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people's VOICE

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to OFL delegates
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declares
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push back**

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OFF
THE
RAILS**

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Sask. Labour meets

Meeting in Saskatoon, 600 delegates to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour say "no" to the corporate austerity agenda and CETA, and "yes" to stronger unity and solidarity struggles.

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Stop Bill C-4!

The Conservative attack against labour ramps up with legislation to deprive many federal public sector workers of their right to strike.

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"This is not my war"

Our series of features exposing the Harper government's pro-war propaganda campaign continues with an historic article by John Reed, the famous U.S. revolutionary journalist.

Sask. Federation of Labour defies drive to right

By Darrell Rankin

Representing 100,000 workers, delegates at the Oct. 30-Nov. 1 Saskatchewan Federation of Labour annual convention in Saskatoon showed they were united against the growing attack by corporations and Brad Wall's right-wing Saskatchewan Party government.

"It's working people in Saskatchewan that make our province, and all of the corporations in it, rich," said SFL President Larry Hubich to the Convention, "not the other way around."

One of the most important panels looked at income inequality, giving delegates resources to deal with the problem in their workplaces and communities. Despite the hype, Saskatchewan has close to the same levels of inequality and suffers from the same eroding influences on wages such as inflation and debt.

On the last day of the convention, a founder of Idle No More, Sheelah McLean, told delegates about the need for labour solidarity with Aboriginal peoples, receiving a standing ovation. Several

resolutions strengthened the SFL's dedication to this struggle.

"Indigenous people are working people," said Hubich, "and it is extremely important that we establish a meaningful dialogue with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. Our indigenous peoples suffer most from social and economic inequality, and it is imperative that we extend access to economic democracy, to joining and forming unions, as a means of closing the gap."

Wall's Labour Minister, Don Morgan, faced questions on issues such as building P3 (private-public partnership) schools, excluding senior nurses from bargaining units, the high cost of tuition, and the growth of foreign temporary workers.

In a divisive comment, Morgan told delegates he preferred foreign workers would stay home after their work is completed, but said nothing about how federal laws allow such workers to earn wages below the average in Canada.

Perhaps the most important issue discussed by delegates is the Wall government's Bill 85 which lays the groundwork for gutting key labour rights, such as the Rand formula

(closed shop, automatic dues check-off). The Bill, now enacted, shifts labour rights from the status of legislation to regulation.

A Labour minister can now change fundamental rights with the stroke of a pen, without legislative scrutiny. The bulk of the new legislation has yet to be written, so workers in Saskatchewan are getting ready for the "other shoe" to drop.

SFL leaders and activists warned against gutting the Rand formula. Delegates sharply criticized some of the new regulations or proposals which erode existing standards such as making it easier for bosses not to pay overtime or to change work week hours. The pressure on labour rights is growing, and could take a serious turn at any time.

This explains the attention being paid to the convention by labour leaders across Canada in recent years. OFL president Sid Ryan was a guest speaker last year. This year, the presidents of the Alberta and B.C. federations and CLC president Ken Georgetti spoke. (BC Fed president Jim Sinclair concluded his talk by quoting Homer Stevens' most important

advice about the need to fight for every advance, and to never stop.)

Georgetti gave greetings "from Canada's largest democratic organization." He said the labour movement is facing its greatest threat in decades, with many hostile anti-union forces such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, Merit Contractors, the CFIB, the Fraser Institute and the National Citizens' Coalition.

Noting that unions need always to be on the offensive in such conditions, Georgetti said today's Tories are "not the same as those of your parents." They are far more anti-labour. He reported receiving a positive response to the CLC's "Fairness Works" campaign which consists mainly of TV advertising. The campaign's goal is to change the public perception of unions, which Georgetti explained was misinformed.

The expensive campaign is using resources that pale in comparison to the billions spent each year by the big business media. Perceptions will change

more readily when unions engage in much larger economic and political action than the present historic low, which has persisted for nearly 25 years. Delegates were still happy to hear about the campaign and see the ads.

Georgetti did not say how the CLC was planning to defeat the Harper Tories in the next election, although two delegates asked the question "What next?" after the Fairness Works ads.

Delegates passed an emergency resolution to oppose the proposed Europe-Canada free trade deal.

Delegates displayed strong solidarity with 55 striking retail workers at Wynyard Federated Co-op, raising over \$25,000 from pledges and a collection from nearly 600 delegates. The Retail Wholesale strikers have been on the picket line since Sept. 4. They earn at or just above the minimum wage and have rejected two offers below the inflation rate.

After the convention, we talked with about 16 strikers in Wynyard. They are determined and have solid support from the community and workers at the Lilydale plant in the same town, who were on strike in 2004.

The SFL's displays of unity and solidarity, its readiness to address important political issues, the active committees made possible by annual meetings, the educational panels - all these are a positive example for less active parts of the labour movement.

(Photo of Wynyard Co-op strikers on the picket line, from rwdsu.sasktelwebhosting.com) ●

Solidarity with Elsipogtog! Canada must act on UN Special Rapporteur recommendations

Central Committee,
Communist Party of
Canada

The preliminary report and recommendations arising from the visit to Canada by James Anaya, the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Rights, make it clear that under the Harper Tories, the crisis facing Aboriginal peoples is deepening. The Communist Party of Canada calls on Parliament to take immediate action on the Anaya recommendations, as a first step towards resolving this crisis on the basis of justice and equality.

After visiting Aboriginal communities in six provinces, James Anaya stated on October 15 that Canada has not narrowed social disparities between Aboriginal and other Canadians. He warned that Indigenous peoples still suffer from "multiple legacies of the history of colonization, treaty infringements, assault on their cultures and land dispossession."

As he has told the United Nations, Aboriginal peoples here live in conditions comparable to much poorer countries. One in five indigenous people live in dilapidated and often overcrowded homes, funding for aboriginal housing is utterly inadequate, and many reserves and communities still lack safe drinking water. The suicide rate among Inuit and First Nations youth on reserve is more than five times greater than that of other Canadians. Such measures indicate that constitutional recognition of certain Aboriginal rights has done little to end the centuries-old national oppression of the First Nations, Inuit and

Métis peoples.

The Special Rapporteur is calling for the federal government be "less adversarial" towards land claim settlements, rather than seeking the most restrictive interpretations of aboriginal and treaty rights. He urges the government to reverse its "hardened positions" on other key issues: by extending the mandate and timeline for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) into the historic abuses committed at residential schools; by heeding the calls for a national inquiry into the high number of murdered and missing Indigenous women; and by reconsidering the proposed First Nations Education Act, which denies the primary importance of First Nation languages and cultures, fails to affirm meaningful Aboriginal control over their education, and does not guarantee adequate funding.

In response, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Bernard Valcourt brazenly claims that the well-being of Aboriginal peoples is "at the center of Canada's preoccupations" and that the Conservative government is taking "effective incremental steps to improve the situation." But PM Harper, who explicitly denies any element of colonialism or racism in Canada's historic oppression of Aboriginal peoples, stubbornly refuses to cooperate with the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to tackle the issues raised by James Anaya. Indeed, less than three days after the UN Special Rapporteur left Canada, RCMP violence was used against anti-fracking protesters from the Elsipogtog First Nation and environmentalists in New Brunswick. This brutal attack was a direct reflection of

the Harper government's real agenda, to give private corporations unfettered control over natural resources on traditional indigenous territories.

Driven by the profit interests of transnational and Canadian energy monopolies, the Harper government is pushing the rapid growth of Alberta tar sands exports. Ignoring the deadly health impacts on Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, and the potential for devastating environmental destruction, the Tories are moving to eliminate legal and regulatory barriers to a massive expansion of pipelines (Enbridge Northern Gateway, Keystone, Line 9), tanker ships, and rail transport. This reactionary, anti-democratic agenda ignores the government's obligations to conduct meaningful consultations with Aboriginal peoples, and denies the rights of all Canadians to a voice in the future economic, environmental and social direction of this country.

In response, the movement to reverse the genocidal policies of the Canadian state continues to gain momentum. We join with the labour, progressive and democratic movements across Canada in demanding that instead of more police batons, rubber bullets, and pepper spray, the federal and provincial governments should act immediately on the recommendations of the UN Rapporteur. This would represent genuine progress towards replacing the current oppressive structures of the Canadian state, with a new, equal and voluntary partnership of the Aboriginal peoples, Québec and English-speaking Canada. ●



Why the acronym for the Globe & Mail Report on Business is right on

By Doug Meggison

I bought the November 5 *Globe and Mail* print edition because I was curious about the BlackBerry Ltd. meltdown, and apparent resurrection.

A summary is that the leveraged buyout proposed by Fairfax Financial Holdings Ltd. fell through, but instead a billion dollars will be injected into the floundering company in the form of convertible notes. These notes (or bonds) can be converted to shares, when and if the sinking share price of BlackBerry Ltd. improves. In any event, the monopoly finance corporation Fairfax would be the first creditor in line if "cash rich" BlackBerry fails. These guys never lose.

Thorsten Heins, the departing CEO, leaves with a \$16 million payout after less than two years in the saddle. The average Canadian industrial wage over 2012 nudged \$50,000 before tax. This means Heins walks away with over three hundred years of an average full-time worker's earnings in his pocket.

Continuing to browse through the green fields of monopoly capital, I came upon a story about Steven A. Cohen's SAC Capital Advisors LP hedge fund. The company pleaded guilty to a US federal prosecution for insider trading and has been fined \$1.2 billion. An earlier settlement on the same matter was for \$616 million.

Steven A. Cohen owns the whole SAC [get the acronym?] so his estimated fortune of \$9 billion will be shaved. However, he won't likely have to sell his art collection which includes Marc Quinn's *Self*, a head sculpture made of frozen blood. He may have to move the sculpture from the SAC lobby where it is now, in the event the hedge fund goes out of business, but what the hay.

Further on in the same issue of RoB, there is a story on Johnson & Johnson US which has settled a fraud case for \$2.2 billion. As well as admitting to kickbacks to pharmacists, J&J admits to marketing drugs for so called off-label uses. One such off-label application has been the prescribing of the anti-psychotic drug Risperdal to elderly dementia patients.

The story notes at the end that another big pharma monopoly, GlaxoSmithKline PLC, settled a suit last year for \$3 billion to clear the company of criminal charges for targeting children for treatment with the antidepressant Paxil, which is FDA approved for adults only, although doctors may freely write "off label" prescriptions. ●

Liberal government fails BC Aboriginal children

By Kimball Cariou,
Vancouver

The Liberal government of BC has wasted tens of millions of dollars in failed projects for Aboriginal youth. That's the view of BC's Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, in a Nov. 6 report detailing how the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) spent \$66 million on measures that do nothing to actually help children.

"MCFD has supported these big, blue-sky initiatives which were neither clearly articulated nor properly scrutinized," said Turpel-

Lafond. "The ministry has been overly focused on transferring the responsibility to provide services instead of ensuring aboriginal children and youth are getting the help they desperately need."

Turpel-Lafond adds B.C. still lacks a system of therapeutic residential care, a comprehensive response to domestic violence, and an effective child and youth mental health system.

Her report, "When Talk Trumped Service", recommends that the government focus on developing a "cross-ministry plan to close the outcome gaps for aboriginal children and youth", and on expanding Aboriginal

representation within the MCFD's senior leadership structure. That point is seen as crucial, since Aboriginal children are over-

represented in the child welfare system.

The best the government could say in response was that its efforts



Child & Youth Representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond

have not been a complete waste. "The work over the last 10 years has been well intentioned and much of it good work," said Stephanie Cadieux, the minister responsible for MCFD.

