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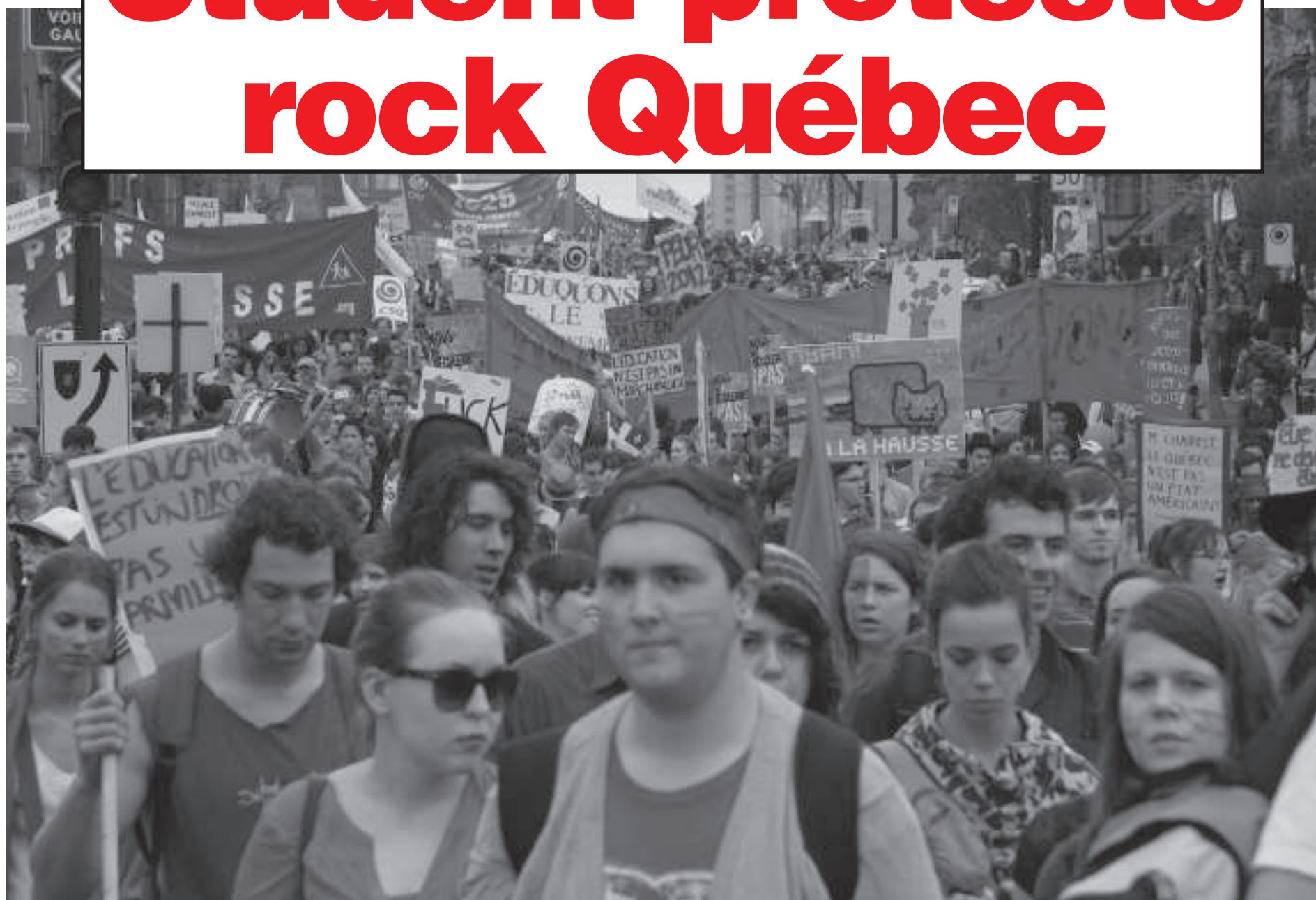
people's VOICE

**Toronto Library
workers strike**

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Student protests rock Québec



Demonstrators on Beri Street in Montreal. Photo by Marianne Breton-Fontaine

"Students in Quebec have stepped-up their escalating strike action for accessible education, with a massive demonstration of over 250,000 people on March 22. The mobilization far exceeded the expectations of organizers, creating a human river of protestors as wide as four lanes of traffic and almost eight kilometres long, effectively shutting down the center of Montreal. The student demonstration, one of the largest protest marches in Canadian history, has rocked Quebec and upped the anti for a movement on a collision course with the provincial Charest Liberal government."

FULL REPORT on pages 6 & 7

3 BC teachers

British Columbia teachers are considering the next steps in their fight for a new collective agreement. The BC Teachers Federation met during March to adopt an Action Plan.

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Enbridge colonialism

The Enbridge Corporation's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline is yet another example of modern imperialism and colonization, says a PV writer.

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Syria commentary

As civic strife continues in Syria, imperialist intervention remains a real and dangerous possibility. Progressive parties in Iran and Syria have issued new statements on this volatile situation.

Library Workers strike as Toronto talks continue

By Liz Rowley

About 2,300 Toronto Public Library (TPL) workers were still on strike as People's Voice went to press. At the same time, the negotiating committee for 23,000 inside workers, members of CUPE Local 79, were taking the City's final offer to a membership vote. It's the first time ever Local 79 negotiators have declined to make a recommendation, which indicates the viciousness of the employer in this round of bargaining.

According to sources, the deal is similar to the one offered in February to the outside workers, members of CUPE 416, which included significant concessions on job security as well as lump sum payments which reduced actual wage increases in two of the contract's four years.

Prior to the city's final offer made March 26, talks had moved into overtime, with the union publicly stating its determination to stay at the bargaining table and hammer out an agreement. The union would only strike, they said, if the City moved to unilaterally impose new terms and conditions of employment. If the final offer is rejected by the membership on March 28, 23,000 inside workers will join already striking librarians on the picket lines.

Imposing new terms and conditions was exactly what the City did to library workers, members of CUPE Local 4948, after the clock ran out on the old agreement. The city's actions were a clear message that the employer wanted to force the workers out. The City wanted to create a crisis *a la* Mike Harris, to stoke the fires of anger and resentment against striking workers.

Library workers had no choice but to hit the bricks March 18th, after the city unilaterally imposed

new terms and conditions - exactly those that the Ford administration wanted in the new collective agreement.

As in the earlier negotiations with the city's outside workers, the key issue is job security. More than half of all city workers are part-timers, who have no benefits, low wages, and less than 24 hours of work per week without any job security. Many have worked part-time for years, with all of the experience and qualifications of full-time workers. Many take on other part-time jobs just to make ends meet.

The union has tried to achieve secure full-time jobs at the same rates of pay and with the benefits provided to full-time workers, but never made the fight to get it. Now the Ford administration is fighting to get rid of these achievements won over decades for full-time workers. Attacking job security clauses as "jobs for life" for "fat cat" workers, the employer aims to decapitate opposition while slashing municipal jobs and services.

This year the City has not only rejected fairness for part-timers, it has eliminated workers through the 2012 budget cuts, and aims to eliminate hundreds more. The goal is to contract out and privatize Toronto's city services and public sector workforce.

The Ford administration has ties to a corporation which administers public library systems in the US, and which is waiting in the wings to take over Toronto's library system - the biggest in Canada.

But the union, and the vast network of friends and supporters of the TPL, have brought their well-organized opposition to the assault on the library system, which to many epitomizes mass public education, culture, freedom and democracy.

The Writers' Union of Canada, representing 2,000 writers

including Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Susan Swan, Writers' Union Chair Greg Hollingshead and others, have vocally opposed the attack since the Mayor and his brother Doug said they would close library branches in a heartbeat. The Mayor's plan to eliminate job security will clear the way to closures, and to contracting out.

Indeed the right-wing majority on Council want to blow up and cut down programs and services built up by Toronto ratepayers and tenants over generations. If they succeed in Toronto, they'll be in your town next.

In January and February, the city's outside workers, members of CUPE Local 416, faced the same demands for deep concessions that other city workers and local unions are now fighting. The leadership of Local 416 recommended the contract, which was grudgingly supported by its members. But half declined to vote, and the final vote on the deal was never revealed.

The contract saw job security provisions removed for workers

with less than 15 years of seniority, opening the way for more layoffs and next year's contracting out of garbage collection in the east end of the city. The four-year agreement also replaced some wage increases with lump sum payments, ensuring those parts of the basic wage package will have to be fought for all over again.

Local 79's inside workers voted to give their negotiating committee a strike mandate of 85%. If the City unilaterally alters the terms and conditions of work, they may be forced to join the library workers, who have strong public support.

Ford has already made numerous false steps in his dealings with labour, and with City Council's majority of right-wing members who still don't like to be ordered around or attacked for daring to disagree. Recent defeats on the transit file have exposed the cracks in the right-wing camp, and the weakness of the Mayor and his "cabinet" in the face of an angry public.

There is every reason to believe that public opinion will oppose the Mayor's agenda. The union's announcement that it will stay at the

What You Can Do!

- * Join the OFL and its social and community allies on April 21 to oppose massive cuts to public services and social programs.
- * Bring a resolution of support for city workers in your union local, ratepayers or tenants organization, or fightback group. Use the opportunity to explain the issues. Invite a striker to speak.
- * Call into Goldhawk Live and other TV and radio phone-in shows. Tell them you support city workers and oppose the Mayor's agenda.
- * Walk with striking library workers on the picket lines.

bargaining table until an agreement is reached, walking out only if the city imposes new terms and conditions, is a recipe for public support. Now the job for progressives is to organize that support and to force the city to negotiate a fair collective agreement for city workers - in the libraries, and throughout the city. ●

PEOPLE'S VOICE FUND DRIVE: \$50,000

Fund Drive nears one-third point

We occasionally get asked a fair question: why does People's Voice hold a Fund Drive every year? Aren't your costs covered by the subscription price?

The short answer is the same for any newspaper - subscription rates and vendor sales pay for only part of the costs of publishing. For the capitalist press, the bulk of the "revenue stream" comes from advertising. The largest-circulation dailies in Canada charge

thousands of dollars per page, and even work out elaborate arrangements to disguise advertising as "news content".

Here at PV, it costs over 60 cents to mail each copy to a subscriber, plus (on average) about 15 cents to print each paper (at a union shop in the Montreal area) beyond a certain minimum press run. It also costs us a certain amount to ship the press run to our offices in Toronto and Vancouver, where the mailing to subscribers is organized. When a reader sends us the regular \$30 subscription rate, this covers these basic costs, with a few bucks left over for other expenses. Of course, some of our subscribers are low-income earners who pay the \$15 rate, which does not cover the basics.

Nor does this account for staff and office expenses, and various miscellaneous costs. As a result, we are dependent on the solidarity and generosity of our subscribers, as the working class has done in Canada for ninety years. Your contributions to our \$50,000 Fund Drive make it possible to keep printing, and to circulate People's Voice at picket lines, demonstrations, workplaces,

libraries, and many other places from coast to coast to coast.

As of March 26, a bit less than four weeks into our Drive, we can report that we have received nearly **\$15,918, which brings us to 31.8% towards our goal.** Leading the way is Ontario, which has now turned in \$6,073, followed closely by British Columbia with \$5035. Alberta supporters have already turned in \$3030, along with \$500 from Manitoba, \$730 from Quebec, \$120 from the Atlantic region, and \$80 from Saskatchewan. Another \$350 in donations from the U.S. and other areas accounts for our total at this time.

Thanks to everyone who took part in the Pasta Dinner for the Fund Drive, organized by the Vancouver East Club as part of their recent Left Film Night. Other upcoming events in B.C. include the annual Mother's Day (May 12) Pancake Breakfast held by the Burnaby Club, and the June 2 Victory Banquet at the Russian Hall in Vancouver. Watch our next issue for more details.

