

FEB.
15-29,
2016

VOL. 24
#3

\$1.50

people's VOICE

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voice of reason

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Printed in Canada by union labour
on recycled paper  118-M
Publications Mail Agreement #40011632



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U.S. political prisoner for 40 years

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FREE Leonard Peltier



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Big Oil vs. Alberta

To the dismay of the Alberta Federation of Labour and many progressive activists, the province's NDP government has buckled to the energy industry's demand to freeze oil royalties.

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CPC's first woman leader

Liz Rowley has been elected the first woman leader of the Communist Party of Canada, which will hold its 38th Central Convention in May.

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Woody vs. Trump

In a classic case of historical irony, the father of far-right Republican billionaire Donald Trump was the racist landlord of radical singer/songwriter Woody Guthrie.

CLC calls for urgent reforms to Employment Insurance

Canada's largest labour organization says the latest job numbers from Statistics Canada highlight the need for economic stimulus and reforms to the Employment Insurance (EI) program.

The job market was stagnant in January and unemployment rose to 7.2 percent. In Alberta,

unemployment rose to 7.4 percent, the first time it has been above the national average since 1988.

Over the past year, unemployment has risen by 123,000 workers across the country: more than half of these (69,000) are in Alberta. Most job creation has been in Ontario, while other provinces continue to

struggle with slack labour markets.

Self-employment has grown twice as fast (1.3 percent) as employment (0.6 percent). Private sector job growth continues to be weak, adding only 30,000 jobs over the past 12 months, up just 0.3 percent. Two sectors account for most job growth over the last year - health care and social

assistance added 90,000 positions, and professional, scientific, and technical services added 38,000 positions.

"These job numbers and the slow economic growth we're seeing now demonstrate the need for the kind of immediate stimulus that would come from urgently needed fixes to the employment insurance program," said CLC president Hassan Yussuff.

The Liberal government has promised to review and improve the program, but Yussuff says urgently needed reforms can be immediately implemented.

"Fewer than 40 percent of unemployed Canadians - and fewer than 37 percent of unemployed Albertans - are receiving EI," said Yussuff. "Part of the problem is that workers run out of benefits before they can find a new job."

The immediate reforms the CLC hopes to see include:

- Temporarily extending EI benefits for an additional five weeks to help displaced workers who risk exhausting their benefits while hunting for hard-to-find jobs. This would be especially helpful in hardest hit regions where jobs are especially scarce.
- Returning to the previous

definition of "suitable employment" and restoring the "best 14 weeks" pilot programs that created a single national standard for determining benefit levels.

- Eliminating the eligibility requirement of 910 hours of insured employment for new entrants and re-entrants to the labour market to make access to EI fairer, especially for young workers and new Canadians.

- Hiring staff to make up for years of devastating cuts under the Conservatives to help eliminate unacceptable delays faced by workers trying to get benefits approved, decisions on appeals, or questions answered.

- Implementing the election promise for an increase of \$200-million in funding for provincial literacy and essential-skills training aimed at those who don't qualify for EI. While it's not part of EI, it would help where it's needed most.

"It takes time for infrastructure spending to kick in and create jobs, so let's act now to stop penalizing unemployed workers, get them the benefits they paid into and so urgently need, and help them start contributing to their local economies again," said Yussuff. ●

Judge refuses to terminate Covered Bridge Chip workers' union

There have been new developments since the last issue of PV reported about the union struggle at Covered Bridge Potato Chips in New Brunswick.

An application from the company to dismantle the union has been rejected by Court of Queen's Bench Justice Terrence Morrison, but the striking workers have not yet won a collective agreement.

Justice Morrison rejected an application by the owners to overturn a ruling in the union's favour by the New Brunswick Labour and Employment Board. The company had applied to the Board to terminate the union based on 24 "statements of desire" from employees who stated they no longer wanted to be represented by the union.

The Board had stated that Covered Bridge did not persuade it that the statements were "the voluntary will of the bargaining unit employees."

The judge said the Board was correct to ensure the statements were free from any potential taint from the employer.

"The test for determining taint is a very low one: if there is a 'reasonable possibility' of employer influence the application will be dismissed," the judge said. "The Board concluded that the section of the signatures by the applicant was tainted by employee perceptions of employer influence. In my view, the evidence relied upon by the Board, considered in its entirety, was more than sufficient to support the Board's inference of a reasonable possibility of a taint by employer influence."

Thirty-two employees represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1288P went on strike Jan. 5, seeking better wages and seniority rights. The union has called for consumers to boycott Covered Bridge chips during the strike. ●

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Petition demands to end MSP premiums

PV Vancouver Bureau

As of Feb. 9, over 65,400 British Columbians have signed an online petition to scrap one of the most regressive and unfair taxes collected by any provincial government in Canada. Launched in early January by Michelle Coulter, from Ucluelet on the west coast of Vancouver Island, the petition demands the elimination of Medical Service Premiums (MSP).

British Columbia is the last province to collect such flat tax premiums, which vary based on the size of a family. Single persons pay \$75 per month, families of two pay \$136, and a family of three or more pay \$150. Those who earn less than \$30,000 have to apply for assistance to pay a smaller amount. Families who earn \$30,000 annually pay exactly the same amount as families with incomes in the millions of dollars.

The petition was in response to the latest increase in MSP rates, which have jumped a staggering 39% since 2009. The annual premium of \$900 (\$75 per month) is now a tax totalling 3 percent of the income for a single person earning \$30,000, but just 0.3 per cent of a single

person who earns \$300,000.

This regressive tax has been pumped up regularly by the BC Liberal government, starting with a 50% increase in 2002. Since then, the MSP has become a major source of provincial revenue. In the 2014/2015 budget, revenue from MSP premiums was about \$2.27 billion, compared to corporate income tax revenue estimates of \$2.35 billion.

The BC Health Coalition and other critics have long argued against the injustice, complexity and bureaucracy added by this additional tax collection system.

Now, the opposition parties are urging major changes. Both Green Party leader Andrew Weaver and NDP leader John Horgan are calling on Premier Christy Clark to eliminate MSP premiums and follow the system adopted by many other provinces, by financing health care from income taxes.

The premier's initial response to the wave of public anger was to claim that she's trying to find a way to make the collection of MSP premiums "work for everyone," with details expected in the upcoming provincial budget.

But BC Liberal budgets are infamous for finding ways to put the tax burden on low and medium income people, while giving huge

breaks to the corporations and the wealthy.

For example, tax transfers to individuals - programs like the sales tax credit, the early childhood tax benefit, the low income climate action benefit, the seniors home renovation tax credit - cost the BC government \$460 million annually. That compares to \$516 million in tax credits to corporations, according to research from the BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Starvation-level social assistance and disability rates in BC have been frozen since 2007, at \$610 and \$906 per month respectively. There has been no change, even after the bi-partisan committee of MLAs who conducted last year's pre-budget consultations unanimously recommended increases.

The most recent BC budget won kudos for ending the claw-back on child support payments for single parents on welfare, a move which put an estimated \$13 million in the hands of some of the poorest British Columbians. But the same budget gave the richest 2% of British Columbians \$227 million - 17 times more - simply by phasing out the \$150,000 tax bracket. ●

Why the age of retirement matters to youth and all discriminated groups

By Darrell Rankin, Winnipeg

One of the moves by the Harper regime was to phase in a retirement age of 67, up from 65. It did not affect older workers, who vote in higher numbers. But the measure targeted younger workers.

The profit motive is behind moves to increase the retirement age in many OECD countries.

First, companies with huge pension liabilities (auto, steel, etc) don't want to see it repeated, especially now that workers live well past retirement.

Second, it is an effort to squeeze every last ounce of surplus labour from the better-trained portion of the labour force.

Of course, the move decreases the odds of young and discriminated workers getting hired. So once this older generation of workers is 'used up', good luck youngsters!

For the capitalist "a quick succession of unhealthy and short-lived generations will keep the labour market well supplied as a series of vigorous and long-lived generations," as Karl Marx noted

in 1865.

It is also easy to see that a short-lived worker has less chance of understanding the need for socialism. This explains the drive to impose conditions of 19th century capitalism on workers.

There is no doubt that a measure like reducing the retirement age would boost the hiring of young people. Like a shorter work week, it would have the same effect, as would more paid vacations such as for International Women's Day, International Workers' Day and election days, for starters.

It would reduce the agony of all the unemployed, among Aboriginal, women and immigrant workers. In the former socialist countries, women often retired at age 55 and men at 60.

Although equality was entrenched in the USSR's 1977 constitution, the earlier age was affirmative action on the part of socialism to recognize the need to overcome ongoing discrimination against women under socialism, inherited from capitalism.

(In fact, affirmative action was everywhere under socialism. Coal miners retired at age 55, to reduce

and mitigate severe occupational health hazards.)

Only a classless, communist society where all democracy deficits are overcome will have no need for legislated affirmative action.

Recent proposals for pension reforms focus on who pays for public pensions, the CPP and OAS. In the end, workers pay for all public pensions - they are deferred personal or social wages. This is because workers are the only human source of wealth in society.

But should women, the new generation and other discriminated groups continue to get lower CPP benefits because of lengthier gaps in work?

Should the working poor live in everlasting poverty from too-low CPP benefits, on the charity of food banks?

Should workers now have to reduce their wages to pay for higher CPP and OAS benefits, in the form of more wage deductions? No to all the questions! Take the cost from corporate profits! And for discriminated groups, reduce the retirement age and increase their personal CPP benefits! ●

Big Oil wins again in Alberta royalty review

By Kimball Cariou

A wide range of critics have already slammed the Alberta NDP government's decision to accept a review panel's recommendation for a decade-long cap on royalty rates paid by oil and gas companies.

In a scathing commentary in the Tyee (<http://thetyee.ca/News/2016/02/02/Alberta-Royalty-Review-Disaster/>), energy and environment researcher Andrew Nikiforuk calls the move "a capitulation to Big Oil and its financial backers."

Conducted by pro-corporate appointees, the panel claims that the collapse in global oil prices leaves Alberta with no room to increase royalty rates, which paid by the companies to the legal owner (the province, in this case) for the right to develop the resource.

One key reason for last year's defeat of the Tory government of Alberta was its policy of consistently lowering royalty rates to among the lowest in the world, while saving almost nothing for future generations. Working people finally revolted against this blatant fiscal mismanagement, electing the NDP's Rachel Notley in hopes of reversing this trend.

In opposition for decades, the NDP had often been critical of low royalty rates, particularly when the province went through periodic revenue droughts and brutal cuts to public services. During the campaign, Notley had promised

to commission a review of the issue.

Since then, the energy industry and right-wing forces have gone on the offensive, blaming the new government for the province's

fiscal shortfall and claiming that increased royalty rates would destroy the economy. In this situation, the review concluded that the "current share of value Albertans receive from our resources is generally appropriate."

The review calls to maintain current royalty rates for wells drilled before 2017, and to set a generic five per cent rate for all new oil and gas wells drilled after 2017. Nikiforuk calls this "equivalent to grading and selling all cuts of beef as hamburger."

Unless a major public campaign to defeat this approach succeeds, this policy would lower Alberta's royalties by another billion dollars a year, according to Jim Roy, a former senior advisor on royalty policy for Alberta Energy.