The report found that more than half of the province's 8,100 children in care are Aboriginal, about 4,450 children.

The spending binge began in 2002, with talks about forming Regional Aboriginal Authorities to take over children's services on a community level. By 2008, the ministry had spent nearly \$35 million discussing what these authorities should look like, and what they would be responsible for. The idea was dropped after several First Nations spoke out against the idea.

The only agency which was ultimately created from this process was Community Living BC, which deals with children and youth with developmental disabilities. Since then, CLBC has been widely condemned for its top-heavy bureaucracy, inadequate supports to youth with disabilities and their families, and other problems.

Another \$31 million was later spent on funding First Nations to create their own child welfare services. This seems to have been largely an exercise in downloading responsibilities from the province to a patchwork of Aboriginal bands and service agencies. Turpel-Lafond says agencies were often left to their own devices, with little support from the ministry in delivering services.

Scott Clark, the executive director of Aboriginal Life in Vancouver Enhancement Society (ALIVE), says his urban-based group opposes the segregation of Aboriginal services from non-Aboriginal services, especially in family and children's services.

"We need to be able to question all government contractors that are receiving dollars to see that they're doing their job," Clark told The Tyee online news site. "Many of these contracted agencies that receive government money once were advocates for Aboriginal people, they've now become contracted agents and are accountable to the government and not the community."

ALIVE and the Our Place coalition of community organizations have urged "place-based initiatives", to offer services to families and individuals in places they already access, like local community centres. ●

Vancouver civic politics keep shifting

PV Vancouver Bureau

With a year left before municipal elections next Nov. 15 in Vancouver, the city's political scene is in constant upheaval. Several groups are working to upset the governing Vision Vancouver, which faces a deepening sense of public resentment in its push for a third consecutive term in office. But Vision may yet benefit from divisions among the opposition parties.

A new sign that Vision's base is shrinking came on Nov. 4 with a statement from community groups questioning the city's rapid rate of development. The Coalition of Vancouver Neighbourhoods (CNV), which includes nineteen residents' associations, says the city is accepting proposals and approving residential construction five times faster than its own projections demand.

According to the Regional Context Statement approved by City Council last June, city planners anticipate that Vancouver will see an increase of 153,800 people by 2041, an additional 4,350 people per year. But since 2011, the city has already proposed or approved sufficient new housing to accommodate 43,000 people, or 28% of the growth projected by 2041. The CNV says that at this rate, the 2041 targets will be reached by 2019, two decades ahead of schedule.

CNV spokesperson Jak King noted that "these numbers do not include any units that were approved between 2006 and 2011 for which we do not have figures but which we believe add significantly to this total."

The Coalition supports "well-planned, reasonably-paced growth, with developments that are aligned with the interests of local communities," said CNV co-chair Fern Jeffries. So, asks the CNV, why is the city pursuing its "unsustainably rapid pace of development so aggressively and so unilaterally?"

It's an interesting question from a coalition representing neighbourhoods which voted heavily for Vision in the past three elections, including Arbutus, Yaletown, Dunbar, Grandview

COPE
Team
Greens
Vision
NPA
NSV

Crowded race shaping up for
2014 civic election

Woodlands, Marpole, Point Grey, Oakridge Langara, Riley Park, and Kitsilano.

Some of these neighbourhoods are pushing back against the city's tentative plans for massive densification. Grandview Woodlands, for example, includes much of the Commercial Drive area where the city recently proposed huge new high rises and other development plans. The projects would jam another 20,000

residents into an area with overcrowded transit lines, community centres and schools. Brought forward after minimal consultation, the plans ran into a brick wall of public opposition, before being pulled for further study by city council.

On the other side of Vancouver, a seemingly innocuous plan to pave a bike path through an ocean-side park similarly drew public wrath. The Vision-dominated Council has greatly expanded bike paths, mostly with public backing, but this time was different for some reason. One explanation is "NIMBYism" - "not in my backyard."

Yet residents in every part of the city are tiring of new developments both large and small being rushed through after token consultation efforts, sometimes against strong local opposition. Every time this happens, Vision's reputation takes another hit. In the last election, much of the Vision campaign was conducted by hired hands rather than volunteers, reflecting the fact that donations from corporate interests pay for the right-wing NPA and Vision campaigns.

Vision has also lost any hope of a common slate with the Coalition of Progressive Electors, an important factor in the past three campaigns. None of the forces within COPE support such a slate for 2014, except perhaps for the School Board race. In fact, the group led by former city councillor Tim Louis which now controls COPE seems determined to run a full slate.

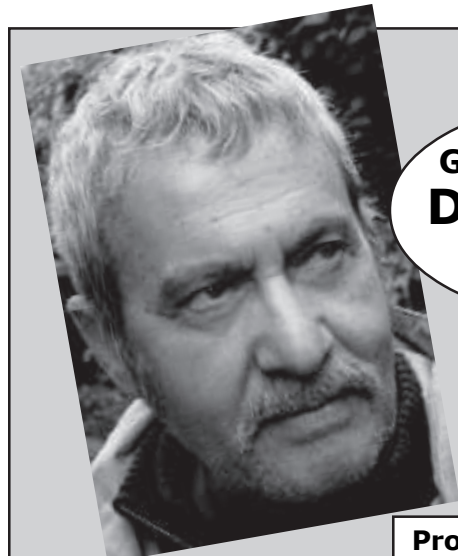
Given Vision's slip in support, COPE might be in a stronger position for 2014, but the party faces its own problems. The sectarian, anti-union stance of some key people in the

Louis camp has badly alienated the party's longstanding labour base, and it appears there will be virtually no union donations to COPE next year. Several COPE executive members linked with the party's historic pro-labour positions have recently resigned, citing an internal atmosphere of bullying and intimidation. Many long-time COPE activists, including some with strong left credentials, are rumoured to be considering their options.

At the same time, the loose coalition which helped the Louis group win a solid majority in the COPE executive last April has also split wide open. So while COPE has made some membership gains in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, there are huge questions about its ability to mount a strong city-wide campaign.

Meanwhile, other parties continue to vie for attention. The Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver, which had an informal alliance with the Louis group in 2011, is still operating, and TEAM, the centrist party which flourished briefly thirty years ago, has re-emerged as a pro-business "alternative" to the right-wing NPA and Vision. Several smaller parties are also registered, and the Greens still have Adriane Carr on City Council.

All the signs point to a crowded electoral race next year. It appears unlikely that the Vancouver and District Labour Council will agree to back any one party or slate, so the VDLC may support a broader list of individual candidates. Such a shift in labour's strategy could herald the biggest change in Vancouver civic politics since the late 1960s. ●



Guest Speaker:
Dr. Michael Parenti

Michael Parenti is an internationally known award-winning author and lecturer. His highly informative and entertaining books and talks have reached a wide range of audiences in North America and abroad. Recent books include *Waiting For Yesterday* (his memoir), *The Face of Imperialism*, *God and His Demons*, and *Contrary Notions: The Michael Parenti Reader*.

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EDITORIALS

Rob Ford's free ride

Rarely has the gap between treatment of the rich and poor been so starkly revealed as during Rob Ford's astonishing ride as mayor of Toronto. While some conservative pundits (Christie Blatchford?) blame the "liberal media" for giving Ford a rough ride, any ordinary person engaged in similar criminal activities would have felt the long arm of the law long before now.

Straight-talking lawyer Clayton Ruby nailed it shortly after Toronto's finest admitted having Ford's infamous crack video in their possession. Ruby accused the police of deliberately giving the mayor a pass on his alleged drug use and ties to accused and convicted traffickers.

"The police have either ignored or overlooked all the evidence against Ford," Ruby said, pointing out the obvious: "I've never seen such a botched investigation, and I've seen thousands."

Let's make one thing clear. This newspaper believes that substance abuse - whether it involves 12-year-old scotch or crack cocaine - is a health issue. The "war on drugs" is a massive failure, and addicts who endanger themselves or others need medical help, not jail time. But in Canada today, when the cops witness, for example, Black or Aboriginal or Latino youths doing anything "suspicious", the usual response is a swift takedown, handcuffs, a kick or two in the ribs, perhaps a charge of resisting arrest.

However, when a powerful white male politician like Rob Ford is seen taking mysterious packages from a convicted drug dealer, there are no humiliating face plants, no billy clubs, no charges. Ford's "driver" is charged with extortion, while the mayor is implored to "take a vacation."

We just don't have enough column-inches to detail all the reasons why Rob Ford should be in jail, not City Hall. But we can say that this case reveals the sickening, racist, classist double-standards of the Canadian "justice" system.

Greetings to OFL delegates

The Ontario Federation of Labour convention this month will be an important moment in the anti-austerity fightback by the labour movement and its allies across Canada. We send warm greetings of solidarity to all OFL delegates as they debate the way forward for labour under difficult circumstances.

Around the world, workers have been under serious attack by big capital ever since the neoliberal offensive began over thirty years ago. Today, this attack is becoming even more aggressive. In response, workers in this country have waged significant and often bitter struggles: the Canada Post and Air Canada disputes; the battles by Caterpillar workers in London, Hamilton steelworkers, and aluminum smelter workers at Rio Tinto Alcan in Alma, Québec; the struggle in Ontario against attacks on collective bargaining rights; and mass protests against EI cuts by workers in Québec and Atlantic Canada, among many others.

Given determined leadership and militant class solidarity, workers are capable of fighting and winning. But the overall state of labour's fightback has been insufficient, especially at the level of the Canadian Labour Congress.

In this context, positive fightback responses are crucial, such as the Common Front backed by the OFL leadership under Sid Ryan. Such initiatives show that stronger labour resistance can be built against the corporate offensive, winning broad support from community allies. Militant tactics and coalition-building can move labour towards a fighting strategy to block the right-wing agenda, and onto the counter-offensive. As the Harper Tories gear up to smash the right to strike in the federal public sector, this is no time to retreat. We are confident that the OFL delegates will meet the challenge to help build a more powerful labour fightback!

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LETTERS

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International communist parties meet in Lisbon

Representatives of 77 parties, from 61 countries, held the 15th annual Meeting of Communist & Workers' Parties (IMCWP) on Nov. 8-10, in Lisbon. Liz Rowley, member of the CEC of the Communist Party of Canada, took part for the CPC. We reprint here excerpts from the news release issued at the end of the meeting by the host party, the Portuguese Communist Party.

The Meeting analysed, among other main aspects, the development of the international situation in the context of the deepening of the structural crisis of capitalism and of a complex process of realignment of forces at the international level, alerting to the great dangers deriving from imperialism's offensive...

The Meeting noted the deepening of the crisis that exploded in 2008 with the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy. A crisis that is far from over, belying the ruling class discourse on an alleged "recovery" and confirming the analyses of the communists about its nature and evolution which, among other aspects, confirms it as a crisis of over-production and over-accumulation of capital. A crisis that expresses the sharpening of capitalism's contradictions - in particular its fundamental contradiction between the social character of production and its private appropriation - highlighting the historical limits of the system and the timeliness of the struggle for the fundamental alternative to capitalism - Socialism.

It denounced the aim of big capital, of the major imperialist powers and their international and supranational structures of imperialist concertation - such as the European Union - to impose on the workers and peoples a social regression of a civilizational dimension assaulting economic, labour and social rights, violently attacking the living conditions of the working and popular masses

and declaring war on the sovereignty and independence of States.

It referenced in particular the harsh reality of the peoples and the impact of the crisis and of the capitalist offensive on developing countries, where the peoples find their right to economic and social development even more curtailed. In this framework, attention was

How we see it...

drawn to the impact of capitalism's crisis on agriculture and food, jeopardising still more the food sovereignty of numerous countries and dooming great masses of the world population to starvation and malnutrition.

