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people's VOICE

CPC analyzes new
political terrain

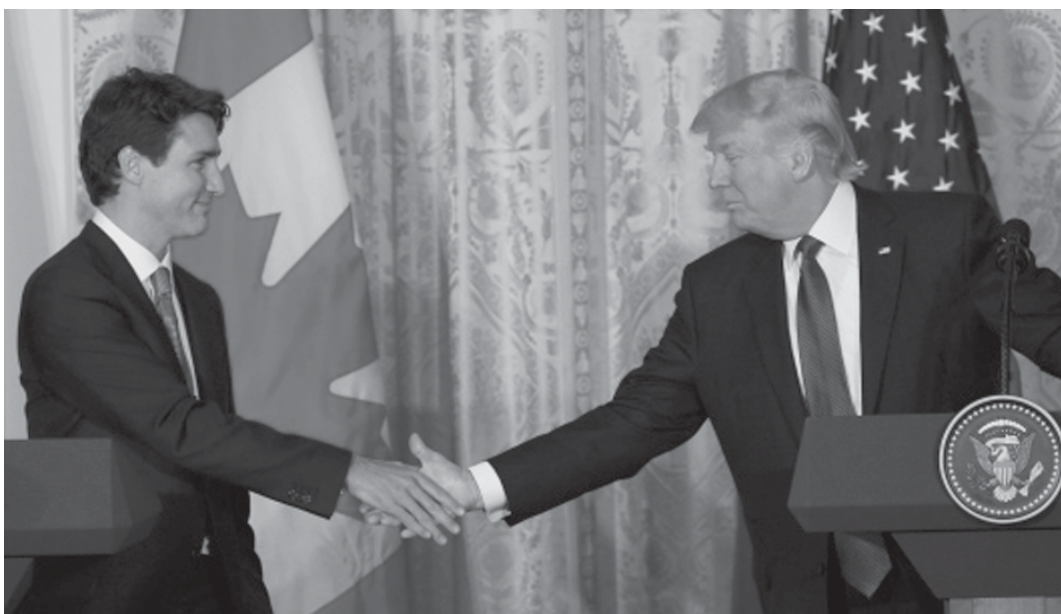
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Liberal budget delivers... to Big Business



"The Liberals' second budget, delivered March 22, made the corporations happy, but left working people, youth and the unemployed looking for the beef promised during the 2015 federal election, and in last year's budget..."

**Stories on
page 2**

Big Bank profits could top \$40 billion in 2017

No limits to
corporate greed?
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Wall's budget

Despite posing for years as a friend of farmers and rural communities, Saskatchewan premier Brad Wall has brought in a 2017-18 budget which will inflict lasting damage on the entire province.

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Release Hassan Diab!

Shocking but true: a Canadian citizen remains in a French jail, accused of a crime he could not have committed, without even being put on trial.

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Threats vs. DPRK

The first US imperialist war of aggression against Korea cost the lives of several million people. Now, the US is threatening pre-emptive attacks against North Korea, with deadly consequences.

Corporations pleased with 2017 Federal Budget

Statement by the Central Executive Committee, Communist Party of Canada

The Liberals' second budget, delivered March 22, made the corporations happy, but left working people, youth and the unemployed looking for the beef promised during the 2015 federal election, and in last year's budget.

For the corporations and the wealthy: no tax hikes, and no new taxes, and no loopholes closed, leaving the government with no revenue to deliver on their many promises. Pointing to the US, where big corporate tax cuts have been promised by the Trump administration, the Liberals say they can't raise corporate taxes here. But they can and should, if they want to stem the tide of right-wing populism that has swept across the US and Europe, and is fueling the Tories and the far right in Canada.

Closing corporate tax loopholes would have generated an estimated \$16 billion in revenue that could have been used to fund a new federal health accord, reduce tuition for students, fund social housing and public transit, and create jobs.

Raising the capital gains tax to 100% of the gain (realized and unrealized) could have been used to eliminate the bubble in housing prices across the country. It could have generated the funds needed to launch a system of universal, accessible, affordable, quality,

public childcare in Canada, and enabled millions of women in the workforce to work full-time, to close the wage gap, and to also contribute and be eligible for full pensions and EI benefits. It would have put some real meaning into this much publicized gender-lens budget that talks the talk, but is too weak to walk.

Introducing wealth and inheritance taxes, which most countries in Europe have had for decades, would have generated funds for an emergency program to create new jobs for youth, and to substantially raise the minimum wage.

Raising the corporate tax rate – now the lowest in the industrialized world – would have provided the funds for massive job creation, putting the country to work, building affordable social housing for sale and for rent right across Canada, building secondary industry and manufacturing that's environmentally sustainable and will help reduce greenhouse gases, developing an infrastructure program using corporate tax revenues to build publicly owned infrastructure, not the widely discredited public private partnerships that are privatization on public infrastructure and services on a massive basis.

It could have restored funding to the EI account, which previous Liberal governments raided for corporate tax cuts, and increased

EI benefits to 90% of previous earnings for the duration of unemployment, and covered all the unemployed including part-time and precarious workers and first-time job seekers. Instead the government will water down EI benefits over an extended 18 month period for some parents.

Raising the corporate tax rate



could have been partnered with the elimination of taxes on incomes under \$40,000, or introduced a guaranteed annual income above the poverty line.

But the government's refusal to raise corporate taxes, or even close the gaping loopholes through which the corporations and the rich daily drive their Porsches, has increased the federal deficit (and provincial and municipal deficits as well in the trickle-down) and extended austerity measures imposed on working people, youth and the unemployed indefinitely. The government's refusal to take decisive action to create jobs, raise wages and living standards, strengthen social programs, and address climate change will deepen

the crisis of living that millions of working people face daily in Canada, and will create more fertile ground for the Tories and the extreme right.

Instead the government chose to post notice that it intends to mirror US tax rates once they are set by the Trump administration. Working people should ask: will Trudeau also match Trump's right-to-work laws when they arrive in the US? Will Trudeau go along with Trump's "tweaks" to NAFTA which target our softwood lumber, Medicare, our supply management system in agriculture, our manufacturing industries and auto jobs?

The biggest prize for big business is the establishment of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, which is intended to facilitate and speed-up the privatization of federal public assets and services. Euphemistically described as the means to "unlock and recycle the value of our public assets", the bank will invite private investors to fund – and jointly own – what is now publicly owned infrastructure, including roads, bridges, water filtration, public buildings and land, etc. The P3 ownership arrangements that the bank will underwrite will make billions in profits for the private corporate investors, and bilk the public out of billions in new and higher user fees, and in the loss of publicly owned infrastructure. It is mass privatization.

The government's willingness to cater to the corporations' demands in Canada, and in the White House, over the needs of working people, is nowhere better

exposed than in the absence of equitable funding for Aboriginal education and health and social services for children. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal has ordered the government three times to pay the \$382 million owing for First Nations child welfare. The \$99 million in this budget is 30% of this legally required funding for 165,000 indigenous children across Canada, who are dying as a result of deliberate underfunding of services by this and previous governments, part of the genocidal policies that included the residential school system.

This government has lied about its willingness to change this horrendous policy towards indigenous people, just as they have lied about recognition of indigenous sovereignty while approving pipelines opposed by indigenous peoples, environmentalists, and a majority of working people. Like the 2016 budget, which promised \$8.4 billion to address the crisis in Aboriginal communities, the lion's share of the funds will not be delivered before the next federal election – if ever. The government's slow implementation of the Public Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Women and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, prove that this is the case.

This corporate budget will cost lives of the most vulnerable, and result in a further loss of Canadian sovereignty, jobs, and social security. It could have been different, it should have been different, Canada is a rich country. Working people will have to take their opposition to the streets, and demand that this government deliver on the promises made. ●

Fund Drive near one-third of \$50,000 goal!

The front page of this issue gives some idea why the working class needs a newspaper like ours.

When the Liberal federal government brought down its second budget on March 22, there was a wide range of responses, both from big business groups and from progressive movements. Not surprisingly, most of the corporate reaction was fairly positive; after all, none of their tax breaks were touched, and the government's infrastructure strategy was clearly designed to give big business a big slice of the profits to be gained from spending on transit and other priorities. On the "people's side", the responses were mixed, but it was notable that many groups looked at the budget through the narrow lens of their own particular issues or demographics. The general tone was that the budget

"should have gone further" in terms of spending on urgent human needs. Some were more critical than others, and we have reprinted excerpts from their analyses. But missing in much of this commentary was a clear, incisive view that this budget is great for corporate interests, and a big step back from the promises and pledges made by the Prime Minister when he was running against Stephen Harper. As we pointed out after the 2015 election, the defeat of the Tories was a major victory, but without mass pressure on the Liberals, the positive elements of their platform would not be implemented. The statement on this page by the Communist Party makes these points, but the mainstream corporate media refuses to present such commentaries. It's up to the

working class press to bring a truly radical analysis of this important annual event in the political and economic life of the country – that's why working people need People's Voice. But we can't stay in print without your support for our annual Fund Drive.

We reported in our previous issue that this year's Drive is off to a great start, and we keep making good progress. As of March 27, four weeks into the Drive, we have raised \$16,340, or 32.7% of our \$50,000 target. Going from west to east, that includes \$3940 from B.C., \$190 from Alberta, \$180 from Saskatchewan, \$1200 from Manitoba, \$9930 from Ontario (that's 45% of the provincial target of \$22,000 – great work!), \$100 from Quebec, \$600 from Nova Scotia (the first area to officially achieve its target), and \$200 from Newfoundland & Labrador.

A couple of fund-raisers have already been held, including the annual Pasta Dinner organized by the Vancouver East Club as part of the monthly Left Film Night at the Centre for Socialist Education.

Next, our Edmonton supporters are holding a "Tribute to Fidel" on, Sat., April 22, 6-11:30 pm, at the Ukrainian Hall, 11018 97 St. The guest speaker is Liz Rowley, leader of the Communist Party, and the event features music, song, dance, and poetry. Tickets are \$20/\$10 for a Caribbean-themed dinner and silent auction.

Coming up in BC is our Mother's Day Brunch, a slightly different take on this traditional event, on Sunday, May 14, 11 am-2 pm, 1600 block E. 20th Ave., Vancouver (3586 Bella Vista), \$15 (kids \$10). ●

Liberals fail to deliver

A sampling of comments from the labour and progressive movements on the federal government's Budget 2017

"Nothing to solve income inequality"

Budget 2017 explicitly recognizes income inequality as a concern but does virtually nothing to solve the problem.

Rather than taking a bite out of the juicy tax loopholes that unfairly benefit the richest Canadians, the Trudeau government has offered up only a few stale crumbs. Despite significant public attention, and overwhelming support for action, Budget 2017 completely ignores the inequitable tax treatment of stock options, capital gains and dividends, which are only available to the richest Canadians and which – every year – deprive the federal government of billions of dollars that could be spent to improve the lives of Canadians. With respect to the misreporting of personal income under private corporations, the budget contains only a vague commitment for further study. As a consequence, the federal government's revenues as a percent of GDP are projected to remain flat through 2022, meaning necessary and valuable social program spending will not occur. In the area of income inequality, the Trudeau government has

acknowledged the problem but refused to take action on a solution. Once again, the poorest and most vulnerable Canadians have been told to stand at the back of the line while the richest Canadians continue to unfairly benefit at the expense of the majority.

- Statement by Rick Smith, Executive Director of the Broadbent Institute

"Good for billionaire tax dodgers"

Budget 2017 was an opportunity for the federal government to make significant and immediate strides on Canadians' priorities like child care, health care, and pay equity. Instead, the Trudeau government has delivered a plan that's heavy on rhetoric, and light on action.

"If you're an infrastructure bankroller or a billionaire tax dodger, today is a good day. For working Canadians, not so much," said CUPE National President Mark Hancock. "Mr. Trudeau has talked a good game lately about things like inclusive growth, pay equity, a living wage, and addressing inequality. But unfortunately, for Canadians, Budget 2017 proves it's just more talk. That's not how you create jobs and solve rising inequality in a precarious economy."

see LIBERAL BUDGET, p. 11

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Sask. budget makes life harder for rural people, says NFU

"The government of Saskatchewan's 2017 budget will make life more difficult for farmers and other rural residents while giving corporations and the extractive industries unnecessary tax breaks," says Cam Goff, Hanley-area farmer and National Farmers Union 2nd Vice President. "With just over a million people in a province that is endowed with incredible wealth, there is no good reason to cut valuable public services and sell off crown

still live in a small community and know they can get to the city if they need to for appointments."

Ending STC will increase rural isolation, promote depopulation and undermine the rural economy. The NFU says the government should keep STC on the road.

The Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation (SGCC) is up for sale. Its mandate is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of transporting and handling grain in partnership with farmers and community groups and in cooperation with shippers and railroads. While the government says the shortlines will get first option to buy, it also says it will accept the offer that returns the most value to Saskatchewan. It is likely that CP Rail or the railcar leasing company GATX would be able to outbid the shortlines.

"SGCC provides service to farmers, and thus to the whole prairie economy, by leasing out its 900 hopper cars and making sure they are well-maintained. Last year it paid a \$2 million dividend to Saskatchewan and helped the province's 13 shortline railways with grants totalling \$900,000," explains Goff. "It is a money-maker, and has contributed over \$20 million in dividends to the government since it was established. If kept, the government would be in position to get another \$30 million in dividends over the hopper cars' remaining lifespan."

The budget also ends the Saskatchewan Pastures Program, putting the 780,000 acres of crown land farmers have been able to use for summer grazing up for sale.

"The pastures program pays its own way — farmers' user-fees cover the cost of running the program. The pastures give more farmers a chance to raise cattle, and that helps them support their families and their communities," says Goff. "Almost 600,000 acres of these pastures is protected for ecological reasons. Keeping it intact is an important way for us to help the climate as well."

The government says it plans to consult with pasture patrons and Indigenous groups before selling

the pastures.

But Goff responds, "Our concern is that the lands would be sold to the highest bidder, maybe farmland investment corporations, that only think about how much money they can make. We are asking the government to reconsider this decision, or at least allow the patron groups enough time to develop a workable proposal."

The decision to cut provincial funding to the Regional Library system will also harm rural Saskatchewan. Service to local libraries will be cut; some libraries

will likely be closed.

"Libraries are important centers in rural communities. They are places where people can gather, connect with one another and with the wider world through the many resources libraries offer," says Goff. "Impairing the library system will further isolate rural people and reduce our quality of life. The loss of STC compounded with library cuts will make it that much harder for young people to stay in rural communities to farm and raise their families."

Many other aspects of the

budget disadvantage farmers and rural communities, including the reduction of the diesel fuel tax rebate and the elimination of the farm fuel tax rebate on gasoline, and the 6% PST being added to the cost of agricultural insurance premiums.

"While all Saskatchewan residents are faced with resolving the financial mess, the government has not only let big business avoid taking its share of the burden, but has actually added to the corporate sector's already excessive benefits," concludes Goff. ●



www.nfu.ca

corporations and crown lands to balance the books."

Released on March 22, the 2017-18 budget shuts down the Saskatchewan Transportation Company (STC), sells the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation and the Saskatchewan Pastures Program lands, and cuts the Regional Library system's funding in half.

As an NFU media release points out, "many farmers deal with small businesses in small communities that rely on STC to ship their orders to other small communities. Without STC, doing business will be more costly and time-consuming, to the extent that some of these businesses may not be able to survive."

"STC provides an essential service between smaller centers. Without the bus, shipping will become more expensive or even impossible. No doubt this will weaken the economic fabric of rural Saskatchewan," says Goff. "Of course when people come in to the bus depot they often go shopping in town as well. With STC, people who don't drive can

Families and public services pay the price for budget

Public services and the families who rely on them continue to pay the price for the Saskatchewan Party government's financial mismanagement, according to the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU/NUPGE).

"Saskatchewan people and the public employees of this province did not get us into this mess, yet we are forced to accept the consequences of government's mismanagement of taxpayers' money," says Bob Bymoan, SGEU President.

The 2017-2018 provincial budget cuts jobs in crucial areas, including in the Ministries of Highways, Education and Environment. In total, there is a net loss of 111 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, which includes some previously announced

reductions.

"Saskatchewan public services have already been cut to the bone, leaving gaps in the workforce and chronic understaffing in vital areas, like child protection and correctional services. More than 1,900 government jobs were cut between 2010 and 2014. Now, workers struggle to deal with unmanageable workloads, and families who need services suffer the consequences," says Bymoan. "Additional cuts will place even more strain on overburdened staff and the people they serve."

"If a threatened 3.5 per cent wage cut is imposed on public service workers, they will be much worse off than before the beginning of the resource boom," the SGEU president points out. "Wages for government employees have not kept up with the cost of living. In

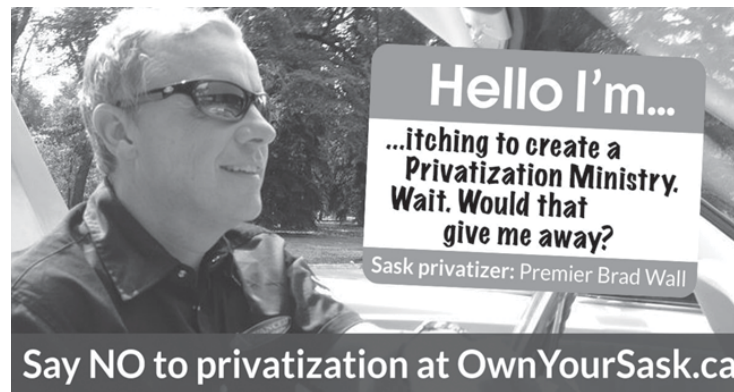
real-dollar terms, government workers already take home less today than they did a decade ago. A further wage cut would be excessively punitive."

"Public employees spend their wages in their local communities, and their purchases help stimulate economic activity that benefits everyone," he adds. "Austerity agendas that hurt families also slow economic recovery."

Cuts to post-secondary education will affect Saskatchewan Polytechnic and regional colleges, hurting young people, and those who lost their jobs in the economic downturn.

"Why would you erode funding for post-secondary education at a time when we need to support skills training to equip people to prepare for a future in an increasingly competitive economy?" asks Bymoan.

The SGEU also slams the decision to give away revenue-generating public assets. Liquor store privatization alone will cost the province \$115 million in public profits in the first five years alone, Bymoan warns, adding "it's time to stop the cutbacks and privatization, before it's too late. It's irresponsible for this government to put the well-being of today's families and future generations at risk." ●



MAY DAY 2017 GREETING ADS

To mark May Day 2017, 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 22; if PV is preparing the layout, the deadline is April 21. 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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Quebec companies break anti-scab rules

For the third time in just one year, investigators with the Quebec Ministry of Labour have caught strikebreakers brought in by a company involved in a labour dispute. The United Steelworkers is now calling on the Quebec government to add some teeth to its anti-scab legislation.

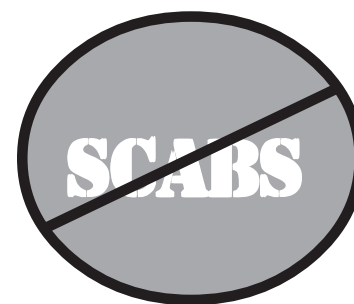
Three scabs were found at Samuel & Fils, a metal processing company where about a hundred workers launched a strike earlier this year, to protest a collective agreement clause that would disadvantage new workers.

"This confirms our suspicions. We saw trucks coming and going, day after day, so it was obvious that the company wasn't operating using only its managers," explained the president of USW Local Union 9441, Alain Paiement.

The USW will pursue the process at the judicial level.

"As soon as possible, our lawyers will file an application with the court for a ruling an order

to be issued. If the company really wants to restart its plant, it will have to return to the table to negotiate seriously. We've had enough of this employer's



shenanigans and hiring of strikebreakers in violation of the Labour Code," said Staff Representative Silvy Vaudry.

Fines are not initially imposed on companies that bring in scabs — only after the Labour Court issues an order, which can take some time. These fines are rather limited, reaching a maximum of \$1,000 per day.

"It's a ridiculously low

amount," said Donald Noël, Steelworkers Area Coordinator for the North/North-West region. "These companies calculate the fines into their operating costs and laugh all the way to the bank heaven. The legislation should be stronger, and should provide for fines to be applied from the moment the violation begins. These fines should be high enough to act as a deterrent against such behaviour by companies."

During a labour dispute in Quebec, only managers hired before negotiations begin are authorized to perform the duties that are normally performed by the unionized workers.

Just recently, investigators discovered that strikebreakers were also being used by CEZinc in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, where workers have been on strike since February 12. The same scenario played out earlier last winter, during the Steelworkers' labour dispute at Ciment Lafarge in Saint-Constant. ●

EDITORIALS

The billionaire bankers

Twenty-two years ago, People's Voice printed a series on the staggering profits by Canada's six largest banks - totalling six billion dollars a year. Our readers took part in a public campaign to draw attention to this profiteering scandal, holding rallies and pickets in a number of cities across the country. As we wrote at the time, if those profits were stuffed into burlap sacks, each containing a million dollars, the sacks would stretch for six kilometers. It was a startling image.

How things change in just a generation! Today, six billion sounds like pocket change for the big banks, in Canada and even more so internationally. A recent Oxfam report, for example, calls out 20 Eurozone banks which stashed US\$27 billion in profits into tax havens in the year 2015 alone. Luxembourg and Ireland are among the favourite destinations. Europe's fifth-biggest bank, Barclays, posted profits of 557 million euros in Luxembourg during 2015, and paid only one million euros in taxes - an effective tax rate of 0.2 percent.

The latest news on banking profits in Canada is equally shocking. "Strong results" from Toronto-Dominion Bank helped push the Big Six banks' total profits to more than \$10.5-billion for the three month period ending January 31, 2017. Projected over a 12-month period, that's \$42 billion, seven times as much as these banks racked up in the mid-1990s. As one business analyst put it, "In general, I think that bank earnings showed that there is still a lot to be positive about when it comes to the Canadian banks."

No kidding. Show us a single group of workers whose earning power jumped seven-fold over the past two decades, and we'll eat this newspaper. But when the richest corporations in the country announce record profits year after year, well, that's just "positive news."

Unite to resist hate groups

The threat posed by hate groups across North America is growing rapidly. The latest evidence of this danger came on March 26, during an event in Vancouver organized by the Coalition Against Bigotry-Pacific to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (officially March 21). As about 200 participants walked along Hastings Street, marchers near the back were approached by men in black outfits covered with ominous symbols - members of the anti-immigrant Soldiers of Odin, who tried to pick fights. When the diverse group of marchers gathered at Victory Square, a smoke bomb was tossed into the crowd and the thugs grew increasingly aggressive, as Vancouver police stood by and observed. The rally did take place, including a powerful speech by Jenny Kwan, Vancouver East NDP MP, herself an immigrant and a target of racism. But the provocations continued, including by members of the so-called "UBC Free Speech Club," which specializes in condemning free speech by anti-racists and political radicals. Three fascists were finally handcuffed and taken away by police, only to be released soon afterwards, when more attacks took place.

As Coalition organizers said, the main lesson is that the anti-racism movements must become much larger and better organized. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's annual census, the number of hate groups in the United States is rising as the radical right becomes energized by Donald Trump. The number of explicitly anti-Muslim groups has nearly tripled since 2015, to over 100 across the U.S. Similar trends are visible here in Canada. We call upon police and politicians to treat the Soldiers of Odin and similar groups as criminal gangs intent on violence. But even more important, labour and other progressive movements must unite to stand up against hate, before more people are killed.

