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people's VOICE

Communes in Venezuela

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Climate change talks: *concensus, but little progress*

On Nov. 21, Greenpeace, Oxfam, WWF, Actionaid, Friends of the Earth, 350.org and other environmental and civil society groups walked out of the UN Climate Change talks (COP 19) in Warsaw, Poland. In a joint statement, the groups said, "Organizations and movements representing people from every corner of the Earth have decided that the best use of our time is to voluntarily withdraw from the Warsaw climate talks. Instead, we are now focusing on mobilizing people to push our governments to take leadership for serious climate action. We will work to transform our food and energy systems at a national and global level and rebuild a broken economic system to create a sustainable and low-carbon economy with decent jobs and livelihoods for all. And we will put pressure on everyone to do more to realize this vision."



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Who controls the food you eat?

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Minimum wage fight

Ontario's minimum wage has been frozen at \$10.25 for three years. Now, labour, students and social justice groups are mobilizing across the province to demand a badly needed raise to \$14/hour.

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Communists in Lisbon

Representatives from 77 communist and workers' parties held their annual meeting last month, setting priorities for common action.

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Left gains in Chile

Four decades ago, a fascist coup overthrew Chile's Popular Unity elected government. Now, the New Majority left coalition has a big lead entering the second round of elections on Dec. 15.

Actions across Ontario demand \$14 minimum wage

From the Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage, <http://raisetheminimumwage.ca>

Ontario workers are struggling to get by. More and more decent jobs are being replaced by low-wage work.

The minimum wage has been frozen at \$10.25 for three years. In that time, food and transit costs have soared while inflation has driven down minimum wage earnings 19% below the poverty line.

It's time for an increase! We need a minimum wage of \$14 to bring workers and their families above the poverty line (by 10%) and a commitment to annual cost-of-living adjustments.

The three year freeze on minimum wage drags down workers wages, increases inequality and hurts our economy.

The Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage was launched in March 2013, with communities across Ontario demanding the government break the freeze. Creative actions and rallies took place in 14 cities with local community groups and activists delivering our message to local MPPs and Ministry of Labour offices.

The Ontario government has said that it will have a panel study minimum wages. But Ontarians can't wait for another commission. We need a raise now.

On November 14, the Campaign spearheaded a province-wide day

of action where students, labour activists and community members visited Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) urging them to support a \$14 minimum wage for all workers.

Across Ontario, community members organized visits with well over half of all sitting MPPs in Ontario and presented cheques for \$5 billion - the amount a \$14 minimum wage would put back into workers' pockets.

On dozens of campuses, students organized outreach blitzes and joined MPP delegation visits, supported by the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario.

Community, student and labour activists in BARRIE organized a minimum wage rally that made

front page news. The group marched from Georgian College to Conservative MPP Rod Jackson's office.

In THUNDER BAY, a rally was organized by Poverty Free Thunder Bay and the Thunder Bay and District Labour Council outside the office of Liberal MPP Michael Gravelle.

Hope Hamilton members met with NDP MPP Monique Taylor, while the Hamilton Labour Council met with NDP MPP Paul Miller. Meanwhile, McMaster students delivered petitions to NDP Opposition Leader Andrea Horwath's office.

In BRAMPTON, the Mississauga and District Labour Council met with Liberal MPP

Harinder Takhar, and presented a cheque for \$5 billion to Liberal MPP Linda Jeffrey.

In the TORONTO GTA, about 50 people joined a delegation at Premier Kathleen Wynne's constituency office, delivering a large cheque in the amount of \$5 billion. Following the action at Wynne's office, labour, community and student groups split up visits to MPPs from Rexdale to Scarborough.

Together Access Alliance Community Health Centre, ACORN, Bread and Bricks, CASSA, PCLS, Respect Scarborough, SAWRO, Scarborough Anti-Poverty Coalition, South Riverdale Community Health Centre, Toronto & York Region Labour Council, University of Toronto Scarborough Campus

Students' Union, UNIFOR members and Workers' Action Centre visited 17 different MPP offices in the GTA!

Other community members carried out outreach drives to gather support for the campaign.

A wide range of similar actions took place in Brantford, London, Kitchener-Waterloo, St. Thomas, Woodstock, Ottawa, Oshawa, Peterborough, Sudbury, Niagara, Kenora, Chatham, Sault Ste. Marie, Burlington, Oakville, Guelph, Kingston, Timmins, Windsor, and in York Region.

In total, campaign supporters visited more than 50 MPPs across Ontario, and close to 1,000 people sent a message to their MPP asking them to support a \$14 minimum wage! ●



Campaign participants rally at Premier Kathleen Wynne's office on Nov. 14. (PV photo: Ed Bil)

Ryan acclaimed as OFL supports austerity fight

PV Ontario Bureau

President Sid Ryan, Secretary Treasurer Nancy Hutchison and Executive Member Irwin Nanda were all acclaimed on Nov. 25 as officers of the Ontario Federation of Labour.

In a barn-burner of a convention opening speech, Ryan told delegates that the OFL had to move its members and community allies in the Common Front into mass action to fight austerity and defend labour's hard-won gains.

Promising more of the militant struggles the OFL has engaged in since his election in 2009, Ryan had the support of the largest section of delegates in the hall.

Two contenders for President dropped out after a struggle that took place in the OFL leading up to the convention.

Fed up with demonstrations and under pressure from the NDP caucus to settle it down, the right wing in the OFL leadership was out to dump Ryan with a surprise challenge, expecting a low turnout

from cash-strapped affiliates.

A staffer from UFCW, Bob Lynton, was set to go when the coalition backing him realized they didn't have the votes to defeat Ryan. A visit from Hutchison the night before the convention began was said to be the reason why a USW candidate from Sault Ste. Marie stepped down, though he was running only to prevent Ryan's acclamation.

It was clear from the get-go that delegates support Ryan, and the militant direction he is leading the OFL. The challenges would have been a defeat for the right if they had played out as initially planned.

As PV went to press on Nov. 26, the Convention was preparing to deal with the Action Plan. Also on the agenda are constitutional amendments which aim to curb the power of the President and the elected leadership, with the creation of an unelected executive body comprised of three public sector unions, three private sector unions, two equity vice presidents and the table officers. Being sold as a body with an advisory function only, which could act to smooth out sharp differences in the leadership, the amendment is a dangerous step away from membership control of the OFL.

The Canadian Labour Congress was restructured in this way at its last convention, and is being touted as a model for the constitutional change. The CLC is also virtually invisible in the struggle against austerity in Canada today.

People's Voice will report on the OFL in our January issue. ●

together against austerity in Canada and Greece



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CPC social**

GCDO Hall
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**6 pm drinks,
7 pm food
Live Music**



LABOUR NEWS

CSN calls for united front vs. Harper

The Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN, Québec confederation of unions), is calling for a united front among unions to fight against the Harper regime. CSN Secretary General Jean Lortie said that the resolutions passed at the Conservative party's convention in Calgary confirm a profound hostility to workers and unions. He hopes the Peoples Social Forum to be held at the end of August of 2014 will help create "a rainbow coalition of unionists, environmentalists and others that will bring 20,000 people to Ottawa next summer to counter Harper's agenda."

Unifor urges fracking moratorium

Unifor has called for a national moratorium on shale gas exploitation, suggesting it would be "folly" to reorient the Canadian energy infrastructure around a short-term spike in an unsustainable energy supply. "Unconventional gas fracking has the potential to have catastrophic effects on our environment and economy. The safety risks are also a major concern for our union," said Unifor National President Jerry Dias. Unifor expressed support for non-violent First Nations efforts to resist fracking on their lands. They called for the governments to collaboratively develop with stakeholders a stable, sustainable energy industry that protects the environment and communities, rather than being guided by the short-term profit interests of private energy companies.

Budget bill endangers health & safety

The National President of PSAC says Harper is "rolling the dice" with the health and safety of more than a million federal government employees. Measures included in the new budget bill vastly undermine the system of accountability and enforcement that keeps public workplaces safe, Robyn Benson argues. They would eliminate workplace health and safety protections from potentially dangerous conditions, including doing away with the right of pregnant women to refuse work that poses hazards to their health.

Ontario should enforce internship laws

A new campaign was launched to push the Ontario Ministry of Labour to proactively enforce a law on unpaid internships. Tens of thousands of young workers in the province are being illegally misclassified as unpaid interns and denied wages. The campaign seeks to change the current complaint-based system as it fails to protect young workers from wage theft, misclassification and abuse. The campaign demands that the Ministry should develop an enforcement strategy, educate young workers about their rights right and undertake a comprehensive review of the laws surrounding unpaid internships.

BC union defends AirCare

The BC General Employees' Union is urging the Clark government to reverse the decision to cut back AirCare, a testing program that identifies high-emitting vehicles and forces owners to curb emissions. Currently, about 10-12 percent of vehicles fail the emissions testing standards set out by the program. The union has also called for the program to focus on heavy trucks, many of which are high emitters of fossil fuels. The program cuts will cost 110 members of the BCGEU their jobs, as light cars and trucks no longer need to have their emissions tested.

(Canadian Association of Labour Media)

Compromises weaken Warsaw climate deal

By Kimball Cariou

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 19) wrapped up on Nov. 23, after heated late-night debates and a walkout by environmental groups. Most of the “civil society” observers at the conference shared a consensus that the compromise deal struck in Warsaw will do little to help cut down carbon emissions which are driving climate change.

Much of the conference was deadlocked in disputes between negotiators from the major capitalist countries and the developing world over the division of responsibility for cutting down emissions, and over financing to countries suffering from the impacts of climate change.

A deal was finally reached through terminology that asks countries for “nationally determined contributions”, instead of “commitments” to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, during talks for a new global climate agreement to be finalized at a 2015 summit in Paris.

The wealthiest capitalist countries have made pledges to help developing countries cope with the impacts of extreme weather events, rising sea levels, desertification, and others. But the United States blocked substantive progress in climate financing, particularly on how these countries will scale up their yearly contributions to \$100 billion by 2020. The U.S. even succeeded in having private finance counted in as climate finance commitments.

Speaking on behalf of the G77+China group of developing countries, Fiji said “there is absolutely nothing to write home about at the moment.”

The Warsaw outcomes were met with negative reactions from the civil society groups which staged a mass walkout on Nov. 21. The walkout highlighted what they called the “serious lack of ambition in the talks”, where developed countries backtracked on earlier commitments, while “dirty energy

corporations” flaunted their overweening influence.

Around 800 representatives from 13 non-governmental organisations joined the walkout, when it became clear that the conference would not produce a timetable to ensure that targets for emissions cuts and climate finance pledges will be set in time for Paris.

The rich capitalist countries continue to demand uniform national emission targets, while developing nations say the major industrialised nations must lead in setting targets and foot most of the bill because they have accounted for most emissions.

The talks were also sharply divided over aid. Developed nations agreed in 2009 to raise climate aid to \$100 billion a year from 2020 from an annual \$10 billion for 2010-12. But the major imperialist countries, focused on their own embattled economies, are now resisting calls to raise aid levels over the rest of this decade.

The Warsaw conference started in early November, in the shadow of Typhoon Haiyan which devastated the Philippines. Speaking at the time, the lead delegate from the Philippines, Yeb Sano, drew tears in the auditorium with a heartfelt plea to “stop this climate madness”.

