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people's VOICE

Waging war on the world

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Polling reveals that Canadians were distinctly unimpressed by the Harper government's abysmal stance at the recent Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change. Are the Tories listening? .

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Refusing to sit down and shut up, organizers of Israeli Apartheid Week held more events and actions than ever this year. .

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The Mossad hit

Israel has a long history of murdering its opponents. But the brazen assassination of Hamas official Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai may have upset some of Israel's most significant allies.

Community Coalition calls April 10 rally in Vancouver

In a welcome sign of a broader struggle against the Campbell government's latest round of cutbacks, a Community Coalition to Build A Better B.C. has been formed by community groups, cultural and arts organizations, and unions. The first major action of the new alliance will be a rally at the Vancouver Art Gallery, starting 11 am, Saturday, April 10.

The groups are joining together to call on the provincial government to stop eliminating public and community services, and to work in consultation to provide "adequate, fair, and consistent funding to support public services and community groups."

A statement from the coalition says, "The strength of British Columbia is our people. We each contribute in unique and different ways, through our talents, ideas, and hard work to build a better BC. Building communities where every woman, man and child is treated with fairness, dignity, and respect is a shared responsibility. When government singles out groups of individuals - by cutting services they depend on, raising fees inequitably, and unfairly shifting taxes - it diminishes all of us. It doesn't bring

us together. It divides us.

"The purpose of the Coalition to Build a Better BC is to bring us together. The public, community, and cultural services that we have built together over the years contribute greatly to a vibrant and diverse BC. They help to ensure that every British Columbian can participate and share in a quality of life that is recognized around the world.

"Public, community, and cultural services are essential cornerstones of a civil society. They are a critical component of our economic well-being, especially in difficult economic times. A strong public sector to

support, build, and regulate the private sector is vital to the social, environmental, and economic health of the province.

"Due to drastic funding cuts, chronic underfunding, and misaligned political priorities, many of these services are at risk of disappearing, and putting our way of life and the environment at risk. Many of the cuts affect the most vulnerable people in our communities, particularly women, children, isolated seniors, and those with the lowest incomes. It is unacceptable for government to take more from those who have the least, in order to give more to those who have the most." •

Radio Labour hits the airwaves

LabourStart/CALM - A new weekly presentation of international labour news is on the Internet. Solidarity News will be available on RadioLabour.net every Monday morning. RadioLabour is the brainchild of Marc Bélanger, the founder of SoliNet, which was the first trade union online network back in the 1980s. Solidarity News will focus on union and workers' activities and issues from around the world with special emphasis on emerging market and developing countries.

RadioLabour reporters will provide regular weekly presentations, but a special feature of the audiocast will be reports from unionists who want to report on particular events or publicize an activity of their organization.

For more information about RadioLabour, listen to the audiocasts, or provide reports, visit www.radiolabour.net. •

Rally backs Vale Inco strikers



On March 6, hundreds of Steelworkers union members and supporters demonstrated at Toronto's Metro Convention Center in solidarity with 3,500 USW workers in Sudbury and Port Colborne who have been on strike since May 2009, and with workers at Voisey's Bay in northern Labrador who launched a strike on Aug. 1. The workers are fighting demands by the transnational Vale Inco for major concessions.

Mediated discussions between the United Steelworkers and Vale Inco broke off the next day, after what the union described as "repeated and unprecedented" attempts to reach a settlement.

"Over 11 consecutive days, our bargaining committee presented several new proposals and made genuine, significant compromises on the key issues," said USW District 6 Director Wayne Fraser.

"This was an all-out effort by our committee to reach a settlement, with the best interests of our members, our community and the company in mind. Our committee is frustrated and angry that Vale Inco was not prepared to bring the same spirit of compromise to the table to resolve this labour dispute. Vale did not come close to reciprocating on the many and substantial changes made by the Union."

The USW has now requested to refer all outstanding issues to a binding arbitration panel, chaired by veteran mediator Kevin Burkett. Vale Inco has adamantly rejected the union's proposal for an immediate return to work and an arbitrated resolution.

The USW has scheduled meetings in Sudbury and Port Colborne to present members with detailed reports. Members will have the opportunity to vote on a five-year settlement offer presented by the company; the USW bargaining committee is unanimously recommending rejection of what it calls a "sub-standard proposal."

Vale, the Brazilian parent company of Vale Inco, claimed \$22 billion US in cash assets as of March 2009. During 2008, Vale's after-tax profits were \$13.2 billion US. The company's top six executive officers were paid a total of \$33 million US in 2008, an increase of 121% over the previous two years. Far from losing money on its Ontario operations, Vale made twice as much profit during 2007/2008 as Inco reported in the previous ten years. •

(PV photo above: Ed Bil)

PV Fund Drive: \$50,000 in 2010

Leonard Asper may be gone, but we're still here. After years of piling up debts, Asper has resigned his position as CEO of CanWest Global Communications, Canada's biggest corporate media empire. As the feeding frenzy begins for control of lucrative chunks of CanWest Global, the potential investors never utter a word about the interests of thousands of media employees, or the subscribers to CanWest stations and newspapers. Their only "lens" is profits, not real news and information.

People's Voice isn't here to make profits, but we are here to provide our readers with reliable facts and analysis from a different perspective, using the lens of working class interests. For example, when the corporate media reports on "reform policies" in a country such as Greece or Iceland, you can safely assume that these "reforms" are meant to protect the vital interests of finance capital. But when we report on reforms, we're talking about the movements for employment insurance, job creation, the shorter work week,

universal social programs, progressive taxation, defense of the environment, reductions in military spending.

Last year we achieved our Fund Drive target of \$50,000 to keep publishing People's Voice. It wasn't easy, and it took a bit longer than we wanted, but we did get there. This year, we need to raise the same amount, and donations are already coming in. Thanks to all who have sent early contributions!

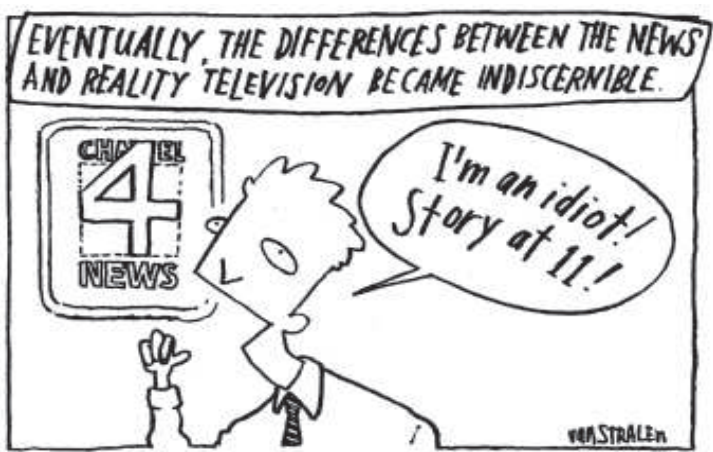
As a mark of appreciation for your generosity, we are once again offering supporters complimentary gifts. For each \$100 in donations, you can choose one of these black and white portraits, mounted on card, matted and ready for framing: Che Guevara, Clara Zetkin, Augusto Cesar Sandino, Bhagrat Singh, Gall (Sioux), Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Louis Riel, Jeanne Corbin, or Gladys Marin. Other choices include music CDs or a copy of our 2010 Women's Socialist Calendar.

Two fundraising events will help kick off this year's PV Drive. On Sunday, March 21, the Vancouver East Club CPC invites all readers in the Lower Mainland to their annual Pasta Dinner, starting at 5 pm, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver. Tickets are just \$12, all proceeds to the Fund Drive. The dinner will be followed at 7 pm with a showing of Michael's Moore's biting documentary, *Capitalism: A Love Story*. Call 604-255-2041 for details.

The Ontario fund drive campaign will start with a lively social event on Saturday, March 27, starting 7 pm, at the GCDO Hall, 290 Danforth Ave., Toronto. The evening will feature live music, good food and refreshments, and greetings from PV Editor Kimball Cariou. For more information, call 416-469-2446. •



Vale Inco CEO Tito Martins; the company's top six executives raked in \$33 million during 2008.



Here's my contribution to the PV Fund Drive!

Enclosed please find my donation of \$ _____ to the 2010 People's Voice Press Fund Drive.

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People's Voice, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1

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
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Fax (604)254-9803 E-mail: pvoice@telus.net

2010 BC Budget: more and more of the same

By Sam Hammond

It's the first week of March, an early spring in British Columbia, and the corporate feeding frenzy on the backs of athletes and the BC population called the Olympic Games is somewhat abated. BC still holds the gold medal for the highest child poverty rate in Canada, the lowest minimum wage, the most homeless, the lowest corporate tax rate in the G7 countries (and still plunging). The Campbell Liberals are leading in the race to the bottom in inadequate funding for education and almost everything that can be called a social program.

It's more and more of the same in the 2010 provincial budget introduced on March 2 by Finance Minister Colin Hansen.

The Harmonized Sales Tax, touted as "revenue neutral" by the Liberals, is apparently partisan to the business community, who will reclaim all that they pay and pocket

what they used to pay. The pockets of the working population, the homeless and the poor, will be emptied by the imposition of taxes on goods previously exempt and the need to fund the higher costs of social services.

The HST is actually "revenue negative," because the government will actually lose \$113 million on it in 2010/11. They will also lose \$69 million on the carbon tax because they went too far on personal tax cuts (to who?). This adds up to \$182 million in losses.

The Forests and Range budget is cut by 37%, because the Liberal crystal ball has told them they won't have to fight forest fires for the next two years.

Capital expenditures for major corporate-friendly projects have been raised 124%. This will generate a debt service cost that in itself is \$417 million more than the entire budget for the Ministry of Children and Family Development, which will receive a modest 1.2% increase



Teachers and supporters rally at the office of BC Education Minister Margaret Macdiarmid to demand higher education funding. (Photo: K. Cariou)

this year and nothing for the next two years. Housing and Social Development will receive 1.9% this year followed by cuts in the next two years.

But the most beautiful stroke of reverse financing was begun by Colin Hansen's predecessor. Carole Taylor introduced a three-year phase-out of the Corporation Capital Tax, which used to bring in over \$100 million annually, mostly

from the big banks. This was in response to the federal Harperite's incentive offer of \$48 million over two years to compensate for looking after our big bankers, who now pay almost nil into the BC treasury. Trading income of \$100 million a year for a one time incentive of \$48 million only makes sense if elected representatives are really closet corporate thieves.

Taylor justified this act of

treachery by introducing the Financial Institutions Minimum Tax, which was to kick in this year when the phase-out of the Corporation Capital Tax was complete.

Guess what. In this budget, Hansen cancelled the Financial Institutions Minimum Tax. The dirty deed is complete and Carole Taylor is now on the board of directors of the TDBank. Unfortunately Colin Hansen is still with us; keep a tight hand on your wallet.

The Liberals came into office in 2001 with huge tax cuts for the wealthy and the corporations, and attacks on workers and social spending. This budget is the same bad news for working people. Lower corporate taxes, higher health premiums, new HST taxes, overcrowded schoolrooms, public service wage freeze, privatization, contracting out, higher unemployment, cancellation of re-training for dumped civil service workers, more poor children, closed women's shelters and an almost complete meltdown in most of the resource based interior areas. Isn't capitalism wonderful? ●

(Hammond is the BC leader of the Communist Party.)

Harper's climate policies get thumbs down

CUPE/CALM and Bulletin/CAUT/CALM

Stephen Harper's minority government let the country and the planet down at the climate change talks in Copenhagen, according to Canadians. From Dec. 7 to 18, 2009, negotiators from 192 nations came together at the United Nations Climate Change Conference to try to reach a binding international agreement on reducing greenhouse gases.

An Angus Reid opinion poll conducted days after Copenhagen shows Canadians are unhappy with the outcomes. Key findings are:

- * 48 per cent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with Harper's performance at the climate change talks; only 28 per cent are content with his leadership.

