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See page 2

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C-23: stealing the next election?

Harper Tories gear up to trash electoral rights

- see page 6 -

Bangladesh garment workers: still fighting for compensation and union rights

- pages 7 & 8 -



At a rally, relatives hold pictures of workers killed in last year's Rana Plaza disaster.

3

Big Brother again

It's happened many times in Canadian history, and it's going on again... the RCMP and CSIS are illegally spying on critics of the energy industry's drive for expanded bitumen exports.

INSIDE

5

Is your mail safe?

Canada Post denies any problem, but the epidemic of superbox thefts raises huge questions about ending urban door-to-door delivery.

12

Ukraine unrest

It's a familiar pattern...Ukraine is the latest country to face a coordinated Western "colour revolution" campaign to fan violent chaos and overthrow an elected government.

Sharp divisions over new First Nations Education Act

PV Vancouver Bureau

The Harper government has finally unveiled the next version of its First Nation Education Act, renamed to give a veneer of "consultation." But the "First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act" has met with a negative response from Indigenous grassroots activists.

The legislation was announced on Feb. 7 by PM Harper during a surprise visit to the Kainai Nation (Blood tribe) High School near Calgary. A large group of First Nations and corporate leaders were in attendance, but word had leaked out about the event. A peaceful rally was held outside the school, and Harper's news conference was briefly interrupted by one protester. Shannon Houle said not all First Nations were consulted on the agreement and it did not have their support.

In a statement issued the day before, Idle No More members of the Blood Tribe condemned the process leading up to the announcement, regardless of the content of what the Prime Minister may promise to First Nations regarding education.

The statement went on to say, "There was no prior information provided to the First Nation Peoples across Canada and given the track record of the Harper government there is no reason to believe or trust that Prime Minister Harper has the best interests of First Nations in mind. We also condemn the collaboration with the federal government by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) through National Chief Shawn Atleo and the AFN Executive Committee who are undermining the collective Inherent, Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of the First Nations and organizations who also oppose the proposed federal First Nations Education Act."

Grassroots activist Twyla Singer stated "Information regarding the Prime Minister's visit to our local high school was leaked to our community members the same day the Prime Minister's

announcement, press conference and photo opportunity were being confirmed to the national media. Our community members have not been given any advance information about the federal government's plans for the Proposed First Nations Education Act (FNEA). Our people have been



Idle No More activist Shannon Houle, who interrupted Harper's Feb. 7 news conference.

left in the dark and left to guess what the details of this announcement will be."

The protesters said that First Nations are concerned about "how the FNEA will impact our Treaty relationship and the promises made under Treaty to respect our control over educating our children. There has been consistent opposition to the FNEA across the country for various reasons, primarily the unilateral imposition of federal legislation ignoring the inherent rights of First Nations to exercise control and jurisdiction over education and the blatant disregard for the Treaty nation to nation relationship. The FNEA is the latest proposed Bill in a suite of unilateral federal Bills amending the Indian Act to assimilate First Nations into the Canadian mainstream while denying First Nations Inherent, Aboriginal and Treaty Rights. The track record of the Harper government leaves no choice but for grassroots peoples to stand up and say 'NO' to the FNEA and other legislation, agreements and policies' that

undermine our sovereignty and right to self-determination."

"Our people are opposed to the whole approach taken by the Federal Government to make this announcement. Any type of decision that affects our future, our children's future and our Treaty needs to be done openly for our

people to be able to provide meaningful input into. No more back room deals without the people knowing" said Rachel Crow Spreading Wings.

The statement concluded, "We want to remind Prime Minister Harper and the First Nation Chiefs that any approach to First Nations education should be based upon the international standard of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, Articles 3 and 14 among others of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the requirement to include First Nations Peoples in any reforms of education policy or law from the ground up, not the top down."

Meanwhile, educators at a reserve near Maniwaki, Quebec, have also warned that the prime minister's new plan to recognize First Nations control over schooling may have the opposite effect.

The Anishinabeg people have been managing their own education for more than 30 years on the Kitigan Zibi reserve, said director of education Anita Tenasco.

"First Nations have the authority and the jurisdiction to control our education. We have a lot of very important work to do and we're ready to do it," she said.

Tenasco said she was "saddened" that the Assembly of First Nations stood by Stephen Harper as he made his announcement.

Harper promised a funding commitment of \$1.9 billion, which includes \$1.25 billion over three years for aboriginal schools across Canada beginning in 2016, an amount that he pledged would increase by 4.5 per cent each year. He also announced \$500 million for new infrastructure on reserves over seven years starting in 2015, and \$160 million for an implementation fund starting in 2015. It remains unclear to what extent these numbers will address the historic underfunding of First Nations students and schools.

The plan also requires that teachers on reserves acquire provincial certification, calls for minimum education standards and allows for the establishment of First Nation education authorities that will act like school boards.

"We do not need any provincial school board or any outside

organization or agency to tell us what needs to be done for our youth, for our children and our community," Tenasco said.

The education program on the Kitigan Zibi reserve currently interweaves language and culture into core courses, like English and math, said teacher Lynn Whiteduck. Making sure the community continues to develop its own education program is "vital," she told the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. "If we're going to serve the students that are in our classroom we have to do it on our terms and that can't be dictated from an external source," she said.

Prominent Mik'maq activist Pamela Palmater was scathing in her response to Harper's announcement.

Presenting a long list of Tory scandals, Palmater says, "I wouldn't want them anywhere near my children or making decisions on their behalf. These people are scary and not the kind of role models we want for our children...If you were a First Nation whose band members had suffered through the rapes, torture, medical experimentation and abuse that occurred in residential schools, would you want the Canadian government running your schools again? If you were a First Nation and the Conservative government was telling you that your choice was status quo underfunded schools, or extra funding under the condition of federal legislative control, would you feel safe sending your kids to those schools? If you were a First Nation

and Harper was standing beside you in a headdress saying "Trust me" - would you?

"The last thing we need is for a federal party, who acts without accountability or any moral compass going anywhere near our kids. We are already suffering the inter-generational impacts of residential schools—we don't need to hurt our future generations too.

"Say No to FNEA. Stay away from our children. Recognize First Nation control over their own education systems; and properly fund these systems. We have treaty rights and internationally protected rights to fully-funded education. It's time Canada lived up to its obligations."

APT National News reports that the Feb. 7 announcement came as a result of negotiations between the AFN and senior federal officials in the PMO, PCO and Aboriginal Affairs.

The government argues that the bill establishes a stable, statutory education funding stream for transition and long-term infrastructure investment. The bill would also create a "Joint Council of Education Professionals" to advise Ottawa and First Nations on the implementation of the proposed bill. First Nations will also be able to incorporate language and cultural programming into their education systems under the new statutory funding stream.

"I do join in marking the beginning of a new way forward to mark the beginning of a new way of life," said AFN National Chief Atleo. "We can do this in our time." ●

Raise the Minimum Wage Now!

PV Ontario Bureau

Protests across Ontario will be the order of the day February 15th as thousands of activists tell Premier Kathleen Wynne that an \$11/hour minimum wage is not an acceptable living wage.

The Liberal Premier promised a year ago to raise the minimum wage, claiming she wanted to be known as "the social justice Premier".

But \$11 is not an increase, it's just adding in four years of lost purchasing power due to inflation. Today's \$11 has the same purchasing power as \$10.25 in 2010. By indexing the minimum wage at its current impoverished level, Wynne is embedding an impoverished minimum wage for the long-term. No wonder minimum wage workers and activists are mobilizing against the "social injustice Premier".

A mass campaign involving youth, labour, the anti-poverty and social justice movements, and the Young Communist League and Communist Party, has come together to fight for a \$14/hour minimum, a demand that has widespread public support. Many of those involved say \$14 is not enough to bring minimum wage workers out of deep poverty, but they are committed to the fight that this campaign has ignited.

The campaign has no supporters in the Legislature, with the Liberals and Tories opposed, and the NDP non-committal. Only the Communist Party supports the demand for \$14, and campaigned in the last election for a \$19 minimum wage.

"Corporations in Ontario are sitting on a pool of dead capital worth \$750 billion, which is the largesse handed over by Liberal and Tory governments through corporate tax cuts and corporate tax rates that are now the lowest in the industrialized world. That money could have and should have been used to raise wages and living standards and create good jobs for young workers, the working poor and the unemployed," said Liz Rowley, leader of the Communist Party (Ontario). "Substantially raising the minimum wage raises the floor under all wages. Together with job creation in manufacturing, industry, construction, and public services - the real economy - this is the single most important factor in moving the economy towards recovery for working people."

But driving down wages and living standards is exactly what austerity is about, and what corporations are demanding the Liberals, Tories, and NDP deliver. A cacophony of opposition by business organizations large and small has opened up, with the assertion that business and the economy will collapse under the weight of any increase in the minimum wage. It's the same song by business every time the minimum wage comes up.

With a minority government in Ontario, and an election just weeks away, this is the time to push the minimum wage onto the public agenda. Continuing mass protests and escalating action will help set the stage for an election that debates the real, bread and butter issues: more jobs, better wages, and better living standards. ●

MAY DAY 2014 GREETING ADS

To mark May Day 2014, People's Voice will print greetings from a wide range of labour and people's organizations in our May 1-15 issue, which will be distributed at events across Canada. The deadline for camera-ready ads will be April 18; if PV is preparing the layout, the deadline is April 16. Please check with us about the format if your ad is being sent electronically.

Ad rates (based on 5 column page):

One column-inch.....	\$15
One column x 2 inches.....	\$25
One column x 3 inches.....	\$35
Two columns x 2 inches.....	\$45
Two columns x 3 inches.....	\$60
Two columns x 4 inches.....	\$75
Two columns x 5 inches.....	\$90
Three columns x 4 inches.....	\$110
Two columns x 7 inches.....	\$130
Three columns x 7 inches.....	\$180

Send greetings to People's Voice at:
706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, V5L 3J1
E-mail: pvoice@telus.net

RCMP and CSIS spying on pipeline critics

PV Vancouver Bureau

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) has filed complaints against the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the RCMP, alleging that the agencies illegally spied on community groups and First Nations opposed to the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline project. These groups include ForestEthics Advocacy, Dogwood Initiative, LeadNow.ca, the Idle No More movement, and others.

The BCCLA alleges that the RCMP and CSIS interfered with the freedoms of expression, assembly and association protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The complaints also claim that the spying activities potentially included illegal searches of private information.

The complaint against CSIS further alleges that the spy agency illegally gathered information on the peaceful and democratic activities of Canadians. The documents released made clear that none of the groups under surveillance posed any threat to the National Energy Board hearings or public safety.

"It's against the law and the constitution for police and spy agencies to spy on the lawful activities of people who are just speaking out and getting involved in their communities," said Josh Paterson, Executive Director of the BCCLA. "This is bigger than an environmental debate-it's a question



of fundamental human rights."

"It's intimidating for people to learn that they're being spied on by their own government," said Ben West, Tar Sands Campaign Director for ForestEthics Advocacy. "Regular people are being made to feel like they are on a list of enemies of the state, just because they are speaking out to protect their community from a threat to their health and safety or trying to do what's right in the era of climate change."