But serious progress was foiled by the complexity of finding consensus among the participating countries. Things began going badly when the Japanese government announced that it would not meet its 2020 emissions cuts target. Instead of cutting emissions by 25% below 1990 levels as previously agreed, Japan now says emissions will actually rise by 3%. Meanwhile, the Polish government, tasked with chairing the talks, came under sharp criticism for being closely tied to the coal industry. The head of the meeting was then sacked as environment minister in a Polish government reshuffle.

Agreement on the outline framework for a “pathway” towards the 2015 Paris summit



While climate talks were underway in Poland, Canadians rallied on Nov. 16 from coast to coast against expansion of tar sands extraction and pipelines. Photo from Toronto rally, by Ed Bil.

proved the most difficult aspect of the negotiations during the tense final thirty hours. This battle eventually centred on a single word in the pathway document. The text originally spoke of “commitments” by all parties. But in a plenary session, delegates from China and India said they could not accept the language.

“Only developed countries should have commitments,” said China’s lead negotiator Su Wei. Emerging economies could merely be expected to “enhance action”, he said.

With time running out, ministers and advisers huddled in a corner

of the hall for an hour, before agreeing to change “commitments” to “contributions”. The more flexible word allows the US and EU to insist that everyone is on the same page, while also allowing China and India to insist that they are doing something

different from the richer countries.

Another key battle was over the issue of loss and damage. This was crucial for developing countries which say that money to help them adapt to climate change is insufficient to cope with extreme events such as Typhoon Haiyan. They argued for a new institution called a loss-and-damage mechanism that would have the financial clout to deal with the impacts of such events clearly affected by climate change.

But in the text the new mechanism would have to sit “under” an existing part of the UN body that deals with adaptation.

This word angered delegates from developing countries. In another moving intervention, Yeb Sano of the Philippines said, “It has boiled down to one word and I would say this is a defining moment for this process. Let us take that bold step and get that word out of the way.”

After another huddle the word was changed and the text accepted.

But many civil society groups like Oxfam, World Wildlife Federation, and Greenpeace concluded that Sano’s appeals largely fell on deaf ears.

“Governments are not doing enough,” said Oxfam’s Celine Charveriat, speaking to BBC News. “We need to tell them you are not allowed to make a mockery of this process. We can’t continue to watch in silence. Enough is enough.”

Executive director of Greenpeace International, Kumi Naidoo, was sharply critical of the overall handling of the talks. “The Polish government has done its best to turn these talks into a showcase for the coal industry,” he said. ●

B.C. again has highest child poverty

PV Vancouver Bureau

How many years will BC continue to have the highest child poverty rate in the country? That is the question raised by the “2013 Child Poverty Report Card” released by the First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition.

According to the latest Statistics Canada figures, 18.6% of BC children were poor in 2011, up from 14.3% in 2010. This is more than 5 percent higher than the Canadian average.

The number of poor children in BC was 153,000 (up from 119,000 in 2010) - enough children to fill Rogers Arena eight times. This represents about one of every five BC children.

Children living in single mother families had a shocking 50 per cent poverty rate in 2011, a dramatic increase from 21.5 per cent in 2010.

“BC stands out as having done the least among all provinces to

bring down child and family poverty through government supports and programs,” said Adrienne Montani, First Call’s Provincial Coordinator. “Concerted government action in the form of a comprehensive poverty reduction plan for the province is long overdue.”

Other key findings in the report include:

- * BC also had the worst poverty rate of any province for children living in two-parent families: 14%.
- * BC’s poverty rate for young children (under 6) was 21%, eight percent higher than the Canadian average.
- * Nearly one third of BC’s poor children lived in families with at least one parent working full time all year.
- * British Columbia has the most unequal distribution of income among rich and poor families with children, primarily due to the very low incomes for the poorest families.

“Seeing the children’s poverty rate climb higher than the overall poverty rate again is particularly worrisome,” said Lorraine Copas, Executive Director of SPARC BC. “We know the experience of poverty and social exclusion undermines children’s physical and emotional well-being, and this is a breach of their right to optimal care and protection. BC is not a poor province and we can do better.”

The Report Card makes 16 policy recommendations to help reduce the child poverty rate to seven percent or less by 2020. These include adopting the \$10 a Day Child Care Plan; increasing and indexing the minimum wage, welfare rates and federal child tax benefits; paying living wages; enhancing Employment Insurance benefits and eligibility; increasing affordable housing options for families; and improving the affordability of post-secondary education. ●

SFL calls for ban on corporate political donations

By Darrell Rankin

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is urging Premier Brad Wall to ban corporate political donations.

“The people of Saskatchewan should have faith that their government is not beholden to corporate donors, and that decisions are made in the interests of the province,” said SFL president Larry Hubich.

The SFL made the call “In light of revelations about how a handful of Saskatchewan construction companies donated more than \$64,000 to the current government in 2011 alone... (This is) the same government that passed Bill 80 at the industry’s request in 2008.”

Bill 80 did away with the basic rights of building trades workers to choose their own union. Contractors can now choose which union will represent workers on job sites, effectively banning craft unions from the industry and ripping up province-wide collective agreements.

“The news about how significantly some construction companies are involved in Saskatchewan politics is extremely troubling,” said Hubich.

The SFL is probably the first labour fed to make such a demand. Most federal and provincial election laws ban both corporate and trade union political donations.

The Communist Party has also called for a ban on corporate donations since corporations should not have the same rights as people; they are purely legal entities.

The current ban on union donations was put in place in the last 20 years as a way to “guarantee” governments are “neutral” and distant from the class struggle. In fact, there is no such thing as a neutral government in class-divided societies. All governments in a capitalist society defend the interests of the ruling capitalist class, a class which always has pools of money to donate to their political parties.

The Communist Party has always opposed the ban on union donations. ●

EDITORIALS

A positive step, but dangers remain

The initial agreement on Iran's nuclear programme is a welcome step away from many years of U.S. threats to launch a devastating war against that country. But the region remains volatile and dangerous. The "new Middle East" strategy of U.S. imperialist domination remains in place, and the Israeli Zionists have not abandoned the goal of occupying the entire territory of Palestine and beyond.

While the western corporate media demonizes Iran, the Rouhani government in Tehran has shown a far stronger grasp of political responsibilities than its counterparts in Washington and Tel Aviv. Unlike both the U.S. and Israel, Iran has no historic record of initiating wars. Nor is Iran guilty of using nuclear bombs, white phosphorus, agent orange, or depleted uranium. It is true that the Iranian fundamentalist regime has committed serious human rights abuses for many years. But both the U.S. and Israel are guilty of a wide range of human rights violations, and war crimes against other countries.

Any success in blocking the spread of nuclear weapons is welcome. But the Middle East remains awash with the estimated 200 nuclear warheads possessed by Israel, and many more on U.S. warships in the Mediterranean and the Gulf. Easing the threat of war in the Middle East requires comprehensive progress towards disarming the entire region, including the huge arsenals held by the U.S. and Israel.

Unfortunately, the government of Canada has criticized the Iranian nuclear agreement, apparently because the deal reduces the likelihood of a bloody imperialist war to destroy Iran. Removing the pro-war Harper government from office as soon as possible would mark a significant victory in the struggle for international relations based on mutual dialogue and cooperation, international law, and reduction of tensions, not threats and violence.

How austerity works for some

How does our society measure what "works" and what doesn't? The economic crisis which broke out in 2008 provides a classic lens to examine this question.

On a global scale, the major shareholders of the most powerful corporations and banks have recovered, and much more. Huge bailouts squeezed from the working class covered any short-term losses suffered by the rich, and then profits and stock prices rebounded past pre-crisis levels.

Here in Canada, studies on the "Rich 100" bear out this analysis. As one media commentary said in November, "because these people have been at it for decades, they keep getting fabulously, obscenely, gloriously richer."

Collectively, the individuals on Canada's Rich 100 are worth \$230 billion, more than the total gross domestic product of many countries. This year alone, their combined net worth surged by more than 15%, the biggest increase since 2000. The cutoff for making Canada's Rich 100 list is now \$728 million, compared to \$309 million in 1999.

Here's one example. While the retail and grocery sectors in Canada have been challenged by Target and Walmart, profits in these sectors have seen big profit increases. Companies controlled by two Rich 100 families, the Westons and the Sobeyes, have bought up Shoppers Drug Mart and Safeway Canada. The net worth of these families shot up by \$2.1 billion and \$598 million, respectively, for gains of about 25%.

So, does capitalist austerity work? The bottom line is that it serves the "one percent" quite well, while working people, the so-called "ninety-nine percent," keep getting shafted. It's time for a system that works for the vast majority, not the ultra-rich.

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LETTERS

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Toronto's Tea Party Mayor

By Liz Rowley

Around the world Toronto's Mayor Rob Ford and his brother Doug have been objects of media derision since the Mayor's crack habit and alcoholism were confirmed by a police report.

A lengthy police investigation exposed the video where Ford is smoking a crack pipe, making racist and homophobic attacks. Two of the men in the video have been shot, and one was killed. Ford's driver has been arrested for drug trafficking and other offenses.

With everything the Mayor does, the intent is build up a heroic persona as a defender of the underdog, a red-tape cutter, a man unafraid to "say it like it is."

But the police report exposed the Mayor as a racist with criminal connections, and a list of domestic assault complaints from his wife. Ford also faces sexual assault complaints, and reports of drunken and belligerent behaviour at official events. He was removed from coaching and financing a high school football team after racially stereotyping players and their families.

In November, City Council passed a series of motions to transfer most of the Mayor's powers to Deputy Mayor Norm Gardner, a member of Ford's hand-picked Executive Committee. As the Fords blustered retribution, hundred of protestors demanded the Mayor's ouster as the key to "Save Our Toronto".

Premier Kathleen Wynne, who had offered to provide City Council with "new tools" to strip the Mayor of his powers, was relieved. Wynne has never been elected, having inherited the top job when Dalton McGuinty resigned after stripping collective bargaining rights from School Boards, teachers and educational workers.

With such a reprehensible public record, why has Ford not faced charges for any of the offenses he has committed?

Toronto lawyer Clayton Ruby has asked exactly this question. At the very least, Ruby says, police have had grounds to search the Mayor's car and home, as they do in thousands of similar cases every year. Why is Ford exempt?

The fact is Ford has been

protected by police, by the corporate moneybags in the city, and by the Tory machine in Ontario and federally.

These powerful forces moved mountains to elect Ford and the right-wing majority on Council in 2010. They wanted to slash city budgets, privatize public services and assets, attack municipal unions, tear up collective agreements, destroy public housing and eliminate public boards and input wherever possible.

How we see it...

For the last three years, budget deliberations have consisted of threats to the public and retribution to councillors who opposed the Ford cuts. This Mayor and his right-wing majority have done the job they were contracted to do by those who bought and paid for their election.

Not surprisingly, these are the same forces the police "serve and protect."

But now it seems the Big Money is shifting to support John Tory for Mayor in 2014, if the Mayor is unable to resurrect himself. Yet Ford is already campaigning against the proposed 2014 budget which includes a 2.5% tax hike. Ford calls the increase the same "gravy train" he "derailed" in 2010. Will this stick? Some of it will, but how much depends on the progressive forces and the alternative they project - or don't - in the 2014 campaign.

Ford's base, while shrinking, is still significant, shifting between 20% and 40% in the polls. Where does this support come from?

According to figures published by the *Toronto Star*, the poor white working class, poorly educated and increasingly marginalized, are the core support for Ford Nation. But it also includes the bankrupted and ruined small business class who have no solidarity with anyone, and who often blame low-waged workers and unions for their

situation, not big business. And this group is growing.

