

Chicago teachers rally against cutbacks



Mark Ugolini / Socialist Action

By MARK UGOLINI

CHICAGO—On April 1, the solidarity of Chicago Teachers, along with the solidarity of more than 50 union, community, and student organizations, was on full display before the entire city and state, and across the country. Nearly 20,000 teachers and supporters flooded the streets in a late-afternoon rally and march in Chicago's "Loop," capping a powerful Day of Action on the theme "Fund Our Futures."

It was an inspirational day that began with picket lines at public schools organized by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), and continued in over 30 separate demonstrations, rallies, and teach-ins throughout Chicago. All were coordinated by a broad coalition of labor and community organizations supporting the CTU and other public employee unions that are under assault by powerful forces determined to implement austerity by privatizing schools, breaking unions, and cutting desperately needed social services across the state.

The Chicago Teachers Union House of Delegates, representing nearly 28,000 Chicago teachers, voted overwhelmingly on March 23 to authorize the April 1 "unfair labor practice (ULP) strike to bring attention to the need for critical revenue solutions to stabilize the city's school district and protect students and families." Eighty percent of more than 600 delegates

voted for a resolution authorizing the one-day strike, while many of those opposing it favored a strike of longer duration.

A CTU press release states that the one-day strike represented "a direct response to continued attacks and efforts toward union-busting from Governor Bruce Rauner, Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and the mayor's handpicked CPS [Chicago Public Schools] CEO, Forrest Claypool."

The current \$5.7B annual budget of the CPS includes a shortfall of \$1.1 billion, of which \$480 million is owed by the state of Illinois but remains unpaid because Gov. Rauner has refused to approve a budget that releases funds for education and desperately needed social services across the state.

The Day of Action was endorsed by a wide range of labor and community organizations including Amalgamated Transit Union Local 308, American Federation of Government Employees Local 789, Bakery Confectionary Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers, Black Lives Matter Chicago, BYP 100, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Fight for \$15, Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, United Electrical Workers Western Region, and SEIU Health Care Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri.

Co-chair Johnae Strong from BYP 100 opened the downtown rally: "We are here today ... united against austerity ... those who are most impacted and mar-

ginalized in this city have been living austerity for far too long. [We] proclaim that this is going to be a turning point in this city. We will no longer allow the death of a thousand cuts to continue in the city of Chicago."

One of the many speakers to address the rally was Irene Robinson of the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), one of Chicago's most influential and respected community organizations. Robinson was one of 12 activists who participated in a 34-day hunger strike last summer to protest a planned phased-out closing of Walter H. Dyett High School by Rahm Emanuel's appointed School Board "CEO."

"I have nine grandchildren in CPS. ... Every last one of us, all the parents of Bronzeville ... stand with CTU," said Robinson. She described the deplorable conditions of some South Side schools due to CPS neglect and repeated denial of funding for upgrade projects proposed by parents and staff. "We don't have no library and we don't have no books ... And [to] Rahm Emanuel and Bruce Rauner: Get your greedy hands off our children! We want an elected school board ... We want a world-class education for all our schools!"

CTU President Karen Lewis was the rally's featured speaker: "We're outside the State of Illinois building ... because the governor of this state has decided to hold everybody hostage. ... We're here for not only the

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French workers and students take to the streets

By JEFF MACKLER

One million workers and students took to the streets of Paris and cities across France on March 31 to protest draconian Labor Code changes proposed by the austerity-minded governing French Socialist Party of Francois Holland. The changes are set to be considered by the French parliament in late April.

The March 31 nationwide mobilization, the largest since the great strike waves of May-June 1968, was supported by France's major trade-union federation, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT). According to activist participants of the French New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), an estimated one-third of the participants were youth mobilized by national student organizations. Strikers included workers from a number of public-employee unions, including teachers and train drivers.

The government's proposal allows companies to organize alternative "flexible" work schedules. These include a workweek of up to 48 hours, as opposed to the maximum legal workweek today of 35 hours. In "exceptional circumstances," employees could be compelled under the proposed new law to work up to 60 hours a week, including mandatory 12-hour shifts. Other proposed changes are akin to part-time and casual labor schemes implemented in the United States.

Zoe Farre, 23, told *Associated Press* reporters during the Paris march and rally that she had serious doubts about the government's new job "flexibility" intentions. "It's going to be like the U.K., where you're on a zero-hour contract, or like the U.S., where they make you hold a sign in the street and call it a job," she said.

Three weeks earlier, on March 9, with barely a week's preparation, 500,000 French workers and students mobilized against the same proposed legislation.

Leaders and activists of the French NPA have scored the proposed Labor Code changes as "annihilating 100



Jean-Paul Pelisser / Reuters

years of past gains for the French working class." Additional protests are slated for April 26 and April 28. Some dissident currents inside the CGT have called for a general strike of unlimited duration to force the government to abandon its proposed anti-labor regulations, and idea that is gaining traction among rank-and-file workers.

Immediately following the March 31 national mobilization, hundreds of thousands of students, workers pensioners, artists, and others mobilized every evening in a new movement called Nuit debout, which loosely means "rise up at night." From Paris to Toulouse, Lyon, and Nantes—and to cities in Belgium, including Brussels—the protesters have taken up long-held grievances over government corruption and massive austerity measures. The sit-ins and teach-ins, daily increasing in size and scope, have obviously given pause to police and government officials, who have to date refrained from attempts to physically remove protesters.

The Place de la République in Paris saw speakers denouncing everything from the tax-evasion schemes of the rich revealed by the "Panama Papers," housing inequality, and France's racist refugee policies to the gov-

ernment crackdown on democratic rights following the Jan. 2015 terrorist shootings at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine.

One Paris protester summed up the political tenor of the protests, which appear to have been sparked by a core group of left-wing youth, as follows: "There's something here that I've never seen before in France—all these people converge here each night of their own accord to talk and debate ideas on any topic they like. No one has told them to, no unions are pushing them on — they're coming of their own accord."

The British-based *Guardian* newspaper quoted Matthiew, 35, who was retraining to be a teacher after 10 years in the private sector as follows: "The labor law was the final straw. But it's much bigger than that. This government, which is supposed to be socialist, has come up with a raft of things I don't agree with, while failing to deal with the real problems like unemployment, climate change and a society heading for disaster."

As we go to press, tens of thousands have taken to the streets of London demanding the resignation of British Prime Minister David Cameron. London's *Daily Mail* reported: "The embattled Prime Minister was accused of 'hypocrisy' after he finally admitted profiting from more than £30,000 in an offshore tax haven. After days of pressure, Mr. Cameron acknowledged he had benefited from a controversial fund set up by his late father Ian.

Clearly, the pent-up anger of French and British workers and youth against the generalized assaults on their standard of living and quality of life has found expression and new forms of organization. The gap between this deeply felt outrage and mass protests that focus on the inherent horrors perpetrated by a world capitalism system in deep crisis is narrowing. The French and British mass democratic assemblies are a first and important step to planning united, massive, and enduring protests capable of inspiring working-class victories. ■

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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Jamar Clark denied justice

Karen Schraufnagel / Socialist Action



By KAREN and JOHN SCHRAUFNAGEL

MINNEAPOLIS— On Wednesday, March 30, Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman announced there would be no charges brought against the police who murdered Jamar Clark on Nov. 15, 2015.

In the version of events that Freeman presented as factual, while Officer Mark Ringgenberg had Clark on the ground, he feared for his own life because he thought Clark was reaching for his gun. This is the claim used by every cop who murders a civilian because such language turns “murder” into “self-defense.” Ringgenberg’s partner, Dustin Schwarze, responded to the situation, firing two shots at Clark. (The second shot hit him in the back of the head—an entry wound, but with no exit.)

Until now, we have not known which officer shot Jamar. In fact, this was the first announcement of the official story of the shooting. The Hennepin County attorney promised to make available the mountains of evidence he examined in coming to his decision (the poor guy was supposedly reading for more than 31 hours).

The county attorney showed some of the video he relied on in making his decision not to charge the officers, but the video he showed did not seem to support his claims. Pastor Danny Givens questioned the cops’ report that Clark had been harassing his girlfriend while paramedics were trying to treat her for a broken ankle because it was not captured on video.

“The video that I watched showed a Jamar Clark who looked concerned about his girlfriend,” Givens said. “The video that I watched showed a Jamar Clark who looked tempered. The video that I saw didn’t show Jamar Clark beating on the door, Jamar Clark irate or uncontrollable. Even after the officers showed up on the scene, the video didn’t show Jamar Clark resisting arrest.” Niema Levy Pounds watched

the video of Ringgenberg tackling Clark to the ground and said: “That was a violent grab, which wasn’t articulated. We didn’t hear that in the narrative about what happened—police grabbing somebody from the back and slamming him.”

Black Lives Matter organizer Mica Grim pointed out that Jamar Clark had filed a lawsuit against the Fourth Precinct for police brutality two weeks before he was shot, causing many in the community to believe the murder might have been “retribution.”

Grim also noted: “The entire case seems to hinge on officers’ statements and DNA evidence, DNA evidence that was held on to and collected by MPD officers, so there’s a lack of trust in believing that the precinct that killed Jamar Clark did not also tamper with evidence.”

The one-sided account of events by Freeman also did not deal with the destruction of evidence by officers on the scene in the early morning hours of Nov. 15, 2015. Levy-Pounds pointed out that, according to witnesses, MPD officers quickly cleaned the street of blood without putting up police tape. Cops also intimidated crowds of those witnesses by pointing guns at them, spraying them with mace, and shoving them.

We are usually told that the purpose of a trial is to sort out disputed facts and seek the truth. In this case, Freeman seems to have appointed himself judge and jury. Earlier this month, Freeman announced there would be no grand jury in cases in which police use deadly force.

This was seen as a partial victory because grand juries have never issued an indictment against a cop for killing a civilian (there have been 141 cases and no indictments). But a system where the prosecuting attorney won’t issue an indictment is no improvement over a system where a grand jury won’t issue an indictment. It is still a system that protects murdering cops, a system where ordinary people cannot get jus-

(Above) Black Lives Matter Minneapolis marchers proceed to Government Center rally on March 31.

tice and Black Lives *Do Not* Matter.

