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# people's VOICE

**Eliminate tuition fees  
& student debt**

**Page 2**

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**150,000  
rally in  
Montreal  
against  
austerity**

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***Which direction for Ontario labour movement? - page 6***



PV photo by Ed Bil

Under President Sid Ryan since 2009, the Ontario Federation of Labour has adopted a "social unionism" strategy, helping to build broad mobilizations around progressive struggles. With Ryan stepping down, will things change at the OFL's convention next month?

<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Communist campaign</b></p> <p>During the current federal election, the Communist Party of Canada is registering important breakthroughs in many parts of the country, despite the continued blackout by the corporate-controlled media.</p>	<p><b>INSIDE</b></p> <p><b>7</b></p> <p><b>War creates refugees</b></p> <p>Today's debate about refugees needs to start with an understanding that western imperialist wars have largely caused the crisis.</p>	<p><b>12</b></p> <p><b>Ayotzinapa one year later</b></p> <p>The forced disappearance of 43 students on September 26, 2014, continues to rock Mexican society and to draw international condemnation. A year later, basic questions remain unanswered.</p>
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# Many "firsts" for Communist Party campaign

By Johan Boyden, Central Organizer, Communist Party of Canada

What are the Communist Party's campaigners hearing at the doors? In the workplaces, schools and on the street?

We hear that voters think there is a lot at stake in this federal election. Nine years of Harper Conservative rule have been a tragedy – a catastrophe, in fact. People are concerned and angry about the danger of another Harper government. There is a view that this election is a reckoning moment, something that's been a long time coming.

The Tories are fighting tooth and nail to hold onto power. Their giant war chest is outspending all other political parties, showing the class essence of their anti-people, pro-war and austerity agenda.

Harper's Unfair Elections act, disenfranchising thousands of voters, will no doubt be coupled with other dirty tricks and voter suppression. Most ridings in the country have been adjusted slightly, and thirty new electoral districts added, overall favouring the Tories.

All this requires a certain sleight of hand, so the Tories have employed Australian-born political consultant Lynton Crosby, the so-called "master" of racist code words. No surprise then that their latest tactic is completely explicit, what I call "social Roundup" spray, or social poison.

The poison of racism, of Islamophobia. "A calamity of terrorists threatens Canada. Niqab-wearing jihadists. Foreign barbarians."

All this is not-so-thinly disguised as what some commentators are calling "Harper's crusade to save the oppressed brown women."

It makes you wonder: are the Conservative "old stock Canadians" those who donned white

bed sheets and ignited crosses in the past? To combat this racism and sexism, we need to rip the sheets from these purveyors of fear, exposing and isolating them.

We need a broad, mass, powerful, visible campaign, not narrowly limited on identity politics, but reaching much further to class solidarity, internationalism and peace.

Into all this fray is the Communist Party of Canada's campaign, fighting for a genuine alternative, raising the issue of fundamental change, not just replacing the Tories with "Harper lite," another party with a similar pro-business agenda.

The Liberals are offering some progressive-sounding rhetoric, presenting polished, tasty, red policies to the voters. But like the fabled witch's red apple in Snow White, Justin Trudeau's ideas aren't as healthy as they look.

The Green Party's idea about eliminating tuition fees is a welcome proposal in the otherwise stale selection of ideas the big parties are peddling. Yet otherwise their party has little that is significantly different.

In Quebec, the Bloc has brought Gilles Duceppe up from the crypt of independentist politics, where he should have stayed.

And as for the NDP, they've moved to centre-stage, literally and figuratively. A pharmacare plan that isn't a plan, just a proposal to talk with the provinces. A child care plan that will take eight years. Neoliberal pledges to balance the budget. Stop bombing Iraq, but no cuts to military spending, and nobreak with NATO. And the Aboriginal NDP candidate who said that indigenous people lived the same experience as Palestine? Close the door on your way out!

So it's no surprise that the Communist campaigns are getting a good response. Some people may hold their nose and vote NDP, but they're also saying – good for you for running!

Our candidates are out door-knocking and fighting to get into debates. Running as a communist candidate is no job for the faint of heart, and we have a strong group of public spokespeople. Behind each candidate are committees and local party organizations, as well as friends and supporters, who donate generously and work tirelessly to get out tens of thousands of leaflets.

This is also a campaign of many firsts for the Communist Party. For the first time, we are on the ballot in Newfoundland and Labrador. After years of perseverance, our organization in the province is coming together behind Sean Burton, a first time candidate and also a first rate campaigner.

Before heading down from Montreal to work out of the Toronto campaign office, I was out in Newfoundland. I got screeched in, walked the streets and met a community that's been fighting to make a living despite years of exploitation by the big

transnationals.

Like the central campaign, Sean is active on facebook and twitter, and getting a very good response. This is also a first.

Another first: we have beautiful, professionally designed lawn signs going up right across the country, and they are in hot demand.

There's more. According to the CBC, the Communist Party is running more self-identified Aboriginal candidates than the entire Tory party.

This is truly a grassroots campaign, part of a long-haul fight for voters to recognize their class interest. Kicking out Harper would be a start in that direction! ●



Communist Party leader Miguel Figueroa, a candidate in Davenport (Toronto)



## Communist Party: "eliminate tuition fees and student debt"

The Communist Party of Canada has reiterated its support for the elimination of tuition fees, and for a plan to build a free, accessible, quality, public post-secondary education system in Canada.

"More and more young people are being denied their right to education at the same time as student debt skyrockets and youth unemployment and underemployment rise," says Drew Garvie, the Communist Party candidate in Toronto's downtown riding of University-Rosedale.

Garvie, a recent graduate, student activist and leader of the Young Communist League, says young people are faced with a dismal future: "Nine years of Harper Conservative rule has made matters much worse for youth and students. The advice given by the Governor of the Bank of Canada to youth last fall said it all: big business wants youth to work for free, at unpaid internships, while living in their parent's basement."

Government funds used to cover up to 80 percent of a post-secondary institution's operating budget nearly 30 years ago, they now cover around 50 percent. This public funding gap has been filled by increasing tuition fees, drives to restructure education to attract corporate funding, and by attacking the wages, benefits, and working conditions of faculty and other campus workers.

According to the Canadian Federation of Students, in the early 1990s, the average undergraduate tuition fees in Canada were \$1,464. Tuition fees have tripled to \$5,581 in 2014, more than five times the



Drew Garvie, Communist candidate in University-Rosedale

average rate of inflation. The average undergraduate student now graduates \$27,000 in debt.

"Education is a right, but today it is a debt sentence for hundreds of thousands of students," said Garvie. "The Communist Party is demanding that tuition fees be eliminated, student debt be forgiven, loans be replaced by grants, and students be compensated during their studies with a living stipend".

Communist candidates are supporting a federal Post-Secondary Education Act, modeled after the Canada Health Act, accompanied by greatly

expanded dedicated cash transfer funding to roll-back privatization and eliminate tuition fees.

Other policy being put forward by the Communist Party of Canada in this area includes lifting the racist cap on Aboriginal post-secondary education funding, supporting public Indigenous-run post-secondary institutions, banning military recruitment on campuses, reversing the corporatization of campus, ending the harassment of Palestinian solidarity activists by campus administrators, and reversing the trend towards more precarious, part-time, low-paid faculty positions. ●



Elizabeth Rowley, Communist candidate in Sudbury

Check out the 2015 election platform of the CPC: [votecomunist.ca](http://votecomunist.ca)

Authorised by Chief Agent CPC

# FACT CHECK Harper's 'human trafficking' plan will do nothing to curb violence against women

By Nora Loreto, Canadian Association of Labour Media, posted on Sept. 28, 2015 at the [Rabble.ca](http://Rabble.ca) website

Stephen Harper has announced that his government, if re-elected would continue to combat human trafficking. They'll do this by creating special RCMP human trafficking teams in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Winnipeg, doubling the money currently available for victims of human trafficking and declaring February 22 human trafficking awareness day.

They would also extend their Human Trafficking Action Plan for five more years, which will cost at least \$30 million dollars. Of this money, \$5.4 million annually is given to the RCMP or Canada Border Services Agency, \$140,000 to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and "up to" \$500,000 is dispensed to "Enhanced Victim Services."

That's right: at most, only eight

per cent of the Human Trafficking Action Plan money actually goes to help victims. And, of that eight per cent, it's likely that at least some of it is going back to police, like this \$75,000 grant given through the Department of Justice to the Calgary Police to help "those wishing to exit prostitution."

Human trafficking is political gold for Conservatives. Few can argue with saving girls from forced sexual exploitation. But journalists and politicians alike are guilty of playing loose with the facts. This can boost the outrage and alarm that is elicited from these stories.

In October 2014, the Canadian Press reported that 18 women were rescued from human trafficking. During the investigation, 31 sex trade workers were interviewed (10 were under the age of 18, or nine, depending on which article you read) and 18 were "saved." The *Toronto Sun* called the investigation a "teen prostitution probe" despite the fact that the average age of the people interviewed was 26. An erroneous

report said that among the victims was a 12-year-old Winnipeg girl. This error made its way into the original *Toronto Star* headline.

And, while the arrests get lots of attention, few people notice that the conviction rates for human traffickers remains very low.

It's a reminder that such salacious stories of abuse might make for good politics, but are always more complicated. In the case of the 2014 probe, of the charges laid against the nine people, only one was related to trafficking in persons. The other charges were related to other crimes: making and distributing child pornography, forcible confinement, uttering threats, assault and obstructing police.

Human trafficking has been a pet project for the Conservatives, and former MP Joy Smith even has her own, self-titled foundation to combat human trafficking. A quick look at the donors to her foundation reveals that there are more religious or evangelical organizations donating to her foundation than businesses. Incidentally, her foundation generated a \$50,000 surplus (of \$138,000 total revenue) at 2014 year-end. Smith is not seeking re-election and will instead focus on her anti-human-trafficking activism.

There's evidence that the human trafficking crisis is being blown up by Conservative forces, probably, at least in part, to distract attention from more widespread and systemic violence against women, especially Indigenous women. During this election campaign, Harper has said nothing about systemic violence against women, despite the fact that at least 21 woman and girls have been found dead, nearly all allegedly murdered, during this election period.

In 2010, Statistics Canada concluded that it's impossible to be able to tell whether human trafficking was increasing or decreasing due to how difficult it

is to access reliable data. Harper's government has done irreparable harm to Canada's data collection, surely making research on human trafficking more difficult. And, one of the first decisions that the Conservatives made was to cut nearly all of Canada's Status of Women offices.

