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# people's VOICE

**Black History  
Month**

*Page 4*

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## The future is here...

a world of  
staggering  
wealth and  
terrible poverty

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# STOP Site C Dam Now



### Fight to save Peace River Valley gains momentum - page 3

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#### We're number one!

It's hard to be proud of this distinction: Canada is the target of more lawsuits by corporations seeking compensation for "lost profits" than its NAFTA partners, the USA and Mexico.

### INSIDE

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#### Why Indonesia?

Indonesia is one of the world's largest Muslim countries, yet it was the target of a recent IS-linked terror attack. What's the story?

**12**

#### Military footprint

Hands up if you think that carbon emissions by the military count towards overall totals. No they don't, even though the Pentagon is one of the world's biggest contributors to climate change.

# Scabs: The secret ingredient at Covered Bridge

By Gabriel Jarman

Ryan Albright, President of Covered Bridge Chips, has a reputation for being confrontational. In August of last year, the New Brunswick Employment and Labour Board ruled Albright had violated the province's labour law for threatening the workers during

their organizing drive.

The Board's written decision describes Albright "storming out" of a mediation session after telling a UFCW representative "Screw you and your f\*\*king union."

Today Albright is again claiming he will give his workers what they want—but not in a union environment.

Members of the United Food

and Commercial Workers Local 1288P at the Covered Bridge potato chip plant near Hartland, New Brunswick, have been in a legal strike position since June 2015. They walked out on January 5. At issue is securing a first collective agreement, which guarantees seniority, wages and working conditions in the plant.

The UFCW is calling for a

boycott of the chips. Already Memorial University student union in Newfoundland are saying they have halted business with the company.

The workers note that the factory has quadrupled its production capacity in the past few years but they have only seen a wage increase from \$10.10 an hour to \$10.30, mandated by a provincial minimum wage increase.

Safety enforcement is very poor, and the workers say the plant does not require steel toes or hard-hats. Equipment such as ladders are often coated in grease from the chip fryers, and break times are short. Perhaps most damning of all is that the boss prohibits having water to drink on the factory floor, so breaks function as water breaks.

The workers are insisting that a new collective agreement include seniority, which would help guarantee job security in the plant. Currently one union worker is involved in legal action after Albright laid her off and then hired three new employees the next day.

The company has received around \$700,000 in subsidies from the provincial government under support for local business initiatives. Albright is even featured in a government TV advertisement, as an so-called

example of a good local employer.

Located in central-western New Brunswick, Hartland is home to the world's largest Covered Bridge, which is a National Historic Site.

The strikers argue that raises for them will have a strong ripple effect in improvement for the community, and there is great public support for the strikers. Hartland has a population of just under 1000 while the factory employs around 90 to 100 people total. Just over thirty people are currently organized by the UFCW but any gains would impact all the workers.

The provincial Gallant Liberals are "consulting" for their upcoming budget, which comes down on Feb. 2 and is expected to cut upwards of \$50 million from both New Brunswick health-care and education.

Covered Bridge Potato chips are sold at Atlantic Superstore, Sobeys, Costco, Dollarama, and the Great Canadian Dollar Store. Chip flavours include the usual selection as well as "Atlantic Lobster" and soon, according to the company's twitter feed, a "Donair flavour." Shoppers can send a letter to the President of the factory, saying Covered Bridge are off your grocery list, via the union website: [www.ufcw.ca](http://www.ufcw.ca). ●

## Medicare advocates want progress on health priorities

Public health care advocates from across Canada converged at the recent health ministers meeting, calling for action to "put the heart back in health care."

Advocates wanted to hear plans for a full national public drug plan, at least 25 per cent federal funding of health care with strings attached, a commitment to enforcing the Canada Health Act, and a national seniors care strategy.

The provincial and territorial health ministers met Jan. 20-21 in Vancouver, their first such gathering since a new federal government was elected last year. The Canadian Health Coalition and its provincial affiliates called it an important opportunity to ask the Ministers to ensure that the public health system stays public and improves to serve everyone better. Coalition activists stood watch outside the Hotel Vancouver, where the ministers were meeting, and collected messages from the public to deliver to the politicians.

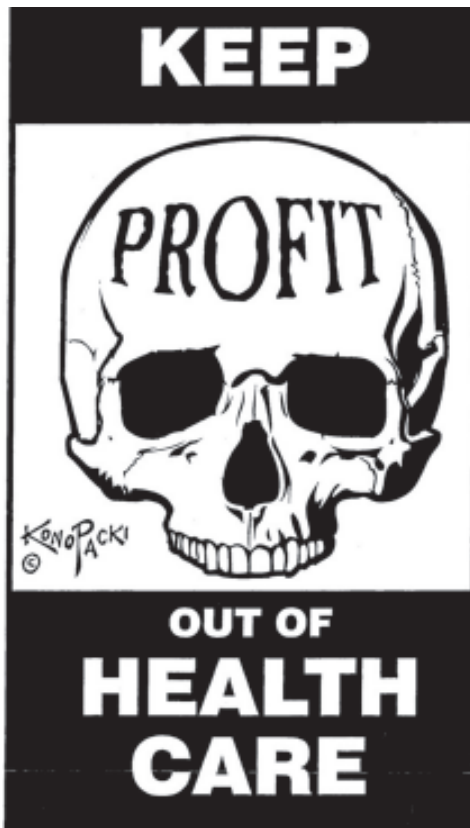
"It's a great first step and we're pleased to see some federal leadership," said Adrienne Sil-nicki, National Coordinator, Canadian Health Coalition. "But after eight years of waiting for federal involvement there are many challenges to accessing public health care and the ministers need to work quickly."

"We are looking forward to announcements in the next couple of months on regulations and funding for health care. We hope the government will agree to contribute at least 25% of health funding with strings attached to national standards of care," said Adam Lyles-Ford, Campaigner, British Columbia Health Coalition.

"Bulk purchasing agreements are good steps, but baby steps. We still need a national public drug plan so everyone can afford the medications they need," said Michael Butler, National Health Care Campaigner, Council of Canadians.

"We hope the federal Health Accord will include a national seniors care strategy that includes a national dementia strategy," says Sandra Azocar, Executive Director, Friends of Medicare.

(For more information, visit [healthcoalition.ca](http://healthcoalition.ca).) ●



## "Stand Up For Steel"

Thousands of United Steelworkers (USW) members and supporters will rally at Hamilton City Hall at 1 pm on January 30, to demand government action to save the Canadian steel industry.

In a Huffington Post article, USW District 6 Director Marty Warren writes that "as the crisis in Canada's steel industry deepens, tens of thousands of working families and pensioners grow increasingly anxious for support from their political leaders. These families and pensioners are ... mobilizing to bring attention to the steel crisis and urge our federal and provincial governments to act now – before it's too late. Unless our governments take decisive, meaningful action, not only will the livelihoods of so many be jeopardized, we could soon witness the irrevocable loss of a cornerstone of the 21st-century manufacturing economy that Canada needs."

Steel was once a huge industry in Canada, before decades of corporate and government policies aimed at exporting unprocessed raw materials. But steel manufacturing in Canada is still a \$14-billion-per-year industry

employing 20,000 workers, with another 100,000 indirect jobs tied to the sector. Tens of thousands of steel industry retirees rely on hard-won pension plans, and many communities depend heavily on tax revenues and economic spinoffs generated by the steel sector.

The latest crisis stems from a worldwide collapse in steel prices, and the difficulties faced by energy and resource sectors as a result of the global capitalist economic slowdown.

Marty Warren emphasizes that "Canada needs a strong, domestic steel industry to provide our manufacturing sector with the steel to build cars, buses, trains, wind turbines, energy projects and all manner of infrastructure development essential for a strong, modern economy."

The new federal government has announced plans to invest \$60 billion on infrastructure in the next decade, and the labour movement wants provincial and municipal governments to add to those investments.

However, this strategy may be crippled if domestic steel manufacturing capacity leaves the

country. Already, U.S. Steel Canada in Hamilton and Nanticoke, and Essar Steel Algoma in Sault Ste. Marie, are operating under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, and thousands of jobs could be lost. Tens of thousands of retirees have lost their health-care benefits, with their pensions also threatened. Layoffs have hit other major producers, even though the industry produces some of the highest grades of steel products in the world.

The USW is calling on political leaders to support a Steel Industry Action Plan, to help the industry restructure and enhance its ability to compete for the long term. Warren says, "this plan must include measures to counter foreign dumping and other unfair trade practices, short-term loans to help domestic producers weather the crisis, investments in research and development, workforce training and support for pensions and benefits for retirees... The livelihoods of tens of thousands of Canadian workers and pensioners, their communities and our country's economic prosperity depend on it." ●

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People's Voice Editor Kimball Cariou

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# Opposition to Site C dam keeps growing

By Kimball Cariou,  
Vancouver

Preparatory work for the controversial Site C dam in northern BC is underway, but opposition to the project is also growing, including a camp by First Nations members and other local residents at the historic site of Rocky Mountain Fort. This location on the west side of the Peace River was chosen by Alexander Mackenzie as British Columbia's first trading post. It's on the traditional territory of Treaty 8 First Nations, who are determined to defend their lands from flooding as BC Hydro seeks to expand what many consider to be completely unnecessary power production.

Along with expanded liquid natural gas exports and the relentless expansion of ports in the Lower Mainland, Site C is one of the favourite projects of Premier Christy Clark's Liberal government. These all involve massive injections of provincial funds or major tax breaks for corporations, as part of a strategy to make BC even more dependent on exports of unprocessed resources.

Since even BC Hydro's own reports say the province can meet current demands through energy conservation, Site C is essentially a huge taxpayer subsidy to the energy and mining industries.

The purpose of what would be the third BC Hydro dam on the Peace River, is to supply electricity to proposed liquid natural gas (LNG) investors, such as the Petronas project backed by the Malaysian government. Towards this end, the 60-meter high dam is now expected to cost some \$8.8 billion, flooding 107 kilometers of the Peace and its tributaries, including critical hunting and fishing grounds. The valley is one of the most important wildlife corridors in the Yellowstone to Yukon migration corridor chain. It also contains the only Class One soil north of Quesnel in BC, at a time when agriculture and food security are increasingly seen as crucial issues.

Yet there is no guaranteed return on such a huge investment.

As professional engineer Randy Evanchuk wrote in a recent letter to the Vancouver Sun, B.C. gas faces tremendous worldwide competition for market share from LNG projects already under construction in the U.S., Australia and Russia, and more to come in East Africa, Mozambique and the Malay Peninsula. Since Canada simply does not appear in industry reports as a serious LNG supplier, says Evanchuk, "it is foolish to destroy so much of the rich Peace River ecosystem to supply electricity for one project at an estimated cost of \$8 billion or more."

He also demolishes the argument that Site C power can be exported: "If so, where are the 25-year, take-or-pay contracts? Where are the market studies?... If power exports are the justification for Site C, wouldn't it be far less expensive to use the existing phases which are planned and ready to be installed in the Columbia River system?"

Evanchuk sums up what many

are saying: "It's time for our government to stop work on this disastrous economic and ecological boondoggle before we end up paying through the nose for future electricity costs—or worse, having to sell BC Hydro at a fire sale price like Ontario is doing with their former Crown jewel, which has been destroyed by short-sighted Liberal governments."

Not surprisingly, First Nations and environmental groups are preparing to risk arrest to preserve the area.

The Dunne-Zaa people have lived in the productive lands around the Site C dam flood zone for at least 11,000 years. When they joined Treaty 8 in 1900, the terms explicitly guaranteed the Dunne-Zaa would be able to continue their traditional practices - hunting, trapping, fishing, collecting medicinal plants - "for as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows."

Instead, Treaty 8, First Nations in northeastern B.C. have seen their lands steadily impacted by logging, oil and gas extraction, mines, dams and other resource development. Research by the David Suzuki Foundation revealed that nearly two-thirds of their traditional territories have been affected by industrial development, leaving little intact habitat for wildlife like moose and caribou, which have sustained communities for millennia. Site C would also wipe out hundreds of graves and ceremonial sites, and directly hinder Treaty 8 First Nations' cultural and ceremonial practices.

As David Suzuki and Grand Chief Stewart Phillip wrote after a recent visit to the camp, "the Peace Valley is one of the few remaining places where Treaty 8 First Nations can participate in traditional activities as their ancestors did for thousands of years before the treaty

was signed — activities crucial to maintaining their cultural and spiritual identity and connection to the land."

Critics call this illegal, pointing out that years of case law, and the Supreme Court of Canada's Tsilhqot'in decision, have made clear that without access to traditional lands and waters, the treaty and aboriginal rights enshrined by Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution are effectively meaningless. The Crown, they warn, must at least try to maintain the ecosystems critical to those rights so that First Nations can continue to live off healthy populations of wild game, fish and plants.

