Gadhafi, it will be the Assad government that is the direct and formal victim in the U.S. crosshairs.

ISIS, contrary to its caliphate (religious state) proclamations, is not a country. It lacks all the prerequisite characteristics of one. Its finances, arms, and “economy” have been dependent on Saudi Arabia and other oil monarch states. The refineries that it captures, as it has done in Syria and Iraq, would be worthless if there were no nations or corporations to purchase their oil for cash to purchase new weapons from their beneficiaries and stuff the pockets of their capitalist “leaders” as well.

Admittedly, the U.S. suffered some embarrassment at Ramadi, when ISIS captured a mass of newly sent U.S. weapons to the Iraqi army, which didn’t bother to take them along as it fled yet another ISIS onslaught.

U.S. imperialism, the world’s sole superpower in the modern era, is centrally responsible for the cataclysmic state of the Middle East today, with its endless wars for profit, plunder, and exploitation being the new norm in world politics.

Following the 2003 conquest of Iraq, that nation was formally ruled by the U.S.-appointed administrator Paul Bremer, after which U.S.-conducted “elections” placed the Nouri al-Maliki regime in power in 2006. Maliki immediately proceeded to persecute and exclude the Sunni minority while granting U.S. oil corporations the lion’s share of Iraq’s renowned oil reserves. With his army and government in a state of collapse, he was forced to step down last year—his corruption and the wanton murder

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