Fewer sources of data and fewer resources for women's organizations means that the Conservatives can get away with overstating particular threats to public safety. This promise will do more to boost Conservative popularity among some Canadians than help victims of exploitation. ●

**STOP  
VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
WOMEN**



## A list of woman and girls who have been found dead during the 2015 election campaign period:

- Cheryl Bau-Tremblay, found dead in her home in Beloeil, Quebec. She was five months pregnant. Her partner was charged on Aug. 7.
- Unnamed woman found dead in Toronto on Aug. 11.
- Lori Constable, found smothered to death in Waterdown, Ontario on Aug. 17. Her husband was also found dead and police are waiting for toxicology reports.
- Breanna Kannick died while in police custody on Aug. 20 in Regina.
- Karyn Samoisette, found dead on Aug. 21 in Estrie, Quebec.
- Dorothy Benson, found dead due to neglect and bed sores in an Ontario nursing home, Aug. 24.
- Lan (or Lana) Cam Kasjaniuk and one unidentified woman, both found dead in Edmonton, one week apart. Two other women were found dead in June in the same neighbourhood.
- Unnamed woman, found dead in a home in Calgary, on Aug. 25. A man has been charged.
- Unnamed woman, found dead in a park in Guelph on Aug. 29.
- Cindy Trapper Hamel-Robert found dead on Sept. 5 near Amos, Quebec.
- Doris Halle-Tremblay, disappeared on Sept. 6 was found dead near Vercheres, Quebec.
- Hannah Meketech, found dead in her home in Coleman, Alberta on Sept. 9. Her death might be connected to the murders of two-year-old Hailey Dunbar-Blanchette and her father, Terry Blanchette, in Blairmore, Alberta.
- Brooklyn Moose, found dead in the attic of a Regina home, on Sept. 11.
- Victoria Joanne Crow Shoe, found dead on Sept. 13. She was from Lethbridge.
- Judith Wilson, killed in her home, in Oakville on Sept. 21. Her son is facing charges.
- Anastasia Kuzyk, Nathalie Warmerdam and Carol Culleton, killed in Wilno, Ontario on Sept. 22.
- Unnamed woman, found dead at a home known to have been the site of domestic disturbances, in Sherwood Park, Alberta, on Sept. 22.

## Alberta labour calls for higher oil royalties

Special to PV

The new government of Alberta has appointed a Royalty Review Panel to consider whether the province is receiving a "fair price" for resources. The Panel is encouraging Albertans to visit [letstalkroyalties.ca](http://letstalkroyalties.ca), where they can ask questions and submit comments on this crucial issue. Panel chair Dave Mowat is on record saying that "we might never have another royalty review again."

The Alberta Federation of Labour says that "working people have an enormous stake in these discussions. This is our opportunity to encourage the government to negotiate on our behalf to get the best possible framework for Albertans."

The AFL points out that while industry has "strong, well-funded lobby groups that command a great deal of attention in the mainstream media and behind closed government doors," Albertans have not been well represented by former governments.

"We give our oil away," is the labour movement's argument. In 2012, Alberta collected barely 10 per cent of oil sands revenue in royalties, and just 11 per cent the next year. By contrast, the AFL says, the Lougheed government of 1971-1985 collected 35-40 per cent of industry revenue in royalties. If Lougheed-era royalties had been collected in 2012, the province would have received \$12 billion extra in revenue, from an industry that collected more than \$42 billion in revenues that year.

"For all of our oil wealth," laments the AFL, "we have very little to show for it. Primarily because we continue to subsidize one of the most profitable industries in the world. For years, the Alberta Federation of Labour has demonstrated that Alberta has one of the cheapest conventional oil and gas fiscal regimes in North America. The same goes for the oil sands. Past Progressive Conservative governments slashed non-conventional oil revenues, handing industry billions in subsidies at the expense of government revenues and Albertans' fair share. The AFL estimates that royalty giveaways since 2009 have cost Albertans at least \$4.7 billion. It's no wonder we are in a deficit budget position today."

Instead, the Federation says, "we need to think like owners," since Albertans actually own the oil resources (although the First Nations of northern Alberta would view this statement in a very different light).

The goal of Alberta's energy policy, says the AFL, "should be to maximize returns to the owners in terms of royalties and jobs. This requires a system that is transparent and delivers fair value for the resources that can only be sold once. Selling resources is exactly like selling off anything else we own, such as a building, a car, or a road — once you sell it you can never do so again. Albertans need a royalty system that enables us to put aside the proceeds in a heritage fund so that we can bequeath the benefits of resource extraction to future generations, and to make the transition to a less carbon intensive economy."

Among other suggestions, the AFL says working Albertans should demand to make the current royalty system more transparent and consistent, remove handouts and hidden industry subsidies from the royalty framework, and develop value-added projects, including local upgrading and refining to create good paying local jobs. ●

## Vancouver truckers owed millions by companies

PV Vancouver Bureau

The long struggle to win decent wages and working conditions for 1800 truckers who deliver goods at Metro Vancouver's port just got an important boost with the revelation of an audit that found six container trucking companies had underpaid their workers.

That news is "just the tip of the iceberg", according to one of the unions representing port truckers.

"There's widespread non-payment here for the union and non-union companies," Garin McGarrigle, B.C. director for Unifor, told the *Business in Vancouver* website. "We think it's in the millions that people are owed."

On Sept. 29, B.C.'s Ministry of Transportation stated that an audit of six companies conducted by Port Metro Vancouver (PMV) found they did not pay drivers the retroactive rates required by an agreement signed last December.

In an email to *Business in Vancouver*, ministry staff wrote that the province's Office of

Trucking Commissioner is still notifying the companies, which could face fines or suspended or revoked licenses.

The dispute predates a one-month trucking strike in March 2014 that halted shipments at the port. For years, truckers have become increasingly angry over low wages and a pick-up system that forced them to wait for hours with no pay. The truckers say they were the victims of price under-cutting by companies in the industry.

Last December, an agreement mediated by Vince Ready won higher rates for the truckers, retroactive to April 3, 2014.

"Throughout that entire process, it was made very clear to operators and companies that operate at the port that they had an obligation, a legal obligation, to pay their workers what the regulation stipulated," said BC Transportation Minister Todd Stone. "They all signed statutory declarations indicating that they didn't owe their trucker employees any wages. Clearly, several have been found to be in contravention of

that."

While the Ready agreement was a big victory for the truckers, the companies have largely refused to implement the deal. For their part, the unions objected to the appointment of Andy Smith, a long-time president of the B.C. Maritime Employers Association which speaks for ship owners and terminal operators, as the province's trucking commissioner. (Smith has recently resigned.)

A new licensing system devised by PMV was designed to reduce the number of trucks and calm the heated competition for jobs that led to rate undercutting. But after most truckers were frozen out of work, they challenged PMV in court, winning a ruling that the system was unfair to applicants. However, PMV has now introduced a new rule that trucks have to be less than 10 years old, allegedly to reduce air pollution.

In effect, the port is refusing to pay drivers the rates they were owed from 2014, while it demands that drivers spend tens of thousands of dollars on new trucks. ●

# EDITORIALS

## Harper tosses his grenade

As People's Voice goes to the printer, the longest federal election in Canadian history is entering the home stretch. But unfortunately, none of the major contestants has offered much hope for working people who face the prospect of declining living standards and environmental change.

Our view remains that the most dangerous outcome would be another majority for the Harper Tories, the favoured party of big business. Ignoring the norms of "parliamentary democracy," the Conservative just signed the pro-corporate Trans Pacific Partnership, during a campaign which they may well lose. Harper's strategy of tossing the TPP grenade into the room is an attempt to shackle any new government with a deal that the ruling class would make virtually impossible to reject. Of course, Justin Trudeau's big business Liberals already favour the deal. The NDP, on the other hand, finally came out against the TPP just hours before the pact was signed; now they must be pushed to help build a powerful mass campaign to block ratification of this treacherous sellout.

In essence, the Tories remain the battering ram of the ruling class, doing the heavy lifting to destroy labour and democratic rights, privatize any remaining public assets, and drive down wages and pensions. The Liberals share the same basic austerity agenda, while also promising to invest public funds in badly-needed infrastructure spending. That tactic may have outflanked both Mulcair's NDP and the Greens, which present themselves as parties of change which won't rock the capitalist boat or challenge neoliberal economics.

Only the Communist Party has fought hard for fundamental change in this election, and its candidates deserve increased vote totals. But in most ridings, working class voters face difficult a choice, as they try to block a Conservative victory and also oppose the wider corporate agenda. In our next issue, we will examine the terrain of struggle under a new balance of forces in Parliament.

## The TPP battle just beginning

This fight is just starting, but it won't be easy. Stephen Harper is already crowing about the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the deal to remove barriers to maximum profits for the transnational corporations which dominate the Pacific Rim region.

The only good news is that the TPP must be ratified by the parliaments of all twelve countries which negotiated the deal. This could take up to two years, giving some time to mobilize resistance. Since Canadians will likely have less time if the Tories win a majority on October 19, defeating Harper is a crucial first step to blocking the TPP.

The deal comes with a hefty price tag of \$4.3 billion to compensate farmers for the move to weaken marketing boards and allow increased imports of foreign poultry and dairy products. Locally based agriculture and all of rural Canada will take a big hit under the TPP, imposed by the "political friends" of farmers and small town residents. Dairy farmers have already warned that up to 25,000 jobs could be at risk across the country.

Over the next five years Canada will phase out its six per cent tariff on foreign cars imported from TPP countries. Unifor, which represents auto workers, says that 20,000 auto worker jobs face elimination, one-quarter of employment in this sector.

Drug companies will have a monopoly on patents for eight years, forcing the provinces to keep shelling out the second-highest prices in the developed world to the big pharma companies, with only the U.S. paying more. Because the TPP limits the ability of governments to regulate drug prices, efforts to win a public pharmacare system could be crippled.

Whoever wins the election, mass action is needed immediately. This must become an urgent priority for the trade union movement, farmers, environmentalists and all who oppose the corporate agenda.

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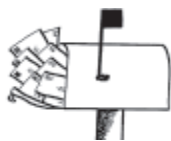
## LETTERS

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706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3J1 or  
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"Keeping it in the family" - a classic socialist cartoon by Art Young



## Letters to the Editor

### Boundary changes disenfranchise First Nation voter

This letter was published in the Merritt Herald on Oct. 1, 2015.

I am a First Nations Elder and residential school survivor from Shackan Indian Reserve, located along the Nicola River.

I am frustrated with the lack of interest shown by the federal government and Elections Canada with regard to our band, on the issue of riding boundaries. Elections Canada states that I belong in and am federally represented in the Chilliwack-Hope riding. Why not the Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola riding, where my First Nations relations and ancestors have called home forever?

I believe I am being separated from my family, relations, land and essential services — all without consultation.

Elections Canada and the Canadian government have redrawn my identity. They have done this by putting up arbitrary walls and invisible fences in the form of voting

boundaries for federal representation in my traditional home.

I was stripped of my identity as a child, when the government removed me from the care of my father, mother and sister and placed me into a system of abuse.

I believe my human rights are again being violated in a way that mirrors residential school, as the Canadian government continues to confine and define me as they choose. The Canadian government makes me a displaced person and a stranger in my own land.

There has never been consultation on election boundaries between the Canadian government and Shackan Indian Band. If this is not bad enough, I have received faulty information both from Election Canada's web page and by phone conversation with Elections Canada.

The process to obtain information on voting on Election Canada's web page is to enter your postal code. My postal code is in

Merritt, as is every band member on Shackan Reserve. Most of our services, including band administration and land ownership exist in Merritt. I was told on Elections Canada's website that postal code V1K 1B8 would vote in Merritt. No other search options. That is false information.

My husband, James Bergh, and myself began to converse on the phone with Elections Canada in January 2015 about this issue, but received no clarity. Again in February we complained about boundaries and that Shackan Band members do not receive the correct MP information because of our postal code. We phoned two Conservative MPs: Chuck Stall in Chilliwack and Dan Albas in Westbank. We told their staff about boundaries and representation. Both MP offices said to have Chief and Council write a letter of complaint. The Shackan Band administration sent letters to both MPs and Elections Canada.

On Sept. 25, we again phoned Elections Canada to find the location of our polling station. After three transfers, we were told by Elections Canada we "do not know now, however you will be notified on your voter card, which should be arriving in the mail shortly." We asked about those Shackan Band members who may not be receiving a voters card in the mail. Elections Canada refused to respond to where Shackan Indian Band's polling station is going to be located.

