

Youth activists call strike to fight climate change



Kin Cheung / AP

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

The planet is burning, yet governments still express indifference, refusing to undertake the radical steps that will be necessary to avoid climate catastrophe. Accordingly, people around the world, led by students and youth, are taking to the streets in protest, focusing this month on global strikes.

The catalyst for the protests took place a year ago when Swedish middle-school student Greta Thunberg decided to leave class and instead to stand outside the parliament building with a sign reading, “School Strike for Climate.” Her action stirred climate activists around the world to redoubled action.

This month’s protests will center on walk-outs and mass rallies on Sept. 20, with additional actions a week later, on Sept. 27. Washington, D.C., will see a day of action on Sept. 23. The activities have been scheduled to influence the Sept. 23 session of the UN Climate Action Summit. Many labor and environmental organizations are supporting the protest events.

With the environmental disasters of 2019, the “worst-case scenario” of climate change appears to

be unfolding before our eyes, and the effects will indeed get much worse in coming years without concerted action to mitigate them.

Reports from the Bahamas state that vast portions of the multi-island nation have been rendered uninhabitable due to the effects of Hurricane Dorian—a storm that was made larger and more catastrophic due to warming oceans. Meanwhile, the West Coast of the United States is recording temperatures in the Pacific of 5 degrees above normal, the highest in 38 years—threatening seals and sea life.

The climate crisis was shown most graphically this summer as forests and grasslands in South America, Africa, Indonesia, Siberia, Greenland, and Alaska went up in flames. Though some of the fires were due to natural causes, such as the effects of lightning on tinder-dry forests, most of the ones in South America and Indonesia were set by people wantonly clearing trees for ranching and mono-crop commercial agriculture (see article on the Amazon fires on page 7).

Research this year suggests that wildfires in California have been 500 percent larger than they would have been without human-induced climate change.

Some researchers warn that the number of burning forests, savanna, and peat deposits threaten to initiate a feedback loop, in which the fires accelerate climate change by adding significant amounts of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide emissions in the Arctic alone reached their highest level this year since satellite record-keeping began in 2003. Moreover, as soot from the fires settles on glaciers, it aids in causing the ice to absorb the sun’s energy instead of reflecting it, thus speeding up melting.

While many regions of the world are in drought, others have been wracked by torrential rains and flooding because of disrupted weather patterns. The heartland of the United States has been flooded for five months. The depth of water in the Great Lakes spiked to record levels, at times as much as three feet over long-term averages. The waters of Lake Michigan, at a record-breaking height, inundated parts of Chicago this past spring and summer. “There’s no doubt that we are in a region where climate change is having an impact,” said Richard B. Rood, a professor in the department of climate and space sciences

(continued on page 9)

Cops attack protest at Boston 'Straight Pride' parade

By C.J. LAPOINTE

Counter-protesters dominated on Aug. 31, as the fascist/alt-right tried to co-opt the LGBTQIA community's Pride events with the hateful message of "Straight Pride" in Boston. While the left outnumbered the right, it was noticeably smaller than the 30,000-person response to a fascist/alt-right demonstration in Boston in 2017.

Eric Maroney, a participant in the counter-protest and an independent socialist from Connecticut, writes, "Unlike 2017 and 2018, the alt-right was able to successfully march and hold a rally for several hours. The alt-right crowd was modestly larger but significantly more racially diverse and sophisticated in its messaging than past years. The anti-LGBT focus cut across racial divisions and featured Latinx and African American speakers."

The fascists and alt-right have always been good in adapting messaging to attract layers of the middle class and working class to their ranks. It's no accident that the Nazis used the word "socialist" at a time when hundreds of thousands of workers were in the ranks of the Social Democratic and Communist parties in Germany. Behind clever messaging is still the same message of hate.

Why is "straight pride" hateful? Saying "straight pride" is like saying "white pride." Our entire society is set up first and foremost for the wealthy and then in the interests of straight and white people.



(Left) Police form ranks to attack counter-protest at "Straight Pride" event.

LGBTQIA people and people of color had to fight their way into the political life of American society, and more often than not it was people of color from the LGBTQIA community leading that fight.

Today, the phrase "straight pride" is being used as a battering ram by the fascist and alt-right groups to rally their base against what they see as the rise of a "degenerate culture" of the LGBTQIA, immigrant, Black, and Muslim communities, which threaten to wipe away their privileges. Just because the march was racially diverse doesn't make the politics any different. While still in a nucleus form, the fascist/alt-right movement in this country is attracting new recruits every day.

We've seen two approaches taken by the fledgling fascists and ultra-right in the

logical base for these attacks.

Second, there are public rallies like the "Straight Pride Parade" trying to make the presence of fascism normal for middle-class and working-class people. The program of these ultra-right-wing forces was on display in Boston. Pro-Trump parade floats read, "Build the Wall." There were also a number of pro-military signs, Israeli flags, and of course anti-LGBTQIA signs.

Police revealed which side they are on by attacking and pepper spraying peaceful counter-protesters. Nine were sent to the hospital. Zoey, a Bridgeport, Conn., DSA member, attended the counter-protest and had this to say, "The way I saw it, the police and the (Straight Pride) marchers were one and the same. They would not have been able to march without the police being there. We clashed with the cops more than we did with any fascist marchers, and they were violent before the parade even started."

"While we were rallying outside of the park and along the parade route, the police frequently opened up their own barricades to violently arrest and mace protesters who had done nothing wrong. This was entirely without provocation from any of us. Once the parade started, we followed them along their route, and by the time we got to the end it seemed to be that the police were there waiting for us, where they again came onto our side of the barricade

(continued on page 4)

JOIN SOCIALIST ACTION!

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. 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.

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.

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, LGBT people, 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. We maintain fraternal relations with the Fourth International.

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. 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. 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!

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Jeff Mackler for U.S. president! Rally launches socialist campaign

By DAVID RIEHLE

Socialist Action's campaign for the offices of United States president and vice president commenced on Aug. 18 at Oakland's Humanist Hall with greetings and endorsements from a broad and impressive cadre of veteran fighters for justice and human rights. Socialist Action has put forward Jeff Mackler from Oakland, Calif., and Heather Bradford from the Twin Ports of Duluth, Minn., and Superior, Wisc., to campaign over the next year and a half for a socialist world, as humanity stands on the brink of global catastrophe from war, climate change, and worldwide industrial pollution.

Celebrated novelist, poet, and social activist **Alice Walker** told the audience, "I met Jeff Mackler on a socialist journey, when I was 18 (1962). I mean, he was really thinking way back then.

"I'm really very happy that Heather and Jeff are standing up for this vision of a world where people can have what they need. ... This is the future, if we're to have one. So it comes down to believing we can do it. ... It's having the vision and having the resolve to continue to believe in what you know is right. And to stand for what you know is right and what you want for the world. ... We have to change this world."

Heather Bradford works full time as an advocate at a domestic violence center and is also a substitute teacher. She is secretary of AFSCME Local 3558. She told the rally:

"For me, the 2020 presidential campaign is an opportunity to raise the red flag at a time when we need to build independent social movements, an independent labor movement, and ultimately a labor party capable of confronting the climate catastrophe and ongoing and deepening crisis of capitalism—a crisis which displaces, cuts short, immiserates the lives of billions of people around the world. Our planet is dying and we are at the crossroads of socialism or barbarism, yet we can be encouraged by the fact that over the past decades there has been increased interest in socialism.

"This campaign must speak to, educate and mobilize those who are fed up with capitalism's brutality and broken promises. Of course, socialism will not be built through the Democratic Party or through the electoral system, which is designed to benefit the rich. The Democratic Party will not abolish the prison state, open our borders or dismantle the U.S. war machine, and we don't have time for a kinder, gentler imperialism! We don't have time to entertain measures that protect the profits of bosses, warmakers, or planet destroyers. We don't have time for the lesser evil, as we are facing an extinction event.

"We have to convince people that their power is found, not in the polling place, but in the workplace, in the streets, and together."

Mumia speaks from prison

Mumia Abu-Jamal, described by *The New York Times* in 1981 (prior to the 2001 vacation of his death sentence to life imprisonment) as "perhaps the world's best known death-row inmate," spoke to the rally from prison: "Jeff Mackler has spent most of his life in struggles for social justice. ... From the 1960s until today—and tomorrow. From the early civil rights movement, the imperial war in Vietnam, the Black liberation movement, and the imperial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Jeff Mackler has been on the side of the oppressed, those opposed by the empire. For the past 36 years, Jeff has served as the National Secretary of the Socialist Action party, an anti-capitalist organization working to bring an end to the imperialist, capitalist system.

"If you name a social struggle of the last 40 years, you will always find the name Jeff Mackler there and his comrades in Socialist Action. In the 'Communist Manifesto,' Marx and Engels wrote, 'The Communists everywhere support revolutionary movements against the existing social and political order of things.' That sounds like Socialist Action at work, supporting struggles from the prison industrial complex to world struggles against imperial intervention.

"When MOVE was attacked by the government, Socialist Action opposed these violent and oppressive actions. When the late Lynne Stewart was attacked by the Bush administration, Socialist Action swiftly took the side of her defense, calling rallies for her, and when Pennsylvania attacked me with death warrants, Socialist Action mobilized rallies throughout California to oppose it...

"Jeff Mackler is an activist's activist. And he has fought against the empire, its wars and the battles happening on the imperial interior. There are more struggles to come, and Jeff Mackler will be where he's always been,



Mackler joins rally against fascist attacks

Some 100 social justice activists, representing a broad range of San Francisco Bay Area organizations, mobilized and rallied at Revolution Books in Berkeley on Sept. 1 to defend the popular bookstore from fascist threats to "burn it down." Another 200 mobilized at Berkeley's Civic Center Plaza for a march to UC Berkeley's Sproul Plaza and then to Revolution Books, a few blocks away, when the fascist rally that had been previously announced, failed to materialize.

The bookstore rally and media conference featured speakers from the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), the organization associated with the bookstore, a representative from the Berkeley City Council, Berkeley Poet Laureate Rafael Gonzalez, solidarity messages from a dozen local bookstores, and solidarity

remarks from many others.

Jeff Mackler (pictured above) addressed the rally as Socialist Action's 2020 candidate for the U.S. presidency. Said Mackler, "Our agreements with the RCP range from opposition to all imperialist wars, opposition to racism, sexism, homophobia, the impending climate catastrophe, defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal and the threatened Washington, D.C. Embassy Protectors to opposition to union busting and the capitalist system itself, whose very nature perpetuates all of the above attacks on working people.

"Our political differences on this day, when fascist thugs threaten violence and destruction, are subordinate to building the kind of mass united front mobilizations that bring us together today." ■

right in the thick of things. From prison, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal on Prison Radio."

Pam Africa, head of International Concerned Friends and Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal, said, "I found out this man [Jeff Mackler] was not just about Mumia, but ALL the Mumias throughout the world. ... Jeff is one that's been battling this terroristic government all through the years. We're there to support what Jeff is saying because we know before we get there that Jeff is talking about us. ... Continue to do what it is that you're doing and all of us will be right here for you."

