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people's VOICE

**Canadian
Boat to Gaza**

See page 10

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NO MANDATE FOR "39% MINORITY" TORIES

Why aren't people voting? Page 5

Canadians cheated again! Page 5

Struggle shifts to streets Page 7

2 Civic unity

In the wake of vote splits which helped the federal Tories win a majority in Parliament, Vancouver's centre-left alliance hopes to achieve cooperation in this fall's civic campaign.

INSIDE

6
May Day of millions
Millions of workers and their allies marched across the world on May 1, demanding higher pay, shorter hours, and a world of peace and justice.

12 Global thugs

The killing of Osama bin Laden emphasizes once again that U.S. imperialism will use any tactics to achieve global domination, completely ignoring treaties and the rules of international law.

Unity proposed for Vancouver civic election

PV Vancouver Bureau

2011 will be a year of elections in British Columbia, including the recent federal campaign; the May 11 byelection in Vancouver Point Grey, where Liberal leader Christy Clark is seeking a Legislature seat; a mail-in referendum on the hated HST; a provincial election expected in September; and municipal elections scheduled for Nov. 19.

Just as the federal race entered the final lap, Vancouver's main centre and left municipal parties reached an agreement-in-principle. On April 28, COPE (the left-wing Coalition of Progressive Electors) and Vision Vancouver announced initial plans to run a common slate of candidates. The result of lengthy negotiations, the proposal must win majority support from COPE members at an upcoming meeting to take effect.

If accepted, this would be the third consecutive cooperation agreement between COPE and Vision, aimed at defeating the right-wing Non-Partisan Alliance (NPA), which has usually dominated Vancouver city council and school boards since the 1930s.

Six years ago, the first attempt at electoral cooperation between COPE and Vision failed to block the NPA from narrowly regaining office after an overwhelming defeat in 2002.

But in 2008, the NPA elected just one city councillor, as Vision won the mayoralty and seven council positions, along with two COPE candidates. Vision also elected four school trustees, along with three for COPE and two from the NPA. While the Vision majority on council has avoided day-to-day cooperation with COPE's Ellen Woodsworth and David Cadman, the two parties have voted along the same lines on most issues. At School Board, the Vision and COPE trustees quickly formed a strong alliance, helping to lead province-wide demands to provide adequate funding for public education.

This time around, the proposed agreement could see COPE win a bigger voice on city council. The deal would provide three spots for COPE on a joint slate, up from two in 2008. At School Board, the proposal is for five Vision and four COPE candidates. Vancouver voters also elect a seven-member Parks Board. This agreement would see four Vision candidates, and two from COPE; the final spot would go to the civic Greens, pending their approval.

Announcing the tentative agreement, COPE External Chair Marcus Youssef said, "COPE has

a long history of cooperating to ensure progressive politics in Vancouver, and we're pleased to have reached an agreement with Vision Vancouver to continue this history."

Youssef said the agreement reflects the hard work COPE Councillors have done at City Hall. "We needed to grow our numbers to keep up that work, and this agreement provides for that," he said. "City Hall is better with COPE, and having a chance to expand on our team there is going to be good for Vancouver."

Within this framework, COPE has been able to influence many critical civic policies, especially around emergency shelters and housing, civil liberties, preventing school closures, and ecological initiatives.

"Political cooperation has been a very good thing for this city," said Youssef. "Unlike the divisive and backward-looking politics of the NPA, COPE's goal of creating a Vancouver for everyone is best served by working collaboratively."

The shift in council slate positions may also reflect some difficulties faced by the Vision majority at City Hall. Heading into the 2008 campaign, Vision signed up a membership of some 15,000, as Vancouverites rebelled against the NPA's arrogance and its undiluted big-business policies.

But while Vision remains the largest civic party by a wide margin, some of its members have dropped out or returned to their former home in COPE. Many cite the governing party's tendency to make important Council decisions prior to full genuine democratic consultation. Others have been alienated by pro-developer decisions, or Vision's move to continue the NPA-initiated shift of property taxes away from the business sector and onto the backs of homeowners.

During the 2008 election, the bulk of labour's support and resources went to the Vision campaign, but the trade union movement in Vancouver has since begun shifting back to the COPE camp. COPE has also made significant gains among the city's important arts and cultural sectors, and is reaching out to ethnic and racialized communities. Not least, COPE's six elected officials have won wide recognition for their principled stands to defend democratic rights and the interests of working people. In a nutshell, COPE is in a somewhat stronger position than in the past two campaigns, while Vision has found it impossible to meet the public's

expectations.

But there is no guarantee that the COPE membership will accept the tentative agreement. Some COPE members are understandably angry about certain Vision policies, and the fact that Vision relies heavily on contributions from the city's developers.

However, the danger is that divisions between the centre and left forces in Vancouver could open the door for an NPA comeback, as happened in 2005 when cooperation was fragile at best.

The election of a Harper Tory majority with less than 40% of the

popular vote is also a warning that disunity can be deadly. The flip side of this argument is easily found on Vancouver's right-wing political blogs, where the Vision/COPE agreement is angrily denounced as a plot to unfairly deny the NPA's path to power.

Some activists, such as supporters of ultra-left former councillor Tim Louis, argue that COPE could win a civic election on its own, but this view overstates the extent of socialist views among working people in Vancouver. In fact, COPE has only done well in civic elections where the political

right is badly divided, or where the centre-left forces cooperate despite their differences.

An examination of Vancouver's five federal ridings shows why. In the May 2 election, the NDP won 82,676 votes in Vancouver, about one-third of the 240,000 ballots cast in the city. The Conservatives were second with 77,213, then 68,965 Liberal, and 18,384 for the Greens.

The 77,000 Tory voters (and many of the Liberals), are the NPA's power base in the city's west and south. Although some Liberals and Greens do vote COPE at the civic level, left-minded NDPers form the core of COPE's east side and Kitsilano base. Vision draws its broader support from Liberals, New Democrats and Greens across the city.

The conclusion is obvious: any "go it alone" strategy by COPE would almost certainly end in defeat. Well aware of the numbers, most sections of the labour movement which lean towards COPE would probably decide not to throw their scarce resources into an impossible campaign. An isolated COPE slate would be outgunned in an expensive at-large civic race, despite its advantages of "brand recognition" and a dynamic group of elected officials and supporters.

Will this sober appraisal be shared by a majority at the next COPE membership meeting? Or will anger at Vision's retreat from its progressive image prove more powerful? In our next issue, we'll hear from COPE executive members and elected officials. ●



Seen here during the 2008 campaign, COPE school trustees Al Blakey, Alan Wong and Jane Bouey have played a pivotal role in making the Vancouver School Board a strong voice for public education. (PV file photo)

People's Voice Fund Drive - 47% and rising

Capitalist media key to Harper's majority

In any close election race, many factors enter into the final result, but media support is critical. That was true on May 2, when the Harper Tories turned a tiny 2% increase in their overall popular vote share into two dozen more seats. Despite being a 39% minority party among voters, the Tories won their coveted majority.

The Conservatives who depended heavily on the clique of opinion-shapers who run Canada's newsrooms - the editors and publishers appointed by some of the wealthiest people in the country. Especially during elections, the television stations and daily papers which most Canadians rely on for their primary information sources get to decide what's news and what isn't, and how that news will be slanted. For example, in this campaign, a retired cop's leak about Jack Layton's innocent quest for a massage after a long day at the office was presented as "news", while Tory mismanagement of the Canadian economy was regularly characterized instead as "trustworthy economic guidance".

We don't often get to see the pro-Conservative bias of the big media conglomerates reduced into hard numbers. This time, researchers found that of 22 major dailies which made editorial endorsements, no less than 21 backed the Conservatives. This includes

ten out of eleven dailies in the Post Media chain, and another six Sun newspapers, plus the *Globe and Mail* and a few more. The lone exception was the *Toronto Star*, which made history by endorsing Jack Layton's NDP.

People's Voice readers won't be surprised by this breakdown, but we do need a response. Our part of the solution is in your hands - this newspaper, which is distributed regularly across Canada to trade union offices, union conventions, picket lines, mass rallies, and independent bookstores. Without our own working class press, we have no way to fight back against the capitalist media monopoly.

With this issue, we are relaunching the 2011 People's Voice Fund Drive, which was on hold during the election. Donations did keep arriving

during the campaign, and we are now up to \$23,495 - 47% of our \$50,000 Fund Drive target. Ontario leads the way, with \$12,165, or 56.3% of their \$21,600 targets. Alberta is next, with \$1855 raised, or 54.6% of their \$3400 target. Our Newfoundland/Labrador supporters have sent in 50% of their \$400 goal, and Quebec is at 49%, with \$245 out of \$500 raised. They are followed by Saskatchewan (\$350 out of \$800, or 43.6%), Manitoba (\$925 out of \$2400, or 38.5%), B.C. (\$7130 out of \$20,000, or 35.7%), and the Atlantic region (\$325 out of \$1200, or 27%). Another \$300 has come from friends outside Canada.

Thanks go out to our Burnaby supporters, for their delicious Mother's Day Pancake Breakfast just as this issue neared completion. Two more B.C. fundraisers are coming up - the "revolutionary bus tour" organized on May 29 by our Vancouver East supporters, and the annual PV Victory Banquet, scheduled for June 4 at the Russian Hall. Look at the ad on page 4 for details!

Once again this year, we offer a gift in appreciation of your solidarity. For each donation of \$100, contributors will have their choice of a PV 2011 Calendar, a framed portrait of a revolutionary fighter, or a copy of "Great October," a DVD dedicated to the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917. ●



Here's my contribution to the PV Fund Drive!

Enclosed please find my donation of \$_____ to the 2011 People's Voice Press Fund Drive.

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Send your contribution to:

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CUPW holds Day of Action for fair contract

PV Vancouver Bureau

Entering the final days of negotiations for a new collective agreement, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers held a Day of Action across the country on May 11, as *People's Voice* was in the printshop. CUPW reports that major issues remain unresolved, and that talks are now in the

mediation phase for the union's urban unit, which represents most of its 54,000 members.

A recent CUPW bulletin stressed the need to focus on key issues, such as efforts to maximize full-time jobs and implement a process to ensure vacant positions are filled.

"We are all aware of the problems resulting from staffing shortages

in postal facilities across the country," says CUPW President Denis Lemelin. "These not only include occupational health and safety problems, but also problems with service to the public. To preserve universal public postal service, we have to find a practical solution to these staffing shortages. To find such a solution, we need to review the ratio of full-time jobs and discuss the rules governing the staffing of vacant positions. This is a concrete problem that needs a concrete solution. This will help us determine whether the employer is truly willing to resolve problems.

"We must continue to put pressure on the employer at the negotiating table and on the work floor. We must intensify activities and solidarity actions as we prepare for the May 11 National Day of Action. Together we will win!"

Illustrating the problems in dealing with Canada Post was a recent presentation by Paul Vincelette of the Montreal CUPW local. Documenting the impact of the introduction of "Modern Post" mechanized letter sequencing at the company's Monterey Depot, Vincelette's research revealed a dramatic increase in injuries, sick

leave and overtime.