On Oct. 14, 2014, the governments of BC and Canada announced that the Site C dam had been granted environmental assessment approval, despite the conclusion of the Joint Review Panel convened by both governments that Site C would have "significant adverse effects" on fishing, hunting and trapping, and other traditional land uses, not just in B.C., but also downstream where the Peace River enters Alberta. According to the panel, most of these adverse effects are impossible to mitigate.

Two Treaty 8 First Nations, West Moberly and Prophet River, have launched court cases to stop Site C on the grounds that it infringes on their treaty rights. Yet the Premier has urged BC Hydro to clear cut large areas of the Peace Valley to make way for the dam and reservoir, before First Nations get their day in court. Preliminary work has begun to clear lands, build access roads, and to establish a construction camp for 1600 workers.

All this is happening while politicians pledge support to reconciliation with First Nations.



Photo from [alaskahighwaynews.ca](http://alaskahighwaynews.ca), which is a great source of news from northern BC and Yukon.

David Suzuki and Stewart Phillip ask, "While politicians are bandying about reconciliation as the salve that will heal centuries-old injustices, are treaty promises even worth anything, when hunting grounds will be under water, moose populations decimated and fish contaminated with toxic methyl mercury from decaying organic matter if the dam is built?"

Faced with this reality, a coalition of environmental groups has appealed directly to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has carried through on an election promise to create a moratorium on oil tanker traffic off B.C.'s northwest coast. But so far, the federal government has dodged this issue.

The coalition includes the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Peace Valley Environment Association, Peace Valley Landowner Association, Sierra Club of B.C., the Wilderness Committee and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. They argue that Site C is a net contributor to climate change when the loss of carbon sinks from forests and farmland and the use of the

energy to facilitate the extraction of natural gas through fracking are factored in. They stress that the joint provincial-federal review did not measure Site C's overall carbon contribution, including such factors.

In early January, BC Hydro issued an eviction notice, warning protesters that all contents of the camp will be removed and delivered to the RCMP.

Then on Jan. 21, the company filed a petition in B.C. Supreme Court, seeking an injunction to prevent protesters from impeding work on the site, and from "threatening or intimidating contractors."

The notice of civil claim mentions eight people—members of the Peace Valley Landowner Association, the Treaty 8 Tribal Association, the Prophet River First Nation and the owner of a nearby equestrian centre, among others.

The move surprised the protesters and their supporters, who have repeatedly expressed their hope to negotiate with B.C. Hydro and the province towards a resolution of the dispute. ●

## Stop Site C, urge BC Communists

**The BC Provincial Executive of the Communist Party has issued the following statement, urging the provincial government and BC Hydro to cancel the Site C dam project.**

The Communist Party of BC expresses our full solidarity with the growing movement to halt the destructive, expensive and unnecessary Site C dam project on the Peace River. We urge BC Hydro and the provincial government to cease all preparatory work for this project, and to drop legal proceedings and threats against those who are using their democratic rights to express their opposition to Site C.

The facts about this project are very clear, starting with the truth that the federal and provincial governments have failed in their responsibility to uphold the terms of Treaty 8, which promised the signatory First Nations across a vast area of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories that they would be able to continue their

traditional practices of hunting, trapping, fishing, and collecting medicinal plants "for as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows."

As many court cases in recent years have proven, the Canadian state is obligated to engage in meaningful consultations with First Nations regarding economic developments on their traditional territories. The days when racist governments and corporations could simply trample on the rights of indigenous peoples in Canada are gone forever. Site C cannot proceed without the full consent of Treaty 8 First Nations, and since there has not even been a token attempt to win such consent, the project is completely illegal.

Beyond this, there are many other powerful reasons to oppose the Site C dam, which will flood some of the best agricultural lands in northern British Columbia, and deal a devastating blow to wildlife in the area. The arguments by the Liberal provincial government and BC Hydro, which claim that the dam must be built to generate electricity for economic development or export, are

patently bogus. Rather than spending over \$8 billion to destroy the environment of the Peace River valley, B.C. Hydro and the province could invest in conservation measures which would be far less expensive. The



real reason for this project is to provide power for the government's nightmarish plan to expand fracking on a massive scale, and to make British Columbia even more dependent on extraction and export of hydrocarbons and other unprocessed raw materials.

This economic strategy is based

on hopes that energy prices will rebound in the near future, and on unproven assumptions that a combination of huge tax breaks and low-cost electricity will lure big energy transnationals to make multi-billion dollar investments in British Columbia. Even if these unlikely claims were true, this strategy is a direct threat to the global environment, since it will result in a major expansion of carbon emissions, which are a key factor in unchecked global warming and climate change.

Site C is a wildly speculative gamble which could throw away billions of taxpayer dollars. It is a serious violation of First Nations treaty rights, and a threat to the people and environment of northern BC, and to the global climate. This fatally flawed project must be blocked now by the power of public opinion. We stand with the protesters at Rocky Mountain Fort, and with all those who demand to end this dangerous fiasco immediately. ●

# EDITORIALS

## Time to renew anti-war action

The anti-war movement has seen many ups and downs, reflecting the international climate and the situation in Canada. Widespread peace actions in recent decades included the 1960s protests against the US imperialist war in Vietnam, and the 1980s decade of mass resistance against the escalation of the arms race, US cruise missile tests in Canada, and imperialist-backed proxy wars in Central America. More recently, in 2002-2003, hundreds of thousands filled the streets across Canada, especially in Quebec, to block Canadian participation in the disastrous US-led destruction of Iraq.

At other times, the anti-war movement has ebbed, even as other progressive and radical struggles emerged. Recent years have seen big mobilizations around indigenous rights, the wealth gap between the 1% and the 99%, the threat of catastrophic climate change, and Bill C-51. Meanwhile, anti-war actions dwindled. There are a variety of explanations, of course. The intensity of the right-wing attack on working people called for a fightback on many fronts, and the launch of the Iraq war and subsequent events left many people feeling powerless to halt the militarist juggernaut.

But another factor has been the propaganda campaign around the so-called "responsibility to protect" doctrine. Wherever imperialist meddling in pursuit of control over resources touches off violent local and regional conflicts, the argument is heard that the US and its allies must launch "humanitarian interventions".

Now, the \$15 billion sale of armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia has exposed the true nature of this doctrine. Canada is an imperialist country, dominated by a ruling class which puts corporate profit above all else, eager to arm one of the most brutal, reactionary regimes on the planet. The time has arrived to reject imperialist platitudes, and to start rebuilding a broad and powerful peace movement.

## Black History Month

February is Black History Month, an occasion to celebrate the contributions of the Black community in Canada, but also to confront the persistence of racism.

The first named Black person to set foot on what became Canada was Mathieu Da Costa, a free man who was hired as a translator for Samuel de Champlain's 1605 excursion. The first named enslaved African to reside here was a six-year-old boy, who was later sold several times. In 1689, King Louis XIV gave official permission for the colonists of New France to keep Black and Pawnee Indian slaves, in response to complaints about the shortage of servants and workers. By the time slavery was abolished in British North America in 1834, there were dozens of flourishing Black communities in Upper and Lower Canada and the Maritimes. The Underground Railroad brought slaves from the US South to freedom in Canada. Today, a recent Angus Reid poll found that 55% of Canadians think that our country has overcome racism.

How does that naive belief fit with the fact that Black males living in Toronto are three times more likely to be carded by police? Or with studies which document that racialized people in Canada are more likely to be unemployed, and earn an average of \$30,385 per year compared to \$37,332 for other Canadians? Racialized Canadians are three times more likely to live in poverty (19.8 per cent compared to 6.4 per cent). The number of Black Canadians being jailed grew at a startling 69% over the past 10 years; while Black people make up about 2.5% of Canada's population, they represent 9% of federal inmates.

The ugly truth is that racism is widespread in this country, not only against indigenous peoples, but towards the 700,000 Canadians who identify as black, and members of other racialized communities. Pretending otherwise simply perpetuates the problem.

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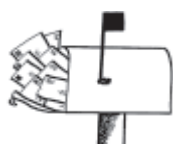
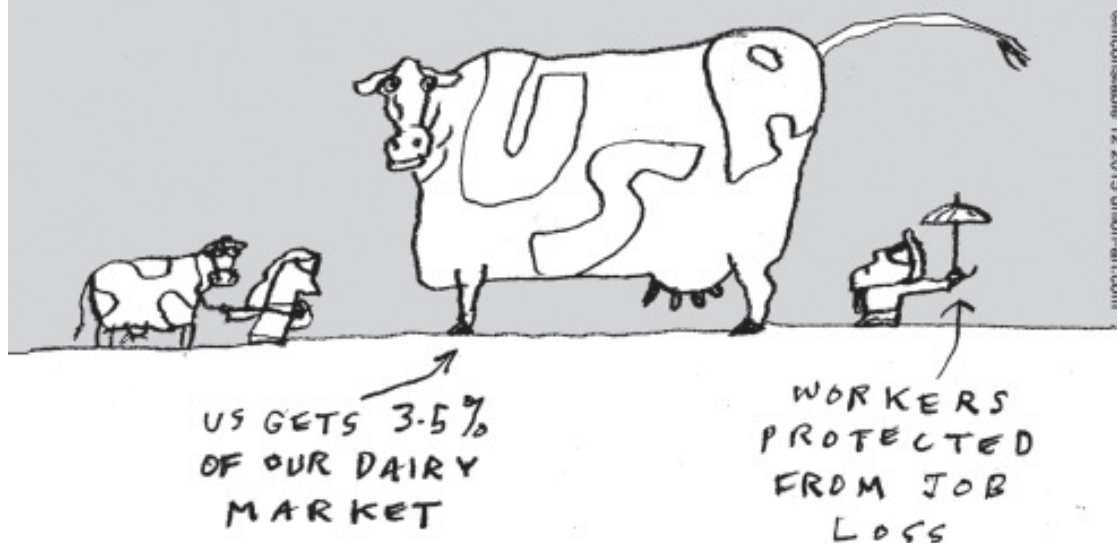
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## LETTERS

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706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1 or  
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## The TPP offers workers pie in the sky



## Letters to the Editor

### The Saudi armoured vehicles sale

Now the newly elected government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is faced with a major foreign affairs dilemma, whether or not to sell \$15 billion worth of light armoured vehicles over the next 14 years to Saudi Arabia. The previous Harper government negotiated the sales agreement, but could not finalize it before the election. There are several critical issues here: whether the Trudeau government is in any way obligated to finalize the sales agreement; whether the dismal human rights record of Saudi Arabia should be a key consideration; and, very importantly, whether any NATO nation should do anything to further militarize Middle East nations.

This deal has an economic aspect for Canada in it. The General Dynamics Land Systems in London, Ontario that manufactures this military hardware would in theory create 3,000 jobs in the process. At a time when the national economy is struggling, it could be tempting for the federal government to give their stamp of approval. The greater issue is whether this deal would conform to the new government's foreign policies. If the object of the Trudeau government is to focus on and enhance its interest in peace-building and diplomacy through humanitarian activities instead of profiting from arms sales, that is what has to be scrutinized.

The present chaos in the Middle East is with certainty the result of colonization and re-colonization of the Arabic nations by western powers, more specifically, those that constitute NATO. Those Arabic nations have been divided and conquered to ensure that cheap petroleum resources flow to the nations that are so skillful in manipulating and exploiting to achieve their economic goals. A sad reality is that the current tragic refugee crisis is a direct result of the imperialist colonization that has prevailed in the region, especially since World War II.

Only the United Nations has the capability of stabilizing the region so that more innocent people are not devastated. Until the means to totally demilitarize the nations of the Middle East is found, we will continue to witness the worst humanitarian crisis since

World War II. Let us encourage the Trudeau government to work in this direction, not in the interest of short-term economic gains.

Roy Lynn Piepenburg,  
Edmonton, AB

### The true cost of war

Open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and MP Stephen Fuhr:

With the announcement the day after the election of your decision to withdraw Canadian warplanes from bombing runs in Iraq and Syria hopes were raised for a re-evaluation of Canada's military priorities. There was talk in some quarters of a "return to Canada's traditional peacekeeping role" in world affairs.

Now we know the planes have not been withdrawn, are still flying and have reportedly even increased their bombing runs. In addition the Liberal government has said it will go ahead with a \$15 billion arms deal with the Saudi government. More troubling, all the major parties in the election reaffirmed their approval of NATO, the nuclear weapon wielding military alliance now expanding to the very borders of Russia, and voiced a commitment to increasing Canada's \$20 billion plus annual military budget.

These things do not fit well with the dearly-held idea of "Canadian peacekeeping".

Canada boasts of strict rules to restrict arms exports to regimes that violate their citizens' human rights. If the ruthless anti-democratic Saudi regime is not an extreme violator of human rights who is? We can't help but wonder if any arms deals have ever been cancelled due to Ottawa's guidelines or if this is just more humanitarian peacekeeping rhetoric. The thought of Canada pouring more arms into that war-ravaged region is not comforting.