A massive outpouring of anger, grief and determination followed the announcement of no indictments in Jamar Clark’s death. Shortly after the announcement, friends and relatives of Jamar started to gather at the spot where the unarmed, young Black man was shot in the head. Those gathered were joined by outraged neighborhood residents and white allies.

Around 1 p.m. the police swept by in a massive show of force, but by the time the Coalition for Justice for Jamar press conference began shortly after 5 p.m., no police could be seen.

After statements to the press, the crowd of about 150 people began the three-mile march to downtown Minneapolis. Meanwhile, a separate “Non-Indictment Response #Justice4Jamar” was called for 6 p.m. at Elliot Park near downtown. The rally and march called by Black Lives Matter Minneapolis drew over 1000 people.

The crowds were very diverse and overwhelmingly young. Many of the speakers connected the racism faced by Black, Brown, and Native people to the capitalist, imperialist system in which the cops are agents of the 1% in their class war against the rest of us. One chant summed up this sentiment: “Killer cops are a symptom, of a sick, sick system.”

Another chant: “Freeman, Hodges and Harteau, We all know you got to go” put the Hennepin County attorney, the mayor of Minneapolis, and the Minneapolis police chief on notice. The thousand-plus crowd took to the streets, marching to meet the North Minneapolis marchers. By the time the two groups merged at the Hennepin County Government Center to hold a unity rally, the crowd had swelled to 1500 people. ■

LABOR BRIEFING

By BILL ONASCH

There are reports elsewhere in this paper about the significant events in Chicago April 1-3, including the one-day strike and mass demonstrations by the Chicago Teachers Union. Their rallies across the city were joined by solidarity contingents ATU, SEIU, NNU, Postal Workers and other local unions, as well as Fast Food Workers striking at McDonald’s for 15 and a Union, and bakery workers protesting offshoring Oreo cookie production to Mexico.

Other labor battles over the past month include:

• **A Minimal First Step**—California law-makers have approved a new minimum wage law in the biggest state that will progress in stages to 15 dollars an hour an hour by 2022. While it falls far short of the demand for 15 Now, it will produce sorely needed substantial raises for the 42 percent of California workers currently paid less than 15. It would not have been achieved without the strikes and demonstrations by Fast Food and other low-wage workers for 15 and a Union. There will be another national mobilization of that movement on April 14.

• **Justice Delayed**—The Connecticut *Journal-Inquirer* reports, “Stop & Shop union workers and their supporters crowded the sidewalk in front of the 940 Silver Lane store on Wednesday to make their case for a new contract. Talks have languished between the United Food and Commercial Workers union—representing workers in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island—and Stop & Shop Supermarkets since the previous agreement expired Feb. 27.”

The article goes on to explain, “Union members said they believe Stop & Shop is deliberately dragging out negotiations, due in part to Royal Ahold’s pending merger with the Delhaize Group, which operates non-union stores, including Hannaford Supermarkets. The merger of Royal Ahold, a Dutch company, and Delhaize, based in Belgium, is expected to be complete by mid-year.”

• **Impasse Ahead**—The Democratic administration in Bernie Sanders’ home state of Vermont has rejected a “fact-finder’s” recommendation for raises for state employees. Accepted by the union, it provides for a 2 percent raise, plus step increases in the first year, 2.25 in the second. Vermont is not having a budget crisis but this modest boost in

real wages is considered too rich by labor’s “friends.”

In an attempt to discredit state workers who grab more than their “fair share” from taxpayers, the Secretary of Administration is quoted: “Johnson said the average Vermonter is not receiving the type of pay increase sought by the VSEA and probably doesn’t expect it, either.” It’s a half-truth. Unorganized workers aren’t getting these raises. Union victories can help change that climate for all workers.

• **Schalten Sie ihn aus:** *The Guardian* reports, “Workers at an Amazon warehouse in Germany, the company’s second-biggest market behind the U.S., are starting a new round of strikes in an attempt to pressure the online retailer to increase pay. The walkout by workers in Koblenz, western Germany, began on Monday night and was due to run until the end of the night shift on Wednesday, 23 March, the Verdi union said in a statement.

“Verdi has organized frequent strikes at Amazon warehouses across Germany since May 2013 as it seeks to force the retailer to raise pay for warehouse workers in accordance with collective bargaining agreements in Germany’s mail order and retail sector.” My rusty German translates the workers most effective workplace tactic—shut it down.

If you have a suggestion for Labor Briefing please send it to billonasch@kclabor.org and mention Labor Briefing in the subject.



(Left) Miguel Fraga, first secretary of the Cuban Embassy, at one of his Bay Area meetings.

Cuban diplomat tours Bay Area

By NICK BAKER

SAN FRANCISCO—Miguel Fraga, first secretary of the Cuban Embassy, which opened last year in Washington, D.C., came to the Bay Area in March for a week-long tour, speaking to students and community members about life in Cuba, renewed U.S.-Cuba diplomatic relations, and the need to end the U.S. embargo of Cuba. The Northern California tour was organized by the International Committee for Peace, Justice and Dignity.

In his talks at several colleges and universities around the Bay Area—as well as in the city council chamber in the working-class city of Richmond, Calif.—Fraga presented basic information about Cuba meant to counter the long disinformation campaign by the United States. Citing statistics from the World Bank (see data.worldbank.org), he noted Cuba's 100% literacy rate, low infant mortality rate of 4/1000 (the U.S. rate is 6/1000), and the highest rate of investment in education in the world, 12.8% of GDP in 2010.

He highlighted Cuba's systems of free higher education and free medical care. The Cuban health system, which is the first in the world to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis, also provides over 50,000 health-care workers to 68 countries.

Fraga also pointed out that, far from being isolated internationally, Cuba has diplomatic relations with 191 countries, including 190 of the 193 members of the United Nations. He also listed Cuba's major international trade partners, which include Canada, China, Venezuela, Brazil, Spain, and the Netherlands.

But the main goal of Fraga's tour was to win support for ending the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba. Since it was imposed in 1960, the embargo has done and continues to do incredible damage to the lives of the Cuban people. Fraga noted that the United Nations annually votes to condemn the embargo.

Last October, the UN voted 191-2 against the embargo; only the U.S. and Israel were opposed. A UN report released ahead of that vote showed that Cuba estimates the embargo has cost its economy over \$800 billion during the past half-century. To put in perspective just how large an amount that is for Cuba, the country's GDP in 2013 was \$77 billion.

However, the embargo is not as popular with the American bourgeoisie as it used to be. Both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have come out in favor of getting rid of it. Clinton has said that, in her opinion, the embargo "no longer serves U.S. interests" in Cuba, or in Latin America in general. As Secretary of State, Clinton served those same interests by supporting a coup against the democratically elected government of Honduras. So it is not the injustice of the embargo that makes her want to get rid of it. She just thinks there are more effective ways to achieve the goals of U.S. imperialism.

Despite renewed diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba, the Obama administration continues to spend tens of millions of dollars every year on programs to undermine the Cuban government. In one example, begun under Obama, the U.S. created a fake social media company in Cuba called ZunZuneo, a "Cuban Twitter," that was intended to provoke unrest

by spreading U.S. propaganda to users and operated from 2009 to 2012. The U.S. also continues to operate the radio and TV stations Radio Martí and TV Martí, which broadcast U.S. propaganda in Cuba.

And these are only the mildest offenses. They are in addition to the U.S. government's long history of training and funding terrorist groups of Cuban exiles based in Miami, whose most notorious attacks include the 1997 Havana hotel bombings and blowing up Cubana Flight 455 in 1976, killing all 73 people on board. One of the leaders of these attacks, Luis Posada Carriles, lives freely and comfortably in Miami today.

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Obama aide Ben Rhodes, the point man in U.S. negotiations with Cuba, told a town hall meeting in Miami that the U.S. was "no longer in the business of regime change in Cuba."

That's an interesting phrase—"the business of regime change." To paraphrase Calvin Coolidge, the last president to visit Cuba before Obama in 1928, when it was still a U.S. colony, the business of U.S. capitalists is business. And when a government doesn't want their business, their business becomes regime change. In Coolidge's words, "they are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing, and prospering" in Cuba, as they did before the revolution, when U.S. capitalists owned the vast majority of Cuba's rural land and controlled all of its major industries. Moreover, capitalists in the United States are seeking compensation on their own terms for the industries, hotels, and other property that Cuba nationalized during the revolution.

The United States is not experiencing rapprochement with the Cuban Revolution. Nor is it resigned to a socialist government in Cuba, giving up its attempts to destroy it by reconsidering the embargo. It is only changing tactics.

Miguel Fraga found sympathetic audiences in the Bay Area. At his talk at Sonoma State University, several older audience members, wanting to educate the young people in the room, prodded him to contrast the benefits to workers of Cuban socialism with the deprivations of American capitalism, and he had to decline each time, saying, "You must understand, I am a diplomat." But the answer was plain to see in the statistics he had already given.

When asked whether increased trade with the U.S. would become a foothold for U.S. imperialism, he asked that people trust Cuba to maintain its revolution. He said that Cuba would only trade for what it needed and what benefited Cuba. He pointed out that the Cuban Revolution has faced many challenges, from the Bay of Pigs to the fall of the Soviet Union, its major trade partner, and survived them all.

Socialist Action stands in solidarity with the Cuban people and their revolution. We support the continued success of the revolution and the continued health of Cuban socialism.

End the embargo! Long live the Cuban Revolution! ■

Chicago coalition protests U.S. blockade of Cuba

By MARK UGOLINI

CHICAGO—To coincide with Barack Obama's March 20-22 trip to Cuba, 30 Chicago activists participated in a "Public Speak-Out and Discussion" at Roosevelt University's downtown campus on March 19, demanding, "End the U.S. Blockade and Travel Ban on Cuba, Return Guantánamo!"

