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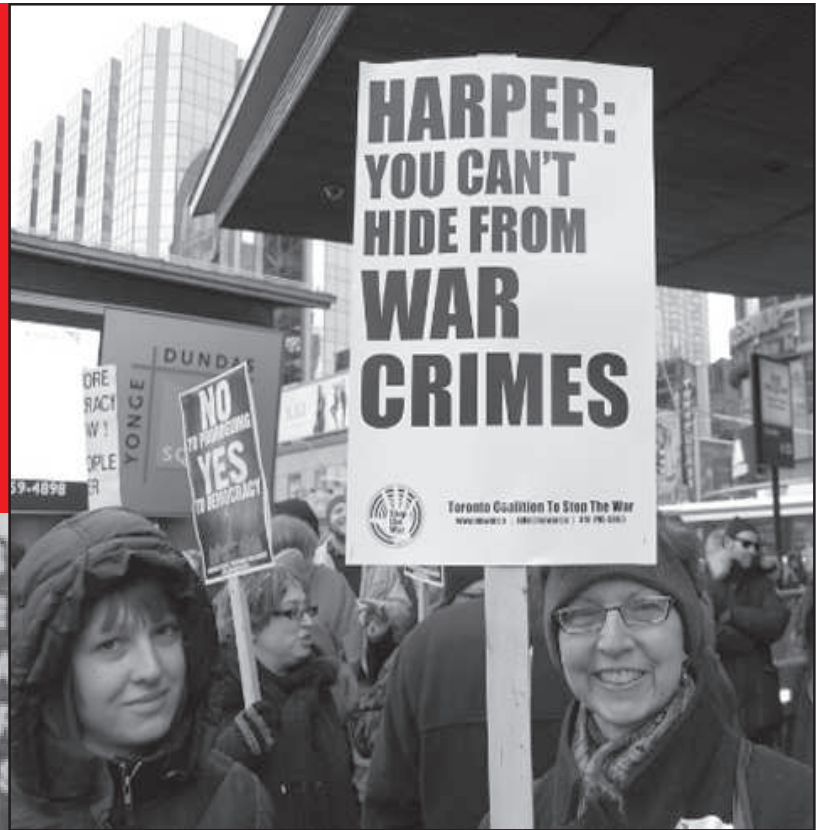
people's VOICE

"Hell on earth"
for shipbreakers

See page 10

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Canadians rally for democracy



The Jan. 23 "Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament" rally drew over 6,000 in Toronto, and 30,000 across Canada
(Photos: Ed Bil)

Tens of thousands tell Harper Tories: "Get back to work" - see page 5

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Jets over Vancouver

CF-18 jet fighters have started patrolling the skies over the BC Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. Welcome to the 2010 Winter Olympics, a celebration of greed and overspending.

INSIDE

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Reds in Toronto

Delegates from across the country will meet this month in Toronto, for the 36th Central Convention of the Communist Party of Canada.

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Disaster in Haiti

The earthquake that stunned Haiti on Jan. 12 was a terrifying natural disaster, but years of imperialist domination left the island nation completely unprepared to cope with the resulting devastation.

500,000 unemployed could run out of EI benefits

Nearly half a million Canadians may exhaust their Employment Insurance benefits without finding work, according to a new report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Many of these unemployed will have to deplete their savings, or resort to loans, family members or welfare for financial help, warns the CCPA.

Even before the economic crash in late 2008, about a quarter of EI recipients saw their benefits expire, says the CCPA report, based on 2006/2007 federal government statistics. About two million new claims were filed last year, so the report estimates about half a million people may be running out.

Meanwhile, Statistics Canada reported in mid-January that the

number of EI recipients fell to 795,900 in November, from a peak of 829,300 last June. The StatsCan monthly report doesn't say how many ran out of claims without finding work. Canada's official unemployment rate is 8.5 per cent, near an 11-year high.

"As many as 500,000 Canadians who initiated an EI claim in 2009 will exhaust their benefits because new jobs remain very difficult to find," says Andrew Jackson, CCPA research associate and chief economist at the Canadian Labour Congress. "As the number of EI exhaustees increases, so will provincial social assistance caseloads and the number of families living in poverty."

On average, an EI claimant

qualifies for about 38 weeks of benefits. But over half of Canada's jobless workers do not even qualify for EI, thanks to stringent eligibility rules which deny benefits to those without enough qualifying hours, or others who quit jobs due to intolerable working conditions.

Last year, the federal government was compelled to adopt a few slight improvements to the EI system, by extending the number of weeks people are eligible, and letting companies adopt work-sharing programs where employees can work fewer hours and still qualify for EI. The CCPA report called on the federal government to extend EI benefits for all unemployed workers by at least 26 weeks.

The federal Finance Department said on Jan. 22 that the deficit has jumped to more than \$36 billion for the 2009-10 fiscal year. Stephen Harper has already announced that his minority government plans to cut the deficit by slashing social spending. ●



PV Fund Drive kicks off March 1

The Annual People's Voice Drive officially kicks off on March 1, as we campaign to raise the funds we need to help cover the costs of printing and distributing the working class press across Canada.

These are complicated times for the print media, large and small. The past year has seen a modest increase in overall paid circulation for *People's Voice*. Meanwhile, even as the corporate boosters in the daily press write endless columns about the "economic recovery," Canada's largest media monopoly heads toward bankruptcy. CanWest Global's problems are proof that the worst economic downturn in decades is far from over. Working people continue to demand answers and solutions. Who caused the crisis? How can we fight back? What

policies will help us, not the bosses?

Over the past year we have focused on critical issues like the fight to restore and expand Employment Insurance, one of the most important victories achieved by millions of workers during the twentieth century. Labour economists calculate that the real unemployment level in Canada is now over two million, and less than half of these jobless workers are even eligible for EI benefits. Across the developed capitalist world, official unemployment levels are projected to pass 57 million this year, but capitalist profits are on the rebound. The ongoing battle for people's needs, not corporate greed, will feature prominently in our pages again this year.

This issue of *People's Voice* reports on another major issue

facing Canadians - the destruction of democratic rights and freedoms by the Harper Tory minority government. Thousands of people rallied across the country on Jan. 23 to condemn Harper's desperate prorogation tactic. There were two important reasons for Harper's move: his fear that the Afghan torture scandal would stay in the headlines, and an excuse to claim that his government is trying to address the economic crisis. It hasn't worked. The Tories have slid to just over 30% in the polls, and their credibility is in tatters. During 2010, with the help of our readers, *People's Voice* will continue to help build the movements to drive this reactionary gang out of office.

Global issues will also be high on our agenda over the next twelve months, from the campaign to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the crucial effort to limit climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Unlike the corporate media, *People's Voice* always links these two issues. How can our planet adopt the radical measures needed to protect the environment, if we keep wasting over \$1 trillion every year on highly destructive military spending? Why does it take weeks to respond to the earthquake quake in Haiti, compared to minutes for U.S. imperialism to launch massive bombing raids against villages in Central Asia?

As always, we need your support to bring this analysis to working people. When you receive your fund appeal letter in the mail in a few weeks, please respond quickly and generously.

In our next issue, we will announce details of the 2010 Fund Drive, including our anti-corporate "shopping bag" for this year. Until then, we welcome your ideas for the campaign, and for ways to improve *People's Voice*. Please contact us at <pvoice@telus.net>, or <newlabourpress@telus.net>. We hope to hear from you soon! ●

GRASSROOTS OLYMPIC NEWS

NORAD CF-18s fighter jets were criss-crossing the skies of the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island starting Jan. 26 as part of their "mission to support RCMP-led Olympic security operations." According to the armed forces, "the flying is being conducted to familiarize pilots with the areas they'll be working in once the airspace restrictions go into effect. The public may see and hear the fighters as they conduct their flying." Yes, we do hear them, and we hope that these NORAD fighters will inflict less damage on civilians here than in Afghanistan.

A spokesperson for StopWar.ca has again corrected the media claim that so-called "free speech zones" have been designated for the Winter Olympics. In a recent letter to the *Vancouver Sun*, Megan Schlase points out that, contrary to a recent Barbara Yaffe column, the Art Gallery "has been left undesignated, as recommended by both the Vancouver police department and the Olympic civil liberties advisory committee, in keeping with its traditional use for protests and rallies. The very idea that free speech can be restricted to certain zones is just one of many reasons so many people object to the Games." On Feb. 12, starting at 3 pm, the 2010 Welcoming Committee coalition will host a free public festival, called **Take Back Our City! Free Speech, Free Games, Free Food!**, at the Art Gallery's north square. The festival will be followed by a parade to BC Place Stadium to coincide with the official opening ceremonies. The parade will end at the security fence around the stadium.

An internal memo obtained by *The Tyee* website advises Vancouver Public Library branches to **protect the interests of Olympic sponsors**. "Do not have Pepsi or Dairy Queen sponsor your event," read guidelines sent to VPL branch heads and supervisory staff. "Coke and McDonald's are the Olympic sponsors. If you are planning a kids' event and approaching sponsors, approach McDonald's." Libraries have also been told to use audio-visual equipment made by official sponsor Panasonic. If Sony equipment is unavailable, staff must use black tape to cover offending corporate logos.

In a vicious corporate knife fight, **Wall Street financiers could push the Whistler Blackcomb ski resort into insolvency**. According to the *New York Post*, creditors who have loaned \$1.4 billion US to the owners, Intrawest ULC, are threatening to foreclose and seize control of the resort which is to host major ski events at the Winter Games. The primary lender on the Intrawest deal in 2006 was defunct investment bank Lehman Brothers. Dogged by \$1 trillion in creditor claims, the bank is apparently unwilling to cut Intrawest much slack. The federal government may inject funding to save the wealthy owners of Intrawest.

Winter Games **officials plan to truck in snow** for the freestyle skiing and snowboarding events at Cypress Mountain on Vancouver's North Shore. A long stretch of mild, wet weather (*in Vancouver - imagine that!*) means there won't be enough snow left for the competitions. Contingency plans include building up the course with straw and wood, then using trucks and helicopters to bring snow down from higher elevations. The situation could leave athletes with a "dumbed-down" course.

About the so-called "Olympic legacy": the B.C. government has cancelled its promise of \$8 million for the National Maritime Centre in North Vancouver. The cut forced the city to scuttle the museum and community centre celebrating the province's maritime history. Just last summer, the government decided to spend \$8 million on the fourth floor of the Vancouver Art Gallery for a B.C. Olympic Pavilion that was not previously planned. When the Campbell government wants to cut something, they talk about "difficult economic times", but when it comes to partying for the Olympics, no expense is spared.

Speaking of cutbacks, **schools across B.C. will be dramatically affected next year** unless the Campbell government provides adequate funding. In the host Olympic city of Vancouver, 800 notices were sent to teachers warning that their jobs are in danger because the School Board faces a deficit of up to \$36 million, caused by the province's refusal to cover escalating costs imposed by its own decisions. Yes, the same Campbell government which is spending billions to host the Olympics... ●



Scene from the annual "Poverty Olympics" event in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Photo from the www.media.publicnow.net website.

MAY DAY 2010 GREETING ADS

To mark May Day 2010, *People's Voice* will print greetings from a wide range of labour and people's organizations in our May 1-15 issue, which will be distributed at events across Canada. The deadline for camera-ready ads is April 24; if PV is preparing the layout, the deadline is April 22. Please check with us about the format if your ad is being sent electronically.