Senior management responded that many of these issues should be dealt with at the local level, but as Vincelette pointed out, local management always says that the problems have to be resolved at the national level.

In other recent sessions, the parties discussed issues such as the union's demand for a comprehensive cost of living allowance (COLA), Canada Post's short term disability plan and the surplus in the disability insurance fund. But CUPW reports that "there has been no response at all from management on the Union's demands. Nothing on proper rotation of duties, protection against contracting out, contracting in new work or providing new services to name only a few."

Management's "clarification" on their proposed short term disability plan states that CUPW members "are not going to lose their bank of sick leave credits". However, under this scheme CUPW members will not be able to use any portion of their sick leave credits for absences of five days or less, and will receive no pay for these absences once their personal days have been used up.

The company's "clarification" also claims that Manulife initially only denies one out of every twenty sick leave claims under the short term disability plan. But the union warns that if Manulife does become the decision-maker when it comes to receiving pay under the short term disability plan, this will give a private insurance company more power over the lives of postal workers.

Meanwhile, Canada Post is demanding wide concessions, starting with a proposal to pay new employees 30% less and give them reduced benefits, an inferior pension and weaker job security.

Canada Post also wants to dramatically increase the amount that retirees have to pay for their extended health care plan, and to turn back the clock on many other contract provisions to slash labour costs. Yet the company has made profits for 16 years while having one of the lowest standard postage rates in the industrialized world.

In response, CUPW wants recognition that postal workers have helped Canada Post increase profits and productivity, and a contract which shares some of these gains, instead of attacking wages, rights and working conditions. ●

Canada Post belongs to all of us.

The struggle continues for good public postal service and a better world.

cupw•sttp

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers
www.cupw.ca

CUPE 1979

Communist Party of Canada backs Postal Workers

A wide array of unions and progressive organizations have issued statements supporting CUPW's negotiations, many of which have been posted on the union's website. This letter of support has been sent from the Communist Party of Canada:

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers has been in negotiations for several months with Canada Post, but has been unable to secure a collective agreement because of the employer's intransigence on the issues of job security and contracting out, among other things. In fact Canada Post, and its boss the Harper government, are intent on privatizing the post office and they recognize that CUPW is the most immediate obstacle to their privatization aims.

In mid-April, CUPW took a strike vote and secured the support of 94.5%, showing the unity and militancy of CUPW members and their union from coast to coast to coast.

We are proud to support CUPW and its fight to keep the post office public, a fight it has taken up on behalf of its members and all Canadians. For many years CUPW has led the fight in the public sector for job security, for decent wages and working conditions, for a strong, militant and membership driven union, and for a united and fighting labour movement.

In the event CUPW is forced to strike, or is locked out, the Communist Party will be there to support striking or locked out workers, and to continue to demand that Canada Post sit down and negotiate a fair collective agreement and end its campaign to privatize Canada's public post office.

We call on all Canadians who care about a public post office, to stand in support of the union and its fight to secure a fair collective agreement, and to stop privatization of Canada Post. ●

Anti-Harper demo caps campaign in Newfoundland

By Sean Burton, May 4, 2011

Stephen Harper attempted to woo Newfoundlanders and Labradorians during the election with the usual campaign promises, but the majority of people in this province demonstrated that they have not forgotten or forgiven the federal Conservative Party's contempt.

This province was largely ignored by the mainstream parties save for a handful of token visits by party leaders. As the campaign moved on, the word on the streets was largely that it would take a miracle for the Conservatives to win any seat here. Nonetheless, a group of about 35 concerned citizens rallied in downtown St. John's on April 29th to denounce the Conservative Party and Prime Minister Harper, under the banner of "Stop the Majority".

Organizer Adrian House condemned the Harper government for its cuts to social programs, excessive military spending and overall right-wing agenda, as well as the PM's lack of commitment to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The rally proceeded to march through St. John's to the old legislature building on Military Road, chanting and condemning Harper over the megaphone and encountering considerable support from passersby all the way.

It was not surprising that the Conservatives once again failed to win a seat. The sole exception was Labrador. Although that victory is being spun as a Conservative breakthrough, in a staunchly liberal riding, Peter Penashue won only by a very narrow margin. Penashue was the president of the Labrador Innu Nation and one of the major

negotiators for the Innu with the Voisey's Bay Nickel Company, but even that did not guarantee a strong victory. Similar stories can be told across Canada, all of which should be used as fuel to challenge the first-past-the-post electoral system.

Regardless of the election outcome, only vague commitments were made to the province on economic development. Harper's minority government as well as the previous Liberal government have not had a good record of keeping promises, and now that Harper has a majority, there is even less reason to do so. Since many Newfoundlanders have vocally rejected the Conservatives twice in a row, Harper may well act out of spite.

The Conservatives were evidently hoping for quite the coup in Newfoundland, putting up a number of high-profile candidates and also having the apparent support of the post-Danny Williams provincial government. It is now obvious that Kathy Dunderdale and her supporters felt ill at ease with

Williams' opposition to the federal government. Dunderdale has been under fire, particularly since appearing with Harper at a rally in St. John's. Given the rejection of the Conservatives here, it is not inconceivable that the premier may seek to intercede with Ottawa in lieu of the Liberal and NDP MPs. Any such behaviour may well undermine the provincial government when elections are held here in October. Another landslide victory for the Progressive Conservative party already seems most unlikely.

It is bittersweet that Harper was defeated here and rejected by over 60% of Canadian voters, who still have to face the fact of a Conservative majority government. Many people worked hard fighting against that majority, and now is certainly not the time to give up. Rather, all Canadians who value peace and democracy must redouble their efforts to challenge the right and expose the Conservatives as the enemies of the working peoples of Canada. ●



In one of many similar protests during the federal election, about 100 people rallied on April 9 outside a Harper campaign speech in Burnaby. The action was initiated by StopWar, Vancouver's broad-based anti-war coalition. (Photo: K. Cariou)

EDITORIALS

Electoral reform: more than ever

It's no exaggeration to state that the May 2 federal election was literally stolen from the 60%-plus of Canadian voters who cast a ballot against the Harper Conservatives. There is wide agreement that the policy platforms presented by the parliamentary opposition parties were sharply different from the Tory agenda. On the whole, the NDP, Bloc Quebecois, Liberals and Greens opposed the Harper government's drive to lower corporate taxes, build more prisons, and ignore climate change.

It's true there was less difference among all the major parties on foreign policy, sadly reflecting the NDP's unwillingness to reject Canada's integration into imperialist war-making. But since none of these parties made foreign policy a key issue in the campaign, the Harper Tories cannot honestly claim a popular mandate for their expansion of military spending and participation in NATO's wars.

But on the whole, Canadian voters faced a choice between one far-right party, and several others which claimed to stand for progressive values. Not surprisingly, three out of five chose one of the latter, hoping to dump the Tories. Instead, eerily reminiscent of the 1988 "free trade" election, the "first-past-the-post" system allowed a minority party to win a solid majority in Parliament. Only one adult out of four voted for the Harper Tories, hardly a "mandate" for their reactionary policies.

This outcome should stoke the demands for genuine electoral reform in Canada. Proportional representation would encourage Canadians to support their favourite party rather simply than to vote against the main danger. A mixed-member PR system would combine the benefits of local representation with a Parliament more closely reflecting the views of working people. PR is not a perfect solution, but it would definitely help generate momentum for fundamental social and economic change in Canada.

Congratulations to B.C. teachers

The recent court victory by British Columbia teachers is a great lesson in the strategy and tactics of class(room) struggle. We congratulate the B.C. Teachers' Federation, and we urge the labour and people's movements to follow this example of how to successfully combine job action, mass protests, and legal challenges.

This matter goes back to the 2001 election of the Liberal government in British Columbia. The Campbell Liberals imposed the full neoliberal agenda, slashing social programs, attacking the poor, tearing up union contracts, and giving multi-billion dollar tax breaks to the rich and the corporations.

The response was a powerful fightback by the labour movement, anti-poverty groups, and other forces. Faced with deeply negative impacts on public education, teachers across the province worked with other unions, students, parent groups, and progressive school trustees to hold huge protest rallies, gather petitions, and much more. Education Minister Christy Clark - now Premier - arrogantly dismissed this public anger. Teachers were finally compelled to walk out in defence of their bargaining rights and the interests of students. For two weeks in the fall of 2005, the BCTF stood up to the Campbell government's bullying, finally winning agreement that the issue of class sizes would be addressed.

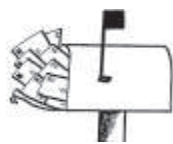
This legal ruling against the Liberals is a solid victory for collective bargaining rights, and it was won as much through the political action of teachers as through legal channels. As the ruling says, the right to collectively bargain "reaffirms the values of dignity, personal autonomy, equality and democracy that are inherent in the Charter."

Next step: defeat the B.C. Liberals and step up the fight to restore education funding cuts over the past two decades!

Canadian jets over Libya Mission Creep



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Letters to the Editor

Tories don't speak for majority

With the federal election resulting in a "majority" Conservative government, the real work begins for the majority of people who did not support the Harper agenda. The Tories only won 39.6% of the vote and must be held accountable for a promise to

be the "government for all the people of Canada."

The election of a large New Democratic Party caucus is good news, but as a left wing New Democrat, I am well aware of two key weaknesses in the party. First of all, in the quest to "be respectable", the party has moved from democratic socialism to social democracy to being "a party of the centre left." We cannot always

depend on New Democrats to take consistently progressive positions on key social, economic or political issues at home or abroad. Secondly, a number of elected New Democrats were originally nominated as candidates not expected to win, but to provide voters with the opportunity to hear about the NDP alternative. These new MPs will have a steep learning curve to become effective.

Three things are essential. We need to build a stronger and more united left in Canada. This will include New Democrats, but must also incorporate Greens, Communists and left-wing Liberals. It is essential for progressive activists including organized labour, human rights activists, peace activists and environmentalists to work together along with the 103 NDP/Green members of parliament to keep pressure on this government for the causes important for us.

Finally, we must build more pressure for the democratization of our democratic system. It is shameful that the NDP in Saskatchewan can win over 35% of the vote and not elect a single MP, or that the Tories in Alberta can elect 96% of MPs on 66% of the vote.

Our work has just begun. We cannot let the Tories pretend they speak for the majority of Canadians - and we definitely must not let them pretend they are protecting the environment, world peace, or the rights of workers and minorities.

Wayne Madden, Edmonton, AB

Revolutionary Bus Tour

Join us on a school bus ride to historic Vancouver sites linked with the activities of the labour movement and the Communist Party!

We will visit the locations of the Battle of Ballantyne Pier, the On to Ottawa Trek, the Post Office occupation, the original People's Co-op Bookstore, the hall where COPE celebrated early election victories, and much more. Tickets just \$20 (low-income rates available on request), including a light lunch at the Centre for Socialist Education following the tour.

Proceeds to the People's Voice Fund Drive.
Call Kimball at 604-255-2041 for information.