- * 56 per cent were frustrated that the Copenhagen agreement is not legally binding.

- * 36 per cent were dissatisfied with the commitment to keep temperatures from rising no more than 2 degrees C.

- * 73 per cent believe the goal to keep temperatures from rising no more than 2 degrees will not be achieved.

Canadians only generally supported two outcomes, with 46 per cent expressing satisfaction with the idea to create a fund to help developing nations adapt to climate change and 58 per cent supporting the worldwide commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions 50 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Meanwhile, scientists working in the climate-change field are being targeted by a well-orchestrated campaign of harassment by global-warming skeptics who want to block any chance of achieving binding greenhouse gas emission

targets, says University of Victoria climatologist Andrew Weaver.

Weaver and other scientists around the world have been speaking out about harassment since the "climategate" controversy that saw the public release of an e-mail archive stolen from the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia in the U.K.

Climate skeptics claimed the e-mails exposed how little evidence exists linking climate change to human activity. But, the scientific community has demonstrated the information in the e-mails was taken out of context and reveals nothing that contradicts the overwhelming scientific evidence demonstrating that link exists.

Weaver, a world leader in climate dynamics and lead author of assessment reports for the Nobel-winning United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has been targeted himself, with two break-ins at his university office, the theft of a computer and several attempts to hack into the computer network. He says the goal of the people who stole and published the e-mail archive was to distract from critical discussions aimed at achieving a binding figure for emissions reduction at the climate conference in Copenhagen.

"This is just one in a series of incidents that have been part of a sustained and well-organized attempt to discredit science and harass scientists, and scientists are being targeted precisely because the evidence is overwhelmingly demanding change," said Weaver.

"In the end, while I'm sure they were overjoyed Copenhagen was an absolute flop, I don't think their tactics had an effect on the outcome of the negotiations," he added. "They were nothing but a transient distraction." ●

Private clinics ordered to open books

The Report/HSABC/CALM

The B.C. Supreme Court has ruled that a pro-medicare coalition can participate as interveners in the legal challenge to B.C.'s medicare legislation that was launched by former Canadian Medical Association president, Brian Day, and a group of private, for-profit medical clinics.

The for-profit clinics are seeking to have key provisions of provincial health law declared unconstitutional so that physicians can sell necessary health care services to patients who wish to jump the queue and

can afford to pay a premium.

"The court's ruling is great news for British Columbians, and all Canadians who value our public health care system," said Rachel Tutte, co-chair of the B.C. Health Coalition and a member of the Health Sciences Association's board of directors.

Recognizing the critical issues at stake, the judge ruled that she will allow necessary evidence and arguments to be presented on the question of the constitutional validity of B.C.'s Medicare Protection Act. A critical piece of this evidence will be information about the billing practices of the

private clinics, which will now be available as the court also issued orders that the clinics be audited. The clinics had been fighting the audit.

"It is essential that B.C.'s Medical Services Commission be able to determine whether clinics and physicians are complying with the billing rules upon which medicare depends," said Tutte. "The BC Health Coalition and our partners have been pushing very hard to ensure that allegations of queue jumping, extra billing and other unethical and unlawful practices be thoroughly investigated." ●

Ontario Ministry of Education adopts pro-gay memorandum

By Michael Oosting

As of February 1, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) students in Ontario will have less to worry about. The Ontario Ministry of Education, finally acting upon the extreme harassment faced by LGBT youth in schools, has replaced Memorandum No. 145 of the Ontario Education Act, the policy which governs how school boards must deal with promoting an accepting environment in schools.

The previous version of the memorandum, which came into effect in October 2007, was put in place as a framework for dealing with prejudice and hatred among students. However, it lacked any protocols on the subject of homophobia or heterosexism. While the issues of racism and sexism encompassed several pages, there was

nothing on issues faced by LGBT people in schools.

These problems have now been brought into the limelight with the new and revamped policy. Previously harassment because of a student's sexual identity was often overlooked by school board employees. It is now law that staff must report any incident involving discrimination based on sexual orientation, even minor incidents

such as homophobic slurs or graffiti.

Also, the memorandum reads that all school board staff must support students who wish to participate in gay-straight alliances; previously, the principal of a school was able to prevent such an organization from being formed, which is quite the opposite of the Ministry's call for equal education for all. This means that Ontario is now the only place in the world where Gay-Straight alliances are supported by law, a milestone in the struggle for gay rights.

Now school faculty will be able to provide more support than ever to LGBT students, and the next generation will receive and education that teaches acceptance regardless of sexual orientation. LGBT activists hope that other provinces will follow the example set by Ontario. ●



GSAs are now supported by Ontario law.

EDITORIALS

Yes, we do have choices

Mired in the polls, with grim economic times still looming, the Harper Tories are trying to revive their fortunes with a classic right-wing formula - a combination of chest-thumping militarism, "family values" rhetoric, racist immigrant-bashing, and scare-mongering about debts and deficits. The reluctance of the federal opposition parties to tackle some of these "wedge issues" may well give Harper an advantage heading into an election. This makes it more crucial than ever for the labour and democratic movements to expose Tory demagoguery and present progressive alternatives.

Take the debt/deficit bogeyman, for example. It's important to point out that the debt to GDP ratio in Canada is just 53%, half the levels of the mid-1990s. Servicing the federal debt requires just 2% of the annual Gross Domestic Product. This is hardly a "crisis" forcing an end to the minor economic stimulus measures adopted a year ago. And in case anyone has forgotten, studies of the "debt crisis" back in the '90s found that nearly half of the accumulated federal debt at that time was due to tax cuts for the corporate sector and upper-income earners.

This is a long-term trend. Sixty years ago, individual income taxes accounted for a slightly higher proportion of federal revenues than corporate taxes. Today the ratio is nearly 4 to 1. As a percentage of GDP, revenue from corporate taxes has fallen from about 6 percent in the early 1950s, to 2.1% today. The next corporate tax cuts (1.5% drops in 2011 and 2012) will give Canada the lowest rates in the G7 countries. The first cut alone will take \$9 billion from federal revenues desperately needed to build low-income housing, expand EI coverage and benefits, and protect social programs.

Contrary to the neo-con pundits, we do have choices. The Harper government has chosen to keep widening the gap between rich and poor. We must choose to drive the Tories out, and to fight for people's needs, not corporate greed.

Afghan war vs. democracy

The NATO war of occupation in Afghanistan is clearly headed for defeat. Sooner or later, the end will be marked by withdrawal cloaked in a "power sharing" agreement between the rival political forces within that country. In the meantime, civilians continue to die under NATO bombs, innocent victims of the latest anti-Taliban offensive.

The breaking point has come for some NATO countries. The coalition government of the Netherlands collapsed in February, after refusing a NATO request to extend its military role in Afghanistan. Instead, Dutch troops will begin withdrawing this August, as planned.

This huge victory should give new inspiration to the anti-war movement in Canada. Only mass extra-Parliamentary pressure can help block a possible treacherous move by the Harper Tories to extend the Kandahar mission.

Make no mistake, despite their claims that Canada's military role will end next year, the Tories badly want to extend the war. For four years, they have cultivated the political terrain, making "support for the troops" the litmus test for public office. That refrain will be hard to keep up if the armed forces aren't busy suppressing insurgents.

But even now, the latest gyrations over the torture of Afghan prisoners undercut Tory credibility. By refusing to reveal the terms of reference of the Iacobucci review into secret documents related to this matter, PM Harper has again signalled that Parliament should keep its nose out of affairs of state. That may suit the immediate interests of the clique in the PMO, but it does fresh damage to democracy in Canada. For the sake of both Afghans and Canadians, this war must end now.

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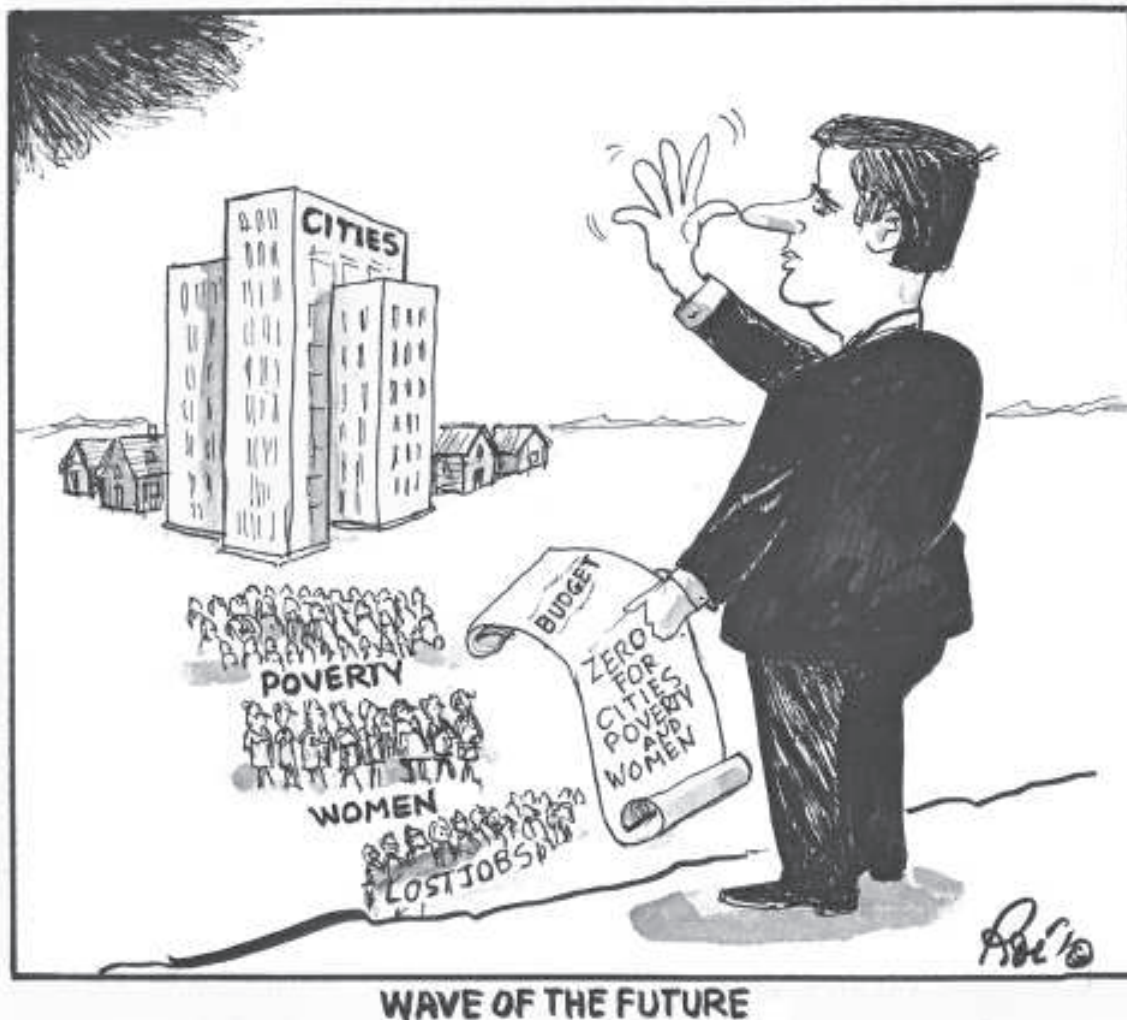
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LETTERS

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SPEAKING FRANKLY

Recovery? What recovery?

By Jim Stanford/CCPA
Monitor/CALM

Economists and politicians alike are watching Canada's economic data closely, searching for signs of economic recovery. After experiencing the largest contraction in nominal GDP since the end of World War II, a 50 per cent increase in unemployment within a year, and unprecedented financial instability, Canadians are eager to see signs of a rebound.