The federal government has written off me and my band.

With sadness,  
Betty-Jean Bergh, Kokowatko,  
Shackan Indian Band Elder

### Canada up for sale by Harper

Here we are in the middle of an election period, in which all important decisions are supposed to be delayed until after the election. And yet, Harper again flouts rules and traditions and is preceding full speed ahead with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade negotiations. Why?

Canadians have several reasons to be concerned. For example, all negotiations are taking place behind closed doors.

Another concern is that eighty per cent of Canadian exports to these countries are raw or semi processed goods, while 80% of imports are high value-added goods. A good way to export good paying Canadian jobs wouldn't you say.

As well, leaked information confirms that the TPP includes an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism similar to NAFTA chapter 11, which allows rich countries to sue governments when policy decisions interfere with their investments. Canada is already the most sued developed country in the world because of NAFTA's ISDS process and TPP will significantly increase the number of foreign investors eligible to sue.

Seniors (and others) are going to suffer too. The intellectual property chapter of the TPP could prove a disaster for efforts to control drug costs in Canada, which are already the second highest in the world.

Farmers are next. Supply management is squarely in TPP's crosshairs. In July, again behind closed doors, negotiators gave the

European Union an additional five percent of our high-end cheese market, and Harper weakened Canada's bargaining position by indicating willingness to reduce dairy tariffs and increase the tariff-free imports of milk. Since the GATT and the Uruguay Round of the WTO, Canadian farmer's share of our own dairy market has been nibbled away bit by bit through various trade deals. Isn't the loss of 17,000 tonnes of cheese production to Europe with CETA and the potential loss of 10% of our market to the USA under TPP enough for Harper?

Unlike the USA, Canada does not allow the growth hormone rBGH which is used in the U.S. to increase dairy cows' milk production, and our dairy farmers are not subsidized by the taxpayer. Supply management provides a fair return to farmers and a reasonably priced supply of fresh milk, eggs and poultry of food to consumers.

Unionized auto workers aren't going to escape either. U.S. negotiators have reportedly agreed to lower the domestic-content requirement to 30% for auto parts and 45% for vehicles. Presently, NAFTA says domestic content for auto parts and vehicles must be more than 60%. In any case, 26,000 Canadian jobs are expected to be lost.

It appears that under the Harper government everything Canadian is up for sale at fire sale prices.

Joyce Neufeld, Waldeck, SK

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# Look at the facts about Harper's racist anti-niqab strategy

By *Kimball Cariou*

By early October, opinion surveys indicated that the federal election could hinge on an outrageous piece of political manipulation - the so-called "niqab" controversy.

When this marathon campaign began two months ago, about two-thirds of voters were desperate for change, and the Conservatives faced a steep uphill climb to reach the 35 percent-plus they need to gain another majority. But progressive critics of the Harper regime's austerity and war policies feared a "game-changing" incident which could be twisted to rouse the reactionary fears within many voters.

At first, it seemed that the refugee crisis which dominated the headlines after the tragic deaths of Alan Kurdi might work the other way, painting the Harper Tories as cold and heartless. Even at that point, however, the growing electoral support in many European countries for racist, anti-immigrant, even fascist political forces was a sobering reminder.

And then, the Tories found the incident they were hoping for: the Federal Court ruling on Sept. 15 that Zunera Ishaq could not be forced to take off her niqab to take part in a citizenship oath ceremony.

The ruling was immediately seized upon by the PM and the Bloc Quebecois to change the discourse of the campaign. Racists suddenly became much bolder, demanding to jail immigrants and keep refugees out of Canada.

The Tories are clearly hoping this ugly backlash may reverse their earlier slide in the polls. The niqab issue has even brought some NDP and Liberal-leaning voters back towards the Conservatives, who have the nerve to paint themselves as "defenders of Canadian values" even while they negotiate the TPP and CETA corporate trade deals which take the sellout of the country's sovereignty to a whole new level.

Amid the furore over the Sept. 15 ruling, very few media outlets have presented any in-depth factual analysis. One such commentary did appear in the Georgia Straight's online edition, by Martyn Brown, a former chief of staff to ex-BC Premier Gordon Campbell. (Despite his background, Brown has become a rather effective critic of the current right-wing BC Liberal government led by Christy Clark.)

Brown had the courage to admit that his initial gut reaction was to back the Conservatives, until he did some research which changed his mind. His first response was "incredulity, irritation, anger, and above all, intolerance. It was also unreasoned, unreasonable, and wholly ignorant of the facts. Which is to say, it was wrong and innately imbued with racism, as much as I like to tell myself that bigotry has nothing to do with me."

"What did I really know about the case in question? Nothing," Brown writes. "Why was I so put off by the image of someone wearing a veil while taking her public oath of citizenship? My arguments were so much weaker than my inexplicable rancour. What did I know about the citizenship procedure? Zip."

He admits that he had no clue

about the oath-taking process as it was formerly practised, or of how the citizenship judges' discretionary power was fundamentally undermined by the policy changes. "To my ethnocentric and intolerant eye," he writes, "those simple pieces of cloth seemed oppressive, coercive and inconsistent with Canada's idea of women's equality. Based on nothing but my ignorant suppositions and my unfamiliarity with the niqab's cultural and

The case was brought to the Federal Court by Zunera Ishaq, a Pakistani national and a Sunni Muslim who took exception to being forbidden to wear her niqab, a veil that covers most of her face, while reciting the oath of citizenship, during the public citizenship ceremony.

She objected on religious grounds that were previously accommodated by allowing people like her to swear their oaths in private, with or without their niqabs

license. She was granted her citizenship in November 2013, after passing her citizenship test and removing her niqab to allow her identity to be confirmed.

Ms. Ishaq's identity is thus completely irrelevant to the current debate, except that so few Canadians are aware of what actually transpired.

She was firmly committed to taking the oath that is legally required under the Citizenship Act, which states: "I swear (or affirm)

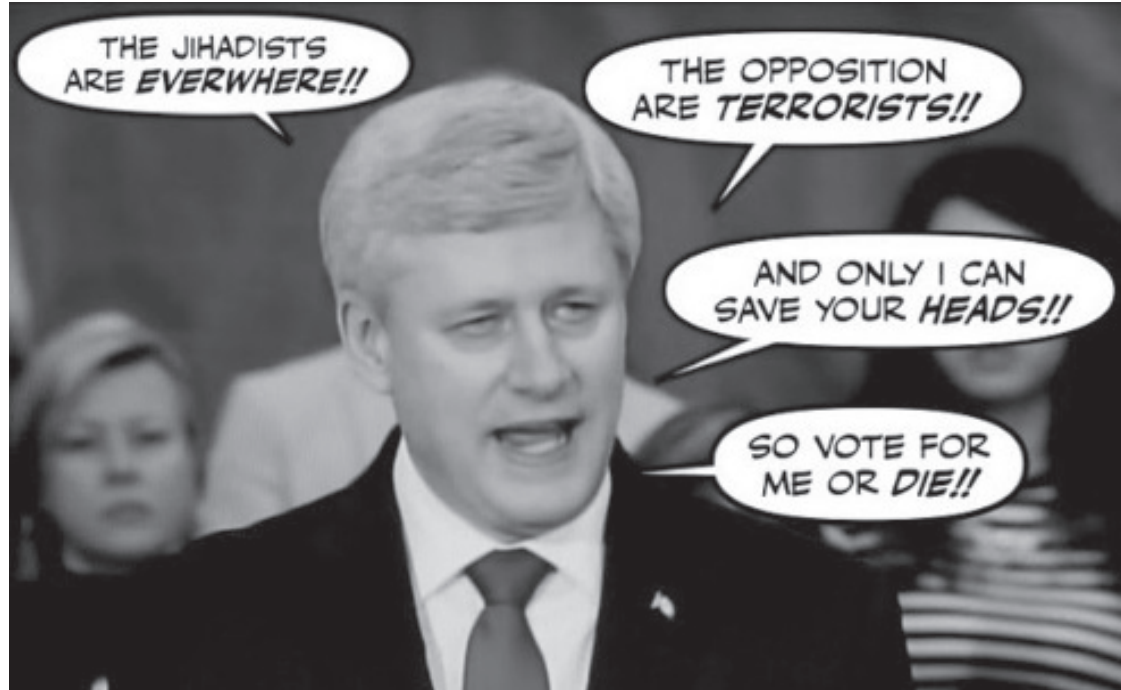
"none of this was never a problem before the Harper government changed the rules, in December 2011."

At that point, the government insisted that anyone taking the oath must be seen stating the words in public, with no face covering. (Brown points out, "presumably beards and droopy moustaches are just fine.") And as Federal Court Justice Boswell noted, the new requirement also makes it impossible for a mute person or a silent monk to take the oath of citizenship.

Essentially, the Harper government changed rules which had been in place for decades, for the specific purpose of forcing a handful of Muslim women to violate their religious beliefs by unveiling themselves in public, in front of strangers, as a precondition of Canadian citizenship.

Why? In a CBC interview on December 12, 2011, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney simply stated that it's "just not possible" to make a solemn commitment to respect Canada's laws and be loyal to the country "with your face covered." End of story, and no need for the Tories to accept court rulings that their policy is illegal and contrary to the Citizenship Act and to its regulations!

The real explanation, of course, is that the policy change was a deliberate racist strategy to seek votes by painting Muslims as "un-Canadian". Fortunately, there has been some push-back, including a resolution adopted unanimously by the Quebec National Assembly to condemn Islamophobia and intolerance. But time is short - all progressive-minded people have to stand up and expose this Tory maneuver before election day! ●



<http://montrealsimon.blogspot.ca/2015/02/stephen-harper-and-revolt-of-sheep-media.html>

religious significance, I felt quite self-righteous concluding that no woman should feel 'compelled' to wear a niqab while giving her oath of citizenship."

Then he goes on to express "appreciation of the facts that the courts have so ably articulated."

removed, in addition to signing an oath as proof of their commitment to its requirements.

She did not oppose the requirement to be heard saying her oath, nor to removing her niqab to prove her identity, as she did when applying for a driver's

that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfil my duties as a Canadian citizen."

As Martyn Brown concludes,

## The Niqab issue – A CPPC Statement

The case of Zunera Ishaq, the 29-year old Muslim woman who came to Ontario from Pakistan in 2008 and refused to take part in a citizenship ceremony because she would have to show her face, is in the news again.

The Committee of Progressive Pakistani-Canadians is a secular organization. We stand for the full equality of women with men – in society, at work, in the home – and against subordinating, segregating and secluding women.

We oppose any one – parents, relatives, religious authorities – from compelling women and girls to wear the niqab, hijab (head-covering) or the burqa (head to toe covering which completely envelops women), or attire deemed to have been mandated by religion or traditions, against their wishes.

Yet, at the same time, we are opposed to the efforts of the Harper Conservatives to force Ms. Ishaq to remove her niqab for the citizenship ceremony.

We find offensive statements such as Mr. Harper's that "it is offensive

that someone would hide their identity at the very moment when they are committing to join the Canadian family" or Minister of Defence, Jason Kenney's that "I think it's entirely reasonable for those thirty seconds, that someone proudly demonstrate their loyalty to Canada".

In other words, wearing a niqab for the citizenship oath taking ceremony is un-Canadian and disloyal to Canada!