Ad rates (based on 5 column page):

One column-inch.....	\$10
One column x 2 inches.....	\$20
Two columns x 2 inches.....	\$35
Two columns x 3 inches.....	\$50
Two columns x 5 inches.....	\$75
Three columns x 4 inches.....	\$90
Two columns x 7 inches.....	\$100
Three columns x 7 inches.....	\$150

**Send greetings to *People's Voice* at:
706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, V5L 3J1
Fax (604)254-9803 E-mail: pvoice@telus.net**

Scaffold deaths highlight safety crisis

Special to PV

The tragedy of four immigrant highrise workers in Toronto who fell 13 storeys to their deaths on Christmas Eve has brought the issue of workplace health and safety back to the front pages. According to the men's widows, they were seriously concerned about their balcony repair jobs, but may have been unaware of their rights to refuse unsafe work.

According to interviews with the women conducted through a Russian language interpreter by the Toronto Star, one of the workers said the swing scaffold was very long and looked like it was made from four parts which weren't securely fastened together.

One of the five non-union immigrant workers survived but remains in hospital. The accident was the worst construction tragedy in Toronto in half a century, and is under investigation by Toronto police and the Ministry of Labour.

The president of Metron Construction, the company which employed the workers, would not comment on the makeup of the workforce at the highrise. But one of the widows said she never saw her husband bring safety manuals home or heard him talk about safety training. Her husband had very limited reading ability in English, she told the Star, so even if he had been given a Construction Association of Ontario manual he would have had difficulty understanding it.

However, it is the legal responsibility of a supervisor to ensure that all workers receive safety training and clearly understand their knowledge of this training.

Meanwhile, the Ontario Construction Secretariat has tried to draw attention to the role of independent contractors in the province's construction industry, often undermining health and safety on the job. The secretariat noted in an April



2008 report that about 84,500 workers, or 22 per cent of the province's construction workforce, are part of the "underground economy." Many undocumented workers face unsafe conditions and a poor apprenticeship system.

In total, 405 construction

workers have lost their lives in Ontario since 1990, including 21 during the year 2009. The litany of deaths on the job ranges from being struck by falling objects, cut by machinery, electrocuted, or crushed between vehicles.

As the Star reports, "union leaders and labour activists believe a lack of proper safety inspections and oversight on the job, and outdated legislation which no longer reflects the reality of modern construction sites, means workers' lives are hanging in the balance. Poor enforcement combined with the growing use of migrant workers will mean the number of accidents will increase, they say."

"Imagine if 405 paramedics or police officers died on the job over the last 20 years," says Patrick Dillon of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, an umbrella group representing more than 150,000 workers.

The story of immigrant workers killed on the job is not new. On March 17, 1960, five Italian construction workers died when the underground tunnel in

which they were working collapsed at Hogg's Hollow near the York Mills subway station. Their deaths led to a royal commission that eventually led to improved safety and labour laws. The 50th anniversary of the Hogg's Hollow tragedy will be marked this spring.

There are now 430 occupational health and safety inspectors in Ontario, and safety blitzes have taken place, but the most recent happened only after the scaffolding deaths. While the Occupational Health and Safety Act has been updated to include the right to refuse unsafe work, the construction industry is turning to "independent contractors" to allow employers to avoid paying benefits or workplace insurance coverage. These bosses take advantage of migrant workers who are desperate to earn an income, without training them adequately. "Independent contractors" operate outside the health and safety act and the Employment Standards Act. While labour ministry officials claim that inspectors watch out for the safety of independent contractors as part of their responsibilities, this is regarded as a wild exaggeration at best.

NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale High Park) has introduced an amendment to the employment standards act, seeking to change the definition of an employee. Calling workers "individual businesses" rather than employees, she says, is the "new out" for employers, who don't have to pay benefits or even minimum wage. DiNovo notes that only one per cent of all workplaces in Ontario ever see an inspector, and that many of the inspectors do not have construction backgrounds. ●

Log exports not needed for B.C., say Steelworkers

British Columbians should strongly reject calls for increased raw-log exports, says the United Steelworkers, responding to the recent Truck Loggers Association convention in Victoria. "Log exports helped create the crisis in the first place," counters Steelworkers Wood Council chair Bob Matters.

The USW has released a chart indicating that over 70 wood-processing facilities have permanently closed in BC since 2000, including 33 in the Coastal region. "These mills were significantly impacted by log exports; some closed as a direct result," notes Matters. "When we lose manufacturing plants, we lose jobs." He especially wants to rebut claims that B.C. needs to export more raw logs because the province supposedly lacks processing capacity.

"Exports caused closures," he says. As exports increase, it becomes harder for domestic mills to get timber. "Exports drove up the domestic price. More logs go south or to Asia, to mills that can pay a premium for a small amount of high-quality wood. Domestic mills don't have that luxury. They're competing with firms that need only a small amount of wood

from BC - but they buy all their logs here, competing with the higher export price."

British Columbians have now a choice, adds Matters: "stop the exports or completely lose our domestic industry. If we put what we call an 'equivalency tax' on exports - equal to the difference between the domestic and export prices for similar logs - exports would dry up. That would drive down the price of domestic logs. Big exporters like TimberWest and Island Timberlands would howl but domestic sawmills and value-added manufacturers would say 'opportunity'. They'd buy up more logs and create more jobs - maybe invest in BC, something the industry hasn't done for almost a decade. The big exporters would have to either sell at the domestic price or leave their trees standing."

"Exports have also killed investment," Matters adds. Recent Industry Canada statistics show declining corporate investment in the Canadian wood manufacturing industry. Between 1999 and 2008 investment actually fell by about 0.1 per cent per year, 12 per cent in 2008. Investment fell every year from 2005 onward, largely due to log exports, the Canada-US Softwood Lumber Agreement and

rising Canadian dollar. From about \$1.3 billion in 2005, machinery and equipment spending in Canada's wood manufacturing plants fell to under \$1 billion in 2008. Employment has fallen dramatically, as well.

"By undermining profitability in the sawmilling and wood-manufacturing sectors, log exports have helped kill investment and jobs," says Matters. "If you're thinking of log exports as our saviour, better think again," Matters warns. ●

"Red Tents" for Vancouver homeless

By Kimball Cariou

With the Winter Olympics coming to a city where an estimated 3,000 people live on the street, Vancouver's Pivot Legal Society will promote the "Red Tent" campaign to end homelessness.

"Our goal is to persuade the federal government to enact a funded National Housing Strategy that will end homelessness and ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for all persons living in Canada," says the Pivot website. "Our strategy is to use red tents and like items as symbols on the streets and in the media to draw attention to Canada's homelessness crisis, educate the public about the need for a funded national housing strategy and mobilize people across the country to pressure government to take action on homelessness."

Housing and human rights activists hope the bright red tents will attract international attention during the Olympics. The society will distribute 500 tents, featuring slogans such as "housing is a right" and "end homelessness now!"

As Pivot executive director John Richardson points out, one of the key promises made by governments and the Vancouver Organizing Committee to win the 2010 games was an Olympic housing legacy. But little has been achieved since Vancouver was awarded the Games, and in fact

wrap up on Feb. 28.

One councillor from the governing Vision majority told CBC News that the city opposes "tent cities." Kerry Jang even hinted at unnamed "other groups" which supposedly feel that Pivot has ulterior motives for launching "simply a PR campaign that's exploiting homeless people for their own gain."

But Laura Stannard of the City Wide Housing Coalition told CBC that "This is a really important campaign. The federal government has completely dropped the ball."

The debate echoes a similar struggle around free speech rights during the Games. Vision Mayor Gregor

Robertson and his fellow councillors argued for months last year that their draconian bylaws regulating free speech and distribution of materials were simply an attempt to protect the legal rights of Olympic sponsors. Only a political and legal campaign by COPE city councillor Ellen Woodsworth and a wide range of civil rights advocates forced the Vision majority to drastically amend the draconian bylaws. ●

(For more information, see redtents.org)



Former BC Forestry Minister Rich Coleman is the target of this cartoon attacking Liberal policies.

EDITORIALS

Thoughts on the Haitian disaster

The terrible suffering of the people of Haiti - and their astonishing solidarity and resilience - have moved the entire world since the January 12 earthquake. The catastrophe has led to an outpouring of assistance from people everywhere.

Several observations stand out in the midst of this crisis. Perhaps most important is to note the contrast between the needs of ordinary people, and the shocking burden imposed on our planet by the arms race. Aid to Haiti is measured in a few billions, while the United States alone pours a trillion dollars a year into its pursuit of global military domination. Never has there been a more powerful argument for slashing military waste and investing in the future of humanity.

We also point out the predictable and outrageous refusal of the North American corporate media to report on the enormous contributions of the Cuban people to their sisters and brothers in Haiti. Not only was the isle of socialism the first country to render effective aid after January 12, but Cuba has trained - free of charge! - literally hundreds of Haitian doctors and other medical personnel. The story of Cuban internationalism will be remembered long after U.S. imperialism has suffered its final defeat.

Finally (for now), it must never be forgotten that Canada joined with the U.S. and France to help overthrow the democratically elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in the coup of Feb. 29, 2004. This shameful act placed Canada in the ranks of the neo-colonial thugs who have kept Haitians under the heel of oppression for decades. Apologies and reparations from Canada should be on the agenda, not self-serving praise from politicians.

Greetings to CPC delegates

A unique gathering will take place this month, bringing together members of the only political party openly dedicated to defending the interests of the working class of Canada. Delegates to the 36th Convention of the Communist Party of Canada will meet at the Steelworkers' Hall in Toronto, across the street from the historic building which was home to the CPC for decades.

Elected at provincial nominating meetings, the delegates are a vivid reflection of activists from across the country, ranging from young students to senior citizens. They come from a wide range of national backgrounds, including Aboriginal, Quebecois, and English-Canadian, as well as from racialised minority communities, speaking a variety of languages. Many are trade union members, and most are involved in various progressive movements - peace coalitions, municipal reform groups, anti-poverty and social equality campaigns. Together with their sisters and brothers in the people's movements, they struggle every day against the impact of the corporate assault, helping to organize fightbacks large and small. A bigger, stronger Communist Party will make an enormous difference in strengthening this fightback.

What's different about these delegates is a shared commitment to go beyond resistance against neoliberal attacks and imperialist war. Their goal is to build a new society, one in which capitalist exploitation and oppression in all its deadly forms are abolished forever. A society in which the wealth created by the working class is our common property, democratically controlled by all to meet our fundamental needs, not to enrich greedy bosses or destroy the natural environment. A socialist Canada, in other words.

No other party has such a bold vision of the future. At a time of unparalleled danger to our planet, that's why growing numbers of people are joining the Communist Party. We send our best wishes to the delegates to the 36th Convention, and we urge all who share this vision to consider joining Canada's party of socialism.