The meeting was sponsored by the Chicago Cuba Coalition, which described the central theme of the meeting: "Washington's diplomatic recognition of Cuba and freeing of the Cuban Five are real victories reflecting the continuing strength of the Cuba Revolution. Yet the U.S. remains entirely committed to its overthrow. And the 'good news' of 'normalization' and Obama's visit deliberately covers both that fundamentally-hostile commitment, Washington's legally-enshrined economic blockade and travel ban, and its illegal occupation of Guantánamo."

Speakers included Dr. Felix Masud, a Cuban faculty member at DePaul University; Gisela López, life-long Cuban-American activist; and public-health physician Howard Ehrman, MD, MPH.

Just back from a one-month trip to Cuba, Dr. Ehrman spoke about aspects of the boycott that the Obama administration has refused to implement, despite having full governmental authority to do so: "Questions of how the blockade affects medicines and supplies to the Cuban people and the Cuban government is still a question mark, but definitely this part of the blockade

is still in effect. What does this mean for the Cuban people? It means death. Every year dozens of Cubans are dying of cancer because even though the Cubans are very advanced biotechnologically, they need certain anti-cancer chemotherapy that only exists in the United States."

Ehrman spoke of contradictory U.S. actions with regard to Latin America. "It's contradictory for the president this afternoon after he sees Tampa Bay play the Cuban National [baseball] team to get on Air Force One and go to Argentina on the 40th anniversary of [a] massacre." Ehrman was referring to the March 24, 1976, ultra-right coup that overthrew Isabel Perón, in which nearly 25,000 Argentine trade unionists, political activists, and cultural figures were murdered.

"It's even more contradictory to declare Venezuela a terrorist nation and to do everything he can to bring down the government [of President Nicolás Maduro], which was legally elected."

The coalition also sponsored a press conference on March 22 at Chicago's Venezuelan Consulate, which was well attended by local media and hosted by Jesus Rodriguez, Venezuelan consul general. Rodriguez opened the meeting by congratulating the "Cuban people, the U.S. Solidarity Movement with Cuba, and the Cuban Foreign Service and Cuban government for this victory." He expressed the hope that openings seen for Cuba would translate into better relations between the U.S. and governments in Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela.



(Above) Dr. Felix Masud, faculty member at DePaul University, speaks on March 19.

"We celebrate what's been accomplished," said Steve Eckardt, co-coordinator of the Chicago Cuba Coalition, "even if Obama specifically says the reason of U.S. policy changes are because the old ones 'weren't working.' Meanwhile, much of the travel ban and blockade remain enshrined in U.S. law. And Guantánamo—the one place in Cuba where human rights are routinely violated—remains occupied by the United States in violation of international law. That's what we're here to oppose. What's more, Washington remains entirely, and openly committed to regime change in Cuba. ... The [U.S.] government seeks not a New Day but a New Way to overthrow the Cuban revolution." ■

New coalition exposes U.S.-Saudi alliance

By MARILYN VOGT-DOWNEY

Over 260 people attended the first 2016 Summit on Saudi Arabia held in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, March 5, and Sunday, March 6, at the University of the District of Columbia Law School. The conference was organized by Code Pink and a new organization, the Coalition to End the U.S.-Saudi Alliance.

The coalition was initiated by Code Pink, The Institute for Gulf Affairs, Massachusetts Peace Action, and the United National Anti-War Coalition. Among at least 30 peace and social action organizations who supported the effort were Veterans for Peace, *The Nation* magazine, and United Methodist General Board of Church and Society. (Notably, the list of supporting groups included no unions or labor groups and no socialist organizations.)

The coalition in its literature explains the pressing reasons for its formation and what it plans to do: "Our mission is to show how the U.S.-Saudi relationship is a key reason for the instability and terror being visited upon the region by murderous sectarian groups, by repressive governments and by U.S. and Saudi bombing campaigns, and to break up this destructive U.S.-Saudi relationship as a step toward peace in the area.

"Towards that end, we will expose the Saudi regime's support for sectarian extremist groups; its horrific human rights record; its deadly military interventions in Bahrain and Yemen and its support for despotic regimes, its collaboration with Israel and other countries pushing for war with Iran; and its support for destructive U.S. military interventions.

It lists its ambitious goals:

- Eliminating the U.S. military spending that is protecting the Gulf tyrannies, including military bases, naval fleets, etc.
- Ending U.S. aid to Saudi Arabia, including arms sales and training to Saudi military or police forces.
- Pushing UN sanctions against the Saudi regime for its military aggression and war crimes in Bahrain and Yemen, its violation of basic human rights, and its provision of material assistance to groups engaged in indiscriminate killing of civilians.

As the goals indicate, the organizers recognize that all the Gulf monarchies—the Gulf tyrannies—are military outposts of U.S. imperialism, and are under the protection of the U.S. and its vast military might. The only one of the Gulf states that does not function as a forward operating military base for the Pentagon and U.S. imperialism is Yemen, which the U.S. government is now bombing to oblivion with the help of the Saudi monarchy and the support of nine of Washington's client regimes—Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, and Somalia.

The reasons that the coalition chose to focus on Saudi Arabia are obvious: It is the largest Pentagon outpost among the Gulf tyrannies in terms of population and area, and its military budget—thanks to U.S. support to the Saudi regime—is the third largest in the world!

The purpose of the conference was to educate and organize to promote the coalition's goals. Toward those ends, Saturday's tight agenda began at 9:30 a.m. and continued until 5:30 p.m., featuring seven hour-long panels with presentations by more than 23 experts, running consecutively, with each panelist getting 10-15 minutes to make presentations followed by Q & A. This format—which was strictly adhered to—provided for an information-packed day. The evening event featured a movie called "Wajda," made secretly in Saudi Arabia to reveal what it is like to be a woman there, with no rights.

The information about the repression of women in this retrograde outpost of medievalism was startling. And what is true of Saudi Arabian "society" is also true of the other Gulf monarchies: Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait as well as Oman. They are all autocratic religious monarchies exercising the same repression—justified by religion—that characterizes the much-maligned ISIS, which U.S. imperialism is bombing Syria to rubble to allegedly destroy. These regimes allow no democratic rights: no independent media, protests, demonstrations, public dissent, or women's or workers' rights. Although there are limited instances of elected bodies, these bodies have no power. The power lies with the monarchy—that is, with the men of the ruling family.

Here are a few examples of points of interest reported by some of the speakers. Regarding the conditions for women:

1) All Saudi women (and women in all the Gulf regimes) must have a male "guardian," whose approval is required before they can do almost anything. Even the lease to their residence is in the name of their "guardian." While women won limited rights to vote-



(Above) Obama met with King Abdullah in 2014.

and run for council positions, proof of residency is required, which means that the male holder of the lease where they live must give his approval; and they must have a driver and guardian permission to go to the polls. In addition, the councils have no authority.

2) Women are not allowed to drive. Anywhere they want to go, they have to have a driver.

3) Women cannot protest, and even if they wanted to seek to join with others to protest, there would be virtually no way they could establish contact with other women who would join them. Of course, social media has opened up some new channels for potential communication, but this avenue is fraught with dangers.

4) If women are punished and imprisoned for violation of any of the numerous laws restricting them, they cannot be released from prison unless their "guardian" approves.

5) Men can abandon women at will and marry someone else at any time.

6) The fact that men have such total power over women tends to transform ordinary males into abusive tyrants against women who are powerless to defend themselves.

Regarding labor rights: It is important to be aware that the working class in these Gulf states—including Saudi Arabia—are indentured servants, foreign workers from impoverished nations to the east. These workers also have no rights. In Saudi Arabia, these non-citizens are roughly 8 million of the country's 28 million population. In other Gulf states—Qatar and the United Arab Emirates—the percentage of non-citizens is over 80%!

In this regard, *The New York Times* reported in February that the decline in oil prices was having a negative impact on some of the Saudi privileged citizens, who now have to compete with expatriates (that is, non-citizens) for jobs, even though Saudi citizens still had privileged wages. At McDonald's in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, for example, a foreign worker's wage would start at \$320 per month while the wage to the Saudi citizen for the same job would be more than four times that: \$1460 per month, "part of which is subsidized by the government." (*The New York Times*, "Young Saudis See Cushy Jobs Vanish Along With Saudi Arabia's Oil Wealth," Ben Hubbard, July 17, 2016.)

As repugnant as this is, it is not even half the story! Sharat G. Lin, a scholar on Middle Eastern migrant rights who spoke on a panel on Human Rights, has uncovered some startling documentation of institutionalized, state-sponsored inequality and discrimination that reveals precisely who calls the shots on the Arabian peninsula. He has found the Saudi regime's labor payment schedule, available only in Arabic. This labor payment schedule defines not two but 15 categories of workers, all of whom are in a different pay grade. They include designations such as "Saudi Nationals," "Arab Nationals," and others all the way down to cover the four million or so foreign workers from impoverished lands who comprise the imported work gangs, that among other projects have built all those garish structures and shopping malls for which the emirates are notorious.

Surprisingly, we find that the highest pay scale is not the Saudis but Europeans and U.S. citizens. This

is because the pay scale was not started by the ruling Saudi family but by the real bosses—British and U.S. imperialists, who since the 1920s, drew the borders creating Saudi Arabia and the other fiefdoms, put the ruling families in power, and established the oil companies such as Aramco.

This wage schedule document drives home the fact that for all its bluster and facade of power and wealth, Saudi Arabia, like the other Gulf states, is an imperialist colony and that even Saudi citizens—the "privileged" group—are second-class citizens.

The conference speakers included prominent figures such as Vijay Prashad, an author and expert on the region, who addressed the conference during the Saturday "lunch break;" Mohammed Al-Nimr, the son of Sheikh Nimr Al-Nimr, a prominent religious leader who—along with 46 others—was executed by the Saudi dictatorship on Jan. 2, 2016, on trumped-up charges because of his public protests for democratic and religious rights; social activist and author Christopher Hedges, who gave the keynote address at the closing Sunday session; and of course, Medea Benjamin, founder of Code Pink, who addressed the conference during the educational sessions and who kept the agenda going as scheduled.