Alberta's total royalty revenues from hydrocarbons in the 2015/16 fiscal year were \$2.8 billion, far below the level of \$10 billion or more during the boom years, when oil and gas corporations racked up tens of billions in profits annually.

Many industry observers point out that frozen rates will only encourage more production and investment, and lower oil prices. This seems obvious, since the current prices are linked to massive overproduction by Canadian bitumen producers and U.S. oil shale fracking. Since 1998, tar sands oil production has gone from nearly 800,000 barrels a day to more than 2.3 million barrels, thanks in large part to low royalties and government incentives and subsidies.

But the review was not conducted by independent analysts. Two key panel members work for firms which invest billions in the energy industry: Dave Mowat, president of the Alberta Treasury Branch and Peter Tertzakian, managing director of Arc Financial Corp.

Jim Roy's view is that their plan "appears to be to increase Alberta production at the

maximum possible rate despite low prices... This strategy may help American consumers, but does not help Alberta owners."

The province's most recent royalty review, held in 2007 at a time of high oil prices, actually cost the Alberta treasury more than \$12 billion revenue, according to Roy's analysis, reported in The Tyee last year.

Economist Mark Anielski has reported how the province would have benefited if it had stuck to the royalty regime implemented by Peter Lougheed, the Conservative Premier elected in 1971: "Had Alberta maintained a 30 per cent royalty rate on the share of the value of the oil and gas produced between 1971 to 2014, Albertans would have generated \$471.4 billion in oil and gas royalties. Had 50 per cent of these royalties been invested in the Alberta Heritage Savings and Trust Fund with annual average return of five per cent per annum we would now have an investment account worth over \$481 billion."

At present, the Heritage Fund holds less than \$20 billion.

No wonder that even friends and supporters of the NDP are speaking out. In an interview with the Calgary Sun, Alberta Federation of Labour president Gil McGowan said, "Some people say the NDP have come face to face with reality. I say what happened can best be described as the

government being captured by industry... I honestly think the government has made a profound political mistake. We don't believe progressive governments have to become conservative to deal effectively with economic issues or to succeed politically. That's a fallacy."

To accusations of calling for a "money grab" while the economy is suffering, McGowan responded, "No one on the left or the right in Alberta is suggesting the government engage in a cash grab at this time when prices are near historic lows."

But the AFL president is angry that virtually none of the labour movement's concerns or suggestions are reflected in the royalty report: "Those ideas were passed over in favour of a plan that could have been introduced by a PC or Wildrose government."

McGowan stressed that the AFL had consulted well-known energy economists to "put forward a case for creative, progressive alternatives to the ones put forward by the oil industry and assorted conservative parties. We had high hopes at least some of those progressive alternatives would have found their way into the final report." That did not happen. Now, it remains to be seen whether the Notley government, already besieged by far right critics, can survive after alienating much of its own political base. ●



No slowdown for Big Bank profits

Canada's six biggest banks saw their profits climb higher over the past year, despite concerns that the sluggish economy, a slowdown in consumer borrowing and low interest rates would take a bite out of their books. Combined, the Royal Bank, TD Bank, Scotiabank, the Bank of Montreal, CIBC and National Bank earned \$34.88 billion in net income during fiscal 2015, up almost five per cent from \$33.27 billion in 2014. This works out to \$3.98 million of profits per hour.

In revenue, the banks raked in a combined \$129.79 billion during the past year, up from \$124.72 billion in 2014. Royal Bank's \$10.03 billion in net income for the year marks a new record for Canadian companies.

For the fourth quarter of 2015, the six banks had \$8.61 billion in collective profits, up from \$7.73 billion over the same quarter of 2014. Revenue for the quarter totalled \$32.06 billion, up from \$30.80 billion a year ago. ●

MAY DAY 2016 GREETING ADS

To mark May Day 2016, People's Voice will print greetings from a wide range of labour and people's organizations in our May 1-15 issue, which will be distributed at events across Canada. The deadline for camera-ready ads will be April 22; if PV is preparing the layout, the deadline is April 21. Please check with us about the format if your ad is being sent electronically.

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Alberta NDP refuses to challenge energy interests

By Naomi Rankin, Communist Party-Alberta leader

If anyone in Alberta thought that electing an NDP government was all they needed to do to fix the economy, they had a rude awakening in the royalty review report finally issued by the NDP appointed committee. This is a document that could have been accepted by any Tory government in the last 40 years, or the Socreds before that, making no challenges to illogical economic assumptions that have guaranteed oil and gas corporate profits at our expense – except that the Tories might have felt obliged to engage in more window dressing of the blatant surrender to the big oil and gas operators.

Not only does the report not call for any increase in royalty rates right now, it recommends lowering the rates for all categories of new production into the indefinite future, no matter what the price of oil or gas or the condition of the economy.

Simple capitalist Economics 101 would tell us that it's not a good idea to subsidize increased production when the price of oil and gas is low. Increasing production would just contribute to further downward pressure on prices. Instead, a sensible capitalist government would seize the opportunity to use low-cost oil and gas as inputs to secondary processing and manufacturing, to begin the process of diversifying our economy. A more diverse economy would free us from the boom and bust dependence on one category of commodities, and would incidentally improve the health of democracy in Alberta, even it did no more than increase the diversity of capitalist interests.

If we ignore the enormous carbon footprint of Tar Sands production, some of our potential customers are not so cavalier. Whether or not they care about the environment, oil and gas consuming countries have a vested interest in developing alternate forms of energy, just to improve their balance of payments and the profitability of their domestic economies. They will not only remove themselves as customers, but get a head start in research and development of the new economy. Continuing to rely on oil and gas exports as the only driver of the Alberta economy is short-sighted, even from a corporate point of view.

The best that can be said for Notley and her government is that they are consistent. When they campaigned on a program of continuing to rely on oil and gas exports, it was not just opportunistic rhetoric.

Luckily for working people in Alberta, Gil McGowan, president of the AFL, has come out strongly criticising the report. What is needed now, as much as under any Tory regime, is a campaign for an alternate economic plan of maximizing our share of the value of existing production, green diversification, and improved social spending, that can unite trade unionists, First Nations, environmental activists and even independent business. There's still a possibility of people's power outweighing corporate power. ●

EDITORIALS

The TPP is not a done deal

Every time the transnational corporations and politicians announce plans for a new "trade agreement," the media propaganda machine pumps out a contradictory message: "everyone supports this deal", and also that "resistance is futile." If corporate globalization really has complete public support, why would there be any resistance? And if there is such resistance, shouldn't it be obvious that support is far from unanimous?

Despite the hoopla around the Feb. 4 signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in New Zealand, this 12-nation corporate rights deal is far from a *fait accompli*. Thousands rallied in Auckland outside the ceremony, a signal that huge protests will emerge against the necessary ratification of the TPP in each country. Our view is that massive citizen action can block the TPP, just as the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, the FTAA and other deals have gone down to defeat.

We need to build up opposition in the streets, in the labour movement, on campuses, and through social media. The TPP puts strict limits on regulation of corporate activity, allows Big Pharma to extract huge profits at our expense, permits the sharing of vital personal information across borders, and helps investors win "compensation" when environmental or public health policies interfere with profits. This deal was negotiated behind closed doors, by representatives of the 1%, for the profits of the 1%. Far from "improving the economy", the TPP will give corporations vast new powers to slash jobs, and to force governments to cut business taxes and public spending.

The struggle to prevent Parliament from ratifying the TPP will be the defining issue of the new Liberal government's term in office. Let's put this fight on the agenda for every union local, labour council, and community group across the country. There's no time to lose!

A tale of two monuments

Just after the new federal government announced that it intends to stop throwing taxpayer dollars at the anti-communist megamonument planned by the recently defeated Harper Tories and their fascist buddies, Heritage Canada jumped back into this mess with an online consultation on "Design Considerations for the Memorial to the Victims of Communism – Canada, a Land of Refuge."

In an appalling exercise in appeasing the ultra-right groups which want Canadians to pay for this monstrosity, the Heritage Canada survey asks participants to "identify important visitor experiences of the Memorial," to be built "on a site in downtown Ottawa that is between 200 and 500 square metres."

Not surprisingly, none of the prefabricated survey answers allow respondents to demand that zero square metres of public space be allocated for this neo-fascist project. There is a blank at the end to express personal views, and we urge readers to continue speaking out against the monument. People's Voice will also publicize actions later this year to resist the spread of fascist ideology, such as the annual so-called "Black Ribbon Day", another attempt to rehabilitate the reputations of traitors who sided with Hitler's armies during the Second World War.

We are, however, delighted by the news that Russian activists are requesting permission to install a monument near the US embassy in Moscow "dedicated to the genocide of American Indians." The activists have launched a petition in support of the monument on the change.org website, pointing out that "despite assuming the position of a 'global policeman' the United States still refuses to accept the responsibility for killing over 15 million Native Americans." The petition says the monument would be dedicated to "the memory of American Indians who perished as heroes in the unfair war with treacherous invaders." Look for the petition online!

PEOPLE'S VOICE

ISSN number 1198-8657 Published by New Labour Press Ltd.
Canadian Publications Mail Sales Product Agreement #40011632

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Circulation Dept.,
People's Voice, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1
Tel: 604.255.2041 Email: pvoice@telus.net

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LETTERS

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Leonard Peltier: 40 years a U.S. political prisoner

Statement of Leonard Peltier, February 6, 2016, the 40th anniversary of his arrest in Canada and subsequent imprisonment by the U.S. state

Greetings friends, supporters and all Native Peoples.

What can I say that I have not said before? I guess I can start by saying see you later to all of those who have passed in the last year. We Natives don't like to mention their names. We believe that if we speak their names it disrupts their journey. They may lose their way and their spirits wander forever. If too many call out to them, they will try to come back. But their spirits know we are thinking about them, so all I will say is safe journey and I hope to see you soon.

On February 6th, I will have been imprisoned for 40 years! I'm 71 years old and still in a maximum security penitentiary. At my age, I'm not sure I have much time left.

I have earned about 4-5 years good time that no one seems to want to recognize. It doesn't count, I guess? And when I was indicted the average time served on a life sentence before being given parole was 7 years. So that means I've served nearly 6 life sentences and I should have been released on parole a very long time ago. Then there's mandatory release after serving 30 years. I'm 10 years past that. The government isn't supposed to change the laws to keep you in prison — EXCEPT if you're Leonard Peltier, it seems.

Now, I'm told I'll be kept at USP Coleman I until 2017 when they'll decide if I can go to a medium security facility — or NOT. But, check this out, I have been classified as a medium security prisoner now for at least 15 years, and BOP regulations say elders shall be kept in a less dangerous facility/environment. But NOT if you're Leonard Peltier, I guess.

As you'll remember, the history of my bid for clemency is long. My first app was with Jimmy

Carter. He denied it. Ronald Reagan promised President Mikhail Gorbachev that he would release me if the Soviet Union released a prisoner, but Reagan reneged. George H.W. Bush did nothing. The next app was with Bill Clinton. He left office without taking action even though the Pardon Attorney did an 11-month investigation (it usually takes 9 months) and we were told she had recommended clemency. George W. Bush denied that petition in 2009. And in all of the applications for clemency, the FBI has interfered with an executive order. That's illegal as hell!