PEOPLE'S VOICE

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LETTERS

People's Voice welcomes your letters. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity, and to refuse to print letters which may be libellous or which contain personal attacks. Send your views to: "Letters to the Editor"
706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1 or
pvoice@telus.net

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Economic Pessimist

Economic Optimist

Letters to the Editor

Police abuse in "Hopenhagen"

I would like to share with our many readers what happened to people that I know, Anne Feeney and her husband when they were involved in a peaceful protest in Copenhagen. Read on and you will see why she sent me this email as HOPENHAGEN. I want people to become aware of such happenings that are either not reported or reported, which serve to distort the truth. Many of my friends in Canada have experienced such occurrences but now I see the Danish police want to join our Canadian and American disgraceful police and what they do to protestors.

Above the email I received from Anne Feeney was a pictorial depiction of a wine glass filled with a Disneyland city atop a coca-cola bottle with a label beside it "A Bottle of Hope." Above this is the label HOPENHAGEN. Read on to see why a bottle like the Coca-Cola bottle holds up the wine glass.

Anne Feeney emailed me about her Swedish husband, Julie and her own experiences in Copenhagen during the international meeting on global warming. She starts by saying that it looked pretty obvious from the time they arrived that the Summit was going to be a corporate affair. Inside the Bella Centre, site of the official Climate Summit, the poorest nations were ostracized as the G20 met with their corporate sponsors. The G20 leaders seemed to be determined to gather corporate goodies and they reported that the environment is in the capable hands of Coca-Cola, Siemens, and Monsanto! There were hundreds of thousands of activists trying to keep the delegates honest. However, Denmark really went berserk in anticipation of the summit. There were laws passed that can be called fascist in nature. They were allowing for mass arrests and the right to detain people without charge for up to 40 days.

They marched in the 100,000 strong permitted march through downtown Copenhagen. The police presence was overwhelming. About 3/4 of a mile into the march, as they rounded a bend, a couple hundred black-clad youngsters ran through their procession and out the other side. Within moments, they were surrounded by hundreds of police and dozens of paddy wagons and police dogs. About 1,000 were completely

isolated from the march by riot police. The march behind them was diverted around them. Only a few hundred people stayed on the outer perimeter, occasionally chanting "let them go!" For a while it appeared that the cops were attempting to cherry-pick their ranks and arrest only those they felt were possibly part of the anarchist black bloc that had completely escaped well before the police stopped them.

As the hours dragged on, the day turned to night, and the temperature plummeted. It became increasingly clear that the cops were going to arrest them all - Belgians, French, Norwegians, Swedes, Germans and Danes - Hare Krishnas, school kids, elderly trade union activists, some puppetistas with big papier mache cows that occasionally charged the police chanting "Moooooooooooo!"

So the cops arrested everyone about 700 people. As they arrested Anne's husband, one of their Danish hosts from the Tvind progressive education movement engaged the cops in a dialogue. Anne was told later that the host told the cops that Anne was a famous folksinger from the U.S. and her arrest would cause terrible embarrassment to the Danish police. To her astonishment, the cops escorted them and the wagon on which she was to perform out of the area.

Those arrested were all handcuffed behind their backs and made to sit on the freezing street, sitting up with their legs apart to accommodate the person arrested after them. As the hours went by, many of those arrested ended up peeing their pants. Julie was at the back of one of those rows, with many people leaning back against him. He had no back support except for his handcuffed hands. When the cops finally came to haul him off to the pokey and instructed him to get up, but he couldn't. The cop helped him to his feet, sized him up and took pity on him. He undid Julie's handcuffs and escorted him to the perimeter, and even loaned him a cell phone so that he could let us know that he hadn't been taken to the jail.

Julie was interviewed by Danish mainstream television, and also by some Swedish newspapers to attest to the lawlessness of the Danish police. Denmark's growing right wing is developing their own FOX-like news

fraudcasting. Anne heard this term was being used most appropriately to describe such reporting. I think it will become part of my vocabulary too.

Anne has included some excerpts from a couple of these Danish right wing sites with the links to the original Danish. *Ekstra Badet* is the Danish newspaper that reported sympathetically on the unprovoked police roundup of 1,000 demonstrators. They quote a poor 66-year old painter named Haakon "Julie" Leonnartsod as the man of Anne Feeney. "Feeney is a member of the relatively unknown Industrial Workers of the World, a legend in Communist circles. She is a member of one of the oldest terrorist organizations in the world - Industrial Workers of the World." One does not need to add any comments about such absurd reporting...

I have chosen to share with you some of these unreported horrendous violations of people during this peaceful protest. I have talked to many other people in Canada who have undergone similar types of treatment during their nonviolent protests right here in Canada. I think many of us will be surprised to learn that Denmark has now joined the ranks of such. Thank you, Anne, for sharing with us these occurrences so that many more people will become aware of this type of violation of people's rights and how pervasive it has become.

Sofia Vuorinen, St. Catharines, ON

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Check your label

Please check the address label on the front page to see if it's time to renew. Readers who find "2010/02/01" on their label, for example, will have their subscriptions expire with this issue, February 1-28, 2010. Don't miss a single copy - renew today!

Tens of thousands rally against "Rogue Harper"

PV Commentary

In a powerful show of anger against the Harper government's shut-down of Parliament, Canadians rallied in some 60 cities and towns across the country on January 23. Supporters of "Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament" (CAPP) also organized protests in Dallas, Costa Rica, San Francisco, London, and New York.

Preliminary estimates indicated that over 27,000 people took part in 32 of these rallies. The largest was in Toronto, where the turnout was over 6,000. Some 2,000 marched to Victory Square in downtown Vancouver, and the Victoria rally was estimated at 1,500.

While many events in small towns were smaller in size, it appears that the total participation was more than 30,000. That's an impressive

figure for a grassroots movement organized in just a couple of weeks in the middle of winter, largely by using Facebook and other social networking sites.

The understandable outpouring of public response to the terrible devastation of the earthquake in Haiti may well have affected the turnout for the Jan. 23 rallies. But the huge geographical range of the CAPP protests was an unmistakable signal that the patience of voters with the Harper Tories is waning fast. Several recent opinion polls found support for the Tories sinking from a late 2009 level of about 40%, down to just over 30% by mid-January.

The Jan. 23 protests also pointed to other difficulties facing the Tories, especially the prominent role of young people among the organizers. At nearly every

demonstration, speakers and signs went beyond the immediate topic of anger at Harper's abuse of Parliamentary democracy. Many young participants focused on the Tory government's refusal to take serious action on climate change, and its scandalous attempt to cover up torture of Afghan detainees. The fact that the Parliamentary opposition parties were largely observers at the Jan. 23 events further highlighted the reality that criticism of the Tories is becoming more deeply-rooted among young activists whose attention is usually directed towards the extra-parliamentary arena. That could spell big trouble for Harper whenever circumstances finally lead to another federal election.

Unfortunately, the labour movement was not highly visible at many of the Jan. 23 events, unlike environmental and anti-war groups. This may reflect the challenge of mobilizing trade unions quickly during a sudden upsurge of popular anger. But the result was a missed opportunity to build a broader struggle to block the Harper government's impending attacks on social spending.

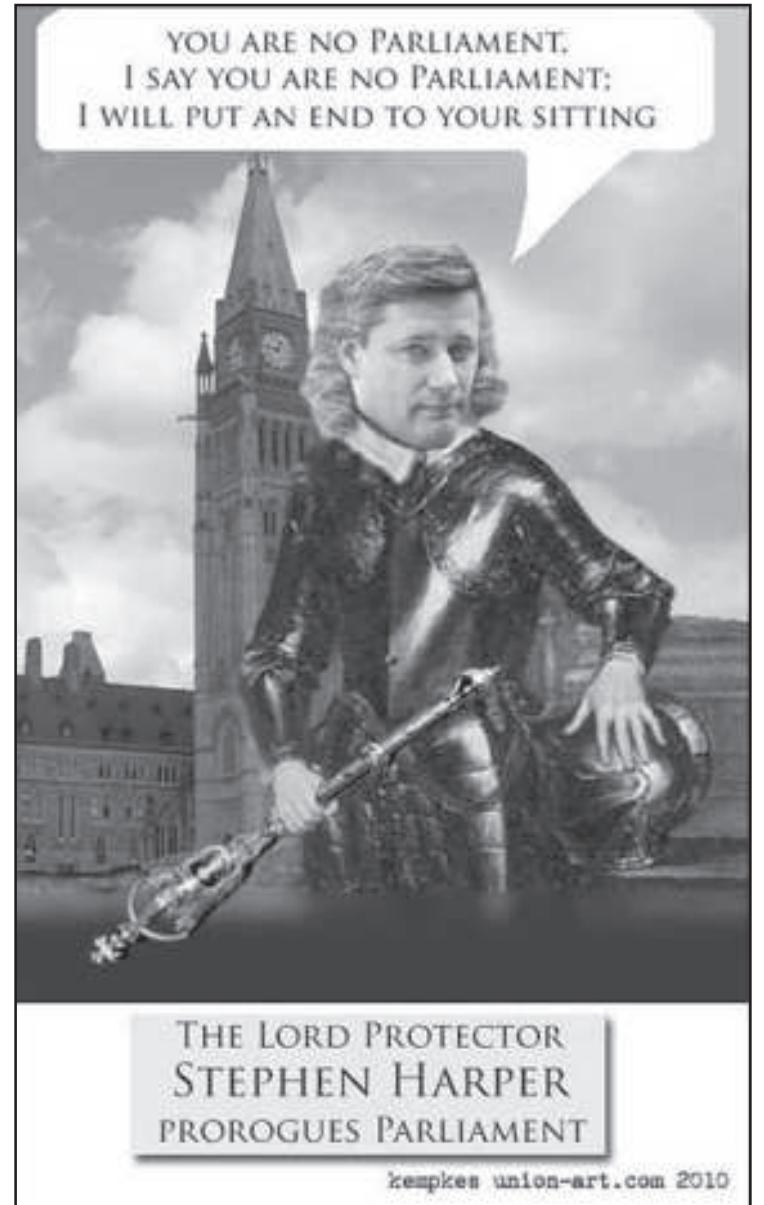
Over the next few weeks, the corporate media and the Harper government will try to shift attention away from the prorogation debacle, using the distraction of the Winter Olympics. But the fundamental issues facing working people will not disappear during this circus. The news that 500,000 Canadians are running out of EI benefits proves that if anything, 2010 may be an even

worse year for working people. As the March 3 return of Parliament nears, it will be even more crucial to turn up the heat on the Harper

Tories and the opposition parties. The Jan. 23 rallies were a good beginning for this movement - but the pressure must keep building!



Above, some of the 2,000 protesters at Victory Square in Vancouver. Below, Communist Party members and friends brave the cold at the anti-prorogation in Halifax on Jan. 23.



Montreal rally for Gaza



Canadians have shown generous support for the people of Haiti. Many also continue to extend solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, where the Israeli government (backed by the Harper Tories) are still imposing a deliberate humanitarian tragedy on the population. This rally in Montreal last month was one of many recent solidarity actions, leading up to the annual "Boycott Israeli Apartheid" campaign across Canada in March.

"Don't treat quake victims as enemy"

In a Jan. 19 statement, the Canada Haiti Action Network expressed deep concerns about the militarization of relief efforts in Haiti and exaggerated reporting on "looting" and violence.

"There is an exaggerated focus on unlawfulness," said one of the group's representatives in Toronto, Niraj Joshi. "Taking food and water from destroyed stores does not constitute looting. It is an instinct of human survival, caused by the failure of the international relief effort to provide timely and effective assistance."