Once again, thanks to all who have sent in donations so far. Your solidarity is deeply appreciated! ●

Marking 90th anniversary of the working class press



Our series of front pages from the 90 years of the working class press in Canada continues with the Oct. 12, 1964 edition of the weekly Canadian Tribune. The cover story reports that 600 Canadians working on the "Distant Early Warning" (DEW) line radar stations were demanding wage parity with U.S. personnel doing similar maintenance work. IBEW union members were threatened that if they went on strike, U.S. Air Force troops would fly in and take their jobs. The same issue includes articles about a convention of Quebec's Confederation of National Trade Unions, police brutality against Toronto Typographical Union strikers, and an international symposium on "Marxism and the contemporary world" held in Berlin. One interesting highlight: excerpts from a speech to a Saskatchewan NDP convention by Stephen Lewis, then a 26-year-old NDP MPP for Scarborough West.

Here's my contribution to the PV Fund Drive!

Enclosed please find my donation of \$_____ to the 2012 People's Voice Press Fund Drive.

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BC teachers adopt Action Plan to repeal Bill 22

PV Vancouver Bureau

"Somebody has to stand up to these bullies."

That simple phrase is heard often in British Columbia these days, as the battle continues between the BC Teachers Federation and the Christy Clark Liberal government. The next stage of the struggle may include a full-scale walkout by teachers, in defiance of Bill 22, the badly misnamed "Education Improvement Act."

Among much of the working class, there's a strong sentiment that while Clark may prevail in this bitter contract fight, the province's 41,000 teachers have become a courageous example of how to resist an arrogant bully.

In fact, even if the Premier gets her way, using Bill 22 to impose a "net-zero" contract on the teachers may be a pyrrhic victory, ending in her defeat at the polls in May 2013. The question for all public sector workers then could become: what will an NDP government do differently?

That question is already on the minds of labour activists and supporters across the province these days. In the BCTF dispute, it has become obvious that the Clark government's real agenda is not just to freeze the pay of teachers, but to push the door to privatized education even further open.

The 700 delegates to the BCTF's 96th Annual General Meeting certainly understood this crucial issue. Meeting in Vancouver from

March 17 to 21, the delegates spent most of their time debating the best way to respond to Bill 22, which contains serious attacks on teachers' rights and students' learning.

In response, delegates adopted a plan of action with the ultimate goal of forcing the repeal of the legislation.

"Christy Clark as education minister started this fight 10 years ago with her legislation that stripped teachers' collective agreements of our bargaining rights and of guarantees for quality learning conditions for students," said BCTF President Susan Lambert, who was re-elected with the support of almost two-thirds of the delegates. "The BC Supreme Court found her bills to be illegal and unconstitutional, yet her government has done nothing to show respect for the ruling, for public education or for the teachers and students of BC. In fact they're violating the rights of teachers and cutting the same services to students with Bill 22."

The BCTF will mount a legal challenge to Bill 22, said Lambert, who sharply criticized Education Minister George Abbott's handling of this round of bargaining.

"He is attempting to abdicate any accountability for the crisis this government has created in our schools and the broken relationship with the teachers of this province," Lambert said. "It's completely irresponsible to think he can impose this draconian legislation with its sham mediation



The BCTF struggle for a fair new collective agreement has seen solidarity actions across the province, including a demonstration by some 15,000 teachers and supporters in Victoria. Above are some of the 2,000 students and allies who gathered at the Vancouver Art Gallery on March 2. (Photo: K. Cariou)

process, order a cooling off period, and the next day head to China to recruit more fee-paying international students to our underfunded public schools."

Despite the threat of enormous fines against individual teachers and their union, the action plan includes the possibility of a vote on a full withdrawal of services, or a withdrawal of all voluntary extra-curricular activities. The plan will be put to a province-wide vote of teachers on April 17 and 18.

Local teacher associations in about a dozen school districts have already voted independently to withdraw participation in extra-curricular voluntary activities, one of the only legal options left for them under the terms of Bill 22.

Under the action plan, teachers will continue teaching and will prepare year-end report cards. As they have throughout their job action which began with the 2011-12 school year, teachers will continue to provide the marks required for graduation, post-secondary applications and scholarships.

The action plan also foresees motivating teachers to make defense of public education a major issue in the provincial election.

"Across BC teachers will be active in their communities, working hard to ensure a strong and stable public education system as part of the foundation of our democracy and for the rights of all children to an education that meets their individual learning needs," Lambert said. "We need a government that supports teachers and parents as we work together to provide the very best for BC kids, not one that claims to put families first while attacking all the vital public services people need."

Ironically, Education Minister George Abbott was in China during the AGM, promoting the "BC education brand" at an international student recruitment fair.

"It's a stunning contradiction," said Lambert. "George Abbott is off in Shanghai praising our public education system with the goal of luring more fee-paying foreign students to study here. Meanwhile, he's actively undermining the quality of education with the legislation he brought in. On top of that, he's spending millions of tax dollars on a major ad campaign attacking the very teachers who are the heart and soul of public education."

"Ten years ago this government

"totally unethical proposition" that would do nothing to improve learning conditions for kids, while trying to encourage teachers to trade their ethics for money.

As Lambert said, "We've been advocating for decades for the conditions that kids need. All students deserve to be in a class where they can get the individual care and attention they need, but after a decade of cuts BC teachers can't keep on filling the gaps for a generation of children growing up in the highest child poverty rate in Canada."

An increasing number of BC school boards have raised serious concerns about Bill 22 and the damage it will cause to the working relationships within school communities. The imposition of severe limitations on the mediation process is seen as a major obstacle.

One powerful letter was sent to Abbott by the Sunshine Coast Board of Education chair Silas White, stating that "the Bill is rather complicated, which is our first complaint. It may be thrilling for a few legislators to take on so many BC Education issues in one swoop, but mixing heavy fines for any teacher job action in the next few months, with confirmations of contract strips from a decade ago, with the correction of ill-advised legislation like Bill 33, with the unusual move of legislating a new line of funding, with forced and micro-managed mediation, with the threat of legislated contractual changes supposedly necessary for the BC Education Plan, is a tough sell under the umbrella of 'Education Improvement.' If there are improvements in this bill, they seem to be wrapped up as a sheep in wolf's clothing."

The letter lists a devastating point-by-point critique of the assumptions and claims underlying Bill 22, making it clear that the legislation will force local school boards to impose a whole new round of cutbacks, to the detriment of both teachers and students.

For those who keep a count, Bill 22 is the 20th piece of BC Liberal legislation since 2001 that targets teachers. ●

Election fraud protests continue



March 31 has been set as a second day of action across Canada to call for a real investigation into voter suppression tactics employed by the Harper Tories during the 2011 election. Organizers are demanding real consequences to the findings, and for by-elections in regions affected by the scandal, if not a full election. Seen here are some of the protesters at the March 11 rally held in Toronto. (PV photo: Ed Bil)

NIAGARA NEWS BULLETIN

People's Voice Niagara Bureau

* 210 Fort Erie slots workers will be laid off by the province as it implements Drummond Report austerity cuts, even though they make a profit. The mayor publicly rebuked the province for destroying hundreds of lives without any consultation. The slots indirectly subsidize the adjacent race track whose closure means more layoffs.

* After Brock University recognized 38 ESL teachers organized with CUPE Local 72 and negotiated a contract at the 11th hour under a public campaign, management reneged saying they "didn't realize" they had agreed to no contracting out. The teachers have resumed their campaign and are heading into a strike.

* Health care workers associated with the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) rallied outside the Niagara Falls MPPs office against the coming Drummond Report austerity cuts, pointing out Syria would have more beds per person than Ontario, already the lowest in Canada. OCHU's President told reporters "we will not allow 12,000 beds to be closed on our watch."

* Lincoln County Human Society workers of CUPE 1287, striking against two-tier wages and benefits, are still being ignored by management who want new workers to pay for their bad decisions resulting in less revenue. Although 4 of 15 workers crossed the picket line on the first day, the rest are still holding strong. ●

MAY DAY 2012 GREETING ADS

To mark May Day 2012, 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 will be April 20; if PV is preparing the layout, the deadline is April 18. Please check with us about the format if your ad is being sent electronically.

Ad rates (based on 5 column page):

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EDITORIALS

No move left for NDP

With Thomas Mulcair as the new leader of the NDP, it appears that Canada's mass social democratic party will likely continue its long-term drift to the political centre. In fact, none of the seven candidates on the ballot were clearly associated with strong left positions, even on issues where working people favour a move towards genuine progressive reforms.

For example, a growing majority of voters support increased taxes on the wealthy and the corporations, to help shift the tax burden from the needy to the greedy and to help pay for vital social programs. Yet no NDP leadership candidate made more than a timid gesture in this direction. Nor did any of them mention the need for public ownership of critical economic sectors such as the energy industry - even though nearly half of Canadians back such a demand, according to surveys over recent years.

Mulcair brings a particularly poor record on issues of peace and war to his new post. Canada already has a viciously anti-Palestinian Prime Minister, and now we also have an Official Opposition leader who has been vehemently pro-Israel in his public statements. Nor did Mr. Mulcair raise any objection to the Harper government's aggressive militarist foreign policy. The NDP has shifted from its identification with the anti-war movement of a decade ago, into the camp of those who support imperialist interventions in the name of "humanitarian intervention."

None of this is any big surprise - the NDP has been on a trajectory away from left policies for many years. But those who counsel "keeping our powder dry" by blocking attempts to mobilize public opposition against the Harper Tories - so that we can elect an NDP government in 2015 - are making a huge mistake. More than ever, the main focus of opposition to the Tory/corporate agenda must be extraparliamentary, in our workplaces and communities.

Budget for the rich, not workers

The first Tory majority budget was delivered two days after this PV went to the printshop. But the outlines were hinted at for weeks by Conservative cabinet ministers. Like the rest of the capitalist world, Canada remains in a protracted economic crisis, and the working class will be forced to pay the price through austerity and war.

Of course, the Tories argue that their "responsible leadership" has left Canada in a relatively well-off position. Measured by the rebound in corporate profits and share prices since the 2008 meltdown, that may be true for the wealthy. But for the 1.5 million Canadians officially counted as jobless, or working people struggling to survive on low wages, or Aboriginal peoples who remain in dire poverty, there is no "recovery" or security.

Instead of tackling the serious problems of unemployment and poverty, the Tories are joining the global capitalist attack on pension eligibility. Instead of investing in desperately needed low-income housing and affordable child care, they pour billions of taxpayer dollars into prisons, cops, and military hardware. Rather than increase taxes on corporate profits, they download costs to the provinces as a way to artificially "reduce" the federal deficit.

Whenever the Harperites say that "everyone" must help to tackle the deficit, remember that Canada's economic problems were created by big business and the wealthy - those who reap the benefits of lower taxes on profits and the highest income brackets. By "everyone", they mean the workers who create the wealth of our society, but have no voice in determining the future of Canada. In our system, budgets are just another form of class war by the rich against the poor. More than ever, we need to build a powerful coalition of the working class and its allies to change course, to win policies for the needy, not the greedy!