Today, I'm facing another dilemma — an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA). It's the size of an AAA battery. The doctor told me if it bursts, I can bleed to death. It's also close to my spine and I could end up paralyzed. The good news is that it's treatable and the operation has a 96-98 percent success rate. BUT I'm in a max security prison. We don't get sent for treatment until it is terminal.

As President Obama completes the final year of his term, I hope that he will continue to fight to fulfill his promises, and further the progress his Administration has made towards working in partnership with First Peoples. It gives me hope that this President has worked hard to affirm the trust relationship with the Tribal Nations. With YOUR encouragement, I believe Obama will have the courage and conviction to commute my sentence and send me home to my family.

Looking back on the 40 years of efforts on my behalf, I am overwhelmed and humbled. I would like to say thank you to all the supporters who have believed in me over the years. Some of you have been supporters since the beginning. You made sure I had books to read and commissary funds to buy what I may need to be as comfortable as one can be in this place. You made donations to the defense committee so we could

continue fighting for my freedom, too. You all worked hard — are still working hard — to spread the word about what is now being called the most outrageous conviction in U.S. history. There are good-hearted people in this world, and you're among them. I'm sorry I cannot keep up with answering all of your letters. But thanks for the love you have shown me. Without it, I could never have made it this long. I'm sure of it.

I believe that my incarceration, the constitutional violations in my case, and the government misconduct in prosecuting my case are issues far more important than just my life or freedom. I feel that each of you who have fought for my freedom have been a part of the greater struggle of Native Peoples — for Treaty rights, sovereignty, and our very survival. If I should be called home, please don't give up on our struggle.

In the Spirit of Crazy Horse...

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Convention plans, leadership changes at Communist Party CC meeting

Special to PV

Big challenges were on the table for the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada, when it met Jan. 30-31 to launch preparations for the party's upcoming 38th Central Convention in Toronto. The centrepiece of the meeting was the Draft Political Resolution for the May 21-23 convention, a document which will be debated by members at club meetings and provincial gatherings over the next three months.

The meeting also discussed ongoing work to increase the party's membership base, and leadership changes.

For the first time since 1992, the Party now has a new central leader. Following the resignation of Miguel Figueroa, the CC elected Liz Rowley to the position. The long-time Ontario leader, Rowley becomes the first woman to lead the CPC (see sidebar article for more details.)

The 22-member CC is the party's leading body between conventions, tasked with guiding the activity of Communists across the country amid a rapidly changing political landscape. This was the CC's first meeting since the historic defeat of the far-right Harper Tories last October. A large part of the agenda was devoted to analysing that election outcome, which the CPC calls a major victory for the working class.

After ten years of a relatively straightforward battle against the

most reactionary sections of the ruling class which backed the Harper Tories, a very different and complex political environment has emerged. In certain respects, says the Resolution, "the objective terrain to win important democratic, economic and political demands has improved with the demise of the Harper government.



This will not be achieved by relying on spontaneous resistance struggles, but rather through a conscious political and organizational effort to invigorate the extra-parliamentary movements, and an ideological struggle to shed illusions about the bourgeois role and character of the capitalist state."

The first in-depth discussion at the CC meeting was around the increasingly dangerous international situation. "As the systemic crisis of capitalism continues to deepen, and the effects of the 2008 economic meltdown continue to be felt, imperialist states and organizations are becoming increasingly aggressive," warns the

opening section of the Resolution. "The standoff between nuclear armed states in Ukraine and the expanding war in Syria are powderkegs that threaten disaster. Millions upon millions of people in all parts of the world are being forced into poverty, hunger, homelessness and displacement. But this is also a moment of rising working class and popular resistance. In all countries, albeit unevenly and with different characteristics, we see increased unity and mobilization. From mass demonstrations to general strikes to online campaigns, people are using many different vehicles to advance these struggles."

The document goes on to provide a detailed overview of the international scene, from the complicated struggles by the working class in Latin America against the return of right-wing, austerity policies, to solidarity with the Palestinian people, opposition to fascist and racist movements in many countries, and much more.

Turning to the domestic situation, the Draft Political Resolution notes that "on the fundamental economic and class issues, the Liberals refuse to consider increased corporate taxes, and they are pushing the TPP and other corporate deals. They have no plans to expand Medicare, pensions and universal social programs, to guarantee labour rights, or to consider nationalization or restoration of privatized public assets. While dropping the former government's hostility to

action around climate change, the Liberals support the energy monopolies' push for tar sands expansion and fossil fuel exports. They aim to establish nation-to-nation relations with First Nations and Metis, but oppose nation-to-nation relations with Quebec. They will not pull out of NATO or reduce military spending, and remain committed to the imperialist concept of 'humanitarian intervention.' In other words, the Liberal pledge to corporate Canada and the transnationals operating in this country is that reforms will be limited to certain social and democratic issues which have sparked major popular mobilizations. The Trudeau government will not interfere with the drive by big capital for maximum profits, and its neo-Keynesian budget proposals will not reverse the basics of austerity."

One of the most in-depth discussions at the CC examined new "democratic socialist" parties and movements, such as Syriza (Greece), Podemos (Spain), the election of Jeremy Corbyn as UK Labour Party leader, and Bernie Sanders; campaign to win the Democratic nomination for US President. These cases, the Resolution says, are a reaction to the rightward shift of traditional social democratic parties, but fail to acknowledge that the history of social democracy is intertwined

with the fatal flaws of anti-communism and class collaboration, which "cannot be rectified by new incarnations of social reformism."

The document also contains a detailed analysis of politics in Quebec, where the labour and student movements have conducted major struggles in recent years, and where the left-wing Quebec Solidaire party now has three seats in the National Assembly.

The CC also considered new strategies to help build stronger popular mobilizations against the corporate agenda. In the months ahead, the Communist Party will be raising a clarion call to stop the TPP, which was signed in New Zealand on Feb. 4 but must still be ratified to take effect. The Communist campaign will include street tables and petitions, support for statements and resolutions at union locals and labour councils, and other creative tactics to raise awareness of this urgent issue.

The Party's Central Organizer, Johan Boyden, presented detailed reports on the CPC's ambitious campaign in the federal election, including the nomination of 26 candidates across the country. One positive outcome, said Boyden, was the formation of a new CPC club in St. John's, Newfoundland, where a Communist was on the ballot for the first time. ●

Excerpts from the Draft Resolution will be printed in upcoming issues of People's Voice. Readers will also be able to read the complete documents online, at www.communist-party.ca.

Communist Party of Canada elects first woman leader

For the first time in the history of the Communist Party of Canada, a woman has been elected as its top leader. Liz Rowley was elected by the CPC's Central Committee, which met in Toronto on the Jan. 30-31 weekend. The long-time Ontario provincial leader, she takes over the federal position following the resignation of Miguel Figueroa, who stepped down due to health reasons after serving in this office for 23 years.

The CC expressed its deepest appreciation to Miguel Figueroa for his many contributions to the work of the Communist Party and the people's movements going back to 1977, when he joined the CPC as a student activist at Dawson College in Montreal. During the years 1978-1985, he was the party's Greater Vancouver organizer. In that capacity, he played an important role in building the annual "End the Arms Race" demonstrations which brought tens of thousands into the streets for nuclear disarmament, and also in strengthening COPE, the broad left-centre municipal reform alliance based on the labour movement, community groups, Communists, NDPers and many other progressives. After that, he served from 1986 to 1992 as Atlantic region Party leader, based in Halifax, where he chaired the Union Organizing Drive Committee which ultimately brought over 800 part-time sessional professors and teaching assistants at Dalhousie University into CUPE. Starting in the late 1980s, he was a key figure in the struggle to prevent an attempt by some of its elected leaders to



Communist Party of Canada leader Liz Rowley.

liquidate the CPC. This successful resistance was followed by the Party's 30th Central Convention in December 1992, which elected Figueroa as leader. Just months later, draconian amendments to the Election Act were adopted by Parliament, effectively banning the Communist Party of Canada and making it nearly impossible for smaller parties to engage in federal elections. Miguel Figueroa was the key public spokesperson for the ten-year campaign to repeal this undemocratic legislation, which was overturned by the Supreme Court's historic 2003 ruling in the case of Figueroa v. Attorney-General of Canada. Over his 23 years as CPC leader, Figueroa led

the Communist Party through eight federal election campaigns, touring and speaking across the country. He was also a prominent figure at the annual International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, representing the CPC at many of these gatherings.

Announcing his resignation, Figueroa told the CC that he intends to remain active in the Party, taking on other assignments and responsibilities. The upcoming 38th Central Convention of the CPC will feature a tribute to Miguel Figueroa as a highlight of the weekend's agenda.

Liz Rowley is well-known across Canada for her many years of activity in the Communist Party

and in a wide range of people's movements. She joined the CPC in the late 1960s, and was the Party's youngest candidate in the 1972 federal election, in the university-based riding of Edmonton Strathcona. She has been a Party organizer and leader in Ontario since 1975, and a member of the CEC since 1978. Living in Hamilton during the 1980s, she was deeply involved in many struggles by the trade union movement to defend jobs, living standards, labour rights, women's equality, social programs and Canadian sovereignty, all of which became the target of a vicious neoliberal assault against working people. Moving to Toronto to work as the Ontario leader of the Party, she became a powerful grassroots spokesperson in the "Days of Action" fightback against brutal cutbacks imposed starting in 1995 by the Mike Harris Tories, and was elected a Public School Trustee in East York. Liz Rowley has been an outspoken

participant in many important battles for the rights and interests of working people in Ontario, around such issues as defence of public education, affordable vehicle insurance, the fight against plant closures, and much more. She has been a prominent spokesperson of the CPC's electoral campaigns, and for the Party's call for a broad People's Coalition to open the door to fundamental progressive change in Canada. Along with Miguel Figueroa, she was instrumental in the membership struggle to block the liquidation of the CPC during the difficult years before its 30th Central Convention.

Over the coming few months, Liz Rowley will be meeting with CPC members across the country, attending provincial Nominating Conventions which will elect delegates to the 38th Central Convention. People's Voice will keep readers informed about upcoming public events where Rowley will speak. ●



Miguel Figueroa at the CPC's 37th Convention. (photo: Ed Bil)

Governments must reject TPP: Steelworkers

www.usw.ca

Last December, Canadian and U.S. leaders of the United Steelworkers (USW), North America's largest industrial union, called on the governments of both countries to reject the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal.

The USW's International Executive Board adopted a formal resolution which forms the basis of a fully engaged TPP rejection campaign in each country.

"The TPP will only continue the failed trade policies of the past that have valued corporate profits, wherever obtained, over the interests of job and opportunity creation here at home. The USW will put every effort into defeating the TPP," the resolution states.

"Our members and all working families in our countries cannot

afford more bad trade policies, flawed enforcement and misplaced priorities from which they have suffered for far too long from previous trade deals," said Ken Neumann, USW National Director for Canada.

"Working people need trade policies that lift wages up, rather than pushing them down. We need trade deals that reduce our trade deficits and promote domestic manufacturing and job creation, rather than more outsourcing and offshoring. We need policies that will reverse the widening gap of income inequality," Neumann said.

The TPP threatens Canadian jobs by facilitating greater offshoring in the auto and manufacturing sectors, in value-added processing of mining and forestry resources, and in the telecommunications sector, Neumann added. "Our governments must reject the TPP and send it back to the negotiating table."