The larger tragedy is that the private profits flowing to the arms producing giants like General Dynamics may preclude the last hope of human survival. While these corporations amass millions in profits (some of which are used

to distort democracy with huge contributions to political campaigns), they generate environmental havoc, create enemies and desperate refugees. They prevent the world's economic, social and environmental problems from being conquered.

So what do we want? For starters: stop the bombing runs, bring the fighter-bombers home; keep them on the ground and don't buy any more of them. Cancel the Saudi arms deal. It is illegal from the standpoint of international law and our own legislation. Exit NATO. Its aggressive expansion threatens world peace and its nuclear armed stance contravenes the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Slash the military budget. Those dollars and the capabilities of our workers should be used to create a fossil fuel free future not preparing for more wars.

When you add the "lost opportunity cost" (foregoing potential gain from other choices like clean energy development) to military spending, you get a clearer idea of the real cost of militarism. And that's just the economic equation. The people who desire peace and a future for the planet must use every means necessary to prevent this (last? best?) opportunity from being lost and becoming the epitaph of our species.

Mark Haley, Member,  
Kelowna Peace Group

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# Wealthiest people on earth evade taxes

## PV Vancouver Bureau

The world's 62 wealthiest people own as much as the globe's poorest half— around 3.6 billion people, Oxfam revealed on Jan. 17. In January 2015, Oxfam warned that within two years, the richest 1% would own more than the rest of the planet. That prediction came true a year earlier than expected.

The total riches of the group (just nine of whom are women) has increased by another \$1.76 trillion (all figures US) since 2010, yet their wealth has not led to higher tax revenues to help the most needy. In comparison, the wealth of the poorest half of the world fell by \$1 trillion over the same time, although the number of people in this group rose by 400 million.

The gap between rich and poor widened "dramatically" over the past year, exacerbated by the super-rich holding \$7.6 trillion in untaxed, hidden offshore accounts. Their aversion to paying a total of \$190 billion in taxes each year on this amount contributes to starving developing countries of funds that would pay for health, education, sanitation and infrastructure.

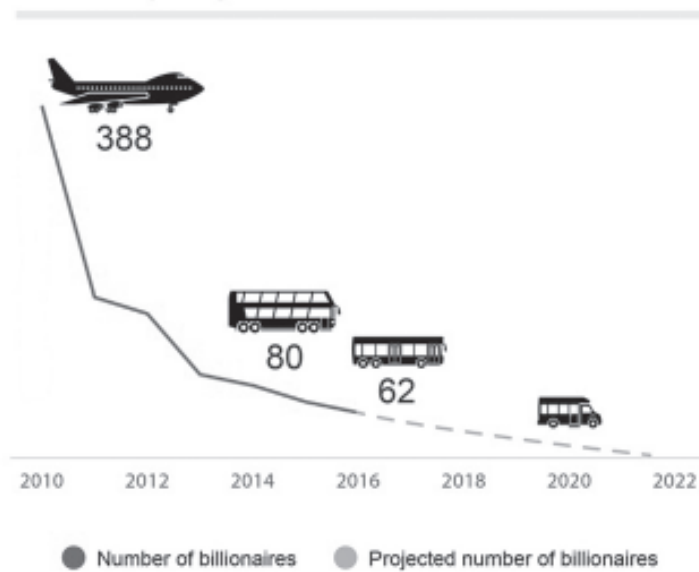
Oxfam said urgent "concrete action" must be taken by world leaders to honour promises to crack down on tax-dodgers in order to tackle the "inequality crisis" by 2030.

As much as 30 per cent of all African financial wealth is believed to be held offshore, according to the *An Economy for the 1 Per Cent* report published before the annual World Economic Forum, taking place Jan. 20-23 in Swiss ski resort Davos. This has cost \$14 billion in lost tax revenue each year — enough to save four million children's lives a year and to keep every African child in school.

Oxfam's chief executive Mark Goldring said: "It is simply unacceptable that the poorest half of the world population owns no more than a small group of the global super-rich — so few, you could fit them all on a single coach. In a world where one in nine people go to bed hungry every night we cannot afford to carry on giving the richest an ever bigger slice of the cake."

Tackling the "veil of secrecy" shrouding Britain's network of tax havens would be a huge step in improving the living standards of

**Billionaires who own the same wealth as half the world**  
And what transport they would fit on



the most impoverished people, he added.

British PM David Cameron vowed in Davos three years ago to get tough on tax avoidance and warned corporations who get away with paying minuscule amounts on their huge profits to "wake up and smell the coffee."

Now he must deliver on his promise, Goldring said, as

promises to increase transparency in British tax havens have not yet been implemented.

Systematic tax avoidance is one of the "defining issues of global injustice," according to Nick Dearden, director of campaign group Global Justice Now.

He added: "The flow of aid that goes to countries in Africa is dwarfed by financial flows that

are leaked out of the continent via offshore tax havens, exacerbating inequality and entrenching poverty. Even the aid that a country like Britain does pay becomes controversial because of tabloid-fuelled accusations that 'charity begins at home. But again it is the fact that corporations and financial elites manage to pay so little tax that vital public services become starved.'

According to Oxfam Canada, the wealthiest five Canadians have seen their assets increase by \$16.9 billion since 2010, a 44 per cent increase. Their total wealth is as much as the bottom 30 per cent of the country's population — more than 11 million people. The poorest 10 per cent of Canadians only make about \$2.30 more per day than they did 25 years ago, and the poorest half of Canada's population has received just 26 per cent of the total increase in income growth.

Oxfam Canada says the Trudeau Liberal government must combat the patterns being highlighted in this report, by leading the charge internationally against tax havens.

(With files from [www.morningstaronline.co.uk](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk)) ●

## "Canada Number One in NAFTA lawsuits"

Canada is the most-sued country under the North American Free Trade Agreement and a majority of the disputes involve investors challenging environmental laws, according to a new study from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Over 70 per cent of claims since 2005 have been brought against Canada, and the number of challenges under NAFTA's settlement clause is rising sharply.

A Huffington Post story by Sunny Freeman on the CCPA report says that the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism contained in NAFTA's chapter 11 grants investors the right to sue foreign governments without first pursuing court action. The provision included in the 1994 treaty on the argument that U.S. and Canadian investors needed protection against corruption in Mexican courts. But the mechanism limits governments from enacting policies on public concerns such as the environment and labour or human rights, and negotiations are often carried out in secret.

The CCPA believes the federal government's commitment to Chapter 11 and its willingness to settle and compensate claimants is encouraging this trend. There were 12 cases brought against Canada from 1995 to 2005, and another 23 in the last decade. This compares to 22 against Mexico and 20 percent against the U.S. since 1995.

Canada has lost or settled six claims paying a total of \$170 million in damages, while Mexico has lost five cases and paid out \$204 million. The U.S. has won 11 cases and has never lost a NAFTA investor-state case.

"Thanks to NAFTA chapter 11, Canada has now been sued more times through investor-state dispute settlement than any other developed country in the world," said Scott Sinclair, who authored

the study. He estimates that Canada has spent \$65 million defending such claims over the past two decades.

About 63 per cent of the claims against Canada involved challenges to environmental protection or resource management programs that allegedly interfere with the profits of foreign investors. The government has lost some of these challenges and has been forced to overturn legislation protecting the environment.

In 1997, the Ethyl Corporation, a U.S. chemical company, used chapter 11 to challenge a Canadian ban on the import of MMT, a gasoline additive that is a suspected neurotoxin and which automakers have said interferes with cars' diagnostic systems. The company

won damages of \$15 million and the government was forced to remove the policy.

A year later, U.S.-based S.D. Myers challenged Canada's temporary ban on the export of toxic PCP waste, which was applied equally to all companies. Canada argued it was obliged to dispose of the waste within its own borders under another international treaty. However, the tribunal ruled the ban was discriminatory and violated NAFTA's standards for fair treatment.

There are currently eight cases brought by U.S. companies against the Canadian government asking for a total of \$6 billion in damages. Many of the current challenges involve domestic environmental

protections such as the promotion of renewable energies, a moratorium on offshore wind projects on Lake Ontario and Nova Scotia's decision to block a mega-quarry.

In one case, Lone Pine Resources, is suing the Canadian government for \$250 million over Quebec's moratorium on natural gas fracking, which applies equally to foreign and domestic companies. Lone Pine argues it was not consulted before the ban nor compensated for its wasted investment or loss of potential revenue.

Sinclair argues that the threat of challenges under chapter 11 has a chilling effect on public interest regulation, which will only worsen unless political and legal action is taken.

"Buoyed by their past successes,

foreign investors and their legal advisors are now turning to NAFTA chapter 11 with increasing frequency and assertiveness," he wrote. "Unfortunately, compared to other parts of the world, there is surprisingly little political debate about the corrosive influence of ISDS on public policy and democracy in Canada."

Canada is embarking on a new generation of treaties such as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union, and the Trans Pacific Partnership, both of which contain investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) systems. While governments can be sued under ISDS, there is no similar recourse for states to hold foreign investors accountable for their actions. ●

## UK ruling affirms "journalism isn't terrorism"

By Nadia Prupis, *Common Dreams*

In a landmark ruling, a British appeals court on Jan. 19 found that the UK's terrorism law violate the European Convention on Human Rights — a decision that came in the case of David Miranda, who was detained and searched at London's Heathrow airport in 2013 while carrying encrypted documents related to U.S. whistleblower Edward Snowden.

The ruling means government ministers will have to reevaluate a controversial provision in the Terrorism Act, known as Section 7, which gives law enforcement officers the power to stop, question, detain, and search people in airports and certain other transit areas, whether or not they are suspected of terrorism.

Individuals who refuse to

answer questions or hand over any requested documents or information may be fined, imprisoned up to four months, or both.

"If journalists and their sources can have no expectation of confidentiality, they may decide against providing information on sensitive matters of public interest," the ruling states. "The court of appeal ruling rejects the broad definition of terrorism advanced by government lawyers. The correct legal definition of terrorism, the court of appeal has now ruled, requires some intention to cause a serious threat to public safety such as endangering life."

The decision was handed down by Lord Dyson, the court's most senior judge. "The stop power, if used in respect of journalistic information or material is incompatible with article 10 [freedom of expression] of the [European convention on human

rights] because it is not 'prescribed by law,'" Dyson said.

Miranda, who is the partner of journalist Glenn Greenwald, was interrogated for nine hours at Heathrow in August 2013 while transporting documents to Greenwald from journalist Laura Poitras, both of whom were reporting on the National Security Agency's (NSA) mass surveillance program. Miranda attempted last year to challenge his detention, but the High Court in London ruled that police had been justified in stopping and searching him.

The government argued at the time that Miranda met the definition of a terrorist because he was carrying documents that "would endanger people's lives" if released.

The Jan. 19 decision overturns at least part of that ruling.

Kate Gould, who represents Miranda, welcomed the decision, stating, "Today's ruling emphasizes

the importance of interpreting terrorism with its ordinary natural meaning to ensure that legitimate public interest journalism is not stifled through the use of draconian powers because of the fear of remote consequences. The notion of a journalist becoming an 'accidental terrorist' has been wholeheartedly rejected. We welcome this court's principled and decisive ruling that Schedule 7 needs to come in line with other legislation to ensure that the seizure of journalistic material is protected by judicial safeguards."

Gould's colleague John Halford added, "In short, this Court has decided that taking effective action against terrorism involves using instruments that are fit for purpose, rather than those that are so blunt that they inevitably damage the interests of democratic societies based on free speech and the journalists that are their champions." ●

# Journalists or Courtesans?

By Zoltan Zigedy, <http://zzs-blg.blogspot.com>, [zoltanzigedy@gmail.com](mailto:zoltanzigedy@gmail.com)

If there is an honest, unfettered, or unsullied investigative reporter or commentator working for the major - even minor - US commercial press, would he or she please stand up?

This past several weeks have demonstrated that the so-called "free press" may well be free of overt US government dictate, but it nevertheless hews faithfully to the US government line on foreign policy matters. The words that flow from the official US spokespersons are dutifully recorded and slavishly reported as news copy by every domestic reporter or pundit holding a press badge and assigned to cover a branch of government.

Consider the outrageous rebuff of Seymour Hersh who has won well over a dozen of the most prestigious US journalism awards, including the Pulitzer and five Polk prizes. Responsible for the My Lai and Abu Ghraib atrocity revelations, Hersh has been effectively blacklisted from publishing in the US since 2013. His accounts of the Syrian war and the US assassination of Osama bin Laden were published overseas in the *London Review of Books*, since his former primary publisher, *The New Yorker*, and other US outlets refused to accept them. Amazingly, no groups of journalists, journalist organizations, or "freedom of the press" advocates have risen in protest against this muzzling of one of their most esteemed colleagues. Collective letters protesting alleged media repression in socialist countries or countries critical of US policy appear regularly in the *New York Review of Books* and as paid ads in the *New York Times*; yet these same indignant journalists, pundits, and academics have remained overwhelmingly silent when it comes to Seymour Hersh.