It highlighted the dangers that arise from the intensification of the militarist, warmongering and interference policy of the major imperialist powers and NATO. It stressed that the wars of aggression, the processes of interference and instigation of internal conflicts, the strengthening of repressive, authoritarian, control and espionage measures are part of the force-based response by big capital to capitalism's crisis, having as its central aims to maintain the control of the resources and sources of energy and contain the revolt, the struggle of the peoples and the inevitable social and revolutionary explosions that the current situation entails...

Participants valued and expressed their solidarity with all the peoples who resist imperialism's policies of interference and aggression - especially to the peoples of the Middle East, saluting the ongoing struggles in that region against all forms of aggression and oppression, for sovereignty, democracy, social justice and national unity, as in Egypt and Tunisia. It reaffirmed its solidarity

with the Palestinian people and their struggle for national rights, as well as with other peoples in the region who are victims of aggressions and interferences, such as the Syrian people...

Participants saluted and valued the struggle of the peoples, of the communists and other progressive forces in Latin America, considering that the processes of struggle, progressive and of sovereign affirmation in this region, as well as the cooperation based on solidarity that is emerging in the region, constitute an important factor and stimulus for the development and strengthening of the anti-imperialist struggle. The participants reasserted their solidarity with Cuba and its socialist revolution, as well as with the Venezuelan people and their Bolivarian revolution, among others.

It stressed the importance of the struggle in defence of democratic freedoms, against the advance of the far right, against xenophobia and racism, against religious fanaticism and obscurantism, against anti-comm-

see IMCWP, page 9

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No to Harper's attack against the right to self-determination of Québec!

Statement by the Central Committee, Communist Party of Canada

The Communist Party of Canada strongly denounces the decision of the federal Conservative government to deny the right to self-determination of the people of Québec, by intervening before the Québec Superior Court in support of the legal challenge to Bill 99 initiated by the former head of the Equality Party, Keith Henderson.

Bill 99 was adopted in 2000 in response to the federal government's "Clarity Act," which imposes the burden of more than a simple majority in response to a question deemed "clear" by the federal government, in order for Québec to be able to declare sovereignty. The "Clarity Act" is in fact an outright denial of the right to self-determination of Québec.

The purpose of Bill 99 was to reaffirm the right to self-determination of the people of Québec, by establishing that the determination of the question remains the exclusive prerogative of the National Assembly of Québec, and that a simple majority of votes cast in a referendum is

sufficient for the exercise. The federal government has asked the Court to "mitigate" the interpretation of these provisions, or failing to do so, to declare Bill 99 "ineffective."

Denying its recognition in 2006 of the Québec nation, which obviously was meaningless, the Conservative government says that "the Court should declare "that under the Constitution of Canada, Québec is established as a province of Canada, and the impugned Act does not and can never provide the legal basis for a unilateral declaration of independence... or the unilateral secession of the 'Québec State' from the Canadian federation."

As a result, on October 23, despite some reluctance on the part of the Liberals, the 125 members of the National Assembly of Québec, from all parties, unanimously passed a motion condemning the federal government's attack on the prerogative of Québécois to choose their future. Despite this, the Conservatives maintain their chauvinist offensive.

Among the opposition in the House of Commons, the Liberals, through their MP Stéphane Dion, the author of the Clarity Act, wholeheartedly applaud the

Conservatives. NDP leader Thomas Mulcair suggests that the matter is just chicanery among the old parties and ultimately of little importance, although he expressed support for the principle of a simple referendum majority. However, this is sheer hypocrisy, since the NDP unanimously voted last March with the Conservatives and Liberals against a Bloc Québécois bill to repeal the Clarity Act, reiterating their support for federal government supervision of Québec's right to self-determination.

Contrary to these parties, the Communist Party of Canada recognizes Québec's right to self-determination, up to and including the right to secede, and to choose the form of sovereignty that the majority of people want: an independent state, a confederation of equal states or nations, or autonomy.

For many years, the Communist Party has advocated a new constitution based on an equal and voluntary partnership of Québec and English Canada, and of the Aboriginal peoples, protecting and enhancing their traditional national rights, including the right to genuine self-government, with a veto against any changes that may affect their constitutional status, and the right to accelerated economic, social and national development.

The Communist Party advocates a confederal republic of different nations, with two legislative chambers at the central level. The first chamber would be

similar to the present House of Commons, but elected by a new system of mixed-member proportional representation. Replacing the current Senate would be a House of Nationalities, consisting of an equal number of MPs from Québec and English Canada, and significant, guaranteed numbers from Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) and Acadiens.

Each chamber should have the right to propose draft legislation which would become law if adopted by both bodies. In addition, Aboriginal peoples would have the right of veto on any matter concerning national development. This structure would protect both fundamental democratic principles: the equal rights of nations, whatever their size, and majority rule. ●



The Communist perspective...

Civil liberties group files lawsuit vs. CSEC

PV Vancouver Bureau

Canadians who believe that electronic privacy protections and oversight are better here than in the United States are mistaken, according to the BC Civil Liberties Association.

In fact, the BCCLA has filed a lawsuit against the Communications Security Establishment Canada claiming that the CSEC's broad and unchecked surveillance of Canadians is unconstitutional.

The lawsuit argues that two aspects of CSEC's operations violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms' protections against unreasonable search and seizure and infringe on free expression: the interception of private communications of Canadians, and the collection of "metadata" produced by Canadians in their online and phone conversations.

Filed last month in the B.C. Supreme Court, this is the first challenge to the legality of CSEC's spying activities. The CSEC is the Canadian counterpart to the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), and engages in similar activities, including those recently revealed through investigative reports based on secret documents leaked by NSA whistleblower, Edward Snowden.

At present, warns the civil liberties group, the CSEC is permitted to read emails and text messages, and listen to phone calls, when a Canadian communicates with a person outside Canada.

When seeking to intercept the content of Canadians' emails, text messages and phone calls, the agency must seek authorization from the Minister of National Defence. Those entirely secret authorizations permit broad collection of personal communications.

"Unaccountable and unchecked government surveillance presents a grave threat to democratic freedoms," says BCCLA lawyer Joseph Arvai. "We are deeply concerned that CSEC is gaining secret, illegal access to the private communications of ordinary Canadians, and there are no reasonable safeguards in place to monitor its activities. We know from the experiences of other countries that government agencies have a tendency to push and even break the boundaries of spying unless they are checked."

Unlike the United States, there is no court or committee in Canada to monitor CSEC's actions, and no judicial oversight of its sweeping powers. The BCCLA calls this "a serious departure from the safeguards that protect Canadians from domestic spying or police agencies, such as CSIS and the RCMP, which must seek judicial warrants before intercepting the communications of Canadians."

CSEC also operates under a directive, issued by the Minister of National Defence in 2011, that allows it to collect and analyze the metadata information produced every time a Canadian uses a mobile phone or accesses the internet. This private metadata includes the exact geographic location of the mobile phone user, records of phone calls and Internet browsing.

This kind of wholesale surveillance is incompatible with Canadian law, according to the BCCLA. Metadata information can reveal intimate details of personal lives, including relationships, and political and personal beliefs. Most Canadians use the Internet and telecommunications on a daily basis, the group says, and they should be able to do so without government snooping.

The lawsuit follows startling revelations about the interception of Internet and phone communications of U.S. and British citizens by their respective governments. Recent disclosures have shown that the U.S. government tracks the calls of almost every American, and spies on a vast number of their international calls, text messages, and emails.

While CSEC claims to "target" its efforts on persons outside of Canada, the agency is allowed to capture the communications of Canadians if this relates to obtaining "foreign intelligence." CSEC shares this information with foreign intelligence entities in the United States, Britain, New Zealand and Australia.

BCCLA counsel Caily DiPuma says, "It is fundamental to the proper operation of our democracy that Canadians be able to access and understand the laws that impact their rights and freedoms. It is simply not enough for the government to ask Canadians to 'trust' their spy agencies. We are not a society of blind faith - we are a society of accountability, transparency and free and open debate."

On Nov. 21, starting at 7 pm, the BCCLA will host a reception and panel forum on these issues. "Secrets & Spies: Canada's Surveillance State", at the SFU Harbour Centre (555 W. Hastings, Vancouver), will hear from lawyers working on the legal case. Contact the BCCLA at 604-687-2919 for information on taking part. ●

Down with Bill C-4

Statement by the Central Committee, Communist Party of Canada

The Communist Party of Canada strongly condemns the new omnibus Bill C-4 to implement elements of the March 2013 Conservative budget, changing many laws and containing an array of measures, including a fierce attack against the right to strike in the public service.

In particular, this bill now gives the government, as an employer, the exclusive right to determine which services, facilities or activities of the State it considers essential, depriving public employees of their right to strike. Currently, the determination of essential services is the result of negotiation between the employer and the union.

In addition, the bill provides that where the employer has said that at least 80% of positions are essential, the right to strike will be completely abolished and the dispute must be referred to arbitration. However, when the employer considers that less than 80% of services are essential, the employer will have a veto over the arbitration. The bill also provides that the arbitrator shall be required to place a

preponderance of weight to employer demands.

Finally, the right to strike will be removed when the exercise, according to the Government, becomes a threat to the Canadian economy.

The Supreme Court will soon determine whether the right to strike is protected by the Constitution, following a disputed lower court ruling about a law similar to Bill C-4 adopted by the Saskatchewan legislature in 2008.

In his book on the asbestos strike of 1949 in Asbestos, former Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, who cannot be accused of being a Communist, wrote:

"In the present state of society, in fact, it is the possibility of the strike which enables workers to negotiate with their employers on terms of approximate equality. It is wrong to think that the unions are in themselves able to secure this equality. If the right to strike is suppressed or seriously limited, the trade union movement becomes nothing more than one institution among many others in the service of capitalism; a convenient organization for disciplining the workers, occupying their leisure time and ensuring profitability for business."

In fact, Bill C-4 violates the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

which provides that "everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests."

This bill confirms the special laws that the government imposed during its negotiations with Canada Post and Air Canada last year. It adds to a series of recent actions by the Conservative government against workers and their organizations, such as the phasing out of tax credits granted to people who subscribe to credit funds workers, the obligation imposed on trade unions to publicly disclose all their financial statements (C-377), legislation to make union organizing more difficult by eliminating automatic "card check" certification (C-525), and threats to remove Rand formula.

All those attacks against the labor movement aim to weaken and neutralize the labor movement, the main obstacle to establishing total domination of big capital and its austerity policies on Canadian society, constituting a serious threat to democracy itself in Canada.

The Communist Party calls upon the Canadian labor movement, particularly the CLC, to mobilize its members and prepare a concrete response against the anti-democratic and anti-worker Tory program. ●

The Gainford derailment and the carbon economy

By *Graham L. Wilson, Nov. 10, 2013*

On the night of October 18, 2013 I was witness to a tremendous event. Around 1:00 am, a train derailed along the tracks lining Highway 16 (Yellowhead Trail) between the Seba Beach exit and the nearby hamlet of Gainford, Alberta. Carrying tanker cars filled with petroleum gas, propane and other flammable substances, the train exploded in a massive fireball, its smoke reaching up into the air as a mushroom cloud.

Despite being approximately ten kilometres away, myself and my brothers could see the night sky bathed in a sudden eerie orange glow. Turning north, we saw it personally: large, bright as day, almost unreal - it could have been right next to us.