Excerpts from USW International Executive Board Resolution on TPP

The United Steelworkers union (USW) is the largest industrial union in North America representing 1.2 million active and retired members in the United States and Canada with members working in virtually every tradable sector from mining and metals, glass and rubber, paper and forestry, automotive and aerospace products and countless other areas....

For workers in manufacturing and the communities that depend upon their success, the agreement would be particularly devastating because it fails to address some of the most important challenges that have decimated the manufacturing sector in recent years.

Rules of origin for autos and auto parts in the TPP would be particularly devastating to USW members because the standards would further diminish the percent of a car's content, by value, which must come from TPP countries in order to benefit from TPP preferential trade protections: The North American Free Trade Agreement set the standard at 62.5 percent; the US-Australia FTA lowered that to 50 percent; the recent U.S.-Korea FTA cut the

BLOCK the TPP!

Over the coming months, every issue of People's Voice will report on opposition by labour and popular movements to the "Trans Pacific Partnership" (TPP)

standard to 35 percent, and the TPP further slashes it to 45 percent, allowing 55 percent of a car's content, by value, to come from China and still be stamped "Made In America or Canada" and receive TPP benefits.

Negotiators may have worsened this rule of origin problem for USW members who work in the auto parts, glass and other industries by including a provision that would allow auto body parts made of steel or aluminum, and possibly glass and other products, to be considered "domestically" produced with only minimal changes, thus in effect reducing the 45 percent content threshold identified in the text to as low as 30 percent or 35 percent, thereby ensuring that production in this vital sector will continue to be offshored and outsourced.

The TPP would facilitate the export of unprocessed raw materials, particularly from Canada's forestry and mining sectors, because the trade agreement would render it more difficult for governments to implement job

creation strategies to process raw materials domestically...

The TPP fails to utilize the standards embodied in the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions to ensure that workers' rights are implemented across every workplace and subject to effective enforcement. The TPP fails to meet the promise that it would be a "high-standards, 21st Century trade agreement" in the area of workers' rights, representing not only a missed opportunity but also limiting the ability of workers to share in the very prosperity that they will be working so hard to create for multinational firms through their labour.

TPP countries would be required to adopt laws to provide for a minimum wage, but that wage may be only pennies an hour to be acceptable under the TPP. The TPP fails to adequately define basic standards for workers' rights and allows labour standards to be open to continuing redefinition that multinational corporations view as fair and appropriate so that their executives, boards of directors and shareholders can profit at workers' expense... ●



Toronto rally against the TPP

Canadian educators join global call against TPP

Canadian organizations representing 268,000 K-12 as well as post-secondary educators across the country are adding their voices to the global teacher unions' call to their governments to carve out education from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Education International (EI) affiliate organizations in the 12 countries involved - Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States and Vietnam - have written their governments demanding to carve education from the deal. The letter was signed by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which share EI's concerns about the potential impacts of the TPP for the education sector as there is no explicit exclusion of education, which exposes the sector to greater risks of privatization and commercialization and threatens free, public, high-quality education.

Teacher trade unions made a final push to keep education off the table before the wide-reaching trade pact that covers 40 per cent of the global economy was signed Feb. 4, in Auckland, New Zealand.

The CTF is a national alliance of organizations representing nearly 200,000 teachers. The CAUT is the voice of 68,000 academic and general staff at more than 100 colleges and universities across the country. EI represents 400 teacher organisations and unions in 171 countries with more than 32 million members. ●

"TPP and food sovereignty don't mix"

Commentary from the National Farmers' Union

Trade deals like TPP are only superficially about trade – they are ultimately designed to limit the authority of national governments over their own economies and to expand the scope and power of multinational corporations. These deals contain ratchet mechanisms, such as Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), that make it difficult, if not impossible, for countries to roll back concessions and reclaim democratic control in the future. The Canadian government would abdicate much of its jurisdiction over important areas of public policy and put these powers into corporate hands by signing on to the TPP and other trade deals.

Agriculture is always contentious in these negotiations, as many countries believe it is essential to ensure that their own farmers can produce the food to feed their people. Often food carries important cultural values as well. The NFU is a member of La Via Campesina (LVC), the international organization of small farmers. In the early 1990s, LVC stood opposed to World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations around agriculture, called for the exemption of agriculture and food from talks, and proposed instead its new concept "Food Sovereignty" as the proper guiding principle. Today, Food Sovereignty has been embraced around the world, including by the NFU, and we say trade deals and Food Sovereignty don't mix.

Destabilizing Supply Management

Supply Management rests on three pillars: production discipline, import controls and cost-of-production pricing. All three are interlocked, so that weakening one pillar weakens the whole system. In the first five years of the TPP agreement, the TPP countries would gain tariff-free access to 3.25 per cent of Canada's current dairy market, 2.3 per cent for eggs, 2.1 per cent for chicken, two per cent for turkey and 1.5 per cent for broiler hatching eggs. In subsequent years tariff-free access to these markets would increase.

The side letter with Australia says "Canada confirms that Australian dairy products, including those imported under HS Chapter 3504 such as milk protein concentrates, can be utilised in dairy processing in Canada to the fullest extent possible, including in cheesemaking"

The side letter with the United States commits both countries to immediately begin assessing the equivalency of each other's pasteurized fluid milk food safety regulations, with the assessment to be done by the end of 2017.

TPP market concessions add on to those given previously through the WTO, and, if ratified, CETA. Each has chipped away at Canadian farmers' share of our own domestic market by increasing the amount of tariff-free imports allowed.

TPP members USA, New Zealand and Australia have embraced an export-oriented approach to dairy, resulting in extended losses for farmers because the world price is quickly depressed as a result of over-production. Instead of disciplining their producers to match demand, these countries aim to sell more milk by prying open Canada's market. However this will not solve their problem, because selling more at prices that below the cost of production will simply increase the volume of their losses.

The TPP and Bovine Growth Hormone

In the 1990s the National Farmers Union, the Dairy Farmers of Canada, the Council of Canadians and numerous other citizens groups, as well as whistle-blower Health Canada scientists and their union, worked hard to keep the genetically engineered cow growth hormone rBGH (recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone – rBGH, also known as recombinant Bovine Somatotropin – rBST) from being approved for use in Canada's dairy herds.

The Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee held hearings on the issue in 1998; and in 1999, recommended that Canada take a precautionary approach in regulating the drug. Monsanto unsuccessfully appealed the government's decision not to approve the drug, which it sells in the USA under the brand name Posilac.

On October 4, 2015 Canadian negotiators of the Trans-Pacific Partnership opened the back door to rBGH by agreeing to allow bulk imports of fluid milk from the USA. At least 3.25% of the Canadian dairy market would be open to TPP countries, with the USA being the only practical source of fluid milk. The TPP agreement would require at least 85% of this imported milk to be processed in Canada. The American regulatory authority allows rBGH to be used in US dairy herds, and it does not require labelling of milk produced with the use of rBGH. It is highly unlikely processors would segregate imported milk into separate batches and package it with labels that indicate it was from the USA.

The TPP goes against the Canadian people's clear direction — several years of concerted effort and Parliamentary debate determined that the Canadian dairy sector and the public did not need or want to have our milk produced with the use of rBGH. ●

Our position against AJAX

Statement from the Kamloops Club of the Communist Party of Canada (abridged)

The Kamloops Club of the Communist Party of Canada stands in absolute opposition to the AJAX Mine development as proposed by the KGHM mining corporation.

There are many problems with the AJAX proposal. Our greatest concern, which has largely gone unmentioned, lay in the economic model and false assumptions by which the project is being promoted.

Like most colonial exploitation projects, the people who live closest are the ones at greatest risk of harm, while investors who live elsewhere will be in the greatest position to reap the benefits. More specifically, those who are the most financially vulnerable, who cannot easily relocate from the ensuing pollution onslaught, will not have a choice in the matter, while the investor class, upon seeing a slightly greater return-on-investment in another corporation, will absolve themselves of all "responsibility" to the community and move their money elsewhere—all-the-while never having to live anywhere near the AJAX Mine.

Corporations are not people. There is no connection between the KGHM Corporation and the community of Kamloops. KGHM has hired some high profile, somewhat local, figures to put a face on their corporation, but these individuals were obviously not hired for their knowledge of the mining industry—they were hired to ease the discomfort people generally feel about faceless corporations.

KGHM may dissolve one day, or it may live for a thousand years, with CEOs and corporate shills doing their dirty work along the way, but KGHM does not have a conscience or a heart. KGHM is responsible to its shareholders and no one else. No one should expect that KGHM would ever put the needs of Kamloopsians ahead of the need of their investors—this is the sad fact behind corporate governance and its regulatory obligations to shareholders for the maximization of profits. There is no such thing as "good will" or "humanity" when it comes to the bottom line, especially not in the mining industry.

It's true that corporations will throw money around and do much influence-peddling to win over desperate members of the community, or to bolster the accounts of certain influential charities, or even politicians and political campaigns. But these efforts are part of the corporation's efforts to, some day, turn that political capital into profits by way of a project that would otherwise not likely ever gain the support of the local political class. Such peddling might sway fence-sitters to their side, or, it might convince skeptics to stay quiet. Many community members have expressed a desire to "wait-and-see" or simply stay quiet because they have already been co-opted into the KGHM camp via the many donations KGHM has made to their favourite charitable organizations, or, in some cases, the direct assistance they've

provided to "mine friendly" and "development friendly" politicians.

Mining donates more to the BC Liberal Party than any other industry... It's not by chance that the BC Liberal Government has been instrumental in dismantling the social safety net and making it harder and harder for working class British Columbians to survive. Such dire situations create a wonderful opportunity for corporations like KGHM to walk into a community and throw millions around in donations to desperate community groups: buying their silence along the way. The return on such a small investment could ultimately result in the approval of a multi-billion dollar project.

By absolving themselves of their governmental responsibilities the Liberals actively foster the desperation that big corporations need in order to maximize profits on the backs of "desperate" communities. This desperation is easy to hear in the claims of mine proponents who routinely say, "Kamloops needs this mine", or "we need growth", or "we need these types of good-paying jobs", or "we're losing our kids to places with better paying jobs". These

Exposing 90,000 people to toxic dust

KGHM-Ajax Mining Corp (a joint venture of Abacus Mining and Exploration, of Vancouver, and KGHM Polska Miedz, a Polish company) is proposing an open pit copper mine on the southwest edge of Kamloops in central British Columbia. The mine will operate for 23 years, producing 60,000 tonnes of ore per day. The Kamloops Area Preservation Association says this will be "a huge, noisy, dusty open pit operation within 1.4 kilometres of the nearest residences, and 2 kilometres from the nearest elementary school". Within six kilometres are eight elementary schools, four high schools, four senior citizen's residences, Royal Inland Hospital, and Thompson Rivers University. About 90,000 people could be exposed to the toxic dust, containing arsenic, lead, aluminum and much more which will blow over the city. The use of 15 billion litres of water per year will create haze and fog. The mine would have a devastating impact on local ranchers, some of whom have lived here for generations, and could cause long-term pollution of the Thompson River.

while mining is still occurring, which obviously violates a fundamental understanding between the Crown and First Nations—that the land would be available for the continued use by First Nations in the ways they've always known. Given the boom and bust cycle of the copper industry, with regular start-ups and shut-downs, AJAX could operate on-and-off for many more years, possibly decades, before any reclamation efforts are made. In

all profits are put towards the socially conscientious needs of our society.

