

## U.S. election charade: Workers lose again

BY JEFF MACKLER

The results are in: The Republican Party won at least seven more seats in the Senate, and now controls both houses of the U.S. Congress. *Disaster is in the making! Right?*

The Democrats and Republicans spent an unprecedented mid-term, if not all-time, election total of \$4 billion, roughly \$2 billion each. The giant corporations that footed the bills for their chosen candidates undoubtedly will get trillions of dollars in return, as is always the case in capitalist elections. The working class, which creates all wealth, will continue to pay regardless of who officially runs the country.

Indeed, working people continued to lose ground in wages and social conditions during the Obama administration's entire reign since the 2008 elections, at which time the Democrats won control of both houses. At the time, Obama won the largest percentage of the white vote ever, almost all of the votes of Blacks, and close to 86 percent of Latinos.

This year, now that his poll figures have sagged deeply, Obama was invited to stump for fellow Democrats in only a handful of locations. Speaking in Philadelphia on Nov. 1, Obama poured on the populist rhetoric, pointing out: "The biggest corporations, they don't need a champion. The wealthiest Americans don't need another champion, they're doing just fine."

But the Democratic Party candidates, Obama declared, would be the champions of working people, "the middle class," the "hard-working single mother" and the "first-generation college student." Is there any reason at all to believe Obama's promises? Let's look at the numbers:

Obama gifted *only* \$30 trillion or so to the corporate elite in bailouts of every sort. During 2012-13 he granted the great banks through the Federal Reserve's "Quantitative Easing" or "economic stimuli to the rich" policy *only* \$89 billion per month. The same crooked banks, the largest in the country, sold the government essentially worthless mortgages. They were eventually fined several billion, a mere "slap on the wrist" fraction of what they stole. No jail for anyone! In contrast, George Bush *only* granted the corporate elite a mere \$1 trillion or two during his reign.

Obama's policies brought the stock market to record highs since the economic meltdown. Ninety percent of the

population was smashed, while the top ten percent flourished in the context of the largest rich-poor gap in the modern era. George Bush was a miser to the corporate elite by comparison.

Obama raised the war and surveillance budgets to record highs, today approaching \$2 trillion a year. Bush was far behind. Yet it was Obama, after all, who was elected as a "man of peace and democratic rights!"

Obama started, continued and/or secretly organized seven wars at once: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Bah-

rain, Yemen, Egypt and Ukraine, plus lots of covert wars across the globe—drone wars, death-squad privatized army wars, and more. George Bush was a pacifist by comparison.

"Champion of the working class" Obama created six million new jobs since 2009, 76 percent of which were *low-wage (50-65 percent less than full time jobs), non-union, no benefit, part-time or temporary work at substandard conditions*. Meanwhile, one million full-time jobs per year, largely union jobs, were offshored to distant lands to in-

crease the super-profits of U.S. multinational corporations.

Obama reduced the *official* unemployment rate to slightly less than seven percent today. But the Bureau of Labor Statistics doesn't include in its figures the 8 million "discouraged" workers who have dropped out of the employment market. They have no work but are not "unemployed" according to the government's number crunchers. In truth, close to 35 percent of the U.S. workforce today has no job!

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### 'Redskins' football team protested

Twin Cities Daily Planet



About 5000 people marched and rallied at TCF Bank Stadium in Minneapolis on Nov. 2 to protest the Washington Redskin's racist name and logos. The protest took place before the football game between the Minnesota Vikings and the Washington team. Rhonda Reese, who marched with protesters from the American Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center, told a reporter from the *Twin Cities Daily Planet* that she was there because "Redskins" is a racial slur. "It's a bounty they put on the Native people for their scalps," she said. "It's negative and it's derogatory."

Clyde Bellecourt, a founding member of the National Coalition Against Racism in Sports and Media, told the media: "All of these mascots have to go. Black Sambo is gone, John Wayne is dead. It's time for America to let it go."

The protesters rallied two days after a federal judge indicated that the Redskins' owners could proceed, for now, with their lawsuit against five Native American activists who had successfully petitioned the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to cancel Redskins patent registrations. Meanwhile, the FCC has said that they might ban use of the team name during television broadcasts.

# Lessons of Ferguson

By CLAY WADENA

As of press time, the grand jury investigating Michael Brown's death at the hands of Officer Darren Wilson has still not issued its decision. The grand jury is made up of six white men, three white women, two African-American women, and one African-American man. Nine out of the 12 must agree that the probable cause threshold has been met in regards to Wilson's having committed a crime.

As you can see from the jury makeup, the process has been rigged from the start, to let Officer Wilson off the hook. For instance, leaks have taken place that are all favorable for Wilson's version of what happened that day. Attorney General Eric Holder said, "Leaking out selective information... These are all the kinds of things that I think are inappropriate. I've said I'm exasperated. That's a nice way of saying it. I'm mad. That's not how things should be done by people in law enforcement."

One might think that Holder's Justice Department investigation may, given his apparent disgust, issue charges for violating Michael Brown's civil rights; after all, the unarmed youth was murdered and the grand jury investigating it was rigged. This looks like a very small possibility.

The *Washington Post* published an article stating that the Justice Department won't be issuing civil rights charges against Wilson, and doesn't want to admit it because "tensions are high" in Ferguson. A Justice Department spokesman called the article "irresponsible," adding that the investigation will continue.

There have been ongoing protests since the Aug. 9 murder of Brown and tensions are high. The so-called "justice" system of this country has no recourse for the most often Black and Brown victims of police and vigilante violence, even when the African-American Attor-



ney General and President verbally state their sympathies with the victims.

Meanwhile, Brown's mother is scheduled to testify at a United Nations convention in Geneva, once again (rightfully) shaming the U.S. government and its lack of serious action. Who could blame her for taking her case to the world audience, when the response from authorities has been so completely inadequate?

It is a very complex, sophisticated, capitalist system that could maintain this bloody and brutal status quo, in the face of such blatant evidence. And those who would protect this system will pay millions of dollars to the family of a victim, they will retrain police officers en masse, they will decry the brutality in the news; but they will not fundamentally attack The New Jim Crow, they have no intention of really changing things.

What made Ferguson different? The key ingredient was

(Photo) Protesters in Clayton, Mo., raise their hands while chanting, "Hands up! Don't shoot!"

the youth and young adults, who came out consistently, a new layer of promising activists. To their immense credit, the youth and young adults have consistently mobilized, and while sell-out leaders are ever-present, they seem not to hold as much sway as they used to.

There is also much to be said about the militarized response to peaceful protesters, broadcasted across the world (despite police roughing up journalists and instituting a No Fly Zone to explicitly stop the media).

In addition to having unique aspects, Ferguson is also a representative picture of so many places in the U.S. The Black and Brown youth are fed up; the constant harassment they are subject to is building considerable resentment, whether it is New York's "stop and frisk" policies, or the Ferguson Police Department's racial profiling African American drivers despite whites' being more likely to have contraband.

There is a national consciousness building around police brutality, people are connecting struggles and seeing beyond the local scene. The demands for justice, for the victims and their families, are being broadened and built upon. While the powers that be are concerned about uprisings ("riots") in which property is damaged, an actual tragedy would be that the youth and community's anger isn't channeled into something that could challenge the racist and classist system on an ongoing basis.

The documented evidence of widespread police brutality is overwhelming and readily available. And that only includes what has been recorded, only a small fraction of the real story.

The lessons of Ferguson are that we should stay in the streets and organize, demand the attention of the world. Rather than putting faith and trust in politicians, demand results and push the struggle forward. The status quo cannot hold the contradictions, the promises versus the reality, which are bound to heat up to a boil at some point. ■

## Socialist Action: Where we stand

Socialist Action is a national organization of activists committed to the emancipation of workers and the oppressed. We strive to revitalize the antiwar, environmental, labor, anti-racist, feminist, student, and other social movements with a mass-action perspective. In the process we hope to bring activists together from different backgrounds into a revolutionary workers' party that can successfully challenge the wealthy elite—whose profit-driven system is driving down living standards and threatens all life on this planet.

Our ultimate goal is a truly democratic, environmentally sustainable, and egalitarian society organized to satisfy human needs rather than corporate greed. We invite you to join us in the struggle to make the world a better place!

We are active partisans of the working class and believe in the need for independent working-class politics—not alliances with the bosses' parties. That is why we call for workers in the U.S. to break from the Democratic and Republican parties to build a Labor Party based on the trade unions.

We support the struggles of those who are specially oppressed under capitalism—women,

queers, national minorities, etc. We support the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities, including Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. We are internationalists, and hold that workers of one country have more in common with workers of another than with their own nation's capitalist class. We seek to link struggles across national boundaries, and to build an international revolutionary movement that will facilitate the sharing of experiences and political lessons. That is why we maintain fraternal relations with the Fourth International

Recognizing the divisions that exist on the left and within the workers' movement, we seek to form united front type organizations around specific issues where various groups have agreement. In this way we seek to maximize our impact and demonstrate the power and effectiveness of mass action.

Socialist Action believes that the capitalist state and its institutions are instruments of the ruling class, and that therefore they cannot be used as tools of the working class but have to be smashed. That is why we fight for revolution, instead of seeking to merely reform or work within the system. When we fight for specific reforms, we do so with the understanding that in the final analysis real social change can only come about with the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of a workers' government, and the fight for socialism.

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# Pennsylvania passes law to gag Mumia and other prisoners

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Since Mumia Abu-Jamal was railroaded to death row on false charges of killing a Philadelphia police officer 33 years ago, he has won acclaim for his eight books and thousands of articles and radio commentaries. Known as the “voice of the voiceless,” Mumia has become one of the foremost progressive political essayists in the United States.

Mumia’s death sentence was vacated in 2011; now he writes from a cell at SCI Mahanoy prison, where he is serving a life sentence without parole.

Pennsylvania state authorities and the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) have tried numerous times to cut off Mumia’s rights to speak out to the public. To cite just a few examples: In 1994, Mumia was commissioned by National Public Radio to deliver a series of commentaries, but the plans were canceled after protests by the FOP and others. After the airing of the HBO documentary “Mumia: The Case for Reasonable Doubt” in 1996, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections banned the use of recording equipment by outsiders in state prisons. And in 1999, soon after Mumia’s first book, “Live from Death Row,” had been printed, the Department of Corrections attempted to prohibit him from publishing again.

Last month saw the latest maneuver by Pennsylvania officials to clamp down on Mumia’s rights to write, speak, and publish. Against the background of the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., and with outrage mounting throughout the country against police violence, the purveyors of “law and order” obviously sense that now is the time to take decisive action against the man who is himself a symbol of the struggle for human rights and against transgressions by the police and prison system.

On Oct. 21, Gov. Tom Corbett signed into law the so-called Revictimization Relief Act, which curtails the First Amendment rights of prisoners to freely communicate with people outside the prison walls through publishing or the media. The signing took place symbolically at the corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and Locust Streets in Philadelphia, where the shooting that Mumia was charged with occurred in 1981, and where Mumia himself was shot and beaten by police to within an inch of his life.