Glen Ford, co-editor of *Black Agenda Report*, stated, "I'm glad Jeff Mackler is running for president. In fact, I'm glad Jeff Mackler is in this world. Because Jeff Mackler fights. He's been fighting for the people all of his life, and that's wild. Jeff is running against Trump, but that's just a technicality. Jeff is really running against this whole damn capitalistic system."

Live from Palestine

Nora Barrows Friedman, journalist and documenter of the Palestinian liberation struggle, spoke to the rally via Skype from Palestine: "Greetings to you, Jeff, and to everyone here to support his vision of a justice-oriented future for us all. I'm writing these greetings from occupied Palestine, where I'm leading a delegation of young activists, artists, and community organizers who are not only here for first-hand witnessing of Israel's entrenched apartheid, settler-colonialism, and violent occupation; but who are committed to linking the Palestinian struggle for liberation to the many struggles for liberation in the U.S.

"This work is critical, and this work is ground zero for understanding and eventually dismantling the U.S. systems of political violence, imperialism, and capitalism. Jeff Mackler's legendary commitment to these linked struggles, over many decades and continents, from Cuba to Venezuela to Palestine to the U.S. prisons, is not just what we need right now, but it is the only way forward. I am proud to call Jeff a friend and a mentor and

I am proud to endorse his candidacy for a just, sustainable, and equitable future for everyone."

Others who spoke or sent messages of endorsement included anti-war fighter Cindy Sheehan; Robbie Meeropol, son of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg; Barbara Becnel, author and filmmaker; Joe Lombardo, co-national coordinator, United National Antiwar Coalition; and more. The rally concluded with a speech by Jeff Mackler.

Mackler featured in *Atlantic Monthly*

Annie Lowery, a staff writer for the *Atlantic Monthly*, wrote in the Aug. 29 issue about "The People Who Think Bernie Is Moderate," referring to several leftists who have announced their candidacies for president in 2020.

"Jeff Mackler," she wrote, "wants the elimination of the military budget, the nationalization of the energy and banking systems, open borders, the creation of a state-run health-care system and the end of capitalism in the United States. ... Senator Majority Leader Mitch McConnell looks at the Democratic primary and sees the proposed Cubafication of the country; Mackler looks at it and sees neoliberal accommodationism. 'Bernie gets a little attention when he says things like, 'Three people in the United States control half the wealth in the country,' he told me with a chuckle. 'He has no proposal to change that in any way!'

Between McConnell and Mackler, the latter probably has the better argument," Lowery stated. "Socialism—real socialism, meaning worker collectives and the nationalization of critical industries and the end of the free-enterprise model? In the presidential race, no one is even talking about it. Save for Mackler and people like him.

"The Oakland-based candidate is gearing up for his 2020 campaign for the White House, with planned meetings from Kentucky to Maine. 'We don't expect to win. We're going to be write-in candidates in maybe a dozen states,' he said. 'But we will win if we build our party.'" ■



Self-determination for Kashmir!

By RUWAN MUNASINGHE

Late on Sunday, Aug. 4, with hardly a notice, India moved tens of thousands of troops into what is already the most militarized region on the planet. In Indian-administered Kashmir, politicians, especially opposition leaders (but even some loyal to India), were placed under house arrest. Internet and landline service have been cut. Free assembly has been banned. Many non-Kashmiris and tourists were advised to flee. Many with family members in Kashmir are still left wondering about the safety of loved ones.

All of this comes as New Delhi has rushed through a presidential decree to revoke Article 370, the part of the constitution that gives Indian-administered Kashmir special status. Also, the Indian parliament pushed through the “Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Bill,” which seeks to bifurcate the area into Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh (which will be ruled over directly by the Indian government via a Lieutenant Governor).

In an earlier *Socialist Action* article, entitled “Modi’s reelection in India: More Attacks on Workers and Ethnic Minorities,” I mentioned that the reelection of right-wing Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (leader of the Hindu Nationalist BJP and member of the semi-fascist RSS) in late June was, among many other things, likely to continue and worsen racist policies against ethnic minorities. It was argued that one of the results of this would play out on a macro scale in the geopolitical issues regarding Kashmir.

Modi and the BJP have maintained very reactionary views toward majority Muslim Kashmir and have exploited any developments in Kashmir for their own interests. A good example of this was the Pulwama attack earlier this year, which resulted in the Indian airforce’s launching an airstrike in Pakistani territory. On the morning of Aug. 5, it became clear that these predictions about India’s growing belligerence toward Kashmir were coming true quicker than imagined.

This is a concerted and well thought-out attempt by

the right-wing BJP and its sympathizers. They want to eliminate article 370 of the constitution—to jettison the autonomous status of Kashmir and the power of the regional government. They also want to do away with Article 35A, which permits the local legislature in Indian-administered Kashmir to define its permanent residents and control property rights.

The election manifesto of Modi specifically states: “We are committed to overcome all obstacles that come in the way of development and provide adequate financial resources to all the regions of the state [of Kashmir]. We reiterate our position since the time of the JanSangh to the abrogation of Article 370.”

Victoria Schofield, author of “Kashmir in Conflict,” explained to Al Jazeera recently that there has been a gradual erosion of article 370 for years. However, the disposal of article 35A, in particular, sets a legal justification for a situation in which Kashmir could be taken over by Hindu settlers and Indian corporations. Kashmiris would have little to no ability to fight this, as they are completely stripped of political clout. This would actually change the demographics of Kashmir. She says, “If article 35A goes, you’ve got any number of people from the rest of India feeling that they can come up and buy property in Jammu and Kashmir.”

Indeed, this seems to be a longer-term vision of the BJP itself. The election manifesto of Modi stated: “We are committed to annulling Article 35A of the constitution of India as the provision is discriminatory against non-permanent residents and women of Jammu and Kashmir.” It continued, “We will make an effort to ensure the safe return of Kashmiri Pandits and we will provide financial assistance for the resettlement of refugees from West Pakistan, Pakistan Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (POJK) and Chhamb.”

Clearly, the BJP is invested in a project to allow Hindus (and perhaps friendly corporations) to have priority to move to Kashmir and buy up land. From Modi’s perspective it is only the Hindu Kashmiris (Pandits), who might have left Kashmir since independence or during violence in the region over the decades, that

are the oppressed people in this situation—not the predominantly Muslim Kashmiris who have been living under occupation even before independence and have been consistently denied the right to voice their political will.

During Indian independence and partition, each province or princely state had a referendum on whether they would join India or Pakistan. In the heavily Muslim area of Kashmir this basic method of measuring the popular will was denied. Instead, the leaders of Indian independence—Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohatma Ghandi—left the decision up to the British-backed Hindu leadership. Nehru himself came from an old Kashmiri Hindu Brahmin family. Ghandi—supposedly nonviolent—gave full support to Indian military forces to shoot and kill Kashmiris if they did not obey.

Following independence, heightened tensions resulted in the Indo-Pakistani war of 1947, which was supposed to end in a referendum regarding whether Kashmir should join India or Pakistan. This referendum never happened. The area split and remains contested to this day. Indeed, Kashmiris have never had the semblance of a formal political opportunity to express political self-determination. Meanwhile, occupied Kashmir is the most militarized region in the world and occupying forces regularly commit acts of brutality. It should be noted that Kashmir is an important source of natural resources, particularly water.

Pakistan responded to India’s actions immediately. Imran Kahn announced that he will lobby for Kashmir at the United Nations and called for the international community to support him. Referring to nuclear war, Kahn said, “We appeal to the world. If the world does not do anything now, it will have serious consequences.” As this article is being written, Pakistan has announced that it will “downgrade” diplomatic relations and suspend trade with India.

The historic position of the United States has been to ignore discussing the issue, ostensibly in order to maintain good diplomatic relations for business and arms sales especially to occupying forces. The U.S. has funded the Indian military’s occupation of Kashmir (along with Russia and Israel), and U.S. military aid has even been correlated with spikes of violence against Kashmiri civilians. In spite of this, Trump recently offered for the U.S. to be a mediating force for peace.

In the hours after these developments, protests across both Pakistan and India occurred spontaneously. Throughout India, protests organized by individual units of the Students Federation of India (SFI) were held. One of the first protests was held by Students For Society (SFS) in University of Panjab. The left parties of India—specifically the CPI-(M) and CPI-(ML)—held marches across the nation. Likewise, student groups and religious groups held protests in Pakistan. One of the largest was in Lahore. In Pakistan-administered Kashmir, the Kashmir National Students Federation held a variety of actions.

As this article is going to press, hundreds are marching and demonstrating in New Delhi, India’s capital. The main march was endorsed by CPI-(M), CPI-(ML), Revolutionary Socialist Party, and All India Forward Bloc. The demands are for a defense of democratic rights of Kashmiris, defense of article 370, and an end to destruction of Kashmir.

During a moving speech, a Kashmiri student at University of Hyderabad gave personal testimony explaining the agony of the current crisis, describing the uncertainty of the status of his family in Indian-occupied Kashmir during the past 72 hours. He challenged his audience to think beyond the current crisis and to recognize the absurdity of Kashmir’s occupied status overall. “Let me remind each and every one here that there is no 370 in Uttar Pradesh. There is no 370 in Bihar. There is no 370 here [in Telangana],” he said.

Self-determination for the people of Kashmir! Indian troops out of Kashmir! No U.S. intervention! ■

... ‘Straight Pride’

(continued from page 2)

to beat people and make arrests.”

Zoey also said, “I was inspired by the brave antifascists who showed up to confront fascists previously in Portland and Charlottesville. This event cut especially deep since I am a lesbian trans woman. I wanted to be a part of the thousands of protesters there to show them that their hate and bigotry would not be tolerated. I also wanted to lend my support to my comrades and fellow queer folks in Boston, who didn’t ask for these people to come to their city.”

Similarly Molly, @socialistdogmom, live tweeted, “police just broke through their own barricade and stormed the sidewalk, tackling a group of people standing on the

sidewalk, pointing pepper spray at us, and carrying at least three people away. I have no idea why and I was five feet away from them.”

Police as an armed wing of the capitalist state enforce the law and order of the wealthy elite. The bosses and their cronies are trying their best to maintain divisions in the working class and keep the oppressed in the shadows, put them behind bars, or murder them.

We have not yet seen the full scope of a fascist movement in the U.S. There is no mass workers’ movement undermining the stability of the class dynamics and threatening to thrust the working class to power. The ruling rich can still maintain control within the framework of a capitalist “democracy.” But with the rise of economic crisis, increased strikes, and a growing in-

terest in socialism among working-class youth, the capitalist class may think that a fascist movement in its initial phase may be useful to have on hand. In the absence of a mass socialist or workers’ party, the capitalists, who have think tanks and strategists running around the clock, understand the ebbs and flows of working-class upsurges in this moment far better than the workers’ movement does.