The royalties received by the provincial government, from extracted resources such as copper, are simply not good enough compensation. Under the current regime the minute revenues generated by royalties are not even listed in the BC government's own budget charts, and you almost never hear the mining industry talk about royalties, because even they know they're embarrassingly low. Mine workers make a good wage, but why shouldn't the rest of society also benefit from the resources to ensure we have our basic rights met, such as housing, food, education, and health services. Of course, capitalists absolutely revile the nationalization of any industry; how will the capitalist make a living when there are no more workers or resources to exploit?

Many high-profile and prominent members of our community have already spoken against this development: union leaders like Richard Boyce, with decades of experience representing mine workers at Highland Valley Copper; the Kamloops Physicians for a Healthy Environment; various faculty of TRU, including scientists and economists; and entire organizations like the Kamloops and District Labour Council, which represents 10,000 union members from all sectors of the work force...

One of the weakest - yet most touted - arguments for building AJAX, is for the sake of jobs. However, KGHM is under no obligation to hire Kamloopsians and possibly not even Canadians. There's no legal obligation to hire locally; thousands of unemployed Kamloopsians will be competing against tens of thousands of qualified unemployed Canadians from across the country. With the recent influx of industrial workers laid off from the oil patch, not many of whom were from Kamloops to begin with, there will be an over-abundance of available workers with far more industrial experience than the ordinary working class Kamloopsian. KGHM has stated they might even utilize the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, known for exploiting vulnerable workers and denying foreign workers the basic rights afforded to Canadian citizens.

Many locals look to nearby

mines like Highland Valley Copper, and likely even know at least one person who works there and makes a very good wage, and then assumes that this will be the case for AJAX workers. But Highland Valley Copper has been operating for many decades, and there are strong, hard fought-for, collective agreements in place between the owners and the workers. KGHM, like every major corporation, will fight tooth-and-nail to keep a union from organizing their workforce.

But we shouldn't assume that there will even be KGHM "staff" in the way that there are Highland Valley Copper staff. One can look at some of the newest mines in Quebec and Ontario to see what the future of mining offers. Mining in Canada, as presented in the 2011 National Film Board documentary *The Hole Story* https://www.nfb.ca/film/hole_story/ rental, will likely not follow the same workplace model that most industrial workers are accustomed to. There are already a number of major industrial worksites around the world, including in the Alberta oil patch, that have replaced equipment operators with fully automated equipment, thereby replacing hundreds of workers with just a half dozen or so computer programmers. New mines also cut production costs by only having managerial staff and a handful of administrative staff and then have all other work performed by contractors. Of course, contracting out all your operations also means that work, for the contractor and his crew, may last for a few weeks at a time, or a few months at a time, or maybe a few years, depending on how well your competitors can underbid you. The natural progression for such business practices is to drive wages lower and lower for the sake of "competitiveness" and "flexibility", which is great when you're an investor, but terrible if you're looking for a regular pay cheque.

The other natural consequence of this irregular workforce employment is that locals who thought they might be able to rent out a suite long-term, or even sell their property to a mine-worker, will not be able to count on such sales, nor on the regularity of having their suite rented, or at least not for very long. And, given that the majority of workers hired to operate AJAX will be from out-of-town, significant long-term growth and investment in Kamloops should not be counted on. The reality is that most folks who move to a new community merely for work, will leave very quickly once that work ends or once a better job appears; this is the well-known cycle for resource extraction industries. We already know that AJAX is not a sustainable project and has a very short expected lifespan of 23 years of operation; whatever growth which might occur from the import of 400 or so workers to our community will be lost every time the mine shuts down and the workers all go back home.

The "ripple effect", in regards to the concept that each mining job leads to the support of seven

see AJAX, p. 11



The open pit mine, to be located at the bottom left on this map, would cover 2.5 square kilometers (www.stopajaxmine.ca)

pleas are commonly heard opposite the health concerns raised about the mine, as though Kamloops were so desperate that it should simply stop worrying about all the negative health, environmental and economic problems this mine will bring, "...because growth and jobs (no matter how poorly arranged) is all that can save communities like Kamloops...". Such arguments arise out of the economic fear-mongering that the resource extraction industries are famous for...

AJAX will grossly violate the ecological integrity of the unceded territories of the Tk'emlups and Skeetchestn First Nations, as well as threaten the waterways which run through many other First Nations territories in BC. AJAX supporters claim that mining accidents are seldom, which may be true, but they do still happen, and some, like the Imperial Metals disaster at Mt. Polley, are catastrophic to the surrounding area, and much worse when posited near an urban centre.

There is absolutely no way to make any use of the mined area

in addition to the direct restricted use of the land being mined, there will be negative impacts on the air, land and water near the mine. Even the blasting noise from the mine will negatively impact the livability of the surrounding areas.

Issues around mineral "rights", as exercised by corporations like KGHM, and the fact that most of BC exists on unceded territories, provide a significant legal backdrop which must be respected; activities that negatively impact the long-term use of any area should be ceased until an understanding is achieved with all affected First Nations regarding the use of their unceded territories.

Putting aside the First Nations territorial claim for a moment, there is still no need for this project, or any like it, under the direction of far-off corporations with all the wealth being extracted from the land under us and deposited into the accounts of corporate investors all over the world. Our provincial and federal governments have every right, and obligation, to nationalize the entire mining industry and ensure that any and



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Police tear gas Athens rally

Police used teargas during a mass rally in Athens on Feb. 4 as Greeks rallied against government pension reforms needed to meet demands of international creditors. Demanding an end to austerity, about 50,000 Greeks marched peacefully on parliament in central Athens chanting for the government to ditch the proposals, which many see as a betrayal of the values of the main governing party, Syriza.

Public health workers carried black balloons, and a large banner depicting a hunched-over nurse with a walking stick. "This is retirement at 67," it said, a reference to the later pension age that will come from the reforms.

The angry backlash is piling pressure on Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, first elected just over a year ago. With just a three-seat majority in parliament, he is pushing the austerity program demanded by international creditors.

"They should be strung up here, in Syntagma Square," said pensioner Nikos Ghinis as he walked along with thousands of others in central Athens. "I'm getting 740 euros (\$826) a month for 40 years of work ... I'm (demonstrating) here for my children and grandchildren," he told Reuters.

It was the second nationwide walkout since Tsipras took power in January 2015 on a pledge to end years of austerity, only to cave in under the threat of expulsion from the euro zone and sign up to new belt-tightening reforms under an EU-IMF bailout package worth up to 86 billion euros.

The 24-hour strike coincided with a major review of Greece's performance on terms of its bailout. The heads of the European Union and International Monetary Fund mission assessing Greece's progress arrived in Athens to discuss the pension plan, tax hikes and loans owed by Greek banks.

Greece has promised to cut pension spending by 1 percent of GDP, or 1.8 billion euros, this year. Pensions have been slashed eleven times already since 2010. The government plans to triple social security contributions by employees and employers over the next three years, but unions say this will increase unemployment as the costs for businesses go up. Self-employed workers will be forced into tax evasion as the plan links social security contributions to declared income.

Moroccan oil workers

A thousand workers at Morocco's sole oil refinery are still in the dark about their future

after the plant suspended production in August 2015 owing huge debts.

Shortly after the shut down, Morocco's tax administration seized SAMIR's assets in pursuit of US\$1.3 billion in unpaid taxes and social charges. In October, a billion-dollar rescue package agreed by the company's general assembly could not be raised.

The SAMIR refinery, situated near Casablanca, produced 200,000 barrels per day. It is controlled by Saudi-owned Corral Petroleum Holdings, which has a



67 per cent stake in the plant.

The workers have been receiving their salaries up until now, but how long this can continue for is uncertain. Meanwhile, 5,000 people whose jobs depend on the oil refinery are suffering as Morocco resorts to importing all its petroleum.

The Syndicat National des Industries du Pétrole & Gaz Naturel (SNIPGN-CDT), is the key union at the refinery. General secretary, Hussein Elyamani, said: "We are worried about the future of the workers at SAMIR and call on the Moroccan state to enter into serious negotiations with the owner of the refinery in order to settle this dispute for the best interest of all parties, especially workers."

In 2015, Corral's CEO, Sheikh Mohamed Houssein El Amoudi, was listed by Forbes as Saudi Arabia's second richest man with a personal wealth of US\$10.8 billion.

Victory for cement workers

After years of struggle, the Indian cement union, PCSS, has reached a fair settlement for over 1,000 contract workers at Holcim (now LafargeHolcim). Following a long-running dispute over redeployment and rehabilitation, more than half the workers will keep their jobs. According to the January 22 settlement, 259 contract workers will be working at the new Jamul plant and 277 at the old Jamul plant. The two plants are located next to each other in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh.

The settlement also provides for the progressive readjustment

of the salaries of the contract workers to reach the national wage agreement for the cement industry.

The remaining 458 workers who are losing their jobs will benefit from a severance package and be given support for rehabilitation.

PCSS has been in constant negotiations with local management since the beginning of 2015. The talks came in part as a result of an OECD complaint in Switzerland submitted against Holcim. The complaint, which also concerned another of the company's Indian plants, Ambuja Cement Ltd, focused on three main violations committed by Holcim against OECD Guidelines on Multinational Companies: precarious employment; discrimination of workers based on employment; insufficient employment for local people.

Contract workers are protected by Indian law and by a sectoral agreement prohibiting employment in core production work, with all work paid at the same rate as permanent workers.

Kurdish teachers protest pay delays

Education International, the global federation of teachers' unions, has strongly protested to the Iraqi Prime Minister about the ongoing delays in the payment of teachers' salaries in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

In a letter, General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen expressed Education International (EI)'s "disappointment to learn from the Kurdistan Teachers Union (KTU), one of EI's affiliates in Iraq, that teachers and education workers in the whole of the Kurdistan Region have not received their salary since September last year... In times of economic crisis, investing in public services, and especially in education, is key to recovery and the best strategic response to such economic crises".

Investment in education includes investment in teachers, in order to have well-motivated, well-trained and well-supported teachers delivering quality education to their students, according to EI. Van Leeuwen insists that "the role of education as a vehicle for peace, respect, tolerance and non-violence is all the more important in a country like Iraq that is facing war, extremism and terrorism".

EI is calling on the Iraqi authorities to immediately pay the salary arrears of all teachers concerned, and to ensure that such delays do not occur in the future.

Repeatedly going on strike over the issue of salary payment, members of the KTU stress that the local government had alleged that the region is suffering from a drop in the price of oil and the cost of the war against the Islamic State's forces. However, the KTU pointed out that the Kurdistan government is selling oil but still not paying public servants' salaries. The union also underlined that teachers are coping with a huge influx of 1.8 million refugees from the war in Syria and other Iraqi regions.



Petroci offshore rig

Strike at Ivory Coast oil company

Workers at Ivory Coast's state oil company Petroci have extended a three-day strike for an additional 72 hours as they sought to bring in employees from other companies in the sector to join their protest against layoffs, union officials said on Feb. 5.

Fifty of Petroci's 600 employees were made redundant last month and another 150 are expected to be dismissed, union leaders have said, in the wake of an audit recommending that the company cut costs and staff amid falling oil prices.