The bill was introduced into the Pennsylvania legislature as retribution against Mumia Abu-Jamal after he had successfully delivered a pre-recorded commencement address to the graduating class at Goddard College in Vermont on Oct. 5. Mumia was a student at Goddard in the 1970s; while he was in prison, in 1996, he completed his BA degree through a correspondence program with Goddard. Mumia spoke to graduating students at Goddard once before, in 2008, despite opposition by the FOP and others.

This time, the Philadelphia chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police and its allies went all out to intimidate the Goddard students and administration into revoking their invitation to Mumia. The controversy that the FOP created over Mumia’s speech was further amplified in the media. As a direct consequence of the hysteria that the police had stirred up, a number of threats of violence and sexual assault were sent to Goddard members. At the last minute, Pennsylvania’s right-wing U.S. Senator, Pat Toome, was enlisted to write a letter to Goddard that included many of the FOP’s fabrications against Mumia—but he too failed to convince the college administration and students to back down.

Bob Kenny, Goddard’s interim president, explained to the media that the students’ choice of Abu-Jamal “shows how this newest group of Goddard graduates expresses their freedom to engage and think radically and critically in a world that often sets up barriers to do just that.” Dylan Byerly, Goddard’s associate director of advancement and alumni affairs, added that “[Abu-Jamal] brings up in racism, imprisonment, the prison industrial complex. I think these conversations are important to have. We encourage our students to have complicated dialogue, and they don’t run from them.”

On the day after Mumia’s speech was broadcast at Goddard, the Revictimization Relief Act was introduced into Pennsylvania’s legislative assembly. The bill was presented as amendments to Pennsylvania’s current Crime Victims Act, and rushed to a vote merely 10 days later. Although a number of Black members of the House had indicated that they would



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

oppose the bill, they proved unable to withstand FOP pressure. Not one member of the House voted against the bill in the end, although 11 Senators opposed it.

The law allows law-enforcement officials or “victims” of a personal injury crime to bring a civil action against an “offender” for conduct that they claim “perpetuates the continuing effect of the crime on the victim,” including inducing a state of “mental anguish.”

The definition of “victim” is left murky; in the case of a homicide, for example, it could conceivably include a family member or friend of the deceased—or anyone else who claims to have been affected. Moreover, the law contains no statute of limitations. It is quite possible that ex-felons would be subject to prosecution under this law even after having served their sentences.

Mumia Abu-Jamal and at least three other prisoners, in conjunction with the Prison Radio Project, have stated that they intend to file suit against the gag law. In addition, Andy Hoover, legislative director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania,

has announced that the ACLU will file suit to overturn the law on constitutional grounds. “The bill is overbroad, vague, and really undermines the fundamental free speech rights in the First Amendment,” Hoover said. “It’s asking judges to preemptively stop speech before it happens.”

Advocates for prisoners’ rights have already made their voices heard against the new law. At least 40 protesters, many of them wearing orange jump suits, greeted Gov. Corbett when he signed the bill in Philadelphia on Oct. 21, and their chanting effectively drowned out the governor’s words. The protest received extensive media coverage, as did a later news conference. The following day, a Temple University meeting of close to 100 people took steps to build a reinvigorated movement for Mumia Abu-Jamal and against the new law.

Plans are in the works for a major event in Philadelphia on Saturday, Dec. 6, to protest this attack on Mumia and the First Amendment by Pennsylvania authorities, and to uphold the rights of all people to speak and resist. ■

## Mumia: ‘They are constitutional outlaws’

By MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Anyone even remotely familiar with my case knows about the “Mumia Rule.” That’s when the court or agency changes its rule or precedent to go against me.

When Amnesty International wrote about my case, that was its essential focus: that laws and precedents that applied to other cases would be changed when it came to me.

In fact, when my habeas corpus case went before the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, one judge in dissent, Judge Ambro, essentially said, “I know of no reason why we don’t apply our precedents to Abu-Jamal.” There was one reason: the Mumia Rule.

Now, the Mumia Rule has been enacted into law, the so-called Victim Revictimization Act, signed into law by Unconstitutional Tom: Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett.

What makes this remarkable is that Corbett, a former attorney general, knows perfectly well that this is an unconstitutional law, in violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution. An unconstitutional law is like no law at all. He knows this, for he’s a lawyer first.

Interestingly, he’s so much a politician, that he was busy running for governor when, under his very nose, children were being raped and abused

in the Penn State scandal. As attorney general, he was on Penn State’s board of trustees at the time these rapes and molestations were happening and did next to nothing—until the scandal broke.

Oh, he reportedly received a generous contribution from the chairman of the board and members—and Jerry Sandusky, the central figure in the Penn State scandal. Nice job, Tom. Too busy picking up campaign contributions to protect the kids?

Every politician and every lawyer who supported this so-called law did so by knowingly violating their oath of office to protect and defend the Pennsylvania Constitution, Article 1, Section 7, and the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

They took an oath to honor the Constitution—not their campaign contributors. They took an oath to protect the constitutional rights of all Pennsylvanians—not just their funders, the FOP, the Fraternal Order of Pigs.

By violating their oaths, they bring disrepute on their oath and their office. By signing a law they knew to be unconstitutional, they departed from the realm of lawmakers—and became constitutional outlaws.

They passed a Mumia Rule, yes. But the damage they have done is greater to themselves than to me. ■



(Left) Workers in Athens bang pots during general strike in July. Now, the country's major unions have called a 24-hour strike for Nov. 27 to protest layoffs and pension cuts demanded by EU lenders.

# Europe: News from the frontlines

By STAN MILLER

*This presentation was made at recent Socialist Action forums in Philadelphia and Hartford, Conn. Stan Miller is a member of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in France and of its minority current, Anticapitalisme et Revolution.*

Europe has been experiencing major recession since 2008. All figures point out that we're in it for the long haul.

In the United States, strong attacks against the working class combined with a policy of quantitative easing by the Federal Reserve and the ability of the U.S. to borrow money almost indefinitely thanks to its role as the world's first superpower did help the American ruling class maintain an acceptable level of profit—even if it is decreasing. Europe, on the other hand, entered a greater recession, especially since 2010. The large sums that were used for the 2008 bailouts dug huge holes in the public finances of many European countries.

There was no quantitative easing from the European Central Bank as countries like Germany, whose economy depends largely on the export of manufacturing goods, favored a strong euro currency. Speculation on government bonds, which pitted countries against one another to give investors their money's worth, led to the sovereign debt crisis of 2010.

The countries of southern Europe and Ireland, contemptuously dubbed the PIGS now by the ruling classes (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain), had enormous amounts of debt to pay and could not borrow anymore—but the capitalists did find a way, as they always do. These states simply had to sell all their assets and get rid of any kind of welfare system in order to reimburse their debt.

The same policies that the IMF had pushed onto South America in the 1980s, with dreadful consequences, were now applied to southern Europe—privatization of public companies, layoffs of hundreds of thousands of civil servants, lowering of the minimum wage, etc.

Since 2010, Greece has been on the forefront of the struggle against austerity. Its public and private-sector unions have called dozens of general strikes. The number of strikers and the turnout in the protests has been incredible. Not only union members but high school students, the unemployed, retirees, and housewives have protested the austerity that was inflicted upon them by the Troika: the IMF, the ECB and the EU.

But however strong and impressive these days of general strikes might have been, they did not manage to put a stop to the attacks on working people. Why? It was because they lacked self-organization. The trade-union bureaucracy would call general strikes for people to vent their anger but not to challenge austerity in the long run. In some local struggles, however, working people did take the matter into their own hands

and it made a huge difference.

I will give just one example of what bottom-up self-organized workers' struggle can achieve. Vio Me was a small-sized chemical factory in the north of Greece. The workers were union members with some ties to the Greek Communist Party, an old-school Stalinist organization. The factory went bankrupt.

With the high unemployment rate in the region, the workers knew they would not be able to get a job again. So they decided to occupy the factory and restart it to produce ecologically sound goods for the community. The Greek Communist Party dropped them at once and ran an issue of their monthly review branding the workers as "petty bourgeois" people who wanted to be bosses. Yet on the contrary, the workers had no illusions that they would carve out their own little socialist paradise out of the capitalist system. For they knew that there is one crime that is worse than all of the others in capitalist society—disrespecting the sacred right of the rich to private property.

There were huge fights with the cops, who tried to drive them out of the factory. But even if they could not rely on the union bureaucracy they did find some support in their community and in the Greek far left. Far left militants joined the workers in fighting the cops, had the workers on tours and rallies all over the country, and collected money in solidarity.

The factory is still occupied today. But the main point is that these workers gave us a blueprint for successful struggle—counting on their own democratically self-organized forces and reaching out to other workers, rather than relying on professional misleaders in the labor movement.

Struggles like Vio Me can actually have the momentum to inspire others to engage in a fightback because they take place in a general situation of instability. In the last European election a few months ago, all countries in southern Europe and in Greece in particular clearly rejected the traditional parties of the system. The center left and the conservatives, which used to gather more than 90 % of the vote, now barely have a majority. Voters on the Greek left decided to switch their allegiance to a reformist party, Syriza. That is not yet socialism, of course, and workers in their fight against austerity will undoubtedly find Syriza in their way, but it is not business as usual either.

In France the crisis is unfolding at a different pace. France was not hit as hard by the crisis as southern European countries because its economy was larger and less overspecialized. But we did take some blows. The first visible signs of austerity were massive layoffs in the auto parts industry in 2009, which led to radical local strikes. These strikes aimed at preventing the layoffs or getting bigger severance packages. Several days of national strikes and protests were called, which gathered as much as 3 million people under the general slogan, "no to austerity," even though the labor officialdom had no intention of carrying the fight to the end.

In the fall of 2010 France saw the biggest strike since 1968 against a pension "reform" scheme that would actually cut benefits. Railroad workers and oil refinery workers were on an all-out strike for 17 days. There were huge protests and one-day strikes in other industries like the postal service, auto, education, civil service, etc.; high school and college students took to the streets as well. It is estimated that 8 million people took to the streets or went on strike at some point.

But the pension reform did pass, and since then austerity has intensified. Not only that but the election of a "left" president (François Hollande from the Socialist Party) was the perfect excuse for the trade-union bureaucracy to do nothing and go along with the layoffs and the concessions.

What happened since Hollande was elected in 2012? People had voted for the "left" to get rid of the unpopular right-wing president Sarkozy and also because they told themselves: it cannot be worse than the right wing. But it actually was worse—in the form of unrelenting attacks on working people, immigrants, and LGBT people. They did not deliver even in terms of basic civil rights: Gaza solidarity demos in July 2014 were banned by the government.

The first gesture of the Hollande government was to give huge tax cuts to the rich. Then they proposed a bill introducing same-sex marriage and also the possibility of artificial insemination for lesbian couples and legal status for children born out of surrogate parents abroad. But in front of massive protests from the right wing, the government let the parliamentary debate drag on for months, opening the way for homophobic hate speech and aggression. At the end, the government gave concessions to the reactionaries; while retaining the right of same-sex marriage, it withdrew the two other provisions of the law.

As we say, each time the left takes a step back, reactionaries take a step forward. In electoral terms, the traditional far right (the National Front of Marine Le Pen) was the first force in the 2014 European election. Regardless of what is going to happen in the 2017 national elections, the damage has been done already; the National Front has popularized chauvinist and racist ideas among working people and the political class.