Ford Nation also includes the déclassé elements whose loyalty is bought and sold as strike-breakers and union-busters. Add in the racists, homophobes and bigots, and it's a potent mix of blind anger and resentment, skilfully turned against organized labour, youth, women, Aboriginal Peoples, migrants, and the LGBTQ community. It also has a very sharp anti-communist edge.

In the US, this same grouping make up the base of the Tea Party, while in parts of Europe this is the base of far right movements, such as Golden Dawn in Greece.

Without a decisive political challenge, this grouping will sink deeper roots as the capitalist crisis deepens, and the threat to working people will grow.

In the 2014 elections, the target for labour and its allies must be to replace the Mayor and the right with a progressive majority in Toronto, and across the province.

To do that we need a coalition of forces able to unite around progressive municipal policies, and candidates who will work with these coalitions and be accountable to them between elections.

This is urgent in Toronto, where the right-wing affliction is easily transmittable, and could appear in any number of cities if action isn't taken soon. •

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The threat of agribusiness

By T.J. Petrowski

The capitalist system is based on the exploitation of workers and the environment in an effort to maximize profit, and therefore privatization and the corporate control of essential services is a recipe for disaster. Corporate control of food and agriculture is a particularly serious threat to both working people and the environment. Democratic rights, despite their limitations, are increasingly being eroded to make way for unlimited corporate control of our food system.

In 2012 we witnessed the largest tainted meat recall in Canadian history from an outbreak of E. coli at an XL Foods Lakeside meat processing plant in Alberta. Almost 2,000 items were removed from store shelves in Canada and the United States, and over 600 tons of meat were dumped at a landfill in Alberta. The scandal rocked the Harper Government, but Federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz, who presided over the 2008 listeriosis outbreak at a Toronto Maple Leaf Foods packing plant that killed 23 people, refused to acknowledge any responsibility.

The 2012 outbreak raised questions about food safety regulations in Canada, which have been being systematically dismantled for decades under both Liberal and Conservative governments. The Harper Government drastically cut back food safety regulations and muzzled critics, but the outbreak is only the latest expression of problems when corporations control our food system.

From genetically modified organisms (GMO), unsanitary and

unregulated food production, terminator seeds, slave labour, to toxic chemicals in our food, working people and the environment are under attack by major agricultural corporations that have no interest other than to make a profit. Agribusiness does everything it can to lobby governments and to keep its farming practices secret from consumers.



Eric Schlosser, co-producer of the documentary *Food Inc.*, has said, "The way we eat has changed more in the last 50 years than in the previous 10,000... Now our food is coming from enormous assembly lines where the animals and the workers are being abused, and the food has become much more dangerous in ways that are deliberately hidden from us. This isn't just about what we're eating. It's about what we're allowed to say. What we're allowed to know."

According to the American Academy of Environmental Medicine, the consumption of GMOs is linked to adverse health

issues, and a test done on rats shows severe organ damage from the consumption of GMOs.

Of course none of this matters to major corporations. A Monsanto official told the *New York Times* that it's not the responsibility of the company to ensure the food is safe, their only interest is selling as much of it as possible. But how do consumers know if their food contains GMOs?

An attempt in California to require retailers and food companies to label products that contain genetically modified ingredients was defeated, thanks to the tens of millions of dollars that major corporations like Monsanto and Hershey contributed to the campaign against the legislation.

Studies have also shown that the use of GMOs has a number of serious environmental consequences, from soil fertility to the decrease in the number of certain plants and animals.

The majority of GMOs are designed to be able to tolerate an excessive use of toxic chemicals,

such as pesticides and herbicides. Some scientists predict that the use of herbicides will triple as a result of GM agricultural products, leading to an increase in soil toxicity. Do we want more chemicals on our food?

GMOs have been linked with the decrease in some beneficial insects that are critical to the environment, especially important pollinators like Monarch butterflies and honeybees. During Monsanto's trial of GM cotton, 40% of the bees died, and GM canola flowers are known to be harmful to important pollinators. Technology companies are now building robotic honeybees as a possible future replacement for real ones. Lacewings, springtails, and ladybird beetles are among other insects that GMOs are known to harm.

Although corporations want us to believe their claims about GMOs, David Ehrenfield, Professor of Biology at Rutgers University, is not convinced: "Genetic Engineering is often justified as a human technology, one that feeds more people with better food. Nothing could be further from the truth. With very few exceptions, the whole point of genetic engineering is to increase sales of chemicals and bio-engineered products to dependent farmers."

As more crimes committed by these corporations come to the public's attention, they are lobbying right-wing governments to enact legislation to make it illegal to expose or film corporate agricultural practices.

In several U.S. states, this aggressive legislation, supported by anti-worker and anti-democratic companies like Koch

Industries and ExxonMobil in addition to agricultural corporations, will prohibit anyone from filming or exposing illegal farming practices, other than law enforcement and food and safety regulators. No doubt the push to criminalize exposure of brutal and inhumane corporate farming practices is a result of the high costs associated with massive food recalls, and the unwillingness of corporations to follow current food and safety regulations.

Earlier exposés by animal rights and environmental activists have shown sick animals being shocked or beaten before being shot, farm animals with infected wounds, and animals living in their own waste.

The American Legislative Exchange Council, an ultra-right-wing organization, called these activists "terrorists". A Republican Senator claimed that because law enforcement agencies exist, this legislation is necessary to maintain corporate privacy. However, the senator didn't say that as regulations are dismantled and austerity forces cutbacks in safety regulators, official agencies are less able to deal with illegal corporate practices.

The real terrorists are companies such as Monsanto, which recently purchased Blackwater (Xe Services), the infamous mercenary army that committed extensive human rights abuses in Iraq and Afghanistan, to target anti-GMO activists.

Corporations should never be trusted with any vital service, whether healthcare, water, or food. Working people and farmers need to fight the corporate takeover of our food system, and create our own reliable, healthy, and safe food for consumption. ●

A French-speaking black man in France....

By B. Prasant, PV correspondent in India

The year was the beginning of the new millennium. I was with a big jamboree delegation from India to Havana, as representatives to an international solidarity conference. Delegations would come from most Latin American countries. The venue was the Karl Marx Theatre, at the edge of the long and broad promenade that fronts the sea across the entire coastline of that lovely city. I was travelling as a journalist and interpreter.

Being financially handicapped, us Communists in the delegation travelled via the cheapest route, Aeroflot to Moscow via Tashkent: then onto Paris with a stop-over for two days, and finally Air Cubana to Havana. The out-and-back journey was full of interesting incidents, as was the stay in Havana. The narrated incident is situated in the menacing rise of the racist right, in a country that swears by the dictum, now worn thin, of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*....

I was about to board the flight to Cuba from Charles de Gaulle airport and had to pass through the double check points. The first raising of the eyebrows of the French security officials was

caused by the fact that of the entire delegation of us Communists, I spoke the city variety of their mother tongue.

I was stopped and asked to stand aside as other members of the delegations were routinely searched, their luggage passed through the scanners, and they were asked to wait for the boarding passes. Then the French officialdom turned on me. I was searched quite thoroughly. My pockets were emptied out. I was asked to take off my suit jacket, my tie, and my shoes and socks. By this time quite a large posse of uniformed policemen (and one woman) had joined in the fray.

They conferred among themselves for a moment, and the tall and statuesque lady officer came forward and roughly ordered me to strip to my bare essentials. The Communist delegation stood huddled, faces agape with fear, shock, anxiety, and suppressed rage. Fear dominated their feelings, and my smile, while not assuaging them, infuriated the French officials further. The officers then produced a thick wad of filed papers, including what I expected were photos of mine taken without my knowledge during my stay in France in the 1960s and 1970s.

They examined my Press

passes, ID card, and passport, over and over again. All the while I stood bare-bodied in the cold of the airport grimly expecting the worst. Next to go under their scrutiny was my visa. This they kept aside.

Then the questions started. Why was I in France? Why had I come from Moscow? What event would I cover in Cuba? How would I return? What I had done during my two days of stay with a lady friend in Paris suburb? Had I known her long, and where had her husband been when I stayed with her? All the questions had quite straightforward answers, were provided with due courtesy, couched in polite but not submissive language despite my physical discomfort.

Then I realised there was a second and perhaps more driving reason for this hassle. Somebody from the officials muttered loudly under his whisky-smelling breath: *Nigger... Communist...*

I thought that handcuffs were being readied, and that the magistrate would soon come marching in to allow the secret police to take me into custody. Then something occurred. A policeman in mufti, easy to spot with my kind of experience, came forward, a bulky cell phone in

hand, talking rapidly to the officers present. A change took place. The tension appeared to be going down, in incremental doses.

I was asked to put on my clothes and shoes, and they handed me the two valises that I carried. My papers were stamped, and I was asked to board the flight. I was never told why I was being released from my humiliation. Nor did I deign to ask. The Indian

Communists who had lost all hope escorted me into the corridor that led to the interior of the Soviet-built Ilyushin 66. As I sank into the hard and small economy class seat, the Carib variety of Spanish spoken by the cabin crew and the stewardesses - all Cuban, sweet calypso music to my ears - I reflected on the sad decline of the

see BLACK MAN, page 11



The Fifth of the Month to Free the Five

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

E-mail: president@whitehouse.gov
On the web: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>
Phone 1-202-456-1111 Fax 1-202-456-2461
Telegram: President Barack Obama, The White House,
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 2500, USA

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

Communist Parties plan common actions for 2014

The 77 parties which took part in the 15th international Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties (IMCWP), held Nov. 8-10 in Lisbon, adopted a set of guidelines for "common or convergent action." The meeting mandated the Working Group of the IMCWP to implement these guidelines in coordination with other parties of the Solidnet List (<http://solidnet.org>).

Activities will be held to commemorate 2014 as the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War I, and the 75th anniversary of the beginning of World War II, "through a joint campaign alerting to the dangers of new international military clashes, the need to enhance the struggle for peace and against imperialist aggressiveness and wars, and highlighting that the struggle for peace is intimately linked with the struggle for socialism."

Next year is also the 15th anniversary of the criminal NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which marked a new phase in the development of imperialist

military strategy.

The Working Group, in coordination with parties from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribe, will hold an international seminar on the impact of the capitalist crisis in the

number of Parties are present, efforts will be made to organize a working meeting to debate the ideological offensive and the mass media's role, and to exchange experiences on mass communication work.

will be given to actions against youth unemployment and to defend the rights of trade unions.

Convergent actions will be considered to combat racism, xenophobia, and fascism, stressing the importance of the ideological

be commemorated, emphasizing the central contributions of V.I. Lenin to the international communist movement.

Parties from the Arab countries and Middle East will organize an international seminar on the social and national emancipation struggles of that region, expressing solidarity with the victims of imperialist and Zionist crimes and aggressions, including the Palestinian and Syrian peoples.

The Communist parties will continue to denounce imperialist intervention against Syria and Iran, and to struggle for the recognition of an independent Palestinian state.

Finally, to promote the international front against imperialism, the parties will continue to support the activities of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the World Peace Council (WPC), the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), and the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), in the specific framework of every country. ●



developing countries. The seminar will focus on issues such as the right to economic and social development, protection of natural resources, agriculture, land tenure, and food security.

International campaigns will build solidarity with socialist Cuba against the US blockade, with Bolivarian Venezuela, and with the Colombian people's struggle for peace with social justice.

Taking advantage of international events where a large

Parties will mark International Women's Day (March 8), by highlighting the effect of the crisis and the imperialist offensive on working women and national oppressed women, expressing solidarity with their struggles.