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LETTERS

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Markham Council bans criticism of Israeli apartheid

Special to PV

The municipality of Markham, Ontario, northeast of Toronto, has been known for its rapid population growth in recent years. Now, Markham is in the news for another reason. On May 3, a majority of city councillors adopted a motion to censor "Israeli Apartheid Week", an event held this year in 95 cities and more than 75 universities on six continents. This includes three cities in Israel and four cities in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Organized every March by students on Canadian campuses, Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) features film screenings and high-profile forums with prominent academics and community leaders. IAW condemns all forms of racism and discrimination, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, and homophobia. Many Jewish students are involved in organizing IAW.

The Canadian Arab Federation

says the May 3 motion "aims to deny Canadian students and academics the rights of freedom of expression and academic freedom, rights that are enjoyed by Israeli students and academics... The motion creates the absurd situation where Canadian students and academics are allowed to freely criticize their own government but are banned from criticizing a foreign government.

"The motion put forward by Councillor (Howard) Shore is one of several attempts currently being undertaken to censor and suppress public debate on this subject in order to shield Israel's actions from scrutiny and criticism. Such actions are an attack on free speech the likes of which we have not seen since the 1950s McCarthy witch hunts."

The CAF points out that Markham councillors ignored a

comprehensive study undertaken by Toronto City staff, which determined the phrase "Israeli



Apartheid" does not promote hatred or discrimination, and does not violate the Criminal Code or the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Markham City Council also ignored the compelling evidence

introduced from the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, the Conference of Southern African Christian Churches, the Association of Civil Rights of Israel and the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, that irrefutably proves Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel are systematically discriminated against and that the situation in the occupied West Bank and Gaza is reminiscent of apartheid in South Africa.

Speakers against the Markham motion represented diverse supporters of free speech and Palestinian rights, including Jews, Christians and Muslims of all ages and gender, and from various backgrounds.

On the surface, the motion is puzzling, since there are no university campuses or IAW events in Markham. But the municipality includes the

provincial riding of Thornhill, represented by MPP Peter Thurman - the same MPP who put forward a non-binding motion in the Ontario legislature last year to condemn IAW.

Also, Markham City Council decided recently to send a trade mission to Israel. Rejection of Councillor Shore's motion would have implied that the city condones the labelling of Israel as an Apartheid state, leaving it in the awkward position of doing business with an apartheid regime.

As CAF National President Khaled Mouammar stated, "Regrettably, this politically expedient decision runs counter to the Town of Markham's stated mission to recognize and accept the diversity of its residents, to respect the differences in all peoples and their right to hold different opinions, to promote the value of human rights, and to oppose racism and discrimination." ●

Why aren't people voting? Let me tell you the reasons why...

At Guelph University, Conservative operatives recently tried to nullify the vote of several hundred students at a poll set up to facilitate student voting. They failed, but there is a far subtler and more effective way of eliminating troublesome voters, students, Aboriginals, the poor and the elderly alike.

In 2008, Elections Canada introduced stringent voter ID requirements that cannot easily be met. You have to show proof not only of your identity but of your street address, and this is where the problem lies, as such documentation is not easy to come by, and often impossible. (Take me: I have ID galore with photos and signatures, but nothing with my address, so I must take a utility or phone bill with me to vote, something not everyone can do unless the bills are in their name.)

There are hundreds of thousands of Canadians whose address is a box number and that is where wholesale rejection occurs: a box number is not acceptable. Among them are large numbers of rural residents and Aboriginals on reserves where street names don't exist and everybody has a box number. (A scrutineer in a 2008 campaign in northern Saskatchewan that I managed reported that fifty aboriginal voters were turned away for this reason in one poll alone. With 180-odd polls in the riding, you can see how elections are lost and won through the denial of the vote.)

Elections Canada does not keep track of rejected voters, but had post-election surveys showing that almost 5% of registered voters (which in 2008 was nearly 500,000 of 13.7 million) "said they did not vote because they lacked proper documentation."

How older citizens are affected was documented by former Victoria University president Howard Petch, who went to vote as he had always done since WW II, with a wallet full of ID - passport, various

This commentary by Saskatoon-based political activist Marjaleena Repo was circulated before the federal election, and remains highly relevant as Canadians debate how to democratize our electoral system. Anecdotal evidence from across Canada indicates that many thousands of eligible voters were again denied the right to cast a ballot on May 2, thanks to rigid regulations designed to block Canadians from voting. We welcome other comments and submissions from PV readers on this crucial topic.

health cards, and voter registration card - none of which were deemed acceptable. No longer driving, he did not have a license which could (but doesn't always) have an address. Wheelchair bound, he was told to go home for more documentation or to wait around to get someone to vouch for him. Outraged, he refused and became one of the rejected. Elsewhere, countless seniors were turned away from polls at seniors' residences for the same reason. Today Petch believes that there is a deliberate plan to keep voters away who are the most discontented and likely to vote against the status quo.

Our voter participation was already decimated by a major change in a system that used to work well. Until the late '90s we had the world's best voter registration system. All potential voters were enumerated after an election was called, and consequently the voters' lists were highly accurate and the voter needed only to prove they were the person in question, not where they lived.

With enumeration, a high percentage of eligible voters were registered; today we do not even know how many can't make the list as it is now left up to citizens to register themselves, by hook or by crook. Educated and privileged classes have an easier time; others can face overwhelming difficulties. We have moved from the world-class Canadian system of universal voter registration to the American-style system of survival of the fittest, each man or woman for him/herself. Large-scale voter

inequality has reared its ugly head and with it comes falling voter participation, from 67% in 1997 when the last enumeration took place to 61% in 2000 and a historic low of 58.8% in 2008.

Another change added to falling rates. The campaign period was shortened in 1997 to a minimum of 36 days from 47. Time is central to

citizen participation in elections, and there can't be much of it when the campaign whirls by at break-neck speed - neither the candidates nor the voters have an opportunity to engage in a meaningful way. Elections have become virtual ones, taking place mostly in the media, run by pollsters and pundits, and not in our neighbourhoods and communities where they belong. (It is interesting that with a 55 day campaign in 2006, participation rose to 65% from 61% in 2004, then fell below 60% in the last election with a 37 day campaign.)

There is much ado about "voter apathy", with a focus on young people, who in creative and desperate ways are urged and

"mobbed" to vote. Unfortunately, much of this effort is barking up the wrong tree: unless we can guarantee that hundreds of thousands of Canadians who are eager to vote can actually do so, we are subjecting them to a nasty piece of Catch 22 where the victims of voter obstruction get the blame for being apathetic and not doing their civic duty. The simple solution is to bring back voter enumeration with all its democratic benefits, and to extend the campaign period to a minimum of 47 days that served us so well.

[Editor's note: The federal election of Jan. 23, 2006 was longer to allow for the Christmas-New Year holiday period. In the 2011 election, voter turnout rose slightly to 61.4%.] ●



Canadians cheated again, says Fair Vote Canada

Canada's movement for voting reform says the election outcome does not accurately reflect the way Canadians voted.

"The Conservative party increased their vote percentage by less than two points," says Fair Vote Canada (FVC) President Bronwen Bruch, "but this allowed them to win 24 more seats than in 2008, when they were already over-represented. Stephen Harper calls this a 'decisive endorsement', but we call it a rip-off."

The total of seats won by each party included: Conservative 167, NDP 102, Liberal 34, Bloc Quebecois 4, and Green 1.

But if the seats were won in

proportion to the votes that were cast, the numbers would look like this: Conservative 122, NDP 95, Liberal 59, Bloc Quebecois 19, Green 13.

The Conservatives won 54.22% of the seats with only 39.62% of the votes, one of the least legitimate majorities in Canadian history.

"This is a classic phony majority," said Bruch, "and leaves us with a government that is completely unaccountable to Parliament. As long as they maintain rigid party discipline, nothing bad can happen to them for four years."

The NDP, historically under-represented by Canada's winner-

take-all voting system, is now over-represented by seven seats. While Liberal support fell by less than 8%, they lost more than half their seats. The Bloc Quebecois should be entitled to 19 seats, not just four. The Green Party finally won a single seat, but took enough votes across the country to win 13 seats.

"Vote splits between the Liberals and NDP allowed the Conservatives to steal seats," added Fair Vote Executive Director Wayne Smith. "Once again, our antiquated voting system has given us the wrong government, a government that most of us voted against. It is truly time to change our voting system."

Millions march on May Day 2011

Marches and rallies marking May First, the International Day of the Worker, took place around the world this year. Millions of people took part, taking a powerful stand against the continued attacks on wages, labour standards and social programs by the transnational corporations and neoliberal governments.

Activists flooded Turkey's largest city to demand more jobs, better working conditions and higher wages. About 200,000 workers gathered in Istanbul's Taksim Square in the largest May Day rally since 1977, when at least 34 people died and more than 100 were injured after a shooting by right-wing provocateurs triggered a stampede. Turkish unions were finally allowed to hold May Day actions in the square last year. This year's rally, marked by colourful flags, dancing and chanting, was organized by Turkey's four trade union confederations.

Across Germany, some 420,000 people took to the streets to demand fair wages, better working conditions, and sufficient social security. Michael Sommer, head of the German unions' umbrella group, DGB, said the high turnout was a clear message to the government that it should give up its refusal to introduce a minimum wage.

In Cuba, hundreds of thousands of **people marched through Havana** and other cities in a vast show of support for economic changes recently approved by the Communist Party.



Rally organized by Spain's UGT labour federation.

In South Korea, police estimated that **50,000 rallied in Seoul for better working conditions**. They also urged the government to contain rising inflation, a growing concern across much of Asia, where spiking food and oil prices pushed millions into poverty. Thousands of workers rallied in other east Asian cities to vent their anger over the rising cost of living and growing disparities between the rich and poor.

Thousands of people turned out for **May Day demonstrations in Paris**, where supporters of the far-right National Front party tried to sow divisions by pushing their racist, anti-immigrant policies. France's five major labour unions organized around 200 marches across the country, calling for measures to tackle the rising cost of living and to denounce racism. The CGT labour federation estimated that more than 120,000 people took part.

In the Philippines, about 3,000 **workers demanding higher wages held a protest in a Manila square**



The scene in Ankara's Taksim Square, where 200,000 people rallied on May First.

that included setting alight the effigy of Philippine President Benigno Aquino III grinning in a luxury car. Aquino has been criticized for buying a second-hand Porsche in a country where a third of people live on a dollar a day.

In Taiwan, about **2,000 people rallied in Taipei to protest the widening income gap** and to demand their government act to create better work conditions. Nearly 10,000 people in Hong Kong took part in two protests calling for stronger labour laws. Best known as a glitzy financial hub, Hong Kong recently introduced the first

banking sector. "When everything's going well they fill their pockets," he said. "And when things are going badly, it's the taxpayers who pay."

In Greece, tens of thousands marched in different cities against austerity measures imposed by the country's social democratic government. Greek unions will hold another **general strike on May 11**, defying the call by Prime Minister Papandreou for "everyone to support the big changes that the country needs."