Some industrial action took place in France in 2014. In June, several strikes unfolded at the same time and managed to link up for brief moments—a six-month local strike of postal workers against precarious labor, a two-week national strike of railroad workers against privatization, and a strike of precarious theater workers against the loss of their unemployment benefits. The first strike was a victory, albeit a hard-earned one. The second went to defeat but saw the emergence of a new generation of workers who might constitute a pool of radicals in the future; and the last strike is still ongoing.

These movements might not change the overall characterization of the period but they do give revolutionaries some leeway to try to obtain victories, while connecting the militant minority of workers who radicalize with socialist ideas. ■

## SA candidate gets 9% in Ontario

The Socialist Action (Canada) candidate for School Board Trustee in Mississauga Wards 3/4, Evan Engering, received 1322 votes, 9 per cent of the total votes cast in that election race.

This is the first time that Socialist Action, founded in 1994, has presented a candidate in an election for public office. Evan Engering, a leading member of Youth for Socialist Action, a young worker, and a member of UFCW, is now a student at Sheridan College. His campaign relied on social media, a website, a cable TV appearance, and a modest leaflet—with no funds for lawn signs, a campaign office, or flashy advertising.

But when over 1000 people in a working-class section of Mississauga vote for an openly socialist candidate, it is no fluke. It demonstrates a real interest in radical change. Socialist Action will soon explore the extent of this new attraction to socialist ideas by hosting a public meeting in the community, 20 minutes west of Toronto. ■

# Europe hit by economic slowdown

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

*Below are portions of the World Political Situation Report, delivered by Michael Schreiber to the Socialist Action National Convention on Oct. 18.*

Capitalism's offensive against the world's working class—which gathered momentum as a consequence of the major economic recession that began in late 2007—continues unabated. Even in the major industrial nations, the ruling class has been waging an all-out struggle to make working people shoulder the debilitating effects of the economic crisis.

The watchword everywhere has been “austerity,” signifying a program of wholesale cutbacks in social services, jobs, working conditions, and wage and benefit packages, along with the elimination of environmental or other impediments to the free flow of capital. Indications are that “austerity” policies will deepen.

Recently, the International Monetary Fund sounded the alarm that the growth of national economies around the world is far weaker than had been anticipated. The so-called “recovery” from the recession appears to be stalling—especially in Europe.

The IMF suggested that a renewed eurozone debt crisis would become the “major issue” facing the world economy. It warned that the crisis was now spreading from smaller economies like Portugal and Greece—in the latter country, unemployment levels are still over 25 percent—to core nations like Italy and France. Actually, the current crisis has rebounded back with renewed intensity to countries like Greece; a weaker bond market has made it far more difficult for them to pay their debts.

The IMF also underscored the fact that several economic indicators have recently declined for Germany. Stagnation in Germany, known as the engine of European growth, could have dire consequences for the rest of the continent. The German economy shrunk by 0.2 percent in the second quarter, and continued to slump throughout the summer. Exports fell by a significant 5.8% in August, the biggest drop since the beginning of the recession in 2009. Unemployment rose in September, and investments tailed off in both domestic and foreign sectors.

Britain, which has had the fastest growth of the major economies, also seems to be slowing down. Manufacturing barely grew in August, with economists blaming the slump on the lack of demand in the European markets that Britain exports to. Uncertainty stemming from the conflict in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia are another obstacle to export growth in some European countries.

Europe now faces the threat of a second (or as some see it, a third) dip into recession. Everywhere in Europe, officials are speaking of economic “turbulence” ahead. In fact, Europe has never recovered fully from the recession—overall Gross Domestic Product for the European Union countries is still well below its peak in early 2008, and corporate profits remain 23 percent below those of 2008. Profit margins have been around 5.5 percent this year, down from 9 percent before the recession—indicating that the working class has not been squeezed hard enough to suit the bosses.

There has been talk here and there (especially in France) of a necessity to shift to what are called Keynesian solutions—the use of government funds for job-creating public-works programs. But the capitalist class has generally resisted these ideas, especially in Germany, expressing the fear that it would raise the public debt still further and also raise corporate taxes. So for now, the program of European capitalism continues to be for more and deeper “austerity.”

But workable solutions are not easy for European capitalism. Flat or depressed wages—as well as heightened unemployment—has subdued the growth of a consumer market both in home economies and in exports. In Germany, wages fell in real terms in 2013, although workers made some gains this year. Wages have barely risen in Britain as well.

The continuing economic crisis has only heightened the competition between advanced industrial countries. This year, for example, European heating-oil refiners are facing a glut of cheaper oil and natural gas—which increasingly comes from the United States. European companies have had to cut prices, which has lowered their profits to just 10 percent of what they received in 2012. Some companies are closing their refineries. Italy's largest oil company is negotiating with the unions to shut down over half of its refinery capacity, with over 3500 jobs at risk.

This competition extends to investments in less de-



(Above) April 2014 Euro March in Brussels.

veloped countries, where the major imperialist powers are vying with each other (though sometimes cooperating) to secure areas to invest their financial capital, as well as to extract raw materials—like oil and gas.

A constellation of countries that were formerly in the orbit of the Soviet Union presents new opportunities for capitalist investment. We see those countries as the legacy of a counter-revolution, presided over by the jaded and corrupt remnants of the Stalinist bureaucracy, whose leaders stole untold amounts of state property and privatized it into their own hands, becoming capitalist billionaires virtually overnight. These counterrevolutions were put into effect to a certain measure through the agency of the United States—and to a lesser extent, Germany and other imperialist states—which sent agents into those countries in an attempt to gain them as military allies and fields for investment.

Since then, Germany and other Western European countries have had some success in capital investments in Eastern Europe. The United States has been ever present in the former Soviet Republics in Central Asia, and particularly in the oil-rich Caspian and Caucasus regions, where it butts up directly against Russian interests.

Studies show that Ukraine might have the fourth largest deposits of frackable shale gas in the world. This helps explain the intense interest of Western capitalism in bringing Ukraine into the European Union and into NATO, while muscling Russian capitalism out of the picture.

In the meantime, the U.S. has virtually encircled Russia with military installations. NATO plans to base some 4000 battle-ready soldiers in Eastern Europe as part of a new “rapid reaction force.” As a step toward that goal, military exercises have been conducted regularly in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states in recent months. In November, 2500 soldiers from the U.S., Canada, Germany, Britain, and several Eastern European nations will participate in war games in Lithuania, just miles from the Russian border.

In summary, despite continued and heightened attacks on the working class by international capital-

ism—leading to a huge increase in poverty worldwide and a huge shift of wealth upward to the already wealthy—none of the efforts by the masses to thwart these attacks has yet resulted in lasting victories.

In recent years we have seen many mobilizations and revolts in the world, most often centering on questions of political democracy—as with the present demonstrations in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, inadequate leadership among the masses has allowed these struggles to be diverted, defeated, and even turned back into reactionary channels. In many instances, we have seen the traditional parties that workers looked to for leadership—often large social democratic parties and parties with Stalinist origins—abandon any semblance of a program or struggles to aid their working-class constituencies. With few exceptions, they fully embrace neoliberal capitalist programs.

The absence of effective working-class leadership has allowed ultra-right, ultra-nationalist, and fascist parties to grow in some areas, luring petty bourgeois and even working-class sectors into their ranks with rhetoric that blames social problems on immigrants or minority ethnic populations. Thus in Sweden, a few weeks ago, although the social democrats were able to reclaim power in a minority government, together with the Greens and the Left Party, the major parliamentary gains were by an ultra-right and anti-immigrant party, the Sweden Democrats.

Like their counterparts in France, Britain, and elsewhere, the Sweden Democrats have for now put away their neo-Nazi regalia, put on business suits, and presented themselves as a “respectable” electoral party. But the capitalist class knows that fascist thugs will have value for them in the long term as a force of repression and violence to be used when the repetitive charade of bourgeois elections is no longer successful in snaring working people, and great masses of people are in revolt in the streets.

And thus, the patient construction of a revolutionary party, capable of providing effective leadership to huge masses in motion, remains the central task for the working class and its allies worldwide. ■

**As we go to press, court trial is proceeding in Detroit for Rasmea Odeh,** arrested in October 2013 for not mentioning in papers she filled out for immigration to the United States that she had been jailed in Israel. *Socialist Action* urges our readers to protest the U.S. government's unjust charges against Rasmea.

The Rasmea Defense Committee has described the initial trial events as follows: “Opening statements were made today [Nov. 5] in the trial of Rasmea Odeh, beloved leader of Chicago's Palestinian community, and the first witnesses for the prosecution were called to the stand. Again, supporters from across the Midwest packed the courtroom.

“Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark Jebson opened for the prosecution, laying out the government's case. According to him, Rasmea should be found guilty of immigration fraud for her failure to disclose the 1970

conviction by Israel. Lead defense attorney Michael Deutsch hit back hard with an opening statement that began, “Odeh was convicted by a military court that was occupying Palestinian land. [With] judges who are soldiers ... Rasmea Odeh embodies the history of the Palestinian people.”

Department of Homeland Security Special Agent Stephen Webber was the prosecution's first witness. He testified to initiating and leading the investigation against Rasmea since 2010. According to the defense committee, the record of his interview with Rasmea reveals that he lied to her. He “claimed he was questioning her because he had a genuine interest in learning more about the conflict between Palestine and Israel. In reality, he was trying to entrap her.”

For more information on Rasmea Odeh's case, go to <http://www.uspcn.org> and <http://www.stopfbi.net>. ■

# The Kurdish question

Jonathan Spyer



(Left) Kurdish fighters in Syria.

By FLORIAN WILDE

*This is an updated, extended and revised version of an article that first appeared in German in the September 2014 issue of **Marx21**. Translation is by Loren Balhorn for **International Viewpoint**, the Fourth International's English-language journal.*

The West has suddenly begun supporting various Kurdish organisations in its fight against the Islamic State. So why is the largest Kurdish organisation of all, the PKK, still outlawed? This article discusses current developments in Kurdistan and gives a brief overview of the history of the Kurdish liberation movement and the PKK's illegal status in Germany. It argues for a radical left strategy focused on defeating the ban on the PKK.

**August 2014:** Terrorist militias under the leadership of the Islamic State (IS) storm a region in northern Iraq near the Syrian border inhabited by the Yazidis, a millennia-old monotheistic ethno-religious Kurdish minority. Divisions of the Peshmerga, the region's armed forces, flee from the advancing IS troops without firing a shot. The Yazidis beg the Peshmerga to at least leave them their weapons so as to give them a chance at defending themselves, but the Peshmerga refuse.

Tens of thousands of Yazidis are forced to flee into the nearby mountains. Those who stay behind are subjected to brutal, genocidal acts: thousands killed, hundreds buried alive, and countless acts of rape, kidnapping and enslavement are perpetrated against Yazidi women. To add insult to injury, IS fighters ransack and destroy ancient Yazidi holy sites.