Working on this assumption, we rushed out towards the smoke and the glow to see if we were in any immediate fire risk and whether we needed to start taking precautions. Running through field after field, into neighbouring property, we reached the gravel road just at the edge of our hilltop locale. From there we could see that it was in fact far away, and we guessed Gainford as the location. Assured that it was at least not our problem, but still without a definite guess as to what happened, we returned home with various cataclysmic theories running through our minds.

We were lucky to actually witness the event, as the rest of our family only noticed the short power blip - sadly, not a very telling indication given how badly our power systems have degraded since Ralph Klein's privatizations of the 1990s. It was not until the next morning that we heard the cause, and learned that three other cars were still burning. Unable to approach, emergency workers had no choice but to let it burn off. A large section of Highway 16 was cut off, merely annoying for us, but presumably quite

inconvenient for others - and certainly nothing compared to the troubles of the people of Gainford who were hurriedly evacuated and kept away until four days later.

Anyone following the news of late would be struck by a strange feeling of *deja vu*. In July a similar incident occurred in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec. That explosion devastated the community and left a death toll of forty-two, with five others classified as missing but presumed dead. Luckily for us in Alberta, there were no fatalities and only minimal damage. No one happened to be driving on that stretch of 16 at that time, which aerial photos showed darkened by scorchmarks. CN spokesperson Warren Chandler's claim that such comparisons are "extremely unfair" seems to belie the truth that, in other circumstances, things could have been much worse.

Further, this is only one of many derailments in Alberta and elsewhere over the past few

months, including three in October, one just two days earlier in Sexsmith. Another near Peers occurred on November 3, just 90 kilometres from the previous incident.

The fireball of Gainford may have attracted international attention, but the larger cycle has no clear end in sight as incident after incident hits the news, with the local area still poisoned by the

Processing our own oil would not only reduce the risks of transporting bitumen, but it would also create more value-added jobs here in Canada, and thus give more back to those most damaged by the effects of tar sands production.

derailment of August 3, 2005, when forty-three cars of a westbound CN freight train derailed, spilling pole treating oil into Wabamun Lake, forcing twenty people from their homes and polluting the lake.

True to character, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has deregulated the rail industry, and has let Transport Canada fail in its responsibilities, with predictable results: deferred maintenance,

infrequent inspections, and aging equipment produce deathtraps. Although CN has stated the track at Gainford was recently inspected, and the cause of the derailment is still unknown, it is wise to consider the potential dangers that could be wrought through such policies. The amount of oil and other volatile chemicals carried by rail has notably expanded in recent years, more than tripling between 2011 and 2012, and is expected to rise still further.

Bear in mind that the train was run by Canadian National, the very same company for which the Conservatives lovingly wrote back-to-work legislation mere hours after their employees walked off the job, waiting only for the labour minister to awaken the next morning.

Union-bashing should hardly inspire public trust, especially after a CBC investigation recently alleged that CN has actively ordered its employees to falsify statistics and to otherwise fake its dwell time and train speed, under fear of reprisal. In addition, ex-employee Tim Wallender has asserted in a whistleblower lawsuit

that CN has routinely covered up minor derailments, sending trains back on the track without proper wheel inspection. This makes CN's claims of an improving safety record all the more dubious.

This is not simply a matter of raising profits for rail companies however, which indeed are at record highs. The Harper government has a secondary objective, as right-wing pro-business groups of all stripes continue using these inevitable disasters as arguments for the Keystone and Northern Gateway pipelines.

While there is a case to the claim that pipelines are less likely to cause loss of life, it really is a false dichotomy, even without considering the environmental costs of such developments, as there should not really be such need for large scale oil transportation. Progressives have long been pushing for Alberta and Canada to develop its own refineries in order to process our petroleum extracts closer to hand.

Processing our own oil would not only reduce the risks of transporting bitumen, but it would also create more value-added jobs here in Canada, and thus give more back to those most damaged by the effects of tar sands production. It is further argued that doing this would allow more money to be kept inside the country for economic diversification and the deployment of renewable energy, ending the problem once and for all with a clean transfer of employment to other sectors.

Instead, our refining capacity is in a steady decline, and the last new refinery in Canada opened in 1982. Claims that such a move is "economically unviable", now under heavier dispute in light of the "bitumen bubble", hold absolutely no moral water as the human costs of oil transportation become more apparent by the day. We can do better, not just in the short term, but in the long term by sensibly managing a retreat from the carbon economy. ●



Graphic image of the Gainford derailment and fireball, as seen from the Wilson family ranch

Canada-EU trade deal will harm Manitoba

From a statement by the *Manitoba Committee, Communist Party of Canada*

Before a new and not-yet-public Canada-Europe free trade deal can proceed, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper needs the support of the Manitoba NDP government. Based on information already available, the Communist Party urges that Premier Greg Selinger and his cabinet reject the deal.

We disagree with Premier Selinger's statement that the deal will have a "positive impact" on Manitoba. It is time to renew the discussion about the alleged benefits of free trade.

The deal will not create jobs, it will create job losses. The deal's focus is to lower tariffs, the main effect of which is to accelerate the concentration and centralization of capital.

Small farms and businesses serving local markets will suffer or go bankrupt, while the largest monopolies benefit. Consumers, including local governments, will be increasingly subject to monopoly-pricing, highly profitable for the biggest corporations. This is an irrefutable law of the development of capitalism.

...A common feature of trade deals today is to allow corporations the right to take sovereign parliaments (and taxpayers) to court, if "democratic" laws harm profits but protect people. Elections are less meaningful when corporations can outweigh a parliament in court.

If Canada's big business parties and the federal NDP are ready to surrender our country's sovereignty to the big corporations, they are clearly not eager to defend the right of self-determination of Aboriginal nations, Quebec or

Acadia. These deals are a sell-out of all nations. They surrender the future of all nations in Canada.

Premier Selinger owes Manitobans more of an explanation why he believes that the Manitoba economy will benefit by \$200 million from this deal. Our party chooses to remain highly dubious about the figure and contends that, based on the undeniable laws of capitalist development, most people will suffer from the deal.

Like all deals that lower tariffs, the Canada-EU deal will benefit the largest corporations at the expense of workers, farmers, local governments, and small business. The big Pharma corporations are specifically protected by extending monopoly patent protections.

Trade deal proponents are attacking Canada's dairy farmers as a privileged and protected "cartel." They claim these dairy farmers are causing consumers of

cheese and dairy products enormous grief. Meanwhile, the real cartel is the small handful of giant corporations who will benefit from the trade deal.

Some dairy farmers may benefit from the deal. But most, perhaps thousands, would suffer or go bankrupt throughout the trade zone. Without marketing boards, huge factory-size dairy farms would dominate the market. Reports such as *The Land of Milk and Money* (1980) and since consistently give facts that the reason for higher grocery prices is the monopolized food processing and grocery retail industries, not farmers.

If free trade deals created jobs or grew the economy, we would have no recessions or higher unemployment. We have seen both after signing a far more significant free trade deal with the U.S. 25 years ago. Better-paying manufacturing jobs continue to

disappear, wages remain stagnant, and income and wealth inequality have skyrocketed. Our future under capitalism is more troubled and uncertain.

For thirty years, free traders have tried to sell the theory that "side deals" can protect labour, the environment and human rights. Bitter experience tells us this is not true.

The Communist Party of Canada-Manitoba urges the NDP government to reject this deal. We urge the Manitoba NDP to adopt genuine job creation policies, such as a shorter work week with no loss in pay, massive housing and child-care programs, more investment in education and strong plant closure laws.

The public and trade unions need to contribute to the debate over this important deal. The Communist Party urges public hearings throughout the province about this new trade deal. ●

“Terrorists” and a Prime Minister versus “Rebels” and a “Brutal Dictator”

By Stephen Gowans, <http://gowans.wordpress.com>

No one would be surprised these days to open a newspaper to read: Violence in Syria has risen dramatically since the spring of 2011, when a mostly Sunni and primarily peaceful protest movement against the Alawite-dominated government in Damascus drew a violent response from regime forces.

But would they be surprised to read the same sentence, with Shiite replacing Alawite, and Baghdad in place of Damascus? Probably.

Yet much the same sentence appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on October 24. Reporters Matt Bradley and Ali A. Nabhan wrote that, “Violence (in Iraq’s Anbar province) has risen dramatically since the spring, when a mostly Sunni and primarily peaceful protest movement against the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad drew a violent response from security forces.”

The Western narrative on Syria is that a government dominated by one religious group used violence to quell a largely peaceful protest movement of another, triggering an armed rebellion. Just like Anbar.

The government’s actions, and the uprising that followed, were labelled a problem by Western news media and governments - a problem to be resolved by removing a president who is “killing his own people” (and who

also, just happens, to refuse to play along with Washington’s economic and foreign policy agenda.) Not like Anbar.

Hence, while two very similar situations exist side-by-side, they have been met by completely different reactions in the West, not only on the part of governments, but also the news media, and a certain faction of leftists that mistake reaction for revolution.

The Western news media have been virtually silent on Maliki’s cracking down violently on a mostly Sunni and primarily peaceful protest movement, yet fevered and voluble in its coverage of the Syrian insurgency, and was, even in the uprising’s early days. Practically everyone knows about Syria. How many know about Anbar?

Western governments have designated Syrian president Bashar al-Assad a pariah, but haven’t demonized Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, have refused to denounce him as a brute who kills his own people, and haven’t told him he has lost his legitimacy, and must step down, as Assad has been told.

And yet as the *Washington Post*’s Liz Sly noted on 8 February, “The grievances [against Maliki] - are real, as was articulated last week in a Human Rights Watch report condemning the ‘draconian’ measures used by the Maliki government to curtail its opponents. The report cited widespread allegations of abuse

within the criminal justice system including torture, the rape of female prisoners and arbitrary arrests, as well as the successful suppression of an earlier attempt to organize Arab Spring-style demonstrations in Baghdad and elsewhere in 2011 (“Arab Spring-style protests take hold in Iraq”).

While some leftists in the West have embraced the Syrian insurgency as if it were a modern day October Revolution in embryo, they have not rallied to the cause of the Anbar insurgents. Probably because they’ve never heard of them, and maybe because the Western news media have yet to invent a faction of moderate (i.e., “good”) rebels that the kind souls of the left can embrace. The field, instead, is dominated by the same al-Qaeda-linked Islamists who lead Syria’s insurgency.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the Anbar fighters “flow fluidly back and forth across the Iraq-Syria border, staging attacks on both sides...” These are the same fighters the US occupation army battled in Iraq during the surge of 2007. Of course, back then, they were called “terrorists”, and were considered “legitimate” targets in a war on terror.

Funny, “terrorists” is what the Syrian government calls them today, when they set off car bombs, execute captives, eviscerate bodies, and saw off heads, on the Syrian side of the border. All the same, this is considered

illegitimate terminology by Western governments, who prefer that terrorists who work on their side be called rebels, freedom fighters, or part of a popular, democratic, uprising.

Maliki, the prime minister who wields violence to crush largely peaceful protest movements, remains Washington’s man in Baghdad. As a consequence, he need not worry about getting the Assad-treatment - for now. Just as Ethiopia’s Meles Zenawi was in reality the monster that Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe is made out to be by Western governments and news media, Meles escaped sanction and demonization from the West, and

was lionized when he died last year, because he did the West’s bidding. Mugabe is more interested in his country’s independence from the West - hence, the sully of his name in Western capitals and newsrooms.

It didn’t matter how many people Meles locked up, killed and tortured, he remained the model statesman in Western eyes, as Maliki may, so long as he doesn’t develop too much of an independent streak. Assad, the president who says “Syria is an independent state working for the interests of its people, rather than making the Syrian people work for the interests of the West,” is, however, quite another matter.