Similar comments were hurled at the first Sikh RCMP officer who wanted to wear his turban instead of the official hat upon being selected for the force.

No law or regulation requires that a woman has to take off her niqab for the ceremony; Ms. Ishaq's identity is not in doubt, there is no security risk whatsoever in her wearing a niqab for her swearing in.

Are we, a progressive group, in favour of the niqab. No we are not. We are for the liberation of women – in the choice of clothes they want to wear, the life-styles they want to live, the husbands and partners they wish to have and the jobs they want to hold. We are simply saying that Ms. Ishaq and others are entitled to wear the clothes of their choice – so long as they

meet genuine security requirements and don't prevent them from performing their duties required by their employment.

On September 15 the Harper government's rule banning face coverings at such ceremonies was found unlawful by the Federal Court of Appeal. Rather than submit to the Court's ruling, the Harper government is taking the case to the Supreme Court.

Women in Canada make 70–80% of what men make; the absence of easily affordable,

even free, day care (like public schools), poses a onerous burden on them and their families and is an obstacle in their entering the work-force; many of them live in or at poverty levels because of the high level of unemployment and the low minimum wage.

Messers Harper and Kenney of the Conservatives should work on these issues rather than pandering to their rightwing base by spreading anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments. ●

*Committee of Progressive Pakistani-Canadians,  
Sept. 25, 2015, <http://pakistanicanadians.ca/>*



# Labour under attack by Labour?

## The OFL Convention, 2015

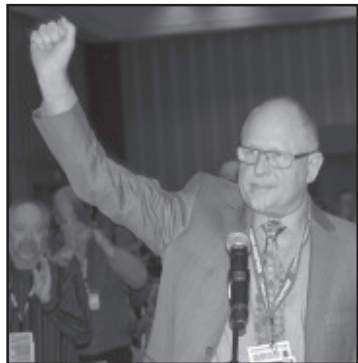
### Ontario Trade Union Commission, Communist Party of Canada

Can anyone explain how a cabal of "heads of unions" with the active support of the CLC decides the agenda of Ontario Labour prior to an OFL Convention? And can anyone explain the fact that this has been fought out and justified in, and with the participation of, the mainstream capitalist media? And can anyone explain why Hassan Yussuff, president of the CLC, would be involved in bypassing the elected leadership of his Ontario division by taking part in a pre-emptive caucus of "heads of unions" (not all heads of unions, invitation only) to actively intervene with a leadership slate to wrest control of the impending convention?

The "heads of unions" favoured with an invitation into the elite will argue that the slate will have to be democratically elected at convention. But what they won't say, and what is very well known, is that to stand against the slate, especially if successful, will be an act of suicide for any future in the labour movement. Sid Ryan is the example of what the future holds for anyone who has too much respect for democracy.

Part of the answer is the CLC structure which has evolved as a model of "Business Unionism" as distinct from its rank and file control generations past. That transition is a history of transition into a federated organisation. The formation of a "heads of unions" group to subvert the OFL Convention is merely an Ontario mirror of the CLC constitutional structure called the Canadian Council, the ruling body that rules permanently and is not a creature of, not elected by the CLC Convention.

The over-the-years transition from Convention control of the CLC to the non-convention rule of the Canadian Council is a general view of the decline in democracy in labour, and the transition from "social-unionism" to "business unionism". Another structural flaw in the CLC allows affiliation to the CLC, but does not require affiliation to its Provincial or Quebec divisions or local Labour Councils. Thus CLC affiliates have the choice to support or starve the provincial or municipal organizations, to support their grassroots campaigns or not. This is what made possible the Ontario dues strike, withdrawal and late payment tactics, to undermine the stability of the



President Sid Ryan at the 2013 OFL Convention

Ontario Federation of Labour.

Because of the financial undermining of OFL stability, and the perceived impossibility of unity, Sid Ryan has stated that he will not stand for re-election as president at the OFL's November 23-27 Convention in Toronto.

Ryan's announcement was preceded by years of open criticism, usually in the media, harassment on frivolous issues, withholding of dues, withdrawal from affiliation, and general guerrilla warfare that never, even once touched on the main issues: mass organization, street level resistance and social partnership, as opposed to tri-partist acquiescence and farming out labour's political program to the NDP. Even though Ryan is an ardent NDPer, he also is a social-unionist who believes in the independent power of direct worker action. This makes backroom politics and deal-making difficult, so Ryan has to go.

In Ryan's own words, in his open letter published in the Toronto Star, "If there is one thing that both my strongest supporters and my harshest critics agree on, it is that in mobilizing workers I have often spoken over the heads of labour leaders to reach union members directly. It is a critique that I wear with pride".

Ryan was elected after the "long sleep" of Wayne Samuelson's presidency of the OFL that reflected the lethargy of the "pink paper" unions, which issued an attack on the militancy of the "days of action" campaign against the Mike Harris government and its anti-labour, anti-worker policies. Their proposed alternative was published on pink paper, and the "pink paper" unions ushered in a period of drowsiness, sleeping through working class crisis like Rip Van Winkle. After years of slumber, they could not maintain the sleep any longer, and Sid Ryan with an agenda for social unionism and labour action went into the Presidency unopposed in 2009.

Ryan was unanimously elected twice more without opposition.

Several large unions went on a "dues strike." A couple withdrew completely to create a financial crisis in the OFL, and then complain that they could not support the OFL because of financial mismanagement. First create a crisis, and then attack because of it. The method developed by right-wing governments over the last two decades apparently was well learned by labour leaders on the right. Too bad Ryan stepped back from the fight he had started.

Too bad because this fight is really not at all about Sid Ryan. It is a clash between "business unionism" and "social unionism". Business unionism is the corporate triangular structure of top-down leadership with the membership in a client relationship with staff and top leadership who wield power and deliver services. They are elected, it is true, but in very controlled conventions. Social Unionism is the root from which all labour grew, rank and file driven, mass participation, and with a political vision that represents the needs of all working people, not just the dues payers. Social unionism seeks to lead mass movements and recruit social allies.

The "heads of unions" hosted by Unifor and calling themselves an "election caucus" are not primarily to get rid of Sid Ryan, who has bowed out of the contest already. The main issue is the message to the upcoming convention that if you elect leadership we don't like, if you adopt policies we don't like, we will destroy you. We will

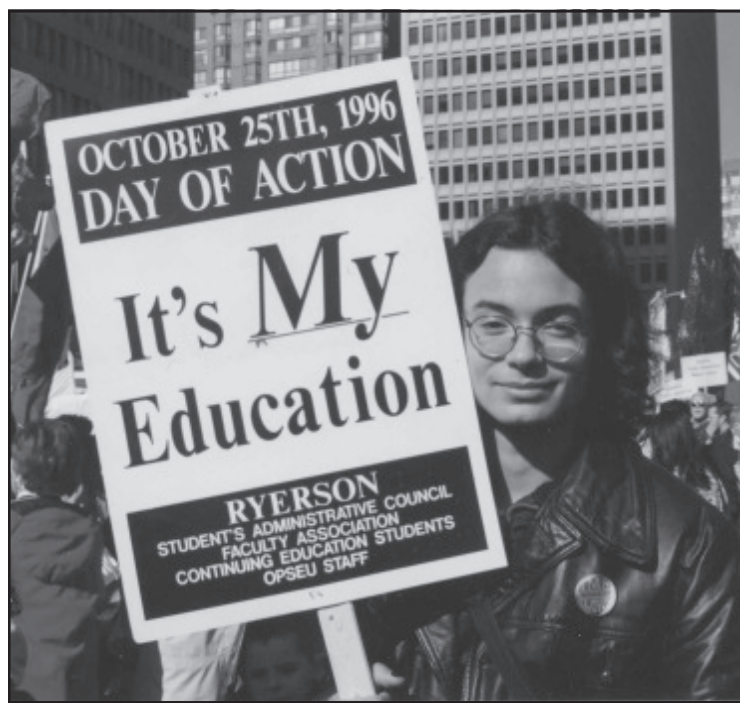
then have labour unity, the unity of the cowed and controlled.

Everyone has the right to put together a slate and campaign for election, but the implied and demonstrated retribution for a democratic convention that disagrees with the "heads of unions" is undemocratic and will ultimately neutralize and disenfranchise labour to the extent that is has south of the border where "business unionism" is

much more dominant.

That is why recent labour history is marked by two phenomena: the consolidation of power through merger and restructuring, and the decline in membership as a percentage of a growing and increasingly disenfranchised and precarious working class. The contradiction in labour is between what we have and what is needed, between business unionism and social unionism. ●

**"If there is one thing that both my strongest supporters and my harshest critics agree on, it is that in mobilizing workers I have often spoken over the heads of labour leaders to reach union members directly. It is a critique that I wear with pride". - Sid Ryan**



Demonstrator at the huge October 1996 "Day of Action" rally in Toronto. Photos on this page by Ed Bil.

### What's the big deal? The high stakes of the TPP

**This commentary is by Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood, a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives trade and energy researcher. Written before the Oct. 5 signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership by Trade Minister Ed Fast and representatives of the other 12 countries involved in the TPP, his analysis points out why this deal is a disaster for working people.**

Should we be excited? What exactly do Canadian citizens have to gain from the TPP and what are we offering up in exchange? Unprecedented secrecy by negotiators means details are sparse, but what we do know paints a worrying picture.

Tariffs are already low between TPP countries, and Canada already has free trade agreements with the U.S., Mexico, Chile and Peru. Eighty percent of Canadian exports to the other TPP countries are raw or semi-processed goods (like coal and lumber) while eighty percent of imports are high value-added goods (like cars and computers). If the TPP encourages greater trade, it will serve to exacerbate Canada's trade deficit with these countries and further weaken our

struggling manufacturing sector.

The Canadian government has not published a study of the deal's potential economic impact, but independent analyses offer grim forecasts. An UNCTAD study predicts a 26% drop in Canada's value-added exports as a consequence of the TPP. Even optimistic U.S. government forecasts predict no net GDP growth for Canada due to the TPP.

Canada's supply-managed agricultural industry is on the chopping block in this deal, which threatens thousands of jobs in addition to our food security. The automotive industry is also at risk with potentially "catastrophic effects" in terms of jobs and exports.

But some of the TPP's most worrying provisions have almost nothing to do with trade at all. Increased intellectual property protections in the deal will undermine generic pharmaceuticals leading to higher drug costs across the country. Canadians' privacy is at risk from rules that would allow the unregulated transmission of personal information across borders. And new copyright rules would rewrite Canadian law to allow stricter penalties for infringement and better protect tobacco companies' branding.

To make matters worse, the TPP includes an investor-state dispute

settlement (ISDS) mechanism, which will allow foreign corporations to sue governments for actions that interfere with their investments. The ISDS mechanism in NAFTA has already forced the Canadian government to backtrack on important environmental and public health regulations. Exposing Canadian governments to TPP investors invites even more challenges to government actions taken in the public interest. Meaningful action on climate change is put at serious risk by these special protections for foreign investors.

The way the TPP has been negotiated - hidden from the public but with heavy involvement from corporate lobbyists - is reason enough to be sceptical of the agreement. But when the likely costs and benefits are assessed the conclusion is clear: Canadians are simply giving up too much for too little.