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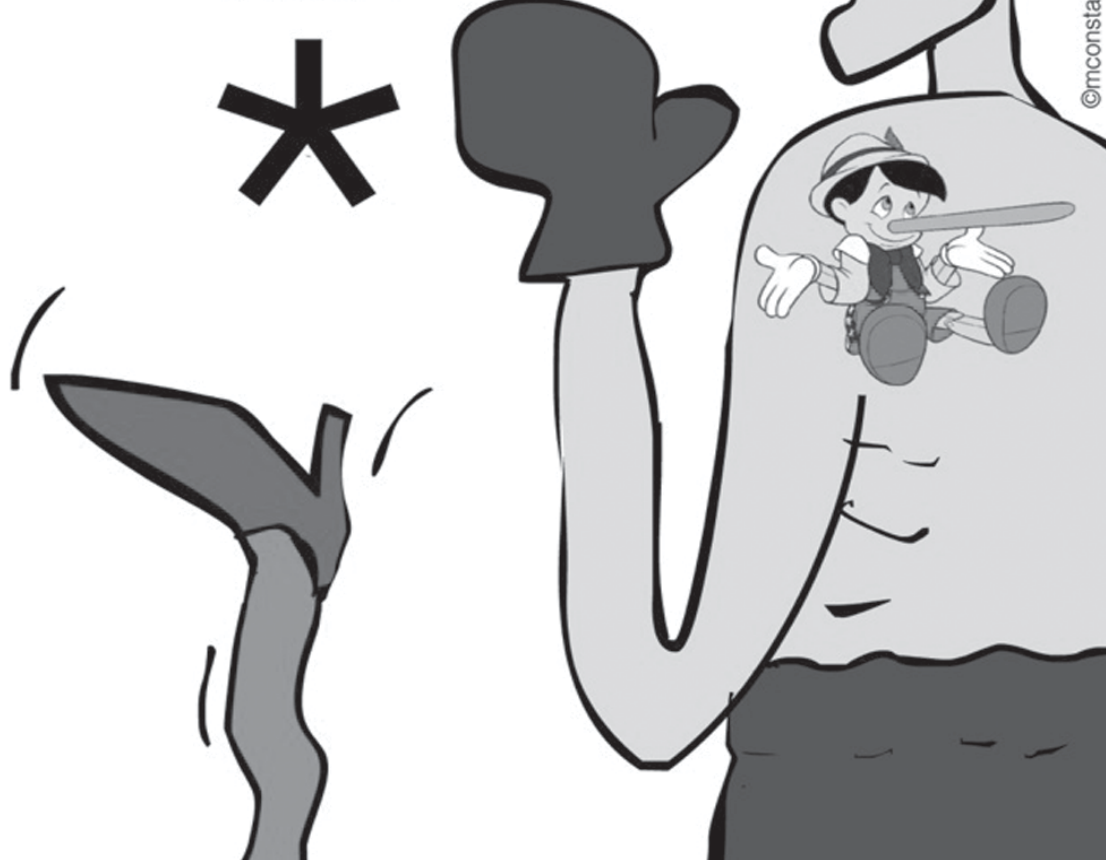
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LETTERS

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Justin sucker -
punched electoral
reform and won
himself a new
tattoo



Chrystia Freeland's family heritage issues

By Paul Bentley

The corporate media has left many questions unanswered about recent news that Mykhailo Chomiak, the grandfather of Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, was editor of the *Krakivski Visti*, referred to as a Nazi "collaborationist newspaper" by the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust.

The most important question is, how did Chomiak gain admission to the United States and Canada after the war? The second, is why he was never prosecuted like many other Nazi collaborators for his crimes?

According to David Matas, senior legal counsel for B'nai Brith, "Chomiak died in 1984. He has been dead for more than 30 years. The Deschenes and Government files on him, if there are any, should be made public".

A second set of questions are raised by Freeland's association to this figure, with whose right-wing Ukrainian nationalist dreams she openly identifies: "That dream persisted into the next generation, and in some cases the generation after that", as she wrote in May 2015.

Of most concern to leftists is her activist anti-communism. For example, on January 28, 2015 Freeland was the only Liberal MP to join with Conservative MPs, including Jason Kenney, in a ceremony celebrating a gift from the government of Latvia to the "Memorial for the Victims of Communism" project.

In her book entitled *Plutocrats*,

moreover, she offers a shocking defense of "global capitalism". Not only is it strange that she chose this

Speaking out

term for her title, given its history as code word for "Jew" in the speeches of Hitler and Goebbels, but statements like the following in the book are a warning signal to all leftists about her agenda:

"America really does need many of its plutocrats. We benefit from the goods they produce and the jobs they create. And even if a growing portion of those jobs are overseas, it is better to be the home of these innovators—native and immigrant alike—than not. In today's hypercompetitive global environment, we need a creative, dynamic super-elite more than ever."

Freeland's stance goes a long way to explain her anti-communism and her collaboration with the global capitalist elite as an editor for the *Globe and Mail* and the *Financial Times*.

Ukrainian nationalism is in no small part a reaction to the difficult early period in Soviet history marked by Civil War and the Holodomor (though the causes of the latter event are still debated by historians). However, her grandfather's education and white-collar career suggest that her family's nationalist aspirations were of a different order than that

of the peasants in the field.

In her previous post as Minister of Trade, Freeland's success in pushing through the EU-Canada free trade deal (CETA), which protects investor rights at the expense of those of labour and the environment, was a major victory for her capitalist agenda.

Now as Minister of Foreign Affairs, she has turned her attention to a major military build-up in the Ukraine and Latvia designed to secure the economic benefits of CETA, and the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA), which she also pushed through Parliament. No wonder she is banned from travel in Russia.

They say the apple does not fall far from the tree. ●

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Solidarity in opposition to the neoliberal ideology

By Nino Pagliccia

In a recent article titled "The Venezuela 'Opposition' We Never Hear About", Canadian journalist and author Arnold August, wrote about the real nature of the "opposition" in Venezuela. [www.telesurtv.net/english/opinion/The-Venezuela-Opposition-We-Never-Hear-About-20170309-0035.html]

In the context of a meeting of delegates of the international Network of Intellectuals, Artists and Social Movements in Defense of Humanity in Caracas, August refers to one of the speakers, the Venezuelan deputy at the National Assembly, Hector Rodríguez, who is the leader of the minority pro-Chavismo group, a fact that puts him effectively on the opposition—at least in a conventional sense.

We learn from August the "conventional" opposition is based simply on the smaller number of representatives, who nevertheless remain loyal (are not opposed) to the capitalist system's ideology (Republicans and Democrats in the U.S.), or to the head of state, the Queen in the case of Conservatives and Liberals in Canada. But in Venezuela, Rodríguez's loyalty lies with the ideology of the Bolivarian Revolution. This

makes him invisible to, or ignored by the corporate media.

August writes, "the Bolivarian Revolution ... is based in words and deeds on opposition to U.S. imperialism and capitalism. While the Revolution is flexible on tactics ... when it comes to the question of principles and objectives, there is no compromise possible."

This ideological opposition is different from the numeric or size-based opposition. The former is a deeper and more meaningful opposition, and should not be penalized by the U.S. and its enablers, as is the often the case, when it is the free sovereign choice of the people.



OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro was silent during the "parliamentary coup" against Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, but now is attacking Venezuelan democracy.

Venezuela's ideological opposition to the Empire must have been at the forefront of Luis Almagro's mind, the secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS), when he singled out Venezuela in his accusatory, aggressive and damning report on March 14, 2017. [www.oas.org/documents/spa/press/Informe-VZ-Spanish-signed-final.pdf]

Totally outside his mandate as secretary general, Almagro lays out serious accusations against the government of Nicolas Maduro, that do not have any support aside from his compromised words. After Venezuela had been inter-

nationally recognized for holding the most transparent presidential elections, Almagro has the audacity to state that "a call to general elections be made in the next 30 days." He goes on to state that "if no general election are held under the stipulated conditions, that would be the time necessary to apply Venezuela's suspension from the activities of the Organization in light of Article 21 of the Interamerican Democratic Charter."

This is the same Almagro who did not suggest a suspension for Brazil when in 2016 its then vice-president Michel Temer and his associates ousted legitimately elected President Dilma Rousseff in a so-called parliamentary coup, to implement rightwing neoliberal policies in line with the requirements of the U.S.

But Almagro's words cannot be trusted, precisely because he is not in opposition to the ideology of the empire. His words are compromised by his adherence to the neoliberal dogma that the Bolivarian Revolution has rejected.

In an immediate public reply through the ministry of external affairs the Venezuelan government stated its "deepest repudiation to the illegitimate and illicit pretense

report on Venezuela presented by Mr. Luis Almagro who...ignores the institutional processes and principles of [the OAS]."

The Latin American community in the hemisphere has reacted solidly in support of Venezuela, with strong words of rejection for the Almagro report. For instance, the senator from Chile, Alejandro Navarro, the president of the Chile-Venezuela interparliamentary group, has firmly stated that instead it is Almagro who "should be suspended from the OAS", and that Chile should send a "clear signal against the continued conduct of this person, who during his whole term of office all he has aimed for has been destabilizing the government of president Nicolas Maduro, and the intervention in a country that is free and that elects its leaders democratically."

Canada, an OAS member since 1990, has not issued its position at the time of this writing. The Canadian-based group Hugo Chavez People's Defense Front, representing organizations and activists with Latin American roots, has asked Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "to call for the institutional respect for the process

see VENEZUELA, p. 11

Trudeau must call for the release of Hassan Diab

By Tyler Levitan, Campaigns Coordinator for Independent Jewish Voices Canada. This article first appeared in Huffington Post-Canada.

Imagine for a moment that you have been accused by a foreign state of committing a heinous crime that took place over 36 years ago. The foreign state calls on your government to extradite you for questioning on the basis of evidence that is either flawed or secret. Over a period of eight years, you are imprisoned by your government, released by your government on strict bail conditions and then extradited to that foreign state, where you await in prison for over two years while that state continues its investigation.

This is the unjust reality for Canadian citizen Hassan Diab. Diab, a Lebanon born Canadian who taught sociology in Ottawa, was accused in 2008 by France of murdering four and wounding dozens from a bomb that exploded outside a Parisian synagogue in 1980. Diab has always maintained his innocence, saying that he was not in Paris at the time and that he is the victim of mistaken identity.

The evidence that France presented against Diab in the Canadian extradition proceedings was described by Superior Court Justice Robert Maranger as "very problematic," "suspect," "convoluted" and "very confusing." Maranger added that if Diab was tried in Canada, it would unlikely result in a conviction.

The French case for extradition rested on two main elements: secret intelligence that was eventually withdrawn by the Crown attorneys (on behalf of France) during the Canadian extradition proceedings, due to its unknown origins and a hotel registration card containing five words in block letters written

The campaign to win justice for Hassan Diab continues on April 5 (7 pm) with a public forum at the Vancouver Public Library Central Branch, sponsored by the BC Civil Liberties Association and other groups. For more on this case, visit www.justiceforhassandiab.org.

by the bomber.

The five capitalized words written on the hotel registration card were determined to be the same handwriting as Diab's by two French handwriting experts. But it turned out that the French experts relied on several comparison handwriting samples that were not even written by Diab his ex wife wrote them. This led the Crown attorneys to withdraw these handwriting analysis reports from the Canadian extradition proceedings.

A third handwriting analysis report was then introduced by the French using Diab's actual handwriting, and it too concluded that there was a match. Diab's legal defence commissioned five independent and internationally recognized handwriting experts to review the reports and its findings. Each expert concluded that the French report is biased, based on faulty methodology and wholly unreliable. A British expert even described the report as "demonstrably false." The defence experts showed that an objective handwriting analysis would actually exclude Diab.

In addition, forensic analyses commissioned by the RCMP show that Diab's fingerprints conclusively do not match those found on the hotel registration card and a police statement signed by the bomber. Despite this exculpatory evidence, Justice Maranger ordered Diab's extradition almost entirely on the basis of the disputed and discredited French handwriting analysis report.

Justice Maranger declared that his hands were tied; he felt forced to extradite Diab because of Canada's embarrassingly low standards for extradition. It is important to note, however, that Canadians are supposed to be extradited to stand trial, not to sit in prison indefinitely while an investigation continues.

One of Canada's foremost authorities on extradition, attorney Gary Botting, believes that the Canadian justice system failed Diab by continuing its long held practice of rubber stamping extraditions, despite a Supreme Court ruling in 2006 that told provincial courts to turn down requests that employ unreliable evidence, and which do not meet Canadian standards.

According to Botting, Canadians "get the short end of the stick every time. Their own

government has sold them down the river." Botting concluded that Diab "should not be going to a country that automatically regards him as a fugitive and has him pegged as a murderer a terrorist. And God knows, in this climate, you don't want that label."

The climate in France is undoubtedly hostile to anyone labeled a terrorist, which Diab is consistently labeled as in France. If Diab's case goes to trial, he will be tried in a special anti-terrorism court, which permits the use of secret intelligence as evidence whose origins are unknown, even to the judge.

And in Diab's legal dossier, the French prosecutor has maintained all the withdrawn evidence from the Canadian extradition proceedings, including the handwriting analysis reports that used Diab's ex-wife's writing as the comparison sample. Diab's lawyers have tried to get this discredited evidence removed, but to no avail.

A recent breakthrough has occurred in this case, though, which should give hope for those seeking justice. The investigating

judge in France recently traveled to Lebanon and found "consistent evidence" that Diab was indeed in Lebanon at the time of the bombing. The judge immediately ordered that Diab be released on bail. Unfortunately, a panel of three appeal judges turned this ruling down, forcing Diab to remain behind bars.

Despite the hideous nature of the allegations against him, Diab's plight has elicited the support of numerous civil society organizations in Canada, including national labour unions, civil liberties associations and human rights organizations. It is objectively clear that the evidence presented against him is unreliable and, in fact, proves his innocence.

Civil society has spoken, and now it is time for the Liberal government to demand the release of Diab from custody. Diab was extradited under the orders of former Conservative Justice Minister Rob Nicholson. The previous government signed off on this request, so the Liberals are not to blame. But now his fate rests in their hands. If this government is truly committed to justice, then it must take swift action. At a minimum, the Liberals must demand that Diab be released on bail, particularly given the French judge's finding that Diab was in Lebanon during the bombing.