May Day 2014 will be honoured with participation in struggles in each country to defend workers' economic and social rights, highlighting the importance of the class struggle for the abolition of exploitation. Particular attention

struggle against anti-communism, and denouncing the European Union's campaign to equate communism with fascism. A day of action will be announced against the persecution of communist parties and the ban against communist symbols in several countries.

The 95th anniversary of the creation of the Communist International (March 3, 1919) will

More information at <http://solidnet.org>

"The central question is the transition to socialism"

From the intervention of the Communist Party of Canada to the 15th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, held Nov. 8-10 in Lisbon, Portugal, presented by Elizabeth Rowley, member of the CPC Central Executive and Ontario Provincial Leader

Last spring, our 37th Convention determined that our Party Program, which outlines our strategy for socialism in Canada, should be reviewed and updated prior to the 38th Convention in 2016. The central question is the transition to socialism, the phases of transition and the objectives of each phase, and the alliances necessary to achieve those objectives.

In addition, the national question in Canada and the national rights of the Québécois(es) and of Aboriginal peoples across the country, is a central factor that affects all aspects of the struggle for socialism, and for a united mass resistance to imperialism and war abroad, and austerity and reaction at home.

As we prepare for this discussion, which is about the role and objectives of our small revolutionary party in non-revolutionary conditions, we reiterate our conviction that we are in the epoch of the transition from capitalism to socialism and that there is no other rung on the ladder of social and human history but socialism.

We also reiterate that the transition to socialism occurs in each country according to a timetable determined by the objective and subjective conditions obtaining in each country, including the strength and unity of the working class and its allies, the strength and influence of the Communist Party, the development of class and political

consciousness among the people, and the development of a revolutionary situation.

More than twenty years after the fall of the USSR and the socialist bloc, we can say that the greatest damage to our



Ontario Communist leader Liz Rowley represented the CPC at the Lisbon meeting.

revolutionary cause, in Canada, was the widespread conclusion that socialism doesn't work and is therefore not the alternative to capitalism that working people are searching for in increasing numbers today. This is the consequence of the "end of the history" proclamations, which while they are quite wrong, have had widespread effect in the advanced capitalist countries, including Canada. We have an enormous job to do politically and ideologically to counter the state sponsored anti-communist campaigns, and to recreate the magnetism of socialism - working class power - that galvanized workers for socialism in the past.

Developments in Cuba and Latin America have sparked the hopes of millions of people that imperialism can be defeated and that a new world order, based on democracy, sovereignty, peace, environmental security, and socialism, can be achieved through the people's struggle.

We are confronted with new

problems, including the environmental catastrophe that is engulfing the whole world; the result of unbridled capitalist greed and development. We must become the champions of peace and the environment, linking these issues to the need for profound and fundamental change, to the Communist agenda, and to socialism.

In this same time, we have seen the crisis of social democracy play out internationally and in Canada, where the New Democratic Party has abandoned all responsibility and accountability to the working class and the organized labour movement, and has jettisoned its progressive policies in favour of neoliberal dogma - all in pursuit of government power and corporate approval.

The CPC has long since abandoned its 1971 policy of seeking cooperation with the NDP, when the NDP leadership abandoned socialism as its stated goal; all references to socialism have been finally purged from that party's program and constitution earlier this year.

Yet there are many socialist-minded members of the NDP with whom we work closely in the labour and people's movements, who are horrified by the NDP's positions in support of war and against the best interests of the working class and working people. The NDP's electoral gains in the last election could easily melt away in the 2015 election, as those votes were mainly against the Conservative austerity policies; not in support of social democratic policies of austerity.

As austerity bites deeper into wages and living standards, as unemployment and social conditions worsen, and as the attack on labour and democratic rights sharpens, there is also a growing demand for an organized economic, social and political resistance lead by labour and its

social and community allies.

A sharp struggle has opened up in the labour movement between left and right social democrats over the direction of the trade union movement, their view of mass independent labour political action, and their relations with the NDP. The central issue is class struggle or class collaboration.

Communists in the trade unions and people's movements are fighting for escalating mass independent political action that will put tens of thousands of people in the streets against austerity and anti-labour, anti-democratic attacks, including Conservative efforts to break the trade union movement and eliminate the right to strike with US styled, right-to-work laws. We fight for a people's agenda of jobs, rising wages, incomes and living standards, for strong public services, affordable housing, quality public and post-



secondary education, universal public healthcare, expanded labour, social, civil and democratic rights, for peace and environmental security, for sovereignty, and for the right of nations to self-determination up to and including the right to secession.

While we do not advocate secession, and in fact warn against secession in the current political context, we defend and uphold the right to nations in Canada to choose secession, in the same way we defend and uphold the rights of men and women to divorce if that

is their choice.

In upholding these rights, we create the essential conditions for unity on an equal, voluntary basis in a socialist Canada. We also create the conditions for unity of the working class in English-speaking Canada, in Québec, and among Aboriginal Peoples, in the struggle to resist capitalist globalization, austerity, war, and reaction today, and for socialism tomorrow.

Our objective is to build a broad-based People's Coalition which, with labour at its core, is an alliance that can launch an extra-parliamentary counter-offensive against the corporations and their right-wing governments. We anticipate that this will lead to new forms of cooperation and alliances that will have a political parliamentary expression, able to curb corporate power, and introduce far-reaching and fundamental social and economic reforms. This will not unfold without the strong, revolutionary leadership of the Communist Party.

Canadian Communists recognize that the specific conditions in Canada, as an advanced capitalist country deeply integrated into the US economy and being rapidly integrated into the US war machine, will not be the same as in other countries where objective and subjective conditions are different. Lenin looked for the weak link in imperialism's chain, reflecting the dialectics of the class struggle nationally and internationally.

What is universal is the transition to socialism as a historical necessity, based on the specific conditions and alignment of forces in each country. We recognize and respect those specificities, while also expressing our strong support for more coordination and unity of the World Communist Movement and of the international working class movement. ●

"We are united by the common ideal of liberation"

Excerpts from the presentations at the 15th annual International Meeting of Communist & Workers' Parties, Nov. 8-10, 2013, Lisbon, Portugal

Greetings by Jeronimo de Sousa, General Secretary, Portuguese Communist Party

We are very pleased with the presence of so many delegations, in an obvious sign of the importance which the process of International Meetings of Communist and Workers' Parties has acquired within the world Communist and revolutionary movement. Among those present, there are Parties which are in power ... but the vast majority have come from countries where, as in Portugal, an intense class struggle is being waged, a struggle that is very demanding for the Communists; from countries where anti-Communism is an official State policy and where cruel dictatorships are forcing the revolutionaries to confront the perils and hardships of the clandestine struggle; from regions where imperialism sows war, death and destruction. You have come, even when domestic tasks of great importance also demanded your presence at home. We are here, in this 15th International Meeting, united by the common ideal of liberation, by the common conviction that Socialism is the alternative to the barbarity of capitalism, and that the day-to-day struggle in defence of the interests of the workers and the peoples, and for the progressive and revolutionary transformation of society, requires stronger Communist Parties, with a stronger internationalist cooperation, which has class solidarity and proletarian internationalism at its core.



For full reports, visit <http://solidnet.org>

"Cuba will continue struggling to improve socialism"

From the intervention of the Communist Party of Cuba

The Communist Party of Cuba considers that, at a time of a difficult and complex international situation, characterized by the economic, financial and global crisis of capitalism, the destabilization of the international order, and the aggressive policy of the U.S. imperialism and NATO, which has led to wars and conflicts for a new sharing of the wealth, it is more necessary than ever the exchange and cooperation, in the first place, among the communist and workers parties, and also with the political forces, social movements and left and progressive parties...

The commitment to build a

prosperous and sustainable socialism, where social ownership over the main means of production and the need of development will prevail as the basis for achieving a state of wellbeing and prosperity, is one of the postulates of the conceptualization process of the social and economic model that signals the present and future direction of Cuba...

For Cuba, only socialism is a condition for development. Therefore, it will continue to preserve the main social gains that made the Cuban model a reference for many in the world. We are making the changes without copying from others, but we do take into account the positive experiences from other models, mainly considering our own experiences and cultural-historical conditions, as well as

the situation of a small and underdeveloped country of 11.2 million people which, in spite of having few natural resources and being subjected for more than half a century to the tightest and most brutal economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States, does not cease in its efforts to favour a better life for the people.

...We reiterate that Cuba will continue struggling to improve its socialism; it will continue demanding the lifting of the blockade and the end of the hostility and subversion against its Revolution; and it will continue struggling for the return of the Five Cubans unjustly incarcerated in U.S. jails. And, in those endeavors, we count on our right and your solidarity. ●

Imperialism's "New Middle East" strategy

From the intervention by Dr. Marie Nassif-Debs, Deputy General Secretary, Lebanese Communist Party

The current crisis in capitalism has exceeded in its severity, complexity and universality all earlier crises witnessed in the twentieth century...

How does the current crisis manifest itself in our region and in Lebanon in particular? We are witnessing an acceleration of political and military developments as follows.

On the one hand, the second phase of the Egyptian revolution, (i.e. the 30 July uprising), has led to an overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood rule, which in turn prompted the Tunisian masses amongst other Arab political parties and masses to mobilize along the same lines. The role of the Egyptian military remains unclear, especially when we take into account the previous American imperialist project, namely trying to enforce the Turkish or Pakistani model of marrying the army and the so called "moderate Islam" political forces. In any case, we as IMCWP are concerned with supporting this revolution and its sister in Tunisia, as well as supporting all the progressive forces that took to the streets in all the Arab world, from North Africa to the Levant and including Sudan. These progressive forces had at the core of their demands the right to employment, education and health, the right to a dignified human existence and social progress, and against the bourgeoisie dictatorships whether directly or indirectly subservient to imperialism and its savage neoliberal policies.

On the other hand, we must recognize the new developments created by the ongoing Syrian crisis. For in addition to the Russian-Iranian-Syrian-regime alliance, which developed as the crisis unfolded and transformed into a crisis with significant external regional and international dimensions, the US started adopting a new stance vis-a-vis Iran. This has manifested itself through the opening of dialogue channels with the Iranian regime and through resisting Israeli calls for an aggression against Iran to prevent it from continuing the uranium enrichment process. This was accompanied with a change in the American stance regarding the Syrian regime, as manifested by abstaining from carrying out an aggression against Syria and by Washington's rapid agreement to resolve the chemical weapons issue. It should be recognized that the main aim of this turning in America policy, is an American imperialist attempt to recapture control of unfolding events and strengthen its hegemony on the region; and certainly this turning does not aim at helping the Syrian people and the people of the region...

If we link this transformation with recent discoveries of oil and gas in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean sea, and the rumours of a Russian-American deal to share this wealth, we can then conclude that the "new Middle East" has been re-divided based on a new allocation of shares, even if tentative, and that such an agreement has benefited from a redrawing of the American and Russian spheres of influence as well as the "Chemical weapons" deal... ●

"Iran at a critical stage": Tudeh Party

From the contribution of the Tudeh Party of Iran

Iran is currently going through a very sensitive period, in which the people's movement for peace, democracy and social justice has reached a critical stage.