In **Portugal, huge protests slammed austerity measures** expected to be imposed under the terms of a European Union and International Monetary Fund bailout plan. "Never has social protest been more important," said Manuel Carvalho da Silva, the head of the CGTP union.

In Seoul at least 50,000 workers gathered to chant slogans calling for higher pay, better job security and to slam the conservative administration. "Our livelihood has been ruined by anti-labour policies, rising unemployment and a widening wealth gap for the past three years under (President) Lee Myung-Bak," the Korean Federation of Trade Unions said.

Thousands of protesters in Indonesia called for better social security, at rallies where they confronted some 10,000 security personnel.

Several **May Day rallies and marches were held across Canada**. In Montreal, several thousand took part in a rally organized by Québec's militant trade union

movement. Later in the day, police attacked an "anti-capitalist May Day march" which drew close to a thousand participants. Several people were arrested after police blocked the march.

In Toronto, two May Day marches converged for a jointly, in a signal of efforts to strengthen unity among progressive movements. On the same evening, activists packed the Steelworkers Hall on Cecil Street for a celebration organized by the United May Day Committee, and endorsed by the Toronto Labour Council and over 30 other progressive organizations.

Vancouver's renewed tradition of May Day actions continued this year with a **demonstration initiated by the Young Workers Committee** and backed by the Vancouver & District Labour Council. About 500 people joined the march down Commercial Drive.

Other May Day rallies were held in Canadian cities such as

Winnipeg, Nanaimo and Victoria.

In the USA, tens of thousands of workers rallied to reclaim May Day as an American holiday.

From a podium next to a memorial in Chicago for the Haymarket Martyrs, Terence O'Sullivan, president of the Laborers International Union, said: "May Day is the real Labor Day for American workers. For those who say it is a day associated with ideas too militant or too radical we say that there is nothing too militant or too radical when it comes to what must be done to protect the rights of workers."

In **Milwaukee**, the president of the largest U.S. labor federation told **a cheering crowd of more than 100,000**: "May Day is our day to stand together!"

"Gov. Scott Walker has declared war on Wisconsin workers," said AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka. "We reject the idea that America can no longer be a great nation and that we're too broke to treat people fairly."

The fusing of the struggles for workers rights and immigrant rights was a feature of all U.S. May Day rallies, as unions rejected the notion that immigrants take jobs away from the native born.

Some 10,000 **demonstrators in Los Angeles called for immigration reform**, starting with passage of the Dream Act, which would provide undocumented youth with a route to legal residency. In Boston, thousands participated in a march that drew on the global fight for workers' rights with the theme of "From Cairo to Wisconsin to Massachusetts Defend All Workers' Rights."

In **Houston**, the local chapter of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement joined with Houston United in a huge rally for worker' and immigrant rights. Workers in Buffalo marched more than two miles to protest the closing of a community health clinic. ●



Striking airline workers rallied on May 1 in India.



Havana's annual May 1 rally showed the support of Cubans for their socialist course.

After the election: struggle shifts outside Parliament

Commentary by the Central Executive Committee, Communist Party of Canada

The May 2nd federal election gave Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party an absolute majority in the new Parliament. But to do it they had to hide their real agenda, and spend millions in payoffs and promises they may never deliver. They haven't convinced a majority of Canadians to privatize medicare and social programs, and they haven't sold Canadians on their sky-high military spending, the wars in Afghanistan and Libya, or their war on civil, democratic and labour rights. The outcome did not reflect a political swing to the right among voters, and Harper has no real mandate to impose his reactionary agenda on the working class and the peoples of Canada.

In fact, the Conservatives garnered less than 40% of votes cast, and only 24.3% support among all registered voters. There was no seismic shift to the Conservatives; rather, the Tory majority came about primarily due to vote-splitting between the Liberals and the NDP in key ridings, especially in B.C. and Southern Ontario.

This election revealed yet again the archaic, undemocratic nature of the "first-past-the-post" electoral system, which always distorts electoral outcomes and in this case negated the anti-Tory sentiments of the majority of the Canadian people. The struggle for democratic electoral reform, beginning with some form of

proportional representation, has become more urgent than ever.

While support for the Harper Conservatives rose just 2%, there were substantial shifts in voting patterns for the other large established parties. Most significant was the growth in both popular support (30.6%) and seats (102 out of 308) for the New Democrats, earning the NDP the status of "official opposition" for the first time. These gains came particularly at the expense of the pro-sovereignist Bloc Québécois, and the Liberal Party in English-speaking Canada.

The collapse of the BQ was dramatic, with its popular vote in Québec sliding to 23.4% (from 38.1% in 2008) and its seats reduced from 49 to only 4, with a corresponding massive increase in support for the NDP. A certain fatigue with the sovereignty debate among Québec voters helped cause the Bloc vote to collapse, in favour of the anti-Harper alternative presented by the NDP. It would be wrong to conclude however that this signifies a marked drop in support for the sovereignty option, considering Layton's public commitment to respect the results of a future referendum vote on separation, and the Québec NDP's shift to support "asymmetrical federalism."

The increased vote for the NDP, and its enlarged caucus which includes many young first-time members, is a welcome development, reflecting a growing trend among working people to break away from the grasp of the old-line parties of big business. Clearly, a larger proportion of electors, especially among youth and students, were attracted by NDP

leader Jack Layton's call for "change". Québec is now the NDP's main base, which may push them to take stronger positions on the national question, on war and militarism, and on protection of medicare and social programs. It must be said however that although many identified the NDP as a left-progressive alternative, the party under Layton's leadership has in



fact moved steadily toward the "centre" of the political spectrum as part of their long-held strategy of supplanting the Liberals as the official opposition.

Also noteworthy and welcome was the breakthrough election of Elizabeth May as the first Green Party representative in Parliament, even though the overall popular vote for the Greens slipped compared to 2008.

Both the Liberals and the BQ emerged from the election badly mauled, and their respective leaders (Ignatieff and Duceppe) have resigned. The post-election crisis in both these camps could take the form of further political

realignments in the future.

Not surprisingly given the continued media blackout, votes for the Communist Party of Canada's 20 candidates remained low. But the Communist campaign helped to inject the anti-war views of millions of Canadians into the debates, and to win support for radical new policies to put people's needs ahead of corporate greed.

The most immediate outcome is the catastrophic reality of a Harper Tory majority in Ottawa for the next four years. The carefully orchestrated Conservative campaign (heavily financed by its big business patrons) convinced at least a section of the electorate that they had somehow moderated their radical, right-wing political agenda and could therefore be "trusted" with the immense power of a parliamentary majority. But this scripted image is belied by the facts. The Tories' first two terms in office - even as a minority - revealed much of their militarist, pro-corporate, anti-environmental and anti-democratic policies, carried out by the most arrogant, dictatorial and secretive government in Canadian history.

The Harper Conservatives' full-blown program will quickly come to the fore: their "law and order" agenda (starting with the "omnibus" crime bill), the further imperialist drive to militarization and war, and a sharpened assault on labour, democratic and social rights and services, not unlike the vicious "austerity" policies being imposed by right-wing governments across Europe, and by Republican-controlled states in the U.S. Workers in the federal public service are

likely to be among the first targets of Harper's "plan" to eliminate the deficit within three years.

The so-called "social conservatives" are already raising demands to "reopen" the debate on women's reproductive rights and to strip away other gender and equity-based gains, and to eliminate Human Rights Tribunals.

Given the new balance of forces within Parliament, the capacity of the NDP and other opposition parties to counter this agenda will be significantly weakened; they will offer up their critiques and may succeed in delaying various pieces of legislation, but with the Tories in full control of both the Commons and the Senate, the possibilities of actually blocking or defeating government bills by parliamentary means alone have all but disappeared. In such circumstances, the focus of resistance and struggle against this reactionary agenda must shift decisively to the extra-parliamentary arena. This is where the next battles will be fought and where victories can and must be won.

The trade union movement has a critical and central role to play in initiating and leading a broad-based, pan-Canadian fightback movement against a renewed "Tory majority" onslaught. The Canadian Labour Congress is currently meeting in Vancouver, to be followed shortly by the congress of the Québec-based CSN labour central. The Communist Party of Canada urges delegates at these key labour conventions to seize upon this opportunity to set those wheels in motion.

The Global Economy's Corporate Crime Wave

May 5, 2011, by Jeffrey D. Sachs, www.project-syndicate.org

New York - The world is drowning in corporate fraud, and the problems are probably greatest in rich countries - those with supposedly "good governance." Poor-country governments probably accept more bribes and commit more offenses, but it is rich countries that host the global companies that carry out the largest offenses. Money talks, and it is corrupting politics and markets all over the world.

Hardly a day passes without a new story of malfeasance. Every Wall Street firm has paid significant fines during the past decade for phony accounting, insider trading, securities fraud, Ponzi schemes, or outright embezzlement by CEOs. A massive insider-trading ring is currently on trial in New York, and has implicated some leading financial-industry figures. And it follows a series of fines paid by America's biggest investment banks to settle charges of various securities violations.

There is, however, scant accountability. Two years after the biggest financial crisis in history, which was fuelled by unscrupulous behaviour by the biggest banks on Wall Street, not a single financial leader has faced jail. When companies are fined for malfeasance, their shareholders, not their CEOs and managers, pay the price. The fines are always a tiny fraction of the ill-gotten gains, implying to Wall Street that corrupt practices have a solid rate of return.

Even today, the banking lobby runs roughshod over regulators and politicians.

Corruption pays in American politics as well. The current governor of Florida, Rick Scott, was CEO of a major health-care company known as Columbia/

other voices

HCA. The company was charged with defrauding the United States government by overbilling for reimbursement, and eventually pled guilty to 14 felonies, paying a fine of \$1.7 billion.

The FBI's investigation forced Scott out of his job. But, a decade after the company's guilty pleas, Scott is back, this time as a "free-market" Republican politician.

When Barack Obama wanted somebody to help with the bailout of the US automobile industry, he turned to a Wall Street "fixer," Steven Rattner, even though Obama knew that Rattner was under investigation for giving kickbacks to government officials. After Rattner finished his work at the White House, he settled the case with a fine of a few million dollars.

But why stop at governors or presidential advisers? Former Vice President Dick Cheney came to the White House after serving as CEO of Halliburton. During his tenure at Halliburton, the firm engaged in

illegal bribery of Nigerian officials to enable the company to win access to that country's oil fields - access worth billions of dollars. When Nigeria's government charged Halliburton with bribery, the company settled the case out of court, paying a fine of \$35 million. Of course, there were no consequences whatsoever for Cheney. The news barely made a ripple in the US media.

Impunity is widespread - indeed, most corporate crimes go unnoticed. The few that are noticed typically end with a slap on the wrist, with the company - meaning its shareholders - picking up a modest fine. The real culprits at the top of these companies rarely need to worry. Even when firms pay mega-fines, their CEOs remain. The

epidemic proportions.

Corporate corruption is out of control for two main reasons. First, big companies are now multinational, while governments remain national. Big companies are so financially powerful that governments are afraid to take them on.