The TPP looks like a bad deal for Canada. With a pivotal federal election just weeks away, it's time for the parties to talk honestly about what's at stake in these negotiations. Ed Fast might come home with an agreement in hand, but it's the next government that will be responsible for ratification and implementation. The fate of the TPP lies in their hands. ●



OFL banners on Toronto's Front Street, October 1996

# Refugees and wars: Time for peace

By Eugene McCartan,  
General Secretary of the  
Communist Party of Ireland

Events now unfolding in the Middle East, with the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees from the camps in Lebanon, Turkey, and elsewhere, have thrown into sharp relief the plight of the Syrian people, as well as the Kurds.

No-one watching the scenes of people with few possessions walking along roads, climbing over barbed-wire fences, scrambling out of boats, or the scenes of bodies floating in the Mediterranean, could fail to be moved to help. The heartfelt response of so many ordinary people throughout Europe, offering a welcome to the refugees, is in stark contrast to the cynicism of governments, which “can weep with one eye and aim a gun with the other,” as Assad put it.

People are fleeing Syria because they are being bombed and butchered by forces directly paid and armed by the West and its allies. Thousands are fleeing Libya because of the complete chaos inflicted on that country.

Yet this was all predictable and has been repeated for decades, just in different places with different faces, mostly unrecorded. The discourse of the establishment media and the liberals was equally predictable. With all the images and the endless debates on radio and television, the central fact of what has led to the present state of affairs was kept well in the background: the aggressive war being waged in Syria by the Western proxy forces of ISIS and Al Nusra.

The ephemeral, allegedly

democratic “Free Syrian Army” of Western propaganda is not a serious force but only serves as a disguise for the imperialists and their allies in attempting to overthrow Assad by any means. These allies are the mediaeval tyrannies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the Zionist apartheid state of Israel, and Turkey, which itself has an Islamist government.

All these see secular Arab nationalism as their main enemy in the region. The Syrian government is the last one standing—however far it may be from the original independence struggle.

What is even more disturbing is the position adopted by the Socialist Workers’ Party and the peace movement it controls, the Irish Anti-War Movement. It is a very strange peace movement that is indistinguishable from the position of the aggressive Western powers.

This opportunism is not confined to the SWP but is expressed by other leftist forces in Ireland. A similar opportunist position was adopted by left forces in France. Their initial support for the Western military intervention in both Libya and Syria was nothing more than opportunism, leading to a great deal of confusion about the real nature of the forces operating in both those countries.

The horrific crimes of the “Islamic State,” its massacres of Shia Muslims and Christians, its enslavement of women, its destruction of ancient monuments, cannot be endorsed by our Western “democratic” states, or even Saudi Arabia, although they are responsible for its existence. They have declared war on it—a war they are not pursuing with any

energy, for their main war aim is the defeat of the Syrian government, even if this means the destruction of Syria, like the destruction of Libya and Somalia. They have supported these backward forces for decades, for their own strategic aims, regardless of the consequences for the

unit costs of labour throughout the EU. We know from experience that “human rights” mean little or nothing to these political and economic forces.

But the scale of the movement of people panicked the Germans, which has led to the present debacle throughout Europe. Britain and

constitute a threat to both countries.

The Russian government has learnt the lesson of Libya, when, by acquiescing in a “no-fly zone,” it enabled a furious bombing campaign that handed the country over to the barbarous jihadis who now fight each other for control of that unfortunate country. Because of that strategic error they are now faced with a similar situation much nearer to home. Russia, therefore, continues to give support to the Syrian government, and is also actively pursuing a peace settlement.

Not alone was the Syrian government a thorn in the side of the United States for many years, it was also greatly opposed to, and rejected by, both Israel and the United States because of its (sometimes inconsistent) support for the Palestinian cause. Some of that support, and at times lack of support, for the Palestinians was born out of self-interest rather than any principled anti-imperialism.

Certainly the people of Syria had important issues with their government. They were experiencing great economic difficulties and a fall in their living standards, largely because of the economic reforms dictated by the IMF. The government had been trying for years to cosy up to the United States, even in its “extraordinary rendition” of prisoners—all to no avail.

There were indeed popular demonstrations making demands on the government, against its repression. How quickly these turned into violence, regardless of who fired the first shot, shows what dark forces were involved, ready to take advantage of the crisis. ●



societies where they operated.

Even the atrocities that have been committed in their own countries, from the World Trade Center to Charlie Hebdo, they consider a price worth paying. They may even welcome the anti-Muslim bigotry thus generated.

Western government are attempting to use the humanitarian crisis to pursue their wider strategic agenda. Germany wanted to use the wave of refugees to fill up labour shortages in crucial areas, as well as helping overcome its concerns about an ageing population. Employers and monopoly corporations can use the large number of refugees and migrant workers to push down the

Turkey, on the other hand, wanted to use the refugee crisis for “mission creep,” in pushing ahead with their long-held desire to establish a “no-fly zone” and “safe havens” inside Syria. This would give them, and the United States, greater scope for attacking the Syrian government and bringing down Assad.

It is well known by now that the military-industrial complex in the United States, along with the Israeli government, have been lobbying for a confrontation with Iran, and also with Russia. For this reason neither country can afford to allow the defeat of the Syrian government, especially not at the hands of Islamist extremists, who

## Twenty-five years of German unification

By Jenny Farrell

Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s prediction in 1990 of flourishing landscapes springing up everywhere following German unification may have come true—but definitely not in East Germany. Instead there has been massive depopulation: 2 million of a former population of 17 million have left their home regions and migrated to Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg in Western Germany.

The populations of all East German regional states have shrunk, while the Western ones have grown. For example, Saxony-Anhalt has lost more than 20 per cent of its population, and, like most East German regions, it is ageing. The young, highly qualified—and especially women—are gone. The population loss in the East will most certainly continue.

What about the people of East and West Germany? How have they practised unification? If East-West marriages are anything to go by, the relationship remains uneasy: only 1.6 per cent of all new marriages are “mixed.” This corresponds approximately to the rate of marriages between Germans and people with a migration background.



“Blokupy-Demo 2013” in Frankfurt, <http://lowerclassmag.com/2015/03/die-ebz-hat-eine-waffe-in-der-hand-und-zielt-auf-griechenland/>

There are dramatic discrepancies between East and West in all kinds of areas. A far greater percentage of people in the East are affected by obesity and alcohol-related death. In the West there is a much higher purchasing power for watches and jewellery. This is, of course, due to poverty and unemployment, as income levels in the East have never averaged more than three-quarters of those

in the West. The employment rate in the Eastern states is not likely to match that of the West in the foreseeable future.

Very few of the GDR’s achievements have survived. Child care is one example. Despite a decline in the number of day-care centres in the East, and an increase of these in West German cities, there is still a substantially higher quota of 52 per cent in the

East—almost double the West German norm.

Another instance is non-membership of religious denominations. The policy of the governing Socialist Unity Party seems to have been a long-term success; even in the West a kind of catching up can be observed, as secularisation approaches Eastern levels. Three-quarters of East Germans do not belong to the

major churches, while in the West the ratio is—still—the exact opposite. However, in 2012 alone four times as many people left the church as joined it in Germany as a whole.

Twenty-five years after unification, the territory of the former German Democratic Republic has become an impoverished internal colony in the heart of one of the richest countries in the world. ●



# GLOBAL CLASS STRUGGLE

## "Fashion Week for the Poor"

As Paris switched into fashion high-gear, a group of chambermaids working for the luxury Park Hyatt hotel staged a "fashion week for the poor" to celebrate victory in a labour dispute.

Dressed up with splashes of colour and sequins about 60 chambermaids and other workers from the Park Hyatt marched to another hotel, the W Paris Opera, where workers were still striking for better working conditions. The Hyatt workers were celebrating their victory after a one-day strike on Sept. 28 saw them obtain double pay for public holidays worked, and increased meal and travel allowances.

"We are doing a fashion week for the poor," laughed one of the marching women.

"I am happy today. We give our all for our job," said Hyatt employee Jessica Gastou, 38, a mother of four who has worked at the upmarket hotel for 15 years.

Workers at the hotel carried out similar strikes in 2013 and 2014 — also as the trendy jet-set attending fashion week descended on Paris — and won a large salary increase. Last year several other glitzy hotels also faced strikes by workers who can earn less in a month than the nightly price of a hotel room.

## Union gains in Finland

Trade unions in Finland are attracting new members since the government announced its latest plans for austerity measures and to limit the scope of labour market negotiations.

Figures for new members became apparent immediately after the government plans become public on September 8. The Service Union United (PAM) got more new members during the next week than ever during its 15 years of existence.

"Unwittingly, Prime Minister Sipilä has been the best recruiting sergeant ever for union membership", rejoiced PAM Chairperson Ann Selin. With more than 500 new members in one day, the union is clearly on a roll. At the beginning of 2015 PAM had 232,381 members.

"On a normal day we get around one hundred new members. On September 9 the number was double", says Pertti Paajanen, head of membership for the 230,000 member Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors (JHL). In just one week JHL attracted more than 600 new members, triple the usual number.

The effect of the Government announcement of its plans was immediate, said Pekka Soini, JHL Head of Organisational Affairs.

"The wage and salary earners both in the public and private sectors are taking a stand against the government's plans by joining the union. This might be a sign of a wage and salary earners counter-attack", Soini said.

These initial figures reflect what has been recorded on the internet. It is expected that many others will

join in more conventional ways.

In general trade union density in Finland is relatively high, at 64.5 per cent. In OECD statistics only Iceland is ahead of Finland in trade union membership.

## New model for garment wages?

International trade union leaders met during September with representatives of global clothing brands, factory suppliers, unions, government ministries, and the ILO to discuss ACT, a new



initiative aimed at creating living wages in the garment industry.

The IndustriALL union is working with a group of 14 global brands and retailers to transform the way that companies source garments in support of higher wages for garment workers. The ACT process is to develop industry-wide collective bargaining in garment-producing countries, backed by reform to purchasing practices to ensure that higher wages can be paid.

Cambodia, which has a garment and footwear industry worth over US\$5 billion a year, has been chosen as the first country in which to start the ACT process.

The ACT delegation, consisting of IndustriALL and representatives from brands including H&M, Inditex, Primark, C&A and Top Shop met with suppliers, garment unions, the Labour Ministry and the Ministry of Commerce, and the garment manufacturers association of Cambodia (GMAC).

"Industry-wide collective bargaining takes wages out of competition, which means supplier factories can't push down wages to win business," said IndustriALL's policy director, Jenny Holdcroft. "Support of the brands through their purchasing practices will mean that factories will be able to pay workers more, while improved working conditions, productivity and efficiency can also be covered in an industry-wide agreement."

The delegation also held technical discussions with the ILO and other expert groups on how a system for industry-wide collective bargaining could be developed in Cambodia.

## Irish postal system shutdown

Ireland's postal system was in chaos during early October, with no immediate signs of breakthrough, as industrial action

by 36 employees who supervise key An Post equipment continued. The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) said that strikes at IO Systems - the contractor that maintains machines at An Post's four mail centres - could go on "indefinitely" if the dispute is not resolved.

On October 2, the national postal service told customers not to send any items. Consumers and businesses were left stunned by the move.

An Post said that the service was unable to accept items for postage if the sorting machines were not supervised. The service processes some 2.5 million letters and parcels per day.

The Passport Express service, via post offices throughout the Republic and Northern Ireland, has been suspended due to the industrial action. The Department of Social Protection said that contingency arrangements to deliver payment cheques to customers would be put in place if the dispute lasted much longer.

Steve Fitzpatrick, secretary general of the CWU, called An Post's decision to suspend deliveries "bizarre and reckless". CWU is against moving rosters from seven days of 12-hour shifts to five of eight-hour shifts.