One incident recorded in the intelligence-gathering was a Kelowna, B.C. volunteer meeting co-hosted by the advocacy organization LeadNow.ca and the Dogwood Initiative, a community action group based in Victoria. Jamie Biggar, the Executive Director of LeadNow, said, "Government spies should not be compiling reports about volunteers literally gathered in church basements to hand-paint signs -

and then sharing that information with oil companies. That puts the interests of a handful of corporations ahead of the privacy rights of Canadians."

Will Horter, the Executive Director of the Dogwood Initiative,

added: "We are helping Canadians engage in their communities and in public decision-making processes for Enbridge and other projects. There is something deeply wrong when holding a story-telling workshop attracts heat from spies and police forces. It's democracy, not a national security threat."

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, who attended one of the meetings that was spied upon, stated: "I was shocked and disgusted to learn that the police and the National Energy Board colluded to keep track of First Nations people who are simply speaking out, including those who participate in Idle No More. This is the kind of thing we'd expect to see in a police state, and it's a violation of our freedom of speech and freedom of assembly."

Some of the intelligence gathered appears to have been shared with the National Energy Board, as well as with Enbridge and other oil and energy companies. The complaint against the RCMP alleges that this could compromise the fairness of the Enbridge hearings.

West added: "You can't have a fair hearing when the police secretly gather information about our activities and then provide secret evidence to the National Energy Board and Enbridge, one of the other parties."

The activities of CSIS and the RCMP came to light through an access to information request filed by Matthew Millar of the *Vancouver Observer*. It is unclear whether covert surveillance, wiretaps or other means were used in gathering the intelligence. ●

End Immigration Detention!

From a recent statement by No One Is Illegal

The recent tragic and shameful news of Lucia Vega Jimenez's death while under Canadian Border Services Agency's (CBSA) custody in a migrant detention center has left us all reeling and outraged. Lucia was a 42-year old Mexican migrant who worked in Vancouver as a hotel worker. She was arrested on December 1, 2013 for an unpaid bus ticket and then transferred to immigration authorities, who incarcerated her at a provincial prison pending deportation. On December 20 she hung herself in the bathroom of the Vancouver Airport detention center and eight days later died in hospital, while still under CBSA custody. CBSA kept her death a secret, and to date neither a full coroner's inquest nor an independent investigation has been ordered.

Since September 17, 2013 hundreds of migrant detainees incarcerated at the Centre East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, Ontario have been on strike, including boycotting their detention hearings and hunger-strike (two men were on hunger strike for over sixty days). The detainees are calling for their release and an end to indefinite detention and maximum-security incarceration. Striking migrants have faced reprisals with many deported, locked-up in segregation, moved to other prisons, and denied access to legal counsel.

These stories have brought some attention to migrant detention in Canada, but the reality is that migrant detention is shrouded in secrecy.

Quick facts on migrant detention in Canada

1) Since 2004, there have been 8,838-14,362 migrant detentions per year in Canada.

2) Over the past seven years, the number of detained minors has fluctuated between 196 to 807 children each year. The actual number is higher because children are not officially tracked as detainees; rather, they are classified as "accompanying" their

parents or guardians. Detained parents often have two choices: bring their children into detention or face child apprehension.

3) Migrants are the only population within Canada who can be detained simply on administrative grounds without being charged with a specific criminal offense. Migrant detention is arbitrary and discretionary. CBSA officers have broad powers to detain migrants if they believe - based on mere suspicion - that the person is a flight

overcrowded centers, detainees sleep on the floors. Some are locked up in their cells for over eighteen hours a day. Detainees are handcuffed to and from detention centers, including being chained to hospital beds when requiring medical attention.

7) Canada is one of the only countries to use prisons to incarcerate non-citizens and to mix populations of migrants facing administrative offenses with those facing criminal charges, increasing



risk, a danger to public safety, inadmissible on security grounds, or is not adequately identified. Contrary to popular perception, 94.2% of refugees are detained on grounds other than being an alleged security threat.

4) Detainees are held in either one of three CBSA-run immigration detention centers or in one of over forty provincial prisons, including maximum-security prisons. Over one-third of all migrant detainees are held in provincial prisons.

5) The three immigration detention centers are in Toronto, Laval and Vancouver. The detention center in Laval is actually called the "Centre de prévention de l'immigration" (Immigration Prevention Center).

6) Despite what the Immigration Minister says, detention centers are not "hotel-style" facilities. Detention centers and provincial prisons have barred windows and central locking systems, are surrounded by high-tech razor-wire fences, and detainees have no freedom with limited access to lawyers or visitation. In some

in-custody tension and violence due to different lived experiences.

8) Canada is one of the only "Western" countries to have indefinite detention with no time limit on how long a migrant can be incarcerated. The US and EU countries have a 90-day "presumptive period," meaning that if removal cannot happen within 90 days then detainees must be released. In Canada, some immigration detainees have been held for over seven years.

9) Canada has no institutionalized framework for consistent independent monitoring of detention conditions and making reports on these conditions publicly available. Only the Red Cross has some limited access to immigration detention centers, and in the case of the Vancouver detention center, even lawyers do not have access to visit detainees.

10) According to an independent study, over 75% of detained asylum-seekers are clinically depressed, 65% are clinically anxious, and over 40% suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. ●

Ferry cuts loom despite opposition

Major cutbacks and far hikes are on the way to the British Columbia ferry system, despite public opposition.

Claiming that the province needs to save \$19 million in costs, Transportation Minister Todd Stone has confirmed that sailing schedules will be reduced on 16 routes as of April 1. The government will also eliminate the Monday-Thursday free trips for seniors, jack up fares another 3.5%, and introduce slot machines on some vessels as a "pilot project."

More than 3,700 people participated in consultations, and thousands more sent submissions or were selected for opinion surveys. The majority disagreed

with the cuts on the grounds that ferry service is an essential service to coastal communities, and also opposed the idea of slot machines on ferries.

The service cuts are expected to have a negative impact on many coastal communities, and on the tourism sector.

Meanwhile, the provincial Liberal government is pushing hard for expansion of tanker traffic along the coast. Various liquid natural gas (LNG) and tar sands projects will require a huge increase in the numbers of ships containing these products, multiplying the chances of disastrous spills in environmentally sensitive waters. ●

What could British Columbia do with \$2.4 billion annual revenue by reversing the Liberal tax cuts?

Gordon Campell's tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations cost the B.C. treasury \$2.4 billion every year in lost revenue. We invite you to this forum on how to reverse the cuts and put people and the environment ahead of private profits.

Thursday, Feb. 27, 7:30 pm

**Centre for Socialist Education
706 Clark Drive, Vancouver**

Everyone welcome, refreshments provided.

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EDITORIALS

Support March 1 "Omnibus" rallies

The federal Conservatives increasingly use their entire toolbox in the drive to eliminate any effective opposition. With depressing regularity, Harper & Co. keep debate in Parliament to a minimum, wrap up huge piles of reactionary legislation into "omnibus" bills, and send spies and goons to intimidate citizens. Scientists are ordered to shut up, libraries are burned, veterans get flipped the bird, court rulings are ignored, senators are dumped from caucus... the list of arbitrary, arrogant actions of this government seems endless.

The latest example is Bill C-23, the hilariously mis-named "Fair Elections Act." Pundits and opposition MPs have found dozens of clangers in this dangerous legislation, which escalates the Tory strategy to rig the next election to a whole new level. Frighteningly, the strategy just might work - not least by sending the discouraging signal that no amount of public anger will deter the Harper neo-cons from making Canada a more profitable place for transnational corporations.

We can't let them get away with this deliberate voter suppression tactic, but neither can we afford to wait until an election some time in 2015. March 1 offers the next good chance to build the fightback in the streets across Canada. In cities and towns across the country, grassroots organizers are planning "Omnibus Bump Harper" actions, bringing together a wide range of issues: defense of the environment, solidarity with Indigenous struggles, labour and migrant rights, the attack on Canada Post, unchecked militarism, electoral democracy, and much more. Check out your local event and start inviting friends and allies. Unity can defeat the Tory agenda - the time to build it is today!

A shameful anniversary

This issue appears just before the tenth anniversary of one of the most shameful episodes in Canadian history: the role of our government in the military coup d'état which overthrew Haiti's democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on Feb. 29, 2004.

For a decade, Canadians have been told little about this story. As Haiti solidarity movements point out, there is compelling evidence of Canada's involvement. A year in advance, the Liberal government hosted the Ottawa Initiative on Haiti at the Meech Lake resort near Gatineau, Québec. Canada took an active part in the forced exile to Africa of President Aristide. Soldiers in Joint Task Force 2 were assigned to join local mercenaries and U.S. troops illegally deployed to Port-au-Prince to conduct the coup.

Even the Parliamentary opposition of the time raised this matter. On March 10, 2004, Conservative foreign affairs critic asked in the Commons about what criteria were used to take part in a regime change in Haiti.

The coup was followed by several documented massacres and arbitrary arrests of pro-democracy activists. Haiti's elected government structure was dismantled, and U.S.-appointed regimes, backed financially, militarily and diplomatically by Canada, are accused of serious human rights abuses. A country with no known cases of cholera for the past century, Haiti now has one of the worst cholera epidemics in the world, thanks to the contamination of water sources by UN occupation troops.

The story is a sickening example of Canada's dirty role in the 21st century imperialist subjugation of developing countries. Readers are encouraged to sign the online apology for Canada's role in this ongoing tragedy.

Look for the petition at www.apologytohaiti.ca.



Tim Hudak's Wal-Mart platform

By John Hanrahan,
president of Canadian
Confederation of Unions

Ontarians have differing views on Wal-Mart's business practices and its corporate agenda. And although some may find the store a nice place to visit, very few would choose to work there.

The vast majority of Wal-Mart employees in Canada earn between 10 to 12 dollars an hour. Not much of a salary to raise a family on, and certainly not an income most would prefer to work for.

Tim Hudak, leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, spent time as a Wal-Mart manager before entering provincial politics. It appears from Hudak's economic platform that although he no longer works at a Wal-Mart store, he most certainly intends to run the province like one.

It may look like blue smocks and happy face buttons for everyone in Ontario. If Hudak has his way, the province may be the future low wage capital of Canada.

The Wal-Mart/Tim Hudak labour strategy consists of a vast

majority of people making very low wages and creating huge amounts of wealth for the privileged few. In fact, according to Forbes Magazine, as a result of Wal-Mart's low wage policies in the United States, the corporation's founding Walton family now has more wealth than the bottom 40% of Americans. That's over 126 million people. Even more

correctly dubbed "right to work for less". When one takes an objective look at the economic numbers, "right to work for less" seems to far better describe Hudak's plan. These American polices are designed to weaken labour rights and force downward pressure on incomes and benefits, creating a race to the bottom with respect to wages and workplace rights.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in American states that have these polices, the median yearly household income is a staggering \$6,437 less than the national average, and not surprisingly, people are less likely to have health insurance, while poverty and infant mortality rates are 15% above the national average. These are the kinds of rights in store for Ontario workers under the Wal-Mart economy of the Hudak Conservatives.

The question is, are Ontarians ready to trade their standard of living and future economic security for the completely unproven and unsubstantiated promise of "more jobs"? (Kind of like how Free Trade Agreements and billion dollar tax cuts to corporations during the past few years were supposed to "create jobs" as well.)