Much like the French Jewish officer Alfred Dreyfus, the victim of a miscarriage of justice based on faulty handwriting analysis and secret evidence, history is repeating itself in the case of Hassan Diab. As Dreyfus found himself in a climate of anti-Semitism, Diab is forced to defend himself in an anti-Arab and Islamophobic climate, where he is presumed guilty. The Liberal government cannot simply wash its hands. ●



CPC leadership analyzes new political situation

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada met in Toronto over the March 4-5 weekend to discuss the big political upheavals of the past few months.

Elected at the 38th Central Convention last spring, the Party's top leadership body convenes in person twice a year to set policy and guide overall activity. Given the outcome of the U.S. election, and the growing threat of ultra-right and racist movements in many countries, this was a particularly significant gathering for the CC, which includes 22 members from all parts of the country.

The meeting began with a political report, presented by leader Liz Rowley on behalf of the CPC's Central Executive Committee. The report calls the election of Donald Trump and Republican majorities in Congress "the worst possible electoral outcome for the US working class, for the international working class, for the environment, and for movement towards global peace, disarmament and mutual security. It is also an immediate threat to Canadian jobs and wages, environmental security, health and social programs. It sharply accelerates the attack on Canadian sovereignty and independence."

As the report notes, Hillary Clinton actually won three million more votes, but the Electoral College system helped the most reactionary elements of the US ruling class take office. While Clinton (like Barack Obama) was backed by trade unions, the main Black and Hispanic organizations, women's organizations, etc., "a significant number of their members either didn't vote, couldn't vote because of extensive voter suppression in key states, or didn't vote for Clinton." Many others voted for Trump, including "an estimated 30% of trade union members, 53% of white women voters, 29% of Hispanics, 8% of African-Americans, and 46% of youth between 18 and 29."

The political report points to widespread dissatisfaction with the pro-corporate and pro-war policies of the Democrats. After the defeat of Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries, Trump focussed on winning over working class voters looking for immediate change from the status quo. But, the report stresses, his "coalition" included groups from the fascist right, sections of the police and military, and wealthy and powerful



CPC leader Liz Rowley

billionaires, bankers, and oilmen who financed his "outsider" campaign.

"The Trump coalition used Islamophobia, anti-Black racism



Communist banner at IWD march and rally in Toronto, March 11, 2017 (photos by Ed Bil)

and anti-Semitism, as well as misogyny to promote their demagogic candidate," notes the report, creating increased political and organizing space for emboldened far-right groups. After posing as a candidate who could reduce the danger of war, Trump is instead escalating arms spending and threatening military action against a number of countries.

The president is also moving to unilaterally strengthen US economic domination, with a sharply negative potential impact on Canada. A key section of the political report analyzes the implications of "tweaking" NAFTA, which since 1994 has created a deeply integrated pattern of trade, production, and movements of goods, services, workers, and capital, across the continent. "While it doesn't have to be that way," the report says, "it is that way thanks to NAFTA."

Instead of trying to win more favourable terms, the report says, Canada should withdraw from NAFTA, and negotiate new trade arrangements based on a policy of mutually beneficial, multi-lateral trade with all countries. The report outlines key priorities for "developing an environmentally sustainable industrial strategy, including a Canadian steel industry, and an energy policy based on public ownership and democratic control of energy resources and development of new sustainable energy such as solar, wind, thermal, tidal and others still in development."

A new economic strategy, it argues, should include a publicly owned and controlled Canadian transportation industry, and a massive program to build affordable social housing. "Instead of capitalist globalization, we fight for peace, jobs, sovereignty, equality, democracy, and for socialism," the report says.

But in the immediate term, "the job of the labour and people's movements is to make sure that the drive towards fascism is derailed before it gathers any more steam."

The conditions that make this drive to the far right possible today include the deep economic crisis that has gripped the capitalist

world, the growth of permanent mass unemployment, widespread anger at bourgeois politicians and governments, and deliberate efforts to stoke racial and religious prejudices against refugees and migrants.

Several fascist movements are growing in Canada, including "La Meute" in Quebec, with a military leadership and a claimed membership of 43,000; the so-called "Coalition of Concerned Canadian Citizens," which has called two country-wide days of action to promote hatred of Muslims; and the fascist "Your Ward News" publication in Toronto, which glorifies Nazism and targets Communists, Jews, immigrants, LGBTQ, women, and minorities. These racist, xenophobic, misogynist and fascist forces, the report says, are "the shock troops of the most violent and reactionary sections of capital."

The only real option for fundamental reform, the report stresses, is based on systemic and revolutionary change. The Communist Party calls for a People's Coalition, with a platform to create good jobs and full employment; raise wages, pensions and living standards; and strengthen the social safety net. "These are the policies that can take Canada out of the crisis, and open to the door to fundamental change and to socialism," says the political report.

From there, it looks at a wide range of struggles against reactionary governments and corporate interests. The Trudeau Liberals, it points out, have broken promises to indigenous peoples, dropped the PM's pledge for electoral reform, and failed to achieve a new health accord to strengthen universal Medicare. These factors "will all have a significant impact on the next election slated for 2019."

For that campaign, the Tories are positioning themselves on the far right of the Liberals, and the Bloc Quebecois has tied itself to the rising right-wing movements. Meanwhile, "unless the left-wing of the party is able to change the direction, the NDP is unlikely to pose a serious challenge to either the Liberals or the Tories in the

next election. In the interim, the NDP's support for NAFTA renegotiations, for NATO and NORAD, and for balanced budgets will not endear it to Canadians, nor help to mount the fight needed to defeat the corporate agenda, and secure the policies Canadians



voted for in the 2015 election campaign."

However, the report does note important developments in the fightback against right-wing forces, such as the huge Women's March demonstrations in cities across Canada on the day after Trump's inauguration: "It was a remarkable demonstration of the unity, militancy, and power of women in action," indicating better conditions for mass action to defend and expand women's equality rights.

Other positive signs include the outpouring of solidarity with Muslims in the wake of murders by a white supremacist in Quebec, and last November's pan-Canadian day of protest against skyrocketing tuition fees, the first in several years called by the Canadian Federation of Students. Recent labour struggles have included the militant battle by teachers and educational workers in Nova Scotia against the provincial government's imposition of a four-year collective agreement that undermines teaching and learning conditions; the strike (now in its second year) by the Chronicle Herald newspaper workers in Halifax; the struggle in Newfoundland against the government's 2016 austerity budget; the huge victory by British Columbia teachers against 15 years of attacks against public education by the Liberal government; the growing strike movement in Quebec, where the demand for a \$15 minimum wage is now part of the bargaining strategy of the main labour centrals; and the strikes by cafeteria workers at York University and other campuses.

But the attacks on the working class, on racialized and indigenous people, on women and immigrants, and on organized labour, says the report, "can't be rolled back by the lobbying that has been the main, and perhaps the only tool in the CLC's arsenal for the past several years."

With the CLC convention taking place this May in Toronto, the Congress will "need to unite and mobilize the 3.3 million workers it represents to take on the employers and their governments in the streets, on the shop floor and in the workplace, in bargaining and on the picket lines, in the Legislatures and on their front steps, in the media, and in every way to stop them and to beat them back this vicious and deadly assault."

To help move the fightback in such a militant and united direction, the report says, requires a much stronger Communist Party and Young Communist League. Provincial leaders of the Party and other CC members spoke about the increased level of recruitment to both organizations, as more and more people turn to the ideas of socialism. ●

The next issue of People's Voice will feature excerpts from the CC political report, which will also be posted online at the website of the Communist Party www.communist-party.ca



People's Voice display at IWD in Toronto.

“Hundreds of thousands will strike on May 1”

Cora Lewis, BuzzFeed News

Almost 350,000 U.S. service workers plan to strike on May 1, in the most direct attempt yet by organized labor to capture the energy from a resurgent wave of activism across the country.

Tens of thousands of members of a powerful California branch of the Service Employees International Union will participate in the strike, according to David Huerta, president of the chapter.

“We understand that there’s risk involved in that,” Huerta told BuzzFeed News, “but we’re willing to take that risk in order to be able to move forward in this moment, while the most marginalized are in the crosshairs of this administration.”

Since Donald Trump’s election, there has been no shortage of wildcat strikes by groups disproportionately affected by his administration’s policies. But this time around, organized labor is driving the effort. According to a coalition of groups leading the strike, more than 300,000 food chain workers and 40,000 unionized service workers have said they will walk off the job so far.

Huerta’s union chapter represents tens of thousands of workers, including janitors, security officers and airport staff, while the Food Chain Workers Alliance, which represents workers throughout the food industry, says hundreds of thousands of its non-

unionized members have committed to striking.

Best known for its creative and militant organizing, Huerta’s SEIU United Service Workers West local was one of the forces behind the successful campaign to unionize janitors in the 1990’s, which many see as the model for today’s wave of fast-food organizing. The Food Chain Workers Alliance, for its part, has built a nationwide network of workers across the food system, from farm fields to restaurant kitchens.

“We are a workforce made up mostly of immigrants, women, African Americans, and indigenous people,” wrote the alliance in a statement

announcing the strike, provided to BuzzFeed News. “Without workers, who does Trump think will harvest the crops, craft the food, transport it to market, stock the shelves, cook in kitchens, and serve the meals?”

Speaking by phone from Milan, Missouri, organizer Axel Fuentes, of the Rural Community Workers Alliance, told BuzzFeed News that a thousand workers at a pork plant in the town will be striking May 1. Fuentes provides services to meat-processing workers in three towns in the northern part of Missouri, most of whom are immigrants and refugees.

“There are workers in this area that voted for Donald Trump,”

Fuentes said, citing abortion as the decisive issue for many. “But what they are seeing is not what they were expecting to happen with this administration. They’re seeing freedom of religion under threat, immigration under threat, and they’ve expressed regret for voting for him.”

Fuentes said he has never seen workers express a desire to go on strike in his ten years of organizing, but on May Day, the majority of workers at the local Smithfield meat processing plant have

Tens of thousands of members of a powerful California branch of the Service Employees International Union will participate in the strike

pledged not to go into work, shutting down operations. They also plan to keep their children home from school and not to shop, he said.

The Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC) United, a food industry worker advocacy group, will also participate in the strike, according to Saru Jayaraman, its co-director. ROC United and its network of restaurant owners and workers were instrumental in organizing the recent Day Without Immigrants protest, which shuttered hundreds of restaurants in cities across the country.

America’s last major general strike was the first such Day Without Immigrants, in 2006, in

which more than a million workers struck.

“That was the largest national rising in many, many decades,” said Daniel Gross, founder and executive director of Brandworkers, which organizes food manufacturing workers. “For those of us who were fortunate enough to be involved, we’ll tell you, it was a strike. That 2006 momentum has not yet been duplicated on May 1 to date.”

The plans for May 1 this year, and the organizations pushing them, highlight the role of so-called alt-labor groups, which can move faster than their larger, richer and more powerful institutional peers. Jayaraman,

from ROC United, said groups like hers have more flexibility to call for their members to stop work, while established unions feel a need to tread carefully.

Striking is “a legal term for them, and it isn’t for us,” she said. “It’s not part of collective bargaining agreements that our members can or cannot strike, so it’s not the same. Since it’s a legal situation in a contract [for unionized workers,] under the purview of the National Labor Relations Act, they’re definitely warier.”

That wariness means no national union has yet called on its workers to join a general strike, even though plenty of their ground-level leaders are actively involved

in the upcoming protests.

“This is a strike from below, from the bottom of the economy,” Gross said of the May 1 action.

The same migrant and immigrant constituency that struck eleven years ago will mobilize this year, joined by the Black Lives Matter movement, native sovereignty rights groups, and organizations Voces de La Frontera and Movimiento Cosecha.

SEIU-USWW’s Huerta acknowledged that “there’s always been tension between institutions and movements.”

“Although we are part of an institution, we see ourselves as part of a movement,” he said. “The question is, ‘How do we use our institutional power to move the movement?’”

Since Trump’s election, a strike by the New York Taxi Workers Alliance has led to a consumer boycott of Uber; a one-day work-stoppage by New York City bodega owners rallied the city around its Yemeni business owners; February’s Day Without Immigrants shut down food service in urban centers; and the Women’s Strike this month closed schools and filled streets.

But Jayaraman dismissed the idea of ‘protest fatigue’ among her membership, which has turned out in high numbers for marches and strikes numerous times in recent months. “If I see fatigue,” she said, “it’s among organizers who are trying to keep up with the workers.” ●

A long history of Western oppression

By Shane Quinn, Morning Star

Some anniversaries are respectfully observed annually in the West and widely reported by the obedient “free press” — International Holocaust Memorial Day, Victory in Europe Day, Remembrance Day and so on. Yet the following are anniversaries suitably airbrushed from history books, the media, political rhetoric and polite conversation which serves the requirements of Western power.