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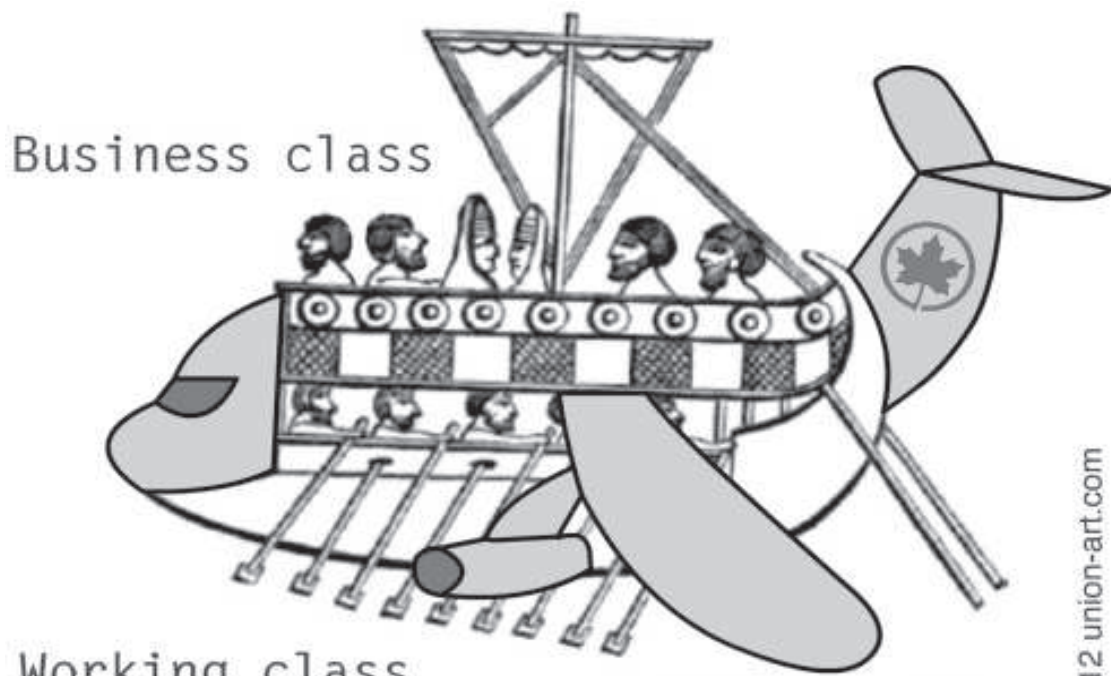
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LETTERS

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706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1 or
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Working class

Raitt dreams of
wage slaves

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Syria: heralding a change in the international strategic situation?

By Ernesto Gomez Abascal,
Granma International

Evidently the Cold War ended in the final decade of the 20th century with the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the European socialist countries, but the U.S. plan of domination enshrined in the Project for the New American Century, drawn up by a group of neoconservative and Zionist strategists, remains in the minds of Washington politicians.

However, Democrat and Republican priorities on the imperial agenda remain. These are: control of the Near East given its energy resources and strategic position, the elimination of governments who stand up to or interfere with its interests, and to exclude the emergence of new rival powers.

While it is a fact that things have not been going well for the U.S. government in Afghanistan and Iraq, this has not resulted in a change of plans, but merely adjustments to the new conditions. Imperialism has many years of experience in methods of regime change, as we in Latin America know very well.

In Libya, included for years on the list of seven countries whose governments had to be changed, the United States was initially successful, having taken advantage of some inconsistencies on the part of Muammar Gaddafi, and certain lack of popularity for the leader. Then came an intensive media campaign, Arab League cover and backing, which facilitated a UN Security Council resolution, and subsequently, a large part of the country's

infrastructure was bombed by NATO aircraft, thousands of Libyans were killed, and a government subordinated to its interests was installed in Tripoli. Libya's large oil reserves are now more accessible to U.S. and

encouraged by those in other countries of the region, and which were repressed particularly where they originated, in the southern city of Daraa, right on the border with Jordan.

The media war machine was immediately activated against Syria, as was the case with Libya. In Cuba, Venezuela and other Latin America countries we have become experts on how this operates, having suffered it for many years, and we also know how to combat it, despite disadvantageous material conditions given the enormous propaganda resources possessed by the enemy. Even with the abovementioned defects, the Syrian government was practising a non-sectarian policy in the religious context and one of relative social justice, anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist. It has been an ally of progressive causes in the South and an obstacle to U.S. and Israeli plans in the region. Allegations intended to discredit it, to the effect that its policy of peace serves Israeli interests, have no serious foundation.

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guest
editorial

European corporations, although the chaos created in the country has created an uncertain future.

While this was taking place in Libya, the CIA and its allies in the NATO special services were working on the next country listed, Syria. It has been acknowledged that hundreds of Syrians were trained and armed in Turkey and other countries ill disposed toward the Damascus government, especially those of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and in areas of the Lebanon under the control of the March 14 alliance (directed by the Hariri clan, pro-Saudi and linked to the French government). These Syrians are predominantly Sunnis and members of the illegal and extremist Muslim Brotherhood, but include mercenaries from other Arab countries, and commandos trained for special operations. These have received a large supply of modern armaments, sophisticated communications equipment and information via NATO satellite networks.

The predominantly Alawite Damascus government, a strong ally of Iran and a supporter of the Lebanese patriotic forces headed by Hezbollah, which controls power in Beirut, had genuine problems - as do all countries in the region and a large part of the world, including the most developed countries. These include repression, lack of democracy, and corruption, and this has provoked malaise within the population, leading to demonstrations initially



Ernesto Gomez Abascal

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Understanding the limits of private capital

By Robert Griffiths

At the end of World War I the Labour Party produced a blueprint for a new society.

Labour And The New Social Order (1918) pointed out that the war had not only consumed millions of lives and a large proportion of the world's accumulated wealth - it threatened the very basis of capitalist society itself.

"The individualist system of capitalist production, based on the private ownership and competitive administration of land and capital, with its reckless 'profiteering' and wage-slavery; with its glorification of the unhampered struggle for the means of life and its hypocritical pretence of the 'survival of the fittest;' with the monstrous inequality of circumstances which it produces and the degradation and brutalisation, both moral and spiritual, resulting therefrom, may, we hope, indeed have received a death-blow," it said.

Labour's new programme argued that the production and distribution of society's material wealth should be planned co-operatively in order to achieve greater equality for all.

Democracy would be extended into industry, thereby "setting free" all workers by hand or brain to serve the interests of the community rather than those of shareholders.

The Labour Party was confident that the British people would not tolerate forever the

"disorganisation, waste and inefficiency involved in the abandonment of British industry to a jostling crowd of separate private employers with their minds bent not on the service of the community but - by the very law of their being - only on the utmost possible profiteering."

What was needed in the postwar period was "a genuinely scientific reorganisation of the nation's industry, no longer deflected by individual profiteering, on the basis of the common ownership of the

haulage, civil aviation, gas and electricity, the postwar Labour government implemented a model of nationalisation that would benefit capitalists and their system.

Generous compensation was given to private owners who had already made their fortunes running these vital industries into the ground.

For their overvalued shares and "loss" of future profits the railway magnates were given transport stock worth £1 billion, yielding 3 per cent a year over 25-40 years.

The coalmine owners received £164 million in Treasury stock for their dirty, dangerous and under-mechanised mines.

Many former owners and managers were awarded senior posts in the new nationalised corporations, along with top Establishment civil servants and military personnel.

The few token "representatives" from the workers' side were invariably right-wing trade union bureaucrats - obliged in any case to serve the interests of the corporation and not its workforce. The workers were denied any meaningful contribution to the management or progress of the industries they understood better than anyone else.

For decades those state corporations provided cheap fuel and transport services to the private sector. Their private suppliers enjoyed "cost-plus" contracts that guaranteed handsome profits - although that did not stop them defrauding the

National Coal Board (NCB) and other state enterprises on an enormous scale.

These policies amounted to a strategy of "capitalist nationalisation," rather than one of expropriating the monopoly capitalists in the interests of the working class and society generally.

Limiting the possibilities for reform, the Labour model of public ownership placed the nationalised corporations beyond direct parliamentary accountability and control.

It was commonplace for ministers to refuse to answer questions from MPs about the policies of the nationalised industries on the grounds that the government had no responsibility for such matters. During the postwar years the public corporations made enormous progress in terms of rationalising and modernising their industries.

In the first decade after nationalisation they increased their investment in fixed assets by 713 per cent compared with a 135 per cent increase in private industry. By 1958 they accounted for a third of all new capital investment in Britain with just a sixth of the private sector's funds.

Most of this public investment had to be funded from state loans and grants because the state sector's total gross operating surplus (£3.4bn) was wiped out by depreciation (£2.957bn) and interest payments (£1.466bn).

The private sector, on the other hand, doled out more than a quarter of its gross operating profits in bank interest and dividends. It

would never have given the priority needed for investment in the coal, gas, electricity and railway industries.

Despite the handicaps placed on them by pro-capitalist personnel, pricing and contracting policies - and by a laudable social obligation to provide universal services - most of the state corporations turned in a gross operating surplus much of the time.

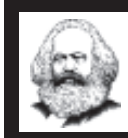
The electricity and gas boards accumulated a net surplus of £578m in the 20 years from nationalisation (to 1966), even after providing for depreciation, compensation and taxation. The coal board incurred a net deficit of just £116m. Over the same period these corporations invested £7bn in fixed assets.

Between 1975 and 1978, the NCB, the British Gas Corporation, the electricity boards, the Post Office, the British Airways Board, British Airports Authority, British Railways Board, British Transport Docks Board, National Bus Company and British Aerospace were all highly profitable.

But there were also periods when the NCB, the British Railways Board and the British Steel Corporation made heavy losses after taking depreciation and interest payments into account.

For example a gross surplus on the railways of £363m between 1948 and 1957 was turned into a net loss of £224m after depreciation (£349m) and interest related to compensation (£238m). Between 1960 and 1968 - and after Beeching's mass closure of "uneconomic" lines, the railways board still made

see LIMITS, page 11



Marxist Theory

means of production."

Instead, the postwar Liberal-Tory government returned control of the coalmines and railways to their owners, whose profits had been generously guaranteed by the state during the war years.

These monopolists then inflicted another 20 years of intensive exploitation, dangerous working conditions, industrial anarchy, social insecurity, underinvestment and profiteering on workers and the economy.

Nationalisation of Britain's basic industries after the second world war became unavoidable. Only state ownership could ensure the levels of reorganisation, rationalisation, co-ordination, planning and investment needed for reconstruction. But in order to minimise opposition to public ownership of coal, rail, road

SPEAKING FRANKLY

The Northern Gateway Pipeline: a modern episode of imperialism and colonization

By Roy Lynn Piepenburg, Edmonton

In January, a consultation process was begun by the Canadian government regarding the planned building of the Northern Gateway Pipeline, which would run from Bruderheim, Alberta to Kitimat, B.C. The media have reported the overwhelming opposition of affected First Nations to the project along that route. Enbridge Corporation, the promoters of the pipeline, have tried to placate that opposition by offering First Nations business and employment development opportunities during the construction phase.

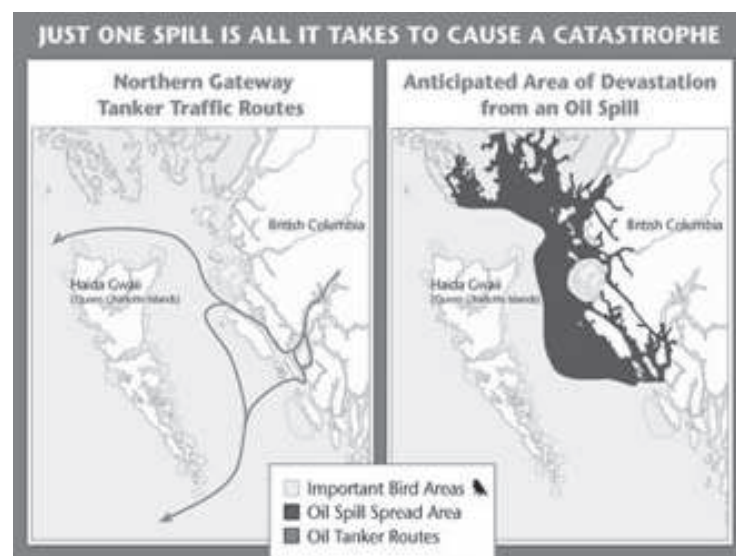
On March 2, the QMI Agency reported that 60 Alberta mayors, including Mayor Stephen Mandell of Edmonton, had formed a coalition called the Capital Region Board Pipeline Linkages Strategy Committee, a group aimed at promoting and advocating global expansion of the Alberta oil sands. They are so much like Frank Oliver and Richard Secord, exploiters and colonists, that operated in the Edmonton area 1880-90. They must be reminded that their position is totally in conflict with numerous First Nations that legitimately object to the project.