But even those who were able to flee faced the possibility of a looming humanitarian catastrophe. The fleeing Yazidis were surrounded by the IS and trapped in the mountains with little food or water under conditions of extreme heat. Abandoned by the rest of the world, it seemed as if they had little choice but to wait for death—that is, until unexpected reinforcements arrived: divisions of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (PYG) break through IS lines in northern Syria, while guerilla fighters from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) advance from the north and fighters from their Iranian sister organisation, the PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan), from the east.

The Kurdish fighters manage to establish an escape corridor, through which tens of thousands pass into liberated Kurdish areas of northern Syria. It is only days after their escape that the U.S. bombing campaign and accompanying Peshmerga offensive begins. Surviving Yazidis repeatedly insisted to Western journalists that "it wasn't the Americans who saved us. It was God and the PKK."

The northern Syrian Kurds came to the Yazidis' assistance despite having to defend themselves from the

**'The Kurdish people are the largest ethnic group without a state in the world. Their interests were ignored after WWI.'**

IS on their home territory as well. The north Syrian Kurds in question are forces under the command of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a sister organisation of the PKK. PYD forces joined the struggle against Bashar al-Assad at the outset of the Syrian revolution and expelled his troops from the northern parts of the country.

Following this victory they declared themselves neutral in the ongoing civil war and restricted themselves to defending their territory. It was here on this territory that the Kurds began building a self-organised and democratic form of self-governance called "Rojava" that is stunningly unique in the world today.

In Rojava one finds a parliament with set quotas mandating the participation and inclusion of women in parliament and all levels of government, with similar rules for ethnic and religious minorities. To defend the region the Kurds established the non-partisan and non-sectarian defense units of the YPG, which also include large independent women's divisions—establishing an island of hope toward self-organization and emancipation in the middle of the nightmare that is the Syrian civil war.

This island of hope, however, was threatened from the onset: Turkey closed its borders in an attempt to starve the Kurdish self-government. Ankara also supported the Islamist terror group ISIS, the predecessor to the IS, which attacked the Kurdish regions from the south.

The IS acquired extensive caches of weapons from the fleeing Iraqi army after they overtook Mosul, a city of over one million in northern Iraq, including heavy weaponry originally purchased from the U.S. These weapons were immediately dispatched to Syria to be used in a major offensive against Kobanê, a centre of the Kurdish self-government, in July 2014.

The YPG, militarily out-gunned and outmatched, prepared for a desperate fight-back. But, once again, assistance came from outside: people all across the Kurdish parts of Turkey donated money, food, and medicine to support besieged Kobanê. Thousands set up camp along the border to destroy the border fence in a provocative act of civil disobedience and thereby broke through the Turkish blockade.

The PKK sent hundreds of its guerrilla fighters down

from the mountains to join the struggle in Kobanê, and volunteers from all over Kurdistan as well as members of left-wing Turkish political parties joined them.

This impressive show of solidarity was successful: the offensive of the IS was stopped, Kobanê has still not fallen, and the democratic experiment of Rojava could live on. But at the time of this writing, Kobanê is once again under threat: the IS began a renewed offensive against the city at the end of September. IS terrorists have managed to slip into the city and engage in house-to-house fighting with YPG units. After long delays, the U.S. decided to "support" Kurdish forces by bombing IS positions.

## The Kurdish liberation movement — a historical overview

The IS offensive in Syria and Iraq has thrust the Kurdish question into the limelight of world politics for the first time in years, as well as highlighting the contradictions manifest in the West's attitude toward it. Western allies like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have at the very least tolerated (and perhaps even supported) the rise of the IS for quite some time, while historically the U.S., EU, and

thus Germany have treated the PKK—the single most effective and successful force currently fighting the IS—as a terrorist organization.

The Kurdish people are the largest ethnic group without a state in the world. Their national interests went ignored by the major imperialist powers during the re-division of the Middle East after World War I, leaving up to 18 million Kurds living in Turkey, between five and seven million in Iran, five million Iraq and two million in Iran today.

The 20th-century history of the Kurds is a history of oppression and resistance. The century witnessed multiple uprisings for national independence, democratic freedoms, and cultural self-determination. In fact, an independent Kurdish state with loyalties to the Soviet Union emerged in Iran after World War II. After being defeated by Persian troops, left-wing Kurdish groups continued their armed struggle—first against the dictatorship of the Shah, and later against the clerical regime of the mullahs. Iraq, however, remained the center of the Kurdish resistance movement for many years.

This movement consisted primarily of two different parties leading the struggle against Saddam Hussein and for an independent Kurdistan: the traditionalist and conservative Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP), and the ideologically somewhat more progressive Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

As history would have it, however, the Kurdish freedom fighters who would later come to be known as the Peshmerga quickly became the playthings of various foreign powers. For example, during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988, Iraq supported the Iranian Kurds while Iran armed the Iraqi Kurds; at the same time, the U.S. supported its then ally Saddam Hussein in his bloody suppression of the (Iraqi) Kurdish uprising. It was in the small Kurdish city of Halabja that, for the first time since World War II, German poison gas was once again implicated in mass killings—German corporations had sold Saddam the chemicals used in the massacre.

This constellation shifted in 1990, at the outset of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. With the outbreak of the first Gulf War, Iraqi Kurds suddenly became potential allies of the U.S. The U.S. established a no-fly zone across northern Iraq in the 1990s in return for their participation in the war, under the protection of which Kurdish fighters were able to expel Iraqi soldiers from the territory.

The Kurds also fought on the side of the U.S. in the second Gulf War in 2003, and were rewarded with an autonomous region following Saddam's fall. This region was under control of the KDP and PUK, but only encompassed part of the Kurdish-populated areas of Iraq. The PKK was also able to establish guerrilla bas-

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es there for their struggle against the Turkish state.

Kurdish uprisings continued to occur in Turkey itself as well. Oppression of Kurds is particularly severe in Turkey, due primarily to the fact that their existence as a separate ethnic and cultural group clashes with the vision of a unitary ethnic Turkish state as projected by the founder of modern Turkey, Atatürk. Kurds were forbidden from speaking their own language, using Kurdish names or even writing the letters W and X, which exist in the Kurdish, but not Turkish, language.

Following a series of large student and labour-led movements in the 1970s, Turkey became host to a plethora of large, left-wing parties, including the PKK, founded in 1978 by a group of left-wing activists centred around Abdullah Öcalan. The party adopted a Marxist-Leninist political programme and oriented itself towards armed revolution with the aim of establishing an independent, socialist Kurdistan.

The PKK was forced into exile with many other leftist groups in Turkey in 1980, after right-wing military officers enacted a coup and unleashed a wave of savage repression against the Turkish left.

The PKK found refuge in the Lebanese training camps of the Palestinian popular liberation front, PFLP, and fought with them against the Israeli invasion in 1982. The PKK began its own bloody guerilla war in the Turkish part of Kurdistan in 1984 and began establishing mass support amongst the Kurdish population. This mass support allowed the PKK to initiate its own “Kurdish intifada” in the early 1990s, culminating in a series of mass uprisings. Internationally, however, the PKK was often the subject of criticism from the left due to its authoritarian leadership style, which including the killing of internal opponents, and strong nationalist sentiments.

Öcalan himself was kidnapped by Turkish secret services (most likely with the assistance of the Mossad) on 15 February 1999, and has been imprisoned on the island of Imrali ever since. In response to his arrest, tens of thousands of Kurds launched protests all over the world.

In Switzerland the army had to be called up to protect UN buildings from Kurdish demonstrators. In Germany, Kurdish demonstrators organized a whole series of marches and occupations of public buildings. An attempt to occupy the Israeli embassy ended in the fatal shooting of four Kurdish protesters, for which no Mossad agents were ever prosecuted.

### The PKK ban in Germany

By the time of Öcalan’s arrest the PKK had already been banned in Germany for six years. In the early 1990s the PKK with its 15,000 members constituted one of the strongest left-wing groups in Germany and organised numerous demonstrations and political actions against the brutal oppression faced by Kurds in Turkey and the continuing sales of German weaponry to its NATO partner.

PKK supporters engaged in militant actions like highway blockades, self-immolations and attacks on Turkish travel agencies and the offices of Turkish fascist groups based in Germany. The German state banned the PKK in 1993 with the intention of assisting Turkey against one of its strongest opponents; equally significant, however, was the wave of racist and anti-immigrant hysteria gripping Germany at the time.

The campaign to ban the PKK, the so-called “Terror-Kurds,” was much more significant than the legal action taken against other left-wing groups by the German state, for it amounted to a de facto ban on political activity for one of Germany’s largest immigrant communities. The U.S. and EU soon followed, placing the PKK on their respective “terror lists.” To this day, simply displaying a PKK symbol at a political demonstration is enough to provoke German police to attack and disperse it. There have been 4500 legal proceedings related to PKK activities since 2004 alone. Since 1996, over 100 PKK functionaries have been penalized, some sentenced to prison.

As late as October of this year, the German Foreign Ministry described the PKK as being equally as dangerous as the Islamic state. In the same report, the ministry emphasised the continued mobilizational capacity of the PKK: according to the Foreign Ministry, the PKK has 14,000 members and a mobilizable periphery of roughly 50,000 additional Kurds and sympathizers.

This strength was reflected in the demonstrations in the first half of October, which saw thousands of Kurds take to the streets, demanding solidarity with Kobanê, an end to the PKK ban and Öcalan’s release.

### The changing nature of the PKK

Öcalan’s arrest was followed by a phase of critical self-reflection and new perspectives within the Kurdish movement. The PKK, animated by the realization that a state alone is no guarantee of democracy and freedom, abandoned demands for an independent



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

## ‘Western assistance to the Kurds is intended to consolidate the influence of imperialism.’

state, advocating a form of “democratic confederalism” in its place. This confederalism would, in practice, mean an association of local democratic structures of self-organization and self-governance within the existing states. Feminist and ecological demands began to receive more attention within the party. Öcalan’s recent political writings exhibit clear influences from both the Zapatistas as well as the North American anarchist Murray Bookchin.

Within Turkey itself, the PKK contributed to building a broad alliance with various Turkish left parties, as well as the women’s and LGBT movements. The alliance’s presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, received nearly 10% of the vote in the August 2014 election, uniting the Kurdish Left, the “old” Turkish Left and the new generation of activists from the Gezi Park movement.

Led by the PKK and its sister organisations, Kurdistan has witnessed the emergence of numerous grassroots movements for democracy, education, gender equality and social justice. These form the left-wing alternative within the Kurdish movement to the corrupt and pro-imperialist KDP and PUK. These two parties seek an independent state in northern Iraq and enjoy Western backing; in return, the West expects unrestricted access to oil fields in the area as well as political marginalisation of the PKK and its allies.

There is strong evidence indicating that the leadership of the northern Iraqi Kurds intentionally withdrew its troops and abandoned the Yazidis to the IS in order to force the West’s hand to intervene and provide weaponry to the Kurdish resistance. Whether the abandonment was intentional or not, the desired effect was achieved, as the Peshmerga have now begun to receive weapons from the West.

What the conservative Kurdish groups did not expect, however, was the PKK’s determined intervention on behalf of the Yazidis and the widespread support and sympathy this generated within the Kurdish population. Thousands of Yazidis joined the PKK and YPG and are now setting up their own self-defense units. These units desperately need modern weaponry but will not be receiving it from the West, for whom the PKK and YPG remain little more than “terrorists”.