Various work committees were established and met to initiate outreach and education, including supporting political prisoners, stopping weapons sales, creating an international coalition, and tracking/countering the Saudi lobby in the U.S. The existence of the work committee, "Getting the 28 pages of 911 Commission report released," marked the first time that an antiwar coalition has recognized that the official report of what happened on 9/11 may not be the real story. These 28 pages of the Congressional report, suppressed by George W. Bush in 2002, are believed to reveal the role of Saudi money in financing some aspects of the attack. There is a bill in Congress to get these pages declassified.

Since the conference, the coalition has been organizing and co-sponsoring protests and press conferences across the country to expose and condemn the year-long U.S.-Saudi-led bombing campaign against Yemen and the war crimes being committed, with the goal of bringing an end to both. It is also planning events to target Textron, the producer of cluster bombs, for its role in war crimes, and to expose programs at Ivy League schools such as Yale that accept funds from Saudi "princes."

The formation of this coalition is a remarkable achievement and a welcome step toward exposing to the U.S. working class—the only social force that has the power to stop this criminal war machine—the extent to which we are being lied to. They will learn that the "War on Terror" is a sham, and the so-called "jihadi terrorist armies" tearing the region apart are actually organized and funded by the Saudi Arabian monarchy and the other regimes of these U.S. military outposts, obviously at the behest of the Pentagon itself.

To watch and listen to all the conference speakers, and to follow the coalition's work and to join it, go to the coalition's website: Saudius.org. ■

The Politics of Deception

Trump & Cruz vs. Sanders & Clinton



BY JEFF MACKLER

I am tempted to compare the *stated* political views of the leading Republican and Democratic Party presidential contenders—even though they are largely irrelevant. But ranking Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders according to their purported degree of “socialist, progressive, liberal, conservative” or even incipient-fascist views is of little value in comparison to their central defense of capitalism—the system of the rule of an elite minority that owns and controls the vast productive capacities and wealth of society. It is the system whose inherent evils include war, repression, racism, poverty, sexism, homophobia, mass incarceration, environmental destruction, and ever-deepening incursions on civil liberties and democratic rights.

In general, elections in the United States, as in virtually all capitalist countries, are carefully orchestrated contests between sometimes competing wings of the *ruling class*. This competition has nothing to do with the interests of the working masses, the 99 percent, and everything to do with what portion of the wealth created by workers goes to which sections of the billionaire elites.

Donald Trump, the consummate “outsider,” appears as a reactionary populist racist, Islamophobic, super-patriotic, “America First,” “isolationist,” nationalist, homophobic, billionaire bigot. His claim to fame is his anti-establishment posture and his absurd assurance that as a clever and successful businessman, he can and will make “deals” (his favorite term) that meet the needs of everyone—workers and bosses alike.

During Trump’s recent 100-minute foreign policy interviews in two sessions with *The New York Times*, he openly accepted the “America First” characterization of his views. It is doubtful that Trump was not aware that the central figure of the infamous America First Committee of the early 1940s was the famous trans-Atlantic aviator Charles Lindbergh, a pro-Nazi/fascist, with anti-Semitic, racist, anti-immigrant politics and a eugenics-based race “purity” ideology. Lindbergh, along with key American anti-Semitic industrialists like Henry Ford, opposed U.S. entry into World War II based on a pro-Hitler and German superiority ideology. *The Times*, perhaps embarrassed, limited its description of the America First Committee to “an isolationist political party in the U.S. in the 1940s.”

Trump’s frequent advocacy of violence—“like in the good old days”—against protesting opponents, his staff members’ sometimes violent exclusion of Blacks and Muslims from his rallies, as well as his overt racism and hate-mongering aimed at Latinos and Blacks similarly reflect an incipient-fascist orientation. His belated disassociation from former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke’s endorsement is sufficient to indicate his vile character and politics.

The recipient of more free media coverage than any other candidate, Trump railed in mid-March against the anti-racist protesters who mobilized 8000 strong outside his planned University of Illinois rally and the several thousand who managed to get inside to exer-

Elections in the United States, as in virtually all capitalist countries, are carefully orchestrated contests between sometimes competing wings of the ruling class.

cise their free speech rights. Trump’s lies that university officials and Chicago police cancelled his meeting out of security concerns, and that the Bernie Sanders campaign sponsored the protests, were soon refuted by these same officials and by Sanders himself.

Trump’s now infamous line, “You’re fired,” taken from his previously hosted “reality TV” show, is now his watchword or signal to threaten or physically remove discordant attendees from his rallies. His campaign chief, Cory Lewandowski, was recently arrested on charges of battery against a Florida newswoman. Trump denied the charges, but the incident was captured on video, and the bruised reporter’s accusations were subsequently affirmed by police officials.

Republican tops try to block Trump candidacy

Trump’s reactionary posturing is increasingly an anathema to the Republican Party hierarchy, several of whose top traditional leaders have stepped forward in an effort to block his drive to obtain the 1237 delegates to ensure his nomination at the July 18-21 Republican Party national convention set for Cleveland. Former Minnesota Republican strategist and major fundraiser Norman Coleman warned that a Trump candidacy could imperil today’s Republican control of the House of Representatives and Senate.

In the meantime, ranked on an abstract scale of right-wing ideas, few doubt that Texas Senator Ted Cruz takes first place, exceeding all others in his insider background, yet expressing racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-immigrant and other reactionary views.

It appears that what began as an orchestrated effort to broaden its base has become a Republican Party nightmare. When the 18 original Republican candidates were paraded before the corporate media to display their wares, what emerged was not any significant differentiation aimed at bringing new forces into the Republican fold but rather a gang of like-minded, almost comical idiots denouncing each other. This ever-escalating descent into crazed rants and hatemongering aptly describes the moral and political bankruptcy of this prominent wing of the U.S. ruling class.

At the same time, at least some clever ruling-class elements who stand above the fray no doubt see these “hardball” right-wing contestants, regardless of who wins the elections, as facilitating the “liberal”

Democrats’ moving ever further to the right in order to achieve common objectives. “Hard cop—soft cop,” so to speak.

On the Democratic Party side we see a different story, with the traditional Democratic Party hierarchy realizing early on that Hillary Clinton’s bashing, not to mention red-baiting, “democratic socialist” Bernie Sanders would do her no good, if not redound against her.

The populist Sanders campaign has its analogies with Trump’s in that it calls into question the Washington elites and their bipartisan “free-trade” deals that yearly, on average, ship some million relatively high-wage U.S. jobs to low-wage peripheral nations like China, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and Mexico. The result has been a U.S. working class whose previous manufacturing and associated trade-union base has been largely eroded—with private-sector unionism today reduced to some 5.6 percent.

Increasing numbers of U.S. workers, if they have jobs at all, (the official U.S. job participation rate, 62 percent, stands at the lowest point in decades) are employed in low-wage, part-time, or precarious/uncertain usually service-sector jobs at the mercy of the boss class. Needless to say, anti-immigrant and racist prejudice is encouraged by corporate elites and serves to reduce all wages.

Sanders approaches this aspect of the employer offensive with proposals for massive public works programs, higher taxes on the rich, as well as single-payer health care and free education through the public college level. In this he has sharply distinguished himself from Trump, who employs openly racist demagoguery and seeks to scapegoat the most oppressed, especially immigrants, as well as Washington’s “free traders” for the country’s deepening crises.

Bipartisan agreement on trade issues

With regard to the issue of “free trade,” and I put this term in quotation marks for a reason, we should note that U.S. trade policy has in recent decades been largely a bipartisan affair. All sections of the capitalist class seek to employ trade policies that best suit their technologies and competitive status in the world economy. Those corporations with the most advanced technologies, regardless of party affiliation, advocate free trade in the sense of opposing any protectionist barriers imposed against their better quality and cheaper products.

Free traders want no obstacles to their penetration of world markets. Indeed, many of the “cheap” products that enter the U.S. from China and other low-wage nations are manufactured abroad by multi-national corporations controlled by U.S. corporations. These same U.S. commodities, produced both with cheap labor abroad and high-tech machinery, if not robots, tend to undermine the economies of poorer or less competitive nations.

Quietly, but also with the operative principles in play, those U.S. corporations whose technologies *cannot* effectively compete on world markets make sure that government negotiators press to include provisions in trade pacts, like NAFTA and the more recent Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement, that *protect* their weaker corporations’ lack of competitive-

(continued on page 7)

What is fascism?



By JEFF MACKLER

Despite the charged rhetoric of Trump and Co., the U.S. ruling class today has no need or desire to play the fascist card. Absent any significant working-class opposition to its policies and with a broad array of consciously constructed and/or controlled pro-Democratic Party “civil rights, immigrant rights and environmental NGO-type organizations” behind it, coupled with an ever-declining labor movement headed by the most hide-bound pro-capitalist and parasitic union bureaucracy ever, the ruling rich today have little to fear, at least in the short term, from a mass working-class insurgency capable of challenging its rule.

Fascism, historically the most extreme political form of capitalist rule, is called into being only when the question of which class shall rule society—either the working class and its allies or the minority property-owning elite—is sharply posed.

This was the case in Germany, Italy, and Spain in the 1920s and 1930s, where mass workers’ organizations led by Communists and Socialists, and anarchists in Spain, had the power and mass support to paralyze capitalist society through massive mobilizations and general strikes.

Indeed, were it not for the Stalinist and reformist mis-leaders of these and other working-class parties, socialist revolution would have likely been on the immediate order of the day. Only at this point did the divided and frightened capitalist classes employ the fascist option, which began with the physical annihi-

lation of the leadership of the mass workers’ parties and organizations.

Fascism arises only when, in the context of a deep economic crisis, society experiences a major class polarization characterized by broad struggles of radicalizing and class-conscious workers and their organizations on the one side—potentially capable of seizing power and ending capitalist rule—and a frightened, divided, and largely impotent minority capitalist class on the other.

Under these circumstances, armed fascist gangs, usually consisting of a threatened petty-bourgeois layer (middle class), accompanied by de-classed and alienated workers (the lumpen proletariat) and a small portion of misguided working-class elements, begin to take form under the tutelage of a “strongman” leader, usually trumpeting “left-sounding” populist/nationalist language against the powers that be, while scapegoating the most oppressed layers of society.