Political leaders have a special incentive to emphasize the bright side of economic affairs. They want to make their government look better and to promote confidence among consumers and businesses. Some recent economic reports seem to support this growing conviction that recovery has arrived. For example, Canada's GDP grew marginally in June (after 10 consecutive months of decline), and seasonally adjusted employment grew by more than 30,000 jobs in September. No less an authority than Mark Carney, governor of Canada's central bank, declared confidently back in July that the recession was already over.

Canadian financial markets have been in full-fledged expansion mode since March 2009. The Toronto stock exchange index climbed by more than 50 per cent in seven months. Bank profits have recovered strongly, to the point that the major Canadian banks are already setting aside billions for executive bonuses.

This renewed financial exuberance, however, should not be mistaken for a recovery in the real economy - where working Canadians produce real goods and services. Beyond Bay Street and the financial industry, the economic indicators are not remotely so positive.

The cold, hard economic reality facing most Canadians has not

been altered by upbeat financial reports, nor by the hopeful claims of political and economic officials that the worst is over. The frightening economic free-fall that occurred in the wake of the most acute phase of the global financial crisis has levelled off, but it is not yet evident that a genuine rebound has begun in Canada.

The normal mechanisms of economic expansion in Canada's market economy - whereby business investment, construction, or exports generate multiplied positive impacts on economic activity through the spending and re-spending of new income - have not been re-established. In fact, available data suggest the underlying drivers of private sector growth, especially exports and business capital investment, are getting weaker.

Work and production are stagnant at best. Incomes, too, are stagnant. Without government transfers they would be falling. Consumer spending is just holding on. Credit conditions continue to tighten for businesses. Prices are dropping, a sign of continuing profound weakness in demand conditions. If this deflationary pattern becomes rooted, it can create a self-reinforcing contraction in prices and incomes.

As well, rapid increases in public spending by all levels of government have been essential to stabilize the economy at even this lower level of activity. Continued increases in public spending will be needed to stop the economy from shrinking again and to generate enough momentum so that the economy eventually becomes able to autonomously create and sustain new jobs and income.

About 85 per cent of Canada's GDP is attributable to the activity of businesses, so, typically, in a market system like Canada's, injections of initial spending power

or investment are required to get the economic ball rolling. This could consist of investments by business in new facilities or products, an increase in demand from abroad for Canadian-made goods and services, or an expansion in consumer spending.

A "recovery" has begun once a country's real GDP has stopped falling and started growing. But, for a true recovery, there must also be a sustained source of new investments or expenditure power to continue stoking the fires of expansion. And that resulting expansion must be vibrant enough to more than keep up with population and productivity growth, to create new jobs and offset the fall in income and living standards that was experienced during the recession.

By these criteria, there is no evidence that Canada's economy is pulling itself out of the recession. Indeed, Canada's public sector - government - has become the only source of new investment and purchasing power. And even more backup from the public sector will be required in the months to come.

(Stanford is an economist with the Canadian Auto Workers and a CCPA Research Associate.)

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Descent Into Barbarism: US and NATO wage war on the world

By *Finian Cunningham*,
Global Research, February
9, 2010

The argument is won: capitalism as an effective system to organise society and provide for human needs has expired. The evidence is conclusive. Trillions of dollars to kickstart the economy in the US and Europe may have given an ephemeral lease of life to the financial class to spin the casino wheel once again, but it is more apparent by the day that the tentative "recovery" has spluttered to a standstill. Gridlocked by unprecedented levels of personal and national debts, the engine of production - the real economy - is in a state of rigor mortis.

This collapse has been a long time in the making. Decades of easy credit was up to now a way for the ruling class - government, corporations, financial institutions - to let the majority of workers subsidise the chronic loss in their livelihoods, which have been drained since the mid-1970s by the oligarchy's self-aggrandisement from wage cutting, regressive taxation and public spending cuts. The political class - whether liberal or conservative, right or left - have facilitated this giant wealth-

siphoning process.

However, the point is that the economic system is now objectively shown to be moribund. And it is impossible for so-called mainstream politicians to think of any other way

Other voices

of doing business. They are ideologically blind. Recall former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's arrogant assertion: "There is no alternative". Likewise, US President Barack Obama insists on throwing billions more dollars at the banks and financiers on Wall Street. But that won't kickstart an economy in which millions of workers are without jobs and homes or who are on crumby wages and up to their necks in debt. The profit system has hit an historic dead-end and this gridlock is a result of deep trends to do with the decline in capitalism as a mode of social production (falling wages and profits and the concomitant explosion in financial speculation and debts).

Widespread poverty and human misery is now seen on a massive scale in the so-called developed world. Some 40 million Americans, for example, are subsisting on food

stamps. The distinction between "developed" and "developing" economies (always a myth anyway) is blurred. The ranks of the world's long-suffering poor are swelled with dispossessed blue and white-collar workers and their families from across the US and Europe. Together more than ever, they stand shut out from those gated havens of obscene wealth for a global minority.

Similar historic junctures have been witnessed before when capitalism floundered from its inexorable tendency to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Disturbingly, the release valve for

the system and its bankruptcy has always been war. Death and destruction is the lender of last resort to an economic system that - despite itself - inevitably polarises wealth to an unworkable degree. The First and Second World Wars - claiming more than 70 million lives over a period of less than 10 years - were effectively the ultimate, grotesque bailouts.

In our time, war, it seems, has already begun. The US oligarchy and its NATO allies are waging a veritable war on the world: killing, disappearing and incarcerating millions of civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan - a war

that is expanding into Yemen, Somalia and the rest of the Horn of Africa, with the militarisation of sea lanes and oceans and the setting up of "forward projecting" military and missile bases in every continent (see Rozoff, ditto). On top of ordinary poverty and misery, the world is truly seeing another historic descent into barbarism. Given this war-mongering dynamic, the growing US antagonism with Iran, Russia and China is far from an idle threat. It is the logical next step for a deeply illogical economic system. But history is not inevitable. We are not necessarily programmed to repeat its horrors. A combination of global communications among citizens and political and social consciousness may be enough to prevent a military conflagration and overthrow the misrule of the oligarchy. What is needed is a) a widening of the recognition that capitalism as a system of social production is finished; and b) the case has to be confidently made that an alternative is very possible. That alternative is socialism (the subject of a further article). To those who remain skeptical, they should bear in mind the stark choice that Rosa Luxemburg foresaw for humanity: that is, socialism or barbarism. And we already have the latter. ●



Wasn't that a party! But look at the mess...

By *Kimball Cariou*,
Vancouver

The Paralympics are still coming to Vancouver, but the dust is starting to settle after the much bigger Winter Olympics. It's time for a preliminary look at the impact of the Games on the people of Vancouver.

Despite claims that the Olympics would "pay for themselves," taxpayers had to shell out most of the \$8 billion to host this corporate festival. That includes assets like the Canada Line, but it also leaves taxpayers with a debt burden which will last for many years.

Even critics did enjoy the superb level of competition and the spirit of most of the athletes. Sports like speed skating, snowboarding, and hockey offer an incredible dramatic spectacle.

For every elite athlete from a privileged background, there is a Clara Hughes, who emerged from the hard streets of Winnipeg to win medals in both summer and winter Olympics. Hughes donated the \$10,000 cash bonus for her 5,000 meter speed-skating bronze medal to the "Take A Hike" program at John Oliver Secondary, an east Vancouver school which suffers from low rankings by the right-wing Fraser Institute. This program helps students with addictions and other problems to take part in "adventure-based" learning.

And for every athlete who parrots the "family values" line, there's a Johnny Weir, courageously taking on bigots who sneered at his figure skating costumes. Jon Montgomery, the Calgary car salesman and auctioneer, shattered Alberta

stereotypes by celebrating at the LGBT Pride House in Whistler after winning his gold medal in the men's skeleton event.

On the downside, politicians took full advantage of all the flag-waving. Stephen Harper turned up everywhere during the final days of the Games. (At some east Vancouver restaurants and pubs, the PM was booed when his face appeared on TV.)

Both the B.C. and federal governments tabled 2010 budgets just after the closing ceremonies. The same politicians who broke open the piggy bank for a 17-day Olympic party are now giving the finger to working people stuck in a lingering economic meltdown.

That reality is on the minds of groups such as anti-poverty activists, and Vancouver teachers and students.

As the Games began, housing advocates and homeless people established a "Red Tent" village on property owned by Concord Pacific, one of western Canada's biggest developers. But on Feb. 28, the final day of the Games, police removed this visible evidence of a massive housing crisis. Civic authorities found places to live for about 35 tent village campers, but denied that any political efforts had been necessary to achieve this outcome.

That's news to the Pivot Legal Society and Streams of Justice, groups which helped organize the tent village. Despite this minor victory, over 2,000 residents of Vancouver remain without a place to call home.

The real success was showing the world that poverty is a burning problem in the wealthy city which hosted the 2010 Games. That message was driven home on Feb.

27, when activists wrapped the entire block around Canada's Olympic Pavilion with giant red tarps calling for action on housing.

On March 1, just 24 hours after Sidney Crosby's "golden goal" set off celebrations across the country, elementary and secondary teachers rallied at the

how we see it...

office of provincial education minister Margaret Macdiarmid, demanding that the Campbell Liberals tackle the staggering funding shortfalls faced by B.C. school boards. In Vancouver alone, funding for the 2010-11 school year will be \$17 million less than costs, out of a \$450 million budget. Just before the Olympics, 800 teachers were sent notices of potential layoffs, as required by their collective agreement. Vital programs are in danger, and school closures are possible. Until now, progressive Vancouver trustees have found ways to keep the main impact of Liberal cuts out of the classroom, trimming administration and fighting for better funding. But there's no fat left to trim.

On another front, Olympic organizers and politicians claimed credit for moving huge crowds with relatively few problems. It's true that widely expected chaos did not materialize. But far from proving that the region's public transportation is a success story, the Games showed just how inadequate the system really is. Olympic organizers did manage to keep thousands of private vehicles

out of the downtown for three weeks, by operating the transit system well beyond normal capacity for that entire period. Today, traffic counts are back up, and the region remains 500 buses short of what's needed to function adequately. Just as bad, fares are going up again on April 1, making public transit even less affordable.

Then there's the matter of the billion-dollar security crackdown, before, during and since the Games. The cops generally avoided attacking protesters during the Olympics. However, it took months of hard work by civil rights defenders to beat back initial threats to block any critical actions. Since the global media left town, several opposition organizers have been the target of police harassment, a tactic which was also used before the Games. Questions also remain around the "Black Bloc" action on Feb. 13; it seems likely that some of the

"masked anarchists" may have been police provocateurs.

The closure of the Tent Village, while media attention was focused on the men's hockey final and the closing ceremonies, shows that the police continue to enforce the rules established by the ruling class. From this perspective, the Games were a golden opportunity for the capitalist state to rehearse the massive security operations which may be required when popular mobilizations against the corporate attack become much larger.

And the "Olympic boom" predicted by Premier Campbell? As expected, many downtown hotels and restaurants did a roaring business during the Games. But others even a couple of blocks from the action missed out, and sales slumped badly in many neighbourhoods during February.

To paraphrase a famous Tom Paxton song: "Wasn't that a party! But look at the mess I'm in..." ●



Parents, students and teachers from Bayview Elementary protested funding shortfalls at this Feb. 28 rally. (Photo: K Cariou)

"To state the facts is not anti-semitism"

The Communist Party of Canada (Ontario) has issued a statement against a motion on "Israeli Apartheid Week," moved by Tory MPP Peter Shurman (Thornhill), and passed "unanimously" by about 30 MPPs in the Ontario Legislature on Feb. 25.

The motion reads: "In the opinion of this House, the term 'Israeli Apartheid Week' is condemned as it serves to incite hatred against Israel, a democratic state that respects the rule of law and human rights, and the use of the word 'apartheid' in this context diminishes the suffering of those who were victims of a true apartheid regime in South Africa."