A week after the deadly quake, many poor neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince had yet to see any assistance. Yet reports from CHAN's colleagues and friends in Port au Prince say that human

solidarity and a quiet determination to survive prevail. Reports on CBC television and radio were saying the same thing.

Meanwhile, Canada's emergency relief teams were sent home, told they will not be deployed.

Roger Annis of CHAN's affiliate in Vancouver commented, "Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs told the country on January 16 that its disaster relief teams are not equipped for Haiti, that only soldiers can do the job. Canadians have apparently been labouring under the false impression that its disaster relief teams are able to handle earthquake disasters."

"Like Washington," he said, "Ottawa has quite simply prioritized the sending of its military to Haiti over disaster relief. Are Canadians

comfortable with that choice, and what is the purpose of this military show of strength?"

The group says that earthquake victims need food, water, medical treatment and shelter, not guns pointed at them.

In February 2004, some 500 Canadian troops were dispatched to Haiti as part of a UN Security Council-endorsed mission that followed the overthrow of its elected government and exile of its elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide. News services now report a growing clamour in the poor neighbourhoods of Haiti for the return of the only president in their recent history who took measures to alleviate their suffering.

(<http://canadahaitiaction.ca>)

CPC-36 A larger, more influential Communist Party Toronto, Feb. 5-7, 2010

The Communist Party will hold its 36th Central Convention over the Feb. 5-7 weekend in Toronto. People's Voice is reprinting parts of the Draft Resolution which is currently being discussed by party members across Canada. The following excerpts are from the final section of the Resolution.

To become larger, more effective, and more influential in the working class movement, among youth, and among women - this is the most urgent and decisive task. All efforts in the next three years must be directed to accomplish this objective. A stronger Communist Party will mean a stronger, more effective labour movement, a stronger and more united left, and a stronger, more effective fightback.

Party clubs and committees across the country must take stock, and take whatever measures are necessary to strengthen their Leninist core, and their links with the working class and peoples movements. Every club and committee should have an organizer, education director, press director, and plan of work. Every club should be connected with the main organizations in its area of responsibility, including the labour councils and local affiliates, peace organizations, youth and women's organizations, and the fightback movements and coalitions in each area. Clubs should take the initiative wherever possible in the struggles developing in their areas, giving particular attention to strikes, picket-lines, workplaces, struggles of the unemployed and unorganized, and struggles involving youth.

...Shortly after our 35th Convention, the Young Communist League of Canada was successfully refounded after a long absence dating back to 1991. From a fledgling start, it is now an established and very active organization from coast to coast in English-speaking Canada and Québec. The YCL has been particularly active on campus and has developed relations with many other youth organizations through its work, and has resumed its international work through membership in the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). It is publishing Rebel Youth on a more regular basis, as well as maintaining its own website, blogs, etc.



Ontario Communist leader Liz Rowley marching with Young Communist League members.

Congratulations are due to the hard work of all young comrades leading this work...

Wherever the YCL and Party work very closely together, this has helped to ensure more

effective work for both our organizations, more visibility and broader outreach to members, supporters and new contacts alike. The Party will continue to support the YCL in every way possible,

including assigning young Party members to the YCL and in supporting their initiatives and activities as best we can.

2011 will mark the 90th anniversary of the Communist

"Our history is closely linked to the fight for universal socialized medicine, for universal public pensions, for unemployment insurance, for trade union rights including the right to strike, for women's rights including reproductive choice, pay and employment equity, for the rights of the Aboriginal peoples and new immigrants, the fight for Canadian sovereignty, democratic and equality rights, and the right to live free of the threat of nuclear annihilation."



CPC leader Miguel Figueroa at rally to "bring the troops home now."



Taking part in an early morning picket in North Vancouver to defend Medicare.



Communist Party banner on Vancouver's Burrard Street Bridge during the World Peace Forum.



Members of the Edmonton Club at a May Day rally.



Communist Party of Canada delegation to Cuba.

Party of Canada. In every respect, the history of the CPC is the history of the class struggle in Canada. Our roots are sunk in the rich experience of working class struggles throughout the decades. Many of our leaders were also mass and labour leaders of some of the most significant struggles in Canadian history. Our history is closely linked to the fight for universal socialized medicine, for universal public pensions, for unemployment insurance, for trade union rights including the right to strike, for women's rights including reproductive choice, pay and employment equity, for the rights of the Aboriginal peoples and new immigrants, the fight for Canadian sovereignty, democratic and equality rights, and the right to live free of the threat of nuclear annihilation.

We will mark this anniversary not simply to remember the past, but to light up the future. Another world is possible, urgent, and necessary, and Communists today will fight to force open those doors to social progress and socialism with as much determination and commitment as those who came before. ●

The Lesson Of Haiti

By Fidel Castro, January 14, 2010

Two days ago, at almost six o'clock in the evening Cuban time and when, given its geographical location, night had already fallen in Haiti, television stations began to broadcast the news that a violent earthquake - measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale - had severely struck Port-au-Prince. The seismic phenomenon originated from a tectonic fault located in the sea just 15 kilometers from the Haitian capital, a city where 80% of the population inhabit fragile homes built of adobe and mud.

The news continued almost without interruption for hours. There was no footage, but it was confirmed that many public buildings, hospitals, schools and more solidly-constructed facilities were reported collapsed. I have

read that an earthquake of the magnitude of 7.3 is equivalent to the energy released by an explosion of 400,000 tons of TNT....

The tragedy has genuinely moved a significant number of people, particularly those in which that quality is innate. But perhaps very few of them have stopped to consider why Haiti is such a poor country. Why does almost 50% of its population depend on family remittances sent from abroad? Why not analyze the realities that led Haiti to its current situation and this enormous suffering as well?

The most curious aspect of this story is that no one has said a single word to recall the fact that Haiti was the first country in which 400,000 Africans, enslaved and trafficked by Europeans, rose up against 30,000 white slave masters on the sugar and coffee plantations, thus undertaking the

first great social revolution in our hemisphere. Pages of insurmountable glory were written there. Napoleon's most eminent general was defeated there. Haiti is the net product of colonialism and imperialism, of more than one century of the employment of its human resources in the toughest forms of work, of military interventions and the extraction of its natural resources.

This historic oversight would not be so serious if it were not for the real fact that Haiti constitutes the disgrace of our era, in a world where the exploitation and pillage of the vast majority of the planet's inhabitants prevails.

Billions of people in Latin American, Africa and Asia are suffering similar shortages although perhaps not to such a degree as in the case of Haiti.

Situations like that of that

country should not exist in any part of the planet, where tens of thousands of cities and towns abound in similar or worse conditions, by virtue of an unjust international economic and political order imposed on the world.

The world population is not only threatened by natural disasters such as that of Haiti, which is a just a pallid shadow of what could take place in the planet as a result of climate change, which really was the object of ridicule, derision, and deception in Copenhagen.

It is only just to say to all the countries and institutions that have lost citizens or personnel because of the natural disaster in Haiti: we do not doubt that in this case, the greatest effort will be made to save human lives and alleviate the pain of this long-suffering people. We cannot blame them for the natural phenomenon that has taken place there, even if we do not agree with the policy adopted with Haiti.

But I have to express the opinion that it is now time to look for real and lasting solutions for that sister nation.

In the field of healthcare and other areas, Cuba - despite being a poor and blockaded country - has been cooperating with the Haitian people for many years. Around 400 doctors and healthcare experts are offering their services free of charge to the Haitian people. Our doctors are working every day in 227 of the country's 337 communes. On the other hand, at least 400 young Haitians have trained as doctors in our homeland. They will now work with the reinforcement brigade which travelled there yesterday to save lives in this critical situation. Thus, without any special effort being made, up to 1,000 doctors and healthcare experts can be mobilized, almost all of whom are already there willing to cooperate with any other state

that wishes to save the lives of the Haitian people and rehabilitate the injured.

Another significant number of young Haitians are currently studying medicine in Cuba.

We are also cooperating with the Haitian people in other areas within our reach. However, there can be no other form of cooperation worthy of being described as such than fighting in the field of ideas and political action in order to put an end to the limitless tragedy suffered by a large number of nations such as Haiti.

The head of our medical brigade reported: "The situation is difficult, but we have already started saving lives." He made that statement in a succinct message hours after his arrival yesterday in Port-au-Prince with additional medical reinforcements.

Later that night, he reported that Cuban doctors and ELAM's Haitian graduates were being deployed throughout the country. They had already seen more than 1,000 patients in Port-au-Prince, immediately establishing and putting into operation a hospital that had not collapsed and using field hospitals where necessary. They were preparing to swiftly set up other centers for emergency care.

We feel a wholesome pride for the cooperation that, in these tragic instances, Cuba doctors and young Haitian doctors who trained in Cuba are offering our brothers and sisters in Haiti! ●



IMF to Haiti: freeze public wages

Internet posting by Richard Kim

Since a devastating earthquake rocked Haiti on Jan. 12, there's been a lot of well-intentioned chatter and twitter about how to help Haiti. Folks have been donating millions of dollars.

But it's also time to stop having a conversation about charity and start having a conversation about justice - about recovery, responsibility and fairness. What the world should be pondering instead is: What is Haiti owed?

Haiti's vulnerability to natural disasters, its food shortages, poverty, deforestation and lack of infrastructure, are not accidental. To say that it is the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere is to miss the point; Haiti was made poor - by France, the United States, Great Britain, other Western powers and by the IMF and the World Bank.

Now, in its attempts to help Haiti, the IMF is pursuing the same kinds of policies that made Haiti a geography of precariousness even before the quake. To great fanfare, the IMF announced a new \$100 million loan to Haiti on Jan. 14. In one crucial way, the loan is a good thing; Haiti is in dire straits and needs a massive cash infusion. But the new loan was made through the IMF's extended credit facility, to which Haiti already has \$165 million in debt. Debt relief activists tell me that these loans came with conditions, including raising prices for electricity, refusing pay increases to all public employees except those making minimum wage and keeping inflation low. They say that the new loans would impose these same conditions. In other words, in the face of this latest tragedy, the IMF is still using crisis and debt as leverage to compel neoliberal reforms.

For Haiti, this is history repeated. As historians have documented, the impoverishment of Haiti began in the earliest decades of its independence, when Haiti's slaves and free gens de couleur rallied to liberate the country from the French in 1804. But by 1825, Haiti was living under a new kind of bondage - external debt. In order to



keep the French and other Western powers from enforcing an embargo, it agreed to pay 150 million francs in reparations to French slave owners (yes, that's right, freed slaves were forced to compensate their former masters for their liberty). In order to do that, they borrowed millions from French banks and then from the US and Germany. As Alex von Tunzelmann pointed out, "by 1900, it [Haiti] was spending 80 percent of its national budget on repayments."

It took Haiti 122 years, but in 1947 the nation paid off about 60 percent, or 90 million francs, of this debt (it was able to negotiate a reduction in 1838). In 2003, then-President Aristide called on France to pay restitution for this sum - valued in 2003 dollars at over \$21 billion. A few months later, he was ousted in a coup d'etat; he claims he left the country under armed pressure from the US.