In response to this unanswered need, a host of German radical left groups (Neue Antikapitalistische Organisation [NAO], Antifaschistische Revolutionäre Aktion Berlin [ARAB] and Perspektive Kurdistan) have launched the “Weapons for the YPG” campaign. They managed to collect over €40,000 in a matter of weeks. A similar initiative started by the Danish left-wing party Eenhedslisten sent over €7,000 to the PYD.

### Against the PKK ban

The desperate need for weapons notwithstanding, it would be wrong for the radical left to support the West’s arming of the Iraqi Kurdish organisations KDP and PUK. Western assistance to these Kurds is intended to stabilize and consolidate the influence of impe-

(Above) Demonstrators in Kurdish-held area of Syria hold photo of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.

rialist powers in the region—precisely the imperialist powers that enabled the rise of the IS in the first place. It is highly possible that the same weapons currently being used against the IS will soon be turned against the PKK.

Rather than get caught up in a debate about the merits of Western support, [\*see footnote] the Western and the German left in particular should start a powerful campaign against the PKK ban. A repeal of the ban would constitute direct assistance to the most important leftist formation in the Middle East and thus a blow against imperialist interests. Given the nearly 800,000 Kurds currently living in Germany, there is no question that the left could mobilize around the issue successfully.

Moreover, a repeal of the PKK ban is politically feasible: even conservative media outlets are beginning to acknowledge the contradiction between the West’s fight against IS on the one hand, and its suppression of the PKK on the other. The radical left should organise demonstrations against the ban and openly display the banned flags and symbols of the PKK. These would be concrete, visible signs of anti-imperialist solidarity with the progressive and democratic movements in the Middle East. ■

**\*FOOTNOTE: Socialist Action disagrees with the author on this point. We think that the issue of imperialism’s armed intervention in the area is of paramount importance. We stand opposed to any and all U.S. and EU imperialist intervention in all its forms. The inclusion of demands like “U.S./EU Imperialism Out of the Middle East!” and “Stop the Imperialist Bombing!” are essential to building an international antiwar movement that best advances the right to self-determination of all oppressed nations and peoples.**

### GLOSSARY:

**IS (Islamic State):** reactionary Salafist organisation pursuing the establishment of a theocratic Islamic state in Syria and Iraq via military means. The group was known as ISIS until June 2014.

**Yazidis:** religious minority in northern Iraq, northern Syria and southeast Turkey. Most of the 800,000 adherents speak Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish).

**KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party):** Traditionalist and conservative Kurdish political party in Iraq, led by the Barzani clan.

**Peshmerga:** Armed forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government in semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan.

**PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan):** Kurdish guerilla organisation based in Iran, sister organisation of the PKK.

**PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party):** Left-wing underground Turkish organisation based in Turkey, listed as “terrorist organization” by the EU, USA, UK, Canada, Australia and others.

**PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan):** Social democratic Kurdish political party in Iraq, led by the Talabani clan.

**PYD (Democratic Union Party):** Kurdish political party in Syria, sister party of the PKK. In the course of the Syrian civil war, the PYD established a self-organised democratic system of governance in a semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan (“Rojava”).

**YPG (People’s Protection Units):** Kurdish militia in Syria with political ties to the PKK and PYD.

# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

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## Did Canada's intervention in Middle East prompt Ottawa shootings?

By EVAN ENGERING  
and BARRY WEISLEDER

Immediately after two Canadian Forces soldiers were killed in separate incidents on Oct. 20 and 22, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper called the assailants "terrorists." Leader of the Official Opposition New Democratic Party, Tom Mulcair, disagreed, citing a blend of factors, psychological and political.

Harper seized on the gun fight in a hallway of Parliament, in which a deranged man with a rifle fell in a hail of police bullets, to step up his assault on civil liberties. Mulcair and the labour-based NDP opposed Harper's words, but should oppose his direction on principle, not just on semantic grounds.

Against a backdrop of widespread grief for the dead soldiers and their families, Harper and the business media stoked the fires of patriotism, which spilled over into Islamophobic acts across the country.

The assailants, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau and Martin Couture-Rouleau, recent converts to Islam, were not linked to ISIS. What is not known is whether they lashed out for political or personal reasons. Thus, their actions can be seen as an indictment of Canada's faltering mental health care system. Or they can be cited as "blow-back" from Western military intervention in the Middle East.

Or both.

In any event, the context of the attack on the soldiers, and the Conservative government's rhetoric in response to it, reveal another crack in the myth that Canada is a peace-keeping state.

In early October, Prime Minister Stephen Harper committed fighter jets, pilots, and ground crew to join the U.S.-led bombing campaign in war-torn Iraq and Syria. That came on the heels of 13 years of Canadian military intervention in Afghanistan, and Ottawa's involvement in NATO wars in the former Yugoslavia, in the Persian Gulf, Libya, and Somalia. This is not to mention Harper's brash support for the Israeli apartheid state, and for its brutal summer 2014 onslaught against the people of Gaza.

Conservative foreign policy makes many enemies at home and abroad, but individual attacks against military personnel on Canadian soil play directly into the hands of the capitalist rulers, fanning the flames of pro-war sentiment, racism, and jingoism.

Stephen Harper and his collaborators, by their engagement in military interventions in the East, have certainly outraged peoples there, fanning the flames of their discontent with the West. Every bomb dropped by Canadian, American and allied fighter jets on Iraq and Syria brings fresh recruits to ISIS.

And the context of intervention goes back much further. In this centennial year of World War I it is timely to recall Canada's contribution to the sad legacy of big power nationalism and imperialism as it continues to plague the peoples of the Middle East. Canada joined the World War at Britain's behest to fight for the class interests of the Triple Entente rulers against those of the Central Powers. Arms producers became obscenely rich, while millions of workers died in trenches, at sea, and by aerial bombardment.

That conflagration was sparked by an assassination in Sarajevo that detonated an already tense situation. For the Arab and Kurdish peoples then living in the countries now under attack, it meant the drawing of artificial borders along lines beneficial to the British and French colonial powers. The foreign rulers called that infamous arrangement the Sykes-Picot Agreement. It is no surprise that the current prime target of the Western rulers, the Islamic State, pledges to abolish the borders imposed by Sykes-Picot.

Prime Minister Harper, in the wake of the Ottawa shootings, made an emotive speech that was broadcast live. In it, he condemned any and all who attack Canadian soldiers as somehow attacking all "Canadians as a free and democratic people," and he doubled down on his "national security" plans. But one is hard pressed to recall the Prime Minister's making such a hard-line speech regarding the hundreds of missing and murdered aboriginal women. He continues to refuse to launch an inquiry into that ongoing tragedy.

In the face of Conservative plans to legislate U.S. Patriot Act-style infringements on civil liberties, progressive and working-class people should stand up to the government and its insidious plans. We should expose the big lies—the false claims that the Canadian state has a duty or right to interfere militarily in the Middle East, that the Canadian Forces are serving to protect all rather than uphold the interests of corporate Canada, and that we should accept the expansion of the surveillance state for our own good.

Instead, the streets should be filled with demonstrators demanding: Canada out of NATO! Ottawa, Washington, London and allies, Out of the Middle East! ■

## Harper 'radicalizes' his attack on civil liberties

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper is using the October shootings in Ottawa, and the deadly assault that killed another soldier east of Montreal, to advance its authoritarian agenda.

With Bill C-44, the "Protection of Canada from Terrorism Act," Harper seeks to increase the authority of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) to spy on Canadians and foreigners abroad, and to share information with foreign agencies—although that might expose innocent people to imprisonment and torture, as happened in the infamous case of Maher Arar.

In addition, the government proposes to give blanket anonymity to CSIS informants whose testimony federal prosecutors want to use as evidence, even though it would make it harder for accused people to defend themselves in court.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Conservative Public Safety Minister Stephen Blaney told Radio-Canada that the government might make it easier to arrest and detain people without charging them.

Preventative arrest already exists in the Criminal Code. It was introduced by a Liberal government in

2002, allowed to lapse after five years, and then reinstated by the Conservatives, with Liberal support in 2013.

Although never used, the Harper administration is toying with the idea of broadening the law to target not only innocent persons it believes *will commit* a terrorist act in the future, but also those who the security services *deem to be terrorists*. That "deeming" could include commission of "thought crimes" like claiming on-line that terrorist acts are justified.

What's next—making it illegal to support governments on a list of regimes labelled "state terrorist" by Ottawa or Washington—like those in Gaza, Iran, Venezuela, or Cuba?

Sadly, the assault on civil liberties is all too familiar.

In October 1970, the Liberal government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act. It suspended basic freedoms of speech, press, and assembly after members of the Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) had kidnapped a British diplomat and a provincial cabinet minister, who was later murdered. Trudeau claimed that Canada faced "an apprehended insurrection." The claim was proven false. And it also emerged that the RCMP had infiltrated the FLQ and pushed for violent actions.

The repressive measures implemented by the state, including the military occupation of Quebec and the arrest and detention of over 500 labour, political, and cultural personalities who were never charged with an offense, backfired big time. The ugly sweep contributed to the 1976 election of the first pro-independence government in Quebec.

Unlike Pierre Trudeau (whose son Justin now leads the federal Liberal Party), Harper didn't wait for an excuse to bring down the hammer. His Bill C-24, the "Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act," enables the government to revoke Canadian citizenship from dual citizens—like those who demonstrate support for a foreign power Ottawa doesn't like.

And in a related move designed to undermine social solidarity, the Tory regime has restricted the ability of refugee claimants to access social assistance. That followed its earlier decision to limit refugee claimants' resort to universal public health care.

The fact that the latest exclusionary step was buried in a government omnibus budget bill, containing hundreds of pages of unrelated measures, says a great deal about Harper's modus operandi, and about the growing trend of capitalist rule that must be confronted and defeated. ■

## Big business wins in Toronto election

Big business scored a big win in the Oct. 28 Toronto municipal election. While voters rejected the mayoral bid of ultra-conservative Councillor Doug Ford, they put Bay Street big-wig and corporate fixer John Tory into the top job in Canada's biggest city. Ex-New Democrat MP Olivia Chow marginalized herself with one of the least effective city campaigns in memory.

Doug Ford was a last-minute stand-in for his drug-addicted, cancer-afflicted, younger brother Rob Ford. For four years, Rob was Toronto's right-wing populist rogue mayor, and the butt of international late-night TV comedy.

Tory won with 40 per cent of the city-wide votes cast. Ford attracted 34 per cent, and Chow trailed with 23 per cent. The turnout was 61 per cent, a significant rise from 51 per cent in 2010. In Mississauga to the west, only 36 per cent bothered to vote.

At his victory party, John Tory, who was briefly leader of the Ontario Progressive

Conservative Party, and for a longer stint was CEO at the Canadian Football League, crowed that the result put an "end to the division that has paralyzed City Hall." The pro-Liberal Party Toronto Star seemed to agree, hailing the "return to normalcy". A look at Tory's platform reveals that it has much in common with the Fords' agenda—minus the soap-operatic drama.