As the CP (Ontario) statement says, "In fact, Israeli Apartheid Week is recognized in South Africa, in Canada, and around the world as a week of public events and activities focusing on peace in the Middle East and the main obstacle to peace in the region: Israeli expansionism, and Israel's refusal to abide by United Nations resolution 242 which calls for Israel to withdraw its troops to its pre-1967 borders, and for the creation of a Palestinian state."

"Also recognized around the world is the shameful US - and now Canada's - role in supporting Israel's flagrant and long-standing flaunting of this and many other UN resolutions, as well as the continuation and escalation of Israel's policies of war, occupation, assassination, kidnapping, torture and detention, partition, economic de-stabilization, starvation, the

withholding of water, the bulldozing of homes and shops, and the targeting of civilians generally and particularly in the

Ontario Communists oppose motion against Israeli Apartheid Week

bombing that levelled Gaza.

"These are war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by successive Israeli governments against the Palestinian people, against Israeli citizens, against the peoples of the Middle East and the world's peoples."

"Canada stands virtually alone on the global stage in its unconditional support for Israel, to the shame of millions of Canadians who look to their legislatures for political solutions that will lead to a just and lasting peace in the region - not threats and intimidation here at home."

"Canada's role in supporting these crimes against humanity is disgraceful and it is to the credit of the youth and academics on Ontario campuses, to the labour and democratic movements, and to progressives in some secular institutions, who were among the first (but by no means the last) to speak up for peace, democracy, and justice in the Middle East, and for democracy, truth, and justice in Canada."

"To state the facts and to demand a change in Canadian, US

and Israeli policy is not anti-semitism, it is the fresh air of democracy. The anti-semites are those who would equate criticism of Israel with anti-semitism, thus ascribing to all Jews an intrinsic or inherent support of Israeli government policy. But the truth is that many Jews in Israel, in Canada and elsewhere around the globe, do not support Israeli government policy and growing numbers are speaking out and becoming active and involved in campaigns such as the boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign. These

campaigns are also supported by anti-apartheid veterans such as COSATU and the ANC in South Africa.

"While it's no surprise that the Tories in Ontario are a small echo of their extremist and reactionary federal cousins, it is shocking and disturbing that the Ontario NDP also supported this resolution which threatens free speech and assembly here at home, while distorting the truth of Canada's foreign policy supporting war crimes and crimes against humanity abroad."

"The NDP should disavow itself of this motion, and clarify its policy

on the Middle East and on free speech and free assembly here at home. As things stand, the NDP caucus accepts that criticism of Israel is hate speech in Ontario. Is this new NDP policy?"

"For our part, the Communist Party is proud to sponsor and participate in the numerous events being organized this week, that will help Ontarians learn more about the causes of the crises in the Middle East and in the process help build the movement for a just political solution as laid out in UN resolution 242, for lasting peace and mutual security in the region." ●



History of Israeli Apartheid Week

Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) is an international series of events held in cities and campuses across the globe. IAW will be running for the sixth consecutive year in 2010, with events taking place between March 1-14 all over the world.

The past few years have seen a sharp increase of literature and analysis that has sought to document and challenge Israeli apartheid, including reports issued by major international bodies and human rights organizations and findings published by political leaders, thinkers, academics, and activists. Many of these efforts have highlighted the role that could be played by people and governments across the world in providing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle by exerting urgent pressure on Israel to alter its current structure and practices as an apartheid state...

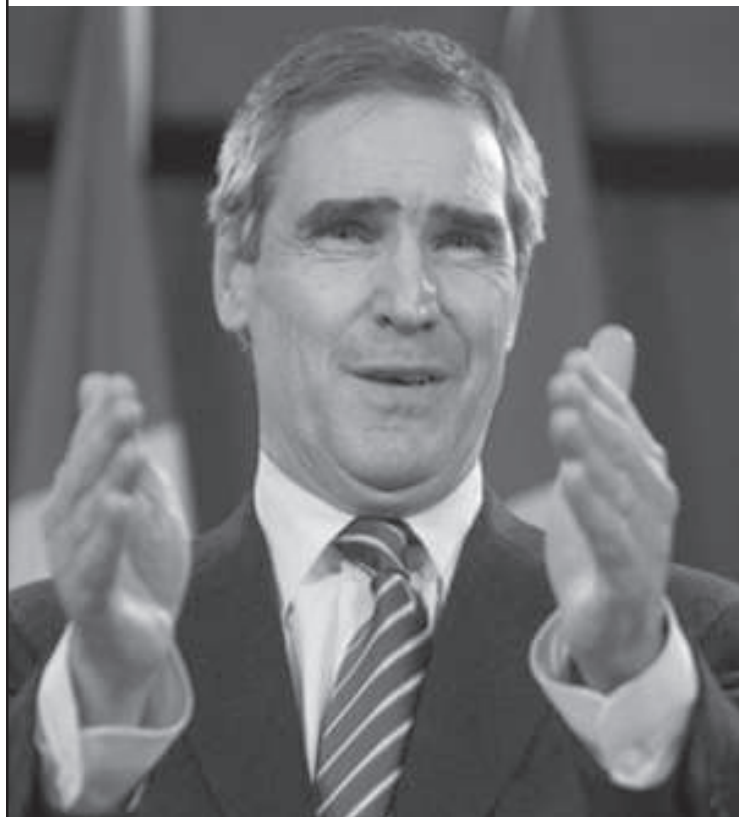
The aim of IAW is to contribute to this chorus of international opposition to Israeli apartheid and to bolster support for the BDS campaign in accordance with the demands outlined in the July 2005 Statement: full equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, an end to the occupation and colonization of all Arab lands - including the Golan Heights, the Occupied West Bank with East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip - and dismantling the Wall, and the protection of Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in U.N. resolution 194. ●

(From www.apartheidweek.org)

Will the real Michael Ignatieff please stand up?

"The very premise of Israeli Apartheid Week runs counter to our shared values... On behalf of the Liberal party of Canada and the Parliamentary caucus, I urge all Canadians to join with us in condemning Israeli Apartheid Week" (Michael Ignatieff, 2010)

"When I looked down at the West Bank, at the settlements like Crusader forts occupying the high ground, at the Israeli security cordon along the Jordan river closing off the Palestinian lands from Jordan, I knew I was not looking down at a state or the beginnings of one, but at a Bantustan, one of those pseudo-states created in the dying years of apartheid to keep the African population under control." (Michael Ignatieff, 2002)



Ignatieff reverses stand on Israeli Apartheid

Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff has reversed his position on the apartheid nature of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. In a March 1 statement condemning Israeli Apartheid Week, Ignatieff declared, "Apartheid is defined, in international law, as a crime against humanity. Israeli Apartheid Week is a deliberate attempt to portray the Jewish state as criminal."

This position contradicts an article Ignatieff wrote in 2002 for *The Guardian* as Director of the Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy. Describing a helicopterride over the Israeli-occupied West Bank, he wrote, "When I looked down at the West Bank, at the settlements like Crusader forts occupying the high ground, at the Israeli security cordon along the Jordan river closing off the Palestinian lands from Jordan, I knew I was not looking down at a state or the beginnings of one, but at a Bantustan, one of those pseudo-states created in the dying years of apartheid to keep the African population under control."

Ignatieff's *Guardian* article was

written soon after Israel had ransacked the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, drastically changing the post-Oslo landscape. In the article, he also admitted that "[a]bsorbing the entire Palestinian population into Israel as equal citizens would be an excellent idea, but it is neither what Palestinians want, nor is it compatible with the continued existence of Jewish majority rule in the Jewish state." "It is sad that a learned man like Mr. Ignatieff would reverse highly rational positions and conclusions under political pressure, presumably for political favour with pro-Israel elements in Canada," observed Thomas Woodley, President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME). "It is also disappointing to see him try to smear Israeli Apartheid Week activities as anti-Semitic, when the mainstream movement is focused exclusively on the actions and policies of the Israeli government."

Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) is a movement to bring attention to apartheid elements of the Israeli regime. It began in 2005, and has now

spread to dozens of cities around the world, including 11 in Canada this year.

As the CJPME points out, "Institutions of apartheid are quite overt in the Palestinian territories, militarily occupied by Israel since 1967. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, apartheid manifests itself in: Jewish-only roads; Jewish-only housing (i.e. colonies); the application of two different systems of law: military on Palestinians, and Israeli civil on Jewish colonists in the territories; the racially-defined course of the Wall; and selective policing and investigation; to mention a few. Apartheid also exists in Israel itself, though its institutions are more subtle: discriminatory family reunification law; confiscation of Palestinian land for exclusive Jewish use; racially-based funding of municipal development; racially-based approval of building permits; systemic inequalities for Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel; and discriminatory policing of Palestinian citizens of Israel; to mention a few." ●

Yet another pro-business Tory budget

PV Commentary

Corporate media outlets and business groups have hailed the Throne Speech which ended Stephen Harper's prorogation of Parliament, as well as Jim Flaherty's federal budget. But as feared by the labour and people's movements, the budget uses the federal deficit as a smokescreen to offer goodies to the corporate sector. For working people, that means major spending cuts. Federal public service workers will bear the brunt of \$6.8 billion in cuts to their departments through job losses and a pay freeze.

As the Canadian Labour Congress pointed out in a response to the budget, "deficits are not a problem when the total government debt today is the lowest of the advanced industrial countries (53% of GDP in 2008-2009 compared to 102% in 1995-1996), and interest rates are at an all-time low. The federal debt is just one-third of GDP, and the cost of servicing that debt is just 2% of GDP. The federal deficit is still less than 4% of national income, far lower than it was in the early to mid-1990s."

Despite the "deficit scare", corporate tax rates will continue to decline, from 22% when the Tories took office, down to 15%, the lowest rate in the G7 countries. This will cost the treasury a whopping \$9 billion in the coming fiscal year alone. The budget will benefit the business sector by reducing tariffs on manufacturing inputs, although this will make things even more difficult for the beleaguered Canadian manufacturing industry. Deregulation of the telecommunications and uranium mining sectors, and expansion of so-called "free trade" have big business applauding. The biggest winners appear to be transnational corporations, eager to expand their role in the Canadian economy.

This aggressive neo-con economic policy is matched on the political side with a combination of flag-waving, war memorials, and a so-called "law and order" agenda designed to take public attention away from the fact that over 1.5 million Canadians remain unemployed.

Overall, the Throne Speech and the budget confirm the minority Harper government's intention to govern as though they had a majority in Parliament to push their far-right agenda. The reluctance of the Opposition parties to block this strategy may allow the Tories to shape political debates heading into an election widely expected later this year.

The Opposition parties have argued that more should have been done to create jobs and combat



poverty, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff will allow the Tories to stay in office, waiting for his party's polling numbers to rise.

NDP leader Jack Layton has been critical of the Tories on some economic issues, but without advancing any substantial alternative. Early in the recession, Layton spoke to the Toronto Board of Trade, praising workers who had the "courage" to accept pay cuts. NDP governments in Manitoba and Nova Scotia continue to implement economic policies which are nearly identical with the big business parties.

Several key trade union leaders came down hard against the Tory budget and the Throne Speech.

"All political parties should vote to bring this government down now," said Dave Coles, president of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers, Canada's largest union in the forestry sector.

"Yet another budget, filled with rhetoric and platitudes, that does nothing for workers, families and communities in hundreds of forest-dependent communities," said Coles. "We saw the same show in last year's budget. In fact, in the past year, the Conservatives made many announcements about aid to the forest sector, yet we saw a record number of bankruptcies."

Coles warned that the budget contains "nothing for pensioners who are paying the price for the federal government's inaction, as companies facing bankruptcy seek to finance their debts with employee pension funds."

In past budgets, the CEP called for a national strategy to help rejuvenate the forest sector through investment in new products and the creation of value-added jobs. The Throne Speech made reference to this, said Coles, but "it's a case of too little, too late.