Hitler and Mussolini, and Franco in Spain, initially organized and armed these disaffected elements to direct their anger and frustrations against the major organizations of the working class as opposed to the ruling capitalist class. They routinely deployed armed thugs to break up union meetings and workers’ protests.

These fascist-led forces operated outside the formal police and military institutions of the still “democratic” capitalist state, although with its increasing implicit approval. But when the beleaguered capitalist rulers came to realize that the deepening work-

(Above) Pro-Nazis in 1938 cheer Hitler’s campaign to unite Germany and Austria.

ing-class mobilizations had the potential to challenge their rule, and at a time when even the ranks of the working-class-based bourgeois army were considered unreliable instruments to quell workers’ uprisings, they felt compelled to call on and/or accede to the now sizeable armed fascist forces to assume at least a share of the state power.

Adolph Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party, for example, was never *elected* as Chancellor of Germany. In January 1933 he was *appointed* to this post by Germany’s President, Paul Von Hindenburg, ostensibly to keep Hitler’s forces “in check”—that is, to give the Nazi Party a piece of the state power to be wielded against an insurgent workers’ movement without posing a direct threat to Germany’s existing “democratic” capitalist parliamentary institutions. In short order however, Hitler employed his new “legitimacy” to physically smash, dismember, murder, or imprison the leading ranks of the mass parties of the working class—especially the Stalinist-led Communist Party, the largest in the world outside the Soviet Union, and the reformist Socialist Party.

Tragically, it was the refusal of the Stalinists to join forces with the Socialists in a workers united front to challenge Hitler and the capitalist state power itself that led to one of history’s most terrible working-class defeats, and, indeed, the most important event that opened the road to the Second World War, which cost the lives of 80 million people worldwide. ■

... Deception

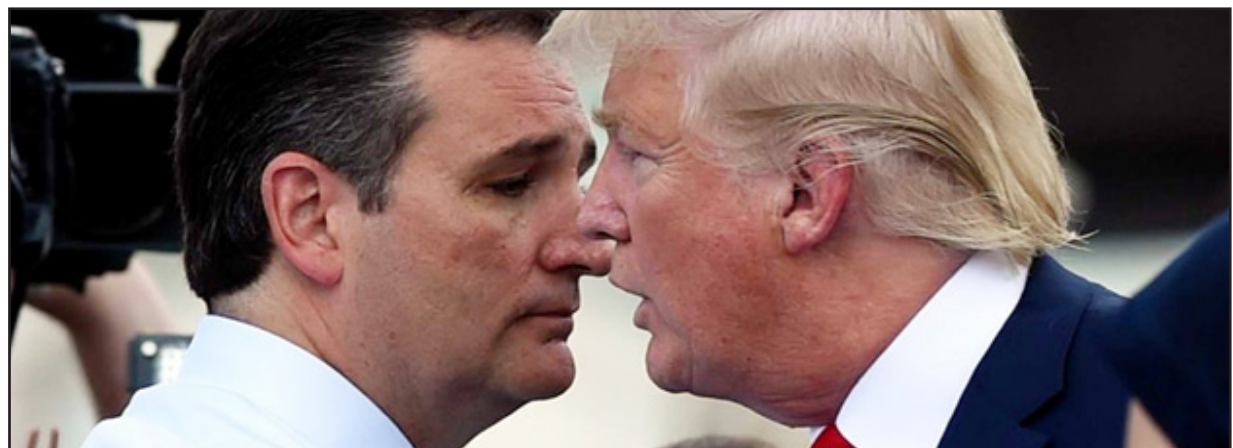
(continued from page 6)

ness. When it comes to profits, capitalists, whether Democrat or Republican, defend their own interests first, whether it be via free trade or protectionist policies.

The anti-immigrant racist Trump, for example, regularly employs low-wage, non-citizen Mexican immigrants in his Florida hotels and elsewhere, justifying this policy with the lie that in Florida white workers simply don’t want part-time (he neglects to add low-wage) jobs!

Sanders’ left populism is of the “democratic socialist” reformist variety, as with Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain and the various Scandinavian nations that, in the past, maintained some comprehensive social welfare programs, many of which have today been sharply curtailed by these same “democratic socialist” capitalist governments.

Trump’s right-wing populist rhetoric is more akin to the neo-fascist or extreme-right populism in Europe, as in France with Marine LePen’s National Front or the recent rise of neo-fascist parties in Poland and Germany. All of these forces rail against immigrants’ taking local jobs and otherwise upsetting the “national culture and traditions”—racist code words indeed. Sanders, like Trump, has chosen to be a player in the



(Above) Cruz and Trump in a nose to nose race.

now almost year-round electoral shenanigans that constitute today’s manufactured reality-TV America. Both understand in their different ways that U.S. presidents do not make any of the fundamental decisions in capitalist society. These are most always in the exclusive purview of behind-the-scenes negotiations between the real rulers, or more accurately, the direct professional unelected representatives of the tiny perhaps .001 percent who own and control the vast wealth of the nation and all associated institutions that help them amass their wealth.

In this Machiavellian schema, everything—from the details of the tax codes, trade policies, war policies, the national budget, Federal Reserve monetary deci-

sions, U.S. debt levels, and more—is honed to a level of precision that exceeds the human imagination.

Despite this ruling class “expertise,” however, the capitalist system’s inherent contradictions, long ago revealed by Karl Marx and as relevant today as ever, continually bring it to the point of crisis and near collapse, invariably impelling it to “solutions” contrary to the interest of the vast majority, as we see everywhere in today’s world of never-ending wars and the brutal imposition of austerity measures.

Driven relentlessly by its profit-first imperative, for

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Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

Looking the Basic Income Gift Horse in the Mouth

By JOHN CLARKE

Both the Justin Trudeau Liberals in Ottawa and the Kathleen Wynne Government at Queen's Park in Toronto have been making noises of late on the subject of Basic Income. The last Ontario budget, in fact, declared an intention to carry out a pilot project in a community still to be announced. While no clear details are yet available, it is very likely that we will soon be dealing with a practical initiative that we will have to respond to. We will have to consider how we view the possibility of the Liberals moving in the direction of a Basic Income system.

After decades of intensifying austerity and the erosion of systems of income support, with social assistance in Ontario now providing such wretchedly inadequate benefits that people are unable to feed themselves properly and retain their housing, the notion of a basic level of income that all are entitled to can't fail to generate a level of interest and raise some hopes.

However, I am convinced that a good hard look in the mouth of this particular gift horse is well advised. What are the different notions of how a Basic Income system might work? Why are governments now considering it more seriously? What form would it be likely to take in the present economic and political context?

Looking deeper into the gift horse

As soon as you start to look into the question of Basic Income or, as it was often called in the past, Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI), you are immediately struck by the ease and enthusiasm with which free-market thinkers and warriors of the neoliberal order have embraced the concept. From Milton Friedman to Charles Murray, the idea has found warm support on the political right.

There are some clear and obvious reasons why this is so. Firstly, the very idea of a basic level of income is about establishing a floor—and right-wing proponents are confident they can locate it in the basement. A low and inadequate

social minimum seems to them a great way of folding in existing, relatively adequate programs so as to, precisely, drive people into deeper poverty.

Another attraction offered by a low universal payment to those who take the side of the capitalists is the potential role it could play in depressing wages. In a recent contribution to the *Union Research* blog on the issue of Basic Income, Toby Sanger draws attention to the Splenhamland System, a wage-supplement arrangement put in place under the English Poor Laws between 1795-1834, and the role it played in driving down wages. Low-wage-paying employers could rely on the tax base to pay their workers' wages, and employers who had been paying higher wages were under an incentive to lower them in order to obtain the same benefit.

In the present context of vastly expanding low-wage precarious work, this danger is one that should not be underestimated.

The right-wing Basic Income agenda, however, sets its sights on more than cutting benefit levels for people in poverty and depressing the wages of the lowest paid workers. Potentially, it is a means to gut social programs and to decimate the workforce that delivers them. The notion is to use the basic payment to advance the pace of privatization enormously. This kind of payment would replace public services and all who received it would become customers shopping for their social needs in the private market. Not just income support systems, but public housing, health care, education, and transportation are threatened by the parsimonious universal payment envisaged by free-market Basic Income.

A different kind of Basic Income?

Of course, the political right's version of a system of basic social payments is countered by those with more progressive concepts. There is a notion of Basic Income that stresses income adequacy, the need to advance full employment, and the importance of preserving and strengthening a range of other elements of the social infrastructure.

More Mission Creep

Don't be distracted by the decision of the Justin Trudeau government to remove six CF18 fighter jets from Iraq, or to allow 25,000 Syrian refugees to come to Canada.

In addition to sending hundreds more troops to the Middle East, and on top of permitting Canadian merchants of death to sell \$5 billion in military vehicles to Saudi Arabia, Ottawa is considering another "training mission," this time in Libya, according to Defense Minister Harjit Sajjan. This would involve troops on the ground, combat troops.

Western forces are preparing for a military intervention in the North African country. Libya was laid waste by NATO bombing and the regime-change war that eventually toppled Muammar Gadhafi. The resulting political vacuum enabled

groups like Daesh (ISIS) and Boko Haram to take advantage, and to seize territory.

In life there aren't many certainties. But here's one: Under capitalism there is plenty of money to be made by weapons producers for conflicts new, and wars ongoing.

Justin Trudeau seems to think that antiwar public opinion will be appeased by cosmetic changes to Canadian military intervention—even as he actually steps up involvement in imperialist adventures overseas.

Ottawa wants a seat at the table where and when African and Asian concessions will in future be awarded to Western powers involved in the scramble for resources. There is nothing humanitarian or defensive about this greedy gambit.

— BARRY WEISLEDER

Socialist 2016: Crisis and Change

An International Educational Conference

May 20 – 21

Woodsworth Residence, U of T,
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Friday, May 20, 7 p.m.: Is Russia Imperialist? The Nature of the Conflict in Ukraine and Syria. Jeff Mackler, National Secretary, Socialist Action – USA; and Roger Annis, socialist journalist

Saturday, May 21, 10 a.m.: Robots, Part-time and Precarious Employment – Is the Working Class Disappearing? Peter D'Gama, paralegal worker, Executive member of CUPE 4948; Xavier, postal worker and leading member of NPA, France; Bob Lyons (see bio below).