For activists and socialists, opposition to the fascists and alt-right means continually mobilizing the largest and broadest layers of the working class. We need hundreds of thousands in the streets; we should be agitating in our unions, deepening our educational efforts, and building our organizations.

The “Timber Army” supporters of the professional soccer club in Portland, Ore.,

Timbers, are fervent anti-fascists known for singing the Italian anti-fascist song “Ciao Bella” during matches. They gave us a refreshing example of organizing against fascism by defying Major League Soccer’s ban of political signs. With the support of a number of the players, the normally raucous crowd organized 30 minutes of silence at the start of the match, followed by an explosion of people waving anti-fascist flags and banners.

Today, the Boston Police Union is calling for prosecutions of protesters arrested at the “Straight Pride” Parade. Readers should be ready to mobilize against police brutality and defend these activists against unjust prosecutions. This further highlights the bankruptcy of police unions and how the labor and LGBTQIA movements have no business associating with them. ■

'Squad' trip spotlights U.S. Israeli policy

By STEVE XAVIER

In August, an announced trip by freshman House members Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) and Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) to the occupied West Bank drew the ire of President Trump and other GOP politicians. The Netanyahu government decided to bar entry to the two legislators, using the urging of Trump, who tweeted that the pair "hate Israel & all Jewish people," as a cover.

An article in *The New York Times* expressed concern that Trump's call to bar Omar and Tlaib would undermine the bipartisan consensus in support of Israel. In doing so, *The Times* admitted the strategic role played by Israel in U.S. Mideast policy:

"If Israel becomes a partisan issue in the United States, advocates warn that there could be negative consequences for both countries. Israel's security would be severely undermined without the political, economic and military support that flows from bipartisan backing in Washington. And if Israel is weakened, so too is the United States' position in the Middle East, which is always stronger when both parties are behind it."

After an international outcry, and protests from usually compliant Democrats in Congress, the Israeli government reversed course, offering a "humanitarian" entry to Tlaib to visit her family in the West Bank. This "humanitarian" exception put political preconditions on Tlaib, a Palestinian-American.

After initially agreeing to "respect any restrictions and will not promote boycotts against Israel during my visit," Tlaib reversed course, saying that she would not allow the Israeli government to cause her to "bow down to their oppressive and racist policies." In a tweet, Tlaib stated: "Silencing me & treating me like a criminal is not what she [her grandmother] wants for me. It would kill a piece of me. I have decided that visiting my grandmother under these oppressive conditions stands against everything I believe in—fighting against racism, oppression & injustice."

The controversy over the Tlaib and Omar trip to Palestine put the Democratic Party in a difficult position. The Democrats, in keeping with the bipartisan policy of support for imperialism, are usually reliable allies of the Zionist apartheid state. The new crop of "progressive" Democrats seems more willing to criticize the policies and actions of Israel, drawing the fury of the GOP and false accusations of anti-Semitism. Recently, the Alabama GOP called for Omar's removal from Congress. Criticism of the policies and actions of the Zionist state are not anti-Semitic.

Both Omar, who came to the U.S. as a refugee from Somalia, and Tlaib, who is the daughter of working-class Palestinian immigrants, have been more consistent in their criticism of Israel than other members of



(Above) Democratic Party Congress members Rashida Tlaib (left) and Rashida Omar.

the so-called "squad" within the Democratic Party. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) and Ayanna Pressley have not been reliable defenders of Palestinian rights. Pressley voted in favor of Resolution 246, which condemned the international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions solidarity campaign. AOC had condemned the Israeli violence against Gaza during her election campaign but quickly hedged on her criticism by admitting that she isn't an "expert."

Meanwhile, Israel's repressive policies against Palestinians, including home demolitions, internment without trial, and the construction of illegal settlements, continue with the tacit approval of Trump and the U.S. ruling class. Israel is proceeding with construction of more than 2300 new homes for settlers in the occupied West Bank. The alleged "resistance" to Trump in the Democratic Party has been mild in expressing any criticism of the apartheid state. The main contenders for the Democratic nomination in 2020 remain supportive of Israel.

In office, the four "progressive" women Congress members have been the target of racist invective and red baiting from the right. The "squad" members have been singled out for particular abuse from Trump, who called for them to "go back where they come from," ignoring the fact that all four are U.S. citizens and that only one, Omar, was born outside the U.S.

In reality, Trump's targeting of the four young women is based on their ethnicity and religion. Tlaib and Omar are Muslims. Ocasio-Cortez, of Puerto Rican descent, was born and raised in New York. Pressley

is African American. Trump's racist rhetoric serves to reinforce the white supremacist myth that people of color are not "real" Americans. Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib are also members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

In office, the four have not been consistently progressive voters, despite the mainstream media attempt to tie them together as a group. Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib voted for the \$738 billion Trump war budget. All four voted against the \$4.6 billion in funding for Trump's anti-immigrant operations along the U.S.-Mexico border, but it's telling that they all voted for a resolution to bring the bill to the House floor before voting against it.

The presence of "progressive" and housebroken socialists in the Democratic Party serves to reinforce illusions that the Democrats can be used to make real social change. Revolutionaries reject the notion that working inside one of the two parties of imperialism, exploitation, and war can result in anything other than a few distorted reforms. Revolutionaries understand that the Democratic Party is the "graveyard of social movements."

Socialists and real progressives who genuinely want fundamental social change should be fighting for an independent working-class party—a labor party based on fighting unions and organizations of the oppressed. ■

By DAVID KEILY

The postal workers of SUD-Poste 92, in Haut-de-Seine, in the western suburbs of Paris, have won their 14-month strike, marking an end to one of the longest strikes in French history. During these long months the workers faced intense repression by the police, who worked hand in hand with the managers of La Poste, a state-run company.

Management fired the district's elected trade-union representative, Gaël Quirante, in 2018, and he was placed under house arrest for two days last June. SUD-Poste 92 workers, members of the *Solidaire* trade union, walked out in protest of his firing as well as to express their own demands on issues such as privatization through sub-contracting, speed-up, the use of temporary workers, and deterioration of services to the public.

The Haut-de-Seine postal workers won many demands. Charges were dropped against Gaël Quirante, though he is still struggling to regain his post office job.

Both bosses and cops tried to curtail the resolve that the striking workers continually displayed. Now their struggle has become an example for workers of how to fight and win.

Workers at La Poste—the second largest employer in France, with over 250,000 workers—have been under increasing pressures from management. The bosses had been utilizing third-party algorithms as well as acquiring companies that specialized in data analysis. The point of these algorithms was to increase the intensity of work by bringing the "scientific" management of workers into the 21st century. Similar to the conditions employed by companies like Amazon, minor tasks of workers became increasingly scrutinized

French postal workers win 14-month strike



(Left) Supporters greet Gaël Quirante after his release from attention.

for a union, the French postal workers sent messages of support. In return for the postal workers' solidarity, the U.S. hotel workers organized an action outside the French consulate in New York City to support the strike. In addition, socialists from the U.S., Spain, France, Greece, and elsewhere raised money to help build the largest strike fund in French history.

In the current period, in which workers' victories are few, the victory of the Hauts-de-Seine French postal workers is important. The postal workers can serve as inspiration to workers facing pressure from the bosses and capitalism, threats from police, speed-up, and dehumanizing working conditions. The French postal workers showed that when workers fight, they can win.

In times of struggle the bosses try to utilize every violent and abusive appendage of business and state to isolate workers' who dare to fight back. They readily employ tactics such as interrogating workers in closed-door meetings, arresting and firing their elected leaders, and calling police or private goons to intimidate them. But working-class solidarity can show that workers are not alone. Solidarity is the most powerful weapon of our class.

Congratulations to the workers of SUD local 92! Their victory serves as inspiration for workers everywhere, and we in Socialist Action are proud to have played a small roll supporting the strike. ■

by data science groups such as the Hardis Group.

Under the new rules at La Poste, workers were required to serve as elder care, in return for an extra fee to customers. The new program allowed subscribers to pay for a postal worker to visit their elderly relatives in addition to tending to their normal postal routes. In northern France, La Poste had experimented with requiring workers to staff small railroad stations as an additional workload. The overall objective was to require workers to do more, and faster.

The strike spanned the duration of the struggles against Macron's labor law reform, the fight for university admittance, and the yellow vest protests. Striking postal workers demonstrated at rallies and picket lines in solidarity with the movement protesters. Undoubtedly, their participation was as important for building these movements as it was for drawing support for the postal strike.

When Stamford, Conn., hotel workers were fighting

Interview: Rising hopes for Puerto Rico independence



(Left) Damage in Puerto Rico from Hurricane María in 2017.

By ERNIE GOTTA

The recent protests in Puerto Rico, taken in the context of uprisings across the globe in Sudan, Hong Kong, and Algeria, paint a picture of mass working-class discontent with capitalism. However, we have yet to see any of these uprisings coalesce around a revolutionary leadership that is able to deal a decisive blow in favor of the workers and farmers. In Puerto Rico there exists the added difficulty of direct colonial rule, which has drawn wealth and human resources from the island and left misery in return.

Below, Socialist Action reporter Ernie Gotta discusses the recent protest movement in Puerto Rico, U.S. colonial rule, and winning independence with Francisco Andrés Santiago Cintrón, co-president of Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano (MINH).

The struggle for independence and self-determination from U.S. colonial rule is a pressing fight that Socialist Action fully supports. We also recognize the urgent need to develop a revolutionary socialist wing of the movement to carry out the revolution, as the Cuban leadership did.

Ernie Gotta: Now that Gov. Ricardo Rosselló has resigned, what is the political mood on the island?

Francisco Santiago: Right now there is a general feeling that the future runs a different course than what we were accustomed to. As with all political processes, the context of the situation sheds light on the reasons why these protests erupted and to their demands. The reality is that Puerto Rico, a direct colony of the United States since 1898, has undergone a deep economic depression since 2005. More so, the two leading parties, the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP) and the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), have undergone a serious erosion of political legitimacy as a byproduct of massive corruption scandals and their implementation of neoliberal policies.

It is in this context that the protests exploded. We must emphasize that the protests are not only because of the chat messages on the Telegram app [by former Gov. Rosselló] but because of the whole compounding situation.

With that said, these protests have signified, in my opinion, a qualitative change in what we think is possible in the political scenery in our island. Never in the written history of our island have we as a people forced an “elected” governor out of office. Some people might say that that really does not change the institutional structure represented by colonization and neoliberalism, which is completely true, but in terms of political imagination, of what is possible, it is a completely different scenario now than before. So, to summarize both questions, the political significance and mood in the island right now is a mixture of rage and hope.

Rage, because as we all know the institutional frame-

‘Every day, folks more than ever wake up with a new notion of politics that is not bound to a vote every four years but to direct action.’

work is designed to maintain institutional power under the control of the governing parties and the U.S.A.