Without loan guarantees to keep mills alive, who will produce these new products?"

The Harper government should be defeated on its plans to sell off key telecommunications and broadcasting industries, said the CEP, which also represents many media workers.

"Telecommunications is now an integrated industry with the rest of the media; the sector is key for our cultural sovereignty and national security," said Peter Murdoch, the CEP's media vice-president. "It is incumbent on all opposition parties to draw a line in the sand on this issue. The cultural community has been of one voice on this issue, but where are the opposition parties? We need something more than rant and rhetoric."

The largest union of federal public-sector workers will mobilize against cuts in public sector programs and operations.

"This budget is a clear attack against quality public services," said John Gordon, president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. "The freeze on public-sector operation budgets, combined with an increase in deregulation and free trade, will further weaken the economy and hurt Canadians."

In a pre-budget news conference with other labour leaders, Gordon called for continued stimulus spending refocused on social infrastructure such as poverty reduction and expanding child and elder care. He also called for improving retirement security for all Canadians.

"What do we get instead? Seniors' Day," said Gordon. "This budget does nothing for workers in Canada. Investing in social infrastructures and in quality public services would have ensured job creation and economic growth. But this government failed in that direction."

Gordon has asked to meeting with the leaders of the opposition parties, calling on them to support his union's position.

"This budget does little to help Canadian workers secure their footing during a period of severe economic instability and is rooted in government-destroying, deeply ideological values," CAW President Ken Lewenza said.

A CAW statement says "the budget shifts the Conservative government policies further in favour of businesses and corporations, to the detriment of

average Canadians."

Taking credit for old news, the Tories re-announced the \$19 billion already planned for stimulus projects in 2010. What Canada needs is not "one-off" projects, Lewenza said, but investment in renewable energy projects, public transit improvements and other initiatives to spur sustainable and "green" economic development.

Despite widespread demands to improve EI eligibility criteria for all workers, the Tories did virtually nothing on this issue.

Since October 2008, almost 500,000 permanent, paid jobs have been lost as the manufacturing and forest industry crisis spread to other sectors. The Budget estimates that the stimulus package has saved or created 130,000 jobs. But unemployment is projected to average 8.5% this year, and 7.9% in 2011. The real rate of unemployment - counting people who have been forced into part-time jobs or have given up looking for jobs - is over 12%.

Only half of all unemployed workers qualify for benefits, and their average weekly benefit is just \$343. The more than 800,000 unemployed workers now on EI qualify for an average of just 38 weeks of benefits, and tens of thousands who lost their jobs in the early stages of the crisis have exhausted their claims. EI benefits have been temporarily extended for five weeks for workers who file claims before September 11, 2010, but provincial social assistance caseloads are already starting to rise rapidly.

"This is a tragic failure of our federal government at a time when many Canadian workers are looking

for leadership in protecting their jobs and their communities," said Ken Neumann, United Steelworkers National Director for Canada.

"Protecting Canadian communities should be the first order of business of our federal government. However, in the Throne Speech, Mr. Harper has indicated he is going to further abdicate his responsibility to ensure communities are the net beneficiaries of foreign ownership."

The Throne Speech emphasized that the government intends to "open Canada's doors further to venture capital and to foreign investment in key sectors."

"It is outrageous that this government has refused to side with Canadian communities and workers as foreign multinational after foreign multinational buy up devastating our resource communities," said Neumann. Instead of putting more teeth in the Investment Canada Act, he said, the government will add insult to the injury communities like Sudbury and Hamilton are experiencing.

He stressed that foreign takeovers by companies like Vale Inco and Xstrata have failed to be a "net benefit" to Canada as the law requires. Rather, these takeovers have resulted in thousands of lost jobs, the closing of vital plants and mills, and the transferring of industrial production outside our borders. The Harper government has failed to make those companies live up to their lawful requirements, and have even refused to make public the promises made by these companies. ●

Students slam federal budget

Student movement leaders have been similarly critical of the Tory budget.

"Chronic underfunding of Canada's post-secondary education system has resulted in skyrocketing tuition fees and record high levels of student debt," said Katherine Giroux-Bougard, National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students. "With a record number of Canadians enrolled in college or university, this budget does nothing to help students and their families afford an education."

Following the economic downturn in 2008, large numbers of Canadians returned to school for education or retraining. While many families' savings were depleted by the recession, tuition fees rose for over ninety percent of college and university students. Despite some steps to restore transfer payments earlier in the decade, federal funding for post-secondary education is roughly \$1 billion short of 1992 levels when accounting for inflation and population growth. Student loans owed to the federal government amount to almost \$13.5 billion. This figure does not include provincial student

loan debt or personal debt such as credit cards, lines of credit, bank loans, and family loans.

The budget fails to address the significant gap in post-secondary participation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, according to Jaden Keitlah, Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Caucus of the CFS.

"Education is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty," said Keitlah. "Each year underfunding shuts out thousands of qualified Aboriginal students from college and university."

Ottawa currently provides financial assistance to status First Nations and Inuit students through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). Despite Aboriginal peoples being the fastest growing demographic in Canada, and huge tuition increases, funding for the program has been capped at 2% growth per year. As a result, thousands of eligible Aboriginal students are unable to attend college and university. In addition, non-status First Nations and Métis students are currently ineligible for funding through the PSSSP. ●

- **Federal public sector workers will bear the brunt of \$6.8 billion in cuts**
- **Corporate tax cuts will cost \$9 billion in revenue**
- **Unemployment is projected to average 8.5% this year, and 7.9% in 2011. The real rate of unemployment - counting people who have been forced into part-time jobs or have given up looking for jobs - is over 12%.**
- **Only half of all unemployed workers qualify for benefits, and their average weekly benefit is just \$343.**



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Big layoffs in Belgium

In late January, General Motors announced the closing down of its Opel plant in Antwerp, and the loss of 2,600 jobs. On Feb. 23, it was the turn of the French group Carrefour to plunge Belgium into dismay: 21 stores - 14 supermarkets and 7 hypermarkets - are due to close by June, costing 1,762 jobs. Another 270 jobs will be lost with the closing down of the Termat warehouse, which serves the group's 117 stores. Carrefour's Belgian boss announced in the same breath that social benefits for the remaining workers would be reduced, which means shorter holidays and lower bonuses.

Workers reacted by staging wildcat strikes. The Belgian Unions' front (which includes Socialist, Liberal, and Christian confederations) has called a one-day general strike.

"Employees are told to accept wage cuts and harder working conditions, otherwise 5,000 jobs will be slashed," Belgian Labour Federation leader Anne Demelenne protested. She denounced a disastrous industrial policy, "that encouraged the financialization of the economy" and demanded that "subsidies should be given on condition that no jobs are cut." Carrefour, she pointed out, received 130 million euros in 2008 to concentrate its financial activities in Belgium.

Negotiations are due to start on March 3, but Belgium's labour minister, André Antoine, said he expects further job cuts, since Carrefour has shown every intention of closing 20 more stores and may leave the country altogether.

Apple admits using child labour

In an annual report on its suppliers, Apple has admitted that child labour was used at the factories that build its computers, iPods and mobile phones. At least eleven 15-year-old children were discovered working last year in three factories which supply Apple. The company did not name the offending factories, or say where they were based, but Apple has factories in China, Taiwan, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, the Czech Republic and the United States. Apple said the child workers are now no longer being used, or are no longer underage.

The report admits that at least 55 of the 102 factories that produce its goods were ignoring Apple's rule that staff cannot work more than 60 hours a week. Only 65% of the factories were paying their staff the correct wages and benefits, and 24 factories were not paying workers China's minimum wage of around 800 yuan (85 euros) a month. Only 61% of Apple's suppliers were following regulations to prevent injuries in the workplace, and just 57% had the correct environmental permits to operate.

The high environmental cost of Apple's products was revealed when three factories were

discovered to be shipping hazardous waste to unqualified disposal companies. In another case, 62 workers at a factory that manufactures products for Apple and Nokia have been poisoned by n-hexane, a toxic chemical that can cause muscular degeneration and blur eyesight. Apple has not



commented on the problems at the plant, which is run by Wintek, in the Chinese city of Suzhou. A spokesman for Wintek said that "almost all" of the affected workers were back at work, but that some remained in hospital. Wintek said n-hexane was commonly used in the technology industry, and that problems had arisen because some areas of the factory were not ventilated properly.

Strike closes Finnish ports

Finland's ports were closed at 6 am on March 4 due a strike by stevedores across the country. The strike is expected to halt about 80 per cent of Finland's foreign trade.

Talks between the Finnish Transport Workers' Union (AKT) and the Finnish Port Operators Association continued late into the night, but no agreement was reached. A government-appointed conciliator said that the parties were so far apart that it was not worth presenting a proposal for settlement. No date has been set for the next round of talks.

The Finnish Forest Industries Federation claims the strike could "wreck" the industry's recovery, costing about 30 million euros of export revenue a day.

Factory fire kills 21 workers

Bangladesh unions and international labour rights organisations are calling for action from companies and the government following a Feb. 25 factory fire which killed at least 21 workers and injured a further 50.

The Garib & Garib Sweater Factory in Gazipur has been producing knitwear for Swedish retailer H&M. Other current and previous buyers include Otto, 3Suisses International, Pimkie, Provera, Lindex, Littlewoods, Wal-Mart and JC Penny.

The fire, apparently caused by an electrical short circuit, started on the first floor of the seven story building at 9:30 pm. As the fire spread, workers became trapped on the floors above. Witnesses said that emergency exits were blocked, the front gate was locked and fire extinguishing equipment

was either missing or inappropriate. According to one survivor, rescue efforts were hampered by the fact that firefighters had to cut the window grills to access the building and rescue the trapped workers. Nobody on the scene could tell firefighters how many workers were in the factory.

The National Garment Workers Federation and other organisations supporting the workers and their families have called for the immediate arrest of the factory owner; immediate compensation payments to the families of the dead workers; medical treatment and compensation for the injured workers; and a credible investigation into the circumstances of the tragedy. The Bangladesh garment industry has a horrendous safety history. At least nine similar fires over the past decade have resulted in 273 deaths.

Portugal civil servants walk out

An estimated 300,000 Portuguese public sector workers walked off their jobs on March 4, closing schools, courts and hospitals in a protest strike against austerity measures imposed by the Socialist government. The strike was the biggest in years in Portugal, testing the minority government, which has been pressed by financial markets to cut spending after Greece's fiscal crisis turned the focus on weak euro zone members. Greece has targeted public employees in a sweeping austerity programme.

Unions members are angered by worsening conditions as pensions and other benefits are cut by the government, which this year froze public wages in an effort to please investors.

"There is immense discontent which you can see in the way workers behave," said Manuel Carvalho da Silva, leader of the 725,000-strong General Confederation of Portuguese Workers.

The country of 10 million people has been staggered by its worst economic downturn in decades. Unemployment, at 10 percent, is the highest in a quarter of a century.

The strike, coming on the heels of industrial action in Spain and Greece, raises pressure on the government as it prepares a plan to cut the budget deficit to below 3 percent of gross domestic product by 2013. Portuguese unions have threatened more strikes if the government follows through with proposals to extend a freeze on civil servant wages beyond this year.

The Portuguese government is also losing popularity due to allegations of interference with the media. A recent poll showed the number of Portuguese who have a positive image of Prime Minister Jose Socrates fell to 29.4% in February from 40.3% in January.

S. Africa unions slam power hikes

The Congress of South African Trade Unions may launch strikes before October over big electricity price rises, but has declined to say whether action could start before

the soccer World Cup in June.

"The last thing we want to do is disrupt the World Cup but our interest is bigger than the World Cup," according to COSATU secretary general Zwelinzima Vavi.