I suspect the answer will be a resounding no. •

Other voices...

shocking is that in 2007, this number was "only" 30%.

This creates a situation that's great for a tiny minority at the top, but lousy for workers. And what's the problem with running Ontario by this economic model? You guessed it, most Ontarians are workers.

Hudak proposes so-called "Right to work" polices, a right-wing concept from the United States that his opponents have



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Will your mail be safe in a "superbox"?

By Kimball Cariou

"There is no problem, and if there is a problem, we're fixing it, so don't worry."

That's the argument from Canada Post and the federal Conservative government when it comes to security of the mail delivery system. But the reality is much different.

Canada Post has announced a "restructuring" program to eliminate urban door-to-door mail delivery within the next five years. "Community superboxes" are coming to your neighbourhood, as they already have in rural and many suburban areas.

The public relations campaign to sell this change relies heavily on distorted facts and outright lies. For example, Canada Post's \$500,000 a year CEO Deepak Chopra claims that 66% of Canadians already get our mail at community mailboxes. But the actual figure is just 25%, while 33% get door-to-door, 25% by apartment lobby mail boxes, 12% general delivery and 5% at rural mail boxes (*Thanks to PV reader Joyce Neufeld for those numbers from a 2012 Canada Post report!*)

There are also huge questions

about the government's inflated numbers for economic losses at Canada Post. We'll return to that topic in a future issue. But for now, there are already serious concerns about the cost of leasing or buying tens of thousands of sites for community mailboxes in urban neighbourhoods where land values are sky-high.

Let's look at a related question raising serious concerns in many parts of the country: the insecurity of the "community mailboxes."

Canada Post and Tory politicians dismiss the epidemic of mailbox theft as trivial ("most of your mail doesn't get stolen"), or as a "British Columbia problem."

Yes, that's right, other Canadians shouldn't worry, because mail thefts are more common in B.C. Those of us who live on the west coast are not reassured by this bland explanation, nor do we necessarily believe it to be true.

Here are some facts. Documents obtained by CBC News through a freedom of information request

show that in British Columbia alone, Canada Post has recorded more than 4,800 incidents involving community mailboxes,



ranging from vandalism and arson to mail theft. Those incidents took place in over 130 communities between 2008 and 2013.

A quick Google search on this topic shows that the 4,800 number is almost certainly an understatement. Many community mailbox recipients tell local media and police that their boxes have been hit repeatedly by criminals using everything from crowbars to pick-up trucks. There are even reports that some thieves now appear to have keys, eliminating any need for brute strength.

But even taking the 4,800 attacks as accurate, that represents nearly one out of every four community mailboxes in the province. A map on the CBC website shows the attacks clustered in areas such as the Fraser Valley and along every major highway.

As nearly everyone points out, the relatively flimsy aluminum construction of these boxes makes them an easy target. But instead of replacing lightweight theft magnets with sturdier mailboxes, Canada Post claims to be expanding the use of so-called "bait mail", hoping to catch the crooks in problem areas, such as Surrey.

Canada Post spokeswoman

Anik Losier told CBC that "The bait mail is intended to catch those who are doing criminal activities. We know that when they bring that mail with them, it enables our postal inspectors as well as police to catch them."

Losier couldn't say how many bait-mail operations have been run. A 2010 report from Surrey RCMP noted that a bait mail sting with Canada Post resulted in 39 arrests, but the problem has not gone away.

One Surrey resident told the CBC that his community mailbox has been plagued by "non-stop break-ins" over the past decade, often in broad daylight.

"The doors are left wide open - the two big panel doors - and obviously mail missing. Looks like mail fraud-type people looking for phony IDs."

A new super mailbox with a special anti-pry bar device was installed at that particular site recently, but the break-ins have continued.

The mayor of Belcarra, a

Vancouver suburb, says that thieves are using a screwdriver or crowbar to simply pry open individual mailboxes, attacking the vulnerable lock mechanism. There have been at least 375 reported incidents of mailbox tampering in Belcarra and surrounding municipalities in the past five years. Yet residents are rarely informed when their mail has been compromised, putting their personal information at risk.

Despite these reports, Losier says community mailboxes are "very secure" and that the number of incidents is "still incredibly low." Her advice: "never leave mail overnight, because that's where generally most of these incidents occur."

In other words, don't forget your hike to the superbox every day, and never go on vacation.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers says the theft problems will persist if the company insists on replacing home delivery with super mailboxes in all urban areas.

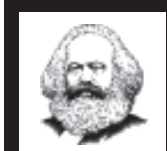
Can readers share experiences from the rest of Canada? Is it true that mailbox crooks prefer to stay west of the Rockies? Let us know! •



This vandalized superbox in the Surrey area was shown in a CTV news story.



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Marxist Theory

Imperialism's shifting strategy in an age of crisis

In this extract from his new book, "Divide And Ruin: The West's Imperial Strategy In An Age Of Crisis", published by Liberation Media, Dan Glazebrook argues that the West's reliance on proxy forces is symptomatic of a deep-rooted crisis.

Things were not looking good for imperialism in 2008. The occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, so loudly trumpeted as "victories" a few years earlier, were suffering increasingly heavy blows at the hands of dogged resistance movements and economic crisis had broken out across the entire Western world.

Huge chunks of the globe appeared to be breaking free from decades of subservience to US and European domination, with popular leftist movements coming to power throughout Latin America and Colonel Gaddafi's vision of an independent and anti-colonial African Union was gaining currency across the continent.

US weakness was underlined by a disastrous attempt to use Georgia as a stalking horse against Russia in a highly symbolic failure of Western military might to impose its will. Everywhere, it seemed, the neocolonial grip of US and Europe was being forced loose.

On an ideological level, imperialism had been exposed as never before. The Iraq war turned what used to be treated as conspiracy theory - the notion that Western governments were prepared to slaughter hundreds of thousands of innocent people in unprovoked acts of aggression to further their imperial interests - into incontrovertible common knowledge.

Meanwhile, the anti-globalisation movement - and even its Establishment counterpart, the Make Poverty History campaign - had alerted the Western public to the reality of debt extortion and the role of international finance in the perpetuation of Third World poverty and hunger. No one could claim to be ignorant of the

mechanisms by which the rich world kept the poor world poor anymore.

Many of us at the time felt that the game was up for the empire. Of course, the US and European ruling class was never going to simply give up its global dominance without a fight and history shows that it is precisely when they are losing power that ruling elites are at their most brutal. But surely, it seemed, their aggression would from now on be exposed and isolated.

The idea that just three years later, leftists, liberals and Muslims the world over would be cheerleading the bombing of yet another Arab country by the very countries that had destroyed Iraq and would be doing so with apparent UN and Arab League support, seemed unthinkable.

The truth is that empire's strategy today is far more insidious than in the days of Bush and Blair. Imperialism no longer swaggers onto the world stage in a cowboy hat declaring its determination to launch "crusades" on behalf of

the "haves and the have mores," to use the memorable phraseology of George W. Bush. Its strategy today is a lot more cunning.

Its new wars are not, in the main, fought by white people in US and European uniform but by bearded jihadi militants, as in Libya and Syria, or black African armies, as in Mali, commanded by an "anti-war" politician of African heritage who came to power by posing as the very antithesis of Bush.

At the same time, imperialism's new wars are sold as responses to crises - the cry that "something must be done" to prevent genocide in Benghazi or Damascus seeming a lot more urgent than Bush and Blair's cack-handed attempts to craft justifications for wars to which everybody knew they were already committed. This move to a reliance on proxy forces rather than imperialist troops, however, is not only an attempt to bewilder and confuse. It is also driven by the reality of military and economic crisis.

The estimated \$3 trillion cost

of the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, the domestic political difficulties resulting from tens of thousands of dead and disabled soldiers, and the inescapable fact of military defeat, mean that direct conquest and occupation is no longer a viable option.

The shift to war by proxy is thus also a sign of vulnerability and weakness. At the same time, economic and military crisis has led to a reduced ambition on the part of the imperial states.

As the late historian Eric Hobsbawm put it when I interviewed him in 2008, "[The US] can still destroy us all but it cannot make the world go its way any more." The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have demonstrated this clearly.

The new governments in both countries, despite being the products of outright conquest by imperialism, often refuse to toe the line of their Western patrons, with Afghan President Hamid Karzai frequently denouncing US

see IMPERIALISM, p. 11

“Unfair” Elections Act: what’s going on?

People’s Voice Commentary

Seventeen long months after promising to clean up Canada’s electoral system, the Harper Conservatives finally tabled their “Fair Elections Act” in the House of Commons on Feb. 4. But despite its name, Bill C-23 was immediately condemned by most observers as an attempt to protect and expand the electoral advantages already held by the Conservatives, without addressing the corrupt activities which tainted the 2011 campaign.

This is not the first time a Conservative government has introduced sweeping undemocratic changes to the electoral system. Back in 1993, the Mulroney Tories amended the Elections Act, just months before being reduced to just two MPs in Parliament. That legislation included little-known draconian measures to “deregister” small political parties, seize their assets, bar them from the ballot, and ban them from spending any funds to oppose the entire process. It took a seven-year political and legal campaign by the Communist Party of Canada to overturn the worst aspects of the legislation.

This time around, Pierre Poilievre, the “minister of state for democratic reform”, told Canadians that the changes in Bill C-23 will “increase democracy.”

Yet this 240-page bill was tabled one day, and debate forced to begin the next day. Next, the government refused to agree to an NDP motion to send the bill to committee study after First Reading, cutting down on any opportunity for amendments. The indications are that the Tories intend to drive C-23 through all three readings in the Commons as soon as possible, with a minimum number of changes.

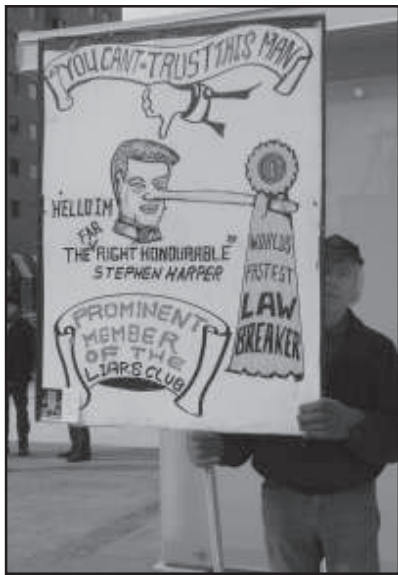
This strategy is consistent with the government’s track record, including their refusal to consult with Elections Canada (EC) prior to introducing C-23. This was hardly surprising, considering that the Harper clique in the PMO can barely control their disdain for the arms-length body responsible for conducting federal elections. For years, the Tories have used U.S.

Republican-style maneuvers to get around or simply ignore Elections Act provisions which cramp their style.

Yet Poilievre brazenly told the House of Commons on Feb. 3 that the government had consulted with Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand. “I did meet with the CEO of Elections Canada some time ago and we had a terrific and a very long meeting, at which I listened carefully to all of his ideas,” Poilievre declared.

(Some will recall Mr. Poilievre as the Tory attack dog after the 2006 federal election, when he savaged critics of the “in and out” expense laundering scheme perpetrated by the Conservatives. That scheme was found to be illegal, yet the “law and order” Harper Tories pretend the opposite to this day.)