1 p.m.: Climate Justice, After COP21. Roger Annis; Jaime Gonzalez, Socialist Unity League-LUS, Mexico; Angela Bischoff, staff member of the Ontario Clean Air Alliance; Xavier, France

4 p.m.: Another Great Recession and the Stakes for Humanity. Louis-Philippe Rochon, professor, Laurentian University; Bob Lyons, SA/LAS member, former NDP MLA in Saskatchewan

7 p.m.: Corbyn, Sanders and the Revival of "Socialism." Barry Weisleder, federal secretary, Socialist Action – Canada; Jeff Mackler, SA-USA.

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Without doubting the good intentions of advocates of a progressive Basic Income, it does need to be pointed out that the question of which version is to be adopted will not be decided by an impartial court of the common good but by present-day governments.

The people running the show on Parliament Hill and at Queen's Park have some history behind them when it comes to the implementation of measures of austerity and privatization. But their recent experience in bold new social policies that raise the living standards of working-class people and increase their share of the social wealth is significantly less.

The austerity agenda, which we can trace back to the 1970s but which has intensified following the international crisis of 2008, has placed a central strategic importance on weakening the adequacy of income-support programs. In addition to the massive undermining of federal unemployment insurance, provincial social assistance has been enormously weakened.

People on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) have seen the spending power of their income reduced by up to 60 per cent since the infamous Tory cuts of the mid 90s. Not only have income levels been driven down but rules and policies have been adopted that have made programs harder to access and more uncertain for those receiving them. The increased poverty and the climate of desperation that this attack has generated have been of central importance in ensuring an astounding growth of low-wage, precarious employment in Ontario.

As the Liberals, political chameleons that they are, posture on the issue of Basic Income, we must avoid the trap of thinking that a rational and socially just approach is going to be won on the strength of good arguments. The idea that Basic Income is so sensible that everyone on both sides of the class divide will want to get behind it and make it work in the best interests of all is profoundly mistaken.

If the concept is being advanced in Ontario by the very provincial government that has led the way in program reduction and austerity, it is not because they want to reverse the undermining of income support, the proliferation of precarious employment, and the privatizing of public services but for the very

opposite reason. They are looking with great interest at the possibility of using Basic Income as a stalking horse for their regressive social agenda and it will be the version that Bay Street has in mind that will win out over notions of progressive redistribution.

As the announcement in the *Ontario Budget* acknowledges: "The pilot would also test whether a basic income would provide a more efficient way of delivering income support, strengthen the attachment to the labour force, and achieve savings in other areas, such as health care and housing supports" (page 132).

Social programs that have emerged in capitalist societies, especially those devoted to income support, have always been reluctant concessions. Their design, effectiveness, and contradictions have reflected the prevailing economic and political situation and the balance of class forces in society. For decades, we have been fighting a largely defensive struggle to prevent the decimation of systems of social provision. We are not in a period when bold new redistributive programs are on the drawing board.

The Liberals will be only too happy if we give up our fight to defend the systems that have been won in previous struggles and join them, as "stakeholders" at the consultative round table. A decade of experience in maintaining an empty discussion of "poverty reduction" has turned them into experts in such diversionary tactics. At the end of the process, however, if we allow them, they will put in place a version of Basic Income that will give Milton Friedman very little reason to turn over in his grave.

We are in a period when capitalism and the governments that represent its interests are increasing the rate of exploitation and reducing the level of social provision. That is not about to change and any redesign of income support systems we confront will be all about furthering, not limiting, levels of social inequality. This is a particularly bad time for the lamb to accept an invitation from the lion to lie down. Basic Income will be no panacea, and the fight for income adequacy will continue, of necessity, to take the form of social mobilization against an agenda of austerity and regression. ■

John Clarke is an organizer with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP).

200 years ago: The historic strike of journeymen shoemakers

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Below is an excerpt from a new book by Michael Schreiber, *“Unsinkable Patriot: The Life and Times of Thomas Cave in Revolutionary America.”* The book is due to be published this month, and can be ordered from Amazon or local bookstores.

The autumn of 1805 was unusually mild. Farmers were able to plough their land almost until Christmas. And in Philadelphia, the balmy temperatures might have “gone to the head” of a group of journeymen cordwainers [shoemakers], who had the temerity on Nov. 1, 1805, to undertake what was one of the earliest labor strikes for wages in U.S. history.

The journeymen had organized themselves back in 1794 into an elemental trade union known as the Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers. This was a reflection of the fact that a revolution in production in the shoe-making industry had produced a new workforce.

In colonial times, shoes generally had been made to order for customers by individual craftsmen, who might have employed merely a few journeymen or apprentices as helpers. But by the end of the 18th century, custom-made shoes were constructed only for wealthy customers. More often, shoes were produced according to pattern for the wholesale as well as retail trade. Far fewer craftsmen worked alone; now they became employers of larger groups of journeymen, who were given piecework wages to produce the commodities.

The wage rate varied according to the quality of the shoe. This formula might be “justified” partly on the assumption that an average worker would produce a cheaper shoe in less time than it took to produce a better one, but it also reflected pricing conditions in the markets. Thus, men employed in making what were called “market-work” shoes—those sold to poorer customers by retailers in the public shambles—would receive wages that were only a third of what they could earn in ordinary “shop work.”

The journeymen grumbled that “market-work” wages were not enough for them to feed and house their families. Although they often labored from five in the morning until past midnight, they still could not make ends meet.

And they also complained that the employers were giving them a lower wage for producing shoes for retail sale than for custom-made products—even though the quality of the two articles and the care put into their manufacture was often the same. “I made some work for Mr. Ryan,” a journeyman named John Hayes said in court, “and he made a similar reduction upon me, because they were to go into the shop, when he used before to give the same price for shop goods as he did for bespoke work.” The journeymen highlighted the unjustness of the situation by noting that the employers would still often sell the shoes for two or three times what they would pay their workers to produce them.

The journeymen had struck before, in 1799, when the masters had threatened to reduce wages. The employers then advertised for “scab” workers, but had little success in recruiting enough to break the strike. In the settlement, the journeymen succeeded in stopping the wage reduction. In 1804, another strike ensued, and again the employers agreed to keep the current wage rate—but when business slackened after Christmas, they began cutting wages again.

The November 1805 walk-out was provoked by an action that had taken place two days earlier, when an informal organization of employers met together to consider the demands of the journeymen for higher wages, and resolved unanimously that “we will not give any more wages than we have given for some time past.”

As in 1799, the employers advertised for scabs to take the jobs of the strikers, and several employers attempted to fire men who had gone on strike. Street battles took place between the scabs and striking workers, which resulted in the arrest of the leaders of the journeymen’s union and the collapse of the strike.

Public opinion in Philadelphia was polarized over the strike. William Duane’s *Aurora* stood up for the strikers, while the Federalist press, reflecting the opinion of the wealthier sector of Philadelphia society, sided with the employers and the scabs. On Nov.



27, the pro-Federalist *United States Gazette* polemicized against the *Aurora* by promoting the bosses’ view of the events: “Electioneering trick.—The *Aurora* this morning has trumped up a pleasant story of certain journeymen shoemakers, who, he says, were last week committed to jail, ‘for meditating and proposing to demand an augmentation of the reward for their manual labor.’—We then hear a good deal of rhodomontade about English common law, aristocracy, nobility, oppression of the poor, &c. &c.”²

“Now the story as we have heard it is thus: For a considerable time past, ever since the inclement season commenced, a great proportion of the journeymen shoemakers of this city have been conspiring to raise the price of their labour; and for the purpose of accomplishing this end have refused to work for the usual wages.

“Some few, however, finding honest industry to be more profitable than idleness and caballing, returned to their work. This exasperated those who chose to stand out, and it is said they appointed a certain number of sturdy individuals of their fraternity, to be dominated [nominated?] ‘The Hammering Committee,’ whose duty it sho[u]ld be to find out and flog all such as should return to their work at the customary wages.

“It is said that some of the members of this committee in the execution of their duty, have been unkindly seized and thrown into prison. This circumstance is caught by the *Aurora* as proof that the object is to deprive these worthy hammering citizens of a vote at the senatorial election tomorrow.”

The following day, the *Aurora* let the journeymen speak for themselves by printing their “Address of the Working Shoemakers of the City of Philadelphia to the Public.” At the beginning, the document took a defensive tact by citing the guarantees of the Pennsylvania state constitution “that the citizens have a right in a peaceable manner to assemble together for the common good.” And in accord with that proposition, it asserted that, “for the past fifteen years and upwards,” the journeymen had been assembling “in a peaceful manner” for such constitutionally protected purposes. Now they wished “to shew to the industrious of all trades, what danger threatens them, and what wrong has been done to us.”

Then the Address went on the attack against the master cordwainers, “who are only the retailers of our labor, and who in truth live upon the work of our hands”: “As they are rich and we are poor—they seem to think that we are not protected by the constitution in meeting peaceably together and pursuing our own happiness—They suppose that they have a right to limit us at all times, and whatever may be the misfortunes of society, the changes in the value of necessities, the encrease or the decrease of trade, they

think they have a right to determine for us the value of our labor; but that we have no right to determine for ourselves what we will or what we will not take in exchange for our labor.”

Unfortunately, the master craftsmen, with the support of the wealthier echelons of the business community, decided to retaliate in the courts against the strikers and their union. They brought charges against the union and eight elected officers for “conspiracy.”

A major charge against the union was that they had used various methods of compulsion—even violence—to force journeymen workers to not scab against their fellows who were on strike. In effect, the bosses professed that in prosecuting the union, they were merely standing up for the democratic rights of their workers.

The trial was put on the docket of the Philadelphia Mayor’s Court for January 1806. The twelve men on the jury could hardly be considered peers of the defendants. The jury included three master craftsmen—a hatter, a tailor, and a watchmaker. And the nine others were employers, such as innkeepers, merchants, etc.