When the Driftpile First Nation (Treaty 8 area of northern Alberta) presented to the three-member panel in late January, their message was clearly resonated. The female

Chief and elders testified that oil, gas and logging operations in their area had already had a damaging effect on their traditional hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering activities. They pleaded to the panel, saying the developer must do everything possible not to worsen their social and economic situation. No assurances could be immediately given.

There is considerable Canadian political history linked to this subject. Recall that in the 1970s a Mackenzie Valley pipeline was under consideration. The Dene and Métis people who lived along that great river expressed broad opposition to the project for mainly two reasons: a) they could foresee serious potential environmental damage in the future, and b) the "aboriginal title" matter of the people had not been resolved. Justice Thomas Berger held extensive consultation meetings and, in the end, concurred with the people in saying the project should be shelved for legitimate reasons. There is a similarity between this scenario and what has unfolded in Alberta and B.C. today.

The British Crown decreed by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that Indian lands in North America could only be purchased from the First Nations with the permission of the government. This was to prevent exploitation of the indigenous peoples. A century later, after the confederation of



Canada, the Crown began negotiating numbered Indian treaties in what is now parts of the North West Territories, the prairies, including Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and part of northeastern British Columbia. The vast region of central western British Columbia is the home of First Nations, almost all of whom have not entered into treaties with the federal Crown.

In 1969, the Trudeau government, in its White Paper on Indian Policy, intended to abolish Indian status and reserves, leading to absolute assimilation of the people. A strong public reaction resulted in the reversal of that policy. Next, in 1973, in a classic case, the Supreme Court of Canada

ruled unequivocally that First Nations did hold "aboriginal title" to the land they occupied. They were seen as in possession of the land and had the right to retain it. Corporations - mining companies, for example - are not satisfied with that aspect of the political and economic order. When the Canadian Constitution was repatriated from Britain in April 1982, Sections 25 and 35, pertaining to the legitimate treaty and aboriginal rights of Indian, Métis and Inuit people, were inserted into it. To ignore that profound reality, will always be a violation of fundamental democracy in this country.

The federal, Alberta and British Columbia governments are all

aware of the legitimacy of the "aboriginal title" right, but in the case of the Northern Gateway pipeline, they prefer to deflect that historic matter. Acting like colonizers of the past four centuries or so, they have a preference for following a policy of "eminent domain," a manner to usurp the true land rights of indigenous people. That is the precise policy that the ill-informed 60 mayors in Alberta want to steadfastly follow.

So, what strategy is followed? It's cunning, it sometimes works, but it is not politically or morally correct. The grand design is to induce First Nations (who are in the way, or vocal opponents) to subscribe to the project, while being promised economic benefits in the short-term. That's a tonic that would presumably make First Nations forget about their "aboriginal title." Remember that 38 years have passed since the momentous S.C.C. decision on that title, and Canada and British Columbia have been incredibly slow and ineffective in settling these land title issues.

Governments, corporate citizens and the 60 mayors have an obligation to respect the historic, legal rights of First Nations pertaining to lands and resources. Now is as good a time as any to demonstrate action far superior to exploitative practices and expedience associated with colonization. ●

Quebec student strike puts Charest Liberals on defensive

By Johan Boyden

Students in Quebec have stepped-up their escalating strike action for accessible education, with a massive demonstration of over 250,000 people on March 22. The mobilization far exceeded the expectations of organizers, creating a human river of protestors as wide as four lanes of traffic and almost eight kilometres long, effectively shutting down the center of Montreal.

The student demonstration, one of the largest protest marches in Canadian history, has rocked Quebec and “upped the anti” for a movement on a collision course with the provincial Charest Liberal government.

“We are just getting started” the students spokesperson said at the rally, calling for all groups in Quebec society to join them, including labour, and by all accounts it looks like the struggle here could be just beginning.

Hard work pays off

The mass demonstrations come after a long haul of organizing by students and allies. Sharp debates on campus just a year ago questioned whether the student unions could forge the unity necessary to launch an effective resistance, and if the students themselves were willing to fight.

The initial announcement of a significant increase in fees by the Charest government came in 2010, but it was only with the 2011 provincial budget that the exact amount of the hike was revealed: \$325 annually over five years, adding up to \$1,625 more per year,

plus ancillary fees. The 2012 budget, tabled a few days before the demonstration, continues this plan of attack by the Liberals - but in new conditions.

Months of sustained resistance starting in December have seen tens of thousands of students, professors, parents, labour and community movements on the streets virtually every week. Even right-wing media commentators are calling for the government to negotiate with the students.

Now the question is whether the students can take the moral pressure of their strike and join forces with the labour movement.

Militancy and unity

Opposition to the tuition hike has already brought together a politically disparate group of student unions known as much for their militant actions as in-fighting. Quebec has a long history of student mobilization. This is the eighth student strike in the last four decades, and the fruits of that pressure has been to keep fees frozen, giving Quebec the most accessible education in Canada - something the government, ironically, never fails to remind people with an all-out media blitz of radio and TV campaign ads in support of the increase.

The stories of the student mobilizations are a hard lesson in the power of unity. Students collectively marched out classes - often for over a month at a time - in 1968, 1974, 1986, 1988, 1996, 2005. While not all students hit the streets, so many acted together

that, despite fear mongering by university administrations, they were not academically penalized. All but one mobilization forced the government to back down.

But the one mobilization that did fold, in 1988, fractured the movement and leading to the end of the l'Association nationale des Etudiantes et des Etudiants du Québec (ANEQQ).

The left - CLASSE

Today there are four centers of student unity and many independent unions. The largest group driving the mobilizations is called CLASSE - the Broad Coalition of the Association pour une solidarité syndicale Etudiante. CLASSE temporarily unites a number of student unions not affiliated with any broader association with the much more established Association for Student Union Solidarité (ASSE).

Known as a “left pole” of the student movement, ASSE presents itself as different kind of progressive student association, taking a bold, combative and sometimes provocative approach to the struggle. It emphasizes student union democracy, feminism, as well as anti-globalization and social issues beyond the campus.

It is also home to different leftist and anarchist tendencies that continue to have difficulty setting aside differences over tactics like direct action and violence, the labour movement, or what to make of free education in socialist Cuba. ASSE is led by two spokespersons, a man and a woman, but the young

face of Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois has come to express the fighting voice of this movement.

The FEUQ

Larger in membership numbers and media presence but with perhaps less capacity to mobilize are the two Federations. La FECQ et la FEUQ, represent college and university students respectively. There is also a loose network of student unions including McGill and Laval, but the FECQ and the FEUQ are bigger players.

The FEUQ is particularly dominated by one of the more powerful conservative student association in Quebec, based at the University of Montreal - sometimes represented as the Eye of Mordor from Lord of the Rings, a play on the prominent main tower of that university.

The FEUQ is wedded to the Parti Québécois and is susceptible to a more electoral strategy - wipe the tuition fees increases out by voting the Charest Liberals out of office in the upcoming provincial election. But the Federations have their own internal differences and contradictions, including many that play a positive role in this battle of ideas.

Marching together

Despite these different strategies, the movements have managed to march together - literally. Last semester the students came to a unity agreement including on the demand to reduce fees and strike and staged a mass action. The agreed upon date for

Aerial shot of March 22 rally in Montreal

the strike to begin was March 22, but as early as February student union members voted to support immediate action and walk out of class. The March 22 demonstration was initially called by the FECQ-FEUQ, but perhaps unexpectedly Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois announced on the very popular Quebec TV show *Tout le monde en parle* that the CLASSE would join forces.

Today there now just under 200,000 students on what is called an unlimited general strike, meaning no participation in classes for unlimited period. For the March 22 demonstration a total of 300,000 students voted for a limited strike, such as a one day of action. This includes the lion's share of the French-language students and, since our report in the March 16-31 issue of *People's Voice*, a much larger number of English-language schools. Several departments in Dawson College, and the universities of Concordia and McGill have now voted on this question and caught the winds of change in their sails.

Strike votes, taken at a General Assembly of all students in a department-organized student union, are taking place every week and more students are steadily joining the unlimited strike. But the clock is ticking down. In a month the semester will be over. The moral pressure of the strike, the most effective weapon of the students, will be gone.

Unity with Labour is key

That's why all eyes are now on the actions of the labour movement, who so far have



Photo courtesy of CLASSE



(Photo: Paul Lamontagne)

To Alma!

For their part the students are outreaching to labour. A week after the mass mobilization, the CLASSE held a media conference calling for mass congress or meeting of students, labour and other people's movements - a popular assembly to discuss and develop a common way forward. The students have announced that they are re-defining the struggle: no longer is it just a question of access to education, but a social movement aimed at confronting the austerity measures of the Charest Liberal government on the streets.

This echoes and idea now widely debated in progressive circles (and which the Communist Party of Quebec was an early advocate of), "to convene an Estates General of organized labour, popular movements, and students who could help develop a plan of mobilization and joint action to roll back government attack."

Positively, the CLASSE will bring their next congress far up north, hours beyond Quebec City into the northern town of Alma. This is where the workers at the transnational corporation, Rio Tinto Alcan have been locked-out since New Year's Day because they refused an attack on their jobs and the use of subcontractors.

Other good news for the students is that as far as the public debate goes, they appear to have won. Opinion polls now not only show strong support of their cause, but also a shift in the discussion.

Before, the Charest Liberals had claimed that an increase in fees is necessary because of a revenue shortfall. But the consistent work of the students around the question of corporate profits and the need for progressive taxation has pushed the government onto the defensive.

In reality the fee hike represents 4.7% of the total budget devoted to universities in 2016-2017. Now the Charest Liberals are emphasizing the need to raise fees to maintain the quality of Quebec's education and, for example, the recruitment of star academics in the international arena.

Scandals contradicting the government's claims keep leaking out. For example, part of the ongoing crisis within the administration at Concordia University has seen several presidents resign. The latest hire for the president's chair demanded the school purchase his ritzy West Island mansion, because it would not sell on the depressed housing market.

Other voices

The government is being supported by a group of students calling for a so-called "rational" approach to fees based on the logic of the market and big business. From McGill, these students have dubious ties including to the Quebec Liberal Party, the self-proclaimed racist off-shoot of the US Tea Party movement, a right-wing think tank, and an openly pro-Harper, pro-war McGill student newspaper.

Likewise, Francois Legault, leader of the fledgling ultra-right Coalition Avenir Québec, has called for even higher tuition increases and, on the secondary level, the abolition of school boards. While these forces are the darlings of the media, the student mobilizations are hurting their popularity.

Significantly, Claude Castonguay, a Quebec businessman and prominent Liberal, has come out with the demand that Charest sit down and negotiate with the students. While not supporting the demand of reduced fees and instead calling for higher bursaries, Castonguay's call is more proof of cracks on the government side.