Tory pledged to privatize garbage collection on the east side of the city, following the Ford union-busting initiative west of Yonge Street. Tory promised no new taxes on the rich. He offered no social housing construction plan, and no measures to alleviate poverty and hunger in the city. His answer to traffic congestion, now at epic proportions, is a pie-in-the-sky scheme that involves borrowing billions and hoping for higher property tax revenues at future rapid transit stops.

Olivia Chow, widow of deceased federal NDP Leader Jack Layton, led in opinion

polls from January to June, but faltered over the summer months.

Chow's vacuous message "New Mayor. Better City," and her weak style, led establishment and middle-class forces, who were desperate to purge Toronto of the Ford embarrassment, to rally behind John Tory's "sensible" option.

It is no wonder that the two campaigns were so similar in their blandness. Chow's was run by Liberal and NDP honchos. Tory's was headed by Conservative and Liberal wags. It was a difference without a distinction.

Chow shifted slightly to the left after Labour Day. She advanced the idea of a higher property transfer tax on residences that sell for over \$2 million. But it was too little, too late.

For 10 months she said nothing about police racial profiling and deadly shootings by cops, nor about the imminent flow of enviro-threatening bitumen through Pipe

Line 9 across the top of the city.

Chow followed in the footsteps of Andrea Horwath, the Ontario NDP Leader, whose Spring provincial election campaign failed in similar ways. Their common error: fiscal conservatism that alienates a left working-class base, while proving unable to win support among the affluent or in business circles.

The composition of the new city council is not unlike the outgoing one. Thirty-six incumbents were re-elected to fill the 44 council seats—producing a snake pit of hard-line conservatives, compromising liberals, and soft-on-austerity New Democrats. In other words, the neo-liberal agenda of cutbacks and privatization is alive and well. Residents and workers face four more years of battles against austerity measures, while poverty, violence and congestion deepen.

The election was also a magnet for racism, sexism, and homophobia, which "Ford Nation" excreted and excused. Among the

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# Corporate raiders target U.S. mail

By MARTY GOODMAN

Corporate raiders targeted the United States Postal Service (USPS) for privatization as far back as the Nixon administration, and they are about to gain ground today unless working people stop them. Some 100,000 postal jobs are thought to be at risk, jobs that are overwhelmingly union.

A sinister part of the privatization drive is the over 50 post offices nationally that are up for sale or already sold as of February of this year. Corporate hustlers are hoping to convert post offices into restaurants, malls, and condos. Many post offices up for sale have been designated National Landmarks for their architectural beauty or for the works of art they contain.

The privatizers hope that remaining USPS jobs and services will fall into the greedy hands of Fed-X, UPS, and other corporate outfits that are hell bent on profits. The current estimated value of USPS facilities nationwide is approximately \$110 billion, a bonanza for corporate vultures. That inventory includes designated architectural and artistic landmarks from San Francisco to New York City, and from Salem, Ore., to Stamford, Conn.

Behind the corporate privatization drive are forces like "The Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service," created in 2004 as the stealthy name for the large mailer association whose industry is estimated at \$1 trillion. Members include Time Warner (*People Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, CNN, etc.), Bank of America, American Express, Pitney Bowes, and AT&T. Another player is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a group of state lawmakers across the country, funded by donors like the ultra-conservative Koch brothers—funders of the right-wing think tank, the Cato Institute—large oil companies, pharmaceutical companies, and tobacco interests.

Benefiting from the corporate raid is CBRE, the world's largest commercial real estate broker and sole manager of all Postal Service property sales. The chairman of CBRE is Richard Blum, husband of California's powerful U.S. Senator, Democrat Dianne Feinstein.

The USPS employs over 500,000 workers; it is the second largest employer in the nation after Walmart, and represents a potential powerhouse of working-class resistance. Its two biggest unions are the American Postal Workers Union (APWU)—representing trucking, mail processing, and clerks—and the National Association of Letter Carriers.

A diverse workforce, USPS workers are about 40% African American, Hispanic, and Asian. Women are about 36% of workers.

The corporate media have repeated the campaign of right-wing lies against the USPS. A so-called "White Paper" was released in January and paid for by the Fortune 500 Company Pitney Bowes Inc., which is heavily involved in corporate packaging and mailing. The "White Paper" outlines a program of massive downsizing, privatization of all aspects of postal work, and half-pay for many workers.

The public only hears that the USPS is going broke because it is being replaced by the internet. While the internet has decreased first-class mail, internet-driven USPS parcel deliveries are way up because the postal service is less expensive than private carriers like UPS and Fed-X.

But the internet is only part of the story—the cover story. The real deal has been bipartisan legislation, which acts to make the USPS's survival extremely difficult, if not impossible. Introduced by right-wing Congressman Darrel Issa of California, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 (PAEA), mandates the USPS to fund health benefits 75 years into the future—for employees not yet born—an obligation that no other federal agency or private corporation has. (Can you imagine your boss being so concerned about your health benefits?)



(Left) Picketers at APWU-sponsored rally outside a Staples on Manhattan's Upper West Side, Oct. 30.

York's Rockefeller Center, later removed because of its inclusion of an image of Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin.

Dennie continued, "The reason this building is being sold is because only the lobby is being used for mail. This building used to be, until 2011, a processing center. They moved the processing to Manhattan. The post office is lying when they say that closing these processing centers doesn't affect service."

Jacquelyn McCornick, of the National Post Office Collaborate ([www.NationalPostOfficeCollaborate.com](http://www.NationalPostOfficeCollaborate.com)), told *Socialist Action*, "We were able to get a court appearance (Oct. 24) on a preliminary injunction to stop the sale of the Stamford, Conn., post office. We expect the judge to rule on the case next week. If we are successful, that should stop the sale of the Stamford P.O., based on violation of National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process.

We are hopeful that this is just the beginning, that this will set a precedent for other like cases throughout the country, including the Bronx, Berkeley, La Hoya, Glendale, Redlands, and others."

McCornick explained, "The Post Office really hasn't looked at the cumulative impact of closing these post offices around the country, what was promised us in the constitution concerning postal service, and we hope that this will elevate the discussion and the legacy of the WPA. The properties are part of the public domain and they should stay that way."

The corporate buyers in Stamford were going to tear down the rear portion of the PO and build condos. In another case in Venice, Calif., the real estate corporation that bought the post office allows public viewing of its art works just six times a year by appointment—but only for one hour a week!

In Berkeley, Calif., activists set up a tent city to save their post office from late July through the end of August. The Beaux-Arts building was constructed in 1914 and contains a WPA mural and sculpture. But, while protesters had gone to another action, cops shut down the tent city in line with the increased repression under the Obama administration, such as the cop attacks on Occupy Wall Street protests around the country. For more news go to [www.savethepostoffice.com](http://www.savethepostoffice.com).

## Insurgents take over APWU

An insurgent caucus in the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), called the "Members First" slate, won union-wide leadership in a vote counted on Oct. 8. Workers were fed-up with inaction in the face of massive attacks on their 2010 contract. Seven of the slate's nine candidates booted out the old guard. Mark Dimondstein of Members First was elected president, with 27,000 votes compared to incumbent Cliff Guffey's 21,000. The APWU represents 196,000 postal workers. The new leadership will take over on Nov. 7 and has pledged to organize resistance to privatization and plant closures.

In a heavily craft-divided workforce, the APWU represents maintenance, truck drivers, and clerks who work in functions like processing mail and selling stamps. The new leadership intends to mend fences with the National Alliance of Letter Carriers (NALC), a union of some 300,000 members. Both unions have shown disunity and an unwillingness to mobilize the ranks against attacks.

The Oct. 18 issue of *Labor Notes* magazine reported, "Dimondstein had been lead organizer for the union's private sector organizing, an effort to unionize subcontracted trucking and private mail-sorting firms that was mandated by delegates at APWU conventions. That effort was shelved by the incumbents. Dimondstein also co-founded the Greensboro, North Carolina, Jobs with Justice chapter and helped initiate a local coalition, Postal Customers and Workers United to Save the Postal Service."

"Two of the new officers were part of a 2012 hunger strike to save the post office, started by the grassroots network Communities and Postal Workers United (CPWU). Several have experienced firsthand the effects of plant shutdowns in their own locals. What they had in common was frustration with the national union's failure to stem the attacks on postal jobs."

Will the new APWU leadership usher in a new era of postal worker militancy? Will it break with the Democratic Party or remain bound to the 1%? Time will tell, but time is short. ■

USPS must make yearly contributions of \$5.6 billion toward the fund and complete the funding by 2016. Without being saddled with this burden, the USPS would have had a surplus in the last several years. On top of that, says the USPS Inspector General, the USPS has overpaid \$80 billion dollars to the Civil Service Retirement System and the Federal Employees Retirement System, which the federal government refuses to return.

The USPS receives no tax funding and survives on the service it provides. Even so, the USPS heavily discounts large-volume corporate bulk mail—that is, mostly junk mail.

General Postmaster Patrick Donahoe, in addition to selling and closing post offices, has tried to break the union by appealing to Congress to remove the no-layoff clause. Donahoe has cut hours of operation, reduced thousands of employees by attrition, subcontracted to private firms, threatened to end six-day delivery, and degraded service, in part by closing and consolidating processing centers, thus delaying mail. Such service cuts can be deadly for the elderly, especially in rural areas, where reliance on mail deliveries of medicine is critical. For the poor who cannot afford the internet, the U.S. mail is a lifeline.

## Saving post offices and their art

In a number of cities, coalitions of community activists have joined hands with postal workers to save post offices, many of which are listed as National Landmarks for their architectural beauty and the artwork that they contain. In New York City, there is a renewed effort to save the Bronx General Post Office, up for sale since February of this year.

*Socialist Action* spoke with retired postal worker John Dennie, who is active in the movement to save the Bronx General Post Office, which went on sale in February. Said Dennie, "I believe that the people of the South Bronx deserve to have this building, which has been here since 1935 with these beautiful Ben Shahn murals in the lobby. There is no reason to sell off this building other than greed."

"This building has been landmarked, and more recently these paintings have been landmarked. We don't want this to become a cornerstone of gentrification in the Bronx. The most likely use of this building (if sold) would be condos, they've already re-zoned this side of the Grand Concourse. We've got to stop them."

Ben Shahn, a renowned artist and Jewish anarchist, completed the murals for the public Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, with his companion and later wife, Bernarda Bryson. Shahn also worked with Mexican artist Diego Rivera on a mural in New

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targets were Chow, councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam (an open lesbian, re-elected in Ward 27) and school trustee candidate Ausma Malik (elected in Ward 19). Most Torontonians rejected bigotry, but did so in a neo-liberal context that defined the political alternatives as "progressivism" versus "conservatism," rather than posing class against class, or socialism versus capitalism.

What should the workers' move-

ment do in the face of the growing attacks? Demand a break from the disastrous political treadmill of vacuous "progressivism," which is just a cunning mask for capitalist austerity. Launch the fight for a Labour City Hall, based on direct action and socialist policies.

The first step, as we argued two years ago, is to demand that the NDP and Labour Council convene a mass municipal political action convention. Such a gathering should be held in 2016 to shoul-

der the task of adopting a Workers' Agenda and selecting a team of candidates for all city offices who will be accountable to working people through their mass organizations.