Civilians inspect the aftermath of a deadly July 2013 car bomb attack in Baghdad. While the Canadian media presents a steady flow of biased coverage of the Syrian crisis, little is reported on the sectarian violence in Iraq.

Asbestos: the deadliest substance

From the opening speech by World Federation of Trade Unions General Secretary George Mavrikos at the WFTU Conference on Asbestos, Athens, Greece, October 30, 2013

It is our great pleasure to welcome you here at the seat of the World Federation of Trade Unions, in Athens, for this important international initiative of the WFTU on Asbestos. We are happy to have you with us today, despite financial and other difficulties the trade union movement internationally is facing.

The WFTU, the class oriented trade union movement is getting stronger step by step, striving to build unions which will be real weapons for the interests of the global working class.

First of all, we should have clarity that the capitalists and the bourgeois state (as a collective capitalist) seek to continuously increase the exploitation of the working class. They know very well what Marx has shown us: that “the increase in the value of labor power represents a drop of surplus value,” a reduction in their profit. So they try, especially during periods of compression of their rate of profit, to reduce that part of the social product that goes to the working class: either directly in the form of wage labor, or indirectly in the form of contributions or expenses for

health and safety measures.

Business owners and big contractors weigh the life of the workers against the cost for taking safety measures, and they always choose what will give them more profits. The scales are almost always leaning against the life and health of the worker.



In this effort, the bourgeois state is not a neutral observer, but through legislation it creates and implements, through the state budget and through the operation of its own government services, supports actively the side of monopolies.

The issue we are discussing today, asbestos, is a very important issue that affects the health and safety of workers not only in the

construction industry (where this material has been used extensively), but all sectors, since its use during the previous years in all countries of the world had and still has an impact on the health of all people. Asbestos keeps being present in many places where the working class and their families

capitalist countries it continues to be a source of profit. It has been proven that asbestos causes a number of malignancies and diseases leading to death like bronchial cancer, asbestosis, pleural mesothelioma and other health problems. The diseases caused by asbestos often do not appear immediately after contact with asbestos. So, often the problem is not immediately apparent, and many buildings are “ticking time-bombs” for public health and for those who live and work there. Asbestos has won thus the nickname “silent killer”. There is no harmless asbestos, and many times measures taken to limit its impact, have been proved inadequate. Asbestos has been used in buildings, machinery, transportation, tools, and even consumer products. We understand what dangers this causes to public health. Let’s think about how many millions of kids come every day in contact with this dangerous material when they go to school, how many millions of construction workers, maritime workers, workers of asbestos mines come into contact with this material in large quantities while doing their job often without the necessary security measures, how many families have undergone extensive asbestos exposure, living in houses for whose construction this dangerous material has been used or living in areas near asbestos

work and live. Even in countries where the use of asbestos is now banned, there are still buildings, tools and machinery containing asbestos, as its removal requires money. In a number of developing countries, asbestos not only has not been banned yet, but continues to be extracted and used because of its low cost and lack of alternatives. Besides, for capitalists and a number of

mines. Even when the consequences of the use of asbestos and human contact with it were obvious and scientifically proven, there was reluctance to abolish its use by governments and international organizations.

We cannot examine this issue without having in mind the economic and political context in which we live today. Under conditions of international domination of capitalism, when economic growth is planned to be in favour of capital and the multinational corporations when the exploitation of workers deepens, the hygiene and safety of workers and the population is neglected.

The use of asbestos in a number of countries may have been banned. In developing and poor countries, however, it has not. This shows in a more realistic way the inequalities caused by capitalist development at global level, as workers in the poorest countries, countries that have been exploited by imperialism and its policies in the worst way, continue to live and work in worse conditions of health and safety. This is a fact that should be taken seriously into consideration.

Where the use of asbestos was supposed to have been completely banned, many risks remain, as the “silent killer” is still present in many public buildings and other



GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Riot cops raid Greek TV station

At 4:20 am on November 7, hundreds of riot police, along with a public prosecutor, raided the headquarters of ERT, Greece's national TV and radio broadcast station, demanding that employees immediately vacate the premises. Panagiotis Kalfayiannis, president of POSPERT (ERT's employee union) was among four who were arrested. Later released from detention, Kalfayiannis said that riot police entered without a warrant and did not inform them of the charges against them or the reason for their detention.

There were numerous reports of tear gas and violence towards those gathered at ERT. The station's normal broadcasting was replaced with a continuous video loop urging the public to come to ERT headquarters in a show of solidarity.

One-day public sector strike in Portugal

A one-day strike by government workers on Nov. 8 disrupted public services in Portugal as labour groups continued their battle against pay and pension cuts and the loss of benefits. Many workers, especially those in the public sector, have endured two years of falling income and higher taxes since Portugal's 78 billion euros (\$105 billion) bailout in 2011. More austerity is planned next year as Portugal's creditors and other countries using the euro currency compel Lisbon to slash spending.

The 24-hour strike forced the cancellation of school classes and medical appointments. Local media reported that courts and government offices around the country were closed or had few staff. Municipal garbage collection was also affected, though trade unions said that some workers couldn't afford to lose a day's pay.

Business wages "economic war" in Venezuela

Trade unions marched against Venezuela's business federation recently to protest the "economic war" being waged against the government. The march in Caracas was directed at Venezuela's largest business federation, Fedecamaras, as well as the Venezuelan-American Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Venacham) and the National Council of Commerce and Services (Consecomercio).

Several unions participated in the march, led by the Bolivarian Central of Socialist Workers, the main pro-government union federation, to Fedecamaras' offices in central Caracas.

"This is about telling the pro-coup sectors of Fedecamaras, Venacham, the Polar Group [Venezuela's largest private food producer] and the bankers that their time has come," said Braulio Alvarez, a legislator of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, who attended the demonstration.

Although the economy has continued to gradually grow this year and unemployment has remained relatively low, since January the country has experienced shortages in some basic foodstuffs such as milk and corn flour while inflation has spiked to 49%. On the black market the dollar is currently worth up to nine times the official value set by the government, creating imbalances for importation and price-setting.

The Venezuelan government argues that these problems are due to an "economic war" being waged by business sectors aligned with the conservative opposition. Officials say that these sectors attack the currency, lower production, hoard products and speculate on prices in order to provoke scarcity, inflation, and political discontent.

"We demand that Fedecamaras cease the economic war, speculation, and reduction of supply...the people are organised, [late president Hugo] Chavez woke us to never again go to sleep or kneel before anyone," declared Frank Quijada, president of the national union of Polar Group workers.

The government has adopted a range of measures to combat shortages and inflation, such as boosting imports, stimulating agricultural production, raising some price controls, and setting up an Economic Commission to monitor private and state-owned companies' production and supply chains. An information line allows citizens to denounce incidents of "economic sabotage" in companies, suppliers or retailers.

"We workers say today to the world, to Fedecamaras, Venacham and all those businesspersons that are destabilising the nation, that we workers have become worker-inspectors, we're training ourselves to accompany the government of President Nicolas Maduro in this struggle," said Marco Antonio Diaz, vice president of the Bolivarian Central.

Several more marches are planned around the country to protest the "economic war".

Costa Rica one-day strike

Trade unions and social groups in Costa Rica held a one day strike and protests on Nov. 11 against changes in electricity rates, new taxes, and the privatization of some health services. Among the groups protesting were the National Medical Union, though some staff stayed on the job to provide emergency services at the country's hospitals.

The health sector unions are protesting a proposed alliance between the Social Security System (CCSS) and private clinics or hospitals for the care of patients. ICE workers joined the strike, and the agency did not provide services to the public on that day.

The Association of Secondary School Teachers also participated in the strike, warning in advance that classes would not be taught at many schools. The motorcyclists union also joined the protests, upset about recent increases in road taxes.

Saudi crackdown on migrants

Saudi authorities rounded up more than 4,000 foreign workers on Nov. 5, at the start of a crackdown allegedly aimed at creating more jobs for locals. Hundreds of thousands of workers have already left the kingdom following a grace period of seven months during which authorities told expatriates to fix their legal status or leave the country, or face jail.

Many workers stayed off the streets to avoid police roadblocks and checkpoints looking for invalid labour papers as a special task force of 1,200 Labour Ministry officials combed shops, construction sites, restaurants and businesses.

Across the Gulf Arab states, rulers fear the changing demographics of the region. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other countries have aggressively supported proposals to open more jobs for their own citizens, worrying that chronic unemployment could feed dissent. However, the kingdom continues to refuse to allow women to drive, which could greatly expand the domestic labour force.

"We want more Saudi men and women to work in the private and public sectors," the Saudi Deputy Labour Minister told reporters before the end of the "amnesty" period. An estimated 1.5 million foreigners - about 16 percent of the total nine million non-Saudi work force - are believed to violate residency and labour rules.

Many low-income Saudis are willing to work the types of jobs long held by Indian, Egyptian, Pakistani and Filipino migrant workers, though not for the same low wages of just several hundred dollars a month. Unemployment among Saudis has remained at 10 percent for several years, according to the International Monetary Fund. Unemployment among Saudis under 30 years old is about three times the national average.

Nearly every worker in the Gulf is directly "sponsored" by an employer who has say over exit visas, residency and work permits. Groups such as Human Rights Watch and the International Labor Organisation accuse employers of withholding workers' passports or ignoring their demands. Last May, hundreds of construction workers in the United Arab Emirates were sent back to Bangladesh, Pakistan and other countries after waging a strike to protest meal costs deducted from their pay.

New law "protects" workers rights?

Even as Saudi Arabia was rounding up thousands of so-called "illegal migrants" in early November, the kingdom announced legislation supposedly aimed at protecting domestic workers' rights. Under the new law, domestic workers are entitled to nine hours' rest daily and one day off weekly. They can also claim paid sick leaves and paid one-month leave after two years' employment. Employers have no rights to assign domestic workers

with risky or degrading tasks, according to the law.

The penalties in the legislation apply to both workers and employers who violate their mutual contracts. Employers who violate the contract will pay a fine of \$53 or will be banned from hiring workers for one year; for second time violation, employers face a fine of \$1,333 and a three-year hiring ban; for a third violation, employers will face a permanent hiring ban.

For their part, workers who breach the contract will be fined and banished from the country. The legislation gives employers the right to put workers on a three-month probation, and stipulates that workers should respect Islamic and Saudi regulations and values. It also bans workers from leaving the job without valid reasons and taking a private job.

Romanian teachers walk out

Ten thousand teachers affiliated to the Fédération des syndicats libres de l'enseignement (FSLE) marched through Bucharest on November 6, demanding better wages and working conditions and an end to political interference in education. During the march, teachers whistled, blew horns and held banners. Some yelled, "Solidarity!" or "Without education, any nation will die!"

They also called on the Romanian Government to increase

spending on education and teachers. A beginning teacher receives a monthly salary of 160 euros, less than half of Romania's average salary, forcing many to give private lessons for additional income.

The union is also demanding that school leaders and principals be appointed on merit, not on political criteria. FSLE President Simon Hancescu warned that if the government does not try to find solutions, all FSLE members will participate in a referendum to see if they want to organise a general strike in education.

There are two options, Hancescu underlined: "Striking before the elections for the European Parliament or a general strike at the end of the school year in June."

At the government building, an FSLE delegation handed an appeal signed by 10,000 teachers, expressing determination to interrupt their work in schools if necessary.