The theocratic regime that has turned the country into a prison for democrats and those seeking change, has proven itself incapable of offering any viable solution for the country's economic, social and political problems. The neo-liberal economic policies of the regime are in line with the prescriptions of the IMF and the World Bank. The devastating economic sanctions by the US and its EU allies have paralysed the economy, interrupted the normal functioning of production units and factories, and resulted in waves of unemployment and high commodity prices. The removal of subsidies from basic goods and services, including energy, has condemned ordinary people, especially those living in urban centres, to economic hardship.

Privatisation has been steadily spreading to every aspect of the economy and now even parts of the oil industry are privatised.

Despite savagely suppressing all progressive and democratic

forces and marginalising advocates of meaningful reforms within the structures of the regime, the theocracy still faces a serious crisis of political legitimacy...

It was in such a climate that the regime approached the presidential elections of 14th June 2013 with a carefully planned process and outcome. The carefully engineered election resulted in the election of Hassan Rouhani, a self proclaimed moderate, and a trusted advocate of the theocratic regime. The new president's main objective has been the removal of crippling sanctions and normalising diplomatic ties with the US...

The main contradiction in Iran is between the people and the interests of the powerful political elite and economic oligarchies, who are the custodians of a highly lucrative, unjust and corrupt political economy.

This contradiction cannot be resolved by cosmetic changes and poses a growing threat to the survival of the ruling dictatorship. The power structure in Iran is complex... The key power factions strongly compete and confront each other but they nonetheless close ranks under the absolute rule of the "supreme leader" when faced by any serious external challenge. They know that if there

is danger of "regime change", it is from the Iranian people seeking fundamental socio-economic change and democratisation. This is why the regime relates all its internal contradictions and problems to forces beyond its borders, and it is now looking to the west as a natural ally by seeking a deal to shore up its position... ●

Important milestones: SACP

From the intervention of the South African Communist Party (SACP)

The South African democratization process will next year mark an important milestone - 20 years of independence and defeat against the policies of racism and exploitation of the indigenous peoples of our country. This will also be marked in a year where an important set of elections national and provincial elections will take place - in 2014! At this crucial stage of the democratization point, it will provide the Communist Party and its allies the opportunity to interrogate the post-colonial state and its challenges - and the extent to which the progressive alliance led by the African National Congress (ANC) has been able to advance the goals of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR)...

National liberation movements do not emerge one fine day out of the mind of some superman or at the instigation of some foreign power. They are born out of popular discontent. They emerge over long periods to combat oppressive conditions and express aspirations for a different kind of society. They are, in short, the agents of class and national struggle. In the case of Southern Africa, they were born in the crucible of the colonial experience. We point this out in order to reinforce our important notion of the Tripartite Alliance and its historic evolution in the unique conditions of South Africa. It is against this background that we should properly contextualise the endeavours of the Tripartite Alliance, led by the ANC and its strategy for achievement of the goals of the Freedom Charter - and thus further advance the struggle for socialism...

The SACP is currently preparing important events to mark the centenary of the SACP in 2021 - and indeed many other parties born during this period will also mark 100 years of existence. This we believe could also provide a platform to prepare the international communist and workers parties movement to observe the centenary of the Great Socialist October Revolution in 2017. ●



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Bulgarian unions hold protests

An estimated 4,000 Bulgarian workers protested in Sofia on Nov. 20 against low wages and a lack of jobs, a sign that opposition to the Socialist-led cabinet may be spreading beyond its student base. Led by Bulgaria's largest trade union CITUB, protesters marched through the capital to demand a 10 percent increase in public sector salaries and reforms in the inefficient and corruption-prone healthcare and energy sectors.

Nov. 20 marked the 160th consecutive day of protests, which began after the government took office in May. Corruption was the main issue raised by the initial demonstrations, led by students and urban professionals who account for a small proportion of Bulgaria's population. Their daily actions in front of parliament, backed by right-wing forces, have focused on what they call poor governance. But the underlying cause of popular discontent is the spread of mass poverty and unemployment, more than two decades after the restoration of capitalism and six years after Bulgaria joined the European Union.

The CITUB has organised nationwide rallies, as the parliament discussed the draft state budget for 2014.

"We want to see the economy turned to the problems of the workers. We want decent pay and jobs. If the government does not take note now, our next move will be to go to strike," said CITUB leader Plamen Dimitrov.

The CITUB said its demands for working people were not been reflected in the draft budget, especially regarding workplace security, regular payment of salaries, and other issues.

The Confederation's main demand is for a tax credit for the poorest working Bulgarians. This would allow over 600,000 people whose monthly salaries are below 204 euros to claim back taxes at the end of the year. The CITUB proposes that the cost could be funded by criminalizing tax evasion, which would mean an extra 100 million Euros in budget revenues.

Tensions in the country are growing over a range of issues, including reorganization of the energy sector. The national electricity company (NEK) debt will increase to about 1.6 billion Euros by next year according to the proposed budget. There is a very real threat that NEK will stop paying its suppliers.

Bangladeshi garment workers win raise

Garment workers in Bangladesh will receive a 77 percent pay increase following a strike against the country's dangerous textile industry. Earlier this year the roof of a factory building collapsed, killing more than 1,100. Experts said the accident would not have occurred if safety measures had been met.

The pay increase for factory

workers, who are largely women, fell short of their demands. The negotiated salary will provide workers, on average, with 5,300 taka (about \$68) per month. Initially, workers requested 3,000 taka, or \$100 a month.

Prior to the increase, thousands went on strike, shutting down more than 100 factories to demand higher wages and safer conditions. During protests against the lower-negotiated deal, police fired tear gas and bullets into crowds as workers occupied the streets. But the negotiated salary, accepted by union leaders, was enough to prompt many workers to return to the factories.

"Despite this significant raise, the garment workers will still be among the lowest compensated in the world," Kevin Matthews of Care2 wrote. "Sadly, most of the Bangladeshi workers would be ecstatic to receive the money paid to sweatshop employees in other parts of the globe."

The protests and wage hikes come as a new report was released, claiming that another factory disaster like the one seen earlier this year could happen again.

"There is high chance of a repeat of the tragic events of Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashion's fire. These risks compromise the long-term investments of brands and limit their ability to improve working conditions," states the report by a British parliamentary group.

Another report found that one in six factories that contract with Walmart failed to meet safety standards. According to the report, the factories had structural deficiencies and failed to meet fire codes. British MPs are calling for regular audits to ensure factories stick to improved standards. Bangladesh is the second highest producing garment nation in the world, home to an industry worth \$20 billion a year.

Nokia workers fired for striking

Striking workers at a Nokia factory in southern China threatened on Nov. 22 to extend industrial action after the company terminated 59 employees for failing to return to work.

Hundreds of employees stopped work on Nov. 19, complaining of changes in the wake of Nokia's sale of its mobile phones business to U.S. software giant Microsoft. The strikers said they are being forced to sign new contracts with worse terms of employment. Protestors gathered outside the factory, holding banners that said: "If you want to change the marriage, you have to first offer compensation."

More than a dozen police cars were parked outside and riot police stood guard with dogs. Striking employees said they were told they had violated work regulations because they refused to return to work.

"They have no grounds for firing us," said a worker named Wang, adding that he is determined to continue the strike. "We've already chosen this road to walk on, so we'll stick with it."

Lack of trust in employers has often led Chinese workers to balk at takeovers they fear will worsen

employment conditions. The confrontation in the industrial city of Dongguan marked the latest incident in a wave of industrial unrest at Chinese affiliates of foreign manufacturing companies.

Nokia claimed it has held a number of sessions with its employees "to explain the situation and dispel the many rumours and false statements." This was denied by some employees. "The company didn't send any representative to negotiate with us; the labour union isn't doing anything either," said one of the workers.

Nokia agreed in September to sell its devices and services business and license its patents to Microsoft after failing to recover from a late start in smartphones. The sale is due to close in the first quarter of next year.

Walmart campaign

A global action week, coordinated from Nov. 18 to 24 by the UNI Global Union federation, highlighted the need to improve working conditions at Walmart stores and throughout the company supply chain. Walmart is the world's largest and richest retailer, run by one of the richest families in the world.

Despite its wealth, the company has repeatedly turned down the requests of workers seeking to improve their own working conditions. Walmart has disciplined and even fired workers who speak out for better jobs in the US. Unsafe conditions at Walmart Bangladeshi garment factories have been linked to tragic loss of life; over 1,100 people died in the April 2013 Rana Plaza disaster, and another 112 died in a fire at a Walmart clothing factory.

The November campaign was supported by the International Transport Federation (ITF), the umbrella group for dockworkers unions. With workers from Argentina to Zambia taking action, the ITF urged its affiliates to rise to the challenge.

An ITF spokesperson said, "As workers, we are always stronger when we act together. As companies increasingly work across national borders, so we must organise across borders and sectors. Combatting international giants like Walmart is possible only when we all pull together - and send a strong message that workers will not be bullied, demeaned, or have their lives threatened through below par working conditions."

Palestine courts back teachers

The Palestinian Supreme Court has ruled that a strike by the general union of teachers is legal, after the Palestinian Authority (PA) sought an injunction to suspend the action. The court ruled on Nov. 21, after the Authority filed a lawsuit against the general secretariat of the union and other branches.

The teacher's union said it was "delighted" with the decision. Secretary-General Ahmed Sahwil promised that teachers and workers in the education ministry will "achieve all our legitimate rights, and impose them on the

government."

The PA is trying to put teachers "in the dock," he added, saying that the court's decision was a blow to those "who stand in the way of teachers and workers in the education field."

Minister of Education Ali Muhana said the PA respects the court decision but will file a lawsuit against the teacher's union if they announce further strike action.

The teachers' union last threatened to strike in September, but called off the plans following an agreement with the PA. The union organized regular strikes in the first half of 2013 to protest unpaid salaries. It demanded a regular promotion system, recognition of teaching as a profession, and adherence to the career ladder.

Strike actions across Indonesia

Workers in Indonesia are demanding higher wages ahead of the new year. Labourers in the capital are campaigning for a US\$258 monthly minimum wage, down from their initial demand of \$320.

Continued rallies and strikes indicate that workers have additional demands, at least in Jakarta, where Governor Joko "Jokowi" Widodo has resisted demands for a higher minimum wage. Recent nationwide strikes called for: an end to outsourcing of jobs; strengthening unions across factories and regions; encouraging women workers to speak up and organize; forcing employers to pay the minimum wage; ending extension of "casual employment" to well over 10 years of service; higher wages in non-industrial areas such as West and Central Java where workers are not organized; and job protection for union leaders and others suspected of union activities.

Indonesia's minimum wage is theoretically only for single workers with less than one year of service, but penalties for employers paying the same amount to long-time workers and those

with families are unclear.

A minimum wage increase of 44% went into effect last January, but massive strike actions were needed to compel many employers to pay workers the new rate.

Labour's current demand is based on a new, longer list of 84 components of living that the minimum wage should take into consideration. This list has not been approved by Indonesia's National Wage Council, which sets 60 components.

"Greek-style" bus strike in Genoa

Italy's sixth-largest city, Genoa, has seen a lengthy wildcat public transport strike, evoking comparisons with "Greek-style" labour unrest.

Despite going through the most severe recession in its post-war history, Italy has not seen the massive protests common in other troubled eurozone economies, such as Greece and Spain.

The strike started on Nov. 19, days after the city council passed a bill to slash "money losing" services, including bus company AMT. Transit workers took to the streets, despite threats from Mayor Marco Doria.

Forty-one per cent of AMT is already owned by French firm RATP, which runs the Paris metro. Local authorities say AMT needs 8 million euros to stave off bankruptcy next year.