Then of course there are the structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF and World Bank in the 1990s. In 1995, for example, the IMF forced Haiti to cut its rice tariff from 35 percent to 3 percent, leading to a massive increase in rice-dumping, the vast majority of which came from the United States. As a 2008 Jubilee USA report notes, although the country had once been a net exporter of rice, "by 2005, three out of every four plates of rice eaten in Haiti came from the US." During this period, USAID invested heavily in Haiti, but this "charity" came not in the form of grants to develop Haiti's agricultural infrastructure, but in direct food

aid, furthering Haiti's dependence on foreign assistance while also funneling money back to US agribusiness.

A 2008 report from the Center for International Policy points out that in 2003, Haiti spent \$57.4 million to service its debt, while total foreign assistance for education, health care and other services was a mere \$39.21 million. In other words, under a system of putative benevolence, Haiti paid back more than it received. As Paul Farmer noted in our pages after hurricanes whipped the country in 2008, Haiti is "a veritable graveyard of development projects."

So what can activists do in addition to donating to a charity? One long-term objective is to get the IMF to forgive all \$265 million of Haiti's debt (that's the \$165 million outstanding, plus the \$100 million issued this week). In the short term, Haiti's IMF loans could be restructured to come from the IMF's rapid credit facility, which doesn't impose conditions like keeping wages and inflation down.

Indeed, debt relief is essential to Haiti's future. It recently had about \$1.2 billion in debt cancelled, but it still owes about \$891 million, all of which was lent to the country from 2004 onward. \$429 million of that debt is held by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to whom Haiti is scheduled to make \$10 million in payments next year. Obviously, that's money better spent on saving Haitian lives and rebuilding the country in the months ahead; the cancellation of the entire sum would free up precious capital. ●

CCFA appeals for aid to Haiti

The Canada-Cuba Friendship Association (Toronto) is helping to raise funds to assist Cuba in its Haitian relief campaign. As early as January 13, Cuba dispatched a planeload of doctors and other medical personnel and equipment from its Henry Reeve Brigade. Within 24 hours of arrival they reported having performed over 100 emergency surgeries. This Brigade is a complement to the 400 Cuban doctors who have been there helping develop health services. Cuba has also trained a large number of Haitian doctors at their International School of Medicine in Cuba.

After the earthquake in Pakistan, over 1,000 Cuban physicians and medical personnel were dispatched to help the victims.

An appeal from the CCFA says, "We want to support Cuba's efforts to provide the people of Haiti with what they need most - doctors to help ease their suffering." 100% of all donations will be used to help Cuba to continue and increase its aid to Haiti by sending more trained physicians, medical equipment, food and clothing. The CCFA campaign is working directly with the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa and the Consulate in Toronto.

Cheques should be made payable to: Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund, with "Cuba for Haiti" on the memo line. Charitable receipts will be issued by the Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund (Charitable Org - Revenue Canada Reg, #88876 9197 RR0001).

Mail donations to: Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund & Friends of the Mac-Pap Battalion, Int'l Brigades, Attn: S. Skup, 56 Riverwood Terrace, Bolton, ON, L7E 1S4.



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Tekel workers on hunger strike

Four Turkish workers were taken to a hospital as a result of a hunger strike that began on Jan. 19. Workers at Tekel, Turkey's former state-owned alcohol and tobacco monopoly, including many women, started a hunger strike in front of the Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions headquarters in Ankara, saying they would stage a "death fast" if their demands were not met. Ambulances were present at the site as well as doctors.

Thousands of Tekel workers have been protesting since mid-December to oppose the privatization of the former monopoly. The sell-off obliges workers to either quit their jobs or accept work in another state institution with lower wages and fewer benefits. The former Tekel workers will be employed in temporary positions at other public institutions under Article 4/C of Law No. 657 in Turkey, which will cause a wage reduction by almost half, and the loss of some of their rights.

Will Democrats listen to workers?

Voters in the Jan. 19 Massachusetts byelection for a vacant Senate seat sent a strong signal that they want results on health care reform, job creation and fixing the economy. Voters also had a message for Democrats: ignore the working class at your peril. That's the analysis posted on the AFL-CIO's "Now Blog".

Some 79 percent of voters polled on election night said the most important issue was electing a candidate who will strengthen the economy and create more jobs. Controlling health care costs was next on their list, at 54 percent. The poll, conducted by Hart Research Associates among 810 voters for the AFL-CIO, found that although voters without a college degree favoured Barack Obama by 21 percentage points in the 2008 election, Democratic candidate Martha Coakley lost that same group by a 20-point margin.

As AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka pointed out, Massachusetts voters have the same goals for reforming health care, creating good jobs and strengthening the economy as they did in November 2008 - but President Obama and the Democrats have done too little. Voters showed they don't think Democrats have "overreached." In fact, 47 percent said their bigger concern about Democrats is that they haven't succeeded in making needed change, rather than trying to make too many changes too quickly (32 percent).

The results puts a lie to the corporate media spin that Democrats have gone "too far" in pushing a reform agenda. Nor was the election result about health care reform. Republican winner Scott Brown actually lost among the 59 percent of voters who picked health care as one of their top two issues (50 percent for Coakley and 46 percent for Brown).

Other polls show the need for Democrats in Congress to take

immediate action to create jobs, reform health care, stop catering to Wall Street and address the needs of workers. Summarizing the findings, MoveOn.org said voters worry that Democrats in power "have not done enough to combat the policies of the Bush era."



Vale aims to break Sudbury union

Vale Inco's hard line with striking workers at its Sudbury, Ontario, nickel operations is an attempt to break the Canadian unions, market sources have told the American Metal Market website, AMM.com. "Word is that Vale is trying to bust the union entirely and may already have done so," a nickel trader said.

Vale SA's size and outlook, combined with a situation in which London Metal Exchange warehouses are well stocked and prices have been unexpectedly strong, give the Brazilian company an opportunity to deal with the unions from a position of strength, sources said.

"Vale is an iron ore company, not a nickel company," a producer source said. "Inco's bread and butter was nickel and the Sudbury operations, and the union always knew that. But at Vale, nickel is just a round-off on the bottom line."

"Vale is making money hand over fist and can afford to dig their heels in. It is an entirely different set of circumstances (to dealing with Inco)," a second nickel trader said.

United Steelworkers union Local 6500, which represents 3,000 striking workers at Sudbury. "Inco forms such a small part of their (Vale's) overall operations and their customer market share that they can sustain a strike for longer," according to Wayne Fraser, USW's District 6 director.

ITF backs Thai railway workers

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) has called on the Thai government to reinstate six railway workers who were dismissed after they took industrial action. The call follows a Thai labour relations committee vote on Jan. 15 against the sackings of workers from the city of Hat Yai, represented by the ITF-affiliated State Railway Workers' Union of Thailand (SRUT). The workers were fired by the State Railways of Thailand (SRT) last year after taking part in industrial action to highlight safety concerns on the railways.

Workers had been refusing to drive unsafe trains after a fatal accident occurred in October 2009.

An ITF delegation visited Thailand January 11-15 to investigate the case and monitor safety standards on the railways. The delegation found that the government and management had failed to invest in the railways for many years, and concluded that the case against the workers had been motivated by attempts to stop the union from taking further industrial action. It called for the SRT's claim for 300 million baht (US\$9.1 million) in damages against the union for the industrial action to be withdrawn.

The ITF said the company must foster a no-blame culture of transparency where workers are rewarded for highlighting safety concerns rather than punished. "Workers have the right to stop work under unsafe conditions. Management must acknowledge that humans make errors and it must be complemented by proper safety devices."

The ITF also warned that unless the government acted urgently to end the conflict and reinstate the fired workers, the ITF would make a complaint to the International Labour Organization.

Strike ends at ArcelorMittal's Algeria plant

A nine-day strike at ArcelorMittal's steel complex in Algeria has ended after the company agreed to worker demands that it keep a coking plant open, a union leader said on Jan. 21.

"We have decided to stop our strike after Arcelor agreed to renovate the coking plant as soon as possible," local union leader Smain Kouadria told Reuters. "This is a victory for us and we will come back to work tomorrow."

ArcelorMittal is the world's largest steelmaker. The complex, near the town of Annaba, produced about 750,000 tonnes of flat and long steel products in 2009, most of it destined for Algeria's domestic market but with some also exported to the Mediterranean region. ArcelorMittal had said there was a question mark over whether it was economical to renovate.

The coking plant was closed since October 2009 over safety concerns. Workers went out on strike because they said permanent closure would lead to several hundred job losses. Union representatives said the Algerian government will provide assistance with investment in modernising the plant up to 2014.

French workers free hostages

Four managers held captive at a Swedish-owned metals plant in France were released on Jan. 21 after workers took radical action in a bid to press demands for better severance pay. The factory's director, human resources director and two other bosses at the Akers plant in Fraisses, southwest of

Lyon, were detained a day earlier by workers angry over the shutdown and loss of 120 jobs. After spending the night in a factory meeting room, the managers tried to persuade the angry workers to let them go.

"There is no other solution than to let us out. The company directors have stripped us of our mandate to negotiate," said factory director Laurent Dousselin. A court ordered the immediate release of the four men but a justice official who turned up at the factory to meet with them was blocked from entering.

"No one has the right to treat us like trash and get rid of us with just 6,000 euros (8,500 dollars)," said one worker. Union officials were demanding a lay-off package of 28,500 euros per worker, but the Swedish headquarters were refusing to negotiate while the bosses were being held.

Akers announced three months ago that it planned to shut down the Fraisses plant in June, citing a collapse in customer orders. French workers last year carried out a series of "bossnappings" to protest layoffs, but this was the first such action in recent months.

Opel to close Belgian plant

German car company Opel will close its plant in Antwerp, Belgium, later this year, GM Europe announced on Jan. 21. "We must make this announcement now so that we can secure a viable future for the entire Opel and Vauxhall operations," GM Europe President Nick Reilly said in a statement. The Opel site employs 2,600 workers.

Opel and its British sister brand Vauxhall have launched "a programme of deep restructuring"

under the direction of US parent company General Motors. Reilly, who is head of both GM Europe and Opel/Vauxhall, has said that 8,300 jobs will be cut from a total of more than 50,000 across Europe.

"It's an absolute catastrophe for Belgian workers and manufacturing," Walter Cnop, of the Belgian CSC union's metalworkers' branch, told the media. Cnop blasted management "arrogance" and a decision he said was "based on political considerations in no way assessed on economic grounds."

GM had planned to sell Opel/Vauxhall to a Canadian company and a Russian bank, but changed its mind last November and decided to restructure the carmaker and cut its output capacity by 20 percent.

Strike at Nokia's Indian factory

Employees at Nokia's mobile handset manufacturing plant in Chennai, India, walked off the job after the company suspended some staff pending an inquiry. The suspended employees are reported to have committed "acts of serious misconduct," the company said in a statement.

About 2,000 staff joined the strike on Jan. 19 after 63 employees were suspended. Nokia has about 8,000 staff at the facility.

India's manufacturing sector has strong trade unions, unlike the software services and business process outsourcing industries. The standoff was triggered after a worker was asked to report for a different shift, which he refused to do. After he was suspended, more workers began to protest and were also suspended. The union said that production of nearly 100,000 mobile handsets was disrupted.