Even more outrageous is the

lack of any serious effort by the mainstream press to confirm or refute Hersh's claims. His counter narrative to the Obama Administration's well publicized and embarrassingly self-serving account of bin Laden's death would be easily assessed by following the threads developed by Hersh. Instead, the press interviewed a handful of government officials and camp followers and left the official story intact.

Even more egregious, some independent investigations of Hersh's Sarin-gas claims have surfaced that suggest strongly that he might be right in laying the gassing of civilians at the doorstep of US allies in the anti-Assad crusade. Both a UN agency and a Turkish legislative body have challenged the sensational claims of alleged Syrian government barbarity that prop the US argument for regime change. However, no major US media outlet has actively acknowledged this challenge—a shameful affront to journalistic integrity.

## The Blair/Ghaddafi Phone Transcripts

A few weeks ago, Tony Blair, former UK Prime Minister, released transcripts of two phone conversations he had with Muammar Ghaddafi on Feb. 25, 2011. Despite their significant bearing on the early moments of the Libyan rising that led to Ghaddafi's assassination and overthrow, US media barons and their sycophant employees chose to trivialize the importance of the calls.

Ten days after the date that the West marks as the major start of the Libyan uprising, Tony Blair placed an anxious call to the Libyan leader, self-admittedly at the behest of the

Obama administration and the NATO allies. It is just as clear, with hostilities at an early stage, that Blair is threatening Ghaddafi on behalf of his sponsors. He begins innocuously enough, decrying violence and calling for a peaceful outcome. He then adds that Ghaddafi must "engage with the international community, including American and European..." Why that engagement is essential is not clear. But it soon becomes so...

will not end peacefully." Sane people would count this as tantamount to a coup.

For his part, Ghaddafi asks Blair to come and see the situation himself. He denies that the situation is either dire or unstable. But he does affirm strongly that his opposition is Al Qaeda — that is, extreme fundamentalists. He asks Blair if he supports them: "...are you supporting terrorism?" Exasperated with the threat,



In Vietnam, our soldiers came back and they were reviled as baby killers, in shame and humiliation. It isn't happening now, but I will tell you, there has never been an American army as violent and murderous as our army has been in Iraq.

— Seymour Hersh —

AZ QUOTES

Five hours later, Blair is back on the phone with a message from his masters: "...if you have a safe place to go you should go there because this will not end peacefully and there has to be a process of change, that process of change can be managed and we have to find a way of managing it."

He goes on: "the violence needs to stop and a new constitution needs to take shape... I repeat the statement people have said to me, if there is a way that he can leave he should do so now. I think this can happen peacefully but he has to act now and signal that he wants this to happen."

Blair could not be clearer. He is demanding that the leader of a sovereign country step aside and allow the US and European powers unilaterally and without the consent of the people of Libya to determine the future of Libya. Moreover, Blair clearly backs the demand with the threat of violence: "...this

Ghaddafi concludes: "...we have no problem, just leave us alone. If you are really serious and you are looking for the truth, get on a plane and come see us."

Of course Blair and those pulling his strings were not "looking for the truth" anymore than the Western media are seriously looking for the truth.

Less than three weeks later, the UN declared the infamous "no fly zone" that allowed NATO forces to launch an air war against Ghaddafi's forces. US and NATO planes, along with covert fighters from the Gulf States, crippled loyalist forces and violently turned the war against Ghaddafi just as Blair said they would.

And today, Libya is a broken, ungovernable state, a haven for jihadists, just as Ghaddafi said would happen. A pity the courtesans of the US media show no interest in "looking for the truth."

## Adrift in the Gulf

Two shallow draft riverine craft operated by the US military were boarded and held by Iranian security forces near Farsi Island the day of President Obama's state of the union address and days before a radical shift in US-Iranian relations.

Any reasonably alert reader of US news accounts of this encounter would be curious about nearly every detail and subsequent explanation offered. The fact that two specialized military craft favoured by US special operations and used extensively for command, control and reconnaissance, were boarded in Iranian territorial waters near Iran's largest naval base might cause some wonder.

The fact that the riverine craft are designed to operate in shallow river or coastal waters, but found

their way over two hundred miles from the Saudi shore and in the middle of the Persian Gulf surely warrants some further wonder.

The military's first explanations of these bizarre circumstances blamed engine failure and drift for the embarrassing presence of two boats and ten US personnel in unauthorized waters.

Of course, it's hard to imagine that both boats suffered engine failure at the same moment and no relief was mobilized to render assistance. Before anyone asked embarrassing questions (not that the lapdog press would), Defense Secretary Ash Carter offered another tale: navigational failure caused the boats to go off course (way off course!).

But should anyone press this explanation (no one did), they might notice that the boats are equipped with sophisticated navigation, radar, and communication systems; and the likelihood that both of the boats would make the same error, go undetected, and proceed radically off course is about the same as a commercial air craft leaving New York's LaGuardia airport and heading east rather than west.

So the military (CENTCOM) returned to a version of the first account, stating emphatically that mechanical failure of one boat's diesel engine caused the two to stop for repairs while travelling from Kuwait to Bahrain. Of course that leaves the question of why the shallow draft boats needed to be hundreds of miles from the Saudi coast in the middle of the Persian Gulf, far away from the most direct and appropriate route to their destination.

But the bumbling explanations caused no consternation among the willfully gullible capitalist press. Instead, they report earnestly the xenophobic ranting of election-season politicians about imaginary offense to US virtue.

Apart from Glenn Greenwald at *The Intercept*, no significant media figure cast a doubt on the Pentagon's ever changing fairy tale, another demonstration of the utter spinelessness of the US media. ●

## Tudeh Party response to sanctions deal

### Statement of the Tudeh Party of Iran on the Implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)

After years of destructive sanctions which have been imposed on our nation by Western States as a result of the ill-advised policies of the Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Khamenei] and his appointees, on January 16<sup>th</sup> the negotiations between Iran and the 5+1 group were concluded and, after verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Iran had fulfilled its commitments, the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) began...

There is no doubt that the implementation of the JCPOA agreement is a significant event that will have substantial impact on political developments in our country. Despite all the propaganda claims of the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran

(IRI) and the assessments of a number of opponents and supporters of the theocratic regime and the efforts of the regime's leadership to hide almost a decade of destructive policies and the



Symbol of the Tudeh Party, Iran's historic Marxist-Leninist party

reasons for dragging the IRI to the secret negotiations with the US, which according to the existing records and documents had started

two years before Hassan Rouhani's administration took office, our party has published concrete and detailed analyses and assessments in this regard in the past two years, from which the following points can be highlighted:

First, as far as the regime and the government of Hassan Rouhani is concerned, signing the JCPOA and agreeing to all the conditions limiting Iran's nuclear industry was inevitable. The regime's factions collectively supported the JCPOA and interaction with the USA, because over eight years of damaging policies of the administration of Ahmadinejad, who was installed by Ali Khamenei, and the devastating sanctions of imperialist states, have created immense problems for our nation and country. Inflation, bankruptcy of manufacturing institutions, unemployment, and poverty are skyrocketing and the risk of social implosion is a serious threat to the survival of the theocratic regime of Iran. Despite

all the deafening political maneuvers of the "concerned" factions connected to the military-security and their media outlets such as the *Kayhan Daily* newspaper, the government agreed to the key elements of the US and European countries' conditions, of course under the supervision and with the full consent of the Supreme Leader, and opened the way for implementation of the JCPOA.

Second, the scope of the negotiations that led to the JCPOA was much broader than just the nuclear industry of Iran and the lifting of economic and financial sanctions, and was directly and closely related to the collaboration of the theocratic regime in Iran with the macro-policies of the US administration in the Middle East region. The concern of the reactionary governments of

see SANCTIONS, p. 11...

# Neo-liberalism raises its ugly head in South America

By Jack Rasmus,  
www.telesur.tv.net

After 9-11, the United States focused its most aggressive foreign policy on the Middle East – from Afghanistan to North Africa. But the deal recently worked out with Iran, the current back-door negotiations over Syria between US Secretary of State John Kerry, and Russia Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, and the decision to subsidise, and now export, US shale oil and gas production in a direct reversal of US past policy toward Saudi Arabia – together signal a relative shift of US policy away from the Middle East.

With a Middle East consolidation phase underway, US policy has been shifting since 2013-14 to the more traditional focus that it had for decades: first, to check and contain China; second, to prevent Russia from economically integrating more deeply with Europe; and, third, to reassert more direct US influence once again, as in previous decades, over the economies and governments in Latin America.

Following his re-election in 2012, Obama announced what was called a 'pivot' to Asia to contain and check China's growing economic and political influence. In 2013-14, it was the US-directed Ukraine coup – i.e. a pretext for sanctions on Russia designed to sever that country's growing economic relations with Europe. But there is yet another US policy shift underway that is perhaps not as evident as the refocus on China or the US new "cold war" offensive against Russia. It is the US pivot toward Latin America, begun in 2014, targeting in particular the key countries and economies of South America – Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina – for economic and political destabilisation as a fundamental requisite for re-introduction of neo-liberal policies in that region.

## Venezuela: example of destabilisation

Economic destabilisation in its most recent phase has been underway in Venezuela since 2013. The collapse of world oil and commodity prices, a consequence in part of the US vs. Saudi fight that erupted in 2014 over who controls the global price of oil, has caused the Venezuela currency, the Bolivar, to collapse.

The US raising its long term interest rates the past year has intensified that currency collapse. But US government and banking forces have further fanned the flames of currency collapse by encouraging speculators, operating out of Colombia and the DollarToday website, to "short" the Bolivar and depress it still further. US-based media, in particular the arch-conservative CATO institute in Washington, has joined in the effort by consistently reporting exaggerated claims of currency decline, as high as 700 percent, to panic Venezuelans to further dump Bolivars for dollars, thus causing even more currency collapse.

Meanwhile, multinational corporations in Venezuela continue to hoard more than



"Reptile from the north", by Jack Chen

US\$11 billion in dollars, causing the dollar to rise and the Bolivar to fall even more. The consequence of all these forces contributing to collapse of the currency is a growing black market for dollars and shortages of key consumer and producer goods.

But all that's just the beginning. Currency collapse in turn means escalating cost of imports and domestic inflation, and thus falling real incomes for small businesses and workers. The black market and dollar shortage means inability to import critical goods like medicines and food. Rising cost of imports means lack of critical materials needed to continue production, which results in falling production, plant and business closures, and rising unemployment.

Currency collapse, inflation, and recession together result in capital flight from the country, which in turn exacerbates all the above again. A vicious cycle of general economic collapse thus ensues, for which the popular government is blamed but which it has fundamentally not caused.

As this scenario in Venezuela since 2014 has worsened, the United States has targeted Venezuela's state owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, with legal suits. The Obama government in March 2015 also issued executive orders freezing assets of Venezuelan government and military representatives charged with alleged "human rights" abuses. The US then recently arrested Venezuelan businessmen in the United States, holding them without bail, no doubt to send a message to those who might still support the government. The US government has also indicted Venezuelan government and military officials recently with charges of alleged drug conspiracy, including National Guard generals who have supported the Maduro government.

This all raises impressions of government corruption with the public, while giving second thoughts to other would-be military and government supporters to "think twice" about their continuing support and perhaps to consider 'going over' to the opposition in exchange for a "deal" to drop the legal charges. The popular impression grows that the economic crisis, the inflation, the shortages, the layoffs must all be associated with the corruption, which is associated with the government. It is all classic US destabilisation strategy.

As all the above economic dislocation has occurred in Venezuela, money has flowed through countless unofficial channels to the opposition parties

and their politicians, enabling them to capture in December control of the national assembly. The leaders of the new assembly, according to media leaks, now have plans to reconstitute the Venezuelan Supreme Court to support their policies and to legally endorse their coming direct attack on the Maduro government in 2016. It is clear the goal is to either remove Maduro and his government or to render it impossible to govern.

As Julio Borges, a possible next president of the National Assembly, has declared publicly in recent days: if the Maduro government does not go along with the new policies of

the Assembly, "it will have to be changed". No doubt impeachment proceedings, to try to remove Maduro, will be soon on the agenda in Venezuela – just as it now is in Brazil. But for that, the Venezuelan Supreme Court must be changed, which makes it the immediate next front in the battle.