On Nov. 22, Genoa-born Beppe Grillo, a satirist who is the leader of Italy's biggest opposition party, the Five Star Movement, joined a transit workers' march.

"They are selling off everything. We will be fighting to death, starting from Genoa," Grillo said, framing the protest as a battle to keep local services and schools in public hands.

By Nov. 23, AMT workers began voting on a deal reached by local authorities and trade unions. The agreement was said to rule out wage cuts and rely on European Union funds to plug budget shortfalls.

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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Left coalition takes big lead in Chile election

PV Vancouver Bureau, with files from the Morning Star

The second round of Chile's general election will take place on December 15, with the New Majority coalition of left parties looking to win both the presidency and control of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies.

In the first round on Nov. 17, New Majority presidential candidate Michelle Bachelet fell short of the necessary 50% for victory, receiving 46% of the 6.6 million votes cast. She is far ahead of the top right-wing candidate, Evelyn Matthei, who received just 25%. Candidates for several other left and centre parties picked up about 16% of the total votes. The right-wing parties around outgoing President Sebastian Pinera suffered a crushing defeat, backed by only about one-third of the electorate.

The elections followed massive social mobilisations since 2011, and growing calls for sweeping changes to the political system left by the Pinochet dictatorship. Issues of inequality and social injustice were prominent in the campaign.



Student leader Camila Vallejo was elected to Chile's Congress.

While the New Majority coalition did not achieve the number of seats necessary to push through constitutional changes alone, they did win a majority in both houses of parliament. In the Senate races, the New Majority won 50.5% of the votes, while the Right got 38%. If the second round vote goes as projected, the New Majority will have 58% of Congress members.

With this majority, Bachelet - a socialist, paediatrician and former political prisoner - will have the

power to implement key elements of her platform: a more progressive tax system, genuine educational reform, and reduction of Chile's huge income inequalities. But to legislate constitutional changes, the New Majority will have to negotiate with other parties.

Chile's political left has been significantly strengthened within the New Majority. The Socialists won six extra seats in Congress, and the Communists doubled their representation to six seats, with most of their candidates winning

high majorities.

While Bachelet did not run on a platform for revolutionary social change, the left parties see the New Majority as a parliamentary force with institutional power to complement the huge mobilisations by workers, students, indigenous peoples, and other progressive movements. From their perspective, the Bachelet government can lay the basis for more democratic and socialist-leaning reforms in the future.

Chilean student leader and Communist Party member Camila Vallejo backed Michelle Bachelet for president, and eagerly awaits education reforms. She has led millions into the streets since 2011, demanding the right to free education. Three other student leaders were also elected.

Chile's educational system still fails families with poor quality state schools, expensive private universities, unprepared teachers and banks that make big profits on costly loans.

But Vallejo is confident Bachelet's coalition will have enough seats in congress to effect

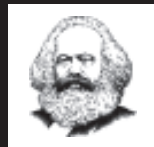
change.

"Given the result of the elections, we have a majority that allows us to make structural changes," Vallejo told a Nov. 21 news conference, together with Karol Carolia, another Young Communist student elected to Congress.

"Social movements are pressuring many sectors that were not in favour of change before and that have now changed their mind," she said.

Vallejo said the Dec. 15 run-off vote will be a major challenge to convince others to support the education reform that she fought for in the streets. But she predicts that Bachelet and her coalition will score a "huge victory."

Responding to the argument that the New Majority coalition lacks the "super-majorities" to change the dictatorship-era electoral system and constitution, Vallejo replied, "Many sectors say we won't be able to make these changes because we don't have the votes in congress, but we've learned that there's no limit to what the social movement can achieve." ●



Marxist Theory

US imperialism is now concentrating on the Asia-Pacific region

From the presentation by Sitaram Yechury, member of the Polit Bureau, Communist Party of India (Marxist), to the International Meeting of Communist & Workers' Parties in Lisbon, Portugal

The global capitalist crisis that is plaguing the world has not abated. The recently published IMF, World Economic Outlook Report, October 2013, states: "Global growth is still weak, its underlying dynamics are changing, and the risks to the forecast remain to the downside... old problems - a fragmented financial system in the euro area and worrisomely high public debt in all major advanced economies - remain unresolved and could trigger new crises... the global economy could grow by only slightly more than 3 percent a year over the medium term, instead of reaccelerating to over 4 percent..."

It further states: "Industrial production recovered modestly in the advanced economies but is still slowing in the emerging market and developing economies. Together with the MENA region, the euro area is seeing another increase in an already high unemployment rate".

The crisis has once again resoundingly demonstrated capitalism's inherent oppressive and exploitative character. It is imposing greater miseries on the vast majority of the world's population. This crisis is also increasingly demonstrating that imperialism, notwithstanding all ideological efforts to obfuscate its existence and role, is leading global capitalism in this offensive against humanity...

Following the shift in favour of imperialism in the international correlation of class forces, USA has embarked to consolidate its

global hegemony. This new world order is designed to operate in all spheres. This, on the one hand, led to unleashing unilateral wars and on the other, it led to the strengthening of the US military machine. At the same time, NATO, whose need for existence should have simply disappeared with the end of the Cold War, was further strengthened as imperialism's global war machine.

In pursuit of its hegemonic designs, US imperialism is now concentrating on Asian continent because it is host to two of the



Sitaram Yechury

largest populated countries in the world - China and India - which means they constitute the largest market. The imperialist powers need this region more than anything else today to come out of the deep economic crisis they find themselves in. And to their strategic concentration in this region is another vital class reason: socialist China, which imperialism considers is developing into a formidable foe and a threat to its hegemony.

All these reasons translated into prioritising Asia-Pacific as a region that deserves the attention of the US, both economically and militarily. The US, over the years had been developing its strategic plans to increase its presence and

ensure its hegemony over the entire Asia-Pacific region. Outlining these priorities, US President Barack Obama during his visit to Australia, stated "After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region... As we plan and budget for the future, we will allocate the resources necessary to maintain our strong military presence in this region..."

Accordingly, the US decided to reposition its Navy so that 60 per cent of its warships would be assigned to the Asia-Pacific region by 2020.

The increasing economic integration of South and East Asia has strengthened the strategic significance of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a continuous thoroughway for global commerce and energy. The US intends to develop its strategic ties with India in this background. This explains some of the vital reasons for the Indo-US nuclear deal, several defence tie-ups and other accords on various other sectors like agriculture, education, etc. Moreover, to establish its global hegemony, the USA needs the containment of China and for this it sees India as a potential ally.

The Asia-Pacific region has also become strategically important because approximately 90 percent of globally traded merchandise travels by these seas. As much as 50 percent of the world's container traffic and 70 percent of global energy trade now transits the Indian Ocean.

In order to improve its economic hold the US now intends to create the world's biggest free trade zone in this region.

Considering itself as a leader of all the countries surrounding the

Pacific rim and Indian ocean it wants to seal a strategic partnership with most of them. This is needed to break the economic relations of China with these countries and prise open the markets of these countries for US goods and services.

Accordingly the US is moving towards the goal of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to create the world's largest and most demanding free-trade area in ways that deepen the economic integration of the US and its Asia-Pacific allies. This TPP zone, if created, will include countries from

Chile in Latin America to Australia, Japan and all other countries in the Pacific Ocean. The US wants India too to be part of the TPP.

As a group, the TPP countries are the largest goods and services export market of the United States. US goods exports to the broader Asia-Pacific totalled \$942 billion in 2012, representing 61 percent of total U.S. goods exports. US exports of agricultural products to the region totalled \$106 billion in

see ASIA-PACIFIC, p. 11

World's 21 million victims of forced labour

By Antonio Carlos Lacerda, Pravda.ru

There are around 21 million people who are victims of forced labour in the world. A study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, www.ilo.org) notes that 20.9 million people are trapped in jobs imposed by means of coercion or deception and from which they cannot leave. Most are women, representing 55% of the total, with 11.4 million estimated victims.

Victims of forced sexual exploitation make up 22% of people subjected to forced labour. The work related to sex has "strong ties" with displacements across borders, the study found. Estimates are that 9.1 million people (44%) who are victims of forced labour have moved within their country or abroad.

The main sectors in which there is exploitation of this type of labour are agriculture, construction, domestic work and industries, among which there is a 68% share of victims.

Besides these sectors, linked to the private sector, 2.2 million (10%) of the victims are victims of forced labour imposed by the state, such as in prisons (violating ILO standards) or imposed by armed rebel forces or national armies.

The concentration of victims of forced labour is higher in central and south eastern Europe, where countries have the mark of 4.2 victims of forced labour for every thousand inhabitants. The lowest concentration is in the Euro zone, with a ratio of 1.5 victims of this type of work for every thousand inhabitants. Latin America and the Caribbean have the rate of 3.1 per thousand inhabitants.

The average age of workers is also a concern raised by the study. Of the 20.9 million people, 5.5 million are under 18. ●

Another racist hate crime in the USA

By Manuel E. Yepe, a CubaNews translation, edited by Walter Lippmann

When on Saturday, July 15, 2013, Renisha McBride, a 19-year-old black American woman resident in the Wayne County, Detroit City, Michigan, drove through a suburb of the city, she needed to ask for help because her car suffered a mechanical mishap that prevented her from continuing to her destination. She had no other way to seek assistance because her cell phone battery had run out, so she walked to the nearest house and knocked on the door with the intention of asking for help.

Without a word to mediate between her and the owner of the house who opened the door, he shot her point blank in the middle of the forehead with the gun he was wielding and left her dead on the spot.

It would seem that nothing could form a clearer picture of murder or that it would deserve no other action but the immediate arrest of the executor by the police. But this did not happen. Michigan is one of 30 states in the U.S. where a so-called "Stand Your Ground" law is in place.

This dreadful crime brings to mind the still-unpunished murder of a 17-year-old young black man, Trayvon Martin, by volunteer vigilante George Zimmermann on February 26, 2012. Without carrying a weapon, on a rainy night, Trayvon was returning to his father's house after buying candy

in a nearby shop when he was killed by the security guard who found him suspicious.

For both crimes, the armed perpetrators hide behind a law that allows "shooting first" if they feel threatened by another person. This time the murderer of Renisha has not been arrested because he declared he shot the girl because he thought that she was a thief. As in the case of Trayvon, what made her suspicious was the colour of her skin in a mostly white neighbourhood.

The organizations defending the rights of black people in Detroit have started a campaign to get the City Police and the Wayne County prosecutor to investigate the crime and apprehend the confessed killer, so that justice will be done for this savage crime. The anti-racist activists argue that this is essential so that in the future nobody needs to educate their children on which neighbourhoods they can walk in and which not, so they can avoid being considered suspicious due to spurious racist rules.

Although the "Stand Your Ground" law was not used by Zimmerman's lawyers for his defense, this legislation was alluded to in his Florida trial and thus became a subject of national attention. But what is this law and where do similar laws apply?

The purpose of the law is to supposedly allow people to defend themselves in their homes and even outside, when they think someone is threatening them with death or serious damage. The law was passed in 2005 in the Florida



Renisha McBride

Senate by a majority of 94-20 and then signed by Republican Gov. Jeb Bush, brother of the then-President George W. Bush.

The National Rifle Association made a strong push in favour of the measure despite the opposition of the Miami police. In the first five years of implementation of the law, so-called justifiable homicides tripled, and there was only a slight drop in the violent crime rate.

Thirty other states have approved similar versions of this legislation with the support of a group called the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), an organization dedicated to promoting reactionary laws.