Second, companies are the major funders of political campaigns in places like the US, while politicians themselves are often part owners, or at least the silent beneficiaries of corporate profits. Roughly one-half of US Congressmen are millionaires, and many have close ties to companies even before they arrive in Congress.

As a result, politicians often look the other way when corporate behaviour crosses the line. Even if governments try to enforce the law,



shareholders are so dispersed and powerless that they exercise little control over the management.

The explosion of corruption - in the US, Europe, China, India, Africa, Brazil, and beyond - raises a host of challenging questions about its causes, and about how to control it now that it has reached

companies have armies of lawyers to run circles around them. The result is a culture of impunity, based on the well-proven expectation that corporate crime pays.

Given the close connections of wealth and power with the law, reining in corporate crime will be an enormous struggle.

Fortunately, the rapid and pervasive flow of information nowadays could act as a kind of deterrent or disinfectant. Corruption thrives in the dark, yet more information than ever comes to light via email and blogs, as well as Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks.

We will also need a new kind of politician leading a new kind of political campaign, one based on free online media rather than paid media. When politicians can emancipate themselves from corporate donations, they will regain the ability to control corporate abuses.

Moreover, we will need to light the dark corners of international finance, especially tax havens like the Cayman Islands and secretive Swiss banks. Tax evasion, kickbacks, illegal payments, bribes, and other illegal transactions flow through these accounts. The wealth, power, and illegality enabled by this hidden system are now so vast as to threaten the global economy's legitimacy, especially at a time of unprecedented income inequality and large budget deficits, owing to governments' inability politically - and sometimes even operationally - to impose taxes on the wealthy.

So the next time you hear about a corruption scandal in Africa or other poor region, ask where it started and who is doing the corrupting. Neither the US nor any other "advanced" country should be pointing the finger at poor countries, for it is often the most powerful global companies that have created the problem. ●



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Cote d'Ivoire union leader missing

Basile Mahan Gahé, general secretary of the ITUC affiliated organisation Dignité in Cote d'Ivoire was arrested in late April, after western-backed Alassane Ouattara won the country's internal power struggle to become president. The trade union leader was taken from his home by members of the Republican Forces of Cote d'Ivoire (FRCI). His house was ransacked and all his property was taken.

The trade union's offices, which were also ransacked, are now being occupied by security forces. The general secretary of the Federation of Autonomous Trade Unions (FECASI) judged it necessary to leave the country.

During the first week after the arrest, media sources published conflicting reports regarding Gahé. The ITUC has urged the government to release Gahé, if he is indeed still being held, unless specific charges are brought against him. ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow also appealed to the Ivorian authorities to urgently guarantee the free exercise of trade union rights.

"We will continue to keep a close eye on the situation in Cote d'Ivoire," said Burrow. "Cote d'Ivoire is under obligation to guarantee fundamental rights for everyone. Trade union organisations must be able to carry out their legitimate mission of defending workers."

Charges against Bahrain medical workers

Bahrain's justice minister has said 47 medical workers will be charged with acting against the state during the recent unrest in the Gulf kingdom. The 23 doctors and 24 nurses had promoted efforts to bring down the Sunni monarchy and spread false news, Khaled Bin Ali Al Khalifa alleged.

Bahraini forces stormed the Salmaniya Medical Centre in Manama - the country's largest hospital - in April as they attempted to quell the protests led mostly by Shia majority community. The hospital had become a shelter for demonstrators and doctors were providing information on the number of dead and wounded. Officials said the facility had been "overrun by political and sectarian activity". Dozens of doctors, nurses and other medical staff disappeared.

At a May 3 news conference, Sheikh Khaled read out the charges facing the medics, which include promoting efforts to bring down the government, harming the public by spreading false news, embezzlement of public funds, forcefully occupying a public building, incitement, and participating in illegal protests.

Physicians for Human Rights has said there is "hard evidence of systematic and co-ordinated attacks against medical personnel because of their efforts to provide unbiased

care for wounded protesters". At least 30 people have been killed in Bahrain since mid-February. More than 400 other people are facing trial, and over one percent of the country's workforce have been fired for being away from work during the protests.

The AFL-CIO is urging Washington to suspend a free



trade pact with Bahrain in response to the anti-union crackdown. Home of the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, Bahrain is a key U.S. ally in the region. While Washington has publicly condemned violence and mass arrests, U.S. officials have stopped short of taking more direct action against Bahrain's rulers.

Wharfies step up strike action

Maritime union workers began 48 hours of strike action on May 7 at Port Kembla, in New South Wales state. The industrial action included 16 hours of work bans and work limitations as well as a 48-hour stoppage.

The strike action follows similar protests that Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) workers staged the previous weekend in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Freemantle. Stevedoring company Patrick and the MUA have been in protracted negotiations over wages and working conditions.

Meanwhile, low-paid Australian workers have won a platform to improve their wages and conditions following an historic industrial tribunal decision. Aged care workers are the first employees to test new provisions in the Fair Work Act that allow the low-paid to group together and bargain on an industry level. In its decision, Fair Work Australia has confirmed the general intent of the Act to help the low-paid access the bargaining system.

Fair Work Australia has authorised the United Voice union to act on behalf of these workers. The decision means all low-paid aged care workers not covered by an enterprise agreement will receive the right to bargain. However, one group of aged care workers have been excluded from industry bargaining because they have previously negotiated a collective agreement, even though they are defined as low-paid.

Red flags in Cairo

Red flags were waved as thousands of Egyptians celebrated May First at Tahrir Square. Workers from factories across Egypt, the newly founded Federation of Independent Labour

Unions, and leftist parties rallied to celebrate their new freedoms. Protesters sang national songs and recited poetry describing the tough working conditions as a result of the policies of the former regime.

The Egyptian government announced in April that workers have the right to establish independent labour unions. Although left-wing groups have been a central part of the opposition movement, it has been unusual for them to rally openly for their cause. But the number of socialist parties is growing rapidly. Among those present at the rally were the Workers Democratic Party, the Socialist Popular Alliance, the Egyptian Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Revolutionary Socialists.

Workers are demanding an immediate improvement of their living conditions. One of the key demands is to raise the monthly minimum wage, currently set at 400 Egyptian Pounds (about US\$70) to 1200 Egyptian Pounds (about US\$200). They want wages to be tied to rising inflation, and a maximum salary set at about 15 times the minimum wage.

The rally also condemned the privatization of the public sector, which left millions of Egyptian workers jobless, and called for the return of these companies to the government.

Prime Minister Essam Sharaf did not attend an army-sponsored May Day celebration organized by the official General Federation of Trade Unions, opting instead to issue a statement on national television. The official celebration in Salam City was the first since a popular revolt ousted Hosni Mubarak, who annually used Labor Day to appease workers with insignificant raises, while his government rejected demands for a fair minimum wage.

Algeria reacts to protests

Algeria announced a sharp increase in budget spending and waived duties on staple foods on May 2, in a move designed to stop public discontent spilling over into the kind of revolts rocking other Arab states.

One of the European Union's biggest suppliers of natural gas, Algeria has been using its cash reserves to soothe grievances and by offering cautious political reforms. At a cabinet meeting chaired by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the government approved amendments to the 2011 budget which would increase public spending by 25 percent.

The extra spending would be concentrated on pay increases for public sector workers, higher state subsidies on flour, milk, cooking oil and sugar, creating work for young unemployed people and building new houses. These have been the focus of discontent among Algerians and have led to protests and riots in the past few months - though none has so far coalesced into the kind of movement that could challenge the government's hold on power. The budget measures still need to be approved by parliament, but this is usually a formality because Bouteflika allies have a majority.

In January, after sharp rises in food prices sparked riots around the country, the government suspended customs duties and VAT on sugar imports and cooking oil until Aug. 31. The budget law will extend the waiver until the end of the year.

The 74-year-old president said in a speech on April 15 that he would ensure freer elections, amend the constitution and end the jailing of journalists. Bouteflika says the proposed political changes should be ready for submission to parliament later this year, but the constitutional changes would not be submitted until after the next parliamentary election, due in May 2012. He did not specify what political reforms he was proposing or how the constitution would be changed.

Textile workers strike in Jordan

Some 3,000 striking Asian workers including 800 Bangladeshis in Jordan returned to work in early May after their employers agreed a minimal pay hike by 10 to 15 Jordanian Dollars (JD) making way for them to resume work. Around 2,000 others, however, continued the strike they started almost a month before. Of them, about 600 are Bangladeshis. Workers from Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and Nepal demanded a hike in their basic salary from JD 110 (\$160 US) to JD 150 (\$210 US).

The companies that raised salaries include Sun Jordan Company, Rainbow Textile, Prestige Apparel and Jerash Garments. Others in negotiations included Starling Apparels, Oasis Fashion and Ivory Garments.

One striker said the employees spent over Tk 2 lakh (\$2700 US)

each to migrate and their employers did not increase their salary for the last three to four years. Around two years back, the basic salary for a foreign garment worker was set at JD 110, while it was JD 150 for a Jordanian, he added. Workers are also paid for overtime, bringing the gross monthly salary of a foreign worker stands around JD 200 (\$320 US). There are around 25,000 Bangladeshi workers in Jordan.

Journalists killed across the globe

The number of journalists killed across the globe last year hit 101, the second highest figure since the 1990s, the International Press Institute (IPI) said on May 3. The most dangerous region was Asia, with 40 journalists killed. Thirty-two journalists were killed in the Americas, making it the second most dangerous continent. Pakistan became the deadliest country with 15 deaths, followed by Mexico (12) and Honduras (10).

"Although the number of journalists killed was down, compared to 2009 when 110 died - including dozens in a massacre in the Philippines - the final tally was still the second-worst annual figure since IPI's Death Watch began in the early 1990s," a statement by the organization said.

The IPI also said the number of countries where journalists were being killed had risen, "indicating that the threat to journalists is widening."

Over the last five years 472 journalists have been killed, most of them in Iraq and in the Philippines. In 2009, 32 journalists died in a massacre in the southeast Asian country as they accompanied a local election candidate in the Maguindanao province.

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

Send me information on the Communist Party of Canada



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

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UK Trade unions call for end to war on Libya

The UK's two biggest unions - Unite and Unison - and the Scottish Trade Union Congress (TUC) have called on the governments of the UK, France and the US to halt the air attacks on Libya. The statements from the labour groups were issued in mid-April.

In its statement, Unite says: "Unite believes the attack on Libya by British, French and US forces is wrong and should be halted. While holding no brief for Colonel Gaddafi and his regime, and strongly supporting the movements now developing for democracy and freedom across the Arab world, Unite believes the present military intervention is a mistake because:

"It risks killing Libyan civilians while doing nothing to end hostilities on the ground. It prolongs a civil conflict when what is needed is a ceasefire followed by mediation. It raises the possibility of escalation leading to military occupation of all or part of Libya, when similar occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown how disastrous and counter-productive such interventions are. This could lead to a wider war in the region.