"Next week we will intensify the strike and see if other employees from other companies in the sector join the Petroci employees in this strike," said Geremie N'Guessan Wondje, secretary general of the SYNTPEPCI union.

Petroci offered to pay 10 dismissed managers six months salary while the 40 other laid-off employees were to receive eight months salary.

Petroci is a small oil and natural gas producer but it is heavily involved in the downstream sector, controlling 36 percent of domestic gas distribution in French-speaking West Africa's largest economy as well as about 30 filling stations. It also partners with companies with production and exploration operations and manages a logistical base that services offshore blocks.

SYNTPEPCI represents workers from 16 companies in addition to Petroci that could be called upon to strike out of solidarity. Those

companies include state-owned Societe Ivoirienne de Raffinage (SIR), which operates a refinery with a capacity of 65,000 barrels per day, as well as logistics firms and fuel retailers such as Total.

Carlsberg fires women workers

Eleven members of the IUF-affiliated Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF) employed by transnational brewery giant Carlsberg's joint venture local brewer Cambrew have been dismissed in retaliation for taking strike action on January 16. Workers are fighting the company's attempt to impose short-term employment contracts and late working hours.

The beer promotion women are employed by Cambrew to market and serve Angkor beer at restaurants, where they compete with promoters from other breweries working in the same restaurants. After two years on the job, workers have a legal right to a permanent contract, which gives paid maternity leave and other benefits. Carlsberg/Cambrew refuse to comply with the law.

The company refused the union's request for talks on the contracts and escalated the conflict on January 15 by extending working hours to 11:00 pm, which puts the women at greater risk of harassment from customers and transport difficulties at late hours. Determined to win their rights, the women struck on January 16. Management responded by claiming that current contracts had expired and that the striking workers had to accept new short-term contracts.

The Labour Arbitration Council instructed workers to resume work while awaiting the outcome of a dispute resolution process. However workers returned to work on January 21 to learn that 11 prominent union members had been dismissed.

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

UN expert urges Pacific Rim countries: don't sign TPP without committing to human rights and development

United Nations human rights expert Alfred de Zayas has called on governments not to sign the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) without reaffirming their human rights treaty obligations and their recent pledges to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

In May 2012, Alfred de Zayas was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as the first Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order. He is currently professor of international law at the Geneva School of Diplomacy.

"The TPP is fundamentally flawed and should not be signed or ratified unless provision is made to guarantee the regulatory space of States," said Mr. de Zayas in a Feb. 2 statement.

He called for a new generation of trade agreements for the 21st

century, which would incorporate human rights and development into their provisions, stressing that "the TPP is based on an old model of trade agreements that is out of step with today's international human rights regime."

His appeal came on the eve of the Feb. 4 gathering of trade ministers in New Zealand, to sign the agreement among twelve Pacific Rim countries that will strengthen the position of investors, transnational corporations and monopolies at the expense of the public, and will impact negatively on labour standards, food security, health and environmental protection.

Mr. de Zayas reiterated his call on the UN system and governments across the world "to put an end to free trade and investment agreements that conflict with human rights treaty obligations,"

made last year during the presentation of a report on free trade and investment agreements to the UN Human Rights Council.

"Trade is not an end in itself, but must be seen in the context of the international human rights regime, which imposes binding legal obligations on States, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," he said. "Trade agreements are not 'stand-alone'

legal regimes, but must conform with fundamental principles of international law, including transparency and accountability. They must not delay, circumvent, undermine or make impossible the fulfilment of human rights treaty obligations."

In his statement, Alfred de Zayas expressed concern that, despite "enormous opposition by civil society worldwide, twelve countries are about to sign an agreement, which is the product of secret negotiations without

multi-stakeholder democratic consultation. The options are not to sign the TPP as it stands, as civil society demands, or not to ratify it, which is the responsibility of democratically elected parliaments. Should the TPP ever enter into force, its compatibility with international law should be challenged before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). If a public referendum were held in all twelve countries concerned, it will be solidly rejected." ●



At a rally in Atlanta, protesters from Japan speak in opposition to the TPP agreement.

Message to CATSA: Drop G4S, don't support war crimes in Palestine!

From the Canada Palestine Association, Vancouver

In 2011, the Canadian Air Transportation Security Authority CATSA, the crown corporation responsible for security at Canadian airports, awarded G4S Canada (the wholly owned subsidiary of a British-based security company) a contract worth up to \$416 million for security at airports in the Pacific Region (which includes BC and the Yukon). The contract covers 20 airports including YVR Vancouver until March 31, 2017.

Because of contracts with Israel which make it complicit in the maintenance of the repressive infrastructure of the occupation and apartheid state, G4S is the target of an international campaign for boycott and divestment.

G4S provides security systems for the Ketziot and Megiddo prisons, which hold Palestinian political prisoners from occupied Palestinian territory inside Israel. Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the transfer of prisoners from occupied territory into the territory of the occupier.

G4S also provides equipment for Ofer prison, located in the occupied West Bank, and for Kishon and Moskobiyyeh detention facilities, where human rights organisations have documented systematic torture and ill treatment of Palestinian prisoners, including child prisoners. Defence for Children-Palestine (DCI-Palestine) has released an urgent appeal to end the practice of holding Palestinian children from the West Bank in solitary confinement in facilities in Israel.

Beyond Israel's prison system, G4S provides equipment and services to Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank along the route of Israel's illegal apartheid Wall and to the terminals isolating the occupied and besieged territory of Gaza. G4S also contracts for

equipment and services for the West Bank Israeli Police headquarters and to private businesses based in illegal Israeli settlements. A panel of legal experts has concluded that G4S may be criminally liable for its activities in support of Israel's illegal Wall and other violations of international law.

Internationally, G4S has been implicated in human rights violations against Indigenous people and poor rural communities, particularly in the Global South where it provides security to international mining and oil & gas companies.

In recent years numerous institutions and governments have heeded the call for boycott and divestment from G4S.

In June 2014, the Gates Foundation divested its entire \$170m holding in the company as a result of an international campaign. Universities in Oslo and Bergen refused to give G4S contracts following student campaigns. In the UK, at least five student unions voted to cancel contracts with G4S, and students successfully pressured two other universities not to renew contracts with the company. Major charities in South Africa, the Netherlands and elsewhere terminated contracts with G4S. The US Methodist Church, the largest Protestant church in the US, divested from G4S after coalition campaigning brought the issue to a vote. The Scottish Trade Union Congress, and the Dutch trade union Abuvakabo have voted to support the campaign for boycott and divestment from G4S.

With numerous other security options available, it's time for CATSA to side with human rights and a just and lasting peace and cancel their contract with G4S.

To sign a petition and to get further information, visit www.cpavancouver.org/index.php/2015/08/10/boycott-and-divest-from-g4/. ●

Ayotzinapa investigation continuing

Mexican investigators say that two recently found bodies do not belong to any of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa teachers' college who disappeared in September 2014 in the southern state of Guerrero.

The bodies were found last month during a search operation between the town of Cocula and Iguala, the city where local police attacked and then abducted the students who they allegedly handed over to a local drug trafficking gang.

Attorney General Arely Gómez informed parents of the disappeared students about the new findings at a private meeting which was also attended by a group of independent experts set up by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights to follow the case. His office says it has been "determined that the human remains found in Cocula do not belong to any of the 43 students disappeared in Iguala."

The disappearance of the students sparked a national protest movement, fueled by a government investigation which concluded that the victims were incinerated in a garbage dump on the same night they were abducted. Experts provided a detailed critique of that investigation in a report released last September.

Growing pressure on the government eventually led to the relaunching of the official investigation in December. But while the Ayotzinapa case may be moving forward, the numbers of new forced disappearances keep piling up.

Five men and a 16-year-old girl disappeared in the southern state of

Veracruz on the Jan. 9-10 weekend in the town of Tierra Blanca. Video footage shows the victims being abducted by state police officers, who were not arrested until relatives of the missing began to make noise in the media.

Mexican and international human rights groups and officials have been drawing attention to the failure of the authorities to resolve the crisis of disappearances that began to take off in the context of the country's drug wars. An Amnesty International report on enforced disappearances in Mexico released on Jan. 14 says there is a lack of skills and political will to solve the problem.

"The investigations do not appear to be aimed at uncovering the truth about what happened, the authorities responses are limited to carrying out actions that contribute little to the inquiry," the report says. "This type of investigation appears to consist of merely going through the motions, and appears to be destined from the outset to lead nowhere."

According to official statistics there are currently about 27,000 missing people in Mexico. An undetermined number are victims of forced disappearance, in which state actors are involved.

(Based on a Vice News report by Alan Hernandez.) ●

Rights abuses by NZ meat company

On January 15, a German tourist with a 'working holiday' visa was caught in a machine while working on the slaughter line at the Talleys/AFFCO meat plant in Rangiora, New Zealand. He was knocked unconscious and suffered injuries to the head, face and teeth. He was working in one of the most dangerous areas in the plant with negligible training. Two years ago, an experienced worker was impaled by a hook on the same machine and dragged along the line. Ninety minutes were needed to extricate the hook, which had entered the back of his head and emerged from under his eye.

According to the New Zealand government's Accident Compensation Corp., over the last three years nearly 5,000 Talley's workers have been awarded over USD 4.7 million in compensation for workplace accidents; 1,286 Talley's workers were injured on the job in 2014 alone. While the Talley family was lobbying against reforms to New Zealand's health and safety legislation, a worker whose arm was sliced open at the company's South Pacific Meats plant had to transport himself to hospital. His boss later told the employment tribunal "he was too busy to deal with the matter."

The International Union of Food Workers (IUF) has called Talleys/AFFCO "a serial rights abuser" with a horrific record of workplace accidents. The employer has fired union health and safety representatives for meeting with their members, and locked out 200 workers at the company's Wairoa meat plant to force them to abandon collective bargaining and accept individual contracts.

For more information, visit www.iuf.org. ●

Woody Guthrie despised his landlord — Donald Trump's racist father

By Will Kaufman, gawker.com

In December 1950, Woody Guthrie signed his name to the lease of a new apartment in Brooklyn. Even now, over half a century later, that uninspiring document prompts a double-take. Below all the legal jargon is the signature of the man who had composed "This Land Is Your Land," the most resounding appeal to an equal share for all in America. Below that is the signature of Donald Trump's father, Fred. No pairing could appear more unlikely.

Guthrie's two-year tenancy in one of Fred Trump's buildings and his relationship with the real estate mogul of New York's outer boroughs produced some of Guthrie's most bitter writings, which I discovered on a recent trip to the Woody Guthrie Archives in Tulsa. These writings have never before been published; they should be, for they clearly pit America's national balladeer against the racist foundations of the Trump real estate empire.

Recalling these foundations becomes all the more relevant in the wake of the racially charged proclamations of Donald Trump, who last year announced, "My legacy has its roots in my father's legacy."

By the time he moved into his new apartment, Guthrie had traveled a long road from the casual racism of his Oklahoma youth.

He'd learned along the way that the North held no special claim to racial enlightenment. He had written songs such as "The Ferguson Brothers Killing," which condemned the out-of-hand police killing of the unarmed Charles and Alfonso Ferguson in Freeport, Long Island, in 1946, after the two young black men had been refused service in a bus terminal café.

In "Buoy Bells from Trenton," he denounced the miscarriage of justice in the case of the so-called "Trenton Six" — black men convicted of murder in 1948 by an all-white jury in a trial marred by official perjury and manufactured evidence.