Many items in our "Global Class Struggle" column are from the Labour Start website, www.labourstart.org

Send me information on the Communist Party of Canada



The Communist Party of Canada, formed in 1921, has a proud history of fighting for jobs, equality, peace, Canadian independence, and socialism. The CPC does much more than run candidates in elections. We think the fight against big business and its parties is a year-round job, so our members are active across the country, to build our party and to help strengthen people's movements on a wide range of issues. All our policies and leadership are set democratically by our members. To find out more about Canada's party of socialism, contact the nearest CPC office.

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CODIR appeals for political prisoners

The Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) is calling for the release of hundreds of people following mass arrests in Iran on December 27-28, 2009. The arrests followed protests during the Shi'a Muslim festival of Ashura which took place on Dec. 27.

Amongst those arrested were Leily Afshar, a 29 year old photographer who was pulled from her car by plainclothes officials near a demonstration; Atieh Yousefi, a women's rights campaigner arrested in the city of Rasht; and Reza al-Basha, a Syrian national studying in Iran who works as a part time reporter for Dubai TV.

Permitted one phone call to her family, Leily Afshar confirmed that she was being held in the notorious

Evin Prison section 209. Atieh Yousefi was allowed to meet her family on January 1. It is not known where Reza al-Basha is being held.

The three are amongst hundreds detained without charge or trial by the government of the Islamic Republic, with little or no access to their families, lawyers or appropriate medical treatment. The arrests follow a long pattern of arrest and detention following the disputed election of June 12, 2009 which saw Mahmoud Ahmadinejad installed as the Iranian president for a second term. Subsequent protests have

met with violent responses by the security forces.

The wave of arrests at the end of December was the most extensive yet. Opposition website Jaras suggests that at least 1300 were arrested across Iran, and human rights groups calculate that at least 300 of these prisoners are being held in Evin Prison in Tehran. Jaras also notes that over 180 journalists, human rights activists and members of political parties linked to Mir Hossein Mousavi and former president Khatami have been detained.

Speaking on Behalf of CODIR,

Assistant General Secretary, Jamshid Ahmadi said, "It is simply not acceptable that the government of Iran is able to act with impunity and round up opponents in this manner. The regime is adopting a strategy of both silencing opposition activists and arresting the journalists who can tell the real story of what is going on in Iran. Ensuring that word of their actions reaches the international community is vital. We must make it clear that their behaviour is not acceptable and that people around the world will continue to speak out in solidarity

with the Iranian campaigners for peace, democracy and social justice."

CODIR has urged supporters around the world to contact Iranian authorities to oppose torture of prisoners, to demand their right to see families and lawyers, and to receive fair legal treatment.

Established in 1981, CODIR has consistently campaigned to expose human rights abuses in the Islamic Republic of Iran, working closely with trade unions, Britain's Stop the War Coalition and other peace movements, political parties and other groups. ●

Jyoti Basu, veteran Indian communist leader

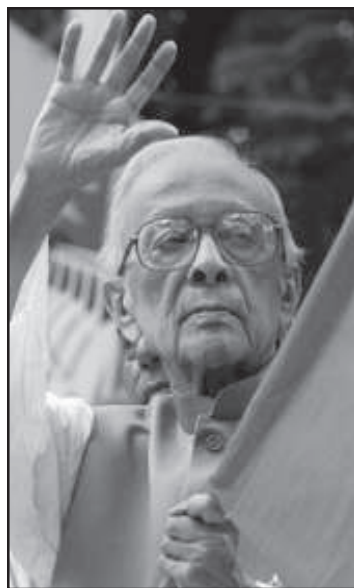
Jyoti Basu, the former head of West Bengal's Left Front government, died on Jan. 17 at the age of 95. His death saw an outpouring of tributes, not only from the Communist Party of India (Marxist), but from a wide range of political forces in India.

Jyoti Basu was born on July 8, 1914 at Kolkata, where his father was an eminent doctor. While in school, Basu was inspired by the Chittagong armed rebellion led by Surya Sen in 1930. Basu went to England to study law in 1935, during the period of intense struggles against fascism. He became an active member of the India League, led by V.K. Krishna Menon, and came into contact with leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain, including Harry Pollit, Rajni Palme Dutt, and others. After returning home in 1940, Basu joined the Communist Party of India. Though he enrolled as a barrister in Calcutta High Court, he never practised law, deciding to devote his life to the Party. He became secretary of Friends of the Soviet Union and the Anti-Fascist Writers' Association in Kolkata, and was assigned to maintain liaison with underground Party leaders. In 1944, the Bengal Assam Railroad Workers' Union was formed, and Basu became its first secretary. He was elected to the Bengal Provincial Assembly in 1946 from the Railway Workers constituency, along with two other Communists. He played a very active role in the stormy days of 1946-47 when Bengal witnessed the Tebhaga movement, strikes and even communal riots.

Jyoti Basu became the secretary of the West Bengal Provincial Committee of the Communist Party, and a member of the Central Committee. After independence, he was elected to the West Bengal assembly from Baranagar in 1952, and was re-elected repeatedly. Despite this, Basu was arrested several times during the 1950s and 60s, and for certain periods went underground to evade arrest.

When the CPI(M) was formed in 1964 as a result of the ideological struggle within the Communist movement, Basu became a member of the new party's PolitBureau.

In 1967, Basu became deputy Chief Minister in West Bengal's first United Front government, and again in 1969. These two governments provided a great



Jyoti Basu, 1914-2010

stimulus in unleashing mass and class struggles. Jyoti Basu played an important role in intertwining the struggle and running the government. In 1970, he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt at the Patna Railway Station, and he was attacked by Congress thugs at least twice. Though

CPI(M) became the largest party in the 1971 assembly elections, the Party was refused the chance to form a government, and central rule was imposed on West Bengal. The 1972 elections were rigged, and the CPI(M) boycotted the assembly for five years, a period of severe repression by the Congress regime.

In 1977, Bengal's Left Front Government was formed as a result of the democratic and mass struggles, and Basu became the Chief Minister. The LF government initiated far reaching measures, including land reforms, political decentralization, trade union rights, widespread relief to impoverished people, and the spread of education. West Bengal saw huge advances in agriculture, and later towards industrialization of the state.

One of Basu's major contributions as Chief Minister was to raise the issue of Centre-State relations at the all-India level. He led the struggle against discrimination against West Bengal, and successfully worked

to build petrochemical and electrical industries, mobilizing other state governments and various political parties on the issue.

Jyoti Basu's intervention in national politics at important junctures proved to be crucial. He played a prominent role in mobilizing secular opposition forces during the Congress governments of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao. He also helped to build secular forces against the Hindu fundamentalist BJP. In 1996, his name was proposed by secular allies for Prime Minister of India. But the CPI(M) Central Committee decided to support the government from outside.

Facing growing health problems, Basu retired from Chief Ministership in November 2000, but continued to lead the Party in West Bengal, participating in Party meetings and in the 2006 election campaign. His wife Kamal Basu died some years ago; he is survived by his only son Chandan and three grandchildren. ●

Sikhs recall Basu as saviour

By Gurpreet Singh, Surrey, BC

The death of Jyoti Basu, a towering communist leader and the longest serving Chief Minister of West Bengal, has saddened the Sikhs residing in Kolkata. Community leaders remember him as a saviour for not letting Congress-led goons murder Sikhs during the 1984 pogrom. Violence against Sikhs broke out in provinces ruled by the Congress Party following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984.

While New Delhi, the national capital and other parts of India witnessed large scale mass murders of Sikhs, Basu ensured that the minority community was protected in his territory.

"He had not only placed Kolkata under curfew, but his party supporters were seen patrolling the Sikh-dominated areas to prevent violence," remembers Surjit Singh Walia, who lives in Dunlop area. Walia,

a community activist who remembers how a mob tried to attack him, was able to escape.

The leader of the Sikh coordination committee, Bachan Singh Saral, spearheaded the campaign for justice for Sikhs who were murdered during the violence. He says that only 10 lives were lost in West Bengal compared to several thousand in New Delhi. "The Sikhs were grateful to Basu and always stood behind his government like a rock," says Saral, who also thinks that Bengal should have made a stronger case to the central government for compensation to the Sikhs. He also remembers that Mamata Banerjee, leader of West Bengal's Trinamool Congress, was in the Congress Party back then and incited the mob.

Sohan Singh Aittiana, a staunch communist in Kolkata, says that the Sikhs had always supported Basu and his Communist Party of India (Marxist) since 1984. "It can be described as his legacy. It's a separate matter that many Sikhs of the new generation have also started identifying themselves with

other parties". Aittiana had led a delegation of the Sikhs to AMRI hospital, where Basu was under treatment. "They prayed for his well being."

Hardev Singh Grewal, the editor of *Navin Parbhat*, a Punjabi daily of Kolkata, says that Basu will always be admired and missed by the Sikh community. "Due to his strong political will to protect our community, there was no mass exodus of the Sikhs from West Bengal."

Sarabjit Singh Sohal, a Singh Sabha leader from Chandigarh, feels the same. "Basu was a true communist, who according to his party's secular ideology did not allow the Hindu fundamentalists to shed the blood of the Sikhs."

It is pertinent to mention that the CPI(M) forced the previous Congress-led coalition government to remove Sajjan Kumar and Jagdish Tytler as cabinet ministers after the Navavati Commission looking into the pogrom had indicted these two leaders. ●

Morales calls Alternative Climate Meeting

Bolivian President Evo Morales has invited scientists, government officials and activists from around the world to an alternative climate conference following the failure of a summit in Copenhagen to produce binding agreements.

The April 20-22 meeting in Cochabamba will include indigenous peoples, social movements, environmentalists and scientists as well as governments "who want to work with their people."

Speaking on Jan. 5, Morales said the April meeting is meant partly to pressure industrialized nations to accept that they have a "climate debt" to poor countries. The meeting will also work toward an international court on environmental crimes.

Other topics will include a "universal proposal for the rights of mother earth" and the transfer of technology.

The December 2009 climate summit in Copenhagen included proposals for creation of a fund to help poor nations, but the details were extremely vague. Bolivia was one of five countries to block a consensus on accepting a last-minute deal brokered by President Barack Obama, after secret talks by a handful of countries.

Lacking consensus, the document was "noted" by the conference, giving it less moral and legal weight than if it had been formally adopted. Morales has since called the Copenhagen summit "a triumph of the people" because "the presidents came, proposed and went without hearing, but this time they could not impose their declaration."

In his speech and news conference in Copenhagen, Morales said that capitalism and imperialism had spawned the problem of climate change by ignoring the rights of nature and the rights of indigenous peoples. He criticized industrialized countries for pledging \$10 billion a year to help countries meet the challenges of climate change, while spending "trillions to fight unnecessary wars" in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Where Ships and Workers Go to Die

From "Shipbreaking in Bangladesh & The Failure of Global Institutions to Protect Worker Rights," report by the U.S.-based National Labor Committee (www.nlcnet.org), September 2009

Some of the world's largest decommissioned tanker ships - measuring up to 1,000 feet long, twenty stories high and weighing 25 million pounds - have been run up on the beaches of Bangladesh. In July of 2009, 112 tanker ships were strewn over four miles of beach.

Thirty thousand Bangladeshi workers, some of them children just 10, 11, 12 and 13 years of age, toil 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for wages of just 22 to 32 cents an hour, doing one of the most dangerous jobs in the world.