On the other hand, the Parti Québécois has made similar statements advocating for a major meeting with students, and a smaller step-by-step increase (which is more or less what the government is doing now, only slower), while Quebec Solidaire has called for the abolition of tuition fees. QS MNA Amir Khadir has also called for greater

unity with the labour movement and supported the idea of a general meeting of people's forces.

The way forward

The Young Communist League of Québec and the Communist Party of Québec are both active in the struggles of the students as well.

"We were more than two hundred thousand [people] yelling at the top of our lungs against the increase in tuition fees. The students must not back up, and do what it takes to build unity and stop Charest," Nicolas Welsh, chair of the YCL-Q told *People's Voice*.

The LJC-Q and PCQ are both calling for the students to maintain their actions, and to expand their unity and build with labour and all people's forces towards a general

political strike to defeat the government.

The Communists are also demanding a living stipend for students, grants not loans, and the elimination of fees, protected this and other rights of youth with a Charter of Rights for youth and students.

The sense of optimism, confidence and energy necessary for such a fight seemed evident at the March 22 rally. People walked out onto their balconies and waved red pillow cases and tea towels in solidarity with the marchers. A solid line of people was still exiting the main congregation square when the front of the rally reached its terminus, eight kilometres away, and the speeches began.

This is history in the making and we can not go back. More demonstrations are planned in the coming weeks. ●



Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, one of CLASSE's spokespersons.

Cuts hit deep in TDSB

By S. Howard Kaplan

Toronto District School Board Trustees recently got the details of staff recommendations for cutting the expected \$85 million shortfall in provincial funding of public education in Toronto. The recommended cuts include 587 full-time equivalent (FTE) school staff reductions, including secondary school teachers, vice-principals, reading recovery teachers, literacy/numeracy coaches, intensive support programs, special education support staff, clerical staff, safety monitors, aquatics instructors, education assistants (EA's), and caretaking. This will be partially offset by the effects of implementing full day kindergarten (FDK), where the TDSB will take on additional elementary teachers, ECE's (early childhood educators), and lunch-room supervisors.

There has been a growing ground-swell of opposition to these cuts, more than half of which (the EA's) will be women on the lowest salary rungs, and the most vulnerable.

Most Trustees have heard the opposition. Whether most will oppose the cuts when it really counts - at the Board meetings - is another story. Groups of Trustees have been meeting informally to discuss ways of avoiding these layoffs, which are purely budget-driven, not needs-driven.

The issue of EA's has been a thorn in the side of Provincial Governments since at least the time of Mike Harris in the late 1990s. It

is claimed that no other school board uses EA's. But there is no other school board like the TDSB, with about 250,000 students from all over the world in over 400 schools, many of them falling apart because of delayed maintenance. (The TDSB has typically robbed capital budgets to pay for operating/program shortfalls.)

Ontario's school budgets almost exclusively come from the Ministry of Education through the infamous "Funding Formula" or Grants for Student Needs (GSNs). The GSNs are designed to pay less than the actual costs of mandated programs. For example, the Formula pays only 90% of the costs of FDK. Likewise, salaries are covered to only 90%. The grants for phones, office equipment, etc., would barely cover that needed by a small business, let alone a school of 500 students with varying needs, abilities and behaviours.

At the same time, negotiations

are about to start on new collective agreements with the teacher and staff unions, due for August 2012.

Many Trustees fear that if the TDSB does not balance its budget, the government could appoint a supervisor to set the budget and staffing without consulting the Board. The supervisor would take over the functions of the Trustees. The last time this happened, under the Conservatives, the supervisor himself could not balance the budget!

Today, however, the Liberal Government does not have a majority in Queen's Park. They would need the support of either the NDP or the Harris-like Progressive Conservatives.

We shall see what will happen, in the wake of the provincial budget to be handed down on March 27, one day after the deadline for this article. Watch the next issue of PV for developments.

(Kaplan is the TDSB Trustee for Ward 5, York Centre) ●

offered full support to the students in words - but not so much in terms of action. The Quebec Federation of Labour and the Congress of National Trade Unions (CSN) have formed the Social Alliance Coalition, which came out of the Common Front actions of last year, although the group has yet to really bring forward its membership.

Local unions as well as the Montreal council of the CSN have more been strongly supportive of the students, forming a coalition with many other people's movements called the Red Hand Coalition. Among other things, the Red Hand coalition has suggested the need for a general political or social strike against the Charest government and its austerity measures.

As well, on their convention books most of the labour movement has adopted some form of action plan; the idea of a political strike, for example, was endorsed by the last convention of the CSN.



Photo by Marianne Breton-Fontaine

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GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Strikes hit Europe: PORTUGAL....

Portuguese strikers halted trains, shut ports and paralysed public transport on March 22, protesting the government's move to implement the terms of an EU/IMF bailout. The strike was called by the country's largest labour federation, the CGTP, but was not backed by the social democratic-led UGT.

Armenio Carlos, the Communist leader of the CGTP, said the confederation wanted its 700,000 members to send a signal to the right-wing government that the country will no longer tolerate the erosion of workers' rights, lower salaries and record high unemployment.

"We have to keep staging strikes, struggling. These policies do not resolve anything, we are on the same path as Greece," said Pedro Ramos, 38, who works for a state waste management company.

Ramos led a rally of CGTP members from Rossio square in downtown Lisbon to parliament, singing songs from the Carnation revolution of 1974 that re-established democracy in Portugal.

The CGTP said the railway system was crippled, including the international Lisbon-Madrid route. Lisbon's underground was shut. Many hospitals were only accepting emergencies. Garbage collectors, ports and some schools shut down across the country. But the impact of the strike was limited when the 520,000-strong UGT union retreated from its earlier position to support the so-called "labour market reforms" required by the European Union and IMF in return for the bailout.

Facing its worst recession since the 1970s, Portugal was forced to take a bailout in May 2011. Many economists say it might need a second bailout as the recession deepens, putting its budget targets in doubt and jeopardizing its planned return to the bond market in late 2013.

Portugal's core deficit tripled in the first two months of 2012, showing that the economic slump is denting tax revenues and stoking concerns over the fiscal targets. The latest data reveals that the official unemployment rate in Portugal has risen to 14.8%, and among young people is above 25%.

SPAIN and ITALY

The two main unions in Spain, Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and the General Union of Workers (UGT) have ratified a general strike call for March 29. The countdown to the strike was announced in mid-March by the leaders of CCOO, Ignacio Fernandez Toxo, and the UGT, Colin Campbell. Although they reiterated their willingness to dialogue with the conservative government of Mariano Rajoy over controversial laws which cut pay rates and make it easier to dismiss workers, Mendez and Fernandez Toxo agreed that time is running out.

Labour policies can be handled in the field of negotiation, insisted the general secretaries of both unions federations, who denounced the "permanent"

measures of the ruling Popular Party. According to Fernandez Toxo, the general strike is the inevitable result of the unjustified behaviour of the Rajoy administration.

Italy's largest trade union has also called a general strike over labour "reforms", escalating a confrontation with Prime Minister Mario Monti over his drive to impose anti-working class measures in the euro zone's third biggest economy.

After weeks of negotiation,



Monti announced on March 20 that the time for talking was over and he would press on with plans to slash employment protection laws dating back to the 1970s, despite stiff opposition from the left-wing CGIL union.

The CGIL proposed an eight-hour general strike to protest against the measures, which would allow companies to lay off individual employees for disciplinary or business reasons, saying the changes risked causing massive job losses.

"This will not be a flare-up which burns out in a day as the government expects, and we have a duty to get results before we see years of mass dismissals from companies," the union's secretariat said in a statement.

A day-long strike would be the biggest demonstration yet against unelected premier Monti, a former European Commissioner who has already imposed painful cuts and tax hikes and attacks on the pension system since taking office in November.

NZ ports dispute deepens

The Ports of Auckland (New Zealand) and the Maritime Union have returned to mediation, as their long-running contract dispute continues to reach new heights.

Ports of Auckland issued a two-week notice on March 22 of an indefinite lockout, just a day after scrapping plans to sack 292 workers and replace them with non-unionised contract workers. The lockout came after the Maritime Union lifted its strike notice and sought an immediate return to work.

Maritime Union national president Garry Parsloe said the union was told there would be no work for the next week. "Aucklanders should be angry that Ports management has no clear plan in place to get the Ports up and running as quickly as possible again," Parsloe said. The union filed an injunction saying the lockout was unlawful.

The global wharfies union, the

International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), condemned the lockout as "unbelievable, unlawful and practically suicidal". It has formed an international crisis mission that it says would investigate "the management-engineered crisis" and plans to meet with Auckland Mayor Len Brown.

The ITF would also further investigate the use of labour supply companies to break strikes and drive down conditions in the ports industry, both in New Zealand and internationally.

The country's Council of Trade Unions is calling on Transport Minister Gerry Brownlee to tell Aucklanders what information he is withholding on the Ports of Auckland dispute.

In February, the CTU wrote to Brownlee under the Official Information Act requesting any briefings he had had on the dispute, but he wrote back saying he did not consider there were "any other considerations which rendered it desirable, in the public interest, to make the information available".

Punjab teachers set up hunger strike camp

The Punjab Teachers Union (PTU) set up a hunger strike camp in front of the Punjab Assembly in Pakistan on March 22 to highlight problems faced by schoolteachers across the province.

Dozens of teachers were present at the camp, carrying banners and placards inscribed with slogans against the Punjab government. They demanded substantial increases in salaries, saying skyrocketing inflation was making their lives miserable.

The teachers also demanded rapid in-service promotion, abolition of a ban on casual leave, and implementation of a teachers' package announced in 2009 and 2011, which authorities in some districts have failed to apply. The PTU leaders said the government should ensure at least six teachers in each primary school, and create a new post of head teacher.

The union also wants a 4-tier formula of promotion for college teachers, and an end to the practice of assigning non-academic duties to schoolteachers.

Swazi unions call two-day strike

Public service unions in Swaziland will strike for two days starting April 11 as part of a continuing protest over pay. Four unions representing about 30,000 teachers, nurses and civil servants want a 4.5 percent pay increase, but the Swazi government, struggling to pay its bills as the economy goes into meltdown, has refused.

Public servants say they will take to the streets in various parts of the kingdom, ruled by the corrupt and vastly wealthy King Mswati III, who is sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch, to draw attention to their claim. They will hold meetings in late March and

early April to finalise their plans, President of the kingdom's teaching union Sibongile Mazibuko told local media.

She said mass demonstrations would take place all over Swaziland, in towns and in rural areas.

The protests coincide with the first anniversary of the failed "April 12 uprising" in which a group of pro-democracy activists used Facebook to agitate for mass protests in Swaziland. Protests took place, but police and security forces quickly quelled them.

Olympic sweatshop labour

The UK media has clamoured for a first glimpse of the new Stella McCartney-designed British Olympic kit - but with little thought to those who produce the garments, often in appalling conditions.

After the Adidas-produced strips were unveiled to great fanfare, a delegation from the National Garment Workers Federation of Bangladesh addressed a March 24 public meeting aimed at highlighting the sweatshop conditions under which millions of workers labour, often for a pittance.

The Federation is hoping to raise consumer consciousness over the issue and also forge greater links with unions in Britain.

NGWF president Amirul Haque Amin spoke to the Morning Star on the eve of an event organised by anti-poverty charity War on Want and the TUC.

"Adidas is just one of many firms sourcing their goods in Bangladesh - there are also Nike and Puma, multinationals such as Tesco, Asda, M&S. Almost all of them use supply factories in Bangladesh," he said. "The

conditions of the workers is almost identical in all these factories. Garment manufacturing is the biggest industry in Bangladesh and it is all export-orientated. There are around 5,000 factories which employ between three and six million workers. Eighty-five per cent of these workers are women. Working conditions and salaries are very poor. The lowest grade is around £20 a month, for higher skilled workers around £30 per month."