## Argentina & Brazil

Should the new pro-US, pro-business Venezuela National Assembly ever prevail over the Maduro government, the outcome economically would something like that now unfolding with the Mauricio Macri government in Argentina. Argentina's Macri has already, within days of assuming the presidency, slashed taxes for big farmers and manufacturers; lifted currency controls and devalued the peso by 30 percent; allowed inflation to rise overnight by 25 percent; provided US\$2 billion in dollar denominated bonds for Argentine exporters and speculators; re-opened discussions with US hedge funds as a prelude to paying them excess interest the de Kirchner government previously denied; put thousands

of government workers on notice of imminent layoffs; declared the new government's intent to stack the supreme court in order to rubber stamp its new neo-liberal programs; and took steps to reverse Argentine's recent media law. And that's just the beginning.

Politically, the neo-liberal vision will mean an overturning and restructuring of the current Supreme Court, possible changes to the existing Constitution, and attempts to remove the duly-elected president from office before his term by various means. Apart from plans to stack the judiciary, as in Argentina, Venezuela's new business controlled National Assembly will likely follow their reactionary class compatriots in Brazil, and move to impeach Venezuela president Maduro and dismantle his popular government – just as they are attempting the same in Brazil with that country's also recently re-elected president, Dilma Rousseff.

What happens in Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil is a harbinger of the intense economic and political class war in South America that is about to escalate to a higher stage in 2016. ●

## FARC-Colombia talks nearing March 23 deadline

From [www.telesur.tv.net/english/news/](http://www.telesur.tv.net/english/news/)

Delegates from the Colombian government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas began a new round of talks in Havana on Jan. 13, in what many believe will be the final stage of negotiations. The two sides have been engaged in peace negotiations since 2012 in an attempt to end 50 years of armed conflict. They have reached several major agreements, and have set a deadline to reach a final peace agreement by March 23.

President Juan Manuel Santos, as well as the government's chief negotiator, Humberto de la Calle, have both said the two sides plan to work long hours and will not stop negotiations until the deadline for a final agreement is reached.

Typically the negotiations have been broken up into smaller rounds, with short breaks allotted between them.

Many challenging themes still need to be discussed, including

the disarmament, demobilization and concentration of the guerrillas, as well as a bilateral cease-fire and whether or not the final deal will go through a public referendum.

TeleSUR's correspondent in Havana reported that the FARC told a press conference that while the delegates are working to meet the self-imposed deadline of March 23, there is a real possibility that it will not be met.

The negotiating parties will be discussing the demobilization of the FARC, a contentious topic as the government is seeking to group guerrillas together in order to proceed. The FARC peace delegation has said it does not agree with that proposal.

The two sides are at odds with respect to the details. The government is pushing for the disarmament of combatants, while the FARC uses slightly different language, talking about the "laying down of arms" instead, implying that they do not intend to give up their weapons.

The FARC's insistence on this point is borne out of the failure of previous peace talks where

thousands of demobilized members were killed and many were forced to return to armed struggle.

Other contentious issues include the demobilization of paramilitary groups – death squads – which continue to exist in the country, the FARC's participation in national politics, and the release of their members from prison, particularly those who have already been pardoned by the government.

FARC negotiators have also slammed the country's prison system as "rotten", calling for reform to fix systemic problems. A statement delivered in early January by FARC leader Sergio Ibanez called for a transformation of the criminal justice system, and urged the government to take "immediate measures" to put an end to "arbitrary actions and abuses" committed against "political prisoners" and prisoners of war in Colombian prisons.

The FARC argued that the current prison system aims to "crush" FARC members and other political prisoners with disregard to basic humanitarian norms. The statement said that the country's prison policy does not uphold rule of law but is instead "more characteristic of a criminal dictatorship." Ibanez said that there are cases in some prisons of inmates being regularly and arbitrarily punished with "damage to their genital areas."

The rebel group called for humanitarian intervention into the situation, stressing that the poor treatment of political prisoners could impact the peace process. ●



FARC leader Sergio Ibanez



# GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

## Journalists fight surveillance

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) has backed a call by the Association of Polish Journalists (SDP), for investigation and preventative measures following a scandal over wiretapping on journalists and leading political figures in Poland.

A recent internal audit revealed that around 80 individuals were under surveillance by two secret police units, including journalists and lawyers reporting on the affair, as well as their family members. One unit oversaw the tapping and infiltrating the journalists and their contacts, while the second looked into whether secret services were at the root of the affair.

EFJ President Mogens Blicher Bjerregard said, "The wiretapping scandal makes the media situation in Poland even more alarming. It is paramount for journalists to protect their confidential sources. A thorough and transparent investigation on the wiretapping scandal must be carried out in order to assess if there is any misuse of surveillance measures that infringe the fundamental rights of journalists and individuals."

The internal audit was ordered by the new head of the Bureau of Internal Affairs, Zbigniew Maj, to reveal who ordered the illegal recording of conversations between high-ranking political figures in a prominent Warsaw restaurant between 2014 and 2015. The conversations often exposed sensitive topics and damaging issues. The investigation discovered 29 officers involved in the wiretapping who failed to properly document their activities; seven are facing disciplinary measures.

## Job actions at Australian docks

Australian waterfront employers and business groups have blocked recent strikes on the docks. On Jan. 22, the nation's industrial umpire imposed a 35-day ban on industrial action at terminals in four cities, after dock workers and the maritime union shut down Patrick Stevedores, Australia's biggest port terminal operator, for the first time since a famous 1998 waterfront dispute. The simultaneous 24-hour strikes on Jan. 18 in Melbourne, Port Botany, Brisbane and Fremantle are estimated to have cost Patrick millions of dollars. The ruling by the Fair Work Commission blocked 48-hour stoppages planned for Jan. 26.

The union and the company remain at loggerheads over the terms of a new deal, with Patrick condemning union demands for all workers at Port Botany to be made permanent full-time. The

union is seeking a greater commitment to job security.

In a separate dispute, strikes by marine engineers working for national tugboat operator Svitzer Australia have come to an end. The tugboat engineers had been walking off the job for between 12 and 48 hours at several major ports, blocking the entry and exit of many commercial carrier vessels.

Engineers had been resisting the company's attempts to bring them onto the same enterprise agreement as other crew members on the three-person tugboats – deckhands and skippers – due to



concerns it would lead to inferior conditions. But the proposal had the support of two other unions involved, and the wider workforce voted to adopt the new deal. The ballot results appeared to show that tug engineers had voted 'no', but the tug masters and deckhands were in favour.

## Layoffs hit manganese miners

Layoffs loom for 3,700 workers at a manganese ore mine in Georgia, following news that the mine will be shut down for four months. On January 11, mining company Georgian Manganese LLC informed workers at its Chiatura Manganese Mine that it would stop extraction from January 20 until May 20 due to a decrease in the market price of manganese.

The management has promised workers 60 per cent of their salary, and medical insurance during the four-month downtime, and says it will pay interest on loans for those workers who had one. However, in return the company is forcing workers to immediately sign an additional agreement that amends the essential terms of their employment contract and deprives the majority of miners of their right to paid leave in 2016.

Local unionists and the union leadership have challenged the managerial decision to shut down mining operations for four months. The Trade Union of Metallurgy, Mining and Chemical Industry Workers of Georgia (TUMMCIWG) is demanding government intervention and guarantees of no job losses when

the company returns to normal operations - even if this requires nationalization of the Chiatura Manganese Mine.

The union wants the government to exempt Chiatura miners from the obligation to pay personal income tax within this period, and to compensate them for the missing 40 per cent of their salaries. The average salary at the mine is about US\$250 a month.

## Unemployment up

The decelerating world economy is having far-reaching effects, with new research projecting that the number of people out of work will grow to nearly 200 million this year, with millions of additional workers left vulnerable in developing countries.

Global unemployment reached 197 million in 2015 and is expected to rise by nearly 2.3 million this year and a further 1.1 million in 2017. The majority of this increase will take place in emerging economies, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said in its report, World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2016.

The ILO said an estimated 327 million employed people are living in extreme poverty, while nearly a billion more are in moderate or near-poverty.

## More strikes in Greece

New rounds of strike action continue in Greece, where the Syriza-led government is imposing austerity measures demanded by international lenders.

On Jan. 20, the Panhellenic Seamen's Federation (PNO) began a 48-hour strike, keeping all vessels in ports and suspending ferry traffic to Greek islands. The sailors are protesting the government's plans to reform pension and social security systems, and to eliminate the seamen's insurance fund NAT. The PNO staged a four-day strike against the Syriza government's anti-people policy last November.

On January 15, the Greek major private sector labour union General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) announced a 24-hour strike on February 4 in response to cuts in pension benefits and increased employee contributions. The union's executive board said it might prolong the strike beyond 24 hours if necessary. GSEE also called for workers to join a rally against pension reform, organized by the umbrella union for the public sector, the Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY), in Athens on Jan. 16. Some 3,000 people participated in the protest.

Legislation to impose the latest cuts in pensions will be voted on by MPs in early February, posing a big challenge for Syria's razor-thin majority in Parliament.

## Sugar workers protest in Guyana

Sugar workers from the Wales Estate marched to Guyana's Parliament on Jan. 21 to protest a decision by the Guyana Sugar Company (GuySuCo) to shut down the estate at the end of 2016.

Carrying placards reading "No to the closure of Wales Estate," "No to Privatisation," "Workers Unite," "Fight Unemployment," the marchers warned government lawmakers that the closure would have negative ripple effects.

"We don't want estate to close because we have to work and we have children," said Norma Martin, who worked at the sugar estate for the last 25 years as a weeder and would find it difficult to move on. "Transportation is close to me...I work a long time there and I feel I shouldn't go somewhere more far to get a job."

The protesters were joined by Opposition Leader Bharrat Jagdeo, former President Donald Ramotar and other members of the left-wing People's Progressive Party opposition. The workers and the PPP say that the closure of the Wales Estate would mean that only private cane farmers would be producing.

Sultan Hussain of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union denied claims by the government that the century-old factory and estate were an "economic nightmare." He said that with some money injected into factory spares, Wales Estate's production could be improved.

The PPP argues that the estate is more than about sugar, but is tied to drainage and irrigation for rice farming and other agricultural production as well as other businesses such as transportation, shops and restaurants.

## ILO trains Gaza fishers

A group of unemployed men from fishing families in the Gaza Strip are getting a chance to learn new skills and increase their chances of employment in the coastal enclave's sea fishing sector, which faces severe restrictions by the Israeli military.

The trainees recently completed the first two phases of the International Labour Organiza-

tion's capacity-building "Skills Development and Enhancement of Employability in the Fishing Sector" programme, implemented in partnership with Gaza's General Syndicate of Marine Fishers.

The ILO programme aims to restore livelihoods for fishers and boat owners who were most affected by the Israeli attack against Gaza in 2014. Participants have learned to repair generators, which will save on costs and help avoid getting caught out at sea. They also receive training in occupational safety and health measures and safe fish handling.

Gaza's fishing sector provides about 4,500 direct jobs for fishers, and livelihoods to some 30,000 people in total.

## Korean teacher union outlawed

The Seoul High Court has ruled in favour of the South Korean government's decision to outlaw a progressive teachers' union. The decision to uphold a lower court's ruling to outlaw the Korean Teachers and Education Workers' Union (KTU) effectively removed the legal rights the group has enjoyed since September 2014, when the Seoul High Court issued an injunction to suspend the government's decision to outlaw the group.

The decision was expected given a Constitutional Court ruling last year that Article 2 of the Teachers' Labour Union Law, which bans dismissed teachers from having union memberships, was constitutional. The article prohibits the union from allowing membership to fired teachers, who are defined as "non-education workers." The union has argued that this provision violates the rights of teachers.

The legal battle began in October 2013 when the Ministry of Employment and Labour stripped the KTU of its legal status after the union refused to expel nine members who were dismissed from their schools.

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Many items in our "Global Class Struggle" column are from the Labour Start website, [www.labourstart.org](http://www.labourstart.org)



# Indonesia snubs Saudi “anti-terror” coalition ... Then its capital gets hit

By Finian Cunningham, RT News, Jan. 15, 2015

Indonesia joins a growing list of countries beyond the Middle East region reportedly hit by the Islamic State group or its affiliates. Is it a case of IS simply going global, or is there something else to the latest incident in Indonesia?

On the face of it, the Jan. 14 attacks in downtown Jakarta—the Indonesian capital of 10 million people—are similar to those carried out in Paris last November, albeit with much less deadly results. Both involved a team of suicide bombers and gun attacks.

In the Paris attacks, eight armed men killed 130 people when they struck at various public venues on Nov. 13. In Jakarta up to 15 assailants armed with explosives and rifles managed to kill only two civilians; the other five reported dead were attackers who were shot by police or blew themselves up.

From the terrorists' point of view, the Jakarta operation was a failure. That failure was partly due to the vigilance of Indonesian police, who had increased security in recent weeks due to what they said was the interception of terror communications.