The FSLE is demanding the government allocate more than six per cent of GDP for education in 2014, and higher salaries. Other demands include changes in the education law to improve the status of teachers, earlier retirement at full pensions, reduced hours for teachers with over 25 years of experience and a teaching degree, a bonus for teachers holding a doctorate, reimbursement for travel expenses, and higher state expenditures on books and computer technology. ●



Major strikes and protests continue against the Greek government's austerity policies. Seen here, a demonstration in the rain by members of the PAME labour federation.

Join the Communist Party of Canada



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

Central Committee CPC
290A Danforth Ave, Toronto, ON, M4K 1N6
416-469-2446 <info@cpc-pcc.ca> www.comunist-party.ca

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Tel/fax: 902-542-7981

The family saga unfolds, the electorate cringes

B. Prasant, PV correspondent in India

It was the decade of the mid-1970s. I had come out of incarceration. I was again active as an associate of the administrative body of the Aero Club of India (AeCI), the federal government-designated body for sports aviation. I would frequent Delhi several times a month and go to the AeCI's Safdarjang airport. There I would meet the country's first family - the Gandhi-Nehrus.

There was this gentle, even shy, young man with thinning hair, his European wife who always hung in the background, a silent spectre-like presence, and their children, a boy who looked clueless for his age, and his sharp-witted, alert, haughty elder sister. The gentle young man later became prime minister before dying a horrible death in a terrorist attack.

The children had a politically powerful uncle who was designated as next-in-line of the ruling dynasty after the old patriarch, the formidable *mater familias*, would pass away, (but who himself later died in a mysterious sports plane crash despite being one of the nation's top sports pilots). I recall when the young shy gentleman crashed one of my aeromodels he looked shocked, aggrieved, bewildered; the girls would not deign a second look. I noticed the same shock when the grandmother died, killed by one of her bodyguards...

Cut to 2013....

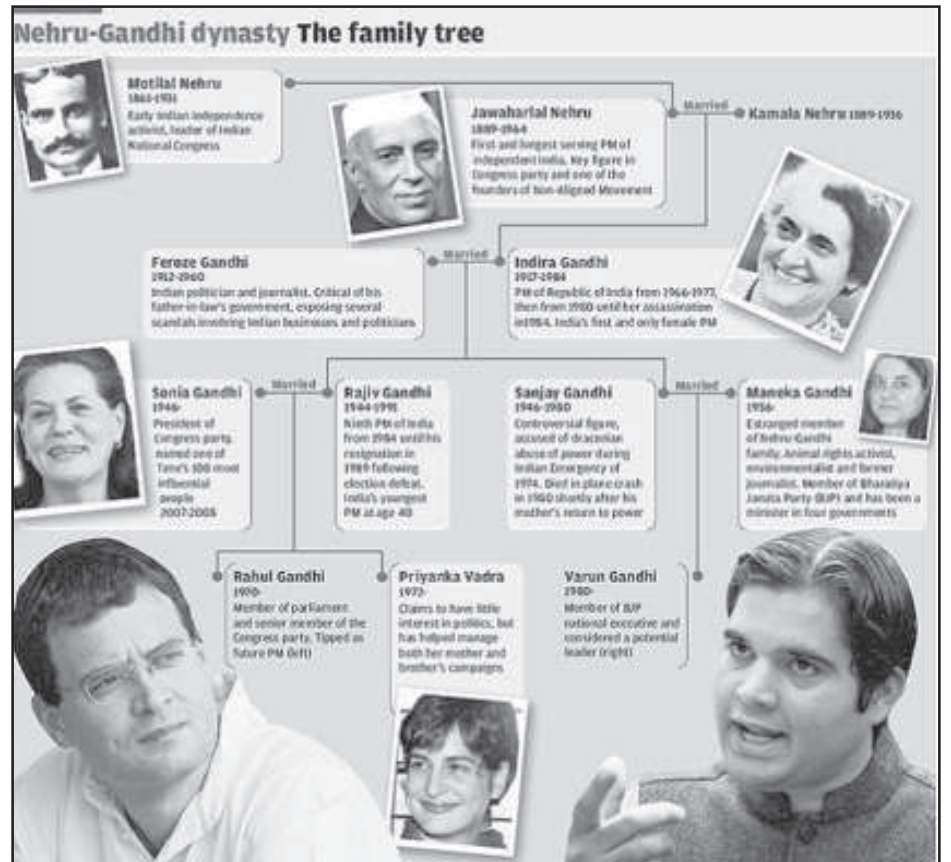
Parliamentary elections are but a few months away. Several important provinces

are about to enter the first phase of the electoral process leading to the polls. The Congress, still with the Gandhi-Nehru line in (weak) charge, is in a deep muddle.

Two crises overtake the outfit. First, there is a sharp increase in the price of common commodities, and food riots. Second, there is massive corruption in high places. Accusing fingers even point at the prime minister's office, alleged to have distributed, out-of-turn, coal "blocks" or prime mining fields worth billions of US dollars or more to a powerful business house. The other scam is grants to "ghost companies" created by international telecoms, to purchase large quantities of spectrum for the operation of wireless devices, and to heck with the security of the nation.

The boy, now grown into a short chubby young lad, has been designated by the Congress as its prime ministerial candidate. He has made a few speeches to very bare attendance. The substance of the speech worries us as to his political balance. In all his stop-overs in the Hindi heartland (also derisively called the cow-belt provinces), between his now-trademark, hysterically fast waving of hands, he would allegedly break down and cry over three issues that in his political bewilderment he thought to be "electoral" issues.

First, mummy is sick, and he presumably means physically. Mummy cries a lot at the poor condition of the masses. Mummy would not leave the parliament until the food security bill was passed, despite being ill. Mummy was in tears, don't you people understand, in



India's dynasty; Rahul Gandhi (bottom left) is the Congress candidate for PM

tears... Then I escorted her home.

Second, "they" have killed my nani (grandmother), "they" have assassinated my papa, and "they" would surely finish me off.

Third, a jewel of a political comment, luminous in its content and brilliant in its significance. "That would not make much

of a difference..." He need not have elaborated.

Can this tantramous child, who indulges in cry-baby soap operas in full view of the electorate, be possibly imagined even in our worst nightmares as the leader of this proud nation?

Komagata Maru II - racism then and now

By Gurpreet Singh, Surrey, BC

While Indo-Canadians continue to insist that the Canadian government officially apologized in Parliament for the *Komagata Maru* episode, the recent violence and racist rants against domestic and foreign migrants in India reveals how bigotry has raised its ugly head in a country known for its diversity.

The *Komagata Maru*, with over 350 South Asian passengers aboard, was forced to return by the Canadian government in 1914 under the discriminatory "continuous journey law" that aimed at preventing Indian immigrants from settling here permanently. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for this episode in a Surrey park in 2008. However, the community is seeking a formal apology in the House of Commons.

Even as the *Komagata Maru* episode apology remains an unfinished agenda for many South Asians, the systemic violence and discrimination against domestic and foreign migrants in a culturally diverse Indian society is unacceptable.

Only recently, Sikh settlers in the Gujarat state of India were physically attacked by Gujarati chauvinists who want them to

abandon their land claims in the province and go back to their native state of Punjab. These enterprising Sikh farmers were brought here years ago to make otherwise barren land near the Indo-Pak international border fertile and productive. But the Gujarat

government now wants to get rid of these people, as a result of which the ruling Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party and the Sikh



The *Komagata Maru*, turned away from Vancouver in 1914.

farmers are locked in a legal battle. Meanwhile back in Punjab, the Sikh fanatics have strongly reacted to the government's announcement of welfare schemes for migratory labourers coming to the state from far-away poor provinces like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Often Indian politicians blame Pakistan and other foreign forces for creating disturbances, while the real danger to the unity of the country lies within.

Khalsa attacked former Nav Democrat MLA from Surrey, Jagrup Brar, for speaking up against their racist rants. The hypocritical supporters of Dal Khalsa in Canada also believe in such exclusionist policies, while expecting rights for themselves in

this country.

Similarly, the Maharashtra-based regional chauvinist groups, like Shiv Sena and Maharashtra

Nav Nirman Sena, have repeatedly targeted migrants from other provinces, like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The recent massacre of Hindi-speaking migrant labourers in Assam is equally disturbing. In 2012, Bangladeshi migrants were targeted by the local tribal groups in the same province.

All this goes on in a country known as world's largest secular democracy with a constitution that allows equal rights and freedom to everyone.

Nevertheless, a handful of fanatical groups operating in different parts of India cannot only be blamed. The mainstream political parties of India which exploit regional and religious emotions and pit one group against another to win elections should take some blame. Linguistic politics has further fuelled these tensions. The ruling Congress government was responsible for engineering the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom following the assassination of then-Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, and the BJP government in Gujarat was directly involved in the anti-Muslim violence in 2002. Ironically, the Congress is well known for its secular credentials, as compared to the BJP which believes in Hindu nationalism. Both parties increased their electoral representations in the aftermath of these massacres.

Only recently, a minister in Goa described Nigerians coming to the state as "cancer". This follows a protest by the Nigerians who were seeking action after the murder of a compatriot. The minister blamed Nigerians for drug trafficking and crime in the state. This has encouraged ordinary folks in Goa to boycott Nigerians.

Such political tendencies hold potential danger to the unity and integrity of the country. Often Indian politicians blame Pakistan

and other foreign forces for creating disturbances, while the real danger to the unity of the country lies within.

This is not to suggest that the Canadian political system is perfect. The systemic racism and discriminatory immigration policies in Canada also need to be questioned, rather than making it accountable for something that happened 100 years ago.

Canada should look hard at its treatment of the indigenous peoples and refugees coming to this part of the world even now. Just because the current government has apologized for historical wrongs in the past does not exonerate its ongoing discriminatory policies. If our politicians continue to repeat those mistakes, what's the point of making symbolic apologies for something that happened centuries ago? ●

IMCWP meeting in Lisbon...

(continued from page 4)

unism. It reaffirmed solidarity with other communist parties and all revolutionary forces that are the target of political persecution and anti-communist campaigns - namely in the European continent, which is carried out by several governments as well as by institutions like the European Union. Concrete experiences of struggle in different countries and regions were present in most interventions, confirming that the workers and peoples do not conform and that, even in the current difficult conditions, liberating advances and achievements of an anti-monopolist and anti-capitalist nature are possible.

It was affirmed that socialism increasingly emerges as the real fundamental alternative to capitalism and its crisis. Drawing lessons from the delays, mistakes and distortions that countered basic principles of socialism, but valuing as highly positive the experiences of building socialism and what they meant and mean for Humanity, highlighting the achievements of the new social system, recognising that there are no models of revolution, the participants stressed the determining role of the masses in the construction and management of socialist societies.

It was stressed that the current international situation makes it particularly necessary to strengthen cooperation among all progressive and anti-imperialist forces and, firstly, among communist and workers' parties from all over the world, one of the most solid guarantees for strengthening of the peoples' struggle and the construction of the alternative of socialism. ●

“Whose war is this? Not mine”

As part of a series of features on the true story of the First World War, we print this April 1917 article by the revolutionary U.S. journalist John Reed (author of Ten Days That Shook The World). As Reed feared, his country entered the imperialist war within days of this article.

By the time this goes to press the United States may be at war. The day the German note arrived, Wall Street flung the American flag to the breeze, the brokers on the floor of the Stock Exchange sang “The Star Spangled Banner” with tears rolling down their cheeks, and the stock market went up.