COSATU, consumers and businesses have condemned the power regulator's decision to grant state utility Eskom average annual price increases of more than 25 percent over the next three years to fund increases in capacity.

Vavi told reporters the federation would consult its two million members in March and April to discuss protest action. COSATU has already filed notice of a strike in October, which unions are obliged to do under South African labour law, but Vavi said they may file a notice for earlier action.

Anger is widespread in South Africa over the power price increases, which will mean a rise of 24.8 percent this year and even more in subsequent years. Critics say the hikes could lead to increased inflation and further slow the recovery from the country's first recession in nearly two decades.

Student strikes hit California

Walkouts, student strikes, and marches shook every level of California's crumbling education system on March 4. University of California students blocked access to campus entrances at Berkeley and Santa Cruz in the morning. In the afternoon, college students joined forces with K-12 students and teachers in downtown Oakland, San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles.

The rallies numbered in the thousands, including an estimated 20,000 in front of San Francisco's Civic Center. In Oakland and Sacramento, hundreds of marchers

confronted police after taking their protests onto the freeways.

The call for action against crippling cuts to the state's education budget - \$17 billion in two years - was taken up on nearly campus, and echoed by students, teachers, and campus union activists in 32 other states.

A major target is Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and state legislators as they prepare to chop another \$20 billion in this year's California budget. The state's universities and colleges have taken a 20 percent funding cut in three years, and student fees have exploded by 182 percent since 2002.

Israeli contractor revokes permits

A private Israeli security company has confiscated more than 400 work permits from Palestinian workers on the Kiryat Sefer, Modi'in, Benyamin, and Karkur settlements west of Ramallah. General Federation of Workers Union secretary-general Shaher Sa'd condemned the permit revocation, citing the move as continued abuse and exploitation of Palestinian workers. Union members say the permits were revoked as a penalty against the Palestinians' supervisors, who apparently failed to pay fees on time. Khalifa has urged the Ministry of Labor to find new employment for the ousted workers.

Over the last three years, thousands of workers have been duped by a gang of Israelis and Palestinians selling forged permits. The head of the operation was identified as a high-profile Israeli security officer working in the Civil Administration offices, Linda Salem, while her second in command was an Israeli working in the Ministry of the Interior, Mariah Hashash.

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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More general strikes against Greek "austerity"

PV Vancouver Bureau

The Greek Parliament has caved in to imperialist pressures, announcing a budget that raises taxes and cuts pensions and public sector salaries. But the struggle against the so-called "austerity measures" continues. A second general strike in nine days shut down much of the country on March 5, as the Communist-led trade union PAME and the civil service ADEDY union workers

walked off the job, closing banks, schools, public transit, flights and reducing hospitals to skeleton staff.

A third general strike has been announced for March 11, backed by the General Confederation of Employees of Greece (GSEE), Greece's largest umbrella trade union group for the private sector, and the civil servants' union ADEDY.

The March 5 strike saw an estimated two million workers take part in a 24-hour stoppage. Tens of

thousands of protestors filled Syntagma Square in the centre of Athens and spilled out beyond, led by unions, activist groups, the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and Syriza, the smaller left coalition.

Beginning in the northern inner area of Athens around Omonia Square, the march came down Stadiou Boulevard, taking more than an hour to reach the city centre. More than 40,000 protesters chanted "We won't pay for their crisis" with radical songs blaring from speaker vans coming behind.

The strike and protests came as officials from the EU, the IMF and other financial bodies arrived in Athens at the invitation of Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou to advise on further efforts to impose austerity measures on the country, in a bid to restructure its economy in line with EU requirements. Essentially, the strategy of Papandreou and his PASOK (social democratic) party is to impose the costs of the country's financial difficulties on the working people, while blaming the European Union.

Financial rating agency Fitch downgraded the ratings of the four major Greek banks, in response to what it said was the banks' "weakening asset quality due to anticipated fiscal adjustments in Greece." The decision will in turn raise yields on Greek bonds, further increasing the deficit.

"We don't deny there is a crisis," KKE MP Yanis Ghiokas told the Morning Star newspaper. "However it is not our crisis and we shouldn't pay for it. While Papandreou has talked about tax evasion, the corporate tax rate has been lowered from 45 percent to 25 percent. We want it raised back to make up the shortfall, and reduce reliance on indirect taxes."



Banner at the Stock Exchange in Athens demands to make the plutocrats pay for the crisis.

Ghiokas also rejected widely publicised claims that Papandreou enjoys up to 70 percent support for the measures.

"People are polled and they are asked 'does something need to be done,' and they say Yes. That is then taken as support," he laughed ruefully.

This view is backed by the wide participation of unions in the strike movement. On March 2, for example, 30,000 taxi drivers across Greece protested against new laws that would force them to provide receipts and keep accounts in order to increase tax income and eliminate fraud. Even tax inspectors have decided to take industrial action against the government's plans, calling a 48-hour strike of their own.

In response, Papandreou has increasingly resorted to fear tactics. Greece risks bankruptcy if it does not take radical measures, he warned on March 2, saying the country was in a "wartime situation."

The measures being proposed by his government include a 2-per-

cent increase in value-added tax, freezing public sector wages for 2012, a further fuel tax hike, a new tax on luxury goods and further raising the retirement age from 65 to 67.

March 16 is the deadline for the European Union to respond to the Greek government's strategy, deciding whether to provide financial assistance.

The KKE has called the success of the strikes "another response to the anti-people measures announced by the social-democrat government of PASOK such as wage and pension reductions, and increase of retirement age. The workers turned their backs on the call of the government to consent 'in order to save the country' from the crisis. They have shown that Greece is not in danger of bankruptcy and that big capital is responsible for the deficits and the debts. Before and during the crisis, big capital has made fabulous profits blackmailing the working and popular strata and placing the burden of the crisis on their shoulders." ●

The fall of Greece

Excerpt from "The Fall of Greece - Yes, It Really is a Capitalist Plot" by Diana Johnstone, Global Research

The crisis broke last autumn after George Papandreou's PASOK party won elections, took office and discovered that the cupboard was bare. The Greek government had cheated to get into the EU's euro zone in 2001 by cooking the books to cover deficits that would have disqualified it from membership in the common currency. The European Treaties capped the acceptable budget deficit at 3 per cent and public debt at 60 per cent of GDP respectively. In fact, this limit is being widely transgressed, quite openly by France.

But major scandal arrived with revelations that Greece's budget deficit reached 12.7 per cent in 2009, with a gross debt forecast for 2010 amounting to 125 per cent of GDP. Of course, European leaders got together to declare solidarity. But their speeches were designed not so much to reassure the increasingly angry and desperate Greek people as to soothe "the markets" - the real hidden almighty gods of the European Union.

The markets, like the ancient gods, have a great old time tormenting mere mortals in trouble, so their response to the Greek problem was naturally to rush to profit from it. For instance, when Greece is obliged to issue new bonds this year, the markets can blithely demand that Greece double its interest rates, on grounds of increased "risk" that Greece won't pay, thus making it that much harder for Greece to pay. Such is the logic of the free market.

What the EU leaders meant by "solidarity" in their appeal to the gods was not that they were going to pour public money into Greece, as they poured it into their troubled banks, but that they intended to squeeze the money owed the banks out of the Greek people. The squeezing is to take the forms made familiar over the past disastrous decades by the International Monetary Fund: the Greek state is enjoined to cut public expenses, which means firing public employees, cutting their overall earnings, delaying retirement, economizing on health care, raising taxes, and incidentally probably raising the jobless rate from 9.6 per cent to around 16 per cent, all with the glorious aim of bringing the deficit down to 8.7 per cent this year and thus appeasing the invisible gods of the market.

This just might propitiate both the gods and German leaders, who above all want to maintain the value of the euro. The financial markets will no doubt grab their pound of flesh in the form of increased interest rates, while the Greeks are bled by IMF-style "shock treatment". ●

Repression continues under new Honduran government

Emile Schepers, People's World

Death squads appear to be operating freely in Honduras, in spite of claims by the United States and Honduran leaders that the election of President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo of the conservative National Party on November 29 would produce peace and normality.

Unions and peasant and other popular organisations have stayed mobilised to be able to respond to efforts to roll back progressive changes instituted by former president Manuel Zelaya, such as increases in the minimum wage, labour and women's rights and land reform.

On February 25, parties unknown murdered an activist of the left wing resistance movement that arose after the April 28, 2009 coup d'état that overthrew Zelaya.

Claudia Larisa Brizuela Rodriguez was shot to death in front of her home in the northern city of San Pedro Sula. The killing happened in broad daylight and in full view of her children, ages 2 and 8.

Brizuela Rodriguez was an active member of the National People's Resistance Front (FNRP) and the daughter of the host of pro-Zelaya

Radio UNO, Pedro Brizuela. The radio station and its staff have been the target of numerous threats because of their opposition to the coup.

She is the third resistance leader to be murdered in this fashion since Lobo was sworn in as president on January 27. On February 3, FNRP activist Vanessa Yaneth Zepeda was kidnapped and later found murdered, her body thrown from a moving vehicle by unknown parties. She too was a mother of three children. At the time of her murder Zepeda was 29 years old and was considered to have great potential as a future mass leader in her country.

The third person to be murdered, on February 15, was Julio Funes, a labour leader in the Water and Sewage Workers Union and also a resistance activist, was shot down by four unknown men who came up to him in a taxi, in the town of Comayagua.

There are numerous other reports of threats, beatings, rapes and other attacks on people associated with pro-Zelaya and anti-coup unions, civic organisations and media entities. The FNRP says that the total number of such incidents is now in the hundreds just since Lobo took power. The Committee of Relatives of Detained and

Disappeared People in Honduras says that several hundred people have had to flee the country because of persecution. However, Honduran police sources claim that there is no proof that any of these incidents are politically motivated; pointing out that the crime rate in the country is very high.

Most countries in the region are still not affording diplomatic recognition to Lobo's government because of the dubious way the election was carried out, with a coup regime in power and troops in the streets repressing its opponents. The US government has been focusing on getting the Lobo regime recognised as well as promoting a "truth commission" headed by former Guatemalan Vice President Eduardo Stein to find out why the coup happened. Yet, many organisations oppose this, pointing out that the reasons for the coup are hardly a secret, and that the coup leaders have already arranged pardons for themselves while continuing to demand prosecution of Zelaya and several of his cabinet members. The resistance is focusing on the fight for a constituent assembly to rewrite the Honduran constitution to allow for much more mass participation in governance. ●

Visa campaign for Cuban Five families



The annual International Women's Day march in Toronto included supporters of the Cuban Five anti-terrorist fighters incarcerated in the United States for almost a decade. The group carried a banner calling for visitation rights for the wives and other family members of the five prisoners. An international campaign is underway to obtain visas for Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez, who have been denied entrance into the US to visit their husbands. Last Sept. 12, the US State Department denied visas for the eighth time to Olga and Adriana. About 100,000 postcards and 30,000 posters on the campaign have been distributed across 15 US states, and similar actions are being carried out in Canada. (PV photo: Ed Bil)

Rideau Canal builders denied historic recognition

By Kimball Cariou

A decision to deny commemoration for the labourers who built the Rideau Canal has stirred up controversy in the Ottawa area.

An application for recognition of the labourers was submitted to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, which turned down the proposal last December. The Board, which honours Canada's historically significant people, places and events, said it did not dispute the hard work of the canal labourers. However, it claimed, they did not meet the bar of "national historic significance," because their work "represented a typical and common form of labour at the time, and that it was not unusual, nor was it remarkable."

The request was put forward in 2006 by labour activist Kevin Dooley, a member of the Canal Workers Commemorative Group which succeeded in getting Parks Canada to place interpretive plaques honouring the workers

along the Canal.

About 1,000 manual labourers died between 1827 and 1832, digging the 202-kilometre Canal out of rocks, forests and lakes between Ottawa and Kingston. Many were Irish immigrants or French Canadians, who used picks, shovels, and axes, working under conditions of poverty, disease and danger.