"We have had our suspicions up to now and these have been confirmed by the irrational action of the company to escalate this dispute, threatening a 850 million euro business to save 100,000 euros in wages."

## Brazil bank workers set to strike

Bank industry workers in Sao Paulo, Brazil's most populous and richest state, plan to strike for an indefinite period starting October 6, after rejecting a pay proposal for the upcoming year. The union turned down a proposal by the National Banking Federation for a salary increase of 5.5 percent, seeking a raise of 16 percent instead.

The Banking Federation, also known as Fenaban, proposed larger profit-sharing, though that was rejected by the union. Banks and unions in Brazil negotiate over future pay raises at this time every year, sometimes leading to short-lived strikes that don't aim to disrupt services.

This year, the banks are slated to post record earnings, after streamlining their operations in the wake of the steepest recession in a quarter century. Workers are demanding a halt to those efforts, which have resulted in the early retirement or dismissal of thousands of employees this year.

## Coal baron trial

On Oct. 1, former coal baron Donald Leon Blankenship went on trial in Charleston, West Virginia. Blankenship was chief executive of the now-defunct Massey Energy Company for a decade. Charged with shunning mine safety rules, conspiring to conceal safety violations, and lying to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and

company shareholders, he faces 30 years in prison if convicted.

Blankenship is accused of creating a work culture that skimmed on safety and employee well-being to improve the bottom line. Three investigators have concluded that his methods contributed to the explosion at the company's Upper Big Branch deep mine at Montcoal, West Virginia, that killed 29 miners on April 5, 2010. It was the U.S. worst mine disaster in 40 years.

The trial is expected to take at least a month, going far beyond the four criminal indictments. This is the first time in 150 years of Appalachian mining that the top boss of a coal firm has had to answer for how he ran his company.

"It's unusual for a CEO to be indicted on criminal charges, but for the coal industry, it is really unprecedented," says Pat McGinley, a law professor at West Virginia University. "It's never happened in the last century where you have had countless disasters killing thousands of miners."

The trial also reveals the predicament left by the slow death of the coal industry. Billions of dollars worth of wealth have been hauled away in coal train cars, leaving a badly impoverished region short of funds for human needs or the repair of decades of ecological destruction.

While running Massey Energy, Blankenship relished confrontation, filing numerous lawsuits, busting union locals, and attacking

environmentalists. He dressed up in an American flag costume for an anti-union festival he paid for on Labour Day 2009, hiring as entertainment reactionary celebrities such as Hank Williams Jr., Ted Nugent, and Sean Hannity.

## Philippines tire workers organize

Workers of Yokohama Tire Philippines have filed a petition for the right to organize at the country's biggest Japanese tire company, located in Clark Freeport.

The Alliance of Yokohama Supervisory Personnel and Alliance of Yokohama Employees hope that the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE) will certify them as bargaining agents for the Yokohama workers.

The right of workers to organize into trade unions is enshrined in the Philippine Constitution of 1987. The tire workers unions are affiliated with the Philippine Trade and General Workers Organization (PTGWO), the biggest labour federation in the country. Originally known as the Philippine Transport Workers Organization, the PTGWO was established in 1953, and currently has more than 100 affiliates representing workers in the transport industry, seafarers, and from the food, beverages, electronics, textile, wood, paper, metal, plastic, services and manufacturing sectors.



## Join the Communist Party of Canada



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# Maduro calls for new anti-imperialist geopolitics at the UN

By *Rachael Boothroyd Rojas, Venezuelanalysis.com*

Drawing on the legacy of Venezuelan independence hero Simon Bolivar, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro called on world leaders to build a “new geopolitics, a new concept and a new world” at the United Nations 70th General Assembly in New York on Sept. 29.

Referencing “the Jamaica Letter” written by Bolivar 200 years ago, Maduro said the time had come to move beyond an international system based on imposing “one way of thinking, neoliberalism, which has sown poverty illness and misery” across the globe and especially in the global South.

“Thanks to the revolutionary strength of the people... the time has arrived for a multi-polar world, a world without hegemony... We dare to say, with Bolivar, that the world needs a new geopolitics. The world needs the truth of the people to be imposed,” said the president.

In his impassioned address, which received several rounds of applause throughout, Maduro described the UN as one of humanity’s greatest achievements, but stated that only a thorough transformation of the institution would enable it to achieve its founding principles.

“200 years on from that prophetic letter (the Jamaica Letter), we, at the heart of the United Nations, keep ratifying in our own, dignified voice, out loud and steadfast: the world needs another United Nations, the world needs a profound transformation of the system it created 70 years ago,” Maduro affirmed.

In particular, he urged the UN to establish a series of new norms that would prohibit the use of armed interventions.

The Venezuelan President, who served as foreign minister for six years to former president Hugo Chavez, went on to condemn the governments which had promoted war. He beseeched world leaders to recognise the “tragic errors” of having intervened in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Stating that history had shown these wars to be motivated by the control of profitable markets and resources as opposed to the well-being of people, Maduro accused politicians of failing the cause of international relations.

“Who will pay for the crimes in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan? This is the politics of terror, of war... We have to ask, did this bring peace, stability?”

The murder of former Libyan head of state Muammar Gaddafi at the hands of Western-backed rebels in 2011 was also officially decried as a “crime” by Maduro to the applause of the room.

“No matter the political differences... Nobody in this world is authorised, neither by the UN or any law, to judge or prejudge the political regime of another country, nor to attempt to effect the regime change of another government,” he declared.

Nonetheless Maduro emphasised that there was “still time” to avoid another tragedy in war-torn Syria, provided that the UN act as a united body to block further intervention in the Arab nation.

He also supported Russian president Vladimir Putin’s call to create a “new alliance for peace”.

“Only peace can guarantee the viability of development,” he said.

In a stinging criticism of President Barack Obama, Maduro also lambasted the executive order signed by the US head of state on March 9th which classifies Venezuela as an “extraordinary threat” to US national security.

Several international observers

have interpreted the executive order as a possible prelude to the enactment of economic sanctions against Venezuela, where public outcry against the order is significant.

Obama publicly backpedalled on the wording of the decree and denied that Venezuela was a security threat to the US on the back of international protest. Nonetheless, he has refused to revoke the decree until now.



*President Maduro at a June 2015 rally to mark the end of primary elections for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela.*

## The lesser of two evils: Greek voters angry, disillusioned

By *Steve Mavrantonis, The Guardian, newspaper of the Communist Party of Australia*

The results of the snap elections in Greece, held on September 20, confirmed what had become obvious during the short pre-election period that the people being tired, dissatisfied, confused and disillusioned opted for “the lesser of the two evils”.

What had transpired since the last elections, in January this year, was an initial general public euphoria based on the false hope and expectation that the then new SYRIZA government would change the intolerable situation in the country that had existed for the last five years. It was hoped that some of the acute problems would be alleviated by taking measures to satisfy some of the demands of the popular masses.

One of the major demands by the people was to do away with the tight grip on the country’s economy by the creditors and the European Union institutions. Instead of that however, the economic controls and demands by the EU and the IMF became more suffocating, pensions and wages levels were not restored, as promised, further cuts were initiated and unemployment levels reached unprecedented heights.

The accumulated anger led the people to reject the new agreement offered by the creditors with a resounding NO in the referendum organised by the government last July.

What followed the referendum was almost beyond description. Instead of the government honouring the people’s will and rejecting the new agreement (memorandum) it completely capitulated to the demands of the leading EU forces and signed a new memorandum, much worse than the previous two.

The Greek people saw their hopes and expectations disappear fast and became frustrated,

disillusioned and confused. SYRIZA was promising the people that their left government would change things. All of a sudden people realised that not even a left government can bring about a change.

This concept of hopelessness was a major factor in alienating a high percentage of people from the election process and in shaping the election result. Hopelessness and the fear that the others might be worse, determined the outcome of the elections that returned SYRIZA to government with 35 percent of the votes and 145 members of Parliament. It will be a coalition government again with the Independent Greeks who managed to elect 10 members.

In the atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion the neo-fascist Golden Dawn managed to poll 7% and will now be the third party in parliamentary strength.

PASOK, which contested the elections in coalition of the Democratic Left and some other groupings, managed only 6%, confirming the prevailing view that this party which ruled Greece for 25 years has been politically annihilated.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) scored 5.6% of the votes the same as in the January elections and had the same number of deputies elected (15).

These elections demonstrated an alarming fact which will no doubt adversely affect the political developments in the near future. The fact that SYRIZA, masquerading as a left force, has done the greatest disservice to the working class movement for progressive change by conditioning people’s minds that there is no alternative, that they are all the same, that there is no way of getting rid of capitalism and its barbarity.

This negative frame of mind is now the most serious problem the working class movement in Greece faces; that the KKE and all other class oriented forces have to

struggle against and defeat. The sooner this poisonous trend is overcome, the sooner the working class movement is free of illusions and does not seek salvation by means of a “more efficient management” of capitalism, the sooner the mass struggles of workers will be developed and strengthened and challenge the power of capitalist domination, in favour of a socialist society.

For this to happen, parliamentary processes are not enough. For the working class movement to seriously challenge the ruling class it must participate in daily struggles

in places of work, in the localities, in schools and universities, to face the forces of oppression, to put forward advanced demands for a life worth living.

Only through the road of determined mass struggle will the workers be fully emancipated and acquire the level of social consciousness that will prevent their systematic brain washing and stop the neutralisation of their collective power.

This of course is not an easy process, but is the only way forward to a brighter future for the Greek people and indeed for any people in the world. ●



*KKE rally in Athens; 15 Communist MPs were elected on Sept. 20.*

### Anti-ANC march fizzles

Opponents of South Africa’s ruling ANC saw a much-hyped march against corruption fall flat on Sept. 30, reports the UK Morning Star online.

Unite Against Corruption (UAC) had counted on the support of hundreds of NGOs and several large unions to fill the streets across the country. But only a few hundred people turned out for a march to Pretoria’s union buildings, the seat of government, with a similar number in Cape Town, home to the nation’s parliament.

Leading the protest were National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)—expelled from ANC-allied union federation COSATU last November—and former COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi.

Vavi, who was himself sacked in March amid allegations of sexual harassment and corruption, joked in August that it was “a march against myself.”

The march was postponed twice over numbers, but NUMSA’s failure to apply for strike protection in time prompted the Federation of Unions of South Africa to pull out.



working class  
culture

## No union mines left in Kentucky

By Rob Gowland, from *The Guardian*, weekly newspaper of the Communist Party of Australia

Underground coal mining is dirty, hard and dangerous work. Apart from accidents, miners are liable to lung damage from coal dust. In South Africa, England, Australia, the US and many other countries, miners have fought often vicious battles to improve their pay and conditions. In few places were those battles harder than in the US.

As Dylan Lovan said in an article for Associated Press on September 5: "Kentucky coal miners bled and died to unionise. Their workplaces became war zones, and gun battles once punctuated union protests. In past decades, organisers have been beaten, stabbed and shot while seeking better pay and safer conditions deep underground."

Despite the obvious drama inherent in these battles to unionise, they are not considered appropriate subjects for US films and TV. The independent movie *Matewan* was a notable exception, as was the documentary feature *Harlan County USA*. But, considering Hollywood's partiality for guns and killings, it is obviously not the violence that inhibits producers from taking up this subject. Clearly, the subject's class position is the key.