And in 1949, he'd stood shoulder to shoulder with Paul Robeson, Howard Fast and Pete Seeger against the mobs of Peekskill, New York, where American racism at its ugliest had inspired 21 songs from his pen (one of which, "My Thirty Thousand," was recorded by Billy Bragg and Wilco).

In the postwar years, with the return of hundreds of thousands of servicemen to New York, affordable public housing had become an urgent priority. For the most part, low-cost housing projects had been left to cash-strapped state and city authorities. But when the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) finally stepped in to issue federal loans and subsidies for urban apartment blocks, one of the first developers in line, with his eye on the main chance, was Fred Trump. He made a fortune not only through the construction of public housing projects but also through collecting the rents on them.

When Guthrie first signed his lease, it's unlikely that he was aware of the murky background to the construction of his new home, the massive public complex that Trump had dubbed "Beach Haven."

Trump would be investigated by a U.S. Senate committee in 1954 for profiteering off of public contracts, not least by over-estimating his Beach Haven building charges to the tune of US\$3.7 million.

What Guthrie discovered all too late was Trump's enthusiastic embrace of the FHA's guidelines for avoiding "inharmonious uses of housing" — or as Trump biographer Gwenda Blair puts it, "a code phrase for selling homes in white areas to blacks." As Blair points out, such "restrictive covenants" were common among FHA projects — a betrayal, if ever there was one, of the New Deal vision that had given birth to the agency.

Only a year into his Beach Haven residency, Guthrie — himself a veteran — was already lamenting the bigotry that pervaded his new, lily-white neighbourhood, which he'd taken to calling "Bitch Havens."

In his notebooks, he conjured up a scenario of smashing the colour line to transform the Trump complex into a diverse cornucopia, with "a face of every bright colour laughing and joshing in these old darkly weeperish empty shadowed windows." He imagined himself calling out in Whitman-esque free verse to the "negro girl yonder that walks along against this headwind / holding onto her purse and her fur coat":

"I welcome you here to live. I welcome you and your man both here to Beach Haven to love in any ways you please and to have some kind of a decent place to get pregnant in and to have your kids raised up in. I'm yelling out my own welcome to you."

For Guthrie, Fred Trump came to personify all the viciousness of the racist codes that continued to put decent housing — both public and private — out of reach for so many of his fellow citizens:

*I suppose
Old Man Trump knows
Just how much
Racial Hate
he stirred up
In the bloodspot of human hearts
When he drewed
That collar line
Here at his
Eighteen hundred family project.*

And as if to leave no doubt over Trump's personal culpability in perpetuating black Americans' status as internal refugees — strangers in their own strange land — Guthrie reworked his signature Dust Bowl ballad "I Ain't Got No Home" into a blistering broadside against his landlord:

*Beach Haven ain't my home!
I just cain't pay this rent!
My money's down the drain!
And my soul is badly bent!
Beach Haven looks like heaven
Where no black ones come to roam!
No, no, no! Old Man Trump!
Old Beach Haven ain't my home!*

In 1979, 12 years after Guthrie had succumbed to the death sentence of Huntington's Disease,

Village Voice reporter Wayne Barrett published a two-part exposé about Fred and Donald Trump's real estate empire.

Barrett devoted substantial attention to the cases brought against the Trumps in 1973 and 1978 by the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department. A major charge was that "racially discriminatory conduct by Trump agents" had "created a substantial impediment to the full

enjoyment of equal opportunity." The most damning evidence had come from Trump's own employees.

As Barrett summarizes: According to court records, four superintendents or rental agents confirmed that applications sent to the central [Trump] office for acceptance or rejection were coded by race. Three doormen were told to discourage blacks who came seeking apartments when the manager was out, either by claiming no vacancies or hiking up the rents. A super said he was instructed to send black applicants to the central office but to accept white applications on site. Another rental agent said that Fred Trump had instructed him not to rent to blacks. Further, the agent said Trump wanted "to decrease the number of black tenants" already in the development "by encouraging them to locate housing elsewhere."

Guthrie had written that white supremacists like the Trumps were "way ahead of God" because "God don't know much about any collar lines."

Guthrie hardly meant this as a compliment. But the Trumps — father and son alike — might well have been arrogant enough to see it as one. After all, if you find yourself "way ahead of God" in any kind of a race, then what else must God be except, well, "a loser"? And we know what Donald Trump thinks about losers.

One thing is certain: Woody Guthrie had no time for "Old Man Trump." We can only imagine what he would think of his heir. ●



One of Woody's famous drawings, still relevant today!

SYRIA: let the voice of reason be heard...

continued from page 12

the Riyadh Conference, "Saudi Arabia hosted a three-day meeting of terrorist groups in Riyadh on December 8-10. The Syrian Kurds, who control large parts of the Northern Syria, had not been invited, but Al-Qaeda's official branch in Syria, the al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham terrorist groups were there...."

The exclusion of Kurds is also an objective of the Turkish government. The Kurds have been a major force in fighting ISIS in the northern part of Syria, but they are at the same time being bombed by the Turkish air force in northern Syria. In effect, Turkey is also directly helping ISIS by opening its borders to the armed militant groups and buying stolen Syrian oil from ISIS. The Turkish government does not want to see

the inclusion of Kurds (who constitute a third of the Syrian population) for fear that such a move will strengthen the hand of Kurdish organizations like the PKK within Turkey. Israel plays a related role by secretly providing medical care to the wounded ISIS fighters through its borders with Syria along the occupied Golan Heights.

It is clear that these attempts to exclude from negotiations all the internal moderate forces in Syria that represent "a significant number of Syrians" and the Kurds will only stack the cards against the Syrian people in favour of foreign governments and Islamic extremist/terrorist groups in Syria — an outcome which will not only fail to lead to any peace, but which is bound to promote conflagration of the conflict in the region and possible war between the US/NATO Alliance and Russia, both major nuclear-weapons powers.

Looking at the whole picture, there is no doubt that we are faced with a dangerously explosive situation in Syria and the Middle East. The true voices of the Syrian people have been silenced by foreign-imposed war and terrorism. We in the U.S. peace and anti-war movement cannot passively watch the intrigues, deceptions and manipulations, which are leading to yet another disaster. We should loudly raise our voices of reason in support of the people of Syria and demand that all parties involved in the Syrian negotiations work honestly and sincerely toward a peaceful solution to the conflict.

We appeal to all of you to ... pressure the Obama Administration to guarantee that Syrian people are allowed to participate in the negotiations freely, and that the Syrian people alone are allowed to decide the future of their country, not foreign powers and their proxy forces.

We call on all activists in the peace movement to flood the emails and phone lines of the White House and the State Department and demand the following:

1) Stop all foreign efforts to force regime change in Syria:

a) Stop bombing Syrian economic infrastructure in the name of fighting ISIS.

b) Stop injecting foreign fighters into Syria.

c) Stop funding, organizing and arming the combatants in Syria.

2) Let the Syrians themselves decide the future of their country free of all foreign intervention:

a) Allow all truly moderate internal opposition groups and the Kurdish organizations to participate in the negotiations.

b) Exclude no segment of the Syrian population from peace negotiations.

c) Exclude all foreign opposition forces, as well as all terrorist organizations, from the negotiations.

3. Lift all sanctions on Syria. Provide humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. Help the Syrian refugees settle wherever they want — including back in Syria.

4. End all wars of aggression, all forms of foreign occupation, and all externally-generated regime change policies in the region. ●

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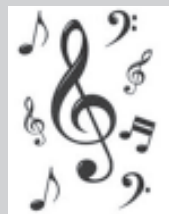
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Anti-TPP rally on January 22 in Santiago, Chile

TPP legislative fight looms

By Emile Schepers, *People's World*

On February 4, the United States and 11 other nations which have been negotiating to create the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) finally agreed on and approved a final version, which must now be approved by their respective legislatures. In the United States, there is going to be a fight about this, in the context of national elections.

Back on June 24 of last year, the US Senate had approved fast track authority for the government to negotiate the treaty by a vote of 60 to 37, with three "not voting". Forty seven of the "yea" votes were cast by Republicans, and 13 were Democrats. Of the "nay" votes, five were Republicans, two were independents (Sanders of Vermont and King of Maine), and 30 were Democrats. The senators not voting were two Republicans and one Democrat.

The fast track vote came after an intense pressure campaign, with business interests and the White House weighing in strongly in favour of approval and organised labour and other grassroots constituency groups lobbying hard against it. The approval of "fast track" means that the Senators will only have a chance to vote the finished and signed treaty up or down, and will not be able to present amendments and modifications. Labour and its allies have made clear that they intend to fight hard for disapproval. Opposition to the TPP has been a major feature of the electoral program of Senator Bernie Sanders, and Hillary Clinton has more recently begun to express doubts.

The other countries that agreed to the TPP on February 4 include: Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Malaysia, Australia, Brunei, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam and New Zealand. Colombia will probably join, and Indonesia is studying the possibility of doing so. In all cases except Malaysia, there also has to be a process of legislative approval which may take a while. And in most of these countries, as in the United States, there have been strong objections to the TPP from many sectors, especially from labour unions and the political left.

When the treaty was signed in Auckland, New Zealand, labour unions there carried out militant demonstrations against it, and sharply criticised their country's prime minister, John Key, for

agreeing to it. Criticisms from labour and the left occurred in several other participating countries. Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz has said the agreement will result in more race-to-the-bottom wages and labour conditions, contrary to what President Obama has promised.

In Chile, the negotiations to participate in the TPP were initiated by the previous government of right-wing President Sebastian Pinera. The current president, Michelle Bachelet of the Socialist Party, has decided to continue with the process, but her doing so has been controversial. On the day of signing, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Chile, *El Siglo* (the Century), carried an article entitled "Criticisms of the TPP are Growing".

"Defenders of the agreement claim that with more opening to trade, more dynamism will be injected into the economy. Meanwhile opponents of the TPP claim that the agreement will only benefit multinational enterprises to the detriment of the smallest ones and will affect sensitive areas such as health or agriculture, severely wounding the sovereignty of the country.

"After signing the agreement, the Chilean Parliament will have two years to vote in favour or against it; presumably it will be sent [to the Parliament] in March. This is the point at which the government will confront an important division, as some of the governing [coalition's] parliamentarians have indicated that they will reject the controversial treaty."

The article goes on to quote Communist Party Deputy Camila Vallejo, who is a high profile grassroots leader in Chile because of the role she has played in protests demanding educational reforms: "I am not willing to contribute to mortgaging our sovereignty in this way and I will vote against the TPP, but I think it is essential to have a citizen mobilisation so that the government backs off its [pro TPP] position and the Parliament rejects it". The Communist Party, a powerful force in Chile, is part of Bachelet's governing coalition.

Similar criticisms are being raised against their government's agreement to the TPP in Australia, Mexico, Peru, and other countries.

People in the United States should realise that the criticisms of the TPP that are being made in the other countries are parallel to the complaints expressed by labour

and other groups in the US.

All are worried that their nations' sovereignty will be subordinated to the interests and power of billionaire multinational corporations. Since many such corporations are headquartered in the United States, and since the United States government is a major promoter of the TPP, the agreement is also seen as favouring the United States' interests to the detriment of smaller and poorer countries.