Poilievre’s latest lie was immediately exposed by EC



spokesperson John Enright, who pointedly stated that “There’s been no consultation on the contents of the bill.”

Much of the current animosity directed at EC by the Harper Tories goes back to the so-called “robocall” scandal during the 2011 election. The Conservatives were widely accused of dirty tricks in that campaign, most notably engineering thousands of calls from phony “Elections Canada” representatives to tell voters leaning to the opposition parties that their polling places had supposedly been “moved.”

Investigations into that scandal are still dragging on, hampered by Tory foot-dragging. Elections Canada has sought increased powers to deal with similar crimes in future elections. Instead, C-23,

“One might have thought that when the Conservative government finally got around to reforming election law, it would be to try to prevent the kind of voter suppression and electoral fraud Canada saw in the 2011 election. But when they said they would make it harder to break the rules, it seems they were talking about cracking down on homeless voters, not party bagmen.” - Ottawa Citizen

would take away power from the independent, arms-length EC, by moving the Commissioner of Canada Elections office to within the Director of Public Prosecutions, i.e. under the government’s control.

As an *Ottawa Citizen* editorial said, “With another election coming soon, Canadians still don’t know what really happened in 2011 or who was responsible. Mayrand has said that the Commissioner of Canada Elections should have the power to compel testimony; this bill does not create that.”

This editorial actually understands the problem. As the NDP has pointed out, C-23 limits the ability of investigators to force violators to provide testimony; it prevents both the Chief Electoral Officer and possibly the Commissioner of Elections Canada from speaking about possible or suspected fraud; it prohibits the Chief Electoral Office from hiring technical experts or other specialists without the approval of the government; and it does not address the problem of foreign telecommunications service providers hired to get around Canadian laws.

In another Orwellian turn of phrase, Poilievre claims that C-23 “closes loopholes to big money”. Yet the legislation actually does the opposite, by raising campaign spending limits a hefty five percent. The bill also raises the maximum donation limit from individuals to parties, from the current \$1200 up to \$1500. This is a huge benefit to the Tories, who have a wider base of wealthy donors capable of contributing another \$300 annually.

The legislation also changes the definition of “campaign expenses” to give the Tories yet another edge. The costs of calling anyone who donated \$20 or more during the past five years will no longer be

considered a campaign expense. This change gives the Tories wide scope to campaign among their donors, freeing up thousands of dollars from every constituency campaign budget for other forms of spending.

Among the widely reported changes proposed by Bill C-23 are amendments to make it harder to vote. Again following in the footsteps of their Republican mentors, the Tories seek to use every method to suppress voter turnout among “unfriendly” sections of the population.

The bill proposes to “tighten up” voter identification rules and to eliminate the practice of “vouching” for other voters who lack proper I.D. at polling stations. Not coincidentally, those voters largely include First Nations, students and people who live in poverty.

The 2011 campaign saw 120,000 voters register at the polls through this method, and through expanded acceptance of the EC Voter Identification Cards. These are people who do not have standard or up-to-date I.D. documents, or have no fixed address, or who have recently moved, or otherwise don’t meet the requirements of the Elections Act. They are not criminals or fraudsters, just citizens who want to vote. Despite all the right-wing fear-mongering, only a handful of accusations have been made about illegal voting, a pattern similar to the U.S.

And Bill C-23 gets even worse on this point. The legislation actually makes it illegal for Elections Canada to conduct public campaigns urging people to get out and vote. Perhaps uniquely among major capitalist countries,

such activities by the body which conducts elections would become a criminal offense.

This sweeping change even extends to the annual Democracy Week conducted by Elections Canada, and its Student Vote Program (SVP), which will now be an illegal program for the Chief Electoral Officer to run. During the 2011 general election, over 500,000 students across Canada cast mock ballots through SVP, an effort designed to encourage them to vote when they turn 18. (The Conservatives usually do very poorly in this mock student vote, while Communist candidates get a much higher vote than their average in the “real” campaign.)

One NDP Member of Parliament has provided an interesting insight into this aspect of C-23: “Well over a year ago, MPs were briefed by the Chief Electoral Officer that, in the 2015 election, Elections Canada would continue to expand its efforts to enhance voter turn-out by placing polling stations on over 20 university and college campuses across Canada, as well as in or near urban Aboriginal Friendship Centres or similar facilities. I was present with Conservative MPs during this briefing, and I can testify that the faces of several of them went either white or purple upon hearing this news.”

Quoting the *Ottawa Citizen* once again: “One might have thought that when the Conservative government finally got around to reforming election law, it would be to try to prevent the kind of voter suppression and electoral fraud Canada saw in the 2011 election. But when they said they would make it harder to break the rules, it seems they were talking about cracking down on homeless voters, not party bagmen.”

When it comes to electoral procedures, the message from the Harper Conservatives is clear. There is no fundamental human or civil right to cast a ballot in Canada or to encourage others to vote; instead, our laws are rapidly being amended to make such activities grounds for suspicion or even criminal charges. It’s a scary prospect, and it’s taking place right before our eyes. ●

Brampton meeting slams high auto insurance

Special to PV

Brampton residents registered their resistance to the atrocious cost of car insurance by attending a recent public meeting addressed by Elizabeth Rowley, the Ontario Communist leader who is on tour campaigning for a People’s Alternative to capitalist globalization.

Rowley criticized the Ontario Liberal government for failing to reduce auto insurance costs, even though they won the last election on this issue. Both the Liberals and the NDP are hand in glove, allowing the insurance companies’ profit to hit \$4.4 billion last year, and to earn a minimum of 12% on each insurance policy they sell.

Rowley demanded a public insurance policy for Ontario, as in

British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec, where people pay less for auto insurance and get more services. She categorically denied the claims by the companies that Brampton is the region where most fraudulent claims are filed, increasing premiums. If that was the case, she asked, why does the profit margin increase every year for the same companies?

She urged residents to form a coalition to fight against the companies, and urged people to call the offices of MPs, MPPs and city councillors, telling them to take action or face repercussions in the next election.

Rowley explained in detail why the Harper government is attacking Canada Post, following the footsteps of Britain and Germany,

where postal services are being privatized. The next step, she warned, would be more cuts to health and education.

The Communist Party, said Rowley, will resist the Tories, demanding better health services, including optical and dental care to every citizen, better support for education, a better public transit system, and higher minimum wages.

Dr. Chaman Cheema, a professional accountant and NDP member, expressed his anger over the expensive cost of auto insurance, and told his experience of British Columbia where premiums are lower.

Surjit Sahota, Secretary of the Indo-Canadian Workers Association, called upon residents of Brampton and the Greater

Toronto Area (GTA) to resist the greed of the insurance companies, and pledged his organisation’s support.

Prominent media person Anil Kundra urged the South Asian community to show their strength, to make elected Conservative or Liberal MPPs understand the language of people’s pressure. He promised to start an aggressive campaign on radio and in the print media to expose the nexus of insurance companies, orthopedic doctors, therapists and chiropractors, who work hand in hand to get fraudulent claims and make money.

Representatives of various peoples’ organizations agreed to create a larger coalition, and to meet on March 9 to chart out the next course of action. ●



Elizabeth Rowley at Brampton forum on auto insurance rates.

Bangladesh factory owners intimidate workers

The Bangladeshi government should stop garment factory owners from threatening workers for organizing trade unions, and prosecute those responsible for attacks on labour leaders, Human Rights Watch said in this Feb. 4 report, calling on major US and European retailers to ensure that Bangladeshi suppliers respect labour rights.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 47 workers in 21 factories in and around Dhaka. The workers claimed that some managers intimidate and mistreat employees involved in setting up unions, including threatening to kill them. Some union organizers were beaten up, and others said they had lost their jobs or had been forced to resign. Factory owners sometimes used local gangsters to threaten or attack workers outside the workplace, including at their homes, they said.

Bangladesh amended its labour law in July 2013 after widespread criticism following the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, which killed more than 1,100 garment workers. The labour ministry had previously refused to register all but a handful of unions, but the amendments have made it easier for unions to be formed. More than 50 factory-level unions have been established, but since the law still requires union organizers to get the support of 30% of the factory's workers before registering a union, employer threats and intimidation make it a difficult task, especially in factories employing thousands of people.

"The best way to avoid future Rana Plaza-type disasters and end the exploitation of Bangladeshi workers is to encourage the establishment of independent trade unions to monitor and protect workers' rights," said Brad Adams, HRW Asia director. "The government has belatedly begun to register unions, which is an important first step, but it now needs to ensure that factory owners stop persecuting their leaders and actually allow them to function."

There are more than 5,000 garment factories in Bangladesh. The US and European Union (EU) have both linked Bangladesh's continued access to trade preferences to making urgent improvements in labour rights and workplace safety.

The government and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) should ensure compliance with the labour law, and sanction companies which abuse worker rights. In July 2013 Bangladesh ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective bargaining, and is required to protect the rights contained in them.

Section 195 of the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006, amended 2013) outlaws numerous "unfair labour practices." For example, no employer shall, "dismiss, discharge, remove from employment, or threaten to dismiss, discharge, or remove from employment a worker, or injure or threaten to injure him in respect of his employment by reason that the worker is or proposes to become, or seeks to persuade any other person to become, a member or

officer of a trade union."

In Human Rights Watch interviews conducted in Dhaka from October 2013 onwards, many of the interviewees described abusive practices.

One female worker said that when the workers in her factory presented their union registration form to the company owner, he threw it in the dustbin - then

agreed to resign.

Many female workers said they received threats or insults of a sexual nature. For example, workers complained that in one factory a supervisor said that any woman joining the union would be stripped of her clothes and thrown into the street. Elsewhere a manager said that a female union organizer was "polluting" his factory and should go and work in a brothel.

A union organizer in a different factory said he received a phone call telling him not to come to work again and threatening to kill him if he did so. When he went there the next day he was surrounded by a group of men who beat him and slashed him with blades.

extra work so they did not have time to meet colleagues. Others said that factory managers refused to meet them.

Labour activists also complained that some of the unions in factories are not genuinely independent, but are so-called "yellow unions", established by the owners to control workers and prevent them from establishing or joining the union of their choice.

Many of the workers described how labour relations, and working conditions, in their Bangladeshi factories are poor. As a result there have been frequent strikes and protests, some of which turn violent.

Yet factory owners interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they

Most of the workers interviewed by HRW were employed by factories that manufacture garments for export and are supposed to comply with international retailers' codes of conduct. Typically these codes include provisions that protect the right of workers to form unions.

After the Rana Plaza disaster, coming on the heels of the fire at the Tazreen Fashions factory in November 2012 in which at least 118 workers died, both the US and the EU called on the Bangladeshi government and garments industry to improve labour rights. The US and the EU compose Bangladesh's two largest overseas markets for garments.

In June 2013, the US announced the suspension of Bangladesh's trade benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). In order to regain these benefits, the US demanded that Bangladesh improve its monitoring and inspection of factories and increase "fines and other sanctions, including loss of import and export licenses" that fail to comply with labour, fire, or building standards. In July 2013, the EU's European trade commissioner, Karel De Gucht, warned that Bangladesh might lose its duty-free and quota-free access to the EU if it did not improve its record on labour rights and workplace safety. The EU will conduct a review in the summer of 2014.