Employers have worked assiduously for decades to not only combat but to destroy workers' class consciousness, belittling class as an "outdated" concept, and playing down the role of unions in raising living and working standards. This relentless propaganda campaign has been very successful in reducing union membership, in the US as here in Australia.

Just recently, despite the state's heroic industrial history, the last union mine in Kentucky has shut down. For the first time in about a

century, in the state that was home to the gun battles of "Bloody Harlan," not a single working miner belongs to a union.

Retired miners who suffered through the long and bloody struggles in the Kentucky coal fields point out that "A lot of young miners right now who don't know what the union stands for are only getting good wages and benefits because of the sacrifices that we made." It is only thanks to the struggles waged by the union that today's miners enjoy higher wages and safer mines, but as memories fade, in recent decades employers, politicians and their media mates have been able to persuade workers at non-union mines to not organise.

In an example of astonishingly twisted logic, the mine owners argue that the union's very success has been the cause of its own decline! Says a smug Bill Bissett, president of industry group the Kentucky Coal Association, "I just don't think there's that level of discontent between the company and working coal miners, which I think is a very good thing". Well,

he would, wouldn't he?

Dylan Lovan puts it another way: "Hard-fought gains are taken for granted by younger workers who earn high wages now." He recalls the deadly organising battles of the 1920s and '30s, many in Harlan County.

"Organising battles raged in Appalachia throughout the last century, most notably the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, where thousands of striking miners fought a shooting war with law enforcement and replacement workers [scabs], ending in dozens of deaths. One year earlier, 10 people had died in Matewan, West Virginia, in a skirmish over eviction notices served to miners who had joined the union.

"In Harlan County, Kentucky, the 1931 Battle of Evarts ended in four deaths. ... One ambush shooting in 1937 ended with the death of union organiser Marshall Musick's 14-year-old son, Bennett, when 'a shower of bullets tore through the walls of the house', according to union leader George Titler's book, *Hell in Harlan*."



Director Barbara Kopple's Oscar-winning documentary *Harlan County USA* focuses on a 1972 strike by coal miners at the Brookside Mine in Kentucky. Refusing to negotiate a fair collective agreement, the owners hired scabs and resorted to violence. Kopple's film can be watched on Youtube or ordered from [www.criterion.com](http://www.criterion.com).



More recently, "I had my house shot up during [the long strike against the AT Massey Coal Company in Pike County in 1984 and 1985]," said Charles Dixon, the United Mine Workers local president at the time. "I was just laying in bed and next thing you know you hear a big AR-15 [machine gun] unloading on it."

"When the coal industry rebounds to the extent that it does, and non-union operators take a look around and see that there's no union competition, and they'll see that they can begin to cut wages, they can begin to cut benefits, they can begin to cut corners on safety, they'll do that," said Phil Smith, a national spokesperson for the miner's union.

Smith pointed to the record of former Massey Energy chief Don Blankenship, who closed union mines in the 1980s and now faces criminal conspiracy charges over a deadly explosion in 2010 at the Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia that killed 29 workers.

"More vigorous federal enforcement and the closing of older Appalachian mines in a turbulent coal market have also contributed to declining injuries and deaths," says Lovan.

Union miners at the Highland mine, the last working union mine in Kentucky, were making about

\$24 an hour and working four 10-hour shifts a week. "Workers at non-union mines typically work long shifts six days a week, and benefits vary from mine to mine." Former Highland miners who have found jobs at smaller non-union mines have had to take a hefty pay cut.

Ironically, enforcement of environmental regulations on high-sulphur coal essentially halted mining in western Kentucky in the 1990s, leading to mine shutdowns that in turn led to the loss of about 20,000 union members in two years. In neighbouring West Virginia, which wasn't affected by the same environmental regulations the union still has more than 30,000 members.

As a young man Kenny Johnson took part in the Brookside strike in the 1970s over safety and union recognition. Johnson was arrested on the picket line.

Returning to the scene of his arrest four decades ago, Johnson looked past a small bridge that leads to a mining operation. Coal is still being mined there today, just not by union miners.

"I realised that day that it was very serious and that people would fight you, even to the point of having you put in jail for standing up for some of the ideals that coal miners hold dear," he said. ●

## Smokescreen of imperial policy on Arab Spring dispersed

*Chaos and Counter-revolution* by Richard Falk (Zed Books, 2015, 256 pages), review by Andrew Murray, [www.morningstar-online.co.uk](http://www.morningstar-online.co.uk)

The Arab Spring has indeed ended everywhere — with the very limited and partial exception of Tunisia — in the chaos and counter-revolution referenced in the title of this collection of blog posts on the greater Middle East by campaigning US academic

Richard Falk.

That chaos is on most lurid display in Iraq, Libya and Syria. Sustained imperialist intervention, direct and indirect, has propelled all three, through measureless suffering, into a state of collapse. The future of these once-powerful countries as integral states must now be doubtful. Yemen, now the theatre for a sustained and savage attack by British-armed Saudi Arabia, is clearly headed in the same direction.

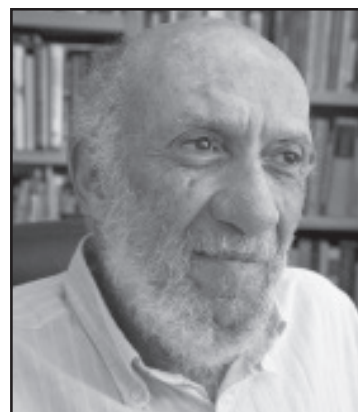
The poster boy for counter-

revolution is Egypt's military dictator el-Sisi, who has established a tyranny more ferocious than his predecessor Hosni Mubarak did and is now firmly tucked into the West's breast pocket, a point which will doubtless be underlined if his planned visit to London comes off.

Falk's take on these dramas is expert. He is a controversial figure, who served for six years as a UN rapporteur on human rights in occupied Palestine.

A clear critic of the main lines of Western policy in the Middle East — military intervention, the stimulation of sectarianism, the provocations against Iran and the oppression of Palestinians — he also tends towards 9/11 conspiracy theories and has been accused of anti-semitism. Look it up and form your own opinion if you wish.

His articles on the region are erudite but not militant. On Syria, he urges a "discussion" to replace "the dogmatic self-righteous indignation of both interventionists and anti-interventionists." That was written in February 2014. An insistence on anti-interventionism — as dogmatic and self-righteous



Richard Falk

as needs be — could have spared Syria more than 18 months of further torment and, indeed, the consolidation of Islamic State (Isis) across much of its territory.

Falk is no prophet either. He forecasts here that Turkey's challenges for 2015 would be dealing with the centenary of the Armenian genocide and ending its passivity on tackling global warming. In fact, Turkey has spent the year covertly supporting Isis in Syria while using purported opposition to it as a cover for attacking its own Kurdish

population. Its authoritarian President Recep Erdogan has taken electoral rebuffs badly.

Confused? You're not alone. Some on the left hope for salvation from a new generation of military-nationalist strongmen, medals jangling all the way to the bank, others from collaboration with imperialism and its local satraps. Conspiracy theories and wishful thinking abound.

Some of Falk's well-researched pieces help cut through the fog, particularly the propaganda smokescreens around imperial policy. However, no clear programme of action for dealing with "chaos and counter-revolution" is developed.

The reality is that imperialism and its principle ideological instrument of rule in the region today — sectarianism — can only be defeated by an alliance of the secular left and nationalist forces with those Islamists committed to democracy, uniting to defend both national independence and advance the principles which animated those who fought for the Arab Spring, elected and accountable governments among them. ●



# Front Commun rally draws 150,000 workers against Quebec austerity attack

## PV Montreal Bureau

Quebec workers were out in force on October 3 for a mass rally of over 150,000 people. Recent mass mobilizations have brought large numbers of Quebec students into the streets, but this is the biggest demonstration by labour in recent years and continues the trend of giant mobilizations against austerity.

While the main focus of the October 3<sup>rd</sup> action was against the severe cuts of the Couillard Liberals, labour speakers made reference to the need to kick out Harper on Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>.

The rally took place at the foot of the Mont Royal massif, which forms a distinctive landmark in the city, and was organized by the Front Commun or Common Front. Together the Front Commun represents over 400,000 public sector workers in health and social services, education, higher education and the public service of Quebec. Their collective agreements expired on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

Speaking at an election rally in Toronto, Communist Party leader Miguel Figueroa condemned the corporate media blackout in English-speaking Canada on the demonstration. "The news seeks to hide and obscure people's awareness of these magnificent protests which our party fully supports," Figueroa said.

Not one major English-language paper gave significant coverage to this action, he noted, adding that

the candidates of the Communist Party in Montreal were all present at the mobilization.

The workers are fighting against the dismantling of the Quebec welfare state and a sharp attack on the principle of universality.

"After dozens and dozens of meetings, [the government] continues to turn a deaf ear, they still wants to impoverish us not only today but for the rest of our days, [including] reducing to 40% the pensions of retirees who have dedicated their lives to public service," said Jacques Létourneau, President of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN).

"An unacceptable arrogance towards the largest group of workers in Quebec, positions in public services [that are] 75% occupied by women. It should be recalled that the government's attacks on our working conditions occur simultaneously imposing unprecedented austerity policies," said Carole Dubé, spokesperson of the Inter-Secretariat of public services (SSSI). "The government would squeeze the lemon, while our members are exhausted [...] and that concerns the entire population of Quebec," she added.

The labour leaders issued a call to fight, stating that they intend to use all means at their disposal to make the government respond, including actions of socio-economic disruption across the province. The rally showed workers and public sector workers were mobilized and united,



Scene from the October 3 Front Commun rally in Montreal

participants told People's Voice.

"If [the government] continues to turn a deaf ear, the Front Commune will be ready to go further, said Daniel Boyer, president of the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ), "If the government maintains its contempt and arrogance towards workers and public service workers, we will not hesitate to call a strike across Quebec if necessary."

Banners were on display from workers in the far north of Quebec close to the border with Labrador. According to the newspaper *Le Devoir*, no less than 384 buses were chartered for the action. The rally was joined by a variety of community and student groups but it was overwhelmingly trade unionists.

"What the government is asking workers is surreal... This is science fiction," said Andrés Fontecilla, spokesperson of Quebec Solidaire, which also strongly supported the mobilizations.

People's Voice sat down with Pierre Fontaine, leader of the Parti Communiste du Quebec and a candidate for the Communist Party in Laurier-Sainte-Marie to talk about the action:

### People's Voice: What did you think about the rally?

Spectacular! In fact I just got off the phone with Radio Canada in Nova Scotia talking about this action which was a great achievement by labour. In fact, the demonstration was the biggest in the history of the Common Front, which was first organized in 1972 and has come together several times since then, as a coalition of unions for public sector negotiations. The weeks before there were many votes in the local unions and a major participation from the membership. The votes sent a strong message for a strike – between 85 to 95 per cent. For example, in my former union local over 1,600 people took part, and they voted at 92 per cent.

### This came after a series of activities by labour?

Yes. The strike has been building for some time. Most recently, on September 30<sup>th</sup>, an independent action took place by the elementary and secondary teachers with a one-day strike involving over 30,000 people. The day after, there were picket lines

by parents, encircling hundreds of schools. There is clearly a lot of support by parents against the cut backs to education.

And the support of the public is very important to win, because the Couillard Liberal government is still maintaining its position of no concessions regarding wages, working conditions and cuts. There is a threat of a decree, imposing the austerity working conditions and two-year wage freeze, by the government. The support of the public will make the difference and be a critical factor in the workers battle.