1962: Kennedy invades Vietnam

The 50th anniversary of the worst level of post-World War II aggression passed by five years ago, and went entirely unreported in Western mainstream circles, almost as if it has disappeared from history.

Kennedy’s direct invasion left millions dead and destroyed large parts of the Vietnamese countryside and later brought death and destruction to much of South-east Asia. The silent passing of this anniversary represents an astonishing level of historical forgetfulness.

The conflict has long been mislabelled “the Vietnam war,” when in reality the United States waged a war of aggression against a weaker nation, a prime example of what the Nuremberg trials held to be “the supreme international crime.”

Kennedy further initiated chemical warfare, used napalm

to destroy vegetation and crops, starved the rebellious population of South Vietnam, later forcing them into concentration camps — or “strategic hamlets,” a tactic copied from the British.

1953: Korean war

Try to contemplate your country being completely obliterated by the world’s foremost military power; it certainly would leave a lingering impression. The US dropped more bombs in this conflict than during their entire Pacific campaign during WWII. Furthermore, the North Korean leadership were likely aware of the US public military accounts lauding the Asian country’s destruction.

By the end, the US Air Force could find nothing left to bomb, so they were sent to destroy North Korea’s dams that controlled their water supply — a classic Nuremberg war crime. As the water gushed from the broken dams, it resulted in enormous rice crop failure and starvation.

1973: US overthrows Salvador Allende in Chile

It is commonly known as “the first 9/11” in South America and dutifully excised from Western history. On September 11 1973 the US under president Richard Nixon vigorously overthrew Salvador Allende’s democratically elected government. The US’s aim

was, as national security adviser Henry Kissinger said, to kill the “virus” of independent nationalism, so as to avoid further “contagion.”

Thousands of people lost their lives during the coup, including Allende himself. Much worse followed. General Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship was installed by the US in 1974, terrorising Chileans through murders and torture for over 15 years. Pinochet’s reign helped the US retain control of “our hemisphere,” as Kennedy once put it.

Meanwhile the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks are marked annually by the willing mainstream media in the West.

1953: US and Britain overthrow Iran’s prime minister

Noam Chomsky wrote recently: “Literally not a day has passed since 1953 when the US has not been torturing the people of Iran.” In 1953, the US and British overthrew Iran’s parliamentary government, led by prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh.

The coup reinstated the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who would compile one of the world’s worst human rights records. The Shah was supported to the bitter end by the West. It wasn’t until the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that he

was finally overthrown.

In the decades since, the US has tirelessly undermined Iran. President Jimmy Carter immediately tried to initiate another coup, while Roland Reagan strongly supported Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, costing half a million lives. US sanctions on Iran were long imposed, becoming yet more severe during the Bill Clinton and George W Bush years.

2003: The US-led invasion of Iraq

The most extreme crime of the 21st century has been referred to in elite circles, and with a straight face, as “the liberation of Iraq.”

The invasion of Iraq resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, bolstered existing terrorist organisations, helped spawn ISIS, instigated a continuing sectarian conflict, fostered the current refugee crisis and destabilised much of the Middle East. Iraq was largely destroyed by the invasion, and its implications extend into the future. The 10th anniversary of the attack scarcely received recognition in Washington.

Bush was the driving force behind “the supreme international crime.” However, Tony Blair’s Britain, hugely supported by the Conservative Party, tagged along as the “junior partner” in crime.

The invasion was perpetrated on the pretexts of eliminating weapons of mass destruction and ousting Saddam Hussein — the same dictator previously given ample support by presidents Carter, Reagan and George Bush Snr. ●



1970: A guerrilla in the Mekong Delta paddles through a mangrove forest defoliated by Agent Orange. The U.S. military denuded the landscape with chemicals to deny cover to soldiers and supporters of the National Liberation Front (misnamed “Viet Cong” in the West). Mangrove forests are bountiful areas for agriculture and fishing. Photo by Le Minh Truong.



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Escondida copper strike ends

The end of a historic strike at Chile's Escondida copper mine, the world's biggest, has left its owner, BHP Billiton, nursing an estimated \$1 billion loss and probably in a weaker position for negotiations in a year or so.

On March 23, the 2,500-member union at the mine decided to return to work after 43 days - the longest strike in the country's mining history - by invoking a legal provision to extend the old contract by 18 months. Workers will begin the gradual job of getting Escondida up and running again, with little resolved for either the union or BHP.

Although the workers lost out on any signing bonus or pay raise, the extension means they get to maintain current working conditions and benefits, which Escondida wanted to roll back. Their position in 2018 will also be stronger, thanks to new labor laws in Chile coming into practice next month.

But Escondida company negotiators underestimated the determination of the union to keep their benefits, and did not expect workers to trigger the legal provision and wind up losing out on their bonus. The company has not given an estimate for the cost of the stoppage, but extrapolating from its usual production rhythm gives a loss of close to \$1 billion. The Chilean economy may contract this quarter for the first time since 2009 due to the strike. Escondida produced some 5 percent of the world's copper last year.

When the two sides sit down next year, there will be one key difference. Legislation passed last year by the government of President Michelle Bachelet will likely give the union a number of useful legal tools they previously lacked.

The existing contract's expiry at the end of January meant that Escondida workers just missed out on being covered by the incoming law. Next time, two of the union's three core demands will be at least partially covered by the new rules. Reducing previous benefits would be largely illegal, and the company would be forced to use the previous contract's minimum benefits as its negotiating floor. The labor reform will also prohibit the use of scabs to replace striking workers.

Rocket launch delayed by protest

The launch of a French rocket called Ariane 5 which would have placed two communications satellites for Brazil and South Korea into orbit was delayed on March 20 by striking workers. The transfer of the rocket to its launch pad was postponed after strikers erected a barricade of tyres and wooden pallets at the Kourou Space Center, which is in French Guiana, on the northeastern coast of South America.

"Due to a strike, the scheduled

transfer operation to move the rocket from the final assembly building to the launching zone could not go ahead," Arianespace said in a statement. "Arianespace has been obliged to postpone the transfer 24 hours"

The VA236 rocket is set to put into orbit two communications satellites. One satellite, called



SGDC, will provide strategic communications for the Brazilian government and military services, and beam broadband services across all of the country's territory, helping to provide internet access to remote and underserved communities. The other, KOREASAT-7, owned by South Korea's KTsat, will provide a range of video and data services over Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, India and Indonesia.

The strike was mainly organised by workers for public energy company EDF Guyane and staff at the Kourou hospital, according to the local trade union.

Argentine teachers march in capital

Tens of thousands of Argentine teachers marched in the capital on March 22 as part of a nationwide strike challenging the administration of President Mauricio Macri. Demonstrators blocked some of the main avenues in Buenos Aires and gathered in front of the presidential palace. Macri has criticized the strike, calling it a politically motivated move ahead of October's congressional elections.

Unions for private and public school teachers are demanding a pay increase of 35 percent to compensate for Argentina's high inflation in consumer prices. Last year's inflation rate reached 40 percent. Provincial governments are offering raises of roughly half the teachers' demand, varying by region.

Teachers first began striking March 6, delaying the start of classes for millions of children and hitting public schools particularly hard. Some walkouts have ended, lasting only four days in several provinces that have resumed classes.

Macri has fired tens of thousands of state workers and slashed utility subsidies to cut government spending. His austerity measures have stoked labor unrest in a nation with a long tradition of the state providing jobs and benefits. Argentina's largest union is calling for a nationwide strike for April 6.

Scotiabank chops Jamaican workers

Close to 100 Jamaicans could lose their jobs as Scotiabank embarks on a restructuring exercise. Bank officials have confirmed the staff cuts but declined to announce the number. However, according to Kavan Gayle, President General of Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU), about 100 positions would be made redundant by the Canadian bank. Media reports indicate that the job losses will also hit workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

The bank justified the move saying the plans were in line with its focus to develop centres of excellence to establish best practices and improve efficiency. According to Gayle, the workers to be affected include support staff that deal with certain services right across the region. He challenged the bank to clarify what it means by "centres of excellence."

Three years ago, Scotiabank announced plans to conduct a US \$451 million restructuring, which included closures and job losses in the Caribbean. Now, Scotiabank says it plans to close or downsize 120 branches outside Canada, largely in Mexico and the Caribbean, in a bid to save CA \$120 million annually.

Cerro Verde copper strike

A labour dispute continues at Freeport-McMoRan's Peruvian copper mine Cerro Verde, where 1,300 miners walked out on March 10. Forced by law to return to work briefly on March 24 after the labor ministry declared the strike illegal, the workers immediately began another strike when management failed to address their demands.

The union is seeking a greater share of profits, safer working conditions and improved health benefits. Cerro Verde, Peru's largest copper mine, has been operating at 50% of capacity after hiring scabs in addition to its 300 non-union workers. Workers last staged a strike at the mine in 2011.

The company claims that production levels have not suffered a "material impact" due to the strike. The mine mainly exports to Asian smelters, with a smaller proportion of sales going to North America, Europe and South America. Cerro Verde boosted its annual profit tenfold to US\$341 million last year compared with US\$33 million in 2016, as sales more than doubled to US\$2.384 billion from US\$1.116bn in 2015.

Peru-based miners including Milpo, Buenaventura, El Brocal, Simsa, Minera Raura and Shougang Hierro Perú have all staged strikes over the past 18 months. Peru is the world's second largest copper and silver producer. The Cerro Verde stoppage adds to a halt of operations at Freeport's Grasberg mine in Indonesia due to a government ban on exports, and slowdowns of copper, zinc and

lead shipments from Peru after flooding damaged the central Andean railway. Workers this week ended a 43 day strike at BHP Billiton's Escondida mine in Chile.

Child labourers face short lives

Children as young as eight, working in the tanneries of Bangladesh producing leather that is in demand across Europe and the USA, are exposed to toxic chemicals that are likely to shorten their lives, according a World Health Organisation report. The WHO says about 90% of those who live and work in the crowded urban slums of Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar, where hazardous chemicals are discharged into the air, streets and river, die before they reach 50.

The volunteer doctors of Medicines Sans Frontières (MSF) set up clinics in the area to diagnose and treat those who are the victims of their workplace. This is the first time MSF have intervened in an area for reasons other than natural disasters or war. MSF's intervention was triggered by "the widespread industrial negligence and apathy of owners of tanneries and other hazardous material factories" towards the more than 600,000 largely migrant population who have no access to government-funded healthcare.

The 250 or so tanneries in Hazaribagh discharge 6,000 cubic metres of toxic effluent and 10 tonnes of solid waste every day. The factories douse animal skins in cauldrons of chemicals as part of the processing of "Bengali black" leather, which is exported to manufacturers in Italy, Spain and elsewhere. Child workers clad in loin cloths and wellington boots are exposed to chemicals including formaldehyde, hydrogen sulphide and sulphuric acid.

"Apart from heavy metals like chromium, cadmium, lead and mercury, a conglomerate of chemicals are discharged by the

tanneries into the environment," says the paper. "Workers aged eight and older are soaked to the skin, breathing the fumes for most of the day and eat and live in these surroundings throughout the year. Personal protective equipment [is] not provided."

Other factories for plastics recycling, garments and metals are in Kamrangirchar, an urban slum which is not officially part of Dhaka city. "In these, there are complex risk hazards from cotton dust, heavy metals and chemicals like mercury, phthalates, acids and dioxins and ergonomic hazards," says the paper. Chronic skin and lung diseases are common.

Coca-Cola violates labour rights

Coca-Cola's Australian-based bottler Amatil is being accused of violating basic rights in an effort to stamp out independent and democratic trade unions at its Indonesian operations. Corporate management in the US has failed to remedy the abuses.

In March 2015, Coca-Cola workers in Central Java began organizing an independent union, the SBCCD, which was legally registered in May. Management responded by harassing members and taking disciplinary action against the leaders. Union chair Atra Narwantwo was suspended on June 30, 2015 in violation of basic legal requirements and due process. In December 2015, the local Labour Office issued a recommendation for immediate reinstatement. Management appealed the case to the higher Industrial Court, employing the services of a union-busting legal firm. The Court ruled for termination on October 5, 2016. Local management has rejected the union's request for collective bargaining negotiations, and insists on barring Narwantwo from union-management meetings, despite the fact that he remains the elected union chair.

Join the Communist Party of Canada

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

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Deadly coal mine expands in Colombia

By *W.T. Whitney*

The Wayúu Indigenous people make up nearly half the population of La Guajira department in Colombia's extreme northeast. They won't be finding much peace from the agreement Colombia's government and FARC insurgents signed in late 2016 to end their war. The government's chief negotiator, Humberto de la Calle, said as much in 2012 when negotiations were beginning.