A legally binding safety accord signed by 125 mainly European retailers after Rana Plaza also called for trade unions, where they exist, to play an important role in ensuring factory safety.

"It is now time for those in the Bangladeshi garment industry to wake up and realize that they are endangering their business if they do not comply with what the US, the EU, and their own government are demanding," Adams said. "But unfortunately, some garment factory owners are continuing their narrow focus of renewed anti-union action based on seeing unions as a threat to their control." ●



Image: <http://listengirlfriends.wordpress.com/2013/12/13/2267/>

threatened the workers, saying he would never allow the union to start. Two of her fellow organizers were later attacked by unknown perpetrators, one with cutting shears. Two weeks later, a group of men, including a local gangster and the owner's brother, visited her home and threatened her. She

Workers at one large factory said they were trying to form their union without the managers finding out, because they were afraid of retaliation and losing their jobs. Other union organizers described being harassed without the use of threats and violence. Some complained that they were given

do not believe that permitting the existence of independent trade unions will improve the situation. One accused union organizers in his factory of fighting among themselves for control of the union; another was afraid that political parties might try to manipulate the unions.

Worker interviews

Identities and factory names withheld to protect workers against possible retaliation

Factory 1, Female worker

One of the main problems I had with the factory was that it was very dirty. One time I even found leeches in the drinking water container, and there was no space to eat so we had to take our lunches and eat in the toilet.

We started to organize the union in July. When we took the registration form to the owner he threw it in the dustbin. He said that he would spend lots of money to stop the union from being formed. He said he would bribe the police and hire thugs. So we felt really scared.

In total there were 14 organizers. Two of them were beaten. One woman was attacked with cutting shears. Then some men came to my house. This was

about 15-20 days after we submitted the forms. There was one mastan [gangster] as well as the owner's brother and some other staff. The mastan said, "if you do not leave your job we will do something serious to you, so take your money, take two months' pay, and go away." I was terrified and so I agreed. I signed the resignation letter and was given the money. Whoever raises their heads suffers the most.

Factory 2, Male worker 1

I was elected the president of my trade union by my colleagues and we started to organize confidentially. But one day the floor supervisor found out. He started to threaten me. He said, "you will be killed by the owners." He then slapped me in the face, insulted me, and said I would lose my job.

We registered our union on

September 29, 2013. We haven't lost our jobs but the workers who are union members are suffering a lot. They have increased the amount of work that all of us have to complete. If we don't finish the work they insult us. This situation forced one of our colleagues to resign.

Factory 2, Male worker 2

In December we invited the management to a meeting but they refused. The production manager said, "the union will not help us so don't try to fight the owner. If you try to fight then we will make sure you won't be able to walk again." Since we have formed the union some of our members have received verbal abuse. Whenever they get the opportunity, they insult us.

Factory 2, Female worker

In the sewing section, when the line supervisor walks up and down,

he says that anyone who is in the union will be stripped naked and kicked into the street. Another one of the supervisors said that the three main organizers of the union will be shot dead, that the owner is planning to hire assassins to shoot us. When we complained about this to the production manager he accused us of doing politics in the factory. He said that whoever does politics will be sacked and now that the union has been formed we are responsible for all the problems of the workers.

Factory 3, Male worker 1

When we were organizing the union, we were treated badly. As well as being threatened, our workload was increased so it was hard to find the time to talk to my colleagues about the union. It was registered in June 2013. Then things became worse. Some local gangsters beat me up and told me not to encourage

see INTERVIEWS, p. 11



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Threats target Kuwait workers

Oil industry workers in Kuwait face fines or imprisonment for allegedly damaging the economy if they carry out a strike action tentatively planned for the week starting Feb. 10. Oil Minister Ali Al-Omar has announced that an emergency plan is ready in case the unions do not suspend or cancel the strike.

Kuwaiti media sources said that the government will not allow any action that may cost the economy to incur nearly \$350 million in losses each day. The government intends to resort to Article No. 14 of Law 1/1993, which stipulates that public employees who commit a mistake that leads to financial losses or affects the interests of the authority where they work will be sentenced to no less than three years imprisonment, or fined a minimum of 3,000 to 20,000 dinars (\$12,000 to \$80,000 Cdn.), or one of the two penalties. The same article applies to "grave mistakes" which harm the State's finances or national interests.

The Kuwait National Petroleum Company and Kuwait Oil Company have made tremendous efforts to outlaw the intended strike by issuing direct warnings to their employees. Several Kuwaiti lawmakers have also criticized the Chair of the Petroleum and Petrochemical Workers Union, Abdulaziz Al-Sharhan, for supporting the proposed strike. Al-Sharhan is accused of "threatening the homeland".

Disabled workers want minimum wage

President Obama's executive order raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour for federal contractors may not apply to thousands of disabled workers who currently make subminimum wages. Some are paid as low as pennies an hour under "14(c) programs."

In a Feb. 4 talk show interview U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez referred to 14(c)-an exemption in the Fair Labor Standards Act that excludes workers with disabilities from minimum-wage protections if they are employed in certified training programs-as "a provision of law that really has worked to the detriment of people with disabilities." Perez said the government is examining the issue.

His statement follows a letter issued by more than 25 civil rights, disability and labour organizations calling on the Obama administration to eliminate the use of subminimum wage for federal contractors. "All employees of federal contractors should mean all employees, regardless of disability status," the letter read. "We believe ... that it is both economically sound and morally just to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the same wage protections as those without."

Some advocates maintain that jobs paying subminimum wages in "sheltered workshops" gives

people with disabilities employment opportunities.

Others, however, argue that several states have phased out the use of sheltered workshops with few ill effects. In 2003, for example, Vermont eliminated such programs altogether. Instead, the state focused on providing training, support and transition services to people with disabilities and their employers. Today, 40 percent of Vermonters with disabilities are employed in "integrated employment" jobs, compared to less than 20 percent of workers with disabilities nationwide.

Advocates say that if the Obama administration were to eliminate 14(c) programs for federal contractors, state and local governments might follow a similar course. In the meantime, groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union are joining the debate. "14(c) workers can and



should do productive work," says Susan Mizner of the ACLU. "They should be paid a living wage, just as every worker should be paid a living wage. This goes to principles of equity and fairness-issues that are at the core of the 14th Amendment and key to all civil rights movements."

Charges dropped in Fiji strike

Unions across the globe, have been gearing up for a fight to defend Fiji's 'Sheraton Six' - hotel union activists threatened with jail for an "illegal strike". The regime had declared that Daniel Urai, the leader of the Fiji Hotel Union and President of the Fiji Trade Union Congress, and five others, had contravened the Essential National Industries decree.

But in early February, Fiji's Director of Public Prosecutions announced the withdrawal of all charges against the Sheraton Six - Daniel Urai, Peni Finau, Sikeli Gavidu, Isei Levula, Merewai Vocevoce and Akariva Nawai. The Fiji police had failed to give any proof that the regime's draconian Essential National Industries decree - allowing them to ban stoppages - had actually been broken.

But the international campaign to restore workers' rights, human rights and democracy to the Pacific island state continues. Unions are urging the International Labour Organisation to set up a Commission of Inquiry into the regime's abuses of trade union rights.

In September 2012 an ILO fact-finding mission was kicked out of the country as they arrived at Fiji's

international airport. A couple of months later, an Australian union delegation was detained and then sent home.

The Fiji Trade Union Congress wants unions from around the world to "continue their much-needed support for campaigns against the violation of our workers".

The latest episode started hours before the 2013 New Year's Eve celebrations, when over 400 Starwood Sheraton Resort workers held a wildcat stoppage to protest management's arbitrary decision to take away working conditions. The stoppage was short and sharp. Management agreed to come back within 14 days and respond to the workers' claims.

After the stoppage was already over, police from the capital, Suva, arrived at the Sheraton resort to declare the workers had taken part in an "illegal strike". The regime's Labour Minister denied he ordered the police to arrest people, but strong rumours suggest the orders came from higher up. Seemingly in retaliation, the police wreaked havoc at the hotel union's office, taking computers, phones and other equipment "for evidence".

The office was running again within days, after the global hotel union, the IUF, provided their Fiji affiliate with funds to replace the equipment now held in a police cell. But the police kept hounding many of the resort workers. It took a massive campaign, including 15,000 email protests from around the world, to make the regime back down.

Fijian trade unions expect their struggle will continue at least until the dictatorship is finally forced out at elections which have been promised late this year.

Compensate Rana Plaza victims

Bangladesh garment worker trade union leaders have threatened to launch countrywide protests if the government does not scale up compensations for Rana Plaza victims in line with ILO standards.

The government-appointed 31-member panel recommended about \$21,000 for each dead victim's family; but under the ILO's 'loss of earnings' standards, which fix compensation based on the age of the victims and national life expectancy, it would come to \$40,000. For survivors, the lowest compensation under the ILO standards is \$5,000, much higher than the \$2100 recommended by the government committee.

"If our demand is not met, we will go for much bigger protests. We know how to realise the demands of the workers," Wajedul Islam Khan, a central leader of Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, said at a rally in Dhaka.

He said the Rana Plaza collapse happened only for the negligence of the building and garment owners and for weak government mechanisms. "Rana Plaza was like a death trap."

Unions say the garment owners are using so-called "civil society" appointees to lower the compensation amount.

"Why was there no representation of trade unions in the committee? It is a matter of the

workers, after all. Why the lower amount all of a sudden? Who put pressure on the committee?" Hamida Hossain, convener of Workers Security Forum, said at the rally.

Amirul Haque Amin, president of the National Garment Workers Federation, demanded the international retailers and the government evenly split whatever compensation is finalised among themselves.

Court rejects company lies

Workers who lost their jobs at Ssangyong Motor in 2009 may be heading back to work after an appeals court ruling that found the mass layoffs invalid. On Feb. 7, a Seoul High Court judge overturned the original verdict in a case filed against Ssangyong by 153 dismissed workers. The court ruled in favour of the plaintiffs, ordering payment of one million won (US\$930) each to 151 of them.

While it did acknowledge that Ssangyong was dealing with a management crisis at the time, the court found that the severity of the crisis had been exaggerated and no urgent need for the layoffs was demonstrated.

In April 2009, Ssangyong notified the union of restructuring plans that would cut 2,646 of its 7,135 staff positions. The reason given was its deteriorating financial performance. Unionists responded by occupying a plant in Pyeongtaek for a long-term strike, which was eventually broken by armed police. The following June, 1,666 of the 2,646 workers left Ssangyong through voluntary resignation, and the other 980 were laid off.

That August, labor and management reached an agreement where 815 of the layoff victims would be put on unpaid leave, allowed to resign voluntarily, or shifted to sales positions, reducing the number of workers dismissed to 165.

In Nov. 2010, 153 of the dismissed workers filed suit against

the company. The Ssangyong chapter of the Korean Metal Workers' Union called the latest ruling "a confirmation of the first step toward future resolution of the Ssangyong issue."

Miners rally against Rio Tinto

The Rio Tinto Global Union Network took to the streets of Cape Town on Feb. 6, supported by hundreds of members from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU). The demonstrators demanded an end to Rio Tinto's bad corporate behaviour at its operations around the world.

The rally culminated outside the Cape Town Convention Centre, where the world's largest congress on mining, the Mining Indaba, was on its last day.