In all countries, including the United States, there is worry about terms in the TPP that could allow multinational corporations to sue to interfere with environmental, labour and consumer protection legislation in the future that could be seen as interfering with the "future profits" of the corporations.

Future nationalisation of industries not already under government control would be prohibited on pain of severe financial penalties. Prices of life saving drugs would be kept high to serve the interests of the big multinational pharmaceutical companies. Democracy would take a hit, because communities could not vote to protect themselves from the depredations of the multinationals.

Several countries, including Peru, have already had to pay big penalties under existing "free trade" deals because local peasant communities mounted protests which prevented multinational corporations from trashing their farmlands through environmentally harmful mining operations. Nowhere are workers convinced that the TPP will lead to "more jobs", the opposite seems much more likely.

The Obama administration has advertised the TPP as a way of countering China's economic and commercial power. But many people in the other countries would like to continue to have the option of building trade relations with China and other countries not in the TPP, and fear the TPP will impede them from doing so.

So there is not only going to be a fight about this in the United States Congress and the streets, but in all the other participating countries as well. The TPP can still be turned into a lesson in worldwide labour and people's solidarity, if activists start making connections and contacts across borders right away, and continue to protest and lobby against this awful agreement. ●

What's Left

Vancouver, BC

Women's Memorial March, annual event to honour murdered and missing indigenous women, Sunday, February 14, 12 noon, from Carnegie Centre, Main & Hastings.

Labour Council Pizza Educational, 6-7 pm, Tuesday, February 16, by donation, at Maritime Labour Centre (111 Victoria Drive). Discussion on the Paris Climate Agreement with CCPA economist Marc Lee.

Left Film Night, Sunday, Feb. 28, 7 pm, at the CSE, 706 Clark Drive. Skip the Oscars and watch "5 Broken Cameras," documentary on Palestinian protests against Israeli occupation. For info, ph. 604-255-2041.

St. Catharines, ON

Cuba: the U.S. embargo continues, Canadian-Cuban Friendship Assoc. Niagara AGM and public night, Tuesday, March 1, 7:00 pm. Guest speaker Consul General of Cuba, Javier Dómokos Ruiz, and presentation on this year's Che Guevara Brigade. For information, call Dave Thomas, 905-382-3468.

Toronto, ON

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

11th Annual Strawberry Ceremony for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Trans and Two Spirited People, Sunday, Feb. 14, 12:30 pm, Toronto Police HQ, 50 College Street.

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

People's Voice 2016 Fund Drive

Our annual press fund drive begins on March 1. Plan your fundraising events now, and contact PV at 604-255-2041 for more information.

People's Voice deadlines

March 1-15 issue: Thursday, Feb. 18

March 16-31 issue: Thursday, March 3

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Ajax mine opposed....

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other jobs around town, has also largely been discredited by economists, as chronicled in a recent CBC episode of Ideas (www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/it-s-the-economists-stupid-1.3219471).

The two economists, Dr. Julie Nelson and Dr. Richard Denniss, who lead the discussion on this episode, lambaste much of the propaganda that the mining industry relies on to promote their projects. They state that economists and consultants hired by the mining industry routinely fabricate numbers, make gross assumptions while presenting them as facts, and inundate ordinary community members with murky data... because the facts are rarely in the mine's favour. The purpose is to place doubt in their opponent's positions; if they succeed in creating confusion and ambivalence, they're already

doing a lot better in the propaganda war than if everyone were simply presented the crystal-clear facts.

There is great opposition to this project from within Kamloops' municipal boundaries, and, should that opposition create enough influence on its own, we may see this project rejected by the provincial government regardless of reassurances about environmental safeguards. Without said community opposition, however, it's easy to see who wields the greatest political clout in this scenario.

The Kamloops Club of the Communist Party of Canada stands in solidarity with all the citizens of Kamloops who oppose this dangerous project and reject the argument that we are so desperate that we must sacrifice the health and ecological longevity of our community for the sake of a short-term project with dubious economic benefits. ●

Syria: let the voice of reason be heard

An urgent appeal by the U.S. Peace Council to all of our friends in the peace movement, Jan. 23, 2016

Dear Friends and Comrades in Peace,

As you are all well aware, after almost half a decade of violent proxy war, terrorism, and bloodshed in Syria, the warring parties have agreed to meet once again, this time in Geneva, to find a political solution to the ongoing war that has cost the lives of tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children, has left millions of Syrians homeless, and has turned millions of others into refugees flooding Syria's neighbouring countries and Europe. Many experts believe this is the last chance for achieving a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis.

It is also well known that these negotiations are being held under extremely complicated circumstances. This conflict has more than two sides and it is certainly not solely about the government of Syria and its opposition. Here we are also dealing with regional power rivalries, with each country pursuing its own interests, and the drive by the United States and NATO states to redraw the map of the Middle East to achieve their own imperial goals. It is also part and parcel of the global drive to encircle, contain, and subdue Russia and China, as a continuation of the neocons' global strategy.

At the global level, the United States and NATO consider Syria as a stepping stone toward a regime change in Iran and ultimately in Russia, and are trying to bring Syria under the West and NATO control by any means possible, including financing, organizing, and arming the militant/terrorist groups fighting the Syrian government, either directly or by using their proxy states and regional allies. This has inevitably put the U.S. on a dangerous confrontation course with Russia, which sees the overthrow of the Syrian government and establishment of another pro-NATO state near its borders as a major threat to its national security.

Russia considers this an extension of what NATO is doing in Ukraine. The shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by NATO

member Turkey was a clear escalation of this dangerous and intentional confrontation. At the regional level, the conflict cannot be reduced to a war between two opposing camps only. It is not simply the case of Syria, Iran and Russia on the one side, and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Turkey, Israel, and others,

influence.

For the Saudis, the overthrow of Assad's Syria, the only Arab state independent of US manipulation and a long-time ally of Iran in the Middle East, serves to weaken Iran and ultimately pave the way for regime change in that country.

However, despite agreeing on

Sham. In many cases, each of these groups is itself a coalition of dozens of Islamist groups fighting in Syria, many of whom are in fact foreign fighters.

All in all, according to BBC, "there are believed to be as many as 1,000 armed opposition groups in Syria, commanding an estimated 100,000 fighters," each, of course, under the control or influence of one or more of anti-Assad governments involved. Until recently the main focus of these governments and the United States was on an armed overthrow of the Assad government, and the U.S. made the policy of "Assad must go" a pre-condition for any direct negotiations with the government of Syria.

However, the entry of Russian military into the scene has made a military victory for the Western powers and their regional allies virtually impossible and, hence, has forced the U.S. to soften its position on the method, but not the goal, of removing Assad.

As a result, the focus has now shifted to finding a way for removing the Assad government from power through "peaceful" negotiations with the participation of both the Syrian government and the opposition, and allowing for a "transitional period" for regime change.

But there are several sticky points that need to be resolved for these negotiations to proceed and bring any results. The first fundamental issue here is who should be considered as a legitimate opposition and therefore be allowed to participate in the negotiations.

As far as Syrian government is concerned, all those who have engaged in violent armed struggle

round of maneuvering is under way as well: Each of these hostile countries is now jockeying for the inclusion of its own favourite fighters and the exclusion of those of others in the upcoming negotiations.

Saudi Arabia, for its part, is pushing for inclusion of all armed Islamist fighters, and to achieve this, in December 2015, it organized a three-day conference in Riyadh consisting of over 100 extremist Islamist rebel groups who are calling for regime change in Syria, including some of those considered to be terrorist by the United States.

According to Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, "what is noteworthy is the presence of some terrorist groups linked to ISIL in the Riyadh Conference." The objective of this conference, titled "Conference of the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces," was to unite these armed extremist forces around a common platform for the negotiations. On Dec. 10, 2015, the conference issued its "Final Statement," which not only called for "the establishment of a state ... with no place for Bashar al-Assad or the symbols and pillars of his regime in it or any coming political arrangements," but took the matter a step further by "stress[ing] that Bashar al-Assad and his circle leave office at the beginning of the transitional period," in other words, regime change from the beginning.

There is no doubt that such a position is aimed at sabotaging the negotiations even before they start. Although the Saudi position is in conflict with the current U.S. position, nevertheless, Secretary of State John Kerry thanked the Saudis for holding the Riyadh Conference.

The Saudis' motive for sabotaging the negotiations, as well as their recent mass execution of 47 people, including a Shi'ite cleric, stems from their nervousness about closer ties that might develop between Iran and the United States as a result of

their nuclear agreement, and potential new agreements during Syrian negotiations. They consider a political settlement of the Syrian conflict without an immediate removal of Assad from power as a step toward ending Iran's isolation and strengthening its position in the region.

What is more significant about the Riyadh Conference, however, is not who participated, but which groups were not allowed to attend. The Saudis made sure that none of the internal moderate (unarmed and non-violent) opposition forces are invited — forces like the Solidarity Party, National Youth Party, and the National Democratic Action Body, who, as a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report concedes, "may very well reflect the views of a significant number of Syrians who would like to see reforms, but who, at the end of the day, prefer Assad over the rebels."

Nor were any Kurdish opposition forces invited to the Riyadh Conference. As Iran's Fars News Agency complained the day after



Anti-war rally in Toronto, October 2014 (PV photo: Ed Bil)

on the other side. Although all of the countries in the latter group are acting within the overall U.S./NATO plan for regime change in Syria, each of them has its own particular agenda for Syria and the region as well, and is trying to push the events in the direction that serves its own interests.

Both Saudi Arabia (the closest U.S. ally after Israel) and Qatar (home of the U.S. Central Command) are dead set on overthrowing the Assad government by use of force. They have been acting as the main dispensers of money and arms to the militant rebels and foreign terrorists in Syria. Saudi Arabia, particularly, has considered Iran as its main rival and enemy in the region ever since the 1979

the goal of forced regime change in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have different ideas about who should replace the Assad government. For the Saudis, who are intent on spreading their own extremist Wahhabi version of Islam in the region, the favourites are ISIS, Al-Qaeda-related groups like al-Nusra Front, and other extremist Islamic groups like the Islam Army, and the Asala wa Tanmiya Front (Authenticity & Growth Front, also supported by U.S.).

On the other hand, Qatar, like Turkey, supports Islamist groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, like the Sham Legion and the Turkish-funded Ahrar al-

The U.S. and NATO consider Syria as a stepping stone toward a regime change in Iran and ultimately in Russia, and are trying to bring Syria under control by any means possible, including financing, organizing, and arming the militant/terrorist groups fighting the Syrian government...

against the legitimate Syrian state, and are responsible for the death and injury of tens of thousands, should be considered terrorists and must be excluded.

Both Iran and Russia have announced their support for the Syrian position. According to Russian Foreign Ministry, "We are still convinced that terrorists of all stripes should be excluded from the political process in Syria..." But this is not what the U.S. and its regional allies have in mind. They are insisting on inclusion of what they term "moderate" armed fighters in the negotiations. Iran's response: "the terrorists will never be allowed to introduce themselves as moderate opposition and decide the future of Syria and the region."

The Syrian government, on its part, has announced it is ready to attend peace talks with the opposition in Geneva this month, but it wants to see lists of the opposition groups who were due to attend, and ensure that "terrorist" groups would not be represented. Aside from the issues of who is a terrorist and who is part of the legitimate opposition, another

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