Jakarta deputy police chief Budi Gunawan was quoted by *The Wall Street Journal* as saying that a homegrown Islamist network in the Java city of Solo had been plotting terror attacks with jihadists based in Syria.

“We detected communications

between a Syria group and the Solo group,” said Gunawan. Following the Jakarta violence, the IS group reportedly claimed responsibility.

The question is: what's behind the uptick in IS-affiliated activity in Indonesia? Police reportedly made several arrests against suspected IS operatives in recent weeks.

Indonesia is no stranger to terrorism carried out by Islamist groups. Between 2000 and 2009, there were six major terrorist atrocities. The biggest one was the bombings in the tourist resort of Bali in 2002 which killed over 200 people. But for the past five years, the country has enjoyed

***If the Saudis and Western intelligence are in some murky way driving jihadist terrorism for their geopolitical agenda, such terror groups could be manipulated by these same protagonists in Indonesia – or anywhere else...***

relative peace.

Author and expert on Indonesia Jeremy Menchik told France 24 in an interview that the relative quiet in the world's fourth largest nation has been achieved because of the country's relatively democratic transition having been able to co-opt dissident Islamist groups.

With a population of over 240 million, Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country. While the country suffered from a brutal dictatorship under Suharto from 1965 until the late 1990s, it has since managed to steer a more benign, inclusive and secular

political path.

Under President Joko Widodo, elected in 2014, Indonesia has managed to contain its erstwhile radical Islamist problem.

On December 17, Saudi Arabia launched a 34-Islamic nation “anti-terror” coalition, with an ostentatious announcement in the Saudi capital Riyadh. The surprise initiative was welcomed by Washington and London, although it was greeted with scepticism by many observers given the documented role that the Saudi rulers have had in funding and arming terror groups, including the Islamic State and other Al-Qaeda-linked militants.

Sceptics noted that the Saudi-led

coalition of 34 Islamic nations appeared to be hastily cobbled together, with some of the nominal member countries later saying that they had not been consulted by the Saudis in its formation. Not included in the Saudi initiative of the “anti-terror” Islamic bloc were Iraq and Iran, perhaps unsurprisingly given the Saudi antagonism with these mainly Shiite countries.

Even more pointedly, two major Islamic nations, Algeria and Indonesia, explicitly declined to participate in the Saudi-led alliance. Given the prominence of Indonesia as the world's biggest



Muslim country, the Saudi initiative was dealt a severe PR blow by Jakarta's refusal to sign up.

It is believed that Saudi Arabia has been behind the funding of radical Islamist groups within Indonesia going back several years, according to the *Financial Times*.

With that in mind, the Indonesia authorities most likely snubbed the Saudi “anti-terror” coalition last month for precisely the same reasons that many analysts dismissed it. Seeing it as a cynical public-relations gimmick by the Saudis who are trying to burnish their badly tarnished international image over suspected links with terrorism, particularly in Syria's five-year conflict.

That raises the plausible conjecture that the terror attacks in Jakarta by an IS-connected group may have been orchestrated as a form of retaliation against the Indonesian government for its embarrassing snub against the Saudis last month.

If the Saudis and Western intelligence are indeed in some murky way driving jihadist terrorism for their geopolitical agenda, then it stands to reason that such terror groups could be manipulated by these same protagonists in Indonesia – or anywhere else for that matter.

A terror attack in the heart of Jakarta, apparently carried out by the IS group, would serve as a sharp warning to Indonesia over its derisory putdown of the Western-backed Saudi “anti-terror” coalition.

The sudden uptick in Islamist terror activity in Indonesia and the failure of the attackers in Jakarta to inflict greater damage suggest that the assault was hurriedly planned. As in the orders to the operatives were hastily dispatched and acted on.

That would fit with the theory that the Saudi sponsors of terrorism were looking for a quick counter to Indonesia undermining their anti-terror charade last month. ●

## Solidarity with Nepal against India's blockade

PV Ontario Bureau

On December 13, Concern Nepal Canada organized a conference and demonstration in Mississauga, Ontario, against India's illegal and undeclared blockade of Nepal.

The event featured many guest speakers, including Govinda Siwakoti of Concern Nepal Canada, Shamshad Elahee Shams of the Indo Canadian Workers Association, Dave McKee of the Canadian Peace Congress, Fozia Tanveer of the Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians, former Conservative MP Bob Dechert and former Nepal government minister Kamal Prasad Chaulagain.

In May 2008, the Nepali people abolished the monarchy and established a federal democratic republic. Since then, Nepal has struggled to craft and adopt a new constitution. The process was completed on September 20, 2015, when the new constitution was announced, with 85% support in the Constituent Assembly.

Early on, though, there were already indications that the Nepali people were facing significant foreign interference in their internal and sovereign affairs. In particular, the government of India repeatedly voiced objections to some provisions in the new constitution and even submitted 7 amendments through official channels. This is quite astonishing – should any country accept having its constitution written by a foreign



Shamshad Elahee Shams of Indo Canadian Workers Association at the Mississauga event in solidarity with Nepal.

government?

Dave McKee of the Peace Congress noted many good features of the constitution, some of which stand in stark and interesting contrast to the constitutions of both India and Canada.

\* Rights of gender and sexual minorities are protected by the new constitution with provisions of special laws to protect, empower and develop minority groups as well as allowing them to get citizenship in their chosen gender. \* Recognizing the rights of women, the constitution of Nepal explicitly states that “women shall have equal ancestral right without any gender-based discrimination.” India has yet to introduce a similar right for women from all faiths. Moreover, ancestral property rights for

women are not a fundamental right in India.

\* Nepal has become the second country after Bhutan in South Asia to abolish the death penalty.

\* Under the new constitution, victims of environmental pollution or degradation in Nepal now have the fundamental right to receive compensation from the polluter. In India the “right to a clean environment” is not explicitly mentioned in the constitution, but the Supreme Court has interpreted it to be included under the right to life. However, unlike Nepal, the victims of environmental pollution or degradation in India are not entitled to any compensation as a fundamental right. The state may impose a penalty on polluters but this does not necessarily mean that

the affected will be compensated.

The biggest issue for the reactionary, religious fundamentalist party of Indian PM Modi, as Shamshad Elahee Shams noted, is the Nepali constitution's secular orientation. “Nepal is the first country to face suffocation by India's sectarian policies,” said Shamshad, “but there are millions of Muslims and others within India who are facing this same problem.”

The government of India responded to the new constitution by imposing an undeclared blockade, which is having a profound effect. Nepal's Central Bank estimates that the severe shortages will push nearly one million people into poverty. Conference speakers noted many other immediate and long-term effects, including:

- Pressure on vulnerable forest resources, as the fuel shortage increases the demand for firewood and illegal logging increases.

- Shortages of medicines, one of the worst-hit supplies. More than three million children under the age of five are at risk of death or disease due to the shortages.

- Severely weakened education system, as school buses take periodic holidays due to fuel shortages and textbooks cannot be printed.

- Stalled relief and rebuilding efforts from the April earthquake, which killed nearly 10,000 people and destroyed 600,000 homes.

- Economic crisis, with trade declining by one-third during the months of the blockade and

estimates that the blockade will inflict greater economic damage than the \$7 billion losses caused by the earthquakes.

- Foreign incitement to division, polarization and even violence, as India's actions essentially amount to aggressive outside support for a specific political group within Nepal.

Taken together, the immediate and long term effects of the blockade are clear and direct attacks on Nepal's sovereignty, on the right of the Nepali people to determine their own future. As Dave McKee stated, “These are calculated actions by the Indian government, whose self-described role as the “regional big brother” is currently guided by its own narrow, dangerous ideological orientation. The blockade and interference must end, and be replaced with international cooperation and solidarity.”

Govinda Siwakoti noted that international law guarantees landlocked countries the right of access to and from the sea. The blockade is in clear and intentional violation of this right. He encouraged participants to take action for justice for Nepal. He identified the World Trade Organization and the International Court of Justice as two institutions that need to be brought into action on the Nepal blockade.

Conference, participants held a peaceful demonstration calling for India to end the blockade, and for the Canadian government to speak in support of Nepal's sovereignty.

# Star Wars: The empire strikes again

Review by John Wight,  
morningstaronline.co.uk

Star Wars is a simple story, simply told. Good versus evil, light versus darkness and freedom versus tyranny — it's the narrative of the US struggle to preserve democracy and civilisation in a world beset by "evil" and "evildoers."

That's hardly a surprise, given that films and political propaganda have long walked hand in hand — if ever a medium was suited to propaganda it is cinema.

And if ever an industry could be credited with creating an alternate reality so pervasive it has managed to convince generations of US citizens and others around the world that up is down, black is white and left is right, that industry is Hollywood.

George Lucas — creator of a franchise which has churned out seven films since 1977 — is, along with Steven Spielberg, a child of the reaction to the counter-culture of the '60s and early '70s in the US.

Though both products of that decade in which culture and the arts, particularly cinema, was at the forefront of resistance to the US military-industrial complex, Lucas and Spielberg came to prominence in the mid-1970s with films which rather than attack or question the Establishment instead embraced its role as both protector and arbiter of the nation's morals.

The curtain began to come down on the most culturally vital and exciting and cerebral period of US cinema, responsible for producing such classics as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *MASH*, *The Last Detail*, *The French Connection*, *The Wild Bunch*, *Taxi Driver* and *Apocalypse Now*, with Spielberg's *Jaws* in 1975 followed in 1977 by Lucas's *Star Wars*.

The former frightened the US. The latter made it feel good about itself again.

Both films spawned the high-concept blockbuster, inviting audiences to feel rather than to think and allowing them to suspend disbelief and escape reality instead of sharing the experience of confronting it via stories in which alienated characters expressed the angst, frustration, anger and disaffection which they themselves were experiencing in their own lives, thus inducing a sense of solidarity.

It was the era of the anti-hero, main characters for whom the system and conformity were the enemy. They ploughed their own furrow, regardless of the consequences.

The questioning of authority and its received truths reflected a country whose young and not so young were hungry for radical change. The war in Vietnam, Watergate and the black civil-rights and nationalist movements had shaken up US society and, with it, its culture and cultural references.

But by the mid-'70s, with the end of the Vietnam war and with the counter-culture running out of steam, the time had arrived to box up all that alienation, anger and

rebelliousness and allow the mythology of the American dream and democracy to reassert its dominance.

In his peerless history of this vital period of US cinema, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*, cultural critic Peter Biskind comments that beyond its impact on film marketing and merchandising, *Star Wars* had a profound effect on the culture. "It benefited from the retrenchment of the Carter years, the march to the centre that followed the end of the Vietnam war," he notes.

This march to the centre became a march to the right under Ronald Reagan, manifested in Hollywood as artistic and cultural stagnation. Directors such as Spielberg

and Lucas became less concerned with story and character and more focused on spectacle. Bigger, louder and richer was the mantra as two-dimensional characters and plot lines that your average 10-year-old, with a set of crayons and an imagination, could come up with predominated.

As Biskind says, "Lucas knew that genres and cinematic conventions depend on consensus, the web of shared assumptions that had been sundered in the '60s. He was recreating and reaffirming these values and *Star Wars*, with its Manichean moral fundamentalism, its white hats and black hats, restored the lustre to threadbare values like heroism and individualism."

In this latest *Star Wars* film, *The Force Awakens*, directed by JJ Abrams, Lucas makes do with a

writing credit after selling the franchise to Disney in 2012 for US\$3.5 billion. That kind of money will buy you a lot of lightsabres.

For all the hype surrounding its release and the rave reviews it has garnered, this instalment of the long-running and inordinately successful franchise is so embarrassingly and toe-curlingly clichéd it's impossible to walk out afterwards without limping.

Disney and Abrams have reached back in time in order to refresh the franchise, with the return of Han Solo (Harrison Ford), Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and the old iconic favourites Chewbacca and R2D2. For *Star Wars* buffs there's even the return of Han Solo's iconic spaceship the Millennium Falcon.

The film's antagonist — its Darth Vader — is Kylo Ren, played by Vladimir Putin... sorry, Adam Driver.

With this character lies the one interesting twist in the narrative but it's only "interesting" relative to the rest of the plot. We're not talking Roman Polanski and *Chinatown* here.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the film is not the battle of good versus evil it portrays but the fact that Harrison Ford was reportedly paid 76 times more than British newcomer Daisy Ridley to star in it. The 73-year-old's financial package comprised an upfront fee in the region of US\$20 million plus 0.5 per cent of the film's gross earnings, projected to reach a whopping US\$1.8 billion.

It is proof that the story of the US is not good versus evil or light versus darkness at all. It is the story of the super rich versus everybody else. ●



Leon Bibb, center-stage in Montgomery, Alabama, at the conclusion of the Selma march, singing with Peter, Paul & Mary, Belafonte, and Joan Baez. See "Music Notes" at right for more.