According to estimates by very credible local organizations, 1,000 to 2,000 workers have been killed in Bangladesh's shipbreaking yards over the last 30 years. Currently, a worker is seriously injured every day, and a worker is killed every three to four weeks.

On September 5, 2009, 35-year-old Mr. Hossain was burned to death while breaking apart a South Korean tanker at the Kabir Steel Yard. Twenty-year old Mr. Ashek remains in critical condition, while three other workers were seriously burned. Their blowtorches struck a gas tank which exploded, engulfing them in flames.

It is common for workers to be paralyzed or crushed to death by heavy metal plates falling from the ship. A 13-year old child, Nasiruddin Molla, was killed on July 14, 2008, when a large iron

plate struck him in the head at the Sultana shipyard. Accidents and even some deaths are not reported, and there is never an investigation.

Each ship contains an average of 15,000 pounds of asbestos and ten to 100 tons of lead paint. Shipbreaking workers are routinely exposed to asbestos, lead, mercury, arsenic, dioxins, solvents, toxic oil residues and carcinogenic fumes from melting metal and lead paint. Environmental damage to Bangladesh's beaches, ocean and fishing villages has been massive.

Helpers, often children, who go barefoot or wear flip flops, use hammers to break apart the asbestos in the ship, which they shovel into bags to carry outside and dump in the sand.

Workers lack even the most rudimentary protective gear. Cutters, who use blowtorches to cut the giant



Children at work in the shipbreaking industry of Bangladesh

ships to pieces, wear sunglasses rather than protective goggles, baseball caps rather than hardhats, wrap dirty bandanas around their nose and mouth as they are not provided respiratory masks and wear two sets of shirts rather than a welder's vests, hoping the sparks will not burn through to their skin, which happens every day.

Four to six workers share each small, primitive room, often sleeping right on the dirty concrete floor. No one has a mattress. In some of the hovels, the roof leaks when it rains, so workers have to sit up at night covering themselves with pieces of plastic. Their "shower" is a hand water pump.

Every single labor law in Bangladesh and every one of the International Labor Organization's internationally recognized workers rights standards are blatantly violated

on a daily basis. While forced to work overtime, the shipbreaking workers receive no overtime premium. There are no weekly holidays, no paid sick days, no national holidays or vacations. Any worker asking for his proper wages is immediately fired.

The shipbreaking workers are very clear on two points: that they will die early and that there have been no improvements whatsoever over the last 30 years in respect for worker rights laws or health and safety.

The global institutions which direct world trade have miserably failed workers across the developing world who continue to be injured, cheated, maimed, paralyzed and killed on a daily basis. The G-20 countries, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations, the International Maritime Organization and the International Labor Organization must be held accountable. •



"If there is a hell on earth, this is it"

Excerpt from the National Labour Committee report, by Charles Kernaghan

It is one of the strangest, most striking and frightening industrial sites in the world... In July, the National Labor Committee counted 112 tanker ships stretching across nearly four miles of beaches.

The shipbreakers do some of the most dangerous jobs in the world, toiling 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for wages of just 22 to 32 cents an hour, handling and breathing in dangerous toxic waste with no safeguards whatsoever and under conditions that violate every local and international labor law. Injuries happen every day - some are paralyzed for life - and a worker dies every three or four weeks. No one helps them. The workers say a dog means more to the business owner than a human being....

Make no mistake. The horrific sweatshop conditions in the shipbreaking yards are not a stepping stone to the middle class. Rather, the shipbreaking yards are the final cycle of the Race to the Bottom in the global sweatshop economy, and the reality is not pretty. Workers, including children, use hammers to break up the 15,000 pounds of asbestos in every ship and then dump it on the sand to wash out to sea. The environment is being destroyed. And life is cheap. A young worker whose back was broken when a

heavy piece of metal fell from the ship and struck him lies paralyzed, unable to even sit up or control his bowels. He just lies there. The owner of the shipyard gave him \$1,800 and walked away.

These are in fact the most dangerous jobs in the world. But unlike in the popular TV series, there is nothing romantic or exciting here. What is going on is the cruel and criminal exploitation of young workers in Bangladesh's shipbreaking yards. Four to six workers share each primitive room, often sleeping on a filthy concrete floor. No one can afford a mattress.

It does not have to be this way. The workers' demands are so modest, it should make us blush. Their dream is to earn 60 cents an hour, to be paid the legal overtime premium, to have one day off each week, sick days, holidays, healthcare for workers injured on the job and the right to organize. It would cost less than \$750 a year to send a child worker back to school - where they belong - to cover books, uniforms and a stipend to replace their lost wages... It is the job of international solidarity to push the G-20 world leaders, the major shipping nations and corporations, the IMO and the ILO to finally guarantee the rule of law and to end the abuse and exploitation in Bangladesh's shipbreaking yards. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. When it comes to protecting and promoting worker rights in the global economy, nothing will improve without activism and struggle. •

Communist Party of Canada's 36th Convention Gala Dinner



Saturday,
February 6, 7 pm
USWA Hall
25 Cecil Street,
Toronto

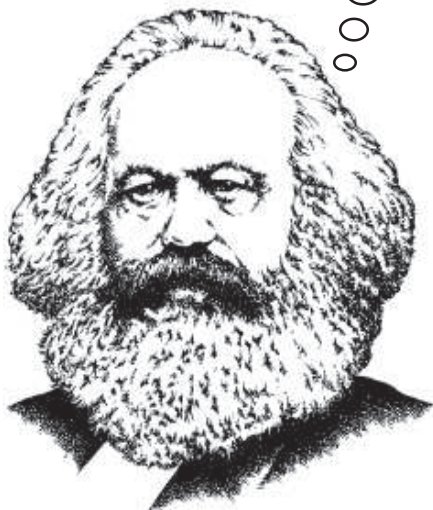
Speaker: Miguel Figueroa and guests

Live Music and Entertainment

\$25 advance/\$30 door

Call 416-469-2446 for tickets

"Come and join the Party"



Next budget will bring "Blood on the streets"

By **Ish Theilheimer**,
Straight Goods News, Jan. 12, 2010

Leading economists predict massive cuts to political targets with the federal budget, set for the day after Stephen Harper releases the kidnapped Parliament. The Conservatives will utilize any pressure on them to cut Canada's \$50 billion deficit by axing programs they don't like or that threaten their ideology.

As examples, the Conservatives recently cut funds to KAIROS and the Canadian Council on Learning. The March budget will provide a pretext to cut many such programs launched in more liberal days.

"There is a strong likelihood of cutbacks in federal departments," according to economist Mike McCracken of Informetrica. The Conservatives' constituency "will want to see blood on the streets," and the government will willingly oblige in keeping with its unspoken but ongoing efforts to defund the left. We could see public service cuts of ten percent."

McCracken and his associate Carl Sonnen believe the pressure to cut the deficit will be surprisingly light, coming mostly from opposition politicians. The \$50 billion will be reduced by \$15 billion with the end of the stimulus program

after 2010, and by another \$8 billion by withdrawing military forces from Afghanistan in 2011. Projecting an additional \$10 billion in increased revenue as the economy recovers, the government will then "only" need to find another \$20 billion to eliminate the deficit.

The pressure to do something is modest, especially compared with the deficit hysteria of the early 1990s. "I don't hear financial institutions saying eliminate the deficit tomorrow," said Carl Sonnen. He believes provincial deficits, currently at the \$35-40 billion level, are going to be the big issue. "The feds know the provinces have this problem. My concern is that what the provinces are going to do could turn this thing [recovery] into a wreck."

"The NDP and the Liberals were more vociferous about the deficit than the Conservatives," said McCracken. This pressure, along with the anti-spending sentiments of Conservative constituents, will provide cover for decimating cuts to federal public services and federal funding for non-profit organizations and international aid, as well as promoting sell-offs of public assets.

"If the Conservatives wanted to achieve significant savings by cutting spending, they would have to decimate the remaining federal

departments," said economist Erin Weir of USW-Canada said in an interview.

"Perhaps a more likely outcome is that everything will be on the chopping block to a more limited extent. The Conservatives have said that they will restrain the growth of federal expenditures below the rate of economic growth. That policy entails a gradual erosion of the economic resources available for public purposes."

"We could see public service cuts of ten percent," said McCracken, who sees current deficit levels as acceptable, pointing out that there were federal deficits in every year from 1947 to 1975. "A \$20 billion deficit is a drop in the bucket as a proportion of Canada's GDP - or compared with what the US is facing. Canada's GDP is \$1.4 trillion. The US deficit for 2009 has been forecast as \$1.8 trillion."

The Conservatives have pledged that they will not reduce transfers to provinces or individuals or raise taxes, but there are many other ways to raise revenues, according to McCracken. "They're now clawing back [taxing income from] the GIS [Guaranteed Income Security] at \$60,000. There's nothing magic about that number."

...Until March, the cuts that are coming will remain a guarded secret. It is easy to predict, however, that as the government announces its cuts, Stephen Harper will once again cite "my training as an economist" to justify them. ●

(Theilheimer is founder & president of Straight Goods News.)

Billionaire wins Chile presidency

Right-wing billionaire Sebastian Pinera won Chile's presidential vote on Jan. 17, taking 52% of the votes to 48% for the ruling Concertation coalition's candidate Eduardo Frei. Pinera ran on a contradictory platform, promising to create jobs while also selling off part of Codelco, the state-owned copper producer. His wide lead in the first round of voting in December narrowed as Frei and outgoing president Michelle Bachelet warned voters of a possible return to the far-right policies of the Pinochet dictatorship era. But the Concertation's inability to legislate more significant social advances put the centre and left forces at a disadvantage which proved too difficult to overcome. In fact, Frei and Pinera agreed on many domestic issues.

One area where Pinera may move in a pro-U.S. direction is in foreign affairs. Bachelet had been credited with trying to improve Chile's relations with Bolivia and other South American countries. Pinera is a friend of Colombia's reactionary President Alvaro Uribe, and has been an outspoken critic of Venezuela, calling it "not a democracy as it is."

The right-wing forces still lack a majority in the Chilean legislature, which may tie Pinera's hands to some extent. ●

What's Left

Vancouver, BC

Left Film Night, Sunday, Jan. 31, 7 pm, screening "H2OIL", documentary on the tar sands and climate change, Centre for Socialist Education, 706 Clark Drive. Admission free, donations welcome. Next Film Night: Sunday, Feb. 28. Call 604-255-2041 for information.

Olympic "Welcome Rally", family-friendly rally to oppose this massive waste of resources, 3 pm, Friday, Feb. 12 (Friday), Vancouver Art Gallery, with parade to BC Place at 4:30 pm.

Annual Women's Memorial March, Sunday, Feb. 14 gather 12 noon, Carnegie Centre, Hastings & Main.

Anti-war Olympics spectacle, organized by StopWar.ca coalition, gather 6 pm, Monday, Feb. 15, Georgia St. side of Vancouver Art Gallery.

Catastrophe in Haiti, public forum with Stuart Hammond, member of human rights delegation to Haiti just before the earthquake, Fri., Feb. 5, 7 pm, Collingwood Neighborhood House, 5288 Joyce St. (Joyce Skytrain). Organized by Haiti Solidarity BC, 778-858-5179.