As a corollary, we can say that after the passing of the "Stand Your Ground" law, people (white, of course) can defend themselves (with deadly intent, if necessary), even outside their homes, when they think someone (not white, of course) is threatening to kill or seriously harm them.

November 13, 2013 •

Global labour vows action in Richmond IKEA lockout fight

The six-month labour dispute at the Richmond, BC IKEA store has gone global. The Nordic Transport Workers' Federation, representing 400,000 workers in all Nordic countries has pledged to place pressure on IKEA in Sweden, its home country. The union is offering to have its members refuse to handle IKEA shipments at seaways, docks and in warehouses. Workers on strike are fighting for access to adequate hours at the store for part-time employees and opposing other concessions and a two-tiered wage package. Despite having a mostly unionized workforce in Sweden, IKEA in Canada is mostly non-unionized, with workers at two stores in Canada represented by a bargaining committee. In late October, the popular Japanese-style hotdog vendor Japadog closed its kiosk at the IKEA location after just one day of operations, citing complaints and comments from people frustrated that Japadog would cross the picket line. On November 13, workers called for union members who crossed the picket line to be fired. •

(Canadian Association of Labour Media)



MUSIC NOTES

By Wally Brooker

UFCW releases "100 Years of Solidarity"

A new generation of labour activist musicians can be heard in a free download album from UFCW Canada. The United Food and Commercial Workers is Canada's largest private sector union, with more than 250,000 members, 40% under the age of 30. This generation is reflected in the union's new compilation album "100 Years of Solidarity". It features progressive young hip-hop artists from a diversity of backgrounds, with an emphasis on rappers of Latin-American descent. Most of the tracks clearly reflect the social justice policies of the UFCW, including its policy of including temporary foreign workers as full members. A case in point is the brilliant "I'm Working on a Farm" by Spin El Poeta, an emcee who helped organize the 2005 World Festival of Youth and Students in Venezuela. Other stand-out performers for this listener are Ruben "Beny" Esguerra and Manuela Astudillo. Esguerra ("Solidarity Forever Remix") is a poet, band leader and arts educator of Colombian descent. Astudillo ("My Accent") is a broadcaster with "Voces Latinas" on Toronto's unique community radio station AM 1610. Download this essential (and free) album at www.ufcw.ca.

"No Woman, No Drive"

On October 26 Saudi women activists attracted the attention of the world's media as they defied their country's ban against females driving and posted videos of themselves online behind the wheel. On the same day, in a well-timed act of culture jamming, comedian Hisham Fageeh released "No Woman, No Drive", a video parody of reggae legend Bob Marley's classic song "No Woman, No Cry". By mid-November Fageeh's video had gone viral with more than ten million YouTube hits. The Saudi-born actor, stand-up comedian and human rights activist attended Columbia University and is now based in New York City. Fageeh achieved a breakthrough of his own in becoming the first Saudi to headline an Arabic stand-up comedy tour in the U.S. and England. Saudi Arabia remains the only country to prohibit women from driving, but the campaign to change the law is picking up steam.

Tunisian rappers unionize

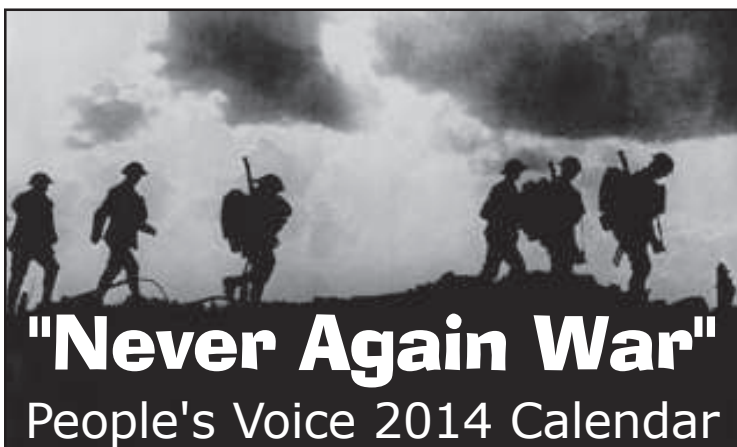
Rappers and DJs are among the most outspoken social critics in contemporary Tunisia, and, as Islamist influence grows in that country, they're coming under increasing attack. In response they've founded the National Rap Union and affiliated with the General Confederation of Tunisian Workers, the country's trade union central. According to Italian news agency Ansa, the National Rap Union will focus on defending its members' right to criticise the authorities. In September rapper Klay BBJ was jailed for "insulting the police" at a concert (his co-performer that night is still in hiding). Klay BBJ had earlier been imprisoned for performing his song "The Police are Dogs". Rappers Mustapha Fakhfakh and Ayem El-Fikih have been charged respectively with "affronting morals" and "insulting public officials". For a look at the struggle of artists in today's Tunisia visit journalist Monica Mark's column at www.theguardian.com.

Symphony musicians protest austerity


European symphony orchestra musicians are mobilizing against austerity policies that threaten their livelihood and lay waste to the continent's musical heritage. In Spain on September 23, more than 1000 musicians in 23 orchestras united to protest against arts budget cuts and a sharp rise in sales tax on concert tickets. A nation-wide concert was staged with musicians simultaneously playing the same program. A week later in Germany musicians from 100 symphony orchestras took to the streets to protest a sustained drop in public funding that has led to the closing of 37 symphony orchestras over the past 20 years. The German event began with an open-air concert by the world-renowned Berlin Philharmonic, followed by dozens of concerts throughout the country. Attacks against symphony orchestras and their unions are escalating throughout Europe and North America. The International Federation of Musicians (FIM) will meet in Oslo in February to map out the next stage of its fightback strategy. For more info visit <http://www.fim-musicians.org/>.

Los Van Van honored at WOMEX Awards

One of the most influential post-revolutionary Cuban bands was honoured at the International World Music Expo (WOMEX), held in Cardiff, Wales in October. Dance band Los Van Van is the recipient of the 2013 WOMEX Artist Award. The prize was founded in 1999 to honour "musical excellence, social importance, commercial success, political impact and lifetime achievement." Previous winners include South African vocal group The Mahotella Queens and the late Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Los Van Van was founded in 1969 by bassist-composer Juan Formell. Together with timbales player Changuito he created a new rhythm called "songo" which gave birth to a new genre of dance music. Los Van Van updated Afro-Cuban popular music by fusing it with contemporary rock and jazz. After more than 40 years Los Van Van is arguably still the most popular band in Cuba. Catch their WOMEX performance at www.womex.com/.



To order a copy of the People's Voice 2014 Anti-First World War Calendar, send \$15 (includes postage and handling) to People's Voice, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1. Contact us at 604-255-2041 or pvoice@telus.net for bulk order prices.



La Trova Nuestra

Friday, November 29, 8 pm

"La Peña Nuestra"
Centre For Socialist Education, Vancouver
706 Clark Drive (Clark and Georgia st)
\$10 Entry

About Vancouver's "La Trova Nuestra"
La Trova Nuestra is composed of 20 individual trovadores who originate from across Latin America and now reside in Vancouver. These trovadores are the keepers of a musical tradition which began with pioneers of the vernacular song. La Trova Nuestra incorporates this tradition interplaying music and poetry. At its foundation is the essence of a popular culture interpreting daily expression... an expression with origins deep within La Raza Mestiza (mixed roots) of Latin America - an expression of the explosive changes within the continent of Latin America today. La Trova Nuestra could be defined as "The encounter between a man, a guitar and poetry. Voices pledging for a better world."

The crisis in the Central African Republic

By T.J. Petrowski

The crisis of imperialism in the Central African Republic (C.A.R.) continues to intensify, with devastating consequences for the people and minimal coverage in the corporate media of the West.

The C.A.R. shares borders with Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon.

During the European colonization of Africa, France, Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom competed to establish their claims to territory in Central Africa. France claimed what is now Cameroon, Gabon, the C.A.R., and Chad, known as French Equatorial Africa. The French ruling class exploited the land and the people much the same as King Leopold II did in the Congo Free State: forced labour, torture, mass killing, whatever was necessary to make a profit for French companies. Much of the territory was consequently depopulated.

Since the C.A.R. declared independence in 1960, the country has experienced repeated military coups and instability.

In 2003 a coup led by Francois Bozizé, with the support of France, overthrew the government of Ange-Félix Patassé. In response, rebels in northeastern C.A.R. formed the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), led by Michel Djotodia, starting the Central African Bush War (2004-2007).

The French ruling class

continued to support Bozizé until his policies tilted towards China, which has been investing heavily throughout the continent. To counter China's economic dominance in Africa, Western imperialism has resorted to military interventions and troop deployments.

French imperialism alone has intervened in Libya, Mali, the Ivory Coast, and the C.A.R., with additional increases of French troops in Gabon, Niger, Djibouti, and elsewhere. France relies heavily on the resources of Africa, including oil in Chad and Libya, uranium in Niger, the extensive mineral deposits in the C.A.R., and the fertile agricultural lands of West Africa.

Under these conditions the French ruling class began to support a coalition of mostly Muslim insurgents from the northeast known as Seleka. Many of the insurgents in Seleka, led by Michel Djotodia, the former rebel leader of the UFDR, were active in resisting the Bozizé regime in the Central African Bush War.

The Seleka overthrew Bozizé

in March 2013, with Djotodia declaring himself president. But there has been an explosion in sectarian violence between Seleka gunmen, many coming from Chad and the Sudan, and the predominately Christian population of the C.A.R., with massacres on both sides.

Saying that the country is "on the verge of genocide," France backs the Seleka transitional government and calls for direct military intervention for "humanitarian reasons". Using the U.N. to legitimize its intervention, more French soldiers are likely to be deployed in the immediate future, with an additional increase in African troops from neighbouring countries.

The "humanitarian" intervention is nothing more than a public relations act. The real aims of French imperialism are to secure its geo-strategic interests and counter Chinese influence. Given France's history of supporting dictators, warlords, and even genocide on the continent, peace loving people should reject Western intervention in the C.A.R. •



Asia-Pacific and U.S. imperialism...

continued from page 9

2012, 75 percent of total US agricultural exports. US private services exports totalled \$226 billion in 2011, 38 percent of total US private services exports to the world. The US is also promoting the re-militarisation of Japan in the region as a counterweight to China. To achieve its strategic opportunities, it is pulling India into its vortex and scheme of things as can be discerned through the joint naval exercises conducted in the Bay of Bengal by both the countries along with Australia, Japan, Philippines.

The rising bourgeoisie of the advanced capitalist countries, in order to consolidate their class rule, had earlier championed national sovereignty as being sacrosanct.

Today, imperialism is using FTAs and also its military might to subvert and negate national sovereignty of independent countries.

The "Global War Against Terror" launched under the leadership of US imperialism is being used as the justification for brazen military intervention, and for trampling national sovereignty to impose "regime change" to suit its interests. Like the "war against Communism" the pretext during the Cold War to justify imperialist military intervention, the "war against terror" is being used today to violate the national sovereignty of independent countries and the basic human rights of its people.

State terrorism practised by

imperialism and individual terrorism unleashed by fundamentalist outfits feed on each other. The fight against both these dangers, is necessary to build the unity of the working class and other toiling sections of the society and also to counter the growing threat of right-wing fundamentalist forces.

We should remember that the devastation caused by the great depression of the 1930s was met in different ways by different capitalist countries. One of these ways laid the basis for the rise of fascism. Georgi Dimitrov, in his speech at the Communist International in 1935, underlined, "Fascism adapts its demagogy to the peculiarities of each country. And the mass of petty bourgeois and even a section of the workers, reduced to despair by want, unemployment and insecurity of their existence fall victim to the social and chauvinist demagogy of fascism."