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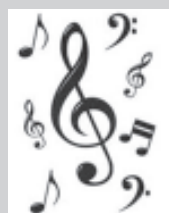
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## MUSIC NOTES

By Wally Brooker

### Musicians unite to save Bristol Bay

In 2010, activists in Alaska invited folk musician and grassroots organizer Si Kahn to help them in their struggle to stop the Pebble Mine. The tailings from this gold and copper extraction project would endanger the fisheries of Bristol Bay, source of 50% of all wild fish caught in North America, including most of the world's sockeye salmon. The Pebble Mine consortium wants to build the world's largest open-pit mine next to the headwaters of the rivers where the salmon spawn. To help Alaskans resist the Pebble Mine, Si Kahn has built a unique solidarity organization, Musicians United to Protect Bristol Bay. Hundreds of musicians from Alaska, continental USA, Canada, and Europe have signed on. They publicize the campaign through their websites, social media, and gigs. Some write songs about the issue and perform at campaign-related concerts around Alaska. In December, President Obama banned oil and gas drilling in Bristol Bay, declaring it to be "one of America's greatest natural resources." But the struggle continues. The company is in the courts challenging recent Environmental Protection Agency decisions that favour the mine's opponents. Here's to Musicians United to Protect Bristol Bay. May they carry on the struggle until victory is finally achieved. For more info: [www.musiciansunited.info](http://www.musiciansunited.info).

### Harry Somers opera "Louis Riel"

The Canadian Opera Company has announced that it will produce "Louis Riel", the acclaimed 1967 opera by Canadian composer Harry Somers, as part of its 2016-17 season. Somers (1925-1999) is widely regarded as one of Canada's most influential and innovative composers. He composed "Louis Riel" for Canada's centennial in 1967, with a bilingual libretto by Mavor Moore and Jacques Languirand. "Louis Riel" is based upon the events surrounding the uprisings of the Métis and First Nations peoples in Red River in 1869-70, and in Saskatchewan in 1885. It dramatizes the political trial and execution of Métis leader Louis Riel, who fought to preserve Métis rights and culture, as the West came under the influence of the expanding Canadian state. For generations Riel was characterized as a half-crazed rebel by the Canadian ruling class. By 1967, when Somers composed his opera, attitudes were just starting to change. Today Riel is acknowledged as the founder of Manitoba and the leader of the Métis people of the Canadian prairies. Unfortunately the COC is based in Toronto; few of its productions travel. Let's hope "Louis Riel" will be an exception.

### Catching up with David Rovics

Music journalists love to make lists of their favourite releases at the end of the year, typically selecting their top ten from mainstream artists who have enjoyed the benefit of mass distribution and publicity. In December, radical singer-songwriter David Rovics, who self-manages his recordings and publicity, proposed his own list in his "Songwriter's Notebook" blog. He offers us "2015 in 10 Songs": the "top ten" news events of the year, each one accompanied by a link to a Rovics song composed in response. Terrorism of all stripes, racist and Islamophobic violence, rampaging police, right-wing xenophobes, deranged U.S. presidential candidates, and the international refugee crisis, all receive a sharply-focused response from the hard-working anti-imperialist troubadour. What's wrong with tooting your own horn if it's to show that you've risen to the occasion to pen another collection of politically astute songs in response to the challenging times in which we live? Many of these songs can be found on Rovics' latest CD, which bears the ominous title "1939". To order Rovics albums, subscribe to his newsletter, get tour info, and read his blog, visit [www.davidrovics.com](http://www.davidrovics.com).

### Leon Bibb: 1922-2015

Folksinger, actor, and civil rights activist Leon Bibb died on October 23rd in his adopted city of Vancouver. He was 93. Bibb was born in the segregated city of Louisville, Kentucky in 1922. He moved to New York City in the 1940's, and established himself as a singer and actor, appearing in Broadway musicals and recording albums for the progressive Folkways and Vanguard labels. By the late fifties he'd become a familiar figure in the burgeoning New York folk music scene, along with contemporaries like Harry Belafonte, Pete Seeger, and Odetta. By 1963, he was appearing regularly on national TV shows like *Hootenanny* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. A famous 1965 photo (seen at left) shows him center-stage in Montgomery, Alabama, at the conclusion of the Selma march, singing with Peter, Paul & Mary, Belafonte, and Joan Baez. Bibb moved to Vancouver in 1969, and spent the rest of his life there, producing and performing in stage and TV shows, including *One More Stop on the Freedom Train*, a gospel musical about the Underground Railroad. He also created 'A Step Ahead', an acclaimed anti-racism school program that has been presented throughout Canada for decades. A celebration of Leon Bibb's life was held January 10th at Vancouver's Arts Club Theatre. ●

# Are we part of the Dark Side?

By Johan Boyden, Central Organizer, CPC

Are we part of the Dark Side?

I recently found myself asking that bizarre question while listening to the radio. And no, it wasn't in the context of the new Star Wars movie.

Last month in People's Voice I wrote about the new Prime Minister's "sunny ways" in contrast with his predecessor. On a whim while researching that article, I googled "Harper + Darth Vader" and was surprised to get hundreds of hits, including under image search. But I wasn't listening to that either.

I was listening CBC's Michael Enright interview William Watson.

Maybe you've never heard of William Watson. I hadn't. But he is an esteemed McGill University professor and author of *The Inequality Trap: Fighting Capitalism Instead of Poverty* (University of Toronto, 2015).

Enright seemed to greatly enjoy doing the interview. I couldn't see, but I have no doubt he was wearing a special ultramarine conservative blue bowtie for the occasion.

Together the two Old Boys were having a jolly good time, disseminating more neo-liberal clap trap about how the poor are to blame for their own misery.

At one point Watson offered up this gem of wisdom: "I think it is very fashionable not to defend capitalism and not to appreciate its virtues. Which is kind of funny, because [my] book starts with a discussion of the 'End of History' with the fall of the Berlin Wall and capitalism had won, it had vanquished everything, [...] and in the 25 years since, well, the Dark Forces have made a comeback against capitalism."

Well, we may be from the Dark Forces. But apparently we've made a comeback. We are even "fashionable." Tell me more, Professor, this is getting interesting.

Watson isn't, of course, very interested in that story. It would involve talking about how capitalism has acquired even more blood and dirt on its hands in the last ten years, the detritus of smashed civilizations, bomb-blasted cities, life-crushing poverty, ecological disasters, famine and cyclical crisis.

Build a monument to the Victims of Capitalism since this "end of history," where every brick is a fatality, and you might as well build a stairway to the Moon.

The juggernaut of exploitation, oppression and misery will always, as Marx so aptly put, create its gravedigger. The Dark Forces, at Watson so inaptly put it, will return.

To be sure, the professor is not in the least outraged about social inequality – in fact, the opposite. Social inequality, he admits, is one of the burning questions of our time. But, he says, it is also misconception and a trap.

A misconception because inequality is greatly over-rated as a social problem. And a trap, because instead of focusing on the poor, we blame the rich. Most importantly, "obsession with it may cause poor and non-poor alike to doubt capitalism," he says in his book.

"[I]t can hardly be healthy if millions of people believe the economic and social system they live under is fundamentally unfair," he writes, adding: "The strength and bitterness of the criticism of capitalism emerging not just from the Occupy Movement but across the political spectrum suggests many people may well begin to look for

alternative ways of organizing society, especially if, as some economists forecast, slower economic growth becomes the twenty-first-century norm."

For example, Watson has a beef with the current Pope who likes to talk about the poor. Maybe Watson agrees with the Fox news commentators who say that "all the Pope needs is a dog with a bandana and he could be on Occupy Wall Street."

Look closer at what Watson is saying, however, and you will see a problem that has the entire capitalist class very looking serious: slower economic growth is here to stay.

No doubt Barack Obama was being somewhat rhetorical when he told a meeting of US banking CEOs at the start of the economic crisis that his administration was "the only thing between you and the pitchforks."

But on the sidelines of last year's Davos conference, an economic advisor quietly let slip that a number of his billionaire clientele from the "one percent" are buying up "boltholes with private airstrips" – mansions tucked away in places like New Zealand's Southern Alps, in case of mass civil unrest.

The professor, despite his class loyalties, probably does not have funds for a secret villa on Lake Hawea, accessible by helicopter. His main effort is to argue-away the problem of inequality. Economic fairness and unfairness, he says, are just part of the natural social order – like good or bad cholesterol!

But in so doing, Watson unabashedly confesses, he largely justifies "the position of the winners."

So – who really is part of the Dark Side? And yes, the pitchforks will reach your office window, professor. ●

## Sanctions on Iran to be lifted...

continued from page 9

Israel and Saudi Arabia in respect of the JCPOA agreement and their strong opposition to it, and the tension-building actions of Saudi Arabia in recent weeks in the region, in addition to recent developments in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Syria, are all strong indications confirming this view.

Third, as we pointed out previously, contrary to the claims of Hassan Rouhani and others, the implementation phase of the JCPOA will not coincide with the lifting of all the sanctions at once. The agreement reached is actually about "gradual lifting of sanctions" parallel to Iran's execution of plans in line with the demands of the US and the EU. Today it has become clear that the representatives of the theocratic regime of Iran took part in the negotiations from a weak position, and according to the agreements reached they have to obtain the positive endorsement of the US and other parties to the agreement with regards to their good intention in the next 10 to 15 years (according to the official documents of the negotiations), because according to the agreed terms, if the US is not satisfied with the performance of the IRI it can immediately restore or snap back the "financial" sanctions. In addition, if it is assessed that Iran has violated the terms of the JCPOA, the UN sanctions can be re-imposed without requiring a fresh vote in the Security Council.

As we have stated previously, we are pleased that the leaders of Iran's theocratic regime, under the pressure

of public opinion and in response to the dangerous situation that was created as a result of the continuation of the reckless policies of the Supreme Leader and its installed government and which was threatening the survival of their rule, were forced to change their damaging and tension-building policies. We congratulate our people – who have suffered the most in the past ten years from those policies – on the occasion of the cessation of the main elements of the financial and economic sanctions and the easing of international pressure on our country. We hope that by strengthening the people's pressure [on the government] and the raising of effective challenge to the economic policies that Hassan Rouhani has planned in line with the implementation of the JCPOA to satisfy imperialist bodies, the way for more positive and significant developments can be paved.

Clearly, the regime's leaders will try to politically exploit the implementation of the JCPOA and the lifting of sanctions to bolster their social base and to overcome the current political crisis in the country. Amongst the consequences of and areas of attention in the implementation of the JCPOA is the regime's hope to build political stability and to take control over the process and the outcomes of the forthcoming parliamentary elections and the elections of the Assembly of Experts in line with the directions and demands of the Supreme Leader, and to secure the "maximum" votes of the people and even of the "opponents of the regime" in these election spectacles, in which ... only 30 of

the 3000 reformist candidates have not been disqualified.

From the point of view of the theocratic regime in Iran, the post-JCPOA era (from the economic perspective) is assessed as the turning point in the attempt to alleviate the social-political crisis and to ease the harsh economic challenges and other problems such as the escalation of joblessness and poverty and the destitution of the people, the society being driven towards social implosion, and a turning point in the efforts of the government to achieve an "accelerating economic growth". Obviously the macro-economic policies of the theocratic regime of Iran, which are the same neoliberal policies prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank, cannot resolve the problems of the ailing economy of our country.

While welcoming the implementation of the JCPOA and the ending of some of the devastating financial and economic sanctions imposed on our nation, the Tudeh Party of Iran believes that it is only through the common struggle of all the freedom-loving forces and those seeking genuine reforms that the road to fundamental and significant change and development in Iran can be paved and the country saved from the current economic-political crisis. The battle against the deeply despotic and anti-people governance practices of the theocratic regime of Iran and the rejection of it as the dominant governance structure in the political regime of Iran is the first step in this difficult and tortuous struggle.

Central Committee of the Tudeh Part of Iran, Jan. 17, 2016 ●

# What's Left

Vancouver, BC

**The Struggle for the Land:** Café Rebelde forum on land reclamation, food sovereignty and state repression, Sat., Jan. 30, 6 pm, Grandview Calvary Church, 1803 E. 1st Ave.

**Women's Memorial March,** to honour murdered & missing indigenous women, Sunday, Feb. 14, 12 noon, from Carnegie Centre, Main & Hastings.

**Left Film Night,** Sunday, Feb. 28, 7 pm, at the CSE, 706 Clark Drive. "5 Broken Cameras," documentary on Palestinian protests against Israeli occupation. Info: 604-255-2041.

Hamilton, ON

**Stand Up For Steel,** USW rally to defend steel industry jobs and pensions, Sat., Jan. 30, 1:00 pm at Hamilton City Hall.