Speakers stressed that while Rio Tinto is generating enormous profits from its operations, workers are struggling with unsafe, precarious work. Calling the situation unacceptable, they demanded that the benefits from the mines should be shared with everyone, and not only used for increasing company profits.

The rally marked the official launch of the Rio Tinto Global Union Network's campaign to increase unionisation at Rio Tinto. But company management flatly refused to meet with representatives of the network to receive a memorandum of demands.

The memorandum demands that Rio Tinto, the Chamber of Mines of South Africa, and the International Council on Mining and Metal, stop interfering in the collective bargaining process and ensure that workers have a right to refuse unsafe work. Rio Tinto also needs to commit to engagement with workers and their trade unions, and to minimize precarious work while maximizing permanent, full-time employment at their operations.

Join the Communist Party of Canada



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

Central Committee CPC

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FMLN wins big lead in El Salvador vote

By Larry Wasslen, San Salvador, 5 February, 2014

The Frente Farabundo Martí por la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) won a significant victory in the first round of the Salvadorian Presidential election on February 2.

Led by Professor Salvador Sanchez Ceren and Oscar Ortiz, the FMLN received 48.92% of the popular vote, well ahead of its main rival Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) at 38.95%, and the right wing coalition UNIDAD, 11.44%.

Two smaller parties also competed in the first round battle, with the Partido Salvadoreño Progresista (PSP) receiving 0.42% and the Partido Fraternidad Patriota Salvadoreña (FPS) 0.26%.

While the Frente won 12 of 13 provinces (departamentos) as well as the capital, it fell short of the critical 50% plus 1 vote needed to win in the first round. The FMLN and ARENA will go head to head for the presidency on March 9, when a simple majority will suffice.

The current "government of change" is headed by Mauricio Funes Cartagena, the former TV host of "Frente a Frente", a hard hitting current affairs program that provided space for critical assessments of the neoliberal politics of ARENA governments. The FMLN supported Funes, who won what was considered the first free election in the history of the country, in the first round in 2009.

The Funes/FMLN government has introduced numerous changes supported by large sections of the working class, peasant farmers, students, women's organizations,

and seniors.

Among the most popular programs was the "school package" which provided school uniforms, shoes and supplies for all elementary and middle school students free of charge. Another program provided all children with a free glass of milk each school day. In addition, there was investment in building new schools and rebuilding or repairing damaged facilities.

One important result of investing in public education was the reduction of illiteracy from 17.9% under ARENA to 12.5% under Funes and FMLN. These changes have been especially important to working class and peasant families. In his roles as both current Vice-President and Minister of Education, Sanchez Ceren was directly involved in implementing these changes.

The government of change has also made significant advances in the health sector. A new investment of \$43 million in a Maternity Hospital is nearing completion and will have a capacity of 401 beds, 154 cribs and 38 examination rooms.

Four other public hospitals damaged in the 2001 earthquake have now been repaired, and \$31 million has been invested in the construction and repairing of 91 public health units, while another 22 are currently under construction.

Another extremely important health care initiative was the completion of numerous Community Teams for Family Health ("Equipos Comunitarios de Salud Familiares", ECOS) throughout the country. These centres provide family medicine and specialist services such as obstetrics, pediatrics, nephrology

as well as pharmacy, laboratory and health education spaces in numerous villages. Vaccination teams go house to house to ensure all children are protected. All these services, including day care, are provided free of charge in the areas where they are located. In addition, ECOS teams make scheduled visits to smaller communities throughout their geographic areas on a weekly basis, to ensure the health services go to where the people actually live.

The Funes administration also introduced an agricultural package aimed at helping peasants improve their standard of living. This package includes fertilizer and improved seeds for beans and corn, which make up the most critical part of the Salvadorian diet. This has effectively increased productivity in the agricultural sector, while reducing the influence of Monsanto in the country. Since the introduction of this program, El Salvador has become self sufficient in these two crops.

The FMLN government has been proactive in addressing the needs of women. The main vehicle for this effort was Ciudad Mujer (Women's City). This organization concentrated access to services of more than 30 institutions in one location to provide immediate access to health services, child care, education, women's shelters, and micro-credit, among many other important services.

It should be noted that the FMLN/Funes government has been enhancing the sovereignty of the people of El Salvador. A symbolic first step was the re-establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations with Cuba, on the first day of the government of change in 2009.



Rally by supporters of FMLN candidate Salvador Sanchez Ceren, who has a big lead heading towards the March 9 vote.

Another important step in the battle for sovereignty is the increasing relations with ALBA. There are now five major ALBA programs in the country including: Alba Alimentos (Alba Food), Alba Becas (Bursaries), Alba Petroleo (Alba Oil), Alba Fertilizantes (Fertilizer), and Alba Financiero (Micro-credit).

Tax reform was another major achievement of the FMLN in its first term. The minimum tax level was increased from \$300 to \$500, to cut taxes on the poorest people. Some loopholes used by corporations to evade taxation have been closed, and tax subsidies for export corporations were eliminated.

The third place UNIDAD presidential candidate, Tony Saca, an owner of numerous radio stations in El Salvador, copied some aspects of the FMLN platform such as Ciudad Mujer. Saca offered bursaries of up to

\$100 to learn English as a way of increasing job skills for young people in El Salvador.

ARENA offered the traditional neoliberal policies of "law and order", balancing the budget by cutting social programs, and opening the country for foreign investment. Their main focus was on militarizing the police to combat the "Maras" or gangs which have been a major problem. Organized crime in El Salvador dates back to the early 1990s, and is directly connected to similar gangs in the United States.

Citizens will have a clear choice on March 9 between ARENA, which wants to return to the neoliberal policies of the past, and the FMLN, which pledges to carry on and deepen the important changes that began under the first Government of Change of Funes/FMLN.

People's Voice will provide in-depth analysis of the electoral battle in upcoming issues. ●

When Pete Seeger came to Kolkata

By B. Prasant, PV correspondent in India

The year was 1961. The Congress Party held authoritarian office in Bengal as in the rest of the country. Nehru was the Prime Minister. The Left remained in disarray; there was one Communist Party, weak, lacking a mass base, and bickering counter-factual arguments the choice between the "China" line and the "Soviet" line in the political-ideological domain.

The one important forum where all of the Left came together was the peace movement. At an invitation of the Peace Forum, Pete Seeger came to Kolkata, staying for two days in the balmy city winter. On both days he mesmerized the big audience at the Park Circus maidan (open, green grounds) with his inimitable renderings of mass songs, and anti-war songs.

I shall never forget the wondrous Seeger voice and the liveness of his fingers as he strummed his trusty banjo. He sang "We Shall Overcome", and the entire gathering joined in, some singing confidently off-key, in English, others belting out the inspiring song in its Bengali and Urdu versions. We thrilled and listened with rapt



Pete Seeger receives a gift during his 1996 visit to Kolkata.

attention. I was 21.

The Congress government made no secret about its displeasure with the programme, and the bourgeois media chimed in, nodding disapproval ("anarchists" was the "in" word with them) in perfect unison. Seeger left, but mass songs and anti-war songs, songs of peace, had found their spring of inspiration.

A much-older Seeger again visited the metropolis in 1996, when the Rabindra Bharati University, known for its strong music departments, classical and modern, conferred on him a degree of D Litt, honoris causa. This time, the singer met a series of Bengali

folk singers and mass singers, and held workshops, picking out amongst the singers the best of the generation. His message was: "Think globally, but sing locally."

In 1996, the then Left Front government invited Pete Seeger on the occasion of the mass song fair, but Seeger politely declined, citing his advancing age. He said memorably and sadly that his fingers were no longer strong enough to do the fast strum. Seeger was represented by his grandson, Tao, who kept the listening crowd of Kolkata spell-bound with his rendition of the grand old man's songs.

Pete Seeger, Kolkata shall miss you. ●

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One week all-inclusive trip
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Organized by Bethune Day Committee.

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

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

Sports Without War exposes "Forces Appreciation Night"

On Jan 31, the independent social organization Sports Without War published a satirical press release designed to expose the hypocrisy inherent in the annual Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) "Forces Appreciation Night."

In the fake press release, "MLSE" announced that they would honour not only Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan but also the thousands of Afghan civilians killed in the conflict. The release acknowledged that while Canadian soldiers get much fanfare for fighting in Afghanistan, they are given very little material support upon their return, as they struggle with physical and emotional trauma from the violent occupation. Finally, the press release suggested that both Canadians and Afghans deserve to enjoy sports and entertainment in peace.

The fake press release was designed to say the things that would more closely reflect the values of most Canadians, including many Afghan-Canadians. Unfortunately, up until now, Forces Appreciation Night has glorified the military mission in Afghanistan, presenting dazzling displays of soldiers rappelling from the rafters with hard rock music pumping, as if the war was uncomplicated and Canada was obviously on the "right" side.

But around 80% of Canadians are opposed to this war, with good reason, and many soldiers themselves come home traumatized and disillusioned from a brutal and disturbing experience.

The people who have participated in the Sports Without War initiative are pretty average Canadians. We are hockey fans; we cheer for the Leafs, the Oilers, sometimes even the Canucks. And we want to know why our hockey teams are promoting a war that



most Canadians, even many in the military, do not want.

This showed in the public's response to the press release. Not only did it generate positive responses from fans of Leafs Nation, but American and British veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq also expressed their support upon seeing the fake press release. This shows that there is an audience - the majority of Canadians - who would support MLSE should they take action to properly represent what the war in Afghanistan has meant for the Afghan and Canadian people.

Canadians have paid \$18 billion for the war in Afghanistan, even while the average hockey fan is paying more for housing, health care, child care and transportation than ever before. On the other side of the ocean, after 12 years of war in Afghanistan, that country is not safer, not wealthier and not more free. In fact, the Canadian mission has made it worse. Some 70% of Afghans live in extreme poverty, several thousand civilians are killed each year, and the situation for women in Afghanistan has actually worsened since the

occupation began in 2001.

Canadians are told that we are helping to "rebuild" Afghanistan. Yet less than 10% of the money spent on this war has been in aid and development, and more than half of that money has gone directly into the hands of Canadian corporations who were granted contracts for this "development."

That leaves only about 5% of the Canadian budget that actually stays in Afghanistan, and that money is typically doled out selectively to allies of the Karzai

dictatorship, who often siphon off a big cut for themselves.

The only people who seem to be benefiting from the war are the white-collar millionaires who sit on the boards of Kilo Goldmines, Lockheed Martin, Canaccord Financial, or SRK Consulting, all firms that are profiting handsomely from the war in Afghanistan.

Perhaps it is no surprise that MLSE, whose board of directors includes some of Canada's biggest corporate bigwigs, are so keen to promote a conflict that is helping their buddies get rich. MLSE board member Dale Lastman, for instance, is also the Chair of Goodman LLP, a law firm whose members testified on the Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another big name on the MLSE board, George Cope, is the CEO of Bell Canada, whose directors have sat on key advisory panels on the war in Afghanistan, and have held cabinet positions in the Harper government.

It starts to feel like we're all being duped. Canadian soldiers are putting their bodies and mental health on the line. Canadian civilians are paying the massive cost of the war. Afghans are being subjected to violence and

destruction and dictatorship. MLSE claims that Forces Appreciation Night supports the men and women who fight for Canada abroad. But the event ignores the facts about the actual war they are fighting, and in creating a celebratory military spectacle, it has actually done a disservice to soldiers and civilians in Canada and Afghanistan.