In final arguments, defense attorney Walter Franklin reiterated the strikers’ insistence that they had been exercising their just right to assembly. But more to the point, he asked, since the master cordwainers had assumed the right to set the level of wages, did not journeymen also have a right to bargain the price of their labor power?

And since the employers had taken action to join forces in order to fix prices and wages, did not the journeymen also have the right to seek collective action “to determine for themselves the value of their own labor?”

In his summary, Franklin appealed to the jury: “If you are contented with the blessings enjoyed under our free constitution, which secures to the citizens an equality of rights, and recognizes no distinction of classes ... I shall look for the result of these feelings and these sentiments in a verdict of acquittal.”

But such arguments failed to deflect the bias of the jury. They retired at 9 p.m. and came to a decision soon afterward. The court then asked the jury to wait until morning before pronouncing the verdict—“guilty.” The eight defendants were each fined \$8, and required to pay court costs.

Just months after conclusion of the journeymen’s conspiracy trial, the transcript of the proceedings, taken in shorthand by Thomas Lloyd, was published in book form. An advertisement for the volume noted: “This trial is deeply interesting, and shews to men of all professions, that by the English common-law (now for the first time introduced into Pennsylvania, since its first settlement as a province under William Penn) they are not at liberty to associate together, for the purpose of fixing the price of their labor, in the way attempted by the society of Journeymen Cordwainers.”⁵

It was a strong setback for labor’s cause. Three decades later, however, the labor movement rose again in Philadelphia, with a general strike and the formation of the first U.S. workingman’s party. By that time, machine-driven factories had increasingly supplanted handicrafts, and the system of masters and journeymen had developed into a new system, with a clear division between capitalists and proletarians. ■

North Carolina sit-in

North Carolina NAACP William Barber has announced a “mass sit-in” at the state legislature if the state’s discriminatory law against LGBTQ people is not repealed by April 21.

“We cannot be silent in the face of this race-based, class-based, homophobic and transphobic attack on wage earners, civil rights, and the LGBTQ community,” Barber said.

Tonyia Rawls of the Freedom Center in Charlotte endorsed the NAACP call. And musician Bruce Springsteen announced that he was canceling his April 10 show in Greensboro, N.C., in solidarity with those protesting the reactionary “religious freedom” legislation.

The law would overturn any measures passed by local governments to protect the rights of LGBT people. Civil rights groups are challenging similar “religious freedom” acts in Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, and other states. ■



Peter Casolino / Hartford Courant

Connecticut march protests bipartisan austerity budgets

By CHRISTINE MARIE

HARTFORD—On April 4, nearly 1000 union workers, community organizations, Fight for Fifteen activists, and allies organized as the Democracy, Unity and Equality Coalition marched on the Connecticut state legislature to protest two austerity budgets in front of the representatives.

The first, overwhelmingly approved a few days earlier by a bipartisan coalition with 127 yeas to 16 nays in the House and designed to close the deficit in 2016 state revenue by \$220 million, hits the most underserved residents in the state. The few lawmakers who held out cited the unacceptable cuts to the Department of Women and Children and services to the disabled.

The second budget plan, the FY 2017 budget proposed by a darling of the national Democratic Party and the chairman of the Democratic Governors Council, Dannel P. Malloy, proposes over \$900 million in cuts and zero increase in taxes on the rich.

At the first of two rallies, Jan Hochdadel, president of the AFT Connecticut, echoed the mantra of the Chi-

cago Teachers Union when she mocked the claim that the state was broke and the budget process broken. "It's not broke unless they broke it on purpose," she countered.

Connecticut has the fourth highest median income of any state in the country, but the figure is deceptive because it also boasts the highest wealth gap between the 1% and the 99%. Connecticut's top 1 percent each earned an average of \$2.7 million a year, and between 2009 and 2012 their income grew 35%. The income of the bottom 99%, on the other hand, dropped 5.4%.

The myth of Connecticut's "wealth" hides the dark economic reality of the state's urban centers, such as Hartford, where the official unemployment rate for African Americans is the highest in the nation.

The refusal of the Democratic and Republican legislators to tax the state's 1%, as well as some of the most profitable corporations in the country, to preserve social services was pointed out by speaker after speaker at the April 4 rally.

Brian Becker, a student activist and AAUP supporter from Central Connecticut State University, told the rally-goers, "Governor Malloy had no difficulty giving

the war profiteers United Technologies \$400 million in tax relief, and their CEO was given a salary of more than \$10 million last year. What is there to be said if legislators are not willing to invest in our future, but are willing to protect the privileged few from paying their fair share in the state in which they make their profits?"

The future they envision is clear from the list of proposed cuts. They include reducing monies to orthodontic care to clients under 21, cutting the amount given to those who cannot afford a burial or cremation from \$1400 to \$1000, significantly dropping the amount given to a children's hospital highly dependent on Medicaid, dramatically cutting aid to dementia care givers and mammogram support, gutting fire training and environmental initiatives, impoverishing school-based health centers and mental health/substance abuse treatment programs, cuts to asthma treatment and group homes, and so on.

In addition, because the State Employees Bargaining Council (SEBAC) has hesitated to open up the pension and health care portions of a contract not set to expire until 2022, the governor is threatening up to 5000 layoffs.

"Business demands this," the governor told reporters, alluding to the repeated demands by the Connecticut Business and Industry Association's 20x17 plan to "rebalance" Connecticut finances and boost the state's bond rating. In short, business is demanding that the investments of the wealthy in Connecticut bonds be protected by depriving the state's poorest residents of subsistence services.

The April 4 union rally, which the press characterized as the largest and loudest in many years, raised hopes that the 15 unions that represent state workers will indeed resist the cuts and use the struggle to deepen a coalition of labor and community groups that could mount a real fightback. In 2011, under similar pressure of huge layoffs, the State Employees Bargaining Council agreed to serious concessions in return for the 2022 contract expiration that the governor and legislature are now trying to reopen.

Because a majority of the SEBAC union rank and file in 2011 refused to agree to the concessions package on the first round, SEBAC illegally changed its bylaws midstream so that affirmation from only eight of the 15 state worker unions was needed to ratify the take-back agreement. Rank-and-file activists who opposed the concessions were told by their union leaders that to defy the Democratic governor would put steam in the Koch brothers' political engine.

The current round of attacks is putting that kind of strategic thinking to the test. Connecticut unionists and community groups may find the confidence to try a more effective response. ■

Labor Notes conference was big and diverse

By BILL ONASCH

Though official statistics were not yet available at this paper's deadline, there were clearly at least a couple of thousand participants at the April 1-3 Labor Notes Conference in the Chicago suburb of Rosemont.

This was the 17th of these biennial gatherings sponsored by the monthly *Labor Notes* magazine. No votes are taken; they are strictly educational—or promotion of solidarity with ongoing class battles. There are plenaries where everyone gathers, topical concurrent workshops to choose from, and interest groups for those organized in particular unions or industries.

An off-shoot of the latter is Railroad Workers United (railroadworkersunited.org), an independent rank-and-file group promoting unity in action among the 20 or so different craft unions in the USA and Canada. They have taken to holding their conventions just prior to *Labor Notes* in the same venue.

Most attending are involved in unions or allied groups such as Fight for 15 or worker centers. They are mostly rank and filers or stewards, organizers, or local officers, but there were at least two international union presidents there as well. And the only socialist holding elected office in the United States—Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative, serving a second term on the Seattle city council—was present.

An effort is always made to bring international guests. This year at least 20 other countries from every inhabited continent were represented. The trend of recent conferences being more and more diverse in color, gender, and age continued. Young people were in the majority.

There was a major "disruption" in the long-planned conference schedule on Friday, April 1—the Chicago Teachers Union strike. There is an article elsewhere in this paper about the mobilization of tens of thou-



Marty Goodman / Socialist Action

sands of workers in solidarity with the CTU and promoting other Chicago labor issues. While I am sure some committed to leading workshops that day were disappointed that hundreds of conference participants chose the CTU actions over workshops, none had hard feelings—they would have preferred to be in the streets too.

Labor Notes has never formally endorsed a candidate in elections and cannot do so while maintaining its non-profit status. However, Labor for Bernie had both a strategy session for those who support the "democratic socialist" seeking the Democrat presidential nomination and a workshop where various views could be expressed.

As usual, this conference was worthwhile for those just entering the workers movement as well as for seasoned veterans. For this, the organizers are to be commended. But due diligence requires noting a repetition of a very serious weakness in these gather-

(Above) Panel sponsored by Labor for Palestine at the *Labor Notes* conference. Speaking is Manawel Abdel-Al, of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions.

ings—the failure to seriously address the overarching crisis of climate change.

To be sure, there was a workshop on Labor Confronts Climate Change. It featured a well-qualified panel of unionists working to build a labor climate justice movement. The facilitator, Sean Sweeney, has connected climate scientists with unions and is playing a leading role in the global Trade Unionists for Energy Democracy. But their powerful message—that should have been delivered to one of the plenaries—was relegated to the smallest room available in the vast Conference Center.

The complete schedule and other information about the conference is available online at: <http://labor-notes.org/conference>. ■

... Teachers

(continued from page 1)

children of Chicago. We're here for the young adults of Chicago, we're here for people that deserve and are entitled to a real future.

"We're going to fight for \$15, so that all our parents can have a living wage. We are fighting for our sisters and brothers that drive the buses and operate the "El" [public transit trains]; for our sisters and brothers in SEIU health care that take care of the most vulnerable people in this state; for the university professors; for the City College professors; for every single working person in this entire state. Somebody's got to lead the way, it happened to fall to CTU."

During the morning picketing, crowds gathered around many schools where rallies were also held. Two such schools were Harlan Community Academy High School on the city's South Side and Roosevelt High School in the North Side Albany Park neighborhood. At both schools hundreds of teachers, students, and supporters gathered, including striking McDonalds workers demanding a \$15 minimum wage.

Later, feeder marches of students and picketers from other nearby schools joined together and extended the protest to nearby McDonald's restaurants; then, they marched on to attend major rallies at two state-funded universities hard hit by Rauner's budget blackmail—Chicago State University on the South Side and Northeastern Illinois University on the North Side.