"Terrible working conditions. Taking your life in your hands every day: rockfalls, drownings, explosions, malaria," Dooley told the *Ottawa Citizen*. "When you look at building a pioneer country - tens of thousands of destitute people coming from Ireland, building up that infrastructure that would build up that country - it reflects that this country was built on blood, sweat and tears."

"We do understand the suffering and the loss, but there were a lot of large-scale construction projects going on at the time, and how do we distinguish one from the other?" said Julie Dompierre, executive

secretary of the board. "Workers worked in similar conditions across the country. What's the story we're trying to tell here that makes this one nationally historically significant? And they did not see that emerge."

Many of the labourers were Irish immigrants, bringing little more than the clothes on their backs, forced to build their own shelters in work camps. Their strikes helped set the stage for the rise of unions during the expansion of industry in Canada, as Parks Canada historian William Wylie wrote to the Board.

Wylie noted the canal was designated as a National Historic Site in 1925 and Colonel By, appointed by Britain to head the construction, was named a National Historic Person in 1954.

"The present nomination turns this emphasis on its head by highlighting the labour-intensive nature of the project and focusing on the role of the people who did the actual physical work," Wylie wrote. "At great personal cost,



This monument to the Rideau Canal workers was unveiled several years ago, but efforts to achieve full recognition of their labour continue.

they did all the backbreaking and dangerous work. In this respect, the Irish labourers, together with the French Canadians and others, made a significant contribution to Canadian history and one that typifies the contributions of canal

construction workers generally in the first half of the 19th century."

In a Feb. 16 editorial, the *Ottawa Citizen* criticized the Board's decision, pointing out that the Rideau Canal played a critical role in blocking schemes by the United States to take over Canada from Britain.

"Building the Rideau Canal today would be a major undertaking, but to have done so in 1827, when Canada was but a collection of rocks, trees and water, was miraculous," continues the editorial. "The historic dimension of this project needs hardly be argued anymore. Indeed, the canal is already a National Historic Site of Canada and, of course, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Even more impressive is that the canal remains a working waterway. How many highways have come and gone and been repaved in the time the Rideau Canal has been operating? How many bridges and overpasses have been rebuilt? Roads are eroded by water but the canal is actually water. Its stonework and walls have withstood the pressures of moisture and freezing decade after decade. The Rideau Canal is a story worth telling, again and again." •

Overtime and low wages affect workers' health

CAW Health, Safety & Environment Newsletter/ CALM/BCNU

Workers who deal with long hours of unpaid overtime, low wages and no raises year after year steadily report worse health.

"The economic crisis may exacerbate these types of insecurities, as cutbacks in organizations are frequently manifested at the level of workers' jobs," says Heather Scott-Marshall, researcher for the Institute for Work and Health.

Scott-Marshall looked at how work-related insecurity affected the health of more than 2,300 workers over five years from 1999 to 2004. Work-related insecurity included low pay, no annual pay increases or job promotions, lack of pension coverage or union protection, and working long overtime hours.

Using information collected

through Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, she began with a group of workers who rated their health as good to excellent in 1999. She also broke down her findings to look at patterns among several groups: women, workers aged 45 to 54, and visible minorities, all of whom make up an increasing percentage of the workforce.

The most striking finding concerned the effect of overtime on health. When workers reported working more unpaid overtime hours than the average for a given year, their self-reported health declined more rapidly over time than for workers who reported fewer unpaid overtime hours. (The average number of overtime hours per week ranged from 6.8 to 8.7 hours.)

The health of older workers who had no pension coverage also declined more rapidly over time

than the health of older workers with pension benefits. So, too, did the health of workers earning low wages or having no annual pay increases compared to that of workers with higher wages or annual pay increases.

"Workplace policies and practices matter to the health of employees, particularly in relation to how these policies and practices affect job quality," says Scott-Marshall.

Interestingly, she did not find any significant differences between men and women, although women were more likely to be in insecure work situations. Indeed, compared to men, women experienced less rapid declines in health over time.

However, one in nine women in Canada is at risk of developing breast cancer during her lifetime, a 23 per cent increase since 1980. This may be related to work patterns.

In 2009, Denmark became the first country to compensate women, mainly nurses and airline attendants, for occupationally related breast cancer, due to their apparent excess risk as night shift workers.

In Canada, no provincial workers' compensation authority has ever recognized breast cancer as occupationally related. Breast cancer patients' occupational histories are rarely tracked. Recent data from Cancer Research Alliance shows only 1.9 per cent of \$390 million went to cancer prevention research in 2006.

Toxic-Free Canada's new publication, *Environmental exposure, the CancerSmart Guide to breast cancer prevention*, shows that environmental factors have been implicated in nearly three-quarters of breast cancer diagnoses made in North America and Europe. For more details, go to www.toxicfreecanada.ca. •

Pension changes needed to protect living standards

PublicValues/CALM

When federal and provincial finance ministers met in Whitehorse in December, two starkly differing reports were presented on Canada's retirement income system.

A report commissioned by the federal department of finance, authored by University of Calgary professor Jack Mintz, concluded, "Canadians are doing relatively well in ensuring they have adequate savings for their retirement."

The Mintz report focuses on the well being of today's retirees and overall savings rates based on research of recent retirement savings prior to the economic crisis, and not on the retirement prospects for young workers.

A different paper commissioned by the Ontario government came to a different conclusion suggesting that a substantial number of young Canadians face a decline in living standards in retirement. The paper was written by Bob Baldwin, member of the Ontario Expert Commission on Pensions and a former research director at the CLC.

Baldwin identified a number of trends that will make it harder for young workers to maintain their standard of living when they retire.

- The percentage of pre-retirement income covered by the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security pensions will likely

fall as a result of the wages of younger workers rising faster than CPP and OAS benefits.

- Contributions required to support traditional defined-benefit pension plans will likely rise as life spans get longer and as the active workforce continues to age.

- The value of public sector pension plans could decline as more plans make inflation protection contingent on investment returns that may not be achieved.

- Workforce participation among women is unlikely to increase more than has already occurred, thus limiting opportunities to increase the retirement income of baby-boomer couples.

- As the demand for a higher-educated workforce increases, later entry into the workforce and later child rearing will cut into families' ability to accumulate wealth.

- The projected rise in immigration will increase the percentage of workers who can look forward to partial OAS pensions, and increase the numbers who have to save more and work longer.

- More workers will experience unpredictable levels of income in retirement as employers move from defined-benefit to defined-contribution plans, or leave employees to save on their own.

Earlier research on the retirement savings of Canadians used data collected before the last two stock market crashes. Baldwin notes that the majority of retired people in Canada achieved a reasonable level of income in retirement compared to their pre-retirement incomes. "However, for a significant minority of elderly who had moderate to high earnings before retirement, retirement may have resulted in a noticeable decline in living standards," the report concludes. •

(PublicValues.ca is a project of the Golden Lake Institute and StraightGoods.ca)



2010 PV Calendar Still On Sale

Some copies of the 2010 People's Voice Calendar are still 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 justice, 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. •



McGuinty puts water at risk, says Council of Canadians

Following the Throne Speech in Ontario, the Council of Canadians is deeply concerned that the provincial government's policies are putting water at risk, given Premier McGuinty's

Icelanders reject "Debt Slavery"

Icelandic voters have delivered an overwhelming blow to bankers and governments attempting saddle them with billions of dollars in debts to foreign states stemming from the failure of a private bank. In a March 7 vote, over 93 percent of Icelanders rejected the proposal to pay back \$5.3 billion allegedly owed to the British and Dutch governments. Less than two percent voted yes. Afterward, people celebrated in the streets with fireworks.

"This is a strong 'No' from the Icelandic nation," said economist Magnus Arni Skulason. "The Icelandic public understands that we are sovereign and we have to be treated like a sovereign nation - not being bullied like the British and the Dutch have been doing."

According to critics of the proposal, the debts are not the responsibility of the Icelandic people, and the government bailouts to British and Dutch depositors on behalf of Iceland may have been illegal. Under the 5.5-percent-interest repayment plan worked out by governments before talks fell apart, each Icelander would have been forced to pay about \$135 per month for almost 10 years - about a fourth of average family income.

The Icelandic parliament agreed to make Icelanders foot the bill. But President Olafur Grimsson refused to sign the repayment agreement because he objected to the terms, sparking the referendum. ●

emphasis on privatization and "tech fixes" that create more problems than they solve.

"McGuinty is using people's genuine growing concern about water as a Trojan horse for widespread privatization," said Council of Canadians water campaigner Meera Karunanathan. "The Water Opportunities Act proposed in the Throne Speech will push water meters and corporatized water boards, which would remove local accountability and set the table for the biggest private water companies in the world to control our drinking water."

"The Premier's support for water cleanup technology while allowing unhindered development, water takings and mining - including for chromite - is the wrong approach," said Karunanathan. "If water is protected there is no need for new technology. The fact that he refuses to rip up the Certificate of

Approval for Site 41 means we should all be very skeptical about his government's alleged commitment to water."

"The Premier has indicated a willingness to sell off profitable crown corporations to pay down the deficit but his privatization agenda will leave Ontarians poorer and with less control over their most vital services," said CoC Ontario Regional Organizer Mark Calzavara. "Selling any amount of them now means that future governments will be able to sell off the rest whenever they decide they need extra cash. In addition to generating revenue for the government every year, these public institutions can provide a leading role in addressing the climate crisis through increased energy conservation and efficiency and the expansion of renewable energy. When profit becomes the only goal, these other benefits will disappear." ●

Think fast

Internet/CALM - The speed of modern life is 2.3 words per second, or about 100,000 words a day. That is the amount of verbiage bombarding the average person during the 12 hours they are typically awake and consuming information, according to a new study.

Through emails, texting, Internet surfing, reading and other media, our brains are being deluged with increasing quantities of information. Although we may not actively read 100,000 words a day, that is the approximate number reaching our eyes and ears. Add images, such as videos and computer games, and we are faced with the equivalent of 34 gigabytes of information each day - enough to overload the typical laptop inside a week.

The study, *How Much Information?*, from the University of California, San Diego, estimates the total amount of words consumed in the U.S. has more than doubled from 4,500 trillion in 1980 to 10,845 trillion in 2008. Those estimates do not include people simply talking to one another.

Total information consumption from televisions, computers and other media was estimated at 3.6 zettabytes (3.6 million gigabytes) in 2008. ●

BC YCL opposes new transit hike

The Young Communist League in British Columbia has expressed strong opposition to impending transit fare increases in the Vancouver region. On April 1, TransLink, the body appointed by the BC Liberals to operate the regional system, will impose a 10% price increase for FareSaver tickets and monthly passes.

"The cost of transit fares in the lower mainland has skyrocketed out of control, particularly in the last few years," says the YCL. "Far from a luxury, the public transit system is a necessity for thousands of working people and for the majority of youth and students. Increased fares continue to make the transit system less accessible for young workers and students. Already a trip to work and back for a young worker costs between \$5 and \$10 while minimum wages sits at \$8 for over eight years. Monthly passes will now cost from \$81 to as much as \$151. Many students are not covered under the various pass programs which offer lower rates."