Hope, because there is a new sense of what’s possible in the political realm that wasn’t there before. That is very powerful and it opens up the political possibilities to other options. Every day, folks now more than ever wake up with a new notion of politics that is not bound to a vote every four years but to direct action. Obviously, this notion of politics is not new in the island, but the novelty is the way that now it is a notion massively understood as true.

EG: What groups or sectors of Puerto Rican society are playing a leading role in the demonstrations? Students, the labor movement, musicians and artists?

FS: These demonstrations have been characterized by an intersectional and interclass role. Not since the protests for the expulsion of the U.S. Navy from the island municipality of Vieques have we seen such massive popular opposition. In that sense there is a strong element of spontaneity in the whole situation. This brings us to acknowledge some positive characteristics and also some worries. First of all, it is important to clarify that even though the call to manifestations were spontaneous in a general sense, there was an important input organization wise by the student movement, unions, left, and pro-independence movements. In a general sense, the massive mobilization completely overwhelmed the left-wing or community organizations even though the general strike and the massive marches were made possible thanks to organized sectors and new actors that started to get organized as the days passed on.

In that specific sense, the role that students played can be twofold: in the traditional student movement that has its roots in the public university and broader layers of students as a whole represented by our youth. In terms of the labor movement, as I said earlier, besides participating as individuals the labor movement actively invested their resources in organizing the massive marches.

In terms of popular musicians and artists, there is something that must be said. It is evident that they, as a sector, played a crucial role in the call for mass protests. There are various factors that come to mind that give rise to this phenomenon. In my opinion, besides the obvious good intentions of the majority of artists,

like Ricky Martin, Bad Bunny, and Residente, their influence is a direct outcome of the neoliberal penetration of our ideals, as a community, in the island. People have grown accustomed to thinking of politics as an act of voting and associate governance and public decisions as part of the corrupt party politics that gave rise to the crisis we live in day by day.

In that sense, there is a deep distrust to collective political mobilizations and new electoral alternatives. Consequently, these artists give rise to much more sympathy and move more effectively public opinion because of their reach and their distance, at least in appearance, from politics. It must be said that there are exceptions and that many people in the last years have organized collectively for pragmatic demands, but in terms of the size of the mobilizations of this historic movement, that is one key element to understanding the importance of their role.

Another important factor is the mobilization of marginalized and impoverished sectors, represented by the historic motorcycle caravan led by “Rey Charlie,” the rapper Ñengo Flow, and others. Not only did they help in the mobilization in social media but they made sure that, before reaching Old San Juan, the caravan

passed through many of the marginalized communities and public housing in the capital city. Historically neglected communities had a voice and were crucial in creating pressure as part of the protests.

Lastly, I cannot conclude this section without acknowledging the profound impact, and role, that the feminist and LGBTQI movements played in terms of organization and combativeness in these past historic 14 days. It was the feminist movement that first called for the march of Wednesday, July 17, 2019, before Residente and Bad Bunny joined in the calling, and many in both movements were in the front lines when the police started to confront violently the manifestations.

EG: Almost immediately after Rosselló resigned, there were calls for the resignation of his replacement, Wanda Vázquez. What next for the movement?

FS: Well, since the moment this question was devised and where we are right now, there have been several important events in between. Nevertheless, at least for the Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano (MINH) (New Hostosian Pro Independence Movement), the necessary political demand is the same: the only way we can move forward is through a constitutional assembly that goes hand in hand with a decolonization process for our country. The reality is that the institutional framework of the colony is designed to maintain the ruling parties and leave U.S. hegemony untouched. And so we are left with a quagmire where the colonial constitution doesn’t offer a real political satisfactory outcome as established by law, and this is united with a real push by the Fiscal Board and PNP to maintain control.

Right now, none of the possible candidates presented by the ruling party have any sort of credibility in the eyes of the general population. In that sense it is indifferent which person takes control: what will come as a necessary outcome will be sustained protests, albeit with lower mobilization, joined with a general discontent.

In terms of what is next for the movement, we in the MINH have worked with other organizations, as well as set a series of demands of our own that can be summarized as: The immediate resignation of Wanda Vázquez as governor of Puerto Rico, the necessity to audit the debt immediately and bring prosecution against the corrupt, the immediate declaration of a State of Emergency against misogynistic violence, the immediate drop of all charges held against protesters, and the necessary call for a new Constituent Assembly and a Status Constitutional Assembly to pave the way to new forms of governance.

EG: President Trump has repeatedly accused the Puerto Rican government of corruption, yet there’s no doubt that through PROMESA the U.S. government has seized the island economically with the fiscal con-

(continued on page 7)

By LAZARO MONTEVERDE

VALPARAISO, Chile—It has been the driest winter in the central valley of Chile in 60 years. June, July, and August are winter in the Southern Hemisphere, and also the rainy season in Chile. Water shortages have been declared in 50 communities and agricultural emergencies in an additional 100 communities. Sheep and cattle ranchers are moving their herds to the south of the country to prevent them from dying off. On Thursday, Sept. 5, Chile's president formed an emergency task force to manage the crisis.

The central valley of Chile is the breadbasket of the country as well as producing most of its crops for export such as fruits, vegetables, and wine. Winters of scant rain are followed by summers of widespread forest fires. Chileans expect the worst fires in decades in December, January, and February. In the port city of Valparaiso, where I live, there has not been a single drop of rain in six weeks. The word on everyone's lips is mega-drought.

The Chilean draught is part of a mega-drought that stretches across the entire Southern Hemisphere. Australia, Southern Africa, and Latin America have all been affected. It is against this backdrop of drought that the Amazon forest is burning.

The Amazon forest is an invaluable biological treasure, habitat to many species, and one of the most important carbon sinks on the planet. Without the Amazon forest, global warming will accelerate and our species will have little chance to reverse course.

But the drought is not the cause of the fires. Many of the fires are set by ranchers seeking to turn forest into pastureland for the production of beef to export to the capitalist center. Indeed, ranchers burn the Amazon every year, systematically reducing the area of the forest. What is different this year is that the fires have increased three-fold, marking an extraordinary increase in the pace of destruction at the precious moment that destruction must cease and the forest allowed to regenerate.

Both the forest and the fires are not limited to Brazil. Fires are also burning in northern Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru. All of these countries include part of the forest.

In "Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World," Marxist political economist Mike Davis presents a brilliant analysis of 19th-century famines and the interaction of capitalism and the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). These famines were the product of ENSO, the forced capitalist penetration of the so-called Third World by the imperialist powers, and government policies in both the capitalist center and periphery.

These three factors also influence each other. The famines killed many millions in Brazil, China, India, and Africa, a genocide perpetrated by the capitalist system and imperial powers for the sake of profit.

The current fires in the Amazon can only be understood within a Marxist framework. The forest is burned to create pastureland for cattle and fields for soy beans, both exports to Europe and increasingly to Asia. The fires are part of a broader deforestation caused by unsustainable forestry, mining, agriculture, and hydroelectric dams.

It is the quest for profits that drives the destruction

The Amazon forest burns

Bruno Kelly / Reuters



of the Amazon forest. Within this dynamic, government policy plays a role.

Jair Bolsonaro, the right-wing president of Brazil, promised to open up the Amazon to increased exploitation during his campaign. Once elected, he followed through by cutting the budget for Brazil's Ministry of the Environment by 25% and trying to merge it into the Ministry of Agriculture. He also stopped the prosecution of individuals charged with starting illegal fires. The burning of the Amazon forest accelerated dramatically with his election to office.

According to Brazilian and international experts, the Amazon forest now runs the risk of turning into a mostly treeless savanna. This is due to the rapid deforestation and the current prolongation of the dry season due to global warming. What is needed, according to these scientists, is a complete stop to the deforestation, replanting of the already destroyed forests, and a sharp reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Without these radical measures, the planet will lose its lungs.

The G-7 offered \$22 million in aid, a package that Bolsonaro originally rejected but was later pressured into accepting. Other countries have also offered aid, above and beyond that given after the G-7 meeting. It is generally agreed that this aid is a pittance compared to what is needed. One country that has not pledged any aid is the United States. Instead, Trump, like Bolsonaro a climate change denier, has given Bolsonaro "complete support."

And Bolsonaro needs Trump's support. Opinion polls in Brazil show that the approval rating for Bolsonaro's government has fallen to 29.4%. His personal approval rating has fallen to 41%.

In Bolivia, August was an especially cruel month;

an area slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut burned. These fires took place in both the Amazon forest and other parts of the country.

Over 80 environmental groups have accused Bolivia's president Evo Morales of ecocide for his role in these fires. In 2016 the Morales government passed Law 741, which facilitated land clearance, and in July of this year Morales issued decree 3973, permitting the burning of forests for pasture and crop lands. Morales donned a blue jumpsuit (used by Bolivian fire fighters), toured the burning area, and was photographed fighting the fire. At the same time, he categorically rejected calls to revoke decree 3973 and repeal Law 741.

The fires were made worse this year and burned out of control due to the drought that Bolivia is currently experiencing, a drought linked to global warming.

The fires in Bolivia may have an impact on the upcoming Bolivian presidential elections. The elections take place Oct. 20, and Morales is seeking re-election after 13 years in office. He is currently ahead in the polls, with 34% in support. His two leading competitors are Carlos Meza, with 27%, and Oscar Ortiz, with 13%. Almost 20% of likely voters are still undecided. If no candidate gets 50% or 10% more than the leading rival, a second-round election will take place. As of this writing, a second round is likely, but the winner of that election is anyone's guess. As a senator, Ortiz supported Law 741.

While the Amazon forest burns, capitalist governments around the world either fiddle or throw fuel on the fire. The defense of the Amazon is a fight for the future of the human species on earth. Defend the Amazon! The choice could not be starker: socialism or ecocide. ■

... Puerto Rico

(continued from page 6)

trol board. Can you discuss the relationship between the government of Puerto Rico and the U.S.?

FS: It is best defined as a classical colonial relationship. Puerto Rico was acquired by the U.S. as war bounty, as a byproduct of the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898. Since that moment on, Puerto Rico as a territory, and Puerto Ricans as a people, have been subject to colonial exploitation. Typical of all classical colonial relations, U.S. colonialism has signified the continued suffering of Puerto Ricans. It has also signified a deeply colonial relation wherein Puerto Rico is shaped, institutional wise, to serve the interest of the United States and the rich classes on the island that are aligned with U.S. capital.

PROMESA was created by enforcing Congress' plenary powers over Puerto Rico as a way to better shape and protect the financial sector's interests regarding Puerto Rico's debt. In terms of Trump, besides being the same xenophobic and ignorant idiot, it must be emphasized that his politics, and the ones of the presidents before him, have been more or less consistent in perpetuating the hold of Puerto Rico as a colony.