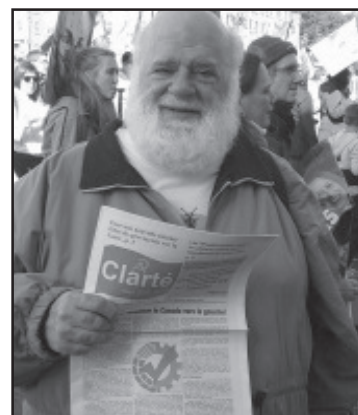
### Is there a connection with the federal election?

Well, of course we fully support the demands of the workers as we talk to voters. While there is not an obvious direct connection, there is actually a link. In fact the cuts to the federal transfer payments mean that Quebec is missing funds for

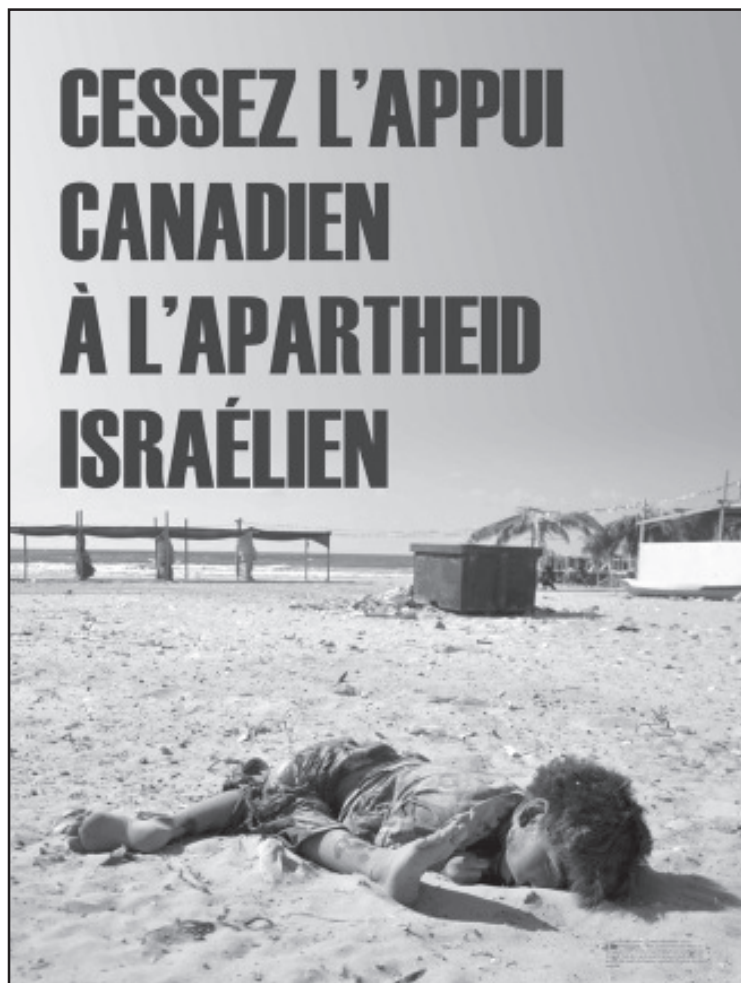
social programmes. The Quebec government admits this reality, but doesn't in fact to fight restore the funds. It says nothing about that. Not only labour but all other voices, nationalist forces included, raise this question.

And of course, we are saying this too – to increase all transfer payments and return them at a bare minimum to their former levels. For example we want to increase the transfer for health to a minimum of 25%, something Trudeau's federal Liberals have refused to do. The NDP has suggested it favours 25% but has not been committal. How can they? They are running on a platform of balancing the budget and keeping military spending the same, so increasing transfers by several billion is impossible. And in the past, the federal role in health care was not 25 but 50 per cent.

Meanwhile, the Harper government is going in the opposite direction. They have refused to negotiate a new health accord, which de facto amounts to a massive cut of several billion dollars, and today in the news is the TPP trade agreement, which will likely increase the costs of medicine and pharmaceutical drugs significantly. This must absolutely be halted and workers across the country need to rise up like labour has in Quebec, with mass united protest, demanding emergency action. One way to send such a message is by voting Communist on October 19<sup>th</sup>.



Pierre Fontaine at Oct. 3 rally



## People's Voice deadlines

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November 16-30 issue: Thursday, Nov. 5

Send submissions to PV Editorial Office,  
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# Ayotzinapa: one year later

By Matthew Lorenzen,  
www.counterpunch.org

September 26 marked the one year commemoration of the attack, perpetrated by government security forces in the city of Iguala, in the State of Guerrero, Mexico, against students from the Ayotzinapa rural teacher's college, in which six people were killed, over 40 were injured, and 43 students were forcefully disappeared.

Large demonstrations demanding truth, justice, that the students be found, and even that the President resign, were held in many Mexican cities. Smaller demonstrations were held in dozens of cities around the world, from London and Paris to Santiago de Chile and Buenos Aires. The march in Mexico City was led by the parents of the disappeared students and many of their classmates. Its starting point was near Los Pinos – the official residence and workplace of the Mexican President – and it ended eight kilometers away, and five hours later, in El Zócalo, the main square in downtown Mexico City.

Similar demonstrations have been taking place in Mexico City on the 26th of every month since the attacks occurred. These marches were massive for the first few months, rallying over 100,000 people from all walks of life. Several ended in police repression after allegedly being infiltrated by government provocateurs. However, turnouts greatly diminished since the beginning of 2015. The Sept. 26 march was once again massive – tens of thousands of people gathered despite the rain – proving that the Ayotzinapa case is still at the centre of public concern.

On Sept. 6, a group of independent experts (the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes or GIEI), appointed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to conduct a parallel investigation into the attacks, presented their preliminary results, which debunked many crucial points of the official government investigation. According to this official investigation, corrupt municipal police attacked the students, killing six people, and abducted 43 of them. They then handed the students over

to members of the Guerreros Unidos drug cartel, who killed and incinerated them in a garbage dump. Their remains were then allegedly put into plastic bags and dumped in a river. The official explanation for the attacks was never clear and was changed



several times; the last explanation was that the Guerreros Unidos cartel and corrupt local police had confused the students with members of a rival cartel.

The GIEI denied the possibility that the students were incinerated in the garbage dump and stated that many detained suspects had been tortured by authorities during their interrogation, which casts doubt on the veracity of their confessions. The experts also declared that municipal, state and federal police, as well as military forces, were monitoring the students' movements in real time, were fully aware of the attacks and were present in the streets of Iguala that night. As a result, the motive for the attacks explained in the official investigation was ruled out, since all of the security forces were well aware of the identity of the students. The GIEI experts also pointed out that important evidence had been destroyed, and that they had repeatedly been denied the possibility of interviewing members of Iguala's military battalion.

Another important development came on Sept. 16, as attorney general Arely Gómez González declared that the remains, supposedly from the garbage dump, of a second student had been identified by DNA analysis (the remains of a first student were identified in December 2014). However, a group of Argentine forensic experts that has participated in the investigation

criticized the attorney general, explaining that the genetic matching between the samples and the student's family was in fact low in statistical terms. These forensic experts also pointed out that the remains of both students were not found at the garbage dump

but apparently in bags in a nearby river, although they were not present during the discovery of these remains and couldn't vouch for their origin.

Parents of the 43 disappeared students criticized the attorney general for her "lack of professional ethics, violating the agreement reached with the government to give information first to the families and then to the media." Also, the director for the Americas of Amnesty International stated that: "the Mexican authorities' unfounded allegations that they have identified the remains of Jhosivani [the second student] smell like desperation and a cruel attempt to show that they are taking action before the first anniversary of the students' forced disappearance. It seems they are prepared to do anything so as to wash their hands of any responsibility in one of the worst human rights tragedies in Mexico's recent past."

The last important development was that the parents of the 43 disappeared students met with President Enrique Peña Nieto on September 24th. They made eight demands to the President:

\* Acknowledgement of the legitimacy of their search for justice and that the case remain open.

\* That the GIEI remain active investigating the case and that their reports and recommendations be accepted.

\* That the investigation be redrawn and conducted by a

specialized investigative unit, with international oversight. This unit would have two tasks: investigating the whereabouts of the students and investigating the government cover-up.

\* Re-launching a search for the students with the use of all technology available.

\* Immediate and dignified attention to those injured during the attacks and to the families of the students who were extrajudicially executed.

\* Respect for the Ayotzinapa rural teacher's college and that all attempts to criminalize the students be ceased.

\* That mechanisms be put in place for permanent and respectful communication between the government and the parents of the disappeared students.

\* Recognition of the crisis of impunity, corruption and widespread violation of human rights in Mexico, and concrete actions to combat these issues.

The President refused to commit to all of these points, stating that the attorney general's office and the Secretary of the Interior would study the demands. Instead, he

military battalion.

The Sept. 26 protest march also comes after signs of growing international pressure to elucidate the Ayotzinapa case. UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn wrote a letter to the Mexican ambassador in the UK, expressing his concern about the Ayotzinapa investigation and about human rights in Mexico. The UN office in Mexico called on the government to elucidate the irregularities and redraw its investigation. Even a group of senators from the US expressed concern about these irregularities and asked John Kerry to insist to Mexican authorities that the investigation be accurate and that the GIEI's findings and recommendations be accepted.

Internal and international pressure will be of the utmost importance for a real investigation, with possible international oversight, to take place. What is certain is that the parents will not rest until they know the truth about what happened to their children, despite the government's desire to wear them out and to close the case.

As one of the parents declared,



Dozens of international solidarity rallies took place on Sept. 26, including one at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Seen here, Tselil-Waututh First Nation activist Reuben George speaks to the crowd in Vancouver. (Photo: K. Cariou)

announced six actions: to investigate all of the findings and possible culprits; to incorporate the GIEI's results and recommendations into the official investigation; to continue to investigate what happened to each of the students; to insure that the victims get proper government attention; to re-analyze evidence in the garbage dump; and to create a special prosecutor's office to investigate disappearances in general (there are around 26,000 disappeared persons in Mexico, most during the last few years). Also, the GIEI was allowed to continue its investigation for another six months. However, the parents of the disappeared students had asked that the GIEI's mission be extended a whole year.

The parents denounced the President's proposal, saying that some of the six points were just rehashed promises or things the government had the responsibility to do, and insisting that they wanted an investigative unit, with international oversight, specifically for the Ayotzinapa case. They also decried the fact that the government continues to avoid recognizing that its investigation was wrong, and that it continues to deny the possibility for the GIEI's interview members of Iguala's

"If he [the President] wagered on us becoming exhausted, he is losing. If he wagered on us forgetting, he is fucked. Because we, the 43 parents, will continue to fight for the 43 disappeared students."

The social movement generated by the Ayotzinapa case will not only be long lasting, but it is also set to instill a congregation of many separate social movements, as some intellectuals and prominent activists have been suggesting. The parents of the disappeared students acknowledged this. One of the parents stated that: "We are here not only to demand that our 43 students be found alive, but also to demand justice for over 25,000 disappeared persons in the country. We must also fight for those that have been dispossessed of their lands. Let there never be one more isolated struggle!"

A recent survey in 18 Latin-American countries revealed that Mexicans are the most unsatisfied with "democracy", and that the Mexican President was one of the worst rated in the whole continent. As Mexicans' trust in their institutions and in democracy keeps fading, the joining of social movements will be of essence to restructure the grave failings of the Mexican State. ●

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