Instead of endlessly increasing the costs of Translink operations, the YCL demands:

- A publicly owned and operated

transit system
- Meaningful public input in transit expansion decisions

- Democratically elected governance and the right to recall
- Expansion of transit services to meet the needs of those who use it; working people, youth, students, and the poor

- Funding through progressive taxation, not through high fares. This means taxing the rich and the corporate elite, not regressive taxes like the HST

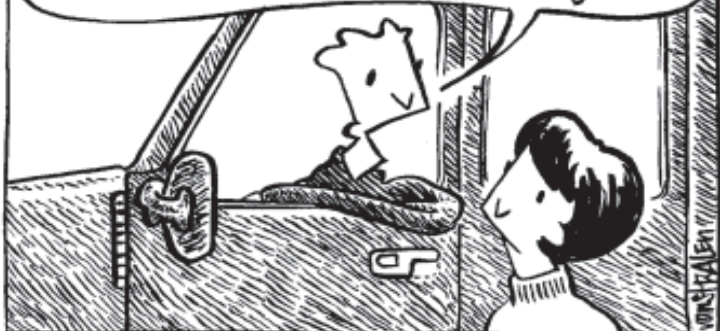
- A system of reduced fares for ALL students

- Reduction and eventual

elimination of fares to make transit accessible for all

"In the long term," the YCL says, "our struggle is for a socialist Canada where the working class, including youth and students, democratically own and control the wealth of society which they alone produce. When society's wealth is put to work improving the lives of the people rather than enriching a small group of elites, all manner of public services including public transit can be funded at never before seen levels to serve the needs of society as a whole." ●

▽ We bought an SUV so we could haul the kids around, but we had to sell them in order to fuel the darn thing...



What's Left

Victoria, BC

Canada and Israel: Building Apartheid, book launch with author Yves Engler, Thursday, March 25, 7:30 pm, University of Victoria, 105 Hickman Bldg., sponsored by Victoria Peace Coalition, UVic Social Justice Studies, Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid.

Williams Lake, BC

World Water Day, Monday, March 22, 4 pm, Cariboo Memorial Recreation, 525 Proctor St., join the Tsilhqot'in National Government and Council of Canadians on World Water Day to defend Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) from proposed Taseko Mines project. For travel pool info, email hgrewal@canadians.org.

New Westminster, BC

International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, rally against neo-Nazis, Sun., March 21, assemble 11 am at Braid Skytrain Station.

Vancouver, BC

International Women's Day Celebration, Sat., March 13, Britannia Cty. Centre Cafeteria (near Commercial @ Napier St.), program 6-9 pm, dance & live DJ 9-11:30 pm. Free admission, international food, cash bar, songs by Solidarity Notes choir. Info: IWD Organizing Ctee., 604-345-4765.

War resisters speak out, Sunday, March 21, 1-3 pm, Maritime Labour Centre, 1880 Triumph St., with Ron Kovic (speaking from Los Angeles), Rodney Watson (from his sanctuary in Vancouver), and Jeremy Hinzman (from Toronto), presented by Vancouver War Resisters Support Campaign.

Left Film Night and People's Voice Pasta Dinner, proceeds to PV Drive, Sun., March 21, 5 pm, Centre for Socialist Education, 706 Clark Drive. Organized by Vancouver East Club CPC, tickets \$12, vegetarian option available, call 604-255-2041 for info. Followed at 7 pm by screening of Michael Moore's "Capitalism: A Love Story."

Canada and Israel: Building Apartheid, book launch with author Yves Engler, Wed., March 24, 7 pm, W2 Community Media, 112 W. Hastings, tour sponsored by Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights and Independent Jewish Voices.

Edmonton, AB

Take Back the Night, Sat., March 27, 7-10 pm, women & girls only, gather at Alberta Ave. Community League, 9210-118 Ave. Demand an end to violence against women! Candle-lighting ceremony at 8 pm.

May Day Cabaret, Saturday, May 1, 7 pm, Ukrainian Centre, 11018-97 St., featuring Notre Dame des Bananes choir and Maria Dunn, tickets \$15 (\$8 low-income), call Naomi, 465-7893.

Winnipeg, MB

Marxism course, classes underway; new students still welcome. 586-7824 or cpc-mb@mts.net.

Toronto, ON

People's Voice Fund Drive launch, Sat., March 27, 7 pm, GCDO Hall, 290 Danforth (Chester subway). Cash bar, food, live music, greetings from PV Editor Kimball Cariou. Info: 416-469-2446.

Bethune Dinner prize winner

The winner of the door prize at this year's Bethune Dinner, held on Feb. 27, is Kerry Wilson from Hamilton. The prize is a one-week trip for two to Cuba, the first free territory of the Americas! Congratulations to Kerry, and thanks to all who sold tickets and helped make the Bethune dinner a success.

People's Voice deadlines:

APRIL 1-15 issue: Thursday, March 18

APRIL 16-30 issue: Thursday, April 8

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

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www.comunist-party.ca

www.peoplesvoice.ca

www.ycl-ljc.ca

www.solidnet.org

The Mossad hit and Israel's path of self-destruction

Hasan Abu Nimah, *The Electronic Intifada*

The assassination of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, a Hamas official in Dubai, almost certainly by a death squad dispatched by Israel's Mossad, is by no means the first such aggression against the sovereignty of another state. While Israel has literally gotten away with murder thousands of times, was this one killing too far?

Israel has a long, bloody history of murder, sabotage and outright terrorism all over Europe, in Beirut, Tunis, Amman, Damascus and now Dubai. And that is just what we know about. All of this is allegedly in "self-defence" against "terrorism" even though the Zionist movement in Palestine invented the sort of modern terrorism for which the Middle East became known.

It started with countless Zionist bomb attacks on Palestinian civilians from the 1930s, often in markets and cafes, the bombing of the King David and Semiramis hotels in Jerusalem in the 1940s claiming dozens of innocent lives, and the murder of UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte.

These crimes, on top of the long history of massacres of Palestinians, Lebanese and other Arabs over the past six decades, were all worn as badges of honour by Zionist leaders including Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir who later became prime ministers.

Current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who according to reports personally approved the killing of al-Mabhouh, must have thought it would be a great achievement celebrated by the "civilised" world that is engaged still in a "war on terror." The so-called "international community," after all, has helped Israel isolate Hamas and labels it a "terrorist" organisation despite Hamas' diplomatic overtures, repeated offers of truces and ceasefires, and the

mandate it won at the ballot box.

But it is not working out that way this time. Counting on the usual international complicity was not that unrealistic on Israel's part. Indeed there has been no clear condemnation of the act of extrajudicial execution of al-Mabhouh, in a hotel room, apparently by electrocution and smothering with a pillow according to *The Daily Mail* (UK). What has been greeted with indignation is the forging of passports and identity theft.

Meeting in Brussels, EU foreign ministers strongly condemned the abuse of passports, but did not have the courage to publicly name Israel even though several governments including the UK and Ireland had already summoned their Israeli ambassadors. The British and Irish foreign ministers even directly confronted their Israeli

Israel has a long, bloody history of murder, sabotage and outright terrorism all over Europe, in Beirut, Tunis, Amman, Damascus and now Dubai. And that is just what we know about. All of this is allegedly in "self-defence" against "terrorism" even though the Zionist movement in Palestine invented the sort of modern terrorism for which the Middle East became known.

counterpart Avigdor Lieberman, who was also in Brussels.

Mossad, the Israeli intelligence and international murder agency, has a long history of using fake and stolen passports of countries including Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany (and now Australia). It notoriously used fake Canadian passports during the attempted murder of Hamas leader Khaled Meshal in Amman in 1997. Countries view their passports much like their currencies - their credibility and value must be defended. The lives of their citizens may well depend on it; an Irish, British or German citizen has to be able to travel all over the world without fear that he or she will be

suspected of being a Mossad assassin.

Several years ago, New Zealand, a country of three million people, broke off diplomatic relations with Israel over the use of its passports by Mossad. But apart from that example, most countries have been too timid to confront Israel. That Lieberman refused to provide any additional information or even acknowledge an Israeli role in the Dubai attack when he met with the European foreign ministers is a sign that Israel still feels safe displaying arrogance and lawlessness, because it knows the "international community" has never dared to hold it accountable.

This time, however, Israeli arrogance may have exceeded the limits of what has been tolerated so far, and turned what was supposed to be an "heroic" act into a scandal with far-reaching consequences.

There are some specific and general factors that contribute to that. First, the crime was committed on the territory of a moderate Arab country whose support for peace with Israel has been practically translated into unofficial bilateral relations.

A high-level Israeli delegation had been in the country only days before the Mossad hit squad arrived. Showing so much contempt for a leading moderate Arab state gives a very bad example for any other state that might consider softening its position toward Israel (as the United States had been demanding as "confidence-building measures" for the "peace process").

A second factor is that Israel mostly used stolen identities of living people, whose very public shock and fear at waking up to find their names splashed over the newspapers and linked to a murder, could not easily be hidden.

A third factor is that the Israeli adventure in Dubai carries the traits of just the kind of terrorist act the world has been mobilising to fight. Improvements in passport security



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were introduced in recent years to stop terrorism, but here is a country violating and sabotaging these security measures in order to commit murder.

We cannot assume that the assassination in Dubai will be the straw that breaks the back of Israeli immunity and impunity, but we can be sure that the general erosion of Israel's standing as a result, particularly of its aggressive recent wars on Lebanon and Gaza, means that what was tolerated by the world more easily five or ten years ago, is less tolerated now. Global public disgust at Israeli actions has reached levels that may require governments who normally prefer complicity and silence than action.

And when there was a "peace process," Israel's crimes particularly against Palestinians were ignored in the interests of not damaging relations or slowing momentum toward the hoped-for successful conclusion. But no one today - except the most naive or delusional - believes that there is any peace process. Despite

Israel's efforts to blame the Palestinians, only the most pro-Israel extremists deny that Israel's aggressive colonisation in Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as the siege on Gaza, is what killed any prospect of a negotiated solution for the foreseeable future.

Consider that just days before the passport affair broke out, Israel was once again pressuring Britain to change its laws to protect Israeli officials from arrest for war crimes should they visit London. Although British officials had publicly expressed shameful enthusiasm to tailor British law to meet Israeli needs, they may now face real public opposition if they attempt to change it. What interest does the UK have to protect the likes of Tzipi Livni from arrest if the facts and evidence make it necessary?

The truth is that as it becomes desperate, Israel is turning ever more wild and dangerous, not only for its neighbours but for world peace, security and prosperity. Without constant pressure from the Israel lobby, there may have been no invasion of Iraq. Today, it is Israel and its apologists who are constantly inciting confrontation and war against Iran when most of this region wants peace and good relations.

Even if the countries harmed by Israel's latest brazen act do not hold it properly and adequately accountable - as they must and should - it appears that it is on a path of self-destruction. The great fear is how much more harm it will do to others on the way.

(Hasan Abu Nimah is the former permanent representative of Jordan at the United Nations.)

More Americans going hungry

Information Clearinghouse

According to a study from the largest food bank operator in the U.S., the number of Americans in need of food aid has jumped 46 percent in three years, including a 50 percent jump in the number of children needing food assistance, and a 64 percent increase in hunger in senior citizens' homes.

The study, *Hunger in America 2010*, found that 37 million people, or roughly one in eight U.S. residents, received food aid in 2009, up 46 percent from a similar survey carried out in 2006.

"Clearly, the economic recession, resulting in dramatically increasing unemployment nationwide, has driven unprecedented, sharp increases in the need for emergency food assistance and enrollment in federal nutrition programs," said Vicki Escarra, president and CEO of Feeding America, which operates some 200 food banks.

The study found a growing number of people having to make difficult choices about what to spend their dwindling dollars on, with the rising cost of health care a major

contributing factor to hunger.

"More than 46 percent of clients served report having to choose between paying for utilities or heating fuel and food; 39 percent said they had to choose between paying for rent or a mortgage and food; 34 percent report having to choose between paying for medical bills and food; and 35 percent must choose between transportation and food," the study reports.

Another recent report from the Food Research and Action Center found that nearly one in five in the US - 18.5 percent - report having gone hungry in the past year, up from 16.3 percent at the start of 2008. Households with children were even likelier to experience hunger, with nearly a quarter reporting hunger in the past year.

The Feeding America study finds that 70 percent of emergency food centers are reporting "one or more problems that threaten their ability to continue operating."

"While we have reached many more people over the past four years, the need of hungry Americans far outpaces our current level of service," Escarra said.

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