The majority of Canadians don't support this war, and we want our \$18 billion back, so we can rebuild our schools and our streets and our subways. We want Canadian troops brought home and given peace jobs. We want to give Afghanistan back to the people who live there, and we want to be a country known for our abilities on the ice, not for destroying other people's lives who we don't even know.

If you want to help us get this message out, send us an email at sportswithoutwar@gmail.com and let's talk. ●



Mac-Pap memoir: timely and fascinating

Mac-Pap: Memoir of a Canadian in the Spanish Civil War, by Ronald Liversedge, edited by David Yorke, New Star Books, 2013, ISBN 978-1-55420-071-9. Review by Kimball Cariou

The world is full of unsung working class heroes, those who live, work, fight and die in obscurity. Despite their remarkable achievements, most remain known only to a handful of family members, friends, and comrades.

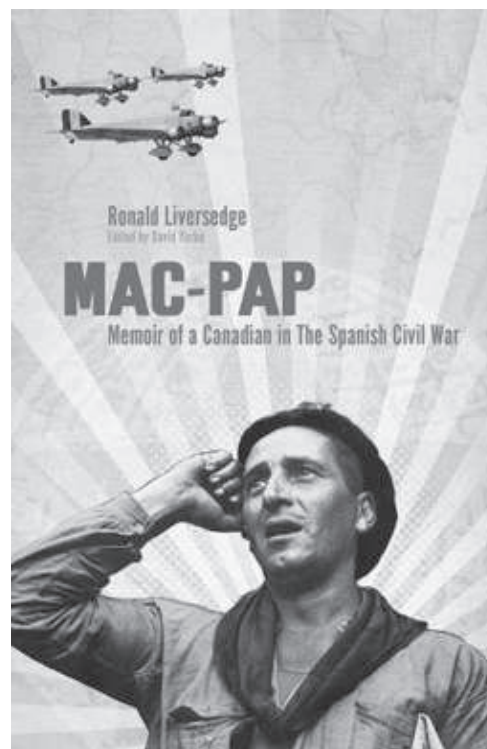
But occasionally, one of these heroes takes a well-deserved moment in the sun. This is the case with Ronald Liversedge, a veteran of two outstanding struggles of the 20th century - the On to Ottawa Trek of 1935, and the Spanish Civil War.

Liversedge died in 1974, thirteen years after the publication of *On to Ottawa*, his memoir of the Relief Camp Workers Union's heroic attempt to bring 1,400 unemployed workers from Vancouver to Ottawa by riding the rails. *On to Ottawa* remains a classic of working class literature, presenting a vivid, engaging picture of a political fight which changed the history of Canada.

Now, we have retired labour activist David Yorke to thank for the appearance of Liversedge's second book, "Mac-Pap: Memoir of a Canadian in the Spanish Civil War," complete with historic photos, an introduction to the author's life, and over forty pages

of invaluable footnotes.

While he was still alive, Ron Liversedge tried and failed to get this book published, reflecting the biases of the publishing industry. The first edition of *On to Ottawa* was printed in the B.C. office of the Communist Party at the Ford building on East Hastings. But for some unknown reason, the Party



considered "too political" by some reviewers, those who are made uncomfortable by the author's proud revolutionary outlook and his willingness to sacrifice his life for the liberation of working people. But *People's Voice* readers will certainly appreciate Liversedge's fierce commitment to democracy, freedom and socialism. During an era filled with scoundrels and traitors, his clear, radical voice is a breath of fresh air.

Amid fascinating descriptions of the "premature anti-fascist war" in Spain, Liversedge also includes many profoundly lyrical passages: "I was not sorry to leave Albacete. My last memory of the place is of peasant men in canvas shoes, shoulders swathed in large black woolen scarves, like a woman's shawl, silently moving through narrow, fog-bound streets."

In today's Canada, the gutless Tory hacks who run the country are spending millions of dollars to "celebrate" the First World War. Ron Liversedge knew better, as a veteran of both the so-called "Great War" and the Great Depression.

His life experience in those tragedies shines through in his writing, and in his decision to go to Spain to defend the young Spanish republic against Franco's fascists, at the age of nearly 40.

This book should be read by every political activist. It is a timely reminder of what we are all fighting for, and of the courage we must find to defeat our 21st century oppressors. ●

declined to print *Mac-Pap* a decade later.

Several copies of Liversedge's manuscript went to his Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion comrades or ended up in various archives. Fortunately, one was given to Yorke, who was finally able to devote his attention to editing and publishing this lost gem.

Mac-Pap is of course

REDS ON THE WEB


www.comunist-party.ca

www.peoplesvoice.ca

www.ycl-ljc.ca

rebelyouth-magazine.blogspot.com

<http://solidnet.org>



La Trova Nuestra

Friday, February 28, 8 pm

"La Peña Nuestra"

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

About Vancouver's "La Trova Nuestra"

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

Imperialism's shifting strategy...

continued from page 5

operations and recently signing a mineral rights deal with China, for example, and the Iraqis refusing to support Western foreign policy on Syria. The puppet master cannot even control his own puppets.

This is the natural result of Empire's declining economic influence. It cannot compete with the very generous terms of trade offered by China and is thus at risk of losing all its contracts in the third world. For Western imperialism, today more than ever, strong independent Third World states are seen as a dangerous threat because all are viewed as potential economic partners of China.

Of course, during the cold war this was also true - every independent third-world state was a potential Soviet ally. But at least anti-communist strongmen could be relied on to pick the US as a partner rather than the USSR. The US could ultimately "outbid" its Soviet rivals for the allegiance of Third World states. This is what has changed. Backing the US and the West is increasingly a game of diminishing returns.

The West realises this, and understanding that any genuinely independent strong state is unlikely to do its bidding any more, prefers to see such states destroyed.

It is only in this context that we can understand the apparently ludicrous policies pursued by the West across the Middle East - the promotion of vicious sectarianism,

the banning of major political parties, barring former officials from work and so on.

These policies are not designed to produce stable and compliant states, as in the past, because the West has realised that in its crisis phase such things are no longer possible. They are designed to produce weak and divided "failed states," which are unable to become regional powers in their own right and unable to become powerful allies of China or anyone else. Thus, the much-criticised "failure to plan" in Iraq was a plan in itself.

There is nothing new of course in the emergence of both these developments - the move to proxy war and the move to destroy, rather than control, potential regional powers. The British empire was largely built by proxy forces and attempts to destroy regional

powers, and prevent their re-emergence, are as old as colonialism itself.

It could even perhaps be argued that it was the existence of the Soviet Union that forced a move away from this strategy as imperialism was forced to support strong states governed by anti-communist generals in order to crush the emergence of popular anti-colonial movements likely to ally with the USSR.

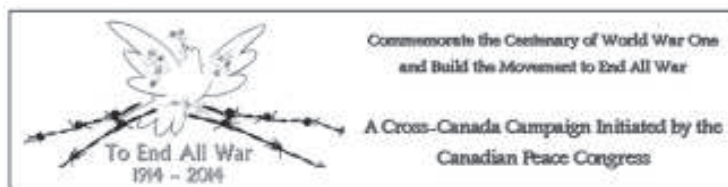
The current strategy could thus be seen as a "reversion to type" after a period of unwilling adjustment to the reality of a serious global challenge, coinciding with a similar "reversion to type" of capitalism itself, falling back into its natural crisis mode after a historically brief period of successfully postponing or exporting the impact of its inherent contradictions. ●

NIAGARA NEWS BULLETIN

People's Voice Niagara Bureau

* Hundreds of CUPE 4156 **public school support workers rallied** at the school board headquarters. The workers are angry at the board for not respecting a memorandum of understanding raising their sick pay to be similar to the percentage other school workers get, going from 2/3 after 11 days to 90%. The union had agreed to concessions such as wage freezes in exchange for parity in sick pay.

* For the first time both the **Conservative and Liberal candidates refused to confirm attendance** to the Ontario Health Coalition's candidate debate for the Niagara Falls byelection. Hospitals in and around the riding have had services cut and moved in favour of a P3 hospital at another end of the peninsula, and now possibly into a new hospital in the riding offered by the government in response to public protests.



Peace Congress to campaign vs. World War One celebrations

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War One, the "war to end all war". We expect the Harper Conservative government and the Canadian military to mark this event by unleashing a full, frontal assault of narrow nationalist, militaristic propaganda.

This will be carefully engineered to try to generate support for recent and ongoing military campaigns - the coup d'etat in Libya, the occupation of Afghanistan, the provocation against the government of Ukraine, the imperialist intervention in Syria - as well as for increased military spending, deeper participation in NATO and other aspects of Harper's aggressive foreign policy.

In contrast to this, the Canadian Peace Congress is initiating a cross-Canada campaign to facilitate of 100-day peace-oriented forum for commemorations of the centenary of WWI.

The "To End All War" campaign has four main objectives:

1. To engage as many peace and progressive organizations as possible, to develop and communicate an effective peace message to the public;
2. To draw parallels between the causes of WWI and the contemporary threats to peace: arms buildup, imperialist expansion and rivalry, military alliances;
3. To conduct outreach in order to organize stronger campaigns for peace in current conditions;
4. To lay the foundation for a broad effort to project a Peace Program for Canada.

The Congress executive is preparing a draft Common Statement, that we will encourage other peace and progressive groups to sign. The plan is to organize "kickoff" activities for the end of July and beginning of August, and build toward a "wrap-up" conference in November that will draw together the themes of WWI with the current threats to peace. Part of the campaign will involve an essay writing contest, for secondary school students, on the theme, "What were the key causes of World War One, and how do they relate to the key threats to peace today?"

Throughout this campaign, the Peace Congress will work to integrate and develop different aspects of its ongoing - No to NATO, Arctic Zone of Peace, Against Foreign Military Bases, and opposition to current imperialist wars and aggressions.

Build the Movement to End All War!

(From *Canadian Peace Bulletin*, the quarterly publication of the Canadian Peace Congress, www.canadianpeacecongress.ca) ●

What's Left

Cross-Canada

Omnibus March Against Harper, Saturday, March 1, events across Canada. For local details, check on Facebook.

Vancouver, BC

Left Film Night, Sunday, Feb. 23, 7 pm, at the CSE, 706 Clark Drive. For film information, call 604-255-2041.

Reverse the Liberal tax cuts, public forum, Thursday, Feb. 27, 7:30 pm, at the CSE, 706 Clark Drive. For info, ph. Vancouver East Club CPC, 604-255-2041.

La Trova Nuestra, evening of Latin American music and socialising, admission \$10, 8 pm, Friday, Feb. 28, at the CSE, 706 Clark Drive.

International Women's Day Dinner, Celebrating Women Making Change, Friday, March 7, 5:15 doors, Fraserview Hall, 8240 Fraser St. Speakers: Sheelah McLean, founding member Idle No More; Janice Makokis, activist Idle No More. Tickets \$45 (low income \$30), contact Keziah at Vancouver & District Labour Council, 604-254-0703

Edmonton, AB

"The socialist press in the age of the internet", forum with PV Editor Kimball Cariou, 2 pm, Sat., Feb. 15, at Hostel International downstairs meeting room, 10647-81 Ave. For info, call 780-435-6795.