With that said, I want to use this opportunity to warn against the drive, presented by the pro-statehood movement in the island and echoed by the Democratic Party and some intellectual sectors for Puerto Rico statehood, standing by the argument in favor of "equal citizenship" and "rights as citizens." The colonial situation in Puerto

Rico is not a matter of individual rights compared to the rights of the U.S. citizens, but the subjugation of a nation, collectively formed, by the government of another collective. For that reason, the only possible outcomes must be thought as collectively framed; as the right of a collective, a people, to their self-determination, not as a merely as an individual issue, as the neoliberal tendency might affirm.

EG: How has the impact of the recent hurricanes and the deeper colonial exploitation of Puerto Rico affected the thinking of the current movement?

FS: In terms of the colonial exploitation, as I mentioned above, the accumulated suffering and the depreciating economic situation paved the way to PROMESA, which with its neoliberal policies deprived the government agencies with sufficient capability to maintain basic services, let alone manage a humanitarian situation as the one we lived after the destruction caused by Hurricane Irma and Hurricane María. What María did cause was a complete delegitimization of the federal and state government. The slow response, coupled with the way Trump completely disparaged our people in the middle of the crisis, with the acquiescence of the destitute Ricardo Rosselló leveled a general discontent that in great part was shown on these historic protests.

Of all the problems we faced, signified by the deaths of more than 4000 people from the hurricane, the complete denial of the death toll and the continued debacle in the Forensic Institute are elements that are present until this day. Also, the political scandal of continued apparitions of water and food [that] are now completely unusable. Then there are the possible deviations of

funds and goods that came in the emergency for political gain contributed to the discontent that we saw in the streets. When some good intentioned people say that people in Puerto Rico protested because of a chat message, they miss the point. The chat exemplified how rich people, with tradition in the political field, completely disregarded key problems in our society. What the chat did is lay in manifest what we knew to be true: that the deaths weren't caused by the passing of the hurricane but by the negligence of the governing parties.

EG: What do you see as the way forward for Puerto Ricans? Is the question of independence on people's minds?

FS: The status question is always on our minds as defined by the historical options presented to the Puerto Rican people: statehood, the same colonial status, or free association and independence. What I want to express with this is that depending on the sector, the question of independence is clearly expressed as part of the problem, but if we want to analyze the totality of the people that took to the streets, then it's the big question of a true process of self-determination.

Now in an immediate sense, our organization, as well as other organizations in one way or another, have delimited the following demands that are crucial for a new path for Puerto Rico: We demand that the interim governor Wanda Vázquez resign, the immediate audit of the national debt, the need to declare a state of emergency against misogynistic violence, the need to create a Constituent Assembly and a Status Constituent Assembly to attend both the immediate constitutional crisis and the colonial situation. ■

Trump, trade, and China: A Marxist assessment



(Left) Mao with Stalin in 1949.

By JEFF MACKLER

Rarely a day passes when one or another U.S. ruling-class institution or personality fails to criticize President Trump's unilateral imposition of ever increasing and broad-ranging protective tariffs against Chinese imports. Trump's critics include the Democratic Party as well as leading Republicans, the prestigious corporate "newspaper of record," The New York Times, and the aptly dubbed "ruling class think tank," the Council on Foreign Relations. The latter's September/October 2019 Foreign Affairs, headlined, "How A Global Trading System Dies," features five articles and essays warning U.S. policy makers against Trump's course.

The titles themselves are indicative of Foreign Affairs' viewpoint. They include: "The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Are Washington and Beijing Fighting a New Cold War?" and "Competition Without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist With China" as well as "Trump's Assault on the Global Trading System And Why Decoupling from China Will Change Everything."

All Trump's trade policy critics begin with the proposition that China today operates on the world stage as a leading capitalist power, indeed as a leading imperialist power with ever-increasing intentions to dominate world markets to the disadvantage of its competitors.

There's nothing new here! In the world of high stakes globalized imperialist competition, there are no friendly players or permanent "historic allies." Indeed, Trump's imposition of major tariffs include painful measures inflicted against its traditional European allies, including France, Germany, Italy, and England, as well as Canada and Mexico. To date, it is estimated that Trump's tariffs—imposed or to be imposed in stages at rates from 10% to 15% and even 30%, have been levied on Chinese, European, Canadian and Mexican imports—are valued at close to \$700 billion, the great proportion of which are aimed at China.

But with regard to all these affected nations, which have retaliated with their own tariffs against U.S. exports to their nations, Trump's critics share the view that—unlike the Cold War "containment" and isolation strategies imposed on the Soviet Union for some 70 years prior to its restoration of capitalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s—China, with a Gross Domestic Product ranked second in the world at 63 percent of the U.S. GDP and the largest trading partner with more than half the world's nations, cannot and must not be excluded from the world marketplace.

Workings of the WTO

Dependent on world trade to export their commodities outside their own limited domestic markets, Trump's critics seek to engage U.S. competitors in broad-ranging negotiations via the aegis of the World Trade Organizations (WTO) and similar international bodies. This is opposed to Trump's belief that he can unilaterally bludgeon competitors into submitting to his dictates, usually in accord with the specific interests of various components of the U.S. ruling class closest to or beholden to Trump's personal circles.

The U.S.-led Cold War policies of previous decades were aimed at the Soviet Union from the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution and continuing through the post-World War II period, when Eastern Europe, via the

Soviet Union's defeat of the largely German-occupied and pro-Hitler capitalist governments there, laid the basis for extricating this huge swath of Europe from capitalist domination. Central to U.S. policies was the fear that the Soviet workers' state's abolition of private property, its original world revolutionary intentions, and its instituting a monopoly of foreign trade aimed at preventing world imperialism from undermining its nascent domestic economy with superior technologies and commodities.

The 70-plus years of the U.S. Cold War were aimed at bringing down the Soviet state and its Eastern European counterparts, as well as China and Vietnam. In Western Europe, where the wartime governments in France and Italy embraced and collaborated with the German Nazi occupation, the immediate post-war period was marked by massive working-class mobilizations that posed a serious threat to capitalist rule and led to major victories that persist to this day, including systems of free health care and major extensions of union and workers' rights.

Similarly, the 1946 post-war U.S. strike wave, the largest in history, saw millions take to the streets to close down major U.S. industries demanding union recognition and an end to the wartime wage freeze that had brought unprecedented profits to the warmakers' military-industrial behemoth and misery to the working-class majority.

A frightened U.S. ruling class, fearful that Europe's mass anti-capitalist worker mobilization would inspire similar challenges to capitalist prerogatives at home, but untainted with Nazi collaboration as in France and Italy, launched the infamous McCarthy-era witch hunt aimed at purging socialists and communists from leadership positions in the growing trade-union movement.

China's 1949-54 revolution eventually abolished capitalist property relations and ended the centuries of world imperialist division, exploitation and colonization of the Chinese people. As with the ending of capitalist rule in the USSR and Eastern Europe, the U.S. and the imperialist world more generally sought restoration and/or expansion of its "interests" in all these states, using ever-increasing military measures (NATO), overt intervention in China during the Korean War, sanctions, embargoes, and economic isolation, coupled with CIA secret wars, assassinations and industrial sabotage.

Stalinism's role in Russia and China

They were aided in these efforts by the ceaseless disputes that emerged between the Stalinist-led bureaucratic regimes in China and the USSR, both of which periodically sought "peaceful co-existence" alliances with U.S. imperialism against each other as opposed to advancing the interests of the world's working masses.

The Russians, under Stalin, demanded that the Chinese refrain from alienating the defeated Chinese capitalists in 1949 by nationalizing their property and repeatedly insisted on Russian ownership of disputed border areas in the Chinese East. The Chinese, under Mao Zedong, armed and financed U.S. and apartheid South African-backed "guerrilla fighters" in efforts to overthrow the Russian-allied Angolan government.

The infamous 1972 Nixon-Mao meeting in Beijing at the height of the U.S. genocidal war against Vietnam informed world opinion that China preferred an alliance with U.S. imperialism as a counter to its rivalry with the USSR—the Vietnamese liberation war be damned! Chi-

na was the first nation to recognize the fascist-like Augusto Pinochet government of Chile that came to power in 1973 via a U.S.-supported military coup. China's heinous 1979 invasion and war against Vietnam, in retaliation for Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia to stop the mass murder of millions of Cambodian workers and peasants at the hands of the China-allied Pol Pot regime was yet another horrific example of China's "Russia [not U.S. imperialism] is the main danger" thesis.

Russia's Stalinists too pulled out all the stops to advance their "nationalist" interests against China, not to mention Russia's reactionary invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), aimed at smashing working-class rebellions against Stalinist rule.

Beginning with the 1979 rise to power in China of the capitalist-restorationist regime of Deng Xiaoping, China's Stalinist leaders signaled world imperialism that they were more than willing to re-open their nation to imperialist penetration and plunder. A decade later, the Russian Stalinists too submitted to massive imperialist penetration and facilitated a capitalist restoration process that brought untold misery to the Russian people.

China enters the WTO

Convinced that capitalist restoration in China was the order of the day, in 2001, the U.S. ended all aspects of hostility toward China and presided over China's admission to the WTO. The terms were simple enough; China would allow U.S. corporations to set up shop and employ endless numbers of Chinese workers at near slave wages and under state-of-the-art technologies to produce unprecedented numbers of commodities for the U.S. and world marketplace. This super-exploitation of Chinese labor had the effect of temporarily boosting declining U.S. profit rates, closing non-competitive U.S. factories, and freezing or reducing U.S. wage rates—more than a 10-year bonanza for U.S. corporations, which happily shipped back to the U.S. Chinese-made commodities from U.S.-owned factories at nearly zero tariff rates.

Indeed, U.S. tariff rates at some 1.5 percent or zero on most Chinese imports were among the lowest in the world. And why not? Historically, tariffs are imposed by nations with inferior technologies that cannot effectively compete on world markets. The age-old debate between protectionists and free traders always comes down to which nations need protection and which need total and unobstructed access to world markets.

In the 18-some years since China was admitted to the WTO, China went from operating as one of the world's lowest technology nations to today, when Chinese technology rivals or exceeds almost all other nations on earth. In the past 20-plus years, for example, China went from providing "internal migrant" teenage girls from the countryside, producing garments in prison-like foreign-owned dormitory factories at six cents per hour and seven days a week, to a nation with some of the most modern factories in the world, producing world-class industrial tools and machinery and state-of-the-art 5G (fifth generation) electronics and telecommunication products.

Super-high-tech 5G Chinese corporations like Huawei are today capable of challenging and exceeding the world's most sophisticated operations. A 2017 Financial Times survey of the global mobile infrastructure market showed that Huawei had a world market share of 28%, with Sweden's Ericsson at 27%, Finland's Nokia at 23%, and ZTE, another Chinese firm, at 13%. Japan's Samsung had 3%. All the others, including the U.S. corporation Cisco, had only 6% between them.

The WTO's inherent contradiction

Established in 1995, and including more than 124 nations, the WTO is an intergovernmental organization concerned with the regulation of international trade in goods, services, and intellectual property. Its functions include negotiating trade agreements and establishing dispute resolution mechanisms to enforce them. While the free-trade-oriented WTO prohibits tariff and other discriminatory practices between trading partners, it provides exceptions for so-called environmental protection and "national security" issues, the latter now invoked by the Trump administration to mean the "right" to ignore WTO rules.