Many workers work seven day weeks and upwards of 14 hours a day. While overtime is by law "voluntary," low wages compel workers to work longer hours to make ends meet. Many factory owners also force employees to work overtime. Despite it being a legal requirement, there are often no childcare facilities, meaning many working mothers barely see their children.

Regarding the role of the multinationals, many of which have claimed that they are not directly responsible for these conditions or that they pay an average wage, Amir is contemptuous.

"For a long-sleeved denim shirt they pay four-five dollars but they sell them for four or five times that. The garment industry is hugely profitable - how else could companies such as Adidas spend millions of pounds sponsoring these Olympics? Multinationals are the head of the whole trade. They are the key players. Why would they give the responsibility for production to someone else?" says Amir.

"Smart companies say: 'We have a code of conduct, monitoring systems and in our code of conduct it clearly says we are providing a living wage and making sure workers are treated well.' They are lying."

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

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Death rays and the like: ready to crush dissent

By Rob Gowland, *The Guardian, weekly paper of the Communist Party of Australia*

The scientific boys and girls who work for the US military, products of some of the best educational institutions, recently showed off a "crowd control" pain ray. Rejoicing in the innocuous name "Active Denial System", the new weapon sends out a high-frequency electromagnetic ray. In other words, it is designed to do to demonstrators what a microwave oven does to porridge.

And you don't have to stick the demonstrator in the oven for it to be effective: the ray has a range of "seven football fields". Whoopee!

The US military has been experimenting with death rays for decades - as well as nerve gasses, neutron weapons, space-mounted X-ray weapons, etc, anything that might kill people while leaving property untouched.

It seems this policy has finally met up with another US phenomenon: the public backlash against the way government policy is being run by and for big corporations, to the growing detriment of the working stiffs who actually create the country's wealth.

The Pentagon is clearly looking towards the day when they will have to defend the rich and powerful from the multitude of "have-nots", who are not going to be satisfied with promises and propaganda forever.

The US military already trains for "subduing" civil disturbances, where the enemy are not wily foreigners in turbans but typical Americans carrying peace placards!

Turning a "non-lethal" heat ray on them is a not particularly big step from that point. During the "occupy Wall Street" protests police in New York herded demonstrators into fenced areas and then turned their pepper sprays on them at close range. Pepper spray - like rubber bullets and tasers - is also defined as a "non-lethal" weapon, despite instances where the use of such weapons has resulted in fatalities.

According to Pentagon tests, people hit with the heat ray feel an intense, unbearable heat. Turn a weapon like that on a struggling mass of people, some angry, some frightened, and you have a recipe for panic and trampling. Especially if the weapon is in the hands of a soldier taught to regard demonstrators as "the enemy" and who has also been told "not to worry, it's non lethal".

Demonstrations are made up of people of all ages and states of health. What is the effect of this heat ray on pregnant women? On a foetus? On someone with a heart condition?

And why is the military being trained to use this weapon against demonstrators anyway? We are constantly being told that the right to demonstrate against the government and its laws is a fundamental measure of our democracy. Well, is it or isn't it? Gunning down demonstrators with a heat ray doesn't sound very democratic.

US Marine Colonel Tracy Taffola, showing off the weapon to

the media, boasted that: "It could be used across the military spectrum of operations, perimeter security, crowd control, entry control points, you name it. I think our forces will figure out the many different applications that it would have."

I think that is just what people are afraid of.

The British tabloid the *Globe and Mail* reports that "Various development versions of the heat ray have been tested for years.

One was sent to Afghanistan - but never used - in 2010." That raises interesting questions: why send it and then never use it? Is it perhaps not so "non-lethal" after all?

The *Globe And Mail* also reports that "Police departments have shown interest". I'll bet they have. When you see how enthusiastically they embraced tasers when those babies became available, giving police a long-distance way of inflicting pain on

demonstrators seems like a very unsafe thing to do.

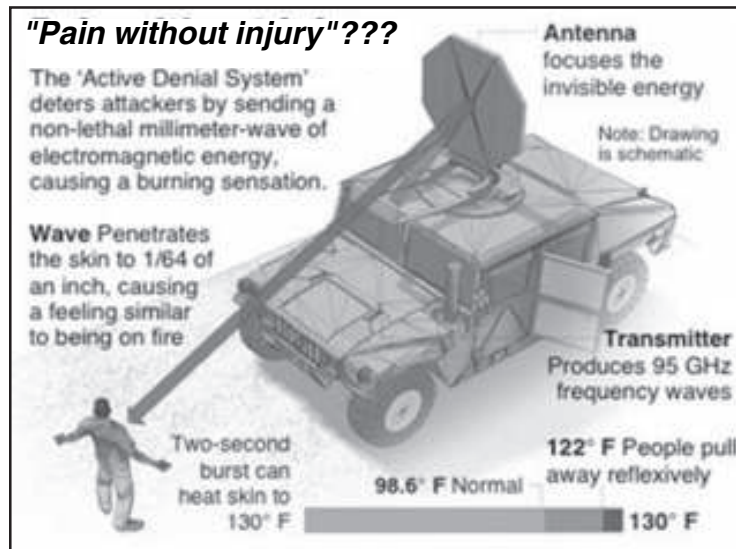
Among the comments that appeared on US websites about this news report was one from Socialist, who suggested that "now is indeed time to leave the country": "My nephew will be going abroad to attend university, he can get a quality education for a tiny fraction of the price of an equivalent US education (taught in English). When he graduates, he will not be a debt slave to the banksters."

When an on-line correspondent asserted that "There is no place on the face of the earth that you or anybody else will be safe from Obama's military", Socialist responded with the commonsense argument: "However in relative terms, there are places that are less violent [than the USA], where essentials of life (like health care, education, quality food and housing) are much more affordable. The Empire, even with drones and all the technology, does not have the power to control everything. The Empire is more fragile than we can imagine. The quality of life in the US is far lower than many would care to admit."

That last point is very real and is becoming recognised by more and more Americans, as the endless propaganda they are fed - about living in the greatest country on Earth - falls apart in front of their eyes. Just the other day I saw a television news report in which US primary school teachers referred to the schools they taught in as "third world" standard.

Every day that big oil companies and big banks and filthy rich hedge funds get additional tax breaks while consumer prices continue to rise (not least at the petrol pump), is a day when Americans are forced to look at the reality of the world and to compare it with the laughable fantasy they are fed as "the American dream". The number who don't bother to vote is a sad indication of their widespread rejection of that dream as bogus.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon and the corporations it serves continue to develop their weapons to suppress any attempt at a popular uprising. For they know that the current situation cannot prevail forever. And they intend to be ready. The question is: will the people be ready? ●



Mixed signals from U.S. on Cuba travel

PV Vancouver Bureau

In an important legal victory, U.S. judge Joan Lenard has issued an order granting René Gonzalez, one of the Cuban Five anti-terrorist fighters, permission to travel home for two weeks to visit his seriously ill brother Roberto.

Judge Lenard, of the South Florida Federal District Court, approved the motion to travel to Cuba presented by the attorney for René Gonzalez. Lenard has been

in charge of the trials of Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino and René Gonzalez.

The Five were detained in 1998 for monitoring violent activities by anti-Cuba groups based in the United States, and are currently serving sentences ranging from 15 years to double life plus 15 years.

Last October, René completed his prison term, although he must remain in the United States for three years under "supervised release."

Judge Lenard ordered him to comply with conditions, including receiving all the necessary licences and permissions to travel home for two weeks, and to present the detailed itinerary of his stay and location in Cuba. René also has to provide information on his contacts in Cuba, as well as report to a probation officer over the phone.

At the same time, however, the U.S. State Department refused to grant two Cuban diplomats, based in Washington, DC, permission to

travel to New York City to participate in a forum on the weekend of March 16-18.

Patricia Pego, First Secretary, and Juan Lamigueiro, Deputy Chief of the Mission, at the Cuban Interest Section in Washington were slated to participate in a Left Forum panel sponsored by MLToday.com (Marxism-Leninism Today) on New Developments in Cuba and a second panel on The Cuban Five.

Cuban diplomats based in Washington and at the United Nations in New York cannot travel outside a 50 mile radius without first obtaining permission from the State Department.

The panels were part of the Socialist Scholars Conference, the largest annual U.S. gathering of left academics, students, labor and community activists. Held this year at Pace University in New York City, the conference attracted over 5,000 registrants.

On very short notice, other diplomats, based at Cuba's United Nations Mission, filled in for their Washington colleagues. They were received with gratitude and appreciation by an overflow crowd anxious to hear their presentation.

For more than 50 years the U.S. government has maintained an illegal and criminal blockade of Cuba that has caused untold damage and injury to Cuban citizens and Cuban society.

As the ML Today Editorial Board pointed out, "it is now very clear that the illegal blockade is also used to deny American citizens the freedom to hear Cuba's point of view. With the Obama Administration stepping up enforcement of the blockade itself; with the administration trying to prevent Cuba from being invited to the Summit of the Americas in Colombia next month; and with the U.S. government attempting to prevent Americans from hearing first hand from Cubans themselves, it is reasonable to ask 'Why is the American government afraid of Cuba?'" ●

Canada opposes Cuba joining Summit of the Americas

In an ironic twist, the Harper Tory government said on March 8 that Canada opposes Cuba joining the Summit of the Americas continental forum.

Speaking to the EFE news agency, a spokesperson for Minister of State Diane Ablonczy claimed that "Cuba doesn't meet the democratic conditions unanimously adopted at the Summit of the Americas in 2001. Canada has made clear its wish to see a greater political opening in Cuba, with a complete respect for human rights."

This statement was made as revelations continue about the Harper government's attempts to manipulate the outcome of the 2011 federal election.

Colombia, the host country for the April 14-15 Summit, has not invited Cuba to the continental meeting.

The Cuban government blames the U.S. for this exclusion from the Summit, which may face a boycott by the countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA).

The Political Council of ALBA "will continue studying" the

situation, according to an official Venezuelan communique, which referred to the "historical position" of President Hugo Chavez against Cuba's exclusion from the Summits of the Americas.

Canada's official diplomatic relations with Cuba have suffered since Stephen Harper came to



power in 2006. Earlier this year, Ablonczy travelled to Cuba, the first high-level visit to the island by a Canadian representative since 2009, even though nearly one million Canadians travel each year to the island.

The Canadian Cuban Friendship Association-Toronto quickly condemned Ablonczy's comments.

"We believe that Canada has no authority to act as an arbiter of

democracy and that it should confine its remarks to encouraging the democratic process in Canada," said a news release from the CCFA-Toronto executive committee. "If Ms. Ablonczy is concerned with human rights she should look at the unjust imprisonment of Five Cubans in the United States for simply trying to stop the terrorism against Cuba. We would like to remind her that a Canadian resident was killed in a bombing of a Havana Hotel by terrorists from the United States. She should be standing up for the safety of Canadian tourists and demanding that the terrorists be brought to justice."

"We support Cuba's right to participate in the upcoming Summit and welcome the statement by other Latin American nations which have shown their willingness to work towards the inclusion of Cuba in future summit meetings."

"We urge the Canadian government to return to its traditional position of cordial and friendly relations with Cuba which it has maintained for over 60 years." ●

The Lorax: a timely fable

Dr. Seuss' The Lorax, Universal Pictures, review by Johan Boyden

The Lorax sounds like a children's cartoon but has lots to offer for the older kids.

Ted (voiced by Zac Efron) is a young tween-ager. He lives in a town where fresh air has been commoditized and everything is artificial, even the trees. But Audrey (Taylor Swift) dreams of a better world,

with real trees. Audrey inspires Ted to find a live tree. With some help from Grandma, the quest leads Ted out of the boundaries of his home town of Thneedville, into a dead landscape under dark smoke-filled skies and to the lonely house of the Once-Ler.