Further, he explained how "it is in the interests of the most reactionary circles of the bourgeoisie that fascism intercepts the disappointed masses who desert the old bourgeois parties. But it impresses these masses by the vehemence of its attacks on the bourgeois governments and its irreconcilable attitude to the old bourgeois parties".

Hence, how this economic crisis will be tackled and how the world comes out of it will determine the nature of social conflicts that arise as various sections of the people scramble for their share of the

shrinking cake. The absence of a powerful communist-led counter attack, engenders the danger of the rise of reactionary forces.

It is hence the responsibility of the Communists and the progressive sections of the society not only to fight back the tendencies that lead to the growth of right-wing politics and neo-fascist forces, but also properly channelise the popular discontent.

This is one of the important steps that needs to be undertaken in the present juncture to strengthen the "subjective factor" that Lenin had talked about and utilise the developing objective conditions to usher in a social transformation - a political alternative to capitalism - socialism. •

A black man in France...

continued from page 5

country I yet love to love. Neo-fascism and xenophobia had crept in along with neo-liberalism to make that beautiful land a bit more unwelcome for us of the dark skin, especially Communists, and more so, if we were unfortunate enough to speak their language, the language of the citizens of France, with suspicious fluency and correctness of accent.

This was my first and most educational experience of what Marshall McLuhan's "global village" would be like, for us, the unfortunates of the third world. •

What's Left

Vancouver, BC

La Trova Nuestra, evening of Latin American music and socialising, admission \$10, 8 pm, Friday, Nov. 29, Centre for Socialist Education, 706 Clark.

Strategies to stop climate change, free public forum, Tues., Dec. 3, 7 pm, Room 1800, SFU Harbour Centre, 515 West Hastings. Info: 604-773-8393.

Songs of Social Significance, with David Rovics, Sat., Dec. 14, 7:30 pm, Heartwood Cafe, 317 East Broadway. Tickets \$15, (no one turned away), ph. 604-874-1256.

Burnaby, BC

Celebrate 10 years of No One Is Illegal-Vancouver, Sunday, Dec. 15, 1 pm, Bonsor Centre, 6550 Bonsor Ave. (Metrotown Skytrain). Speakers, performers, music, and more.

Toronto, ON

Together Against Austerity, from Canada to Greece, fundraising social by Belogiannis Club CPC, Sat., Dec. 14, drinks at 6 pm, food at 7 pm, live music, at the GCDO Hall, 290 Danforth Ave. (near Chester subway).

Jose Marti Dinner and Dance, Sat., Jan. 25, celebrate a Cuban national hero, freedom fighter, poet and journalist with a traditional Cuban Dinner and Live Cuban Band, 1604 Bloor St. West. Doors 6:30 pm, tickets \$35 advance, \$45 door. Sponsored by the Canadian Cuban Friendship Association Toronto, ph. Sharon 905-951-8499.

Montreal, QC

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

Season's Greetings to all PV readers!

News for people, not for profits!



People's Voice deadlines

January 1-31 issue: Thursday, Jan. 9

February 1-14 issue: Thursday, Jan. 23

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

Bill Chobotuck, 1929-2013

William (Bill) Chobotuck, lifelong labour activist and supporter of the working class press, passed away on October 30 at the age of 84.

The second youngest of nine children, Bill was born on Jan. 16, 1929, in Edmonton, though he always claimed that Smokey Lake, Alberta, was his spiritual home. He came to BC about 1950 and worked in a variety of industrial jobs and as a stone mason's helper. His interest in the trade union movement was sparked as a member of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers when he worked at Pioneer Mines.

A proud member of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 502 (New Westminster), Bill was one of the first group of longshoremen to go to Westshore Terminals (Roberts Bank) where he retired in 1991.

Known for his quirky sense of humour, he was a tinkerer, a swap meet aficionado, and a collector of "good stuff". He recycled scrap into playground equipment, loved beekeeping, travel to Cuba, hunting, canoeing and other outdoor activities.

Over the last few years blindness and increasing deafness had increased his isolation from the world, but not his interest in the struggle for peace and social justice.

A celebration of Bill Chobotuck's life was held in Burnaby on November 23.

REDS ON THE WEB

www.comunist-party.ca

www.peoplesvoice.ca

www.ycl-ljc.ca

rebelyouth-magazine.blogspot.com

<http://solidnet.org>

Activist from Venezuela reports on socialist communes

By Peter Miller, *Rebel Youth Magazine*

Venezuela is a country that represents a different vision for our future. Its Bolivarian revolutionary process is the opposite of capitalist austerity and neoliberalism that many working class people around the world are facing today.

In November, Katrina Kozarek came to Ontario and Quebec for a speaking tour about Venezuela today.

Kozarek is active in the Ataroa Socialist Commune and a long-term activist in the Nacional Association of Community, Free and Alternative Media (ANMCLA). She grew up in Pennsylvania, but moved to Venezuela in 2003.

Kozarek gave a background into the situation in Venezuela before launching into discussion about the pro-socialist communes. Venezuela faced neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1989 uprisings occurred across the country against neoliberal politics.

Hugo Chavez was elected to be president in 1998, backed by a people's movement and progressive forces. Right away he initiated policies that helped the poor, including a land law that redistributed unoccupied land to peasants or the state.

Chavez's reforms went too far for rich corporations, and the right wing organized a CIA-backed coup in 2002. The coup was to no avail though, mainly because the people in Venezuela showed their strength on the streets and pressured the democratic-minded forces in the military to quickly free Chavez.

The main part of Kozarek's presentation focused on her experiences living and working in "Ataroa Socialist Commune" which has a population of around 30,000 people in Lara province. The people of Venezuela have been setting up communes even before the government implemented the Ministry of Communes in 2009. The communes are real living examples of democracy and the seeds for socialism.

Communal councils are made



in areas of around 250 families. These families get together frequently in what are called citizens assemblies to take control over their lives, and democratically organize their communities.

Spokespeople are elected from the councils, and these

privatization is now a hospital that is socially run by the commune.

The communal city Kozarek is from, like all communes in Venezuela, organizes to control communal enterprises in common. The idea is that these enterprises will benefit the community. For instance, Ataroa Socialist Commune runs its own block making enterprise under communal control. Therefore, as well as getting

some funding from the government, people in communes look to create funding from these socialist enterprises.

The Ataroa commune also democratically controls a school that teaches people construction skills, and another separate agricultural school. Along with schools, enterprises, and a hospital, the commune runs cultural events, and allows people in the commune to be empowered by collectively operating different grass roots media outlets that Kozarek is very involved in.

The Commune sometimes has conflict with big business. The owners of big business do not want production to be organized and controlled by workers and communities in communes.

For instance, a private company that extracts sand from a river in the area of the commune causes environmental damage.

The commune has a plan

importance of organizing in solidarity with the Venezuelan people in their process of the Bolivarian Revolution. Wealthy corporations, and rich people with particular interests, have been trying to cause economic chaos in Venezuela. Speculating on the dollar value has caused Bolívares to be worth little compared to the dollar. At the same time, companies are hoarding food and other resources to create psychological and economic panic. People often have to wait in long lines for food when companies and supermarkets behind closed doors store large amounts of food. The result is a type of psychological warfare.

Wealthy elites in Venezuela and imperialists from Canada have interests in sabotaging the Bolivarian revolution because they want to overthrow a government that takes into account the interests and demands of working people.

"Venezuela is preparing itself for some sort of military intervention in the next months," Kozarek warned.

There will be municipal elections on December 8, and the right wing opposition is threatening to create havoc to make the Bolivarian Revolution look bad. It is important for supporters of the revolution in Canada to hear true stories during any upheavals that will happen during the elections. By connecting to people on the ground in Venezuela, activists can spread the true story of the Bolivarian Revolution to fellow citizens.

Peter Miller is a student and member of the YCL in Guelph. He will travel to Ecuador as part of the Pan-Canadian delegation to the 18th World Festival of Youth and Students. The delegates' stories will be reported at rebelyouth.blogspot.com. ●

"Ataroa Socialist Commune" has a population of around 30,000. The people have been setting up communes - living examples of democracy and the seeds for socialism - even before the government implemented the Ministry of Communes in 2009.

spokespeople represent the communal council in larger communes, and in some cases, even communal cities. Decisions made in higher bodies, like communal parliaments, are to be brought back to smaller communal councils for approval, allowing everyone to have the opportunity to have a say in decision making.

The people decide the geographical boundaries of communes in Venezuela.

"In our commune, we have a territorial ties because we fought together against the privatization of health in our community," Kozarek explained. The history of organizing in the Ataroa community, and other factors, were what influenced the community's decisions about the boundary of the Ataroa commune.

Now, thanks to their struggle for public health care, a health clinic that faced threats of

an environmentally friendly way, the community can benefit from collectively taking over extraction.

The Ataroa Socialist Commune is also located in the state of Lara, an area of Venezuela that has elected an opposition governor. Unsurprisingly, the commune has faced opposition from the governor, a neoliberal politician.

For instance, the sewer system in Ataroa is about to collapse; yet the people are receiving no support from the Falcon to fix the problem. Falcon has been in office for four straight years without tackling the issue despite growing demands. The reason behind his inaction is his dislike of socialist communes that threaten the material interests of his main supporters, big business. The communal city also has goals of connecting with other communal cities to create a communal state, something that would make his position obsolete.

Kozarek emphasized the

"Scottsboro Boys" win pardons

Alabama's parole board wrote a new ending for the infamous "Scottsboro Boys" rape case on Nov. 21 by approving posthumous pardons - more than 80 years after the arrests.

The board handed down a unanimous decision during a hearing in Montgomery over three black men whose convictions were never overturned in a case that came to symbolise racial injustice in the deep south of the US in the 1930s.

"Today, the Scottsboro Boys have finally received justice," Governor Robert Bentley said.

Nine black men were falsely accused of raping two white women on a train in north-east Alabama in 1931. They were convicted by all-white juries and all but the youngest defendant were sentenced to death.

The state senator who fought through a law to permit posthumous pardons said the Scottsboro Boys' lives had been ruined by a justice system that ignored evidence and it was time to right a wrong.

"It is a reminder of how far we have come since those regretful days in our past," said Senator Arthur Orr.

Shelia Washington, the founder of the Scottsboro Boys Museum, said the pardons "give the history books a new ending - not guilty."

The case inspired songs, books and films. A Broadway musical was staged in 2010 - the same year the museum opened in Scottsboro.

Five of the men's convictions were overturned in 1937 after one of the alleged victims recanted her story. Clarence Norris received a pardon before he died in 1976. Nothing was done for the others at the time because state law did not permit posthumous pardons.

But in April the Alabama legislature passed Orr's Bill to allow them in cases where convictions involved racial discrimination.

The three Scottsboro Boys considered by the parole board on Nov. 21 were Haywood Patterson, Charles Weems and Andy Wright. The board said the other five - Olen Montgomery, Ozie Powell, Willie Roberson, Eugene Williams and Roy Wright - weren't eligible under the new law because their convictions had been overturned on appeal.

Washington said some of the Scottsboro Boys changed their names and started new lives. The museum, working with students and faculty members at the University of Alabama, has found the graves of four of the nine. Washington said the next goal is to find all the graves and erect historical markers. ●

(With files from Associated Press)

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