Trump, for example, recently threatened to invoke U.S. "national security" concerns to ban Japanese cars from the U.S. market. Needless to say, the most powerful WTO nations, with the ability to ban key commodities from their markets, make the rules in the context of their so-called "free trade" system. Thus, "deal-making" is the norm among trade negotiators. The most powerful are able to make "concessions" when they negotiate with the weaker, based on the fact that the latter usually compete

(continued on page 9)

with regard to a handful of products while the former compete on world markets with literally thousands of commodities.

Further, and perhaps less known, is the fact the WTO's "dispute resolution" mechanisms consist of a rotating group of arbitrators that the U.S. does not always dominate, posing the possibility that unilaterally-imposed U.S. tariffs might be reversed, hence perhaps a clearer explanation for Trump's public disdain for WTO rules and its leading component powers.

Decline of U.S. economic power

Of course, the most obvious aspect of Trump's and U.S. imperialist concerns rests in the undeniable fact that the U.S. economy is far from stable, that the U.S. no longer operates with impunity on world markets, that its technological supremacy is increasingly challenged by its major competitors and that, in consequence, its corporate profit rates are steadily in decline. In short, the inherent factors that periodically lead all capitalist powers to crises and decline are fully operative today.

This is the primary explanation for why every serious assessment of the state of the U.S. and world economy includes dire warnings that perhaps another great recession, deeper than the devastating 2008-09 massive and near financial collapse, and associated devastating effects on U.S. workers, may well be on the horizon. When in mid-August Trump publically attacked Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, charging that Powell posed "a greater threat to the U.S. than China's President Xi Jinping," serious analysts took notice, not because of Trump's buffoonery, but rather because Trump sounded the alarm that the corporate elite needed even lower interest rates to facilitate corporate "borrowing."

And borrowing for what purpose? As with past and recent periods of nearly zero interest rates under the Obama administration, corporate borrowing is qualitatively less for infrastructure investment and building new U.S. factories than it is for a new wave of stock market and related highly speculative "investments" that have lined the pockets of the billionaire elite with "paper money" that has little or no correspondence to real commodities.

Trump's bragging that the U.S. dollar is the strongest currency in the world is increasingly challenged when China, Japan, and a growing number of other nations conduct business in their own currencies as opposed to the ever-inflating U.S. dollar. Indeed, China's deflating its own currency, the renminbi, to counter Trump's tariffs told the world that two could play the same game.

And further, Trump's public complaints about the U.S. trade deficit with China, wherein Chinese imports to the U.S. exceeded U.S. exports to China by \$419 billion in 2018, fail to take into account that the U.S. corporations pay for these imports with increasingly inflated dollars, printed with abandon by the U.S. Treasury in the form of paper money or the issuance of computer-generated federal bonds and/or related promises to pay. Again, any government that prints money with no regard to its material basis in commodity production risks disaster. The U.S. "coin of the world realm" is, in this writer's view, in deep trouble.

China's transition to capitalism

China, upon its 2001 WTO entry, was incapable of competing with regard to any commodity, except its capacity to "sell" its labor force in greater quantities and cheaper than most other nations. To enter the WTO China was compelled to open its country to every nation seeking this super-cheap and seemingly inexhaustible supply of labor, almost zero taxes, and other concessions.

The question therefore inevitably arises of how China made the transition from a relatively poor nation, largely bereft of modern technology, to a world-class player on international markets? The answer lies in how China made the transition over the past 40 years from a deformed workers' state that essentially banned capitalist private property, established a planned economy that focused more on addressing human needs—including providing free health care and education to all its citizens—than capitalist profits, to a leading capitalist and imperialist nation with trillion-dollar infrastructure investments in China and, increasingly around the world, as with China's Belt and Road initiative, aimed at increasing China's market penetration on a world scale.

A serious approach to answering this critical question, a complex matter to be sure, begins with China's adoption of the key features of the BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa. In all these relatively underdeveloped nations, the ruling elite focused on a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich that they expected to result in the emergence of a relatively well-off layer of perhaps 20 to 25 percent of the population, consisting of "middle class" and working-class sectors, who would be capable of purchasing a broad range of nationally produced consumer commodities typical of their counterparts in advanced nations. This massive transfer, of course, was to be at the expense of the vast majority of their respective populations, who were in turn driven into abject poverty.

This BRICS phenomenon is indeed operative interna-



(Above) Strikers at Honda Lock factory in Zhongshan, Guangdong province, in 2010.

tionally wherein a tiny ruling class elite, the "one percent," own and control more wealth than the bottom half of the population. In the U.S. for example—as Bernie Sanders often notes, without reference to a solution—"three U.S. individuals own and control more wealth than the bottom half of the country."

In China, with a population of 1.3 billion, this massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich and a layer of a new middle class and some well-paid workers, is consciously pursued via the relative impoverishment of some one billion people, who today have largely been denied the social gains of the 1949 revolution.

In short, China's capitalist class, through a process akin to the "primitive accumulation of capital" in past centuries, that is, the massive extraction of surplus value via the super-exploitation of the vast peasantry, amassed the initial capital to begin the process of transforming its backward productive infrastructure into a first rate competitor on world markets. This forced transfer of literally millions of poor peasants, "internal migrants" requiring special passports, from the countryside to the periphery of China's cities, virtually locked into slave labor like factories accounts for China's "rise" and NOT the wonders of the capitalist system. So intensive was this super-exploitation that many of the near-enlaved and literally starved peasants had to periodically transferred back to the countryside to be rejuvenated for future use!

For the Chinese capitalists, the construction of an internal market of 300 million people, comparable to the U.S. population, is viewed as sufficient to absorb increasing commodities manufactured by Chinese corporations. These Chinese corporations, of course, employ state-of-the-art technologies, including robots that allow them to effectively compete against U.S. and other foreign corporations seeking access to China's massive internal market.

"Theft" of intellectual property

Trump and his associates ever chastise China for "steal-

ing U.S. intellectual property rights" and for violating WTO rules against government funding of private corporations. Few seriously believe these rants. All serious players operating in the world of international banking, finance, and world trade fully understand that the name of the game is never-ending competition between the world's leading corporations, which are always backed to the hilt by their own governments.

In the U.S. this backing includes multi-trillion-dollar tax breaks and subsidies to U.S. corporations, who really write the tax codes, and the most massive surveillance operations in the world, overseen by the CIA and the myriad of associated U.S. spy agencies, aimed at stealing the technologies and secret scientific breakthroughs of all U.S. competitors.

While Donald Trump is truly the "moron" described by his fired Secretary of State, former Exxon Mobile chief Rex Tillerson, he and his U.S. critics, and the central leaders of world capitalism, from China and Japan to Europe, are all aware not only of the declining power of U.S. imperialism, but of the emerging crises facing the entire world capitalist system.

China too, a major player in this world constellation of ever competing and inherently warring nations, has seen its record growth rates of previous decades sharply decline. None of the players in this deadly venture of subordinating human needs, and the environment itself, to the private profits of the few, including endless hot and cold wars to achieve heinous ends, have any serious solutions other than more of the same.

The bully Trump's current weapons include embarrassing and uninformed displays of disgusting bluster and bluff. But his critics, with zero exceptions, accept and embrace the same basic tenets of capitalist plunder, although they seek to sugarcoat its ongoing and inevitable consequences with Cheshire cat smiles. ■

... Climate

(continued from page 1)

at the University of Michigan.

As a heat wave gripped the Arctic region this summer, the world was stunned by pictures of glaciers that had become raging rivers and of mountains of ice collapsing into the ocean. Some 12.5 billion tons of ice melted in Greenland during the summer, at a rate that was 50 years ahead of predicted schedules. Danish climate scientist Martin Stendel warned that the melting was enough to cover all of Florida with five feet of water.

As ocean waters rise, the government of Indonesia has put plans into operation to relocate some 10 million people from the sinking city of Jakarta to a new capital, which would be built on the eastern edge of Borneo. However, the World Wildlife Foundation and other environmentalists, as well as Indigenous people, fear that the new city would impinge on the habitat of many endangered species, such as orangutans, in the nearby rainforest. Already, vast sections of Borneo's forest have been burnt and cleared for mining and palm oil plantations, regularly drenching the region in smoke.

It appears virtually certain that the earth will endure a future of immense hurricanes, rising seas, bleached-out coral reefs, deserts encroaching on

once-fertile lands, burning forests, beleaguered populations forced to migrate, and a rise in the spread of tropical diseases—to list just a few of the dangerous conditions ahead of us. But how can we avoid the *most* catastrophic effects of climate change, which within a few more decades would render immense sections of the earth uninhabitable for humans and most animal life?

It should be obvious that "Green Capitalism" is a scheme that has already shown itself to be ineffectual; instead, we need a system that puts people's needs and the needs of the earth ahead of the drive for profits. Nor can we ask ordinary people to "consume less" at a time when billions of people have been reduced to utter poverty.

We need to work to bring about a new system that prioritizes social and environmental planning and can redistribute life's necessities from the ultra-rich to those who are in need, yielding a higher quality of life for all. It would be a just system, one that can effectively replace our present infrastructure, based on fossil fuels, with one based on renewable energy, while ensuring that no workers remain without job training and good jobs at union wages.

It would be a fully democratic system, in which working people and those in the "front lines" of the environmental crisis can for the first time determine their own future. That system is socialism.

System change, not climate change! ■

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

SNC-Lavalin scandal: A glimpse into the making of capitalist law

By BARRY WEISLEDER

What was more appalling, *the breaking*, or *the making* of the Deferred Prosecution Agreement law?

On Aug. 21, Canada's Ethics Commissioner, Mario Dion, found that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau broke the conflict of interest law by pressing then Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould to offer SNC-Lavalin a plea bargain to escape prosecution for corruption and fraud. Less well known is the fact that executives of the country's largest engineering and construction firm lobbied for and got an amendment to the Criminal Code that allowed the government to exempt criminal corporations from trial and onerous punishment.

Who was the enabler of this cozy corporate arrangement? Finance Minister Bill Morneau, a month before he presented his 2018 budget, introduced the revision of the law. The change, a provision for a *deferred prosecution agreement*, was buried in a huge Omnibus Budget, the kind the Liberals complained about when Stephen Harper's Conservatives ran the show. It is the same Bill Morneau, former Bay Street banker and chair of Canada's largest human resources firm,

Moreau Shepell, who failed to demand an audit of SNC-Lavalin to determine how many jobs would disappear should the company be found guilty of illegal business practices.

It turns out that the potential job losses were highly exaggerated by SNC and its political allies. In any case, it is quite likely other companies would pick up the slack if SNC were barred from obtaining *federal* contracts for a decade. Failing that, Ottawa has other options. Did it not nationalize the Trans Mountain pipeline, ostensibly to safeguard jobs?