Toronto, ON

Norman Bethune Dinner, Sat., Feb. 22, 7 pm, 290 Danforth Ave. Tickets \$5, door prize all-inclusive trip for two to Cuba. Media sponsor: People's Voice. For tickets, call 416-469-2446.

Montreal, QC

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

People's Voice 2014 Fund Drive starts March 1

Our annual Press Fund Drive to raise \$50,000 will kick off on March 1st. Subscribers can watch for our mail appeal, and press clubs should make plans now for fundraisers over the next couple of months. Thanks for your ongoing support, and we look forward to another successful Drive!

Interviews....

continued from page 7

other workers to join the union. Two managers and 10 outsiders were involved. They beat me up in front of the factory and told me to resign from the union or I would be killed.

Factory 3, Male worker 2

On November 14, after work at around 9:30 pm, I received a phone call from an unknown number. The man asked me if my name was correct and then asked if I worked at the factory. Both times I said yes. Then the man accused me of threatening one of the production managers at the factory. I told him no such thing happened. Then he started insulting me and said that it didn't matter if I were a leader, I should not go back to the factory. "If we see you there we will shoot you and make sure you die," he said.

Then on the morning of the 15th, just as I left my house and reached the street corner, I saw some men standing there. They followed me close to the factory. Then one grabbed my neck and slapped me. He said, "last night I told you not to come to the factory." They searched my pockets and stole my money. Then they began to beat me. Then they took blades out of their pockets and started to slash me. I called for help, and the men ran away. I have filed a case with the police and the union is now demanding that the factory sack the general manager and the production manager. ●

People's Voice deadlines

March 1-15 issue: Thursday, Feb. 20

March 16-31 issue: Thursday, March 6

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

Probation for profit

U.S. courts sentence hundreds of thousands of misdemeanor offenders to probation overseen by private companies that charge their fees directly to the probationers. Often, the poorest wind up paying the most in fees over time, in what amounts to a discriminatory penalty. And when they can't pay, companies can and do secure their arrest.

A new report from Human Rights Watch, "Profiting from Probation: America's Offender-Funded Probation Industry", describes how courts in several states delegate tremendous power to companies that are subject to little oversight or regulation. In many cases, the only reason people are put on probation is because they need time to pay off fines and court costs linked to minor crimes.

Probation companies operate on an "offender-funded" basis that is financially appealing to many courts and local governments. They offer to provide probation supervision for low-level, misdemeanor offenders at no cost

to the taxpayer. Instead, their contracts stipulate that judges should order probationers to pay their various fees as a condition of their sentence of probation.

Companies refuse to disclose how much money they collect in fees from offenders under their supervision. It is estimated that, in Georgia alone, the industry collects a minimum of US\$40 million in fees every year from probationers.

Some courts effectively delegate the responsibility of determining whether an offender can afford to pay fines and company fees to their probation companies. This is a clear conflict of interest because profits, along with the quarterly bonuses of some company probation officers, depend entirely on their ability to collect fees.

Many offenders are guilty only of minor traffic violations. While these offenses often carry no real threat of jail time in and of themselves, a probationer who fails to keep up with payments on their fines, court costs, and company fees can be locked up. ●

SodaStream row boosts BDS campaign profile

By Johyn Haylett, Morning Star (UK)

Oxfam's decision to dump Hollywood superstar Scarlett Johansson from her ambassadorial role over her tie-up with SodaStream has brought the boycott, disinvestment, sanctions (BDS) issue centre-stage.

SodaStream is based in the illegal Jewish West Bank settlement of Maale Adumim, which is part of the massive Zionist colonisation project east of Jerusalem, designed to Judaize the city and frustrate the Palestinian goal of siting the capital of an independent state in east Jerusalem.

Oxfam paid polite tribute to Johansson's work in raising funds for the charity, but it was uncompromising over Israel's lawless activities on the occupied West Bank, stating that her promotion of SodaStream was "incompatible" with being an Oxfam ambassador.

"Oxfam believes that businesses such as SodaStream that operate in settlements further the ongoing poverty and denial of rights of the Palestinian communities that we work to support," it said.

SodaStream owner and US citizen Daniel Birnbaum describes his factory as a "model for peace," pointing out that he employs 500 Palestinians, supporting about 5,000 people, who would otherwise be unemployed.

His self-justification could be taken virtually word for word from the apologia spouted by various transnational corporations that gorged themselves on black workers' labour in apartheid South Africa.

Birnbaum's self-righteousness blinds him to the reason why Palestinians on the occupied West Bank suffer unemployment and hardship.

It's the occupation, stupid. Their homeland is under a brutal Israeli military dictatorship and is milked by rapacious capitalists such as himself.

Birnbaum is reputed to have agreed a \$4 million fee to screen a SodaStream advert featuring Johansson during TV coverage of the Super Bowl. But he faced censorship of the ad by Fox TV,

which took exception to Johansson's "Sorry, Coke and Pepsi" line that undermines two major corporate advertisers.

The last thing the Israeli government needs now is a spotlight on growing international

vague" formulas about the fate of Jerusalem.

Even Abbas recognises that Israel has benefited more from the negotiations process than the Palestinian side. He said that Palestinians living inside what is

to apologise or resign.

Economics Minister Naftali Bennett, a member of Jewish Home, had accused Netanyahu of planning to leave some Israeli West Bank settlements under a future Palestinian state. He ranted that "our forefathers and the descendants of our descendants will not forgive an Israeli leader who gives up our land and divides our capital."

Bennett's unapologetic apology consisted of stating that he had never intended to insult Netanyahu but that it was his responsibility to criticise the prime minister "when necessary."

Fellow Bayit Yehudi Knesset member Motti Yogeve went so far as to accuse Kerry of "anti-semitic undertones" for pressing Netanyahu "to decrease the Jewish presence in the land of Israel and create a Palestinian state."

Such strident rhetoric recalls the bluster of South African apartheid president PW Botha or Ian Paisley in Northern Ireland when they failed

to perceive a historical shift in the prevailing wind.

Far from hostile to Israel, Kerry is an ardent supporter, but he fears that, "if talks fail, for Israel, the demographic dynamic will make it impossible to preserve its future as a democratic Jewish state. Today's status quo cannot last forever."

British ambassador Matthew Gould told Israeli TV in January that attitudes were changing in Europe, noting EU insistence on differentiating between Israeli and its West Bank illegal settlements.

"I love Israel and I worry that in another five years Israel will wake up and find that the country won't have enough friends," he warned.

Whether Netanyahu listens to his backers or gambles by going for broke, the SodaStream row has clearly been a publicity disaster for Israel. It should encourage friends of Palestine to intensify the BDS campaign and help secure justice for the Palestinian people. ●

Boycott SodaStream

sodastream is made
in an illegal Israeli settlement.

support for the BDS campaign at a time when its closest allies in the US and the European Union are growing impatient over Tel Aviv's intransigence.

US Secretary of State John Kerry has been involved in a tortuous process of talks about talks in recent months, having put pressure on Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to drop preconditions as a means of persuading Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to participate.

However, there is widespread opposition to his efforts from both sides. Thousands of supporters of left-wing secular forces led by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Palestinian People's Party (PPP) demonstrated in Hebron and Nablus on Jan. 25 urging Abbas to end the talks.

PPP central committee member Fahmi Shahin called on the Palestinian Authority to "immediately stop peace negotiations and reject US sponsorship of these talks."

DFLP political bureau member Ramzi Rabah said that Kerry's meanderings had given Israel more time to expand settlements that were destroying the possibility of an independent Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem.

Palestine Liberation Organisation secretary-general Yasser Abed Rabbo damned proposals emanating from Kerry as Israeli ideas, accusing him of offering Palestinians "general and

now Israel "were on the land 1,500 years before Israel was established," which made it impossible to recognise it as a Jewish state.

Members of Netanyahu's government have also condemned the process, openly attacking their PM and refusing

Ukrainian Communists condemn violence and foreign interference

In an open appeal to international communist, workers' and left parties, the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) warns that their country is the latest to fall victim to the "colour revolutions".

As the Ukrainian Communists say, "shocking massacres, acts of vandalism, riots and seizures of administrative buildings in Ukraine have been shown to the world media." The clashes have included serious injuries and even deaths to protesters and law enforcement officers, as well as kidnappings and physical violence against parties to the conflict.

These events, according to the CPU, have dispelled the myth that the struggle is between a "criminal regime" and "peaceful European democrats."

In reality, they say, there is a fight for power among oligarchic clans in Ukraine, and for the Presidency in particular. Calling

the current events a "coup", the CPU points to the creation of parallel institutions of power by the opposition groups, fuelling the conflict and provoking stronger responses from the authorities.

Little mentioned in the West has been the role of neo-Nazi and extreme nationalist political forces which provoke violence and confrontation.

These organizations, says the CPU, include the *Spilna Sprava* ("Common Cause"), *Trizub* ("Trident"), UNAUNSO, "Right sector", the "Freedom" party, etc.

The "Freedom" party occupies a special role in the escalation of the conflict. As a parliamentary party, in power in some Western regions of the country, "Freedom" continues to pursue "a policy of subversion against the constitutional order in Ukraine."

All of these organizations, warns the CPU, follow the example of Nazi collaborators like Bandera and Shukhevych, even using identical slogans. For example, a popular slogan today, "Glory to Ukraine, Glory to Heroes!", was used during the massacre of peaceful Polish and Ukrainian residents in western Ukraine. The neo-Nazi forces have committed numerous acts of vandalism, destroying statues of Lenin and Soviet-era monuments to the heroes of struggle against fascism.

Fuelling the escalation of the conflict, says the CPU, is the political support of the Western powers in Ukraine. The U.S. State Department constantly demands that the Ukrainian authorities negotiate with the opposition, withdraw all law enforcement officers from Kiev, and allow the "opposition" to seize the government and reverse laws adopted by the Parliament of Ukraine.

Contrary to descriptions in the corporate media, these laws are consistent with similar legislation in the West, such as the requirement

that public organizations financed from abroad must register as foreign agents. Many western countries have implemented laws to prohibit protesters from hiding their faces, or from using helmets and shields during demonstrations.

The Communist Party of Ukraine says it believes that "the responsibility for the violence equally rests on Ukraine's leadership, whose actions forced the people of Ukraine to enter the mass protests, and leaders of the so-called 'opposition', the ultra-nationalist militant organizations and foreign politicians who urged people to 'radicalize the protests' and 'fight to the bitter end.'"

The CPU is calling for an end to the use of force, non-interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine, and negotiations to end the conflict. The attempts to create parallel structures of authority, they say, threaten to escalate the conflict into civil war and a division of Ukraine.

In these circumstances, the Communist Party of Ukraine presents concrete proposals to resolve the situation:

- Declare a Ukrainian referendum on the definition of foreign economic policy of Ukraine's integration.
- Conduct a political reform to eliminate the presidency and install a parliamentary republic, and significantly expand the rights of territorial communities.
- Return to a proportional voting electoral system.
- Establish an independent civilian "National control" body with the broadest powers.
- Conduct judicial reform and introduce the institution of electing judges.

The CPU also urges international condemnation of extremist actions, fascist propaganda, and external interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine. ●

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