Now is the time to start moving forward on this course, while mobilizing in the streets and communities against the coming attacks sure to emanate from a city hall that operates more and more like a subsidiary of corporate Canada.

— B.W.



(Left) Edward Snowden in a shot from Laura Poitras' documentary film, "Citizen Four."

## Snowden speaks in 'Citizen Four'

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

It is chilling to know for a fact that since 9/11/2001, the U.S. National Security Agency, NSA, has been tracking phone calls from ATT and Verizon, and also bank activity, internet searches, and all social media sites used by every person in America. It also tracks our credit card purchases—on the internet or from brick and mortar stores.

This information was revealed by Edward Snowden to filmmaker, documentarian Laura Poitras and journalist Glenn Greenwald at a clandestine meeting in a Hong Kong hotel room over a period of eight days in May 2013. How Greenwald was going to write it up is a huge part of Laura Poitras's important and shocking documentary film, "Citizen Four."

Snowden was a young contract employee of the consulting firm Booze Allen Hamilton in their Hawaii offices. They lent his services to the NSA as a systems administrator/consultant. Snowden at first thought it was important to look for data disclosing terrorist plots from militant groups like al-Queda. But soon, while advising superiors at the NSA on methods of developing security systems against hackers, he discovered files on its domestic spying activities against U.S. citizens.

Subsequently, Snowden downloaded into his computer many thousands of implicating files. (He had unlimited access and the highest security clearance because of his expertise.) Then, knowing of Poitras' revelatory documentary films, specifically one about whistleblower William Binney, he began e-mailing her using the code name Citizen Four, and hinting at what he had in his possession.

Snowden also came to know Poitras from an article written about her by the British *Guardian's* investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald, in which she said to him that she was a "government target." Snowden had previously tried to interest Greenwald,

but Greenwald never followed through since he felt Snowden's method of encrypting e-mail too annoying. But he changed his mind after Snowden connected with Poitras.

Writer Barton Gellman, then a journalist at the *Washington Post*, became involved in May 2013, when the *Post* declined to "guarantee publication within 72 hours of all the Power Point slides that Snowden had leaked exposing the PRISM electronic data mining program [which searched Google and Yahoo] and would eventually lead to a code allowing Snowden to later prove that he was the source."

In the film Snowden tells Poitras that he knew the wiretapping was wrong and unconstitutional—an infringement on individual privacy. He wanted this to be known publicly, but realized that how to do it would be tricky. He has said that he abides by the U.S. Constitution's Fourth and Fifth Amendments: "I have no intention of hiding who I am because I know I have done nothing wrong." He also discovered that U.S. intelligence's MUSCULAR system tapped into the undersea cable.

Poitras's film opens with a black screen with Snowden's keystrokes appearing as though he's typing his queries to her in real time. Her answers appear below his messages in the same way. After confirming his identity and involving Greenwald, the three agree to meet at a secure location in a Hong Kong hotel, in May 2013.

The film was shot almost entirely in Snowden's small, no-frills room, where everything is white: the bedding, walls, carpets, and window covering. So it was a color shock when Snowden covered his head and laptop with a red cowl (he works propped up on his bed) so the camera couldn't capture his keystrokes.

Scenes of the Hong Kong skyline and other outdoor sites give the audience a break from the room's claustrophobic atmosphere. At one point, the fire alarm

goes off. Paranoid, the three suspect that they're being monitored. The alarm sounds off-and-on three or four times. They conclude that it's a test and call the front desk to confirm that this is the case. It is, and only then do they relax.

Snowden explains and demonstrates on his laptop how he accessed the information, much of which is conveyed using tech-talk. To one unfamiliar with the jargon, it is extremely difficult to follow, let alone understand. At one point, Snowden insists that Poitras's film not be about him but what his files reveal about the NSA secret, domestic and international (in cahoots with the UK) spying activities. For example, his files reveal that the NSA had spied on Germany's Angela Merkel since 2002.

Poitras includes film footage of the courtroom scene in the Ninth Circuit Court in San Francisco when ATT was sued for spying on its customers' phone calls (discovered by an ATT employee.) The people won the suit. She also includes footage of former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper's testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, in which he denied that NSA collects data on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans. When pressed, Clapper added: "Not wittingly, there are cases where they could inadvertently, perhaps, collect, but not wittingly."

Poitras shows a clip of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange trying to arrange asylum for Snowden in various countries after threats surfaced from the U.S. government to Snowden's life and liberty should he return voluntarily. However, the U.S. revoked his passport.

Edward Snowden ended up in Moscow after spending close to three months in limbo in the Moscow airport. He was first granted a one-year stay, which was then renewed for three years. There, in January 2014, he was asked during an interview why he decided to blow the whistle. Snowden replied: "Sort of the breaking point was seeing Clapper directly lie under oath to Congress ... that really meant for me there was no going back."

By his own words, backed up by extensive research, Snowden has not released his appropriated files by transfer or USB flash drives to any foreign governments. He wanted only that the public be made aware of the matter through the media, reportage, and publication of the files.

One critic has asked that if Snowden is willing to accept the consequences of his actions, i.e., jail time, why is he hiding out in Moscow? When you have members of the U.S. Congress labeling him a traitor, and Senator Diane Feinstein all but calling for his head, does he or anyone believe he will get a fair trial? And notable government figures as disparate as Ron Paul and Bernie Sanders, plus the editorial boards of the *Washington Post* and the *Guardian*, wonder why the NSA is not on trial for the illegal wiretapping that Snowden has proven in spades.

When the film ended, we in the audience erupted with applause. Someone shouted, "We are all on the list." Another said, "Okay, so now what do we do?" As the credits rolled and the lights came up, a voice was heard to say, "Revolution!" If we weren't on the list before, we certainly are now. ■

## ... Climate

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a sustained mass movement against climate change. The presence of 400,000 people marching on Sept. 21 in advance of a UN climate talk shop—over twice what march organizers expected—speaks to the growing impulse to fight the status quo, particularly among young people and those living with the direct environmental consequences of fossil fuel extraction.

Those who marched carried signs representing a broad range of currents and struggles, notably including anti-fracking, tar sands pipeline blockades, Native American sovereignty, immigrant rights, anti-racism and anti-police violence. Yet unified demands—those that could have been amplified enough by the sheer numbers marching for them to overcome the corporate media blackout—were absent from the march, which was produced by political liberals and endorsed by corporate front groups.

Ironically, the same can be said for the "anti-capitalist" Flood Wall Street civil-disobedience action the following day, which saw 2500 people block a street in Manhattan for eight hours with no apparent aim other than catharsis for their hatred of the bourgeoisie. After a workday's worth of non-interference, the NYPD ultimately took the street-sitters up on their pageant, accidentally pepper-spraying themselves before arresting a man in a polar bear suit.

We face a critical juncture in the nascent climate movement, at which we must try our best to contribute our vision to its direction. In the most immediate and practical sense, this means applying our understanding of transitional demands to the situation. This is also where much of our pre-convention discussion has focused, so I will try briefly to summarize some of the perspectives that have been offered.

Over the last few years we have been calling for a massive mobilization of government resources to retool the economy to become climate neutral. We have compared the scope of this project to the emergency ramping-up of war production that the U.S. undertook during World War II. A "Marshall Plan" for the climate, to rebuild hollowed-out factories and farms for use in the transition, may seem like an even more apt analogy to blue-collar workers.

The moving parts of our Transitional Program for Class and Climate Justice include a halt to military spending; nationalization of the financial and energy sectors under democratic workers' management; clean, efficient, free mass transit; a rapid transition from fossil fuels to clean renewable energy sources such as wind and solar; technology and wealth transfer to poorer nations; paid retraining for workers transitioning to new sectors of the economy; and "climate jobs" providing full employment at union wages. We of course support worker factory seizures and conversion of any and all vehicle plants to mass transit production.

In Socialist Action's pre-convention discussion, comrades raised the important point that this program

should include affirmative policies to meet the special needs of women, including "free 24-hour childcare, free 24-hour elder care, and freely available socially produced healthy food for them and their children."

Socialist Action's *transitional* program is based on the premises that we cannot wait for a socialist revolution to start addressing the looming climate catastrophe, and that the ruling class may make some progress if pushed by an uncompromising mass movement. However, we recognize that a sustainable economy is ultimately not possible within a capitalist framework, and have written extensively as to why this is the case. This was also the perspective put forward in many of the eco-socialist workshops within the Climate Convergence conference that took place prior to the Sept. 21 march.

Other forces on the left have a different angle. The reformist Green Party calls for a "Green New Deal," which has some provisions similar to our program but also calls for government investment in "green businesses" and other social democratic policies. We distinguish ourselves by calling for initiatives that are sponsored by the government under *workers' management*, not by private business. We also vehemently oppose neo-Malthusian analyses that place blame for the crisis on population growth among the poor, who are responsible for a miniscule share of the world's climate-changing carbon emissions.

In my report on the Sept. 21 Climate March in the October 2014 edition of *Socialist Action* newspaper, I raised pieces of our program to the level of specific

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# ... Election

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Obama passed the Affordable Health Care Act, which gifted the health-care and pharmaceutical monopolies a cool trillion dollars more than they had stolen previously, while simultaneously robbing millions of union workers of health-care benefits won in struggle. Yesterday's "Cadillac plans" have also been on Obama's chopping block.

Obama's promised Comprehensive Immigration Reform disappeared. In its place he deported two million immigrants, exceeding the total of all the presidents before him. He even attempted to circumvent the law that mandates that immigrants receive a fair hearing before being thrown out of the country. Here he took aim at the 50,000 children who massed at the U.S. border believing that they could enter the U.S. to escape the U.S.-imposed poverty and exploitation of Latin America.

Obama's NSA surveillance policies and his "interpretation" of the Patriot Act made George Bush look like a civil libertarian. Bush never organized 1.3 security-cleared NSA and other spy agency operatives to record all electronic communications of all U.S. citizens and, indeed, those of the whole world. Obama prosecuted more people under the Patriot Act and related legislation than all previous presidents combined.

Obama is the world's number-one shale fracker, poisoning the nation's waters and raising global temperatures with abandon.

Weeks before the election, when pollsters everywhere predicted major Democratic Party defeats and loss of its Senate majority, the party's top strategists embarked on a campaign to close the gap by a massive effort to turn out Black and Latino voters.

In the Southern states that Obama won in 2008, via unprecedented Black participation, huge sums were expended in mid-October 2014 to place radio and newspaper ads in local Black community media. The ads, highlighted in a late October issue of *The New York Times*, warned that Republican victories would mean "more Fergusons" and "more Travon Martins," as if the nation's racist criminal justice system were restricted to police brutality, murder, and mass incarceration in the largely Republican South. Indeed, "liberal" Blue State California leads the way in these matters, perhaps second only to Texas.

Southern Republicans, the modern-day heirs to the racist Dixiecrats (Southern racist Democrats, themselves heirs to the former slave owners, Klansmen, and White Citizens Council terrorists who ruled the South after the smashing of Reconstruction) cried foul and accused the South's post-Nixon-era remnant Democrats of "race-baiting."