Recall what SNC-Lavalin is accused of doing. The Montreal-based corporation, seeking a \$500,000,000 contract to build an airport in Benghazi, Libya, and a \$275-million prison in Gharyan, allegedly channeled over \$160 million in kickbacks to Muammar Gadhafi's son, Saadi, who maintained a super-yacht, a private jet, a harem of prostitutes, and a penthouse suite in Toronto.

Is it ironic, or just business as usual, that Canadian Lt.-General Charles Bouchard led NATO's terror bombing that toppled a regime enriched by a Canadian corporation, an imperialist military intervention

resulting in a situation today marked by permanent tribal warfare and mass suffering?

The latest opinion polls suggest that Justin Trudeau may not be mortally wounded by the resurrected scandal, especially in Quebec, where the myth of "defender of 9000 jobs" plays well.

Will the RCMP charge Trudeau with violating the conflict of interest law? Does it matter that, according to Ethics Commissioner Mario Dion, Trudeau and at least 10 of his ministers and the clerk of the Privy Council, on 22 documented occasions, leaned on Wilson-Raybould to overrule her own director of public prosecution's decision that SNC did not qualify for a *deferred prosecution agreement*?

The crime of Wilson-Raybould and her Liberal cabinet colleague Jane Philpott is that they believed in upholding the Conflict of Interest Act. They swallowed many other Liberal government misdeeds against Indigenous people, workers, and the environment, but here they drew the line. For their trouble they got booted from the Liberal Cabinet and Caucus, and now run for parliament as independents. Only inadvertently did they expose how the bourgeois state favours the super-rich. You know, by making one law for the big business class, another for the working class.

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh denounced the insider access enjoyed by corporate Canada, but not the economic system that spawns and rewards such monumentally corrupt practices. Singh should start by demanding that SNC-Lavalin be nationalized under workers' and community control and be put to work building 500,000 quality social housing units. That should be not over a 10-year period, as Singh pledges, but each year, starting now. The need to vanquish homelessness is great, and the means are at hand. To demand it would be a good way to cut across Trudeau's sanctimonious, teary apologies for an array of state crimes past, while he digs in his heels on this latest one. ■

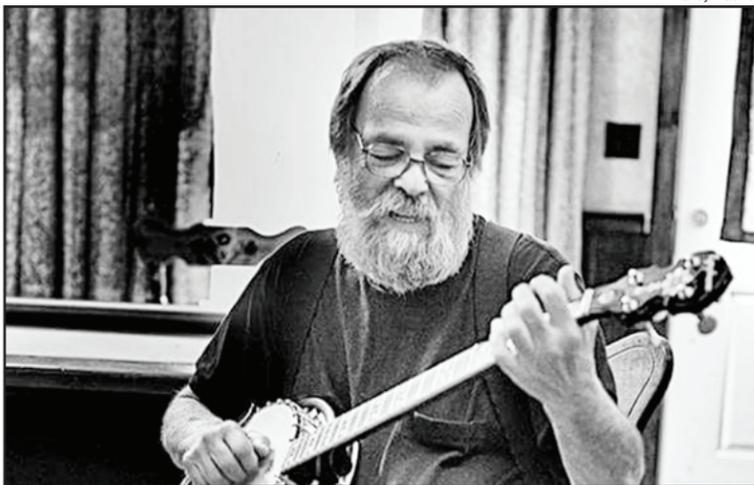
Tribute to Mitch Podolak 1948 - 2019

By BOB LYONS

This is my best friend, Mitch Podolak. He and I have been comrades in the Trotskyist movement for more than 50 years, in Mitch's case since 1961.

Mitch will be remembered for his enduring contributions to the Canadian folk music scene. He was the founder and artistic director of some of the most successful folk music festivals in North America, perhaps the world, starting with the Winnipeg Folk Music Festival in 1974.

His model of festival management, based on his understanding of Leninism, has become an accepted methodology globally. It boiled down to this: treat the performers like royalty, feed and house them well, and they will produce their best music. Treat the festival volunteers like family, feed them like performers and involve them in decision-making on how to make the festival better, and they will return year after year, and



Randy MacNeil

see the festival as theirs.

Mitch developed his philosophy of festivals by believing in the vision of his friend Pete Seeger, that music is a physical force that can form bonds between people, and create a shared culture of solidarity that is instinctively understood by those participating; both performers and audience are the participants.

As a proud and unrepentant banjo picker, as well as revolutionary socialist, Mitch was a consummate strategist and brilliant organizer whose influence reached millions, which, as Lenin points out, is where revolutionary politics start.

Mitch died on Aug. 25, at age 71. Today's journals are filled with tributes to his accomplishments. But Mitch didn't believe in the Great Man theory of history. He knew all accomplishments are the results of the combined labour of the many. He was proud of the work he had done, but he was prouder still of the work of Ava Kobrinsky, his partner of 48 years, and his family—Leonard, Zeke and Max, all devoted

to the cause of better music, in a better world.

A militant from start to finish, Mitch was a member or supporter of Socialist Action/Ligue pour l'Action Socialiste up to the time of his death.

Comrade Mitch Podolak, presente! Hasta la victoria siempre! So long, it's been great to know ya! ■

How Canadian Pension Plan 'earns' tainted returns on our money

By GARY PORTER

The Canada Pension plan was established in 1966 with the stated purpose of providing a pension of up to 25% of the average weekly industrial wage in Canada. The CPP is fully funded by workers' contributions, 50% directly out of our pay, and 50% is wages paid directly to CPP by the employer. These contributions are invested by the CPP Investment Board to earn returns and complete the funding.

The directors of the investment board are lawyers, accountants, and both active and retired senior business and financial executives, thoroughly imbued with the legislated sole objective of the CPPIB, to invest the assets of the CPP Fund with a view to achieving a maximum rate of return without undue risk of loss.

Like capitalism itself, profit must come before human need and human decency, notwithstanding the crimes of the imperialist corporations into which funds are invested. The CPP is the 9th largest pension fund in the world, with assets ap-

proaching \$400 billion.

For most working Canadians, the CPP is a crucial part of our retirement income. But our benefits are too often funded by profit based on suffering, misery, child labour, ruinous pollution, virtual slavery, beating, rapes, and even killings of poor people in other countries, where people bravely oppose the imperialism of Canadian mining and other resource companies. Then there are the companies that produce genetically modified crops, over medicated and hormone-stuffed herds, gas-guzzling cars, military arms, and vast amounts of greenhouse gasses.

So why not just tell CPP to stop investing in such companies? The answer is three-fold. First, their legal mandate does not allow it. Secondly, the current Board of Directors consider this totally normal and would strongly resist change. Although it is workers' money, the board consists entirely of capitalists and servants of capital. A third reason is that some workers, not schooled in working class solidarity, would object to investment decisions being made primarily for

ethical reasons, if it affected profit negatively, and they would sue the CPP board.

I served for eight years as a director of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan Board. The world's 22nd largest fund, as a teachers' union appointee. The question of ethical investing was always present. Many union leaders and activists wanted to invest ethically. The board responded, whose ethics? Although teachers are generally allies of the exploited and oppressed, a significant number are not. Some support the hate of Trump and Scheer and Trudeau.

In 1985, in England, Alex Scargill, a National Mine Workers' Union leader went to jail for putting ethics over profit in the judge's opinion. The idea of profit over human need is not some socialist shibboleth. It is a capitalist dictate, and they mean business.

So how do we earn pensions without harming millions of other people? We do it by overthrowing the capitalist exploiters and oppressors and investing the funds in building a workers' and socialist Canada.

In the meantime, we can fight for change. It is our money. The board should consist of workers. The board, under workers' control, can move investments away from polluters, exploiters and oppressors domestic and foreign, and into massive public green energy industries, public pharmaceutical research and production, mass free public transit, affordable homes, renewed infrastructure, pollution remediation beginning with the Alberta tar sands, and a long list of unfulfilled needs that we can learn by consulting indigenous people. The list is long, the needs are many.

In addition, a socialist view of pensions involves more. If you provided services all your life in the form of unpaid domestic labour, or if you are physically challenged, or have learning issues, you get no CPP. If you were in a low-paid job, in precarious work, or can get only part-time work, you get less CPP. CPP plus OAS should be set at \$35,000 and continue to escalate with changes in the consumer price index. It should be payable to everyone at 55 years of age. ■

... Hong Kong

(continued from page 12)

speech and protection of the law. The Extradition bill thus doubtlessly struck a nerve with ordinary Hong Kongers.

Second, poverty and social inequality have been exacerbated. Since the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the government forcefully pursued neoliberal policies, commodifying education, health care, and housing. The monopoly of large capital became especially trenchant, real estate prices have shot through the roof. Employment for young people became highly precarious, while wages never catch up to the actual cost of goods, rendering the youth to see no hope in their future.

In the past 20 years, Hong Kong's real wages have stagnated, while the population under the poverty line increased to over 1.37 million, almost one in five Hong Kongers. The Gini coefficient of Hong Kong, which measures inequality, has reached 0.539, higher than that of the U.S. and Singapore. Public housing has decreased, forcing over 220,000 people to live in what's called "sub-divided flats," i.e., extremely small subdivided apartment units. This is the deeper social factor that drove the ferocity of the Anti-Extradition movement and the large participation of the youth, as well as their radical measures, winning a degree of understanding of the otherwise peaceful, nonviolent wage workers. Some youths even have drafted up wills to prepare for a literal life-and-death struggle. The severity of social contradictions is self-evident.

Third, in the 20 years since Hong Kong's return, the elevation of repression is helping the masses to see that the CCP has no intention of allowing for real general elections. At the same time, the increasingly authoritarian Xi Jinping regime, as well as the worsening social conditions, have rapidly driven the Hong Kong masses away from China in the past 10 years.

Finally, Carrie Lam's arrogant and snobbish attitude, as well as the deployment of the police and mobsters against the protesters, have ratcheted up even more anger of the masses.

Umbrella & Anti-Extradition movements

Perhaps we all recall the 2014 "Umbrella Movement." Although the present Anti-Extradition movement has not ended, we can still compare the current experience with that of five years ago.

First, the Umbrella Movement struggled for rights to a general election and in particular the right to elect the Chief Executive, whereas the Anti-Extradition movement sought to defend the existing personal freedoms and basic human rights from further encroachment, making it a defensive struggle.

Second, the Umbrella Movement pursued long-term road occupations, stresses for a no-retreat "valiant" struggle, while the Anti-Extradition movement adopts more flexible tactics. Protesters don't stubbornly defend their grounds in face of police repression and stress the need for a "smart struggle."