Toronto, ON

**The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution,** documentary for the Feb. 10-14 Black Film Festival and Black History Month, Friday, Feb. 11, 9 pm, Carlton Cinema

**Jose Marti Dinner & Dance,** Sat., Feb. 13, 7 pm, delicious Cuban meal and the music of Pablo Terry and Sol de Cuba, 1604 Bloor West (Dundas West TTC), tickets \$45 at door, child \$15, cash bar, raffle, door prize. Contact CCFA-Toronto, 647-501-1219, www.ccfatoronto.ca.

**Annual Norman Bethune Day,** Sat., Feb. 27, 7 pm, GCDO Hall, 290 Danforth (Chester TTC), admission \$5 includes dinner and cultural program. Speaker Kimball Cariou, editor of People's Voice. Door prize: trip for two to Cuba. For details and tickets, ph. 416-469-2446.

## People's Voice deadlines

February 15-29 issue: Thursday, Feb. 4

March 1-15 issue: Thursday, Feb. 18

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

## REDS ON THE WEB

[www.comunist-party.ca](http://www.comunist-party.ca)

[www.peoplesvoice.ca](http://www.peoplesvoice.ca)

[www.ycl-ljc.ca](http://www.ycl-ljc.ca)

[rebelyouth-magazine.blogspot.com](http://rebelyouth-magazine.blogspot.com)

<http://solidnet.org>

## GRACE TICKSON

It was standing room only at Nanaimo's Coast Bastion Inn on Jan. 23, as over 250 comrades, trade unionists, community activists, friends, dance partners and family members gathered to celebrate the life of Grace Tickson, who died on Nov. 2 at the age of 92. The astonishing range of speakers and performers reflected the impact Grace had on the community which she called home for over sixty years. Born in Victoria in 1923, Grace married Walter Tickson during WW2 while he was in the military, and after the war they moved around Vancouver Island with their son Raymond, going where Walter found work as a logger. They eventually settled down in the Nanaimo/Wellington area, a hot spot for militant labour activists and left-wingers. Grace was a Labour Progressive Party candidate in the 1953 BC provincial election, one of 25 communists on the ballot in that famous campaign, and she remained a proud party member through good and difficult times to the end of her life. Grace never yielded an inch on her socialist ideals, and was often sharply critical of social democracy. But she invariably found ways to build friendships with everyone in the area around struggles for the interests of working people. She worked for the provincial government for 24 years, and was instrumental in organizing and bargaining for her component of the BC Government and Service Employees Union (BCGEU). She was also active in the UFAWU auxiliary, after Walter moved to the fishing industry. Through the years, Grace was active in many other movements, from the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom to the Raging Grannies and the BC Peace Council, always putting a high priority on the issues of world peace, international solidarity, and the environment. For decades, she was involved in nearly every picket line, protest rally and progressive event in the mid-Island area. After Walter died in 1986, Grace met a new partner, Marvin Brown, with whom she travelled widely, and she discovered dancing as "the cure for everything." After Marvin passed away, she later met Terry Lorenz, a fisherman friend of Walter; they kept the dance floor hot at the MGM restaurant in Nanaimo, and never dropped their commitments to social justice, peace and a better world. With her zest for life and youthful outlook, Grace was a beloved comrade of many young activists in Nanaimo, several of whom spoke about her influence on their political development. Speakers included local NDP MLA Leonard Krog, Kimball Cariou for the Communist Party's Central Executive Committee, BCGEU leaders, and many local grassroots activists, musicians and friends. She will be deeply missed by all whose lives she touched.

**Save the planet:  
defeat imperialism**

## Military's "carbon bootprints" contribute to the climate crisis

*Excerpts from the executive summary of "Demilitarization for Deep Decarbonization: Reducing Militarism and Military Expenditures to Invest in the UN Green Climate Fund and to Create Low-Carbon Economies and Resilient Communities," a draft working paper by Tamara Lorincz, Senior Researcher, International Peace Bureau, September 2014. To read the full paper, visit the Bureau's website, at <http://ipb.org>*

Not only have carbon emissions increased for the past ten years, so too have military expenditures to a record high. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimated that global military spending was \$839 billion in 2001 and rose to \$1.6 trillion in 2011 – a 92% increase.

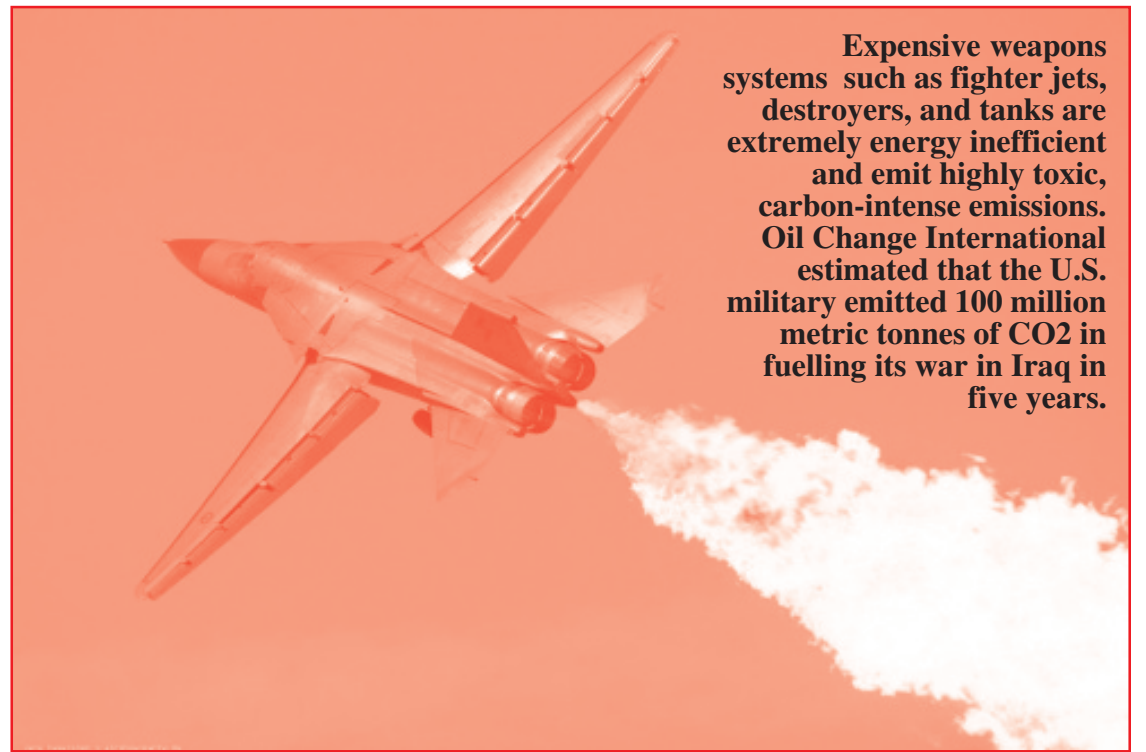
The U.S. and its allies have spent trillions of dollars financing their deadly and destructive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These wars have had terrible social, economic and environmental costs and have made global warming much worse. Expensive weapons systems such as fighter jets, destroyers, and tanks are extremely energy inefficient and emit highly toxic, carbon-intense emissions. Oil Change International estimated that the U.S. military emitted 100 million metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in fuelling its war in Iraq in five years.

The U.S. Department of Defense is the largest industrial consumer of fossil fuels in the world. It is also the top arms exporter and military spender at

\$640 billion, which accounts for 37% of the total. Other western countries that are top military spenders like the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, have high carbon emissions per capita.

Military expenditures are depriving the international community of the funds desperately needed to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Over the past two decades, the developed countries have provided a paltry \$12.5 billion for the Global Environmental Facility, one of the first funding mechanisms under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate (UNFCCC). In ten years, the Adaptation Fund has only disbursed \$150 million to help developing countries, which are the most vulnerable and least responsible for climate change. In 2009 at the UNFCCC 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) in Copenhagen, developed countries made a commitment to raise \$100 billion annually by 2020 for the Green Climate Fund to finance the national adaptation plans for developing countries. This is less than 1% of global annual military expenditures. Yet, wealthy, industrialized countries have failed to make adequate pledges to pay their climate debt.

The report shows the different pathways that countries can take to reach net zero emissions with a mixed renewable energy system. However, the IPCC and the DDPP failed to include the fuel consumption and carbon emissions for the military in their calculations and analysis. According to the UNFCCC reporting guidelines,



**Expensive weapons systems such as fighter jets, destroyers, and tanks are extremely energy inefficient and emit highly toxic, carbon-intense emissions. Oil Change International estimated that the U.S. military emitted 100 million metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in fuelling its war in Iraq in five years.**

most of the military sector's fuel consumption and emissions are excluded from national greenhouse gas inventories.

While the military's domestic fuel use is reported, international marine and aviation bunker fuels used on naval vessels and fighter aircraft outside national borders are not included in a country's fuel and GHG total. The exemption of the military sector in calculations and reporting is because of the intense lobbying by the United States during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations in the mid-1990s. Since then, the military's carbon "bootprint" has been ignored. There is no mention of the military sector's emissions in the fifth and latest IPCC assessment report. Without complete and transparent information about the emissions and impacts in the military sector, it will not be possible to develop and implement the mitigation and adaptation strategies needed to stabilize the climate. Though, the IPCC and DDPP have argued for decarbonization that supports sustainable development, they overlook one of the most carbon-intensive and environmentally-destructive sectors.

The problem of military expenditures and emissions must be confronted not only by the IPCC and the DDPP, but the entire

international community. We need to answer some basic questions: Why is spending for the military prioritized over spending on the climate and the environment? How much of the global carbon budget, if any amount, should be allocated to the military? And should the limited supply of fossil fuels be burned to build new weapons, drop bigger bombs, and fight more wars?

The International Peace Bureau argues that war must stop for global warming to slow down. Military expenditures must be reduced and re-directed for climate finance to create low carbon economies and climate-resilient communities. Disarmament must take place alongside mitigation and adaptation. The military is the problem, not the solution to the climate crisis.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**1. Disarm and demilitarize for climate justice and sustainable development.**

In 2004, a UN Group of Governmental Experts released a report, The Relationship between Disarmament and Development in the Current International Context, and advocated for the mainstreaming of the disarmament-development relationship. Thus, an integrated parallel process of disarmament and demilitarization must be pursued alongside climate mitigation and adaptation and the post-2015 development agenda.

**2. Reduce and re-direct military spending to climate finance and research, development, demonstration and deployment (RDD&D).**

The International Energy Agency (IEA) calculated that the total additional investment needs for mitigation for the period 2010-2050 are US \$45 trillion. The IEA also estimated that funding for climate RDD&D requires a two to five fold increase to \$40-90 billion annually. Combined, this is approximately \$1 trillion a year for mitigation and research for the next forty years and roughly equivalent to annual military expenditures.

**3. Mitigate and adapt to prevent the drastic impacts of climate change in the Arctic, stop its industrialization and militarization.**

Countries, such as Russia, the United States, and Canada have plans for increased natural resource development and shipping in the Arctic. These countries are also modernizing their navies for the Arctic environment. Yet to protect this fragile ecosystem and stay within the carbon budget, oil and gas should stay under the ice. The region should be demilitarized, declared a nuclear-weapons free zone and a zone of peace.

**4. Convert defence industries into civilian, green industries to create a low-carbon economy.**

The UN Group of Governmental Experts' 2004 report, recommended that conversion should be encouraged for disarmament and development. To tackle the climate crisis, a conversion plan would help lay the foundation for building a green economy. A University of Massachusetts report found that more jobs could be created with \$1 billion in government expenditures in health care, education, and construction than in the military.

**5. Abolish nuclear weapons and avoid nuclear energy.**

Due to the inherent link with nuclear weapons, nuclear power as a pathway to a low-carbon future should be avoided by the DDPP. Nuclear power risks cost-overruns and accidents. In its report, Nuclear Weapons Cost Study, Global Zero estimated that world spending to date on nuclear weapons exceeded one trillion dollars per decade and predicted that another trillion dollars will be spent over the next decade as countries modernize their arsenals.

**6. Integrate cooperation, peace-building and nonviolence for climate-resilient communities.**

Cooperation is necessary to stay within the carbon budget in an equitable and just way. The UNFCCC has established the cooperative architecture of diplomacy and the rule of law to peacefully resolve climate conflict. At the local level, peacebuilding and nonviolent conflict resolution help to ensure climate resiliency in communities. Climate change must not be securitized as a threat multiplier that requires a robust military response. ●

**The U.S. is the center of a huge global empire, with 1,000 bases in 130 countries, and 6,000 military facilities in the U.S. When carbon emissions are counted, those bases around the world, aircraft carriers, overflights, NATO operations, are excluded from any calculation. The US military consumes the equivalent of about a million barrels of oil per day.**

- From a Real News Network interview with Prof. Barry Sanders, author of *The Green Zone: the Environmental Costs of Militarism*, and Sara Flounders, author of *War Without Victory*.

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