The Once-Ler tells the story of how he helped create this environmental crisis, despite the warning of the Lorax (Danny DeVito). A lot of the movie is taken up with this entertaining

story within a story about the Once-Ler and the Lorax, the protector of the trees - a small, bald, orange creature with a giant moustache.

The good news is (spoiler alert!) that the Once-Ler still has a tree seed. The bad news is that Ted's adventures have attracted the interest of the boss of the town, Mr. O'Hare, who has made a fortune by selling purified air. His monopoly, of course, is threatened by trees that make clean air for free.

Ted, Grandma and Audrey take matters into their own hands. Through an act of civil disobedience, they expose corporate O'Hare, winning the moral support of the town, who send him packing.

I couldn't help notice that although Grandma kicks it up for the girls' side, Audrey generally stays at home and the boys do all the exploring. But in the end the tale is cute, silly, sweet and funny, yet addresses serious issues of ecology and sustainability.

While he didn't fully break out of the cold-war framework he lived in, Theodor Seuss Geisel was a progressive and democratic American writer for his time. His poems and cartoons tackled topics such as racial equality, the arms race, nuclear war and, as in *The Lorax*, environmental destruction - a stance which attracted the flak of big forestry companies.

People wanting to hear Seuss' rhymes and word games, or a direct rendering of the book may be disappointed. One online fan claimed Universal Pictures had kept only two lines from the original story. And ironically the film is also being used to sell a new Mazda SUV and a brand of diapers.

But a critical message does shine through the 3D sizzle. How you read that message, however, depends. Are environmental problems caused by greedy human nature, dirty industrial consumerism and ultimately the people themselves? Or are the people the solution, brought together in cities by industry but now a 99 per cent who can unite, kick out the 1 per cent, and grow a better, sustainable, world where nature comes before profits?

Either way, *The Lorax* is a good watch, and goes down with *Wall-E* as a fable of our times about the importance of nature and respecting the environment. ●



De-link militarism and sports

The push to link professional sports with militarism hit a new low on March 21, when the Toronto Raptors unveiled their new Canadian Forces camouflage jersey decorated with a maple leaf symbol. The basketball team's "fourth jersey" made its debut in a 94-82 loss to the Chicago Bulls. The "daffy-looking" jersey (quoting the *Globe and Mail*) will be worn again on March 26, April 1, and April 16.

For the Bulls game, the crowd included 300 members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and the Raptors' starting five were each accompanied onto the floor by a soldier. Tom Anselmi of Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment said this "shows our organization's commitment and appreciation for the men and women who serve our country."

But as the US-led NATO occupation of Afghanistan crumbles into chaos, the pretence that this war had anything to do with defending Canada is complete nonsense. In fact, the drive to equate sports with war becomes more frantic and nauseating every time the imperialist disaster in Afghanistan becomes more apparent. It's time to demand an end to the attempt by the Harper Tories and Corporate Canada to shove militarism down the throats of sports fans.

(By PV Editor Kimball Cariou, who is a founder of the Hockey Fans For Peace facebook group.)



The Fifth of the Month to Free the Five

Join in the worldwide action to Free the Cuban Five on the 5th day of each month! Write to President Obama and demand that he Free the Cuban Five:

E-mail: president@whitehouse.gov

On the web: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>

Phone 1-202-456-1111

Fax 1-202-456-2461

Telegram: President Barack Obama, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 2500, USA

For more information, see <http://thecuban5.org> or www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca

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MUSIC NOTES

By Wally Brooker

Mikis Theodorakis on the front lines

Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, best known for his acclaimed scores for films like *Zorba the Greek*, *Serpico*, *Z* and *State of Siege*, was tear-gassed Feb. 12 at a massive Athens demonstration. The protest, organized by the All-Workers Militant Front (PAME), attracted more than 100,000 people. It was one of dozens throughout the country against the latest round of IMF and Euro Bank austerity measures. Theodorakis, 87, is a veteran of the anti-Nazi resistance and was a prominent figure in the struggle against the junta that ruled Greece from 1967-74. Like another veteran who accompanied him at the rally, 89 year-old partisan hero Manolis Glezos, he's a former MP. After being treated for tear-gas, the two militants were allowed to witness the betrayal of the Greek people in parliament later that day. In an open letter published on his website Theodorakis calls for a "unified front of resistance and solidarity." For more info: www.mikis-theodorakis.net/.

Madonna's imperial spectacle

Madonna's half-time show at the Superbowl began with her arrival on a giant winged chariot pulled by 50 Roman soldiers. The pop superstar appeared as a fantasy version of an ancient Babylonian queen. The allusion to America's colonial wars in the Middle East was unmistakable. Football's annual spectacle of bread and circuses featured Madonna lip-synching and dancing her way through a medley of songs, surrounded by dancers, acrobats, singers, a gospel choir, a military drum corps, and (dressed as cheerleaders) two young female pop stars: M.I.A. and Nicki Minaj. Madonna exited in a puff of smoke, leaving behind a giant glowing slogan: "World Peace." She's launching a world tour May 29 in Tel Aviv, revealing her contempt for the cultural boycott of Israel and the just cause of occupied Palestine. Some of Madonna's Israeli fans recognize her "world peace" slogan for a cynical ploy. They've created a Facebook page calling for Israel not to attack Iran until after her Tel Aviv spectacle.

Rock stars rage against Limbaugh

Rock musicians Tom Morello, Peter Dinklage, and Canadian band Rush are demanding that talk show host Rush Limbaugh stop playing their music on the air. The racist, misogynist Limbaugh has been losing corporate sponsors since his Feb. 29 rant against law student Sandra Fluke. He called Fluke a "slut" and a "prostitute" after she testified in Congress in support of health coverage for contraceptives. The musicians can hope that their public outcry will pressure Limbaugh to remove their songs from his syndicated show, but they have no real legal power to enforce the cease and desist orders some of them have issued. Radio networks are covered under blanket permission agreements for "public performances" of all songs in major licensing catalogues as long as they pay their fees. So far more than 30 corporate sponsors have abandoned The Rush Limbaugh Show.

Musicians protest Grammy cuts

Media coverage of the 2012 Grammy Awards was dominated by tributes to R&B megastar Whitney Houston, who died at the age of 48 on Feb. 12. While the outpouring of tributes to one of the world's most popular entertainers was understandable, her death overshadowed an important story at the Grammys. This year 31 categories were dropped from the American music awards, most of them in "ethnic music" categories, such as latin jazz, native american, cajun and gospel. On Feb. 9 musicians demonstrated outside the L.A. office of the Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences (sponsor of the Grammys), where Latin jazz star and spokesperson Bobby Sanabria called the cuts "a subtle form of racism." Protests continued with a picket outside the Grammy Awards. Letters of protest have been sent by many prominent musicians including Paul Simon, Bonnie Rait, Carlos Santana and Herbie Hancock. For info visit: www.grammywatch.org/.

Springsteen's new album

In an age of commercial decline for classic rock, it's perhaps a sign of the times that a 62-year-old veteran like Bruce Springsteen can reach the top of the Billboard charts with a collection of pro-working class songs influenced by the occupy movement. The left-of-centre populist, who's consistently supported grassroots struggles over the years, has released "Wrecking Ball," an album that reflects the hard times faced by working people in the plutocracy that is contemporary America. In 2008 he jumped on the Obama train, and even joined Pete Seeger in a rendition of Woody Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land* at the President's inauguration. In this election year Springsteen's support for Obama has apparently been withdrawn. But he'll be on tour singing many of these new songs - some bitter, some hopeful and inspiring - with an expanded E-Street Band that includes back-up singers and a full horn section. For more info: <http://bruce.springsteen.net/>.

UK statistics reveal public jobs "carnage"

Official figures show that 381,000 public sector jobs have been cut in Britain since the 2010 election. The figures expose the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition's economic plans as "arrant nonsense," according to GMB union leader Paul Kenny.

Workers in south-west England suffered the most, with 53,000 posts scrapped. London was second with 46,000, then the north-west with 45,000 and the south-east with 41,000. Scotland lost 38,000 jobs.

GMB ("Britain's General Union" with over 600,000 members)

said the "carnage" was the real reason for the surging numbers of people out of work, particularly women. The jobs cull also reflects the scores of public services lost or damaged in communities across Britain, including child-care facilities, services for the disabled and organisations that tackle domestic abuse.

Kenny said private firms could not fill the gaps left and it was hurting Britain's chances of economic recovery. He ridiculed Chancellor George Osborne's "theory" that scrapping the 50p tax rate for the richest would help stimulate the economy.

"The UK economy is in a hole being dug deeper by the deflationary policies which derailed the recovery the government inherited," said the GMB leader. "Instead of cutting wages in real terms and increasing pensions contributions for millions of public sector workers to cut the deficit the Chancellor should look instead to stop tax evasion and tax avoidance which could bring in billions every year."

Kenny urged voters to use the May local elections to "send a clear message" to the Tories and Lib Dems "that this approach is not acceptable." •

Syria: heralding a change?

continued from page 4

Installing a pro-Western government in Damascus would propitiate a change of government in Lebanon and possibly another war there to eliminate the power of Hezbollah, an ally of Iran together with Syria, and viewed as enemies by the Sunni Gulf monarchies, who submit to Western policy in return for protection from an alleged Iranian threat, even though no war has been initiated by that country for centuries.

If the plan concerning Syria is consummated, the Western powers would move against Tehran and, along the way, crush the resistance of Palestine, obliging it to accept crumbs of territory and the minimum rights which Israeli Zionists would be disposed to concede to the people. The U.S. "Grand Middle East" would be completed with its extension to Central Asia, and the siege of Russia and China would be laid.

However, Syria is not Libya. Although its leaders have made undeniable errors and have acted slowly in response to the conspiracy and plans of its powerful enemies, thus losing a lot of time and ground, it would seem to have sufficient internal support

and resources to stand up to its enemies and defeat them, albeit at a heavy price in terms of death and destruction.

Apparently, a clear perception of this reality prompted Russian and Chinese representatives to use their veto in the February 4 Security Council vote on a resolution which - regardless of its text, as was the case with Libya - would open the gates to foreign intervention in order to destroy the country and impose a regime change. The highest authorities in both countries have clearly declared a red line and they are not prepared to allow a military intervention in Syria.

The firm stand of Moscow and Beijing and the cooperation they are giving the Syrian government, appears to be starting to change the situation on the ground. The Lebanese army has been mobilized to the border in an attempt to prevent the entry of mercenaries and military supplies into the neighbouring area of Homs, center of the anti-government uprising and whose capital city was intended to become the Benghazi of Syria. Syrian government forces have recently moved onto the offensive there.

The Baghdad government, now

closer to Iran's influence than to that of the United States, is also trying to prevent Sunni Islamic extremists - possibly linked to Al Qaeda and receiving funds from Saudi Arabia and Qatar - from continuing to infiltrate into Syrian territory. Recent terrorist attacks on the Shiite population in various parts of Iraq would seem to be a message of protest from Saudi Arabia and the United States given the change in position in favour of Syria adopted by the Iraqi government.

Turkey and Jordan, two other countries to have adopted belligerent positions against the Damascus government, are beginning to make more moderate statements. There are even signs of concern in Western capitals at the possibility of extremist Islamic forces linked to Al Qaeda coming to power in Syria in the case of the current executive being defeated.