Third, during the Umbrella Movement, many far-right localists were able to highjack the attention and support of many youths with their demagoguery of "Hong Kong First," rejecting new mainland Chinese immigrants and tourists. The far-right localists' influence over the present movement has diminished. The masses do not all insist on the "valiant struggles" championed by the localists, and many have actively sought to win over the masses of mainland China. The most representative example was the Kowloon district protest of July 7. Despite some leading organizers themselves tending towards xenophobic localism, the rank-and-file protesters instead started distributing flyers in simplified Chinese to tourists, and even started to sing the Internationale! This shows that not all protesters tend towards localist ideas.

Backed by foreign forces?

The CCP regime and Carrie Lam have slandered the Anti-Extradition movement as one backed by foreign forces. Yet the entire movement erupted spontaneously, with many road blocking and clashes of the youths stressing the "leaderlessness" of their actions. The U.S. National Endowment for Democracy has indeed funded some of the oppositionist parties in Hong Kong, but the masses are not under these forces' control. They mostly strategize and decide on slogans via online chat forums or communication software.

Even the "Civil Human Rights Front," which is composed of over 50 pro-democratic civil societies and parties and largely credited as the organizer of many demonstrations, has admitted that they can only act as a platform and does not have the political authority to lead the entire mass movement

In fact, since the Umbrella Movement, decentralization, lack of organization, and distrust of the existing political parties and figures have largely character-



FAST FOOD WORKERS RALLY

Dozens of SEIU members and supporters rallied in support of fast-food workers at a service plaza in Darien, Conn., on Aug. 28. These workers are fighting to reclaim potentially millions of dollars in stolen wages through unpaid benefits or the additional payment required by the Connecticut Standard Wage Law. 32BJ SEIU, the union that organizes the janitors at the same service plazas north and south along I-95, have filed a wage theft complaint with the state on behalf of the workers.

In their pursuit to maximize profits, Dunkin Donuts, McDonald's, and Subway franchise owners like George Michell and Paul Landino, who have been both named in the complaint, are using intimidation and threats of termination to

keep workers from fighting back.

Since 2012 the mass mobilizations and militancy of fast-food workers have made a number of gains for low-wage workers across the country. Yet not one fast-food shop in seven years has secured a union.

Fast-food workers on the shop floor hold the key to winning a union in their millions, just like the rank-and-file-led organizing drives of low-wage industrial workers in the 1930s, which changed the living standards for the entire working class.

There are more than 3 million fast-food workers, many from oppressed Black, Latinx, and immigrant communities in the U.S. If these workers take the lead to organize committees in their restaurants and demand a union, they can win.

— ERNIE GOTTA

ized the mass movements in Hong Kong.

Political errors within the movement

Nonetheless, we must identify two primary political errors within the Anti-Extradition movement, although these tendencies have yet to dominate the entire movement. The first is the presence of pro-Western imperialist liberals who have illusions to ask Trump to pressure China into granting more freedoms in Hong Kong. They merely oppose dictatorship in Hong Kong, but never oppose the monopoly capitalists, let alone winning workers over to the movement by proposing economic demands of the working class.

The other was the role of the aforementioned far-right localists, who prettify the leaderless form of struggle to allow for their adventurist tactics of storming government buildings without being criticized and disciplined by the entire mass movement. They brand mainland Chinese people as "chinks," flying British colonial flags.

These methods would only help the CCP to characterize the present movement as one for Hong Kong independence and in turn use nationalist demagoguery to lie to the Chinese masses, exacerbating the divide between the Hong Kong and mainland Chinese masses. In reality, it is precisely the illusions and cowardice of the liberals that allowed for a minority of "valiant" protesters to pursue unwise adventures and gain increased influence over the mass movement.

Labor movement and the socialist left

Finally, I would like to discuss the role of the labor movement and the socialist left within the Anti-Extradition movement.

As we know, Hong Kong has had a history of heroic class struggle. The Seamen's Strike of 1922 and the Canton-Hong Kong General Strike of 1925-26 both brought the British imperialists to heel, but both of them happened almost a century ago. The last attempt at a political strike was in 1967, led by the CCP-controlled Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU). After that struggle failed, and as the CCP began to pursue "Reform and Opening" to restore capitalism in China in the 1980s, the HKFTU became an openly pro-business and pro-capitalist conservative trade union. During the same time, a trade-union movement independent of the CCP and the KMT began to emerge, concentrated primarily in education, airline, public transportation, and social work sectors.

The present movement saw two attempts at political strikes on June 17 and Aug. 5 led by independent trade unions. The first attempt was largely unsuccessful; the second one involved over 350,000 workers. It is claimed that over a third of air traffic controllers went on strike, and many flight attendants of Cathay

Pacific and Hong Kong Airline also joined the strike, causing over 200 flights being canceled. The subway also halted operation for half of the day on the morning of Aug. 5. However, this cannot be classified as a total general strike. Many workers such as teachers and social workers chose to take a personal holiday instead of going on strike to avoid management's retaliation. Some of the bosses also permitted the workers to take the day off for them to join the protest.

Right now the independent unions are preparing for a third political strike in September, the same time that university and high school students plan on striking. If the political strike can successfully coordinate with the student actions, then they would deal a serious blow to the ruling class.

The left in Hong Kong remains small and divided, including social-democratic political organizations, broad-left organizations, and a minority of revolutionary socialist network. As a revolutionary socialist activist, I have consistently proposed three demands:

1) The protesters must organize democratic discussions that determine the tactics of the movement. "Leaderless" form of struggle must not be prettified. Instead, protesters must look towards the Yellow Vests in France who formed constituent assemblies.

2) While we should continue to press for rallies, demonstrations, and mass encirclement, we must also avoid storming government buildings, to prevent the government from using these occasions to escalate repression or even deploying Chinese troops.

3) The Anti-Extradition movement must connect with the labor and social movements, wielding political strikes and school walk-outs as weapons, thus creating a movement independent of the ruling class and controlled by the working masses. For this, they must propose anti-capitalist social demands to win over more workers' participation. They must also support the workers' struggle in mainland China or mass struggles for rights protection, to foster more movement against the CCP's bureaucratic capitalist regime within mainland China.

We must also foster the solidarity of all workers around the world by calling for a "better world." Some on the left still hold a "campist" view, believing that the CCP regime still represents a progressive force against Western imperialism or even something along the lines of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." These kinds of "leftists" do not understand that the CCP regime today is already a regime of bureaucratic capital against the workers. They also forget that the left must firmly hold a perspective from the working class. We must not only fight against US imperialism but also the various imperialist forces and capitalist exploitation across East Asia. ■

Report from Hong Kong: The rise of a mass struggle

Athit Perawongmetha / Reuters



By LAM CHI LEUNG

Protests are continuing in Hong Kong, despite the withdrawal of the Extradition Bill by Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Sept. 4. Protesters raise the slogan, "Five key demands, not one less!" They want direct elections of Hong Kong leaders, an independent investigation into police brutality, unconditional release of the detainees, and no more labeling of the protests as riots.

On Sept. 8, in an effort that is not helpful to their cause, thousands marched on the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong, carrying U.S. flags, and begging the U.S. to support their demands by imposing sanctions and other measures. We must raise the call, "U.S. Hands Off!"

An earlier article, by Hong Kong revolutionary socialist Lam Chi Leung, follows:

Warm greetings to comrades around the world! I am grateful for your invitation to introduce the present situation of Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Movement as well as the contexts under which it emerged. I will also attempt to provide a simplified analysis of the movement's internal dynamics and contradictions, as well as my hopes and advice to the movement as a member of the socialist left.

At the time of writing (Sunday, Aug. 18), over 1.7 million citizens returned to the streets in protest. In face of the police's directive that restricted the rally to take place inside a single park, the leading organizers around Civil Human Rights Front refused to comply, let alone the ordinary people who stepped into the streets. Both the organizers and the rank-and-file participants understand that this will be a peaceful demonstration. They would not storm any government buildings or police barricades, to block the government from blaming the masses for "rioting" and thusly crackdown on the entire movement.

Change in tactics

How is there such a consensus? This is because, in the past one and a half months, the repression from the government against protesters became ever more brutal. They allowed the police to launch teargas, pel-

let rounds, and rubber bullets at close distance, not to mention the liberal use of the baton. At the same time, the police unleashed mobsters to attack protesters and ordinary people on the subway platforms and inside the trains. Some of these elements even attacked protesters with knives.

Last week, the police disguised as protesters to infiltrate the movement and provoke adventurist violence. Some mainland Chinese police and state journalist operatives (many of whom hold both credentials) went to the airport to deliberately expose their identities to protesters to incite violence, to create footages of mainland Chinese officials being bullied. The escalation of the government's violence and conspiratorial tactics led the protesters to conclude a need to change tactics. This means halting any confrontations or surrounding actions in favor of peaceful demonstrations. They hope that by doing so more people would be attracted to the movement while depriving the government an excuse to slander the movement and increase repression.

Two phases of the movement

The process of the Anti-Extradition movement that erupted since June 9 could be roughly divided into early and later phases.

The first phase would be between June 9 and July 20. During this phase, there were mostly peaceful demonstrations (with the two million-strong protest of June 16 at its height), which also included the besieging of Legislative Council and government buildings. These resulted in Chief Executive Carrie Lam's concession to postpone the extradition bill that fell short of a full retraction.

This first phase was characterized by the defensive posture of the government and the masses' bravery, creativity, and flexibility. For example, as the police were ready to charge the protesters after the masses encircled the Legislative Council building, the masses rapidly conducted an orderly retreat rather than fighting the police. Another example was in early July when the movement was spreading to other districts outside of Hong Kong island by way of active organiz-

ing of protests.

The second phase is from July 21 up until now. During this phase the government condoned the mobsters' attack on protesters; the police also increased the level of repression. The Hong Kong government refuses to respond to the Five Demands from the protesters (including the retraction of characterizing the movement as "riots," the release of arrested protesters, the retraction of the extradition bill, the responsibility of police brutality, and the formation of an independent investigation commission into violence).

The CCP regime further accused the movement as a terroristic riot engineered by the U.S. and Taiwan, even deploying a large number of forces along the Shenzhen border with Hong Kong as a deterrent to the Hong Kong masses. While the Hong Kong masses remain unbowed, most protests are approaching the methods of urban guerrilla tactics. The exploits of preventing people from boarding subways or airlines as a means to "civil disobedience," or the unwise handling of the mainland Chinese police provocateur, have inspired internal discussions and self-reflection within the movement. At the moment the movement is at a crossroads that can only be advanced with a better strategy.

The deep crisis

How is it that the present mass struggle can last for 11 weeks and counting? We can attribute to it several main reasons:

First, the Extradition Bill, once passed, anyone who criticizes the Chinese government, attends Tiananmen commemoration events, or generally support more democracy in China may be vulnerable to be extradited to mainland China and be tried. This will significantly infringe on Hong Kongers' freedom and basic human rights, it also encroaches upon the CCP's (Chinese Communist Party's) promise for allowing "Hong Kongers to govern Hong Kong with a high degree of autonomy" since Hong Kong's return to China in 1997. The CCP forbids democratic elections in Hong Kong but would grant a degree of freedom of

(continued on page 11)