"The action has little or no Arab involvement, and is opposed by, amongst others, Russia, China and India, leaving it dependent on those western powers whose policies have aroused deep hostility throughout the Middle East.

"It stands in contrast to the indulgence shown by the government to the autocrats in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere who have been allowed to repress movements for democracy in their own countries with impunity.

"We urge the British government to think again, call a halt to the military action and urge a general ceasefire to be followed by international mediation."

Unison issued a similar statement on the war in Libya:

"The record of the Gaddafi regime and the serious concerns over the safety of civilians in the areas of Libya that supported the revolt against his regime led to the United Nations Security Council resolution establishing the no-fly zone. However, the intervention of NATO forces potentially risks prolonging a civil conflict and a division on Libya, instead of a

lasting solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people."

The following was issued by the Scottish TUC:

"This Congress supports the right to protest for people around the world and expresses its solidarity with people in Libya who seek democracy and regime change. Congress, however, is not convinced that the current military action is contributing to a positive solution for the Libyan people.

"Congress is concerned that the military action taken by British, French and US forces goes beyond the scope of the UN resolution and has resulted in civilian casualties. Furthermore, this action is likely to lead to further and significant 'mission creep' increasing the humanitarian costs and resulting in large numbers of refugees fleeing the area. It may also result in Britain becoming involved in a long and drawn out ground offensive, to the detriment of the Libyan people. The belief that Gaddafi's regime would crumble in the face of international pressure has become less likely with each passing day and this Congress believes that the current military action has precipitated a stalemate. Furthermore, this activity does not

contribute to the development of civil society organisations, such as independent trade unions, which are required to build democracy and ensure lasting change for Libya.

"Congress, therefore, urges the UK Government to: work towards a cessation of the current military action in Libya and towards a diplomatic solution that will allow for a peaceful transition to

democracy; and encourage the growth of an independent civil society in Libya and other Middle Eastern nations, including support for the development of truly independent trade unions." •

Canadian boat *Tahrir* to join Flotilla

The Canadian Boat to Gaza campaign has announced the successful conclusion of arrangements to purchase and register a boat to carry the Canadian delegation to Gaza. The boat's name *Tahrir* (Liberation in Arabic) has been chosen to honour the square in Cairo that was the focus of the democratic uprising in Egypt.

The *Tahrir* will sail with vessels from France, USA, UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Greece, Turkey, and other countries, as part of the Freedom Flotilla II. This international movement in solidarity with the Palestinian people turns the spotlight on the blockade of Gaza and its 1.6 million residents whose access to resources and ability to travel has been unilaterally impeded by the illegal Israeli blockade.

Fundraising for this campaign has been shared by thousands of Canadians from coast to coast, and organizers expect to secure the remaining amount

needed over the next few weeks of fundraising.

The 25-metre *Tahrir* will carry about 45 delegates from across the country, high profile Canadians plus journalists. As well, the boat will carry delegates from Australia, Belgium and Denmark. A new website tahrir.ca has been launched, and will now be the site for online donations.

Despite news that Egypt plans to open the Rafah border crossing, the maritime blockade by Israel remains a major obstacle to achieving normal life in Gaza. The Canadian Boat to Gaza and the Freedom Flotilla movement will continue until the Port of Gaza is opened to ensure free circulation of goods and people.

"Gaza is the only port on the Mediterranean which is closed to shipping and the only coastal area in the world which cannot access its own territorial waters," points out David Heap of the CBG steering committee. "Until the Palestinians

of Gaza can travel freely and trade with the world, we will continue to challenge this illegal military blockade."

The Israeli government continues to threaten the use of force against the Freedom Flotilla II. The campaign is calling on all Canadians, including Members of Parliament, to demand that the Canadian government take concrete steps to guarantee the safety of humanitarians headed to Gaza.

"My heart is with the participants in the Canadian boat to Gaza in this important initiative for freedom and justice for Palestine. I urge the Canadian government to do all it can to prevent Israeli aggression against the flotilla and the activists aboard the boats," says Jewish Holocaust survivor and Palestine rights activist Suzanne Weiss in Toronto.

For more information, visit www.canadaboatgaza.org or email info@canadaboatgaza.org. •

Sandinistas: where do they stand today?

By Rozhin Emadi, West Vancouver

"Viva La Revolucion". These are the words I kept seeing on the streets of Nicaragua, and the power these words contain still amazes me. The Revolution of Nicaragua in 1979 united the people to fight for their rights, and for the change that they deserved after living for years with no ability to stand up for their needs, for their families, and for their country.

The Sandinistas united the people together for a Revolution to give Nicaragua back to its citizens. Inspired by the philosophies and ideologies of Augusto Cesar Sandino, the Sandinistas were able to provide the people with hope to fight for the country they dreamed of seeing.

However, the USA feared further revolutions would occur in Latin America. Ronald Reagan often referred to the Sandinistas as "the enemy of freedom", despite the improvements in education, health care, and Agrarian Reform which the Sandinistas provided in comparison to life under the Somoza regime.

My Global Ed 2011 class at West Vancouver Secondary recently provided me with great opportunities to work and to experience the culture of Nicaragua, while staying in Balgue, a community on Ometepe Island. I wondered how the Sandinistas were viewed in Nicaragua. Did they still give the public hope, or are they going to be beaten in the upcoming 2011 election? After talking to numerous Nicaraguans, I can conclude that a great number of them support the Sandinistas.

As I sit inside our red tour bus, I look outside, to see and observe Managua. Looking around, I notice phrases written on buildings that portray support of the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional), the party of the Sandinistas. But I wouldn't be able to make a fair analysis based on graffiti. To truly know what Nicaraguan people think of the government, I had to talk to as many as of them as I could.

I first discussed politics with my Spanish instructor in Laguna de Apollo. Elena is an intellectual young woman. She liked the Sandinistas, she told me, though she mentioned that she doesn't like Daniel Ortega, the leader of the FSLN. She believes that stronger leaders would better represent the Sandinista Party, which always gets her vote. Her whole family are supporters of the Sandinistas, in particular her brother. She showed



Photo by Rozhin Emadi

me a book of all the Sandinista icons, and proudly explained who they were, and why they were inspirational. I listened and tried to understand to the best of my ability, using what little Spanish I knew to comprehend what she was saying.

Later, I talked to Tania Gutierrez, the translator for our program. She supports the FSLN, because their number one priority is health and education, which she believes are the most important aspects to have in a community. Tania told me that the Liberal Party in Nicaragua wants to privatize much of education and health care, and if they win the next election, they will destroy all the work put into creating a strong health care and education system. I also talked to Roberto Myrena, the Coordinator of the community we worked in, Mano Amiga. He mentioned that he only ever votes for the Sandinistas, the party that he believes is for the people of Nicaragua. I was extremely honoured to talk to Roberto's grandfather, and a dear friend of mine, Julio Carrillo Castillo, who fought in the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution. A proud supporter of Sandino, and of the Sandinistas, he

referred to himself as "the Sandino of Balgue". He told me, "I'm a supporter of the Sandinista Party, and like Sandino said, it doesn't matter who is running for president, it is the ideologies of a party, which is worth to fight for and to support."

The majority of the Community in which we spent the most of our time were supporters of the FSLN. My home-stay family were also proud Sandinista supporters of them. Nonetheless, after asking all these people who they thought would win the next election, none had any idea. They were afraid that there could be a chance that the opposition could win.

Overall, I'm proud to say that the people I got the chance to meet were supporters of socialism and the Sandinistas. We will have to wait till the 2011 election in Nicaragua to get more of a precise viewpoint of where the Sandinistas stand, and how supported their government is by the people.

"Viva La Revolucion"; three words, with powerful meanings that sum up the fight for change that occurred in Nicaragua, a country I'm honoured to now refer to as a part of me. •

**Solidarity Greetings
on the occasion of
May 1, 2011 to
workers in Canada
and across the world.**

Andre Kolompar

President

Society Staff Union (SSU)

Toronto, Ontario

**(Staff employees working for
the Society of Energy Professionals)**

Australia's asylum policies incite protest riots

By Peter Mac, *The Guardian, Australia's communist newspaper*

During the protest riots over the delays resulting from the mandatory detention policy, nine buildings at Sydney's Villawood Detention Centre were burnt down. On May 1, the last starving, sick and disoriented rooftop protester surrendered and came down.

A hunger strike and sit in protest at the Curtin centre in Western Australia is continuing. The protest was sparked by the death of a detainee, almost casually described by national dailies as "a suicide". The impact of such a loss on any family that has struggled half-way across the world to find safety and a new life, is barely imaginable.

At one point during the

Villawood protest TV coverage captured the voice of a young man speaking with a mobile phone from a rooftop. He asked: "What crime have we committed, that we must stay here so long?"

That's the fundamental, unanswered question raised by the mandatory detention policy, under which people who arrive unannounced by boat are "detained" (in effect imprisoned) while their applications for asylum are considered.

The policy was introduced by the former Keating government. Prior to that, new arrivals were only detained, and then for the minimum period, if they did not have a passport or means of identification, before being released into the community. The policy of community release still applies to those who arrive by plane.

The Keating government adopted the mandatory detention policy after an increase in unannounced boat arrivals. The numbers were very small (they remain less than one percent of new immigrants). However, the government took a political opportunist approach, by treating the arrival of the "boat people" as an invasion, which would be defeated by punishing them and thereby deterring others.

It clearly did not do such thing. Nevertheless, the policy has been retained by every subsequent federal government. Australia is the only developed western nation that treats the desperate people who arrive in leaky boats seeking help by slapping them into detention centres.

Determined to repeat the disaster

Amnesty International has stated that the practice of building ever-bigger detention centres to hold asylum seekers who arrive by boat is the problem, not the solution. That has not deterred Julia Gillard's Labor government, which is now building a new detention centre to house 400 single adult men at Pontville near Hobart, as well as a 1,500-person centre at Wickham Point in Darwin, and another at Northam



Refugee solidarity rally in Australia.

in Western Australia.

As of late April 3,361 asylum seekers were being held in mainland detention centres. Another 1,215 were housed in community or residential accommodation. The detention centres are all overcrowded, one of the key factors that has sparked riots for years. Another 1,934 detainees are still being held in the Christmas Island centre, designed to hold a maximum of 800 people. The 504 detainees at the existing Sherger centre in Queensland, (originally designed to accommodate 300), are being housed in tents, another factor that led to the protest riots on Christmas Island.

However, the primary factor underlying the protests is the delay in being released, an inevitable result of the mandatory detention policy. Independent MP Andrew Wilkie attacked the Pontville centre plan, and described the mandatory detention policy as "fundamentally unethical".

Criminal policies

The government is increasing the number of mainland detention centres, but the off-shore processing policy has not been abandoned. The Gillard government is still defending its plan to dump asylum seekers in a new processing centre on East Timor, even though the government of that country has emphatically rejected the idea.

Opposition leader Tony Abbott insists that the government's only solution to the asylum seeker problem is to "pick up the phone and ring Nauru". Opinion polling suggests that if an election were held today the government would be defeated, in which case the vicious policies of the Howard regime, which saw some asylum seekers detained for five years, would be re-imposed.