In the theaters they are singing “patriotic” ballads of the George M. Cohan-Irving Berlin variety, playing the national anthem, and flashing the flag and the portrait of long-suffering Lincoln - while the tired suburbanite who has just been scalped by a ticket-speculator goes into hysterics. Exclusive ladies whose husbands own banks are rolling bandages for the wounded, just like they do in Europe; a million-dollar fund for ice in field-hospitals has been started; and the Boston Budget for Conveying Virgins Inland has grown enormously. The directors of the British, French and Belgian Permanent Blind Relief

Fund have added “American” to the name of the organization, in gruesome anticipation. Our soldier boys, guarding the aqueducts and bridges, are shooting each other by mistake for Teutonic spies. There is talk of “conscription,” “war-brides,” and “On to Berlin”

I know what war means. I have been with the armies of all the belligerents except one, and I have seen men die, and go mad, and lie in hospitals suffering hell; but there is a worse thing than that. War means an ugly mob-madness, crucifying the truth-tellers, choking the artists, side-tracking reforms, revolutions, and the working of social forces. Already in America those citizens who oppose the entrance of their country into the European melee are called “traitors,” and those who protest against the curtailing of our meagre rights of free speech are spoken of as “dangerous lunatics.” We have had a forecast of the censorship - when the naval authorities in charge of the Sayville wireless cut off American news from Germany, and only the wildest fictions reached Berlin via London, creating a perilous situation. The press is howling for war. The church is howling for war. Lawyers, politicians, stock-brokers, social leaders are all howling for war. Roosevelt is again recruiting his thrice-thwarted family regiment.

But whether it comes to actual hostilities or not, some damage has

been done. The militarists have proved their point. I know of at least two valuable social movements that have suspended functioning because no one cares. For many years this country is going to be a worse place for free men to live in; less tolerant, less hospitable. Maybe it is too late, but I want to put down what I think about it all.

Whose war is this? Not mine. I know that hundreds of thousands of American workingmen employed by our great financial “patriots” are not paid a living wage. I have seen poor men sent to jail for long terms without trial, and even without any charge. Peaceful strikers, and their wives and children, have been shot to death, burned to death, by private detectives and militiamen. The rich have steadily become richer, and the cost of living higher, and the workers proportionally poorer. These toilers don’t want war-not even civil war. But the speculators, the employers, the plutocracy-they want it, just as they did in Germany and in England; and with lies and sophistries they will whip up our blood until we are savage-and then we’ll fight and die for them...

We are simple folk. Prussian militarism seemed to us insufferable; we thought the invasion of Belgium a crime; German atrocities horrified us, and also the idea of German submarines exploding ships full of peaceful people without warning. But then we began to hear about

England and France jailing, fining, exiling and even shooting men who refused to go out and kill; the Allied armies invaded and seized a part of neutral Greece, and a French admiral forced upon her an ultimatum as shameful as Austria’s to Serbia; Russian atrocities were shown to be more dreadful than German; and hidden mines sown by England in the open sea exploded ships full of peaceful people without warning.

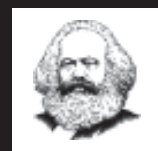
Other things disturbed us. For instance, why was it a violation of international law for the Germans to establish a “war-zone” around the British Isles, and perfectly legal for England to close the North Sea? Why is it we submitted to the British order forbidding the shipment of non-contraband to Germany, and insisted upon our right to ship contraband to the Allies? If our “national honour” was smirched by Germany’s refusal to allow war materials to be shipped to the Allies, what happened to our national honour when England refused to let us ship noncontraband food and even Red Cross hospital supplies to Germany? Why is England allowed to attempt the avowed starvation of German civilians, in violation of international law, when the Germans

cannot attempt the same thing without our horrified protest? How is it that the British can arbitrarily regulate our commerce with neutral nations, while we raise a howl whenever the Germans “threaten to restrict our merchant ships going about their business?”

...We have shipped and are shipping vast quantities of war materials to the Allies, we have floated the Allied loans. We have been strictly neutral toward the Teutonic powers only. Hence the inevitable desperation of the last German note. Hence this war we are on the brink of.

Those of us who voted for Woodrow Wilson did so because we felt his mind and his eyes were open, because he had kept us out of the mad-dogfight of Europe, and because the plutocracy opposed him. We had learned enough about the war to lose some of our illusions, and we wanted to be neutral. We grant that the President, considering the position he’d got himself into, couldn’t do anything but answer the German note as he did - but if we had been neutral, that note wouldn’t have been sent. The President didn’t ask us; he won’t ask us if we want war or not. The fault is not ours. It is not our war. ●

To order a copy of the People’s Voice 2014 Anti-First World War Calendar, send \$15 (includes postage and handling) to People’s Voice, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1. Contact us at 604-255-2041 or pvoice@telus.net for information on lower-cost bulk orders. The Calendar is also on sale at PV Bureaus in Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg.



Marxist Theory

Marxism, religion, and the Quebec Charter of Values

By Kimball Cariou

People’s Voice has received some interesting feedback about a recent statement printed in our pages: the commentary on the Charter of Quebec Values by the Parti Comuniste du Quebec (issue of Oct. 1-15).

Much of the response welcomes the PCQ’s principled stand against the Charter’s attempt to scapegoat religious and cultural minorities. Other readers were pleased that People’s Voice rejects attempts by chauvinists within English-speaking Canada to claim that such racism is only a problem within Quebec.

Several readers, however, were critical of one passage in the lengthy PCQ statement, stating that

working class unity is needed to struggle for socialism, and further that “the Communist Party is of the opinion that religion and the churches of all kinds are fundamentally reactionary, and serve to defend the exploitation of the working class.”

These readers argue that it is wrong to consider religion as “fundamentally reactionary”, especially since many believers participate in a wide range of progressive movements. The Communist Party of Canada itself, they point out, welcomes religious believers as members, provided they support the Party’s program and constitution.

The PCQ statement refers to religion as a general category, not

to individual believers or particular groups, which are sometimes radical or even revolutionary in their outlook. The statement stresses that “the Communist Party supports the freedom of conscience and the democratic right of individuals to practice their religions or to have none,” and that a state ban against wearing religious symbols is an attack on human rights.

However, the Communist understanding of religion is complex and often misunderstood. Scientific socialism, also known as Marxism-Leninism, forms the ideological basis of Communist parties in Canada and most other countries. This is a philosophy based in materialist science, rather than idealism. This simply means that Communists analyze the world as a material reality, not as the construction of a supreme being. The Communist program is based on the understanding that human beings, not higher powers, have the ability to change our world, hopefully for the better!

From this perspective, the religious argument that our fates are in the hands of a supreme being is often used to justify fatalistic acceptance of mass poverty, exploitation, violence against women, wars, environmental destruction, since humans should prepare for “the next life,” not this world. Of course, many believers are active fighters for a better world, in alliance with communists and other progressives. But most often, religious elites in class-divided societies align their interests and ideologies with those of the wealthy exploiting minority. This contradiction is reflected

in the often-quoted statement by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, to the effect that “religion is the opium of the people.”

Few people, even among communists, can cite the entire quote: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.”

The Communist understanding of ideologies is that these tend to reflect the societies in which they appear. As Marx also wrote, “the foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man.”

A society based on hunting and gathering for survival will develop religious concepts which reflect the natural world around it, rather than hierarchal forms of worship. The churches which emerged parallel with the rapid expansion of capitalism and imperialism tended to downplay earlier Christian concepts of equality and sharing, in favour of structures and ideals similar to the capitalist hierarchy of wealth and power.

Similar processes can be seen within Islamic societies, as these shifted from equality-oriented tribal groups to highly complex capitalist economies. In both Christianity and Islam, the main


historical trend is towards centralisation of power, wealth, and ideological control, despite occasional attempts to return to the “roots” of these religions.

This trend does not deny the powerful attraction of certain concepts and narratives associated with religions. Jesus Christ has often been called “the first communist,” not in a literal sense, but because this lowly Jewish carpenter openly identified with the poor and oppressed, against the Roman overlords and their wealthy local allies. This reading of the Jesus story has inspired many oppressed peoples over the centuries. The late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez was an outstanding example of those who took courage from the example of Jesus.

Fidel Castro, the leader of the Cuban Revolution, is an atheist who often engages in dialogues with religious activists, such as Latin America’s “liberation theologians”.

Castro’s views are contained in such books as “Fidel on Religion,” well worth searching out in used book stores. Here’s a quote from Fidel: “If instead of being born and elaborating his ideas when he did, Christ had been born in these times, you can be sure - or at least I am - that his preaching would not have differed much from the ideas or the preaching that we revolutionaries of today try to bring the world.”

Communists and religious believers do have differing ideologies. But while this philosophical debate continues, there is also a search for unity around both immediate and long-range issues. ●



La Trova Nuestra

Friday, November 29, 8 pm

"La Peña Nuestra"

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

About Vancouver's "La Trova Nuestra"

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

Asbestos: the deadliest substance....

continued from page 7

places, and control mechanisms are non-existent or unable to manage the removal of asbestos from those facilities and prevent unauthorized use and sales of asbestos-containing materials.

Moreover, the removal of asbestos from buildings and facilities has been undertaken by private companies, which in order to ensure higher profits neglect the health and safety of the workers working for them, while caring little about the effects of asbestos dismantling operations to the general population and the environment.

Finally, big risks remain, since the population has been exposed for decades to asbestos-containing materials, while the implementation of health and safety measures is still not satisfying modern needs and requirements.

The risks from the use of asbestos and other hazardous materials are even greater when we consider the fact that a huge part of the world's population has less access to health services. Public health systems in all countries are being privatized or degraded significantly when capitalist governments implement measures that transform health from a public good into an expensive commodity from which the capital and multinationals gain multimillion profits. This fact, essentially, deprives large masses of workers and poor people of the

right to fight against health problems, which were caused by the same voracious activity of capitalism.

What is the role of trade unions in this situation? The class oriented trade union movement, the movement that recognizes that there are no common interests between workers and employers, between the exploiters and the exploited, and has been struggling and must continue to struggle for the protection of the health and the life of the workers, demand modern health and safety measures.

The WFTU and its affiliates in five continents have dealt extensively with issues of health and safety at work and struggle daily so that these measures be respected, implemented and modernized. Employers' and governments' negligence on job health and safety issues (security measures, presence of doctors in workplaces, etc.) is a crime against the working class.

Especially for asbestos, the labor movement has an obligation to demand full registration of asbestos contained in public buildings and facilities, and that the state takes measures for the care and support for victims of asbestos and their rehabilitation. Also, strict implementation of the ban of asbestos, and the universal ban on use of asbestos-containing materials and their replacement with safer ones, no matter the difficulties and the cost of doing so, should be in our orientation.

The positions of the WFTU for

a public, high quality, free health-care system accessible to all, public and free social security is an integral part of the struggle of workers to protect their lives by phenomena such as the effects of asbestos we are discussing today. These requests cannot be seen separately from the daily demands of the working class movement for salaries, pensions and working conditions that meet the current needs of the working class and the people.

The main cause of the problems described above is capitalist profit, the unrestrained activity of capital, the international monopolies and the multinationals. The history of the international labor movement has shown that the struggle for the life and health of workers, the struggle for modern workers' rights, is a struggle that results in hard conflict with employers, capital and capitalist governments. This kind of struggle is able to bring achievements that will ensure a better quality of workers' and peoples' lives, it gives perspective on a way of development, where the economy and science will work in favour of the real producers of the wealth the workers, and not for the monopolies.

The WFTU, based on its class, internationalist and anti-imperialist policies adopted since its establishment in 1945, will continue to struggle along with its affiliates for modern workers' rights, that meet the needs of the workers and protection of the health and the life of the working class and their families. ●

What's Left

Vancouver, BC

Annual Revolution Dinner, speaker Michael Parenti, Sat., Nov. 16, 6 pm, Peretz Centre, 6184 Ash St., tickets \$20 (\$10 students) & info from 604-254-9836, sponsored by Centre for Socialist Education.