A report states that, "more than 4,770 children of this Indigenous community have died over eight years due to malnourishment and a lack of drinking water."

The former Colombian vice-president warned that, "We are not going to negotiate the development model of Colombia, nor the legal framework which supports private property, nor the current foreign investment model in the country, nor the military doctrine of the government."

The owners of El Cerrejón coal mine must have been satisfied. They are: BHP Billiton (Australia), which, operating in 100 locations in 25 countries, extracts iron ore, oil, coal, and diamonds; Anglo-American (South Africa) which mines coal, iron ore, and copper in South Africa, Australia, and the Western Hemisphere; and Glencore (Switzerland), the tenth largest corporation in the world, producing 90 commodities. Profits of the three in 2016 were: US\$3.2 billion (July through December), US\$1.59 billion, and US\$3.67 billion, respectively.

The Colombian government's version of peace suits the US government. That was the message of the Obama administration's "Peace Colombia" plan, announced in February 2016.

Military and police assistance to Colombia would continue, and even exceed recent levels. Funds for social and humanitarian purposes were reduced.

The stage was set for humanitarian disaster. In 2012, 87.7% of jobs in Guajira were in the informal sector, and 60% of workers received less than the legal minimum wage. Unemployment was 47%, and more than half the population lived in poverty; 25%, in extreme poverty.

Wayúu vulnerability contrasts with the immensity of El Cerrejón. It's the world's largest open pit coal mine; annually 32 million tons of coal are exported. The company owns a 93-mile long railway and a deep-water seaport.

Despite an arid climate, the Wayúu had been able to feed themselves. Water and land were available. Then mining and oil extraction expanded and farmers lost land. London activist Richard Solly reports that in 1960, "104,963 hectares of the department [were] suitable for agriculture; but in 2001 only 30,752 hectares were under cultivation and in 2008 much less."

The coal mine has dominated the region since the 1980s. Cerrejón bulldozers began razing Wayúu villages in 2001. Some 30,000 acres of forest have been ravaged. Steps were taken to supply the mine with water, essential to its operations.

Beginning in 2010, the Cerrejón owners put dams across the Ranchería River and a couple of tributaries. River water now flows to the mine, 17 million litres every day. Since then – and there's been drought – twelve rivers have disappeared, or almost so. Farm animals died because of no water. Irrigation of crops came to a halt.

Now individual Wayúu people living nearby can find, on the average, only 0.7 liters each day of untreated water to drink.

A report from 2016 says, "around 27 percent of children under five are suffering from malnutrition." Another one that year states that, "more than 4,770 children of this Indigenous community have died over eight years due to malnourishment and a lack of drinking water." In 2016, 36 mothers died of malnutrition.

Actual deaths may exceed these numbers inasmuch as official record keepers are unaware of the deaths of many Wayúu infants. The Colombian pediatric society pointed out that, "an Indigenous child [in La Guajira] has a 24 times greater risk of dying than children elsewhere in the country."

In Bogota, an observer claims, "They have no idea of La Guajira, there's laxity in understanding it, studying it, respecting it." A socially-conscious physician writes of "state abandonment, violent stealing of resources, and institutional and political crisis."

Tax income and royalties from coal mining aren't enough to bankroll social spending in La Guajira. Formerly 85 percent of royalties from mineral extraction stayed in the local area; now "only 9.3 percent of the royalties come

to the producing department." Cerrejón benefits from a concession of no taxation until 2034. Royalties paid by Cerrejón barely exceed the value of government subsidies for the company.

Corrupt officials waylay money the national government sends to La Guajira to pay for schooling, health care, water, and food. El Cerrejón allegedly bribes officials. Two departmental governors have gone to prison recently, one for buying votes, the other for murder.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights insisted on "precautionary measures"; it made recommendations in late 2015 for dealing with malnutrition affecting babies and children and a year later did likewise on behalf of pregnant women and lactating mothers.

The national government recently announced it would be managing "health, education, and drinkable water resources" in La Guajira for three years, although President Juan Manuel Santos insists there's no emergency. Colombia's Constitutional Court sent inspectors to La Guajira. But they avoided southern regions of the department where suffering is extreme. The Council of State recently did stop the diversion of one tributary of the Ranchería River.

A powerful company, one concludes, is laying waste to the very weak, with state collusion. The process is hardly new; rapacious individuals and commercial entities have long set forth from centres of wealth and power to plunder distant regions. Capitalist imperatives dominate, wealth and power are concentrated, and marginalised peoples don't matter. These are the markers of imperialism.

Those in charge in Colombia evidently support El Cerrejón's successful pursuit of imperialist goals. They and the Cerrejón owners tolerate Wayúu suffering. Civil war in Colombia may be ending, but war against the Wayúu – and presumably other rural Colombians – is not.

Lastly, to suppose a creative response from the US government to suffering and human rights violations in Colombia would be wishful thinking. The US government supported Colombia in its internal war for decades, and there is no sign of changed priorities.

The United States, Colombia's partner, is the self-appointed protector and protagonist of the prevailing world economic order. The two are united in the imperialist project by which, generally, high-rollers thrive and bystanders suffer. ●

Pinochet agents sentenced for murders of communists

Chile's Supreme Court has sentenced 33 former intelligence agents of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship for the enforced disappearances of five communist activists in 1987 who were kidnapped, drugged and dumped out to sea.

The court sentenced the defendants to between three and 15 years in prison for the abduction and disappearance of the five members of the Manuel Rodriguez Patriot Front, the militant wing of the country's Communist Party.

The longest sentences were given to the former head of the National Information Center, General Hugo Salas Wenzel, and Major Alvaro Corbalan Castilla, both of whom will spend 15 years behind bars. Twenty-one other officials were sentenced to 10 years in prison for their involvement in the event.

The Supreme Court also ruled that the families of the victims will receive compensation from the state amounting to US\$575,000 for the families of the victims.

The victims, Julian Pena Maltes, Alejandro Pinochet Arenas, Manuel Sepulveda Sanchez, Gonzalo Fuenzalida Navarrete and Julio Muñoz Otarola, were disappeared after being arrested by agents in retaliation for the kidnapping of Colonel Carlos Carreno in 1987.

During former President Sebastian Piñera's candidacy launch on March 21 at the National Museum of Natural History, small groups shouted slogans in favour of the former dictator on several occasions, sparking outrage on social media. Piñera later said he did not support the chants. ● *TeleSUR*



Wayúu protest against the El Cerrejón coal mine project.

People's Voice 2017 Calendar - now on sale

2017 is the centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, achieved under the leadership of the Bolsheviks and V.I. Lenin. This Calendar is dedicated to the heroic victory of the working class and oppressed peoples of Tsarist Russia against war, exploitation, oppression, and imperialism, and to all who continue today's struggles for peace, social justice, human liberation, equality, environmental sustainability, and socialism, inspired by the example of Great October.



Our full-colour 2017 calendar features posters and other images of the October Revolution and the construction of socialism in the USSR, plus a wide variety of historic dates, statutory holidays, and significant anniversaries.

For your calendar, send \$20 (includes postage) to People's Voice, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1, or pay by interac e-transfer to <pvoicepayment@gmail.com>.

Bulk orders of 5 or more Calendars are available at a reduced rate; contact us at 604-255-2041 or pvoice@telus.net for details.

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<http://solidnet.org>



The fabricated "national myth" of Canada

The Vimy Trap: Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War, Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, Toronto, Between the Lines, 2016. Review by Tony Quarrington.

This book is a very interesting read: well-written, deeply researched, mostly well-organized, and definitely impassioned. Its central thesis is that the pervasive 'national myth' or 'folk memory' of Canada's supposed 'coming of age', (or perhaps even 'achieving real nationhood') at the 1917 victory on France's Vimy Ridge is actually a fabrication of much later vintage, cynically utilized by governments (particularly, that of Stephen Harper) to re-imagine and rebrand Canada as a militaristic 'Warrior Nation' (which is, in fact, the title and gist of these authors' previous collaboration, published in 2012).

The present book is somewhat short on information regarding the actual battle; although it references many related events pre-1900, right up through 2015, it does not really consider Vimy Ridge proper in any detail until around its 200-page mark. It does talk about Second Ypres, current history textbooks, Mackenzie King, Walter Allward (the architect and sculptor of the Vimy Memorial), Arthur Currie, the Ottawa War Museum, Don Cherry, and much else besides.

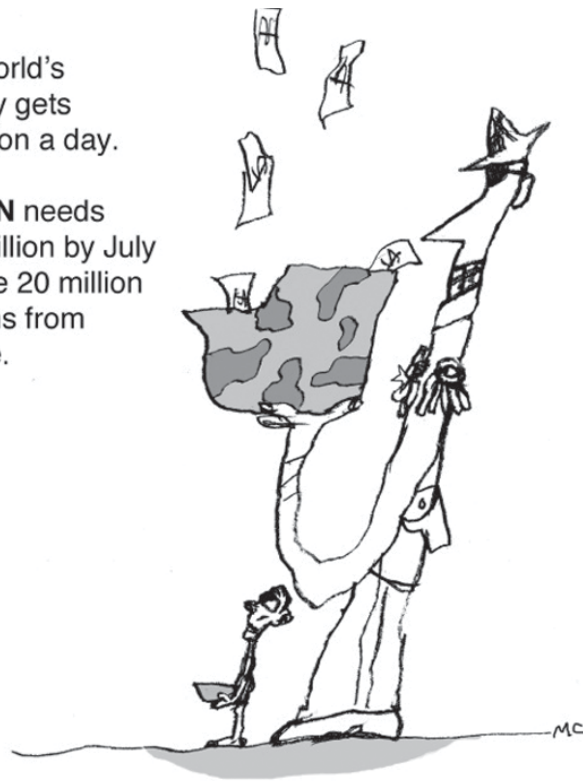
The authors see the syndrome of 'Vimyism' (or what Pierre Berton called 'Vimy Fever') as a 'highly dubious, mythologized narrative' that leads to an unsettling, obsessive fascination with war. In their view, no war could ever truly be 'Great': they are all dismal, terrible, and brutalizing, to be avoided at any cost. Many people (including myself!) would agree. However, if your viewpoint is pacifist, you will probably write an unsympathetic brand of military history, somewhat as if a vegetarian were to write a book about meat. *The Vimy Trap* is really an extended cultural analysis of a military event, rather than a more straightforward military history.

The authors minimize the importance of Vimy as a battle, seeing it as neither a turning point, nor a strategic breakthrough. They assert that full-blown 'Vimyism' was largely a political creation of the 1980s and 90s. They (correctly) point out that most non-Canadian historians do not even acknowledge that there was such a battle, it being seen as merely one phase of the larger Battle of Arras, an extended, multi-national, effort. On the German side, it has even been asserted that Vimy was in fact a German victory, or at the worst a draw, or at any rate, an insignificant loss.

Despite the nay-saying here, I believe something big did happen at Vimy Ridge. In that war where battles usually meant gains or losses of only a few yards, to force the enemy into a two-mile retreat from a long-held, strategic promontory was, simply, a huge thing. And while the resultant sense of pride and developing nationalism may have found its fullest expression in later years, the fighting men certainly knew at the time that something momen-

The world's military gets \$4 billion a day.

The UN needs \$4.4 billion by July to save 20 million civilians from famine.



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Pass the Hat!

tous and formative was up.

McKay and Swift quote the words of soldier and journalist Greg Clark, who asserted "[I felt my] first full sense of nationhood [on Vimy Ridge]", but they point out that he waited fifty years, till 1967, to say so. However, he did write to his father, on April 6, 1917, that he was about to 'take part in the greatest battle in Canadian history, and perhaps in the history of the world'.

Lt. Edward Sewell wrote in his diary, after the first day of conflict, 'Canadian soldiers this day did more to give Canada a real standing among nations of the world, than any previous single act in [our] history.' P.W. McClure, writing on April 13, said 'It will be one of the biggest things in Canadian history'. A Major Dibblee wrote in his journal of his sense of 'undying glory'.

Even the *New York Times* weighed in, asserting that '[Vimy] would be in Canada's history... a day of glory to furnish inspiration to her sons, for generations'. These contemporary estimates somewhat belie the 'Vimy Trap's central assertions that the battle did not amount to very much, and was not perceived as important or iconic till much later.