For that matter, neither of the two parties is willing to abandon mandatory detention. Neither appears to have considered the possibility that the policy actually incites violent behaviour, or that unnecessary detention is itself a crime that violates human rights.

Opposition immigration spokesperson Scott Morrison accurately described the government's initiatives as "... the same toxic policy cocktail of overcrowding, processing delays and now people in tents that existed on Christmas Island, and is now appearing in mainland centres." However, the opposition coalition now wants any protest action to result in confinement, suspension of immigration processing and visitor rights, and fines!

The government's response is little better. Immigration Minister Chris Bowen has declared that the only difference between government and opposition policies is the Liberals' proposed imposition of financial penalties, which he dismissed as little more than parking fines.

The new 400-detainee Pontville centre, which will be surrounded by double chainwire fences and built on a treeless plain notorious for its bitter winds, symbolises the government's draconian approach.

Significantly, the name itself is an anagram of Pentonville, the notorious early Victorian English prison. Indeed, British government policies of that period resulted in a grossly punitive approach to minor crimes and misdemeanours, which in turn led to the settlement of the Australian mainland as a penal colony.

The present federal government has certainly not learnt the lessons of history. Paul Power of the Refugee Council of Australia, commented: "The Pontville plan is an elaborate, inhumane and costly way to deal with 400 people who have committed no crime and for whom there is no demonstrable reason for continued detention."

And that is a good summary of the worth of the off-shore processing and mandatory detention policies. ●

FOOD FOR PEOPLE, NOT FOR PROFITS



Canada needs a national food policy

By Chris Picek, *Vancouver*

With the 2011 federal election in the bag we can reflect on the state of our pretend democracy in Canada. The parade of irrelevant personal attacks, mudslinging and personality cults (or lack thereof) had little to do with intelligent, reasoned debate or ground level issues affecting working people.

One issue that the mainstream media completely ignored is one that affects all humans, regardless of colour, creed or credentials: food.

This is unfortunate, since for the first time, all major parties included a food policy component in their platforms. The Grits and Tories were largely long on style but short on substance to affect change. The NDP hit closest to the mark by way of the Heritage Breed Act, which would aim to preserve biodiversity and establish a sustainable agricultural sector for the future.

The Green Party put focus on the critical issue of food sovereignty by amending the Canadian Food Inspection Agency mandate to remove any obligations to agribusiness.

According to the People's Food Policy, 2.5 million Canadians are food insecure. There has been a surge in the last ten years in farm-to-table eating and a resurgence of local farms. This has been spearheaded by chefs, restaurateurs and farmers.

While an admirable effort to reestablish a link between producer and consumer, it is overlooked that this wonderful bounty is priced out of range for most working people and the poor. The alternative is to resort to the unholy trinity of sugar-fat-salt which passes for food in our industrially provisioned supermarkets. Even those who could afford a local, organic diet do not know, due to decades of propaganda by agribusiness that have convinced us it is normal to eat California strawberries in January or Peruvian asparagus in April.

This illustrates our heavy dependence on imports, often from countries where food production is profoundly undemocratic and relies on migrant labour that may be ill treated and poorly paid. This is compounded by the environmental degradation that comes with industrial agriculture and the huge amounts of fuel, water and chemicals it requires to function.

An area of specific concern in Canada is that of food deserts. These are pockets in primarily urban suburbs where residents do not have close access to affordable quality food. A visit to the grocery involves a car journey, or a lengthy trip on public transit. This problem is exasperated in some rural and northern communities in particular, where remote locations and very short or non-existent growing seasons mean fresh meat or vegetables are rare and/or prohibitive in price.

A well thought out policy on food administered at the federal level must take into account the particular needs of our country's disparate regions and their unique populations, climate and demographics. The way to ensuring we all have something good to eat begins with the admission at all levels of government that access to food is the basic human right. This right cannot be overlooked under any circumstance whatever.

We can start by accepting that smaller scale, biodiverse farms are at least as efficient as their larger counterparts, without the attendant costs and environmental fallout. The biodiversity and integrity of the ecosystem must be protected and nurtured, since it is upon this that we depend for life itself.

Producers that practice sustainable methods and humane animal husbandry must be encouraged and endorsed at all levels. People must have a framework in which to help themselves by means of an urban food production program that makes use of land that is otherwise wasted: golf courses, parking lots and half-empty condo developments.

It is imperative that all Canadians, indeed, all people of the Earth have access to healthy, tasty, sustainable, affordable and appropriate sustenance. The wars of the future may well be fought over food and water, not oil. ●

"KARL MARX LIVED HERE"



PV contributor Gurpreet Singh took this photo of a building at 28 Dean Street in London's Soho district, where Karl Marx, his wife Jenny, and their children lived from 1851 to 1856. The inset at top left is a close-up of the historical plaque placed by the Greater London Council. Marx paid 22 pounds a year for the two-room flat, which he described as a hovel. Despite living in dire poverty, Marx engaged in writing, research and political activity during these years. Today the main floor of the building is a well-known restaurant.

Building Solidarity from South Africa to Palestine

Excitement is building for a cross-Canada speaking tour with trade union representatives from South Africa and Palestine. Taking place May 15 to 30, the tour features representatives from the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUPE) and the South African Union of Municipal Workers (SAMWU).

Mathematician Dr. Amjad Barham is the head of the Palestine Polytechnic University employees union and the President of the PFUPE, which represents unions at all Palestinian universities in the West Bank and Gaza. At PV press time, the SAMWU speaker had not been announced.

Palestinian trade unions continue to confront a daily reality of military occupation, apartheid walls and neoliberal austerity. In Gaza, 98% of industrial operations remain idle as a result of Israel's blockade, which includes severe restrictions on electricity, heating oil, natural gas and construction materials. In the occupied West Bank, 25% of the population continues to face food insecurity as well as a complex network of

400-500 military checkpoints, roadblocks, fences, and other obstacles that separate Palestinian workers from their workplaces.

The General Union of Palestinian Workers (GUPW), Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), and the Palestinian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (PFITU) have been at the forefront of the Palestinian movement challenging these multiple violations of Palestinian workers' rights.

The tour will help to consolidate the worker-to-worker solidarity already established between Palestinian and Canadian and Québécois trade unionists.

Trade union sponsors and endorsers of the tour and local events include: Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW-STTP); CUPE-Ontario Division; CUPE Local 15 (Vancouver); CUPE Local 2491; CUPE Local 3903, Toronto; CUPE Local 3906, Hamilton Political Action Committee; CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee; CUPE Toronto District Council; Fédération nationale des enseignants et enseignantes du Québec (FNEEQ); FTQ Regional

Conseil Montreal; London & District Labour Council; Metropolitan Montréal Central Council, Confédération des syndicats nationaux; Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) Local 568; Teaching Support Staff Union, Social Justice Committee, Simon Fraser University; Toronto Secondary Unit Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association Human Rights' Committee; Vancouver & District Labour Council.

Other groups include Boycott Israeli Apartheid Campaign, Vancouver; Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid; Faculty for Palestine; Independent Jewish Voices; London Solidarity Coalition for Palestine; Not in Our Name: Jewish Voices Opposing Zionism; Students Against Israeli Apartheid; Tadamon! Montreal; The Canada-Palestine Support Network (CanPalNet); and StopWar Vancouver.

Tour dates:
MONTREAL - Tue., May 17, 7 pm, Centre St. Pierre Salle 304, 1212, rue Panet (metro Beaudry). Info: 514-659-0106.

OTTAWA - Wed., May 18, 7 pm, CUPW National Office, 377 Bank St.
WINDSOR - Sun., May 22, 2 pm, Oak Room, Vanier Hall, University of Windsor.

TORONTO - Sat., May 21, 6:30 pm, Beit Zatoun, 612 Markham St. (Bathurst subway). (Also during the CUPE Ontario Convention, Thursday, May 26, 7 pm, Sheraton Hotel, 123 Queen St. West.) Info: 416-828-3851.

HAMILTON - Tue., May 24, 6 pm, McMaster University.

LONDON - Wed., May 25, 7 pm, Tolpudde room, 380 Adelaide St. North (at King), info 519-858-9560.
REGINA - Thur., May 27, 7:30 pm, Regina Union Centre, 2709 12th Ave., Info: 306-569-9787.

VANCOUVER - Sunday, May 29, 7 pm, Maritime Labour Centre, 1880 Triumph St., (two blocks north of Hastings), Info 604-779-7430. ●

Unions to merge in Swaziland

Special to PV

The formation of a single federation of trade unions announced at a May Day rally means that sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch will have to deal with workers on the march. Union leaders revealed that with the birth of Tucoswa (Trade Union Congress of Swaziland) there will no longer be two centres of labour.

Two labour groups, one headed by Mduduzi Gina, secretary general of Swaziland's Federation of Trade Unions, the other by Vincent Ncongwane, secretary general of the Swaziland Federation of Labour - will be joined by the Swaziland National Teachers Association, of which Sibongile Mazibuko is the president. They will form one powerful body. The leader of the federation will be announced at a later date when Tucoswa is formally instated, Gina said.

Mswati III, the sole African royal guest to at the nuptials of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, may wonder how much longer he can be allowed to abuse his country's public purse. The autocratic monarch will soon be called to account, according to Mazibuko.

The bills for the 50-strong entourage accompanying the profligate king to London's Dorchester Hotel to watch the royal wedding would have gone a way to servicing what is among the world's greatest equality gaps, in a country where 70 percent live in poverty - while the king is rated by Forbes magazine as one of Africa's richest.

Mazibuko said in her May Day speech: "Corruption levels are extremely high, costing in the region of R80 million per month and the imminent civil servant salary cuts that we are being threatened with, show that this government has failed."

The dissolution of Mswati's cabinet, the creation of a

transitional government which will lead to multiparty democracy, is key among the union's demands.

"King Mswati III has the powers to appoint government. He forces people to attend cultural events in the rural areas where the land is in trust and the chiefs are his extension - and if you do not go you could be evicted."

On April 12, the army and a bolstered police force was sent to crush dissenters. Maxwell Dlamini, president of the Swaziland students union, and Musa Ngubeni, a high-ranking member of the banned opposition People's United Democratic Front, were arrested on April 13. They have been denied bail repeatedly. ●

By Johan Boyden

The NDP 58-seat "surge" in Quebec has generated considerable discussion since the federal election. Some in the corporate media have suggested the collapse of Bloc Québécois to four seats marks the death-knell of the sovereigntist cause. However, the story is not so simple.

Overwhelmingly, Quebec voted against the Harper Conservative government, reducing the total number of Tories to six rural ridings. None in major urban areas, where working-class votes are concentrated, went Tory.

In addition to their anti-people, pro-war and anti-Quebec agenda, the Tories were embroiled in a scandal. Harper's top advisor in Quebec, Dimitri Soudas, was exposed in a likely violation of the conflict of interest law regarding the appointment of the Port of Montreal's new CEO. "Mr Harper's preferred candidate," appears to have been aggressively promoted by a notorious construction boss with links to the Fonds de solidarité

FTQ and the Mafia, Tony Accurso.