Secrets & Spies: Canada's Surveillance State, BC Civil Liberties Association reception and panel, Thursday, Nov. 21, 7-9 pm, SFU Harbour Centre, Segal Room.

Spanish Civil War Memoir, launch of book by Ron Liversedge, Friday, Nov. 22, 7:30 pm, People's Co-op Books, 1391 Commercial Drive.

Left Film Night, 7 pm, Sunday, Nov. 24, 706 Clark Drive, call 604-255-2041 for details.

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

Burnaby, BC

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

Surrey, BC

Ghadar Centenary Forum, lecture by Mangat Ram Pasla, Desh Bhagat Yadgar Committee Jalandhar, Sunday, Nov. 17, 12-4 pm, India Banquet Hall, 13030 76 Ave.

Toronto, ON

Policing the Police, People's Voice forum with Peter Rosenthal, civil rights lawyer and Professor of Mathematics at University of Toronto, Thursday, November 21, 7 pm, at the Greek-Canadian Democratic Hall, 290 Danforth Ave (Chester subway), ph. 416-469-2446 for info.

Montreal, QC

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

News for people, not for profits!



New murders in Guerrero state

The Communist Party of Mexico has condemned several new murders of political activists.

On Oct. 19, Rocio Mesino, part of the leadership of the Peasant Organization of the Southern Sierra, was killed. Three weeks after her murder, on Nov. 9, the leader of the People's Organization of Producers in the Costa Grande of Guerrero (OPPCG), Luis Olivares Enriquez and his wife, Ana Lilia Gatica Romulo, were shot to death at their home in the community of Emiliano Zapata Fuerte, in the municipality of Coyuca de Benitez.

A statement from the CPM leadership says, "These are not isolated cases, but confirm the repressive trend of the 'Mexico Pact' to physically eliminate popular cadres with the clear intention to behead organizational processes, spread terror, and immobilize and demobilize the various people's organizations."

The murder of Luis Olivares, Ana Lilia Gatica, and Rocio Mesino, follow those of Raymundo Velasquez, Secretary General of the CPM in Guerrero state, Samuel Vargas Ramirez, Miguel Angel Solano Barrera, and 13 other activists killed in Guerrero under Aguirre Rivero's PRD administration. Since Enrique Pena Nieto became President of Mexico in December 2012, four social fighters have been killed per month on average.

The CPM says, "When the three communist comrades were killed in Coyuca de Benitez by a paramilitary squad at the service of the government, we received



Rocio Mesino (above) and Luis Olivares Enriquez (below), victims of state repression in Guerrero state.



solidarity from popular and revolutionary organizations of the country and the world, and we also took note of the silence of others, that with that attitude work jointly with State terrorism."

The statement condemns "expressions of opportunism" and slanders amid the paramilitary assault: "As a matter of principles, the Communist Party of Mexico

not only vindicates its imprisoned or dead, but considers its duty to demand the release of all political prisoners and condemn the killing of any fighter, regardless of the organization to which they belonged, as long they are enrolled in the forces that aspire to a Mexico without exploitation."

The communists accuse the "Mexico Pact" coalition government of PRI, PAN and PRD of responsibility for an "operation of open state terrorism to murder cadres of the revolutionary movement".

Before the death threats against Luis Olivares and Ana Lilia Gatica, military forces entered the community. They detained and tortured four young OPPCG members, who were fingered as the alleged murderers of Raymundo Velasquez. The CPM condemns this accusation as an attempt to whitewash the paramilitaries and their masters in the Guerrero and national governments.

"We do not expect the slightest justice from this government that mounts this farce and bases its supposed investigations on statements coerced under torture," says the CPM. "The current governor sooner or later must pay for his bloodthirsty actions as jackal of the Mexico Pact. We shall redouble our efforts, like other revolutionary organizations who suffer this onslaught, to overthrow the power of the monopolies, and to make the perpetrators accountable to the justice of a new power. Workers of the world, Unite!" ●

People's Voice deadlines

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



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The shadow of Chile falls on Venezuela

Morning Star, Nov. 8, 2013

The mayoral elections campaign has seen an increase in economic sabotage aimed at incapacitating the government of President Nicolas Maduro and, says FRANCISCO DOMINGUEZ, present a threat not unlike that faced decades ago by Salvador Allende in Chile

Mayoral elections are to be held in Venezuela on December 8. Every mayorality will be contested and, as is the case in Venezuela's vibrant democracy, both the right-wing coalition and Chavista candidates are busily campaigning up and down the country.

These municipal elections take place in a very different context to recent elections in Venezuela - they will be the first held since the death of Hugo Chavez.

They are also the first following the violent response of the right-wing opposition to the presidential election in April.

Venezuela's anti-democratic opposition used the close election results to try to unseat the elected government of Nicolas Maduro.

They alleged fraud but failed to provide any evidence.

Nonetheless, their leader Henrique Capriles encouraged opposition supporters to "vent their anger." A wave of violence followed resulting in the death of 13 innocent people as well as the burning of vehicles, attacks on health centres, national electoral council buildings and houses of prominent members of the government.

The opposition also attempted to internationalise its false claim of fraud. Its political leaders travelled around the world linking up with right-wing politicians such as Jovino Novoa, senator for Chile's extreme right Union Democratica Independiente (UDI). The establishment of UDI was encouraged and assisted by Pinochet's dictatorship. Novoa notoriously served as general government undersecretary of the military dictatorship between 1979-1982.

This link with the Chilean right wing makes sense. The opposition

in Venezuela is at the moment - just like its counterparts in Chile 40 years ago - waging economic war as a strategy to destabilise and bring down the government of President Maduro.

They are organising shortages of vital food and other day-to-day essentials, carrying out sabotage attacks against key facilities such as electricity plants, the metro and oil refineries.

All this echoes the strategy of president Nixon in Chile designed to "make the economy scream" to "prevent Allende from coming to power or to unseat him."

As in Chile, they have unleashed psychological warfare in the media to sow confusion and despair among the poorest and most vulnerable as well as the middle classes.

The West's mainstream media readily and uncritically lends support to this campaign. In October alone the *Washington Post* ran an editorial headlined Venezuela, On The Path To

Global solidarity with the elected government of Venezuela is vital. As Martin Luther King once said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Implosion, the *Miami Herald* right on cue announced Desperation In Venezuela and the FT followed with Chaos In Caracas. *Foreign Policy* magazine ran a piece called Is The US Ready For A Venezuelan Meltdown?

Just as with the ousting of the democratically elected Salvador Allende in Chile the influence of the US looms large in Venezuela.

Key bodies of the US foreign policy apparatus are very actively intervening in the internal affairs of the country by channelling millions of dollars of taxpayers' money into opposition political, social and media coffers.

President Maduro has denounced the destabilisation efforts saying that the Venezuelan right is not campaigning for elections but is instead focused on "insurrection."

Former vice-president Jose Vicente Rangel - now a well respected journalist - warned of "a terrorist agenda of the opposition seeking to selectively assassinate Chavista leaders, ministers and

high military officers, as well as terrorist attacks against the metro (underground), cable cars, state



Venezuela's communal councils are part of a wider process of democratic rejuvenation of the country.

oil company installations, water supplies, supermarkets and electric installations."

Maduro has explained that extremists in the opposition are seeking a "total collapse," exploiting

difficulties in the Venezuelan economy to create chaos or, at the very least, to give the strong impression of it among anxious sections of society. It hopes to provoke a "social explosion" that could see the government ousted.

In that context, one major

concern is the recent statement by 45 Venezuelan retired military officers - including a dozen

generals and admirals and a former defence minister - supporting a military intervention to replace the Maduro government which they claimed "would not be a coup d'etat" but "defending sovereignty."

The opposition is characterising the mayoral elections as a plebiscite against the Maduro government. They are seeking to popularise the idea that a setback for Maduro must lead to a new government. This is a baseless line of argument as the pro-Chavista forces have a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, 20 out of 23 state governors and 22 of 23

local state assemblies as well as just having just won a six-year presidential term for Maduro.

Furthermore, recent polls indicate that the government coalition will win a majority of the mayors. In coming weeks calls from anti-democratic sections of the opposition for an end to the Maduro government are likely to get ever more shrill and should they, and their external sponsors, be able to carry out their plans successfully it would lead to a severe setback to democracy and social progress in Venezuela.

As in Chile 40 years ago, we would see the rise of a vicious regime trampling on all the democratic, social, political and economic rights that the Venezuelan majority secured over the past 15 years.

In Chile, Pinochet's dictatorship lasted 17 years and an estimated 10,000 people were killed. So the stakes are very high in Venezuela. A setback there would be a massive blow to progress in the whole of Latin America.

Global solidarity with the elected government of Venezuela is vital. As Martin Luther King once said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." ●

Francisco Dominguez is head of Latin American Studies at Middlesex University in Britain, and secretary of that country's Venezuela Solidarity Campaign (www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk).



Captain Phillips: the perfect propaganda film

Film review by Jeff Sawtell

Captain Phillips has drawn overwhelmingly friendly critical fire, presumably in the hope it might go some way to repairing decades of US imperialist abuse.

That includes Dubya launching the "war on terror" with dodgy dossiers and the abuse of human rights, Afghanistan calling for the US to withdraw and Obama sabre-rattling in Syria while provoking Russia.

A change of image is definitely on the cards, so along comes this very human story based upon the real-life US hero Captain Phillips. He was taken hostage by Somali pirates on board his ship the Maersk Alabama in 2009.

An ordinary and honourable man, he's played by Tom Hanks with humanity exuding from every pore.

As he and his wife agonise over the future of their kids, director Paul Greengrass and screenwriter Billy Ray relate the other side of the story. They show fishermen, ruled by warlords, fighting over who's going to take the next piratical mission as they line up like the dockers of old waiting to be picked.

Ever since *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, Greengrass's forte has been to engage the audience in identifying with the protagonists and involving them in the action. Numerous hand-held cameras intensify the claustrophobia alongside rapid, jump-cut editing.

True to his intention for verisimilitude, Greengrass hired a sister ship to the Maersk Alabama and got the US Defence Department to allow them to use real warships and crew alongside actors who'd gained work experience as seamen.

Phillips's ship is on its own because he refused the safety of a convoy and, as a strategy is devised to counter the threat in an area where there had been no hijacks for 200 years they see blips on the

radar indicating pirates heading their way. Their drill becomes a reality but they fail to stop the armed men boarding.

All the incredible action sequences, filmed without the aid of CGI manipulation, take place in the confines of the boat as the pirates track down the crew, with the pirate leader Muse (Barkhad Abdi) deciding to take Phillips hostage as the US navy approaches. The tension throughout is palpable, aided by Hanks's Oscar-contending performance throughout.

It matters not that Greengrass tries to be even-handed and stress the plight of the global poor, since we're suddenly caught up in the thrill of the chase until his hero's rescue by Navy Seals - who have a record in screwing up other jobs.

The war publicists will be more interested in parading a self-effacing hero without gung-ho obscenities, somebody prepared to show charity to his captors.

Yet three of the pirates were shot in the head on a lifeboat and another - who continuously repeats "America, I want to live like the Americans" - now languishes in a US jail for life.

Captain Phillips - a lesson in how to produce the perfect propaganda film - will doubtless be hailed as the most patriotic since *The Hurt Locker*.

But the difference is that it will take more than a film to portray the US as anything other than a predatory power. ●

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