Now, it happens that military historian Tim Cook (*Shock Troops*, etc.) has quite recently brought out his own book on the same topic, *Vimy - The Battle and the Legend* (2017), containing a true wealth of detail on the conflict, and using a number of first-hand accounts. Cook wisely sums up - 'Vimy, like all legends, is a layered skein of stories, myths, wishful thinking, and

conflicting nar-ratives'. He cautions further that 'Canada is a country - like most - that places little stock in its history, teaching it badly, embracing it little, feeding it only episodically' (6). For the actual sequence of events of the battle, and a measured consideration of their later significance, this book is well worth consulting. And Pierre Berton's *Vimy* (1986) is still a compelling yarn. Ted Barris's more recent *Victory at Vimy* (2007) brings in a lot of new material, and Hayes et al., *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*, is a good collection of essays on some of the very contentious historical issues that Vimy Trap raises. And finally, it bears saying, one of the best features of McKay's and Swift's book is the excellent (and lengthy) bibliographical essay 'Reading Further', 24 pages of very helpful analysis.

The authors' chief point, that we should not allow politicians to co-opt the legends and imagery of the Great War to further their militaristic purposes, and to drain our national budget, is well-taken. But we should also not allow our modernism and/or cynicism to devalue the sacrifices that were made in that war, or minimize the extreme bravery that was demonstrated.

Tony Quarrington is a Toronto-area guitarist, songwriter, and amateur historian whose most recent project is the soon-to-be-released 'WAR STORIES', a CD of new original tunes about Canadians in the First World War. His song about Vimy is called 'The Day We Took the Ridge', a collaboration with veteran folkie James Gordon. •



René Pérez (aka Residente) takes on Trump; see story above right.



MUSIC NOTES

By Wally Brooker

Bragg fires up folk music convention

British singer-songwriter Billy Bragg delivered a rousing keynote address on February 16 to several thousand folk musicians at the 29th annual Folk Alliance International conference in Kansas City. Bragg's plea for "compassion" and "solidarity" matched the conference theme, "to celebrate activism in art by exploring the past and present role of folk music in civil, labor, pacifist, and environmental movements." The singer, now 59, described his political awakening, as a young punk rocker, at a 1978 Rock Against Racism concert, organized to build resistance to England's fascist National Front. He went on to describe a lesson learned at a gig in Northern England in the eighties in support of striking miners. There, to his dismay, he found that his political songs were no match for the repertoire of a miner-musician named Jock, his opening act. Jock showed him that he was a link in a chain of generations of folk musicians. Bragg told the assembly that his experience working with Woody Guthrie's archive of unpublished lyrics, at the invitation of daughter Nora Guthrie, taught him the important of resisting cynicism. "You've got to have that optimism to be a socialist", he declared, adding that socialism a form of "organized compassion". He concluded with an appeal to folk music's history of struggle. "Its tradition", he said, "is to pass on that struggle to the next generation of musicians". Listen to Bragg's address at www.kkfi.org.

Residente denounces U.S. colonialism

René Pérez (a.k.a. Residente), co-founder of the Puerto Rican rap duo Calle 13, was at the SXSW music festival in Austin on March 13, promoting his new documentary film. Seen below left, Residente, who has won three Grammy awards and 21 Latin Grammys, used the occasion to denounce American colonial rule over his homeland. The long-time supporter of Puerto Rican independence called it "ridiculous" that the island remains a colony. Residente was commenting on the U.S. appointment of an oversight board with a fiscal plan that will force the Puerto Rican government to impose punishing austerity measures on the people. Puerto Rico has been a U.S. colony since 1898, when it was seized from the Spanish Empire. Its colonial status prevents it from making independent decisions about its economy, particularly regarding debt. Residente had a few other choice comments about racism in the U.S. He called President Donald Trump an "idiot", while crediting him, in a back-handed way, with inspiring racists to identify themselves. "You can see them with the little cap," he said, alluding to the red "Make America Great Again" caps that are popular with Trump supporters.

Rock On, Chuck Berry!

Chuck Berry, the major architect of the mid-fifties cultural revolution that was rock & roll, died on March 18. He was 90. Given the co-optation of rock music in later years, and its relative eclipse in the digital age, it may be difficult for younger generations to appreciate Berry's accomplishments. Simply put, Chuck Berry, a southern Black man from St. Louis, had the audacity to cross over from the segregated "race music" categories of the day to bring a hybrid contemporary style of rhythm & blues and hillbilly swing to "mainstream" (i.e. "white") American culture. Berry's lyrics celebrated the everyday life of teenagers and young adults in their quest for freedom and independence, while slipping in democratic, anti-racist and anti-military content. He was both the first poet of rock & roll, and a brilliant guitarist who laid the musical foundations of a musical genre that ruled the airwaves for several generations. As he cried out in his 1957 hit School Days: "Hail, hail, rock and roll! Deliver me from the days of old!"

Ángel Parra: 1943-2017

Chilean singer and guitarist Ángel Parra died in Paris, France on March 11. He was one of the leading exponents of Nueva Canción, the revolutionary Latin American song movement that swept the world in the sixties and seventies. Ángel Parra was a member of a family of Chilean musicians, poets, and visual artists that has left a profound impact on Latin American culture. His mother was Violeta Parra, a singer-songwriter, folklorist, and cultural organizer best known for her famous anthem *Gracias a la Vida*. His uncle is the renowned poet Nicanor Parra. His sister Isabel is a prominent folk musician. Another sister, Catalina, is a well-known visual artist. Ángel, possessor of an unforgettable voice, was a passionate interpreter of contemporary revolutionary songs. He was arrested and imprisoned shortly after the overthrow of the socialist government of Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973. Parra was freed thanks to an international solidarity campaign led by U.S. singer Joan Baez and French singer Charles Aznavour. He eventually settled in France, where he lived for 40 years. While Parra recorded many albums, they are not easily found in the English-speaking world, but his fine 2005 album "Le Prix de la Liberté", can be listened to for free on Spotify.

Liberal budget fails to deliver...

continued from page 2

The government's infrastructure privatization bank could double the cost of building new infrastructure in Canada. Even worse, privatization of new infrastructure like public transit and water facilities will force Canadians to shell out user fees on infrastructure they already over-paid for. Meanwhile, the federal government continues to insist that the cupboard is bare, while giving international tax evaders an easy ride, and refusing to close tax loopholes on stock options and capital gains. These loopholes overwhelmingly benefit the wealthiest 1% and cost the treasury billions of dollars every year.

CUPE is encouraged by the government's proposed investment in affordable housing, modest investment in child care, and the inclusion of a gender-based analysis in its fiscal plan. But, the fact remains that Budget 2017 does far too little to address the immediate challenges of Canadians, who are faced with skyrocketing costs of living, and an increasingly precarious labour market.

Disappointed: Council of Canadians

The Council of Canadians is disappointed by the Trudeau government's budget. We were looking for an immediate \$1.2 billion investment in First Nations water and wastewater systems, the elimination of about \$7.8 billion in federal subsidies to fossil fuel producers, a commitment to fund a minimum of 25 per cent of provincial health care costs, a commitment to a cost-saving universal pharmacare program, and a rejection of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) as a job-killer.

1- Water

Budget 2017 - "Over the last year, the Government has lifted 18 long-term drinking water advisories in First Nations communities, and is on track to eliminate all remaining advisories by March 2021."

Comment - The immediate \$1.2 billion infusion for First Nations drinking water and wastewater systems noted in a 2011 federal government assessment of the spending needs to address this situation is not there. The March 2021 deadline is also slightly

longer than the five-year pledge Trudeau made during the October 2015 election.

2- Fossil fuel subsidies

Budget 2017 - "Budget 2017 proposes to provide a one-time payment of \$30 million to the Government of Alberta to support provincial actions that will stimulate economic activity and employment in Alberta's resource sector. This specialized workforce is necessary to generate wealth for Albertan and Canadian citizens now and in the future."

Comment - The fossil fuel subsidies appear to remain in place despite a projected deficit of \$28.5 billion in 2017-18, up from the \$25.4 billion projected in the fall.

3- Health care

Budget 2017 - "In 2017-18, the Canada Health Transfer [will] grow in line with a three-year moving average of nominal gross domestic product growth, with funding guaranteed to increase by at least 3 per cent per year."

Comment - This is Harper's funding formula that could result in the loss of \$43.5 billion in health care transfer payments over an eight year period.

4- Pharmacare

Budget 2017 - "Improving access to prescription medications, lowering drug prices and supporting appropriate prescribing through an investment of \$140.3 million over five years, starting in

2017-18, with \$18.2 million per year ongoing, for Health Canada, the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board and the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health."

Comment - Studies show that the patent provisions for pharmaceutical drugs in CETA could cost us between \$850 million to \$1.65 billion annually, while pharmacare would save about \$14 billion a year.

5- CETA

Budget 2017 - "Canada and the EU will now complete their respective legislative and regulatory processes that will bring virtually all significant parts of the Agreement into force by the spring of 2017. This agreement sets the stage for an even stronger relationship with the EU, which will create greater opportunities for the middle class in Canada and in Europe by opening our respective markets."

Comment - The Tufts University CETA Without Blinders study shows that CETA signatory countries would lose 230,000 jobs, and that in Canada it would transfer 1.74 per cent of national income from labour to capital (meaning any economic gains will flow overwhelmingly to owners of capital rather than to workers) and that due to rising inequality and unemployment the average income in Canada is projected to fall by \$2,650 by 2023. ●

"Revolutions - A Conference"

As the world heads into stormy political weather, it is important for revolutionary and popular movements to have clarity on the main ideas of revolutionary change and the emancipation of workers and all oppressed people. Academics at the University of Manitoba are marking the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution by hosting an academic conference on revolutions, Sept. 29 to Oct. 1, 2017 in Winnipeg. The conference will feature international academic speakers, workshops and panel discussions. The deadline for proposals (papers, panels) is April 15.

To learn more or participate, visit: <http://geopoliticeconomy.org/revolutions-conference-2017/call-for-papers/>, Geopolitical Economy Research Group, 527 Fletcher Argue, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg MB, R3T 2N2, Tel 204.474.9818

People's Voice deadlines

April 16-30 issue: Thursday, April 6

May 1-15 issue: Thursday, April 20

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

Venezuela: oppos... liberal ideology...

continued from page 5

and principles of the OAS Charter when they are trampled upon by the Secretary General."

It is particularly poignant and not coincidental that the Almagro report is released on the heels of two important statements issued earlier in March, but totally opposite in nature. One is from the 14th Summit of Heads of State and Governments of the member countries of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Trade Treaty of the Peoples (ALBA-TCP) [www.humanidadenred.org.ve/?p=7289] and a second is from the 15th meeting of the Network of

and Social Humanity. www.humanidadenred.org.ve/

document is against "the U.S. strategy in Venezuela and the report. It is Venezuelan tone, the network of negative sign used in the particular of and Bolivia of constant campaigns

through messages and images intended to strip away all their political and ideological references that do not correspond to the logic of the empire."

Ultimately, the exclusion of from the OAS lacks within the organization, and happen. However, it is a principle to oppose the report. It is Venezuelan Hector Rodriguez's promising principle that in solidarity all people in opposition to the ideology that creates wars, poverty and in sovereign ●

What's Left

Vancouver, BC

May Day Info Fair, Sat., April 29, Grandview Park (1200 block Commercial Drive), tables and displays by left and community groups, including People's Voice.

Left Film Night, Sunday, April 30, 7 pm at the CSE, 706 Clark. Film to be announced, ph. 604-255-2041 for details.

Annual May Day march and rally, Monday, May 1, gather 5 pm at Clark Park, 14th & Commercial, organized by Vancouver & District Labour Council. After the rally, come to the CSE at 706 Clark Drive for a cultural & political social, and meet east Vancouver Communist candidates in the BC election.

Mother's Day Brunch, Sunday May 14, 11 am-2 pm, 1600 block E. 20th Avenue (3586 BellaVista), \$15; kids \$10. All proceeds to People's Voice.

People's Voice Victory Banquet, hold the date: Sat. June 17 at the Russian Hall, 600 Campbell Ave. See next issue for details.