Call Mr. Robeson, performance on the life and songs of Paul Robeson, Vancouver East Cultural Centre, 1895 Venables St., Feb. 11-14, call 604-251-1363 for times and tickets.

Calgary, AB

The Oil Sands: Engaging Constructive Dialogue, annual Kairos event, Saturday, February 6, 8:45 am-4:30 pm, Our Lady of Grace Church, 1714-14 Ave. NE, to register call 403-243-5478.

Winnipeg, MB

Climate change teach-in, Monday, February 1, 7:00 pm keynote speech kick-off; Tuesday, Feb. 2, 9 am to 4 pm discussions and workshops. Convocation Hall, Univ. of Winnipeg, Info 943-4836.

Marxism course, classes begin in February. Pre-register at 586-7824 or cpc-mb@mts.net.

Toronto, ON

Gala Dinner for the Communist Party of Canada's 36th Central Convention, Sat., Feb. 6, 7 pm, USWA Hall, 25 Cecil Street. Speakers: Miguel Figueroa and Guests. Live music and entertainment, call 416-469-2446 for tickets (\$25 advance).

Norman Bethune Day social, Saturday, February 27, 2010, at the GCDO, 290 Danforth Ave. (near Chester subway). Tickets \$5, door prize one week all-inclusive trip for two to Cuba. For tickets or further information, call media sponsor People's Voice, 416-469-2446.

Laurette Chretien-Sloan

Laurette Chretien-Sloan passed away peacefully in Montreal on Dec. 28, 2009, at the age of 83. The daughter of Purissima Bourdon and Oliva Chretien, she was a Franco-Ontarian born into a family of eleven children, who came to Montreal in the early 1950s. There she married Edward Sloan, together raising five children (Bill, Fruma, Suzanne, Johanne and Marianne), even as she became increasingly involved in the movements for peace, women's equality, and social justice. She was president of the Ligue des femmes du Québec from 1975 to 1985, and was also a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada. The Central Executive Committee of the CPC extends its deepest condolences to the Sloan family for their loss.

Big success for People's Co-op Bookstore fundraiser



Nearly 300 supporters of People's Co-op Bookstore jammed the WISE Hall in Vancouver on Jan. 22, boosting the store's campaign to keep its doors open. The event was the first of several this year to mark the Co-op's 65th anniversary, making it the oldest bookstore in British Columbia. Entertainment was provided by the Carnival Band (above), and several prominent local authors gave readings, including George Bowering, Kevin Chong, Anne Stone, David Chariandy, Rex Weyler, as well as several women stand-up comedians (Morgan Brayton, Katie-Ellen Humphries and Alicia Tobin) and playwrights Marcus Youssef and Camyar Chai. The event came just after the news that another local independent bookstore, Duthies, will soon close its last outlet. But the People's Co-op campaign to stay open is gaining support. The Vancouver Sun recently printed a very positive full-page article on the store, which has also received an award in the pages of another local newspaper. For more information, visit the store at 1391 Commercial Drive, or call 604-253-6442.

REDS ON THE WEB

www.communist-party.ca
www.peoplesvoice.ca
www.ycl-ljc.ca
www.solidnet.org

2010 PV Calendar Now On Sale

The 2010 People's Voice Calendar is now available. This year's theme is "Socialist Women," marking the centenary of the famous 1910 conference which adopted Clara Zetkin's resolution establishing International Women's Day.

As usual, the 2010 Calendar includes a wide variety of memorable dates for the working class movements, from birthdays of prominent revolutionaries to the anniversaries of watershed struggles for peace, social jus-

tice, equality and socialism.

For your copy, send \$5 plus \$2 to cover postage to People's Voice, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1. The



Calendar is also on sale at the Ontario bureau of People's Voice (290A Danforth Ave., Toronto, M4K 1N6) and our Manitoba Bureau (387 Selkirk Ave., Winnipeg, R2W 2M3).

Vancouver-area readers can pick up the Calendar at People's Co-op Books, 1391 Commercial Drive, Vancouver. ●

People's Voice deadlines:

MARCH 1-15 issue: Thursday, Feb. 18

MARCH 16-31 issue: Thursday, March 4

**Send submissions to PV Editorial Office,
706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, V5L 3J1,
<pvoice@telus.net>**

The path not taken: how to spend billions

By Kimball Cariou

Vancouver is about to descend into 17 days of chaos and contradictions: the 2010 Winter Olympics. For a few, the Games will bring a windfall of tourist dollars during the usual slow month of February. Huge profits will be racked up by hotels, developers, security companies, and corporations with exclusive marketing rights. Those fortunate enough to afford tickets to events will enjoy watching the best athletes in the world, and some dazzling cultural performances.

But for most in Vancouver, the Games will be a different experience. Many residents have picked up temporary jobs, doing security, for example. Unlike top Olympic officials who have scored big bonuses, they will have to fight through traffic snarls or transit line-ups for low wages. Those with medical appointments near Olympic venues face big challenges to get there, or else wait until March. Ordinary residents who want to take part in free Olympic celebrations will have to endure lengthy waits, intrusive searches and the scrutiny of closed-circuit TV cameras. Thousands of homeless people in Vancouver remain uncertain about their status during the Olympics.

In the circumstances, even many sports fans question the priorities involved in this spectacle. Was the decision to invest \$6 billion in Olympic preparations the wisest choice for Vancouver and Whistler? Or should other priorities have been picked?

That was already a big question in 2003, when 64% of Vancouverites voted "yes" in a referendum on hosting the Games. We were promised that the athletes' village would be turned into social housing, that major transportation improvements would be made, that these would be the "greenest Games ever," and that indigenous peoples would reap huge benefits.

Even then, however, these promises seemed dubious. The referendum was held at the height of spending cuts imposed by the Campbell Liberal provincial government. Members of health care unions largely opposed the Games bid since they were being

laid off and hit with wage rollbacks. Teachers, parents and students were angry that the province would open the purse strings for the Games but not for cash-starved public schools. Anti-poverty activists warned that the social housing promises were unlikely to be kept. Civil rights advocates scoffed at the initial low budget estimates for Olympic security. Small wonder that many social



justice movements (including People's Voice newspaper and the Communist Party) urged a "no" vote. If the opposition forces had been more tightly focused on the issue of social priorities, the vote might have been just a bit closer, tipping the scales against VANOC's narrowly successful bid.

Seven years later, the so-called "nay-sayers" have largely been vindicated. Many of the promises in the VANOC bid book have gone up in smoke, especially the social housing commitment. Homelessness has skyrocketed in the Vancouver region, and the social housing component of the ritzy athletes' village was eliminated.

As for public transit, the only significant Olympic-related improvement is the Canada Line skytrain between downtown and the airport. Initial ridership levels are higher than transit experts had feared, but the line will require taxpayer subsidies to its private ownership for an indefinite period. At the enormous cost of \$2 billion, the Canada Line has improved transit options for a fraction of the population, but construction impacts devastated dozens of businesses along its route. Meanwhile, riders in the rest of the

Vancouver region still suffer from poor service thanks to a chronic shortage of buses.

Less than a month before the Feb. 12 opening ceremonies, the full impact of provincial spending cuts is front page news. On Jan. 19, the Vancouver School Board was compelled to send letters to teachers warning that hundreds of jobs may be in danger. The culprit here is the Campbell government. Scrambling to cover a \$3 billion deficit, the province has left Vancouver schools with an estimated \$17-36 million shortfall heading into consultations for the district's next budget. The story is the same across B.C. Nearly every district faces grim choices to close schools, slash programs, lay off teachers, and expand class sizes. The students who are encouraged to celebrate excellence at the Winter Games will soon see a stark deterioration in their learning conditions.

Staff and patients in B.C.'s health care face a similar outlook. Despite the Campbell government's cheery claims to be protecting core services, regional authorities simply cannot maintain the system with current funding levels.

The government's response to the fiscal decline which followed the 2008 global economic crisis has been two-fold: slash spending on vital public services, and impose the "harmonised sales tax" on British Columbians. The first strategy has meant the problems just described. The latter does not even bring in revenue to government coffers, since the HST will go directly from consumers to businesses. It's true that B.C. is being bribed to impose the HST by the federal Tories, but nowhere near the provincial deficit.

As for indigenous peoples,

If half of the Olympic security budget had gone into tackling homelessness, at an average of \$200,000 per unit, about 2500 units of housing could have been built. Most of Vancouver's street people (who are largely Native) would already be living in decent housing.



Critics of the Vancouver Olympics have focused on several key issues, including the broken promises for major investments in social housing (above) and the fact that the Games are taking place on unceded indigenous territories. (Photos: K. Cariou)



members of the "Four Host Nations" have picked up some temporary jobs, and native art will appear prominently at many Olympic venues. But aboriginal poverty rates in B.C. have not shifted, and the Campbell government's "treaty process" has been sunk by well-founded fears that this path leads to elimination of inherent aboriginal rights. "No Olympics on stolen Native land" has become the rallying cry of many critics, including the Olympic Resistance Network, which is holding an "anti-Olympic convergence" starting on February 10.

That leaves many asking: what if different choices had been made seven years ago?

Consider a few hard numbers, such as the billion-dollar Olympic security budget. If half of this expenditure (\$500 million) had gone into tackling homelessness, at an average of \$200,000 per unit, about 2500 units of housing could have been built. Most of Vancouver's street people (who are largely Native) would already be living in decent housing. Sounds expensive? Maybe, but the average annual cost of health care, policing, etc. for homeless people in Vancouver is over \$50,000. In other words, investing \$500 million in housing would save taxpayers about \$125 million per year. Such an emergency plan would have required governments to seize a sizable chunk of real estate from private developers, but the only obstacle was lack of political will.

What about the other \$500 million? Currently, TransLink limps along with a shortage of 500 buses. Less than a year ago, the "More Buses Now" campaign supported by CAWL Local 111 (TransLink drivers) pointed out that 100 used buses could be purchased from California for \$35-90,000 each, or less than \$10 million. More expensive new buses cost up

to \$400,000, so 400 of these vehicles would cost \$160 million. The crippling shortage of buses across the region could be solved for a fraction of the Olympic security budget.

Then there's public education. Investing another \$200 million of the Olympic security funds would have allowed Vancouver to overcome the impacts of 20 years of underfunding and cutbacks, with plenty left over for other school systems in the Lower Mainland.

That still allows another \$130 million to build hospitals, hire more health care staff at better pay, raise social assistance rates, etc.

All these options would have created thousands of jobs, some permanent, some short-term, but all more secure and beneficial to society than spending \$1 billion to search backpacks, install video cameras, and erect 40 kilometers of fencing. The lives of tens of thousands of people could have been dramatically improved, lowering the annual costs of health care for British Columbians. Thousands of young people would have received a better education.

Far more would have been possible if the rest of the Olympic budget - the \$2 billion Canada Line, the billion dollar athletes' village, the \$800 million upgrade of the highway to Whistler, hundreds of millions on new Olympic facilities - had been redirected.

When the torch enters B.C. Place on February 12, protesters will be in the streets outside. That demonstration may not be huge, given the relentless media/police attack against anti-Olympic dissent. But growing numbers of British Columbians are wondering about the "path not taken." After all, we'll be paying through the nose for this expensive party for at least another generation. ●

(Cariou is the organizer of the Vancouver East Club CPC.)

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