The Democrats looked to a 2013 Census Bureau report indicating that in 2012 a higher percentage of African Americans than whites voted in a presidential election for the first time in history. This was the matchup between President Obama and Republican nomi-

nee Mitt Romney, in which 66 percent of eligible Blacks voted, as compared to 64.1 percent of whites. Similar statistics apply to Latino voters.

But polls before the current election predicted a significant decline in illusions in either of the two capitalist parties among oppressed nationalities. A national poll a week or so before the election recorded that the Latino voter participation would decline by at least 10 percent, with one in three Latinos stating that they knew of at least one family member or friend who had been deported—under Obama's rule. The percentage of Latinos who indicated "significant confidence" in the Democrats dropped to 14 percent.

Fully 43 percent of those who were not likely to cast ballots, according to a Pew poll a week before the election, were Hispanic, African American, or other racial and ethnic minorities,—roughly double the percentage among likely voters (22 percent).

Hoopla aside regarding any significant transformation in U.S. politics that will accompany the Republican election victory, Obama's Democratic Party strategists once again signaled that the corporate agenda would be advanced with full force. A front-page story in the Nov. 2 *New York Times* entitled, "Braced for a Shift in Congress, Obama Is Setting a New Agenda," reported that the president's "top aides" are "mapping possible compromises with Republicans to expand trade, overhaul taxes and build roads and bridges."

Translated to the language of the ruling class, this means further lowering wages of U.S. manufacturing workers to increase U.S. corporate competitiveness abroad, while continuing to export U.S. jobs, granting deeper tax cuts for the rich at home, and lowering corporate taxes on the trillions of dollars made abroad to encourage major monopolies like Apple Corporation to repatriate its behemoth profits with minimum taxes. For the workers, setting aside a relative pittance to repair bridges and roads will be part of fostering the false illusion that U.S. capitalists might be considering significant government spending to create jobs.

On the Republican side, the new Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell, admitted a few days before the vote that his party's pledge to repeal the Affordable Health Care Act would go nowhere—and not only because the Republicans had not achieved the required the 60 Senate votes to accomplish it, or that they can utilize the special "reconciliation" procedure that requires only 51 votes, or the fact that Obama can veto any such attempt.

In truth, the year-long "debate" over this health-care legislation, which preserved and qualitatively expanded this inefficient and inadequate nearly monopolized industry, which is run for private profit of the elite insurance companies and associated financial in-



(Above) Speaking at the Oct. 17 public rally during the national convention of Socialist Action (U.S.), in Minneapolis, is Chris Mato Nunpa, Ph.D, a retired associate professor of Indigenous Nations & Dakota Studies. At left is Barry Weisleder, national secretary of Socialist Action (Canada), who gave greetings.

stitutions, adds additional trillions to their coffers at the expense of working people. Obama's bill, and the Republicans' too, are based not on "taxing the rich" but rather on the "Robin Hood in reverse" thesis that workers must pay.

Obama, as is expected, can technically veto any and all appeal efforts or legislation presented to him for approval. The Republicans, in turn, have their own "strategy" to supposedly advance their agenda. They intend to offer endless amendments to any "spending bills" that might secure bipartisan support. The latter are often a requirement to avoid "shutting down the government" entirely—that is, not paying federal workers on the basis that funds to do so have been withheld. This strategy was effectively employed several times over the past years.

In such circumstances the ruling rich *never fail* to appoint special panels of equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans to resolve supposed differences of opinion. These are the "blue ribbon" and direct representatives of the corporate elite who truly run the country. They are the bipartisan panels of capital that engage in trading billions and trillions in taxpayer dollars among themselves to advance their corporate and banking interests at the expense of the vast majority.

The same holds for the U.S. Supreme Court, the Federal Reserve, the Internal Revenue Service and all other top institutions of the capitalist state, where daily decisions are made in the exclusive interests of the ruling 0.1 percent.

That was the scene in 2009 when the nation's financial system faced imminent collapse. The top corporate and banking leaders met in private with the Treasury Secretary and the chair of the Federal Reserve to devise an unprecedented bailout, which was in a matter of a week or less, approved nearly unanimously by Congress."

The working class and its representatives are excluded from all capitalist

institutions. The U.S. is an advanced capitalist state wherein its fundamental corporate institutions dominate public, economic, and social life in accord with their interests only.

U.S. elections, today nearly year-round propaganda vehicles for the parties of the corporate elite, are little more than orchestrated "contests" aimed at convincing the "people" that they live in a democratic society. A recent poll indicates that 60 percent of the American people prefer a new party to emerge on the political scene, presumably one that represents their interests as opposed to those who currently govern.

They increasingly understand that there are no significant differences between Republicans, with their more overt reactionary babbling Tea Party wing, and the Democrats, with the "Blue Dog" wing of their own more overtly fanatical advocates of the same ideas and policies. In the end, this charade that passes for politics devolves into backdoor decision-making on every critical issue, whether it be to wage yet another trillion-dollar war or to grant trillions more to this or that section of the corporate power structure.

The need has never been greater for working people to break from the parties of capital and build their own working-class political party based on a reinvigorated and fighting trade-union movement, as well as on the hundreds and millions more who will be organized in new unions, all in alliance with the oppressed nationalities, immigrants, and youth. These are the kinds of institutions that the vast majority can organize, finance, participate in, control, and use to advance their interests in the political arena.

These institutions can and must also become the political expression of a fighting working class that takes on capitalist exploitation and oppression in the workplace, in the communities, and everywhere where working people fight for their basic rights. ■

# ... Climate

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demands, which prompted some response. One reader expressed concern over my formulation of the need for payments to poor nations by wealthy ones. Third-world negotiators at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit put forward the demand for "climate reparations," using the analogy of reparations for slavery: the polluters that have substantially caused the crisis should pay compensation to its victims, as well as the costs of adaptation and clean energy development. This demand is included in Socialist Action's 2014 Political Resolution [soon to be issued as a pamphlet by Socialist Action Books.]

The existing imperialist institutions such as USAID and the IMF/World Bank cannot act as vehicles for these

payments without furthering the ends of imperialism. We must contrast this with the call for direct, no-strings-attached payments from the governments of top climate polluters to the governments of impoverished nations. We can't only call for socialist revolution and workers' solidarity to combat the increased diseases, storms, and coastal inundation that working people in tropical countries face. The rich must pay for the crisis they've created.

This principle brings up the idea of a carbon tax. In our movement, the demand for a "heavy, progressive income tax" dates back to Karl Marx's "Communist Manifesto" and is just as relevant today. We can and should work with groups that promote a heavy, progressive carbon tax as a demand, but promote the need for nationalization of the energy sector under democratic workers' management as well.

The Transitional Program for Class and Climate Justice,

included in Socialist Action's 2014 Political Resolution, is informed by both the science of global warming and our historical approach to transitional demands. We reject solutions based on the ideas that technology alone will save us, that the planet can be inhabited sustainably at current levels of material production, or that capitalism can somehow be transformed into a sustainable economic system. Likewise, we reject the notion that population is the problem and must be forcibly reduced; this perspective is reactionary and dangerous.

We contend that a decrease in capitalist modes of production will correspond with an *increase* in the satisfaction of human wants and needs. While we look eagerly toward socialist revolution as the ultimate solution to the climate crisis created by capital, in the interim we recognize the urgent need for movement-building to force the ruling class to seriously address the looming catastrophe. ■

## A transitional program for class and climate justice



By CARL SACK

This article is based on a report that the author gave to the Socialist Action (U.S.) National Convention on Oct. 18, 2014.

We live in unlikely times. Clearly, none of the classical Marxist thinkers we rely on for our theoretical groundings foresaw, or could have foreseen, the climate disaster that we now find imminent.

When Rosa Luxemburg declared that the world faced a choice between “socialism and barbarism,” she was referring to the horrors of a world war that would reduce much of Europe to rubble, not the global ecosystem collapse that could, if left in its current trajectory, wipe out humanity entirely. Today, “socialism or barbarism” has become “socialism or extinction,” lending new urgency to debates and decisions over what is to be done.

Atmospheric carbon dioxide is now bumping up against 400 parts per million, a level never before seen by humanity. Rome is beginning to burn, while Nero is not so much fiddling as pouring gas on the fire. Every U.S. government initiative to curtail carbon emissions to date utterly pales in comparison to the Obama administration’s sabotage of international climate accords, its hypocritical use of “climate adaptation” funding to promote a new round of colonialism, and its policy to push fracking and fossil fuel development everywhere in the world.

Climate change is not an environmental problem. Nor is it a technology problem. We have the technology to meet 100% of

the world’s current energy needs with renewable sources *right now*, though doing so would not halt capitalism’s drive for perpetual increases in the extraction and use of finite resources. Climate change is a *social problem*, and calls for the application of political economy and social struggle.

In confronting climate change, we face a dual challenge. We must educate ourselves and patiently explain to oblivious co-workers what’s at stake. Yet we also must build a mass movement with revolutionary potential, which cannot be done on the basis of pessimism or nihilism. It is critical to emphasize that what we do today still has the potential to build a *better* world tomorrow.

Our progeny will face unprecedented challenges from a changing physical environment. But a socialist society based on mutualism and democratic planning will meet those challenges with all the beautiful human resilience that can be mustered. No one will be left to drown in a hurricane storm surge or lack access to the best modern medicine. Nor will anyone be cursed any longer with overwork, financial insecurity, unemployment, hunger, or poverty. All will have access to free education, community support for child-rearing, and the time and means to express their creativity through the arts.

Do we need to reduce global energy consumption? Absolutely. Does this entail reducing the level of production? Yes. *But people will be better off.*

This perspective is critical to building  
(continued on page 10)

### Corporate media sounds the alarm

BY JEFF MACKLER

When the leading corporate media sound the alarm big time on the impending climate catastrophe, it’s clear that the scientific facts are no longer refutable by the “deniers.” A Nov. 2 *New York Times* headline, “U.N. Panel Issues Its Starkest Warning Yet on Global Warming,” quotes extensively from the 175-page excerpted report issued the same day in Copenhagen by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a body appointed by the world’s top polluters.

A few of the reports conclusions highlight of depth of the crisis:

- Failure to leave most fossil fuel resources in the ground “could threaten society with food shortages, refugee crises, the flooding of major cities and entire island nations, mass extinction of plants and animals, and a climate so drastically altered it might become dangerous for people to work or play outside during the hottest times of the year.”

- “Continued emission of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system, increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for

people and ecosystems.”

- “Mass die-offs of forests, such as those killed by heat-loving beetles in the American West; the melting of land ice virtually everywhere in the world; an accelerating rise of the seas that is leading to increased coastal flooding; and heat waves that have devastated crops and killed tens of thousands of people” are today’s climate crisis reality.

The report nevertheless demonstrates that the world’s leading polluters and their monopoly energy corporations, the most profitable in the world, have every intention of ignoring the most elementary data and are instead currently spending and planning to spend additional multi-trillions of dollars to *increase* the use and extraction of the very energy sources whose deployment spells doom to humankind.

The report comes a month before the Lima, Peru, international climate conference, where little or no action is expected to reverse the climate crisis. *The Times* quoted one of the report’s authors, Oxford University climate scientist Myles R. Adams: “If they choose not to talk about the carbon budget ... they might as well not bother to turn up for these meetings.” ■