The situation is highly fluid and extremely complex, but if Syria succeeds in resisting this imperialist, and Zionist counterrevolutionary aggression, and if Russia and China remain firm, there could be a defeat of strategic magnitude. Iran would emerge strengthened and new alliances could be established to oppose imperialist plans of domination. The countries of the BRICS group, the newly independent countries of Latin America, especially the strong core members of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), are in agreement with the principals of a foreign policy opposed to aggression, and would favour the negotiated solution to conflicts. They also defend justice, sovereignty and non-intervention, all of which could initiate the beginnings of a new multipolar balance in the world.

The grave economic crisis affecting the major capitalist powers and the debilitation this implies, in conjunction with the indignados movement, could significantly contribute to this potential panorama.

(Ernesto Abascal was the Cuban ambassador to Iraq.) •

Limits of private capital....

continued from page 5

a gross operating loss every year.

An annual passenger grant then supplemented an occasional gross surplus, but depreciation and compensation costs kept railways in the red. Furthermore such state support for the railways lagged way behind that given by other governments in Europe to their nationalised railway industries.

Of course, the big business lobbies and their press and politicians either ignored public-sector profits or attacked them as a punitive tax on private enterprise and consumers.

So-called "losses," on the other hand, were seized upon by the Daily Mail, Daily Express and other papers as evidence of public ownership's costliness alongside its bureaucratic inefficiency and oppressiveness.

Britain's monopoly capitalists rarely pressed for privatisation before Thatcher's election victory in 1979, except for steel and road haulage. But they were always on guard against steps to nationalise the more profitable and modern

sectors of the economy.

Waging the battle of ideas in favour of "private ownership" remained important, even as public ownership - a form of "state capitalism" - helped rebuild Britain's capitalist economy.

In today's Britain the privatised monopolies are every bit as wasteful, exploitative, anarchic and profiteering as those of the pre-Great War and interwar periods.

Moreover, in the 21st century, monopoly capitalist control of the energy and transport sectors means that two new and mortal crises facing humanity - energy supplies and global warming - meet with no rational response.

Robert Griffiths is general secretary of the Communist Party of Britain. •

REDS ON THE WEB

www.communist-party.ca

www.peoplesvoice.ca

www.ycl-ljc.ca

www.solidnet.org

What's Left

Victoria, BC

31st Annual Walk for Peace, Earth, and Justice, Sat., April 21, gather at the Legislature 11:30 am, walk at 12 noon to Centennial Square for speeches, entertainment, info tables. Call 250-888-2588.

Vancouver, BC

COPE Winter Gala, tribute to outgoing COPE electeds, Sat., March 31, 7 pm, Museum of Vancouver (1100 Chestnut). Tickets at 604-255-0400, or www.cope.bc.ca.

Media and Democracy, forum with David Barsamian, Sun., April 15, 2 pm, Room 1700, SFU Harbour Centre, 515 W. Hastings, Co-sponsored by Ctee. of Progressive Pakistani Canadians and Progressive Nepali Forum in Americas, 604-421-6752.

Free Palestinian political prisoners, rally Tue., April 17, 5-7 pm, CBC Building (700 Hamilton), called by Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network & others. Info: charlotte.kates@gmail.com.

Left Film Night, Sunday, April 29, 7 pm Centre for Socialist Education, 706 Clark Dr. Call 604-255-2041 for information.

Winnipeg, MB

7th Generation Walk for Mother Earth, April 22, 1 pm, meet at Central Park, walk to Forks' Odeena Circle. Info <http://www.facebook.com/events/255423977876851/>

Toronto, ON

Dinner and Evening in praise of Dave Rigby, Sat., April 14 (note date change), doors open 6 pm. Ausp: Central Committee, CPC. For tickets and info, call 416-469-2446.

La Colmenita (The Beehive), the Cuban Children's Theatre Group, April 19 (6:30 pm) and April 21 (7 pm), at the Royal Theatre, 608 College, advance \$25 from Sound-scapes, 572 College. Info: 647-403-7308, www.lacolmenita.cult.ca.

Day of Action: Demand Prosperity, Not Austerity, Sat., April 21, 3-5 pm, Queen's Park, organized by Ontario Federation of Labour and allies. For info call OFL, 416-571-3087

Montreal, QC

Palestinians And Jews United, boycott/disinvestment/sanctions picket, every Saturday, 1-3 pm, outside Israeli shoe store "NAOT", 3941 St-Denis Street.

People's Voice deadlines

April 16-31 issue: Thursday, April 5

May 1-15 issue: Thursday, April 19

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

Toronto reader wins trip to Cuba

The winner of the one-week trip for two to Cuba at this year's annual Norman Bethune Dinner was Mohammed Mushtaq of Toronto, holder of door prize ticket #2805. Our thanks to all PV supporters across the country who sold tickets to the dinner, and warmest congratulations from our Editorial Board to the winner!

"Libertad Prisoneras Politicas Colombianas"

The image here is a scan of a colourful needlepoint artwork sent to Canada by Liliyany Obando, who was recently released from a jail in Bogota. The needlepoint message - *Libertad Prisoneras Politicas Colombianas* (Freedom for Colombian Political Prisoners) - was created by one of the women in Patio 6 of the Buen Pastor prison where Liliyany was incarcerated without charge for over three years. The artwork expresses the thanks of Liliyany and her fellow prisoners for our coverage of their struggles, and for the internationalist solidarity of People's Voice readers. We will continue to report on the campaigns to free the 6,000-plus political prisoners in Colombia.



On developments in Syria: negotiation, not intervention

Developments in Syria have picked up pace in recent months. With the hesitation of the Syrian regime in rendering fundamental and real reforms, the initiative of the democratic, progressive and patriotic forces has been restricted increasingly.

On the other hand, the pro-imperialism and reactionary forces in the region are preparing for a "regime change". The imperialist-backed forces that are already creeping into Syria through the borders with Turkey and Jordan enjoy tens of millions of dollars of financial support from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the most advanced weapons provided by the imperialist states. These forces persistently encourage armed conflicts, sabotage the infrastructure of the country, and infiltrate mercenaries and smuggle weapons into the country, attempting to destabilize the country and prepare the ground to justify foreign intervention, and to repeat what we witnessed happen in Libya.

After failing to get the resolution to rationalize foreign intervention in Syria ratified in the Security Council of the UN, due to the veto by China and Russia, the imperialist states and the reactionary regimes in the region have intensified their efforts to fan the flames of the civil war in Syria by blatant and formal

support of pro-West reactionary forces like the "Muslim Brotherhood" and "Salafi" circles. On the other hand, the United States, Britain and reactionary Sheikdoms organized the conference of "Friends of Syria" to turn the Syrian crisis into an international crisis. A wide range of peace-loving, progressive

Published in Nameh Mardom, Central Organ of the Tudeh Party of Iran, Issue No. 889, Feb. 26, 2012

forces and advocates of Syria's sovereignty, both inside and outside of that country, have supported the just and legitimate demands of the people, and at the same time have resolutely condemned the interventions of the reactionary forces and imperialism.

The Tudeh Party of Iran supports the noble slogans of the struggle of the Syrian people for democratic changes and fundamental reforms in the interest of the people and the power of the working people, and condemns any foreign intervention in the developments of this country. We are of the belief that the United States and its NATO allies are advancing their "Great Middle East" plan, whose objective is to control the rich sources of energy of the region, domination over the market and raw material resources

of the countries of the region, and to maintain their political and economic hegemony in the Middle East.

The Tudeh Party of Iran expresses its support for the strategy of the Syrian Communist Party (United) in relentless opposition to domestic, regional and international plots against the people of Syria, in condemning and rejecting the interfering policies and actions of foreign powers and lackeys of imperialism and reaction, and their efforts to fan the flames of a full-scale civil war. As in the case of Libya, the outcome of such interventions would be the rule of dark-minded and reactionary forces and dominance of imperialism over Syria. While maintaining this position, we also express support for the demand of the communists and democratic forces of Syria for "the urgent need to expedite the social and political reforms" and to utilize "the means for more democratic and

comprehensive reforms" in Syria in order to ensure a democratic, progressive and peaceful future for that country.

What is needed in Syria is serious, responsible and accountable talks and negotiations between the government and pro-reform, pro-democracy forces. This is the only way to prevent

continuing bloodshed in that country. The Tudeh Party of Iran supports the proposal of the Syrian Communist Party (United), the democratic and progressive forces of Syria, and the international peace advocates for resuming talks between the parties and making efforts to find ways to advance the reforms through negotiations. ●



Anti-war rally in Toronto, Feb. 4 (PV photos: Ed Bil)

"A step toward a political solution for the crisis"

PV Vancouver Bureau

In a statement issued in Damascus on March 13, the Communist Party of Syria (Unified) presented its views on the search for solutions to the crisis in their country.

As it has since the beginning of the upheaval a year ago, the party remains resolutely opposed to any form of armed military intervention in Syrian affairs. The necessity for a political solution, it stresses, has been strengthened by the "collapse of illusions spread by the America-European-Turkish-Gulf coalition for the purpose of persuading the world with claims about the alleged powers of their followers inside Syria, on one hand, and the miscalculations as regards the power and steadfastness of Syria and its people, who united to defend their homeland and resist

any imperialist intervention."

The violence practised by armed groups and saboteurs has "reached a dead end", say the Syrian communists, who call such activity "a materialization of hopelessness" which led to armed confrontation.

On the other hand, the communists say, "it is important to state that the disproportionate and excessive use of force and security irregularities, whose price has been paid by many innocent persons, has had a negative effect and resulted in the creation of an environment of discontent among wide circles of people."

The party welcomes the recent Chinese and Russian initiatives and Koffi Annan's mission as "a change towards the rising weight of peaceful efforts."

Also seen as positive is the Arab foreign ministers meeting in Cairo, which called for an end to violence regardless of its source, a neutral and independent monitoring mechanism, the exclusion of foreign intervention, and a political dialogue between the government and all the opposition forces.

This agreement, according to the Syrian communists, "means a recognition of Syrian sovereignty over all Syrian territory, the negation of all forms of foreign intervention, (and) an end to bloodshed everywhere in Syria. The dialogue table, they say, is "the only place to formulate the future of Syria, and to help it move into a democratic and pluralistic society.... This accord is an indication of the triumph of the idea of a political solution, which contradicts all extremist slogans regardless of where they come from - those who believe in the security solution as the only way out of this crisis, or those who have lost all feelings of political realism and wait for NATO planes to destroy their homeland, people and civilization." ●

However, the communists warn that "some armed groups, whose weaponry is smuggled across borders, who have millions of dollars at their disposal, and who benefit from the aid rendered by foreign mercenaries and officers, would not be pleased by reaching a peaceful political solution. That is why from the very beginning they have started condemning the agreement."

The Syrian people, says the party, want to restore security and stability in Syria, to exclude foreign intervention, and to continue Syrian resistance against the American-Israeli plan for a "Grand Middle East". The people are also interested in genuine reforms and change, "and to have the new constitution transformed into new laws".

In the meantime, the statement says, "Our people are under the burden of unjustified economic sanctions which impact on their daily lives. They also suffer from the practices of the new wartime merchants and wealthy persons, who, in collaboration with their partners in the Gulf states and emirates, drastically undervalue the exchange rate of the Syrian pound. It has become a national duty to confront these groups, because they are an extension of the corruption in front of which the state stood helpless and powerless in the past. In fact some corrupt groups colluded with officials in the state and some of the apparatuses."

Stressing the need for confidence between the people, the government and the national opposition forces, the statement urgently calls for creation of a climate necessary for the success of the five-point accord, and for the release of "innocent detainees whose hands have not been polluted by the blood of Syrian citizens, and have not committed any sabotage." ●



Progressive movements in Iran and Syria call for democratic change in their countries, while remaining completely opposed to "regime change" imposed by western imperialist powers. Above is a sign at a recent Toronto rally reflecting this outlook.

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