Harper's government is the first majority in modern Canadian history without a significant number of seats in Quebec. This raises serious implications for the future of federalism.

Just last winter Ezra Levant, conservative author and self-styled Zionist Albertan "red-neck", told the founding meeting of Francois Legault's new right-wing group Réseau Liberté-Québec (RLQ) that separation would be positive to conservatives in the rest of Canada. (The RLQ aim to become a political party that puts separation second to the attack on unions and environmentalists.)

Leading right-wing have long floated scenarios where the inflammation of long-standing grievances helps provoke the eventual separation of Quebec, an area of strong popular support of the labour movement, social programs, and peace.

The unexpected mass attraction of Quebec voters to the New Democrats fits that mood. The NDP took some votes away from the

What's Left

Solidarity Tour

Solidarity from South Africa to Palestine, May 15-30 cross-Canada tour by speakers from Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUPE) and South African Union of Municipal Workers (SAMWU). For info and dates, see article on this page.

Victoria, BC

David Rovics concert, fundraiser for Canadian Boat to Gaza, Sat. May 21, 7:30 pm, BCGEU Hall, 2994 Douglas St. Admission \$20 waged/\$15 unwaged, call Kevin, 595-3991.

Vancouver, BC

Re:Imagine Schools, Defending the Potential of Public Education, Tue., May 17, 7:30 pm, at Museum of Vancouver, 1100 Chestnut St. Presented by COPE Education Ctee., with COPE trustees and other speakers. Tickets \$10 online thru eventbrite, or contact COPE at 604-255-0400 or cope@cope.bc.ca.

Left Film Night, 7 pm, Sunday, May 22, Centre for Socialist Education, 706 Clark Drive. Screening "CHEVOLUTION", documentary on Korda's iconic photo of Che Guevara. Free, call 604-255-2041 for info.

Fair Taxation Conference, co-sponsored by BC Fed and Coalition to Build a Better BC, May 27-28 (Friday 7-9 pm, Sat. (9:30-4), Maritime Labour Centre, 1880 Triumph St. Registration \$75 for union-sponsored; \$50 individual; \$35 low wage/student. Contact VDLC, 604-254-0703.

Revolutionary Bus Tour, Sun., May 29, leaves 10 am from 706 Clark Drive. Visit sites in Vancouver linked with the history of the Communist Party and the labour movement! Tickets \$20 (includes lunch), call 604-255-2041.

Sanctions - Busting Fundraiser for Abousfian Abdelrazik, Monday, May 30, 7 pm, at Grandview Calvary Baptist, 1803 E. 1st Ave. Tickets \$20 at People's Co-Op Books and other locations. Hosted by No One Is Illegal-Vancouver (www.nooneisillegal.org) and Streams of Justice.

19th Annual People's Voice Victory Banquet, 6 pm, Sat., June 4, Russian Hall, 600 Campbell Ave. Tickets \$15 from 706 Clark Drive, to reserve ph. 604-254-9836.

Winnipeg, MB

Mayworks Festival of Labour and the Arts, throughout May, call 947-2220, see www.mayworks.org for full program.

Making Connections: Communities and Labour, MayWorks event including tribute to the legacy of Joe Zuken, Wed., May 18, 7 pm, Millennium Library, for info contact Jill at CCPA, 927-3200.

Marxism course, register with the Communist Party at 586-7824 or cpc-mb@mts.net

Toronto, ON

Hemingway On Stage: IN DEADLY ERNEST, Thur., June 2, 7:30 pm, 585 Cranbrooke Ave., preview performance of world premiere at the International Colloquium Ernest Hemingway in Havana, award-winning actor Brian Gordon Sinclair as Hemingway. Sponsored by CCFA Toronto (Canadian-Cuban Friendship Association) and United Jewish People's Order, advance tickets \$10, door \$15. Ph. Liz 416-654-7105 or Sharon 905-951-8499.

Montreal, QC

Palestinians And Jews United, boycott/disinvestment/sanctions picket, every Saturday, 1-3 pm, outside Le marcheur, at Duluth & St. Denis.

The election: a view from Quebec

Liberals (who won only in seven Allophone and Anglophone ridings on the island of Montreal) and overwhelmingly from the BQ, who lost all their star candidates, including leader Gilles Duceppe.

This should not be seen as a rejection of sovereignty for Quebec, which exists as an unrecognized nation unequally locked into the constitution. After twenty years of protest votes for the Bloc, voters questioned: what can be achieved this way? For most Québécois, sovereignty will be determined by the people on the provincial level.

These sentiments have sent an unusually large number of workers,

students, Aboriginal people - even a single mother who helps run a pub - to the seats of Parliament, next to lawyers, CEOs and bankers. The corporate media, having Americanized elections into a horse-race between "the leaders", is mocking the people for electing "rookie" MPs; most people never heard about their local candidates, just Jack Layton.

What are the implications of the anti-Harper vote for Quebec politics, the left party Quebec Solidaire, the labour and people's movement, and the next provincial election? These are important questions for progressive forces in the time ahead. ●

People's Voice deadlines

June 1-15 issue: Thursday, May 19

June 16-30 issue: Thursday, June 2

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

The Assassination of Osama bin Laden

Fidel Castro Ruz, May 4, 2011, 8:34 pm.

Those persons who deal with these issues know that on September 11 of 2001 our people expressed its solidarity to the US people and offered the modest cooperation that in the area of health we could have offered to the victims of the brutal attack against the Twin Towers in New York.

We also immediately opened our country's airports to the American airplanes that were unable to land anywhere, given the chaos that came about soon after the strike.

The traditional stand adopted by the Cuban Revolution, which was always opposed to any action that could jeopardize the life of civilians, is well known.

Although we resolutely supported the armed struggle against Batista's tyranny, we were, on principle, opposed to any terrorist action that could cause the death of innocent people. Such behaviour, which has been maintained for more than half a century, gives us the right to express our views about such a sensitive matter.

On that day, at a public gathering that took place at Ciudad Deportiva, I expressed my conviction that international terrorism could never be eradicated through violence and war.

By the way, Bin Laden was, for many years, a friend of the US, a country that gave him military training; he was also an adversary of



never know the feeling of their child's embrace. Nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts."

are also the horrible images of human beings who, in Guantanamo, a Cuban occupied territory, walk down in silence, being submitted for months, and even for years, to unbearable and excruciating tortures. Those are persons who were kidnapped and transferred to secret prisons with the hypocritical connivance of supposedly civilized societies.

Obama has no way to conceal that Osama was executed in front of his children and wives, who are now under the custody of the authorities of Pakistan, a Muslim country of almost 200 million inhabitants, whose laws have been violated, its national dignity offended and its religious traditions desecrated.

How could he now prevent the women and children of the person who was executed out of the law and without any trial from

explaining what happened? How could he prevent those images from being broadcast to the world?

On January 28 of 2002 the CBS journalist Dan Rather reported through that TV network that on September 10 of 2001, one day before the attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Osama Bin Laden underwent a hemodialysis at a military hospital in Pakistan. He was physically unfit to hide and take shelter inside deep caves.

Having assassinated him and plunging his corpse into the bottom of the sea are an expression of fear and insecurity which turn him into a far more dangerous person.

The US public opinion itself, after the initial euphoria, will end up by criticizing the methods that, far from protecting its citizen, will multiply the feelings of hatred and revenge against them. ●

the USSR and Socialism. But, whatever the actions attributed to him, the assassination of an unarmed human being while surrounded by his own relatives is something abhorrent. Apparently this is what the government of the most powerful nation that has ever existed did.

In the carefully drafted speech announcing Bin Laden's death Obama asserts as follows: "And yet we know that the worst images are those that were unseen to the world. The empty seat at the dinner table. Children who were forced to grow up without their mother or their father. Parents who would

That paragraph expressed a dramatic truth, but can not prevent honest persons from remembering the unjust wars unleashed by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, the hundreds of thousands of children who were forced to grow up without their mothers and fathers and the parents who would never know the feeling of their child's embrace.

Millions of citizens were taken from their villages in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Cuba and many other countries of the world.

Still engraved in the minds of hundreds of millions of persons



List of countries the USA has bombed since the end of WW2

Compiled by www.globalresearch.ca

China 1945-46
Korea 1950-53
China 1950-53
Guatemala 1954
Indonesia 1958
Cuba 1959-60
Guatemala 1960
Belgian Congo 1964
Guatemala 1964
Dominican Republic 1965-66
Peru 1965
Laos 1964-73
Vietnam 1961-73
Cambodia 1969-70
Guatemala 1967-69

Lebanon 1982-84
Grenada 1983-84
Libya 1986
El Salvador 1981-92
Nicaragua 1981-90
Iran 1987-88
Libya 1989
Panama 1989-90
Iraq 1991
Kuwait 1991
Somalia 1992-94
Bosnia 1995
Iran 1998
Sudan 1998
Afghanistan 1998
Yugoslavia-Serbia 1999
Afghanistan 2001
Libya 2011

Caracas, May 2 - Responding to the announcement by the U.S. President on the alleged murder of Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, Carolus Wimmer, Communist Party (PCV) member of the Venezuelan parliament, responded that "Obama legitimizes execution without trial as imperialist policy and institutionalizes the extension of Bush Doctrine of Permanent War..."

"This practice, in fact, delegitimizes international law and the institutions they themselves have established within the UN

Obama legitimizes execution without trial



Venezuelan Communist MP Carolus Wimmer

are gaining strength with huge support of popular movements, they have also tried and are still trying to carry out such actions.

"In 2002, we lived such a situation in Venezuela with the coup d'état on April 11; they tried to do the same in Bolivia in 2008, and in Ecuador in 2010. In all these three cases, the Presidents were not injured in kidnappings and assassination attempts, but those plans are part of the U.S. warmongering policy."

Wimmer called attention to the dismissal of the bourgeois press to continued reports by President Chavez about assassination attempts. The media never point out the violation of international law by the Pentagon, he noted.

Speaking about the confused reports of bin Laden's execution and burial, Wimmer said that allowing the U.S. President to make an announcement of this importance without having the evidence in hand shows Obama's weakness in the Pentagon's circle of power.

"Practically, they used him as a buffoon and put him into question, so it would not be a surprise if, in the future, he were a victim of his own practice."

Finally, Wimmer added, "I think that people of the Middle East and North Africa should consider requesting the evacuation of U.S. troops from their territories following the dismantling of Al Qaeda, because that was the main reason for these troops to remain there." ●

system to condemn crimes against humanity, such as the International Criminal Court. What is it useful for if execution is applied without allowing the defence of (the accused)?

"... It is clear that executions without trial will be applied to everyone included on the list of adversaries, enemies or people uncomfortable for imperialism. By this same vision, Gadhafi's residence was bombed in order to assassinate him, as well as the former President of Ivory Coast. On both failed occasions, they were Heads of State still in office. In Libya, they keep trying."

Wimmer emphasized that this strategy is not exclusive to the Middle East. In Latin America, where progressive governments

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