Edmonton, AB

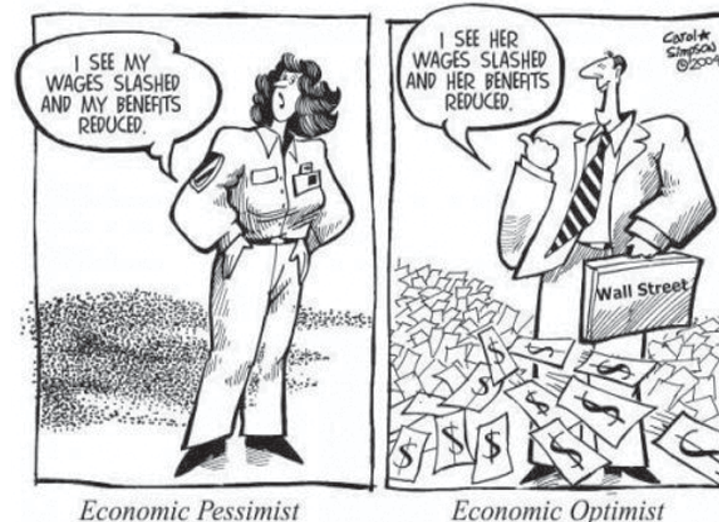
A Tribute to Fidel, Sat., April 22, 6-11:30 pm, 11018 97 St NW. Special guest speaker - Liz Rowley, leader of the Communist Party of Canada. All our friends are invited to participate as donors,

performers and guests. We invite music, song, dance, poetry and theatre performances on the theme of A Tribute to Fidel. Tickets \$20/\$10 for a Caribbean-themed dinner and silent auction, proceeds to People's Voice.

Toronto, ON

Celebrate May Day, Sat., April 29, doors open 6 pm, Steelworkers Hall, 25 Cecil St., free admission, food & beverages on sale. Organized by United May Day Committee, speakers include former OFL president Sid Ryan and Communist Party leader Liz Rowley. Cultural performers include drum ensemble Baro Dununba, poet Mohammad Ali, musical duet Tony Quarrington and Laura Fernandez; and Marcelo Puente.

The US Embargo on Cuba from a Canadian's perspective, Café Cuba Event with guest speaker Bill Ryan, creator of 'Cubacan' with Gerardo Hernandez Nordelo, one of the Cuban Five, as a name for their baseball bats donated to Cuba. Hear how the embargo has impacted their efforts, Sunday, April 2, 4:30-6:30 pm, Friends House, 60 Lowther Avenue (2 blks north of St. George Subway - Bedford Exit). Free admission, ph. 647-501-1219, sponsored by Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association Toronto www.ccfatoronto.ca.



Economic Pessimist

Economic Optimist

Peter Smollett, 1930-2017

Peter Smollett, a lifelong radical, trade unionist, civil rights activist, self-educated person, reader and polemicist, died on February 19, in Toronto, a week before his 87th birthday. Peter was born on February 26, 1930 in Brooklyn, N.Y., the son of David Smollett and Dawley Smollett (nee Levy), both from Eastern European Jewish immigrant families. At 19 years old, he apprenticed as a film editor in New York City, where he worked during the 1950's and early 1960's, interrupted by some years in Pennsylvania as an industrial worker and union organizer. During that period, he was married to Molly Smollett (nee Hirschenson), and had two sons, Jeff and Joel. In 1966, he married Eleanor Wenkart Smollett, a cultural anthropologist. They moved to Regina, Saskatchewan, where both went to work at the University of Regina. There they raised their daughter Rebecca. For nearly two decades at the U of R, Peter taught innovative courses on the politics of the mass media, especially film, and on the evolution of the role of artists in society. He was also a leading activist in solidarity movements and other progressive struggles in Regina, and in the Communist Party of Canada. In the 1990's, Peter and Eleanor retired to Toronto, where they welcomed a son-in-law and two grandchildren into their lives. Peter leaves his wife Eleanor, his daughter Rebecca Smollett, son-in-law David Ley, their children, Abraham Ley and Yohanna Ley, and many other relatives. He will be sadly missed by his comrades in Regina, Toronto, and elsewhere, and by many former students who learned much about Marxism, social science and life from this remarkable human being.

Washington considers military action against North Korea

By Stephen Gowans, *What's Left*, March 7, 2017 (abridged)

The White House is considering “possible military action to force regime change” in North Korea, another in a long succession of threats Washington has issued against Pyongyang, piled atop unremitting aggression the U.S. has directed at the country from the moment of its birth in 1948.

In addition to direct military action from 1950 to 1953 against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (the country's official name), US aggression has included multiple threats of nuclear annihilation, and the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea until 1991. Re-deployment is now under consideration in Washington.

Most US nuclear threats against Pyongyang were made before North Korea embarked upon its own nuclear weapons program, and constitute one of the principal reasons it did so. The country's being declared an original member of the Bush administration's Axis of Evil, along with Iraq and Iran, provided an additional impetus.

US aggression against Gaddafi's Libya, after the Arab and African nationalist leader abandoned his country's nuclear weapons program in a failed effort at an entente with the West, only affirmed Pyongyang's view that its decision to acquire a nuclear deterrent was sound and imperative. To make Gaddafi's blunder would be to commit suicide.

North Korea has additionally been menaced by annual US-directed war games involving hundreds of thousands of troops, carried out along North Korea's borders. While US officials describe the twice yearly assembling of significant military forces within striking range of the DPRK as routine and defensive, it is never clear to the North Korean military whether the US-directed maneuvers are defensive exercises or preparations for an invasion...

The US decision to consider military action against North Korea to force regime change may be considered a response to Pyongyang's “threats,” but the DPRK, regardless of its bluster, has never posed a threat to the physical safety of the United States. It is far too small (its population is

only 25 million) and too weak militarily (its annual defense spending is less than \$10 billion, swamped by the Himalayan military outlays of its adversaries, from South Korea's \$36 billion to Japan's \$41 billion to the United States' \$603 billion), to pose a significant threat, or even a derisory one. Moreover, it is totally devoid of the means to convey a military force to US soil, lacking long range bombers and a capable navy.

To be sure, Pyongyang may have developed ICBMs capable of reaching the United States, and it may have acquired the know-how to miniaturize nuclear warheads that can be carried atop them, but the notion that Pyongyang would undertake an offensive strike against the United States is risible. Doing so would be tantamount to a porcupine tangling with a mountain lion. Since porcupines have no hope of defeating mountain lions, and would be mangled in the attempt, they avoid confrontations with them. They do, however, have self-defensive quills—the equivalent of North Korea's nuclear arms and ballistic missile programs—to deter mountain lions from tangling with them...

Next month, South Korea will significantly increase the rewards it pays to defectors from the north who treasonously disclose state secrets or surrender military equipment. High-ranking North Korean officials will receive \$860,000 for defecting and selling out their compatriots, while pilots will be offered the same to fly their warplanes to South Korea. Sailors who surrender their warships to Seoul will also receive \$860,000. Payouts from \$43,000 to \$260,000 will be handed to North Korean military personnel who defect, if they bring lesser weapons, such as tanks or machine guns.

South Korea, in contrast to the much-threatened North, is a US neo-colonial appendage which hosts tens of thousands of US troops on its soil, ostensibly for protection against the DPRK, even though North Korea is weaker militarily than its peninsular counterpart, has less advanced equipment and weapons systems, and its military outlays are only one-quarter of Seoul's. South Korea denies itself sovereign

control of its own military, yielding to de jure US command in times of emergency, and de facto US control otherwise. This reflects the history of the country. It began as a regime of collaborators with the Japanese, who shifted their collaboration to their new American

Anti-war voices

overlords at the end of the Second World War. Meanwhile, to the north, it was guerrillas who fought Japanese colonization, and committed their lives to the manumission of Korea from foreign control, who founded the government in Pyongyang. Then as now, one half of the Korean peninsula exhibited a prickly independence, while the elite of the other half kow-towed to an imperialist behemoth (in contradistinction to a grassroots guerilla movement in the south that sought, unsuccessfully, to throw off the yoke of oppression by collaborationist governments and their US suzerain.)

South Korea's hostility to its pro-independence northern neighbor, along with the United States' nearly seven full decades of overt aggression against the DPRK, is directly responsible for the North Korean state's closed, garrisoned, and authoritarian character. The country's anti-liberal democratic orientation is not an expression of an ideological preference for police state rule, but an adaptation to a geopolitical reality. The nature of the North Korean state, its military strategy, and its nuclear weapons and missile programs, are consequences of its ideological commitment to independence intersecting with the difficulties of charting an independent course in the midst of hostile and much stronger neighbors whose US patron insists on North Korean submission.

The DPRK is also criticized for being an economic basket-case, though its economic travails are almost invariably exaggerated. Nevertheless, nearly seven full decades of economic warfare and the imperatives of maintaining a military strong enough to deter the aggression of hostile neighbors and their imperialist patron must

necessarily take a toll. Trying to bankrupt the DPRK by imposing on it trade sanctions, working to cut Pyongyang off from the world financial system, and maneuvering the country into a position where it has been forced to spend heavily on self-defense to survive (Pyongyang allocates an estimated 15%-24% of its GDP to defense compared to South Korea's 2.6% and the United States' 3.3%), and then attributing its economic difficulties to its “non-market” economy, as Washington has done, is dishonest in the extreme...

The revelation that the White House is considering military action against its long-standing victim was casually tucked away in a Wall Street Journal article, and was thought so inconsequential as not to merit inclusion in the headline. Instead, the article's headline mentioned that North Korea had fired “four ballistic missiles into waters off coast, South Korea says,” in keeping with the portrayal of the DPRK as a signal menace. Accordingly, the announcement of a considered US military strike on North Korea could be positioned as a legitimate response to an alleged North Korean provocation, rather than North Korea's test firing of ballistic missiles being presented more reasonably as a legitimate reaction to nearly seven full decades of US belligerence.

Some liberals, worried by the increased tempo of US saber-rattling against Pyongyang, adjure Washington to negotiate a peace treaty with the DPRK, in exchange for North Korea undertaking Gaddafi's folly and dismantling its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. The idea that the United States reciprocate is never considered and is seen as Quixotic. The preferred arrangement is one of a nuclear weapons apartheid where the United States and its subalterns keep their nuclear arms as a “self-evident” necessity of self-defense and a bulwark against “nuclear blackmail,” while the rest

of the world is expected to voluntarily submit to the nuclear weapons blackmail of the United States and the established members of the nuclear weapons club.

However, almost equally Quixotic is the idea that the DPRK will relinquish its nuclear arms and the means of delivering them. The United States has unintentionally created conditions which make a North Korean nuclear weapons program almost inevitable, and perfectly sound from Pyongyang's point of view. For a nuclear deterrent not only forces Washington to exercise extreme circumspection in the deployment of its military assets against the DPRK, it also allows Pyongyang to reduce its expenditures on conventional deterrence, freeing up resources for its civilian economy. Nuclear weapons are cost-effective. This thinking is implicit in North Korea's “Byungjin policy, “the ‘two-track program’ of building the economy and nuclear weapons, defined in the resolution adopted by the 7th Congress of the Korean Workers' Party in May as its ‘permanent strategic course.’”

James Clapper, the former head of US intelligence, told the Wall Street-directed foreign policy think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations, to forget about negotiating a nuclear deal with Pyongyang. “I think the notion of getting the North Koreans to denuclearize is probably a lost cause,” said Clapper last October. “They are not going to do that. That is their ticket to survival. And I got a good taste of that when I was there about how the world looks from their vantage. And they are under siege... So the notion of giving up their nuclear capability, whatever it is, is a nonstarter with them.”

“So an Iranian kind of negotiation that would put a cap or suspend is not—your experience in diplomacy is that it's not likely to happen,” he was asked. Clapper replied, “I don't think so.” ●

“A true giant of Irish politics”

A “giant of Irish politics,” Martin McGuinness, died on March 21 at the age of 66, several months after retiring due to illness. Hundreds of people accompanied the coffin that was draped in the Irish flag as it was carried through the Bogside area of Derry to his home.

McGuinness's long-time friend and political ally Gerry Adams said he was “a passionate republican who worked tirelessly for peace and reconciliation and for the reunification of his country.”

He was born James Martin Pacelli McGuinness in Derry's deprived Bogside neighbourhood in 1950. He spent his political life fighting for the unification of Ireland and will be remembered for his role as the main republican architect of the peace process that led to the power-sharing Good Friday Agreement. It was part of a process that saw him transform from paramilitary to peacemaker — which culminated in the former IRA commander becoming Stormont's deputy first minister in 2007.

McGuinness joined the IRA after witnessing the vicious treatment of Catholics protesting peacefully for civil rights in the 1960s. Rising quickly through the ranks, he was the IRA's second-in-command in Derry at the age of 21 when British troops opened fire on a peace march in the city on Bloody Sunday in 1972. Fourteen people were killed by British Army soldiers who shot unarmed protesters and those who were helping the injured.

Adams explained: “Martin McGuinness didn't go to war, the war came to him. It came to his streets, it came to his city, it came to his community. When we were arguing for civil rights, we got the answer. When we were arguing for basic modern reform, we got the answer, and it was a militaristic answer.”

Sinn Fein leader in the north Michelle O'Neill said McGuinness “was truly a giant of Irish politics and was known and respected across the world. He was an international statesman. He was a man that was recognised as a peacemaker and a man that touched the lives of so many people... his impact will be felt for many years to come.” ●

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