About 1000 people attended a rally and teach-in at Chicago State University organized by student, faculty, and BYP 100, where CTU President Karen Lewis, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and others spoke. The situation is most dire at Chicago State, where about 30% of university funding (approximately \$36 million per year) comes from the state.

"They plan to lock up and not to lift up, because somebody knows that strong minds break strong chains," Jesse Jackson told the rally. "We will not let them break our spirits. This school will not be closed. The governor may go, but Chicago State will stay."

The only overwhelmingly Black university in Illinois, Chicago State has not received funds from the state for nearly 10 months and is now falling behind meeting payroll costs. In late February the university sent potential layoff notices to all 900 of its employees. More recently, university officials instructed employees and students to turn in keys to campus buildings and offices, since planning is underway for widespread layoffs as early as April 30. Chicago State has cut back in many areas, and is now struggling to finish the semester without the cash necessary to meet the needs of its 4500 mostly low-income students.

A broad campus coalition including students, faculty, and staff organized the Northeastern Illinois University April 1 Day of Action. An outdoor rally of over 3000 on the University Commons heard a list of speakers including American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and representatives of AFSCME District 31 and University Professionals of Illinois Local 4100. It was preceded by a student theatrical dramatization of the "death of education" and the "rising of the phoenix," symbolizing the fightback required for its survival.

"Our state employees are without a contract going on a year," said Linda Loew of AFSCME Local 1989. "The governor walked away from the table. ... [We] deserve



(Above) Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis addresses the April 1 rally.

a fair contract just as Chicago teachers deserve a fair contract. The same governor, and the same banks and corporations ... are holding *all* of us hostage!"

Nearly all faculty and university staff at Northeastern have had work hours cut. Most university employees have already seen reductions of 20% in their paychecks. In addition, the state stopped funding MAP financial aid grants to students. Around 2000 students at NEIU alone must receive these funds in order to remain in school. Earlier this year the school's president, Sharon Hahs, said she anticipates completing the spring semester but there is a possibility that the university will be "shut down" later in the year if no funds are received.

Nabisco workers of Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco, and Grain Mill Workers Union Local 300 joined a CTU picket line at Tarkington Elementary School, and then marched with teachers to Nabisco's Southwest Side factory for a rally and press conference. Nearly 200 people participated. Nabisco's parent company, Mondelez International, announced earlier this year that 600 Nabisco workers at the Chicago plant are losing their jobs due to a company decision to open a new plant in Mexico.

Gov. Rauner has just launched a statewide, campaign-style speaking tour throughout Illinois to promote his union-busting, service-slashing "Turn-around Agenda," important portions of which are supported by both Democratic and Republican politicians around the state.

Chicago Tribune reporter Kim Geiger reported on a meeting Rauner held with the Tribune editorial board: "Crisis creates opportunity. Crisis creates leverage to change ... and we've got to use that leverage of the

crisis to force structural change,' said Rauner, borrowing from a political philosophy famously coined by his [Democratic Party] friend Rahm Emanuel that 'you never want a serious crisis to go to waste.'"

"Opportunity" for big business means massive profits for the tiny few on the backs of all working people throughout the state. Such "opportunities" are always the first priority of capitalist parties and politicians.

Since the Chicago Teachers Union strike of 2012, the union has broadened its base of support, winning allies from others within the labor movement and communities of the oppressed. The April 1 Day of Action shows the progress CTU has made in building the kind of coalition that is needed. Continuing down this path with a strategy of united labor and community action, while remaining independent of the Democratic and Republican parties, can protect gains won in past struggles and win new victories.

It's already clear that the big-business interests are united in a massive assault on the CTU and all unions throughout the state. It's also clear that this fight cannot be won by the CTU and its current supporters alone. A much broader struggle is needed.

This offensive can only be effectively challenged with a united counter-mobilization of working-class forces on a massive scale. This means that other powerful Chicago unions need to join the fight and demonstrate that they stand behind the CTU and are willing to take whatever action is necessary to turn back the employer's offensive and protect the interests of all working people in Illinois. ■

... Deception

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example, the introduction of modern labor-saving technology into the productive process inevitably results in massive layoffs for the working class as opposed to a massive increase in leisure time—time that in an egalitarian socialist society would be devoted to the advancement of education, broad cultural pursuits, and furthering humanity's well-being.

Contradictions of capitalism

The capitalism system in all its fundamentals is based on the exploitation of human labor, that is, the stealing of a major portion of the value that labor produces. But the very substitution of machines to replace human labor eventually leads to a fall in the rate of profit for the broad capitalist class.

It is this "law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall," as Marx explained, that compels capitalists to introduce a myriad of counter-measures, including extension of the length of the work day, speed up at the workplace, attacks on wages, pensions and social benefits—and today, the outsourcing of basic

production to low-wage and increasingly near slave-labor countries.

These, and other elements of capitalism's inherent contradictions, lie at the center of any rational explanation of the imposition of massive austerity measures against workers in every nation. They have raised the consciousness of millions, if not billions of people, that there is something fundamentally flawed in the system itself.

In the U.S. this awareness is expressed in contradictory ways, with the Trumps of the world blaming capitalism's victims and appealing to base prejudice while the Sanders camp poses more palliative responses that point to remedies that in essence keep the system intact along with its leading party, the Democrats, who have proven to be the most malleable, reliable, and skilled in channeling rising discontent back into the establishment's political framework.

Rhetoric aside, Sanders' record of voting with the Democrats 98 percent of the time—including his support to nearly all U.S. imperialist wars and the annual trillion-dollar military budget—as well as his pledge to support Hillary Clinton should he lose the present primary contests is more than sufficient to justify his treatment in the corporate media as a "le-

gitimate" candidate.

Indeed, to the extent that Sanders travels the country to convince ever-increasing numbers of young activists that the Democratic Party can be effectively reformed, he is well suited to shepherding the disillusioned back into the camp of the capitalist exploiters.

Sadly, those in the socialist movement who should know better, such as Socialist Alternative and its elected Seattle city-council member, Kshama Sawant, have opted to support Sanders and to organize rallies for his campaign—with Sawant serving as a keynote speaker at a late March Sanders rally in Seattle.

While Sanders has certainly brought new legitimacy and interest to socialist ideas, a development that began to be reflected in the polls a few years before his announced candidacy, he has also sought to obscure socialism's revolutionary content. As always, this task falls to those who clearly understand the class divide in capitalist societies.

The revolutionary socialist future will be a product of the conscious organization and mobilization of the broad working-class majority to end capitalist rule once and for all. The construction of a revolutionary socialist party to help in the leadership of this struggle stands at the center of Socialist Action's reason for being. Join us! ■

Jobs, energy, and survival

Mark Ralston / AFP / Getty Images



By BARRY WEISLEDER

Let's talk about jobs and the carbon-based energy industry. Over 100,000 workers have lost their jobs in Canada's oil-producing region since the current downturn in the industry began in June 2014. In the oil-rich province of Alberta, the number of workers collecting unemployment insurance has more than doubled in the past year. Wages are also plummeting. Workers at the lowest income levels have been hit the hardest.

Who left Alberta oil workers in the lurch? It was not the opponents of pipelines. Environmentalists didn't cause the commodity price to plummet. Capitalist greed, causing overproduction, is the main culprit. But the present situation does give everyone pause to take stock of where we're going. It's clear that the world is on a fast track to catastrophe, fueled by rising greenhouse gas emissions.

A paper published last month by retired NASA climate scientist James Hansen and his colleagues found that even attaining a global warming rise of 2 degrees Celsius, a goal that many authorities tended to view as their target, could be highly dangerous. Their models predicted disruption of the major ocean currents, growing loss of the ice shelves, increasingly powerful storms, and a sea level rise of several feet in the next 50 years—which could lead to major coastal cities around the world becoming flooded.

"We're in danger of handing young people a situation that's out of their control," said Hansen.

The effects of climate change are already being felt. Warming and rapidly acidifying oceans (due to their absorption of CO₂) have caused a stunning drop in the number of plankton—the foundation of the food

chain for sea creatures. A study of Pacific sea snails at the University of Washington in 2014 indicated that acidification of the water is dissolving their shells. Last fall, scientists discovered 35,000 walrus on a beach in Alaska, a sign that sea ice, their usual habitat, is steadily shrinking.

To avoid the certainty of disaster, a transition from carbon fuels to safe, clean, 100% renewables is urgent. Clearly, the change cannot be completed overnight. But, it must begin with rejection of any new pipelines. It must be accompanied by a commitment to re-tool the energy industry.

In the process, we should not do to oil and gas workers what their greedy bosses have done—toss them onto the scrap heap, or drop them into the tar pit.

There must be a transition to solar, geothermal, hydro, ocean wave, and wind power. Laid-off workers should be at the centre of the change. The energy

(Above) Workers' trucks, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

shift must be engineered rapidly and extensively. It will cost trillions, and it must involve restitution to indigenous peoples.

Who will pay for this? The business class wants working people and the poor to pay for it, again and again. The rich even want to make money on it by operating a shell game called Cap and Trade.

Socialists say the polluters should pay. The plundering eco-pirates are the ones who must make amends. It's clear that if Big Oil and Gas don't pay, the energy transition will not happen soon enough, and human civilization will be history.

Only public ownership of the entire energy sector, under democratic workers' and community control, would enable society to harness the wealth and resources necessary to make this urgent transition in good time. ■

Oil versus food

Food scarcity and malnutrition, exacerbated by climate change, could result in a half a million extra deaths by 2050.

Research published in the medical journal *The Lancet* in early March indicates that fewer fruits and vegetables would be available due to climate change, and that would increase rates of heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Three-quarters of the projected extra deaths would be in China and India.

Unless action is taken to reduce greenhouse gas

emissions, fruit and vegetables available to people in 2050 will shrink by 4 per cent, the calories available by 3 per cent, and the red and processed meat by 0.7 per cent.

The 500,000 deaths figure by 2050 is a middle of the road scenario compared with a world without climate change, the study says.

Climate change has already been called the biggest global health crisis of our times because of floods, droughts, and increased risk of infectious diseases.

Experts warn that changes to diet beyond 2050 could be even greater. — B.W.