

## 400,000 march for climate action



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

By CARL SACK

An estimated 400,000 people took to the streets of Manhattan on Sept. 21 for the largest single climate change protest to date.

The People's Climate March, which took place two days before a one-day United Nations Climate Summit, was about twice as large as organizers had expected. There were so many present that by the time the back of the march began to move—over four hours after the front stepped off—many thousands of people had already finished the 2.1-mile route. It took more than six hours for the entire march to end.

The event was organized by 350.org and the liberal internet activism group Avaaz, with over 1500 endorsing organizations. While the New York march was the largest, 2646 companion rallies took place in 162 different countries.

The Northern California People's Climate Rally filled Oakland's Lake Merritt

Park Amphitheater with 4500 activists and was endorsed and sponsored by a broad range of 170 regional organizations. The speakers' platform featured climate activists from frontline communities, students engaged in divestment actions, representatives from the Sierra Club and Bay Area 350.org—as well as socialists, who linked the struggle to resolve the climate crisis to the abolition of capitalism's oil wars and to the abolition of capitalism itself.

Despite political flaws, the giant New York march was a major step toward building a unified movement against climate change. The diverse crowd included groups from around the continent representing many different environmental and social causes. Large contingents of indigenous people, anti-fracking activists, anti-nuclear activists, tar sands pipeline fighters, scientists, union members, antiwar veterans, and eco-socialists were present.

Groups promoting immigrant rights,

freedom for Palestine, and justice for the victims of racist police violence were also present. One contingent carried a 300-foot-long banner that read "Capitalism = Climate Chaos," created by the organizers of the Flood Wall Street civil-disobedience event that took place the next day.

That event, which fell on a Monday, drew an estimated 2000 protesters, who blocked Broadway for about eight hours until cops finally unleashed tear gas and made over 100 arrests to break up the crowd. The symbolic blockade had no immediate goals other than to close the street and get media attention—or "to confront the system that both causes and profits from the crisis that is threatening humanity," according to the "call to action" on the event's website.

Many of the participants interviewed by "Democracy Now!" showed up to protest against fossil-fuel extraction and burning. "We come from a land that

is heavily resource-rich, and we came to tell the world that we're not going to be a resource colony anymore, and enough is enough," said one Diné (Navajo) activist.

The day prior to the Climate March, the ecosocialist System Change Not Climate Change coalition and Green Party-backed Global Climate Convergence held a one-day "Converge for Climate" conference, with dozens of workshops at various locations around lower Manhattan on topics including indigenous peoples' rights, anti-racism, fossil-fuel struggles, renewable energy, U.S. imperialism, Marxist ecology, and eco-socialism.

Workshops brought together people engaged in direct struggles against pollution and resource extraction, with writers and theorists who presented capitalism as the source of the crisis and socialism as the solution. The closing plenary featured Olga Bautista, an

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# Spain: Women have won!

By JUSTA MONTERO

MADRID—On Sept. 23, the prime minister of the Spanish State, Mariano Rajoy, announced that he was withdrawing the proposal to amend the abortion law. The law's main architect, Minister of Justice Alberto Ruíz Gallardón, immediately resigned.

Gallardón never tired of repeating that the preliminary draft for "protection of the life of the conceived and the rights of pregnant woman," his project to further restrict women's abortion rights, was the most important project of his career. But he could not even imagine what this would come to mean, since the defeat of this project has ended his political career.

It was a career of 30 years in which he has held a huge number of political positions, one plagued by disasters from the astronomical debt that Madrid citizens will have to pay back as a result of his mismanagement, his repeated Olympian failures, the curtailing of civil liberties perpetrated by the gagging law [1] and the conversion of justice into a luxury for the majority of the population. And as the icing on the cake: his misogyny and contempt for women.

It was of course the government that, in December 2013, approved the draft bill that Gallardón was defending, in a process that had lasted almost three years since they announced their intentions. In this time many women experienced a situation of anguish and fear in the face of uncertainty of what might happen if they needed to have an abortion. Feminist outrage increased as Gallardón reinforced his proposals, with the aim of trying to establish in which cases of malformation of the foetus a woman would have the choice of asking for an abortion.



The total failure of this draft shows the extent to which the government and those who supported it, with the Catholic Church as the most important of these, are distanced from real society, the reality of women, their different life projects and the various forms in which motherhood and sexuality are experienced. We are not willing to give up the profound changes we have won.

That is the reason for their attempt to harken back to the situation of the past century. It was a losing battle for them, but their arrogance and deep patriarchal conservatism did not allow them to suspect that such an error would cost them dear, as shown by the decomposition that is today visible among their ranks.

And the government will pay much more dearly if they try to use women as a currency of exchange, either to pander to an ultra-reactionary sector in permanent crusade against the sexual and reproductive rights of women, or by using our bodies and rights to climb in the polls of voting intentions before the

next elections.

The farewell ceremony for Gallardón has had as a counterpoint the celebration of thousands of women in all corners of the Spanish state. Because the withdrawal of the preliminary draft is a first victory of the feminist movement, proponent of a profound change in our society, a victory that is the result of the mobilization that has been maintained on a sustained basis, sometimes very visibly, other times not, sometimes in large demonstrations, other times in more symbolic actions like flash mobs, in protests and occupations in health centres, in churches, also in meetings in parliament, in hundreds of initiatives by the most varied feminist groups.

This was a mobilization that had significant support from health professionals among others, and in the final analysis by a significant mobilization of citizens. And always with the goal of explaining and convincing the public that the call for "free abortion, women decide" requires sovereignty over our bodies, and that when we defend our right to decide, we affirm our status as legal subjects, with feminist demands for social justice and real democracy.

On Sunday Sept. 28, the International Day for the Decriminalization of Abortion, there are demonstrations organized by the feminist movement in many cities. It will be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate. After Gallardón, the government has already rushed to advance new plans that must be stopped: new attacks on the decision-making ability of young women, and a plan for "protection of the family." The current law effectively needs to be changed, but in a way radically opposite to that proposed by the government, to ensure that abortion is not criminalized and is normalized as a provision in the public health network.

Sunday [Sept. 28], doubly festive, is also the occasion to call for sexual and reproductive rights, among others, the right of lesbians to access to assisted reproduction, for all immigrant women have their social security card, for sex education in all schools, for respect for the autonomy and sexual identity of all persons. History says we are right in our determination not to give in to anything or anyone in the defense of the right to make decisions about our life, and in demanding rights for all women.

*This article originally appeared in Viento del Sur.*

## Socialist Action: Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# Fast food strikers say — \$15 Now and a Union!

The web newsletter, "Anticapitalisme et Revolution," which represents a current in the French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), recently interviewed Socialist Action member Ann Montague in regard to the growing movement in the United States for a minimum wage of \$15. The interview appears below.

The French-language version can be found at: <http://anticapitalisme-et-revolution.blogspot.fr/2014/09/nous-sommes-un-mouvement-maintenant.html>

**Anticapitalisme et Revolution:** How did your union come to organize fast-food workers?

**Ann Montague:** I am a member of Socialist Action, and I have been a rank-and-file member of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) for 30 years. This is the union that provided staff and financial support to the fast food workers who have been organizing demonstrations, actions, and strikes, demanding a living wage of \$15 an hour.

SEIU has around 2.2 million members. Most of them are in the United States, with some workers in Canada and Puerto Rico. There are over a million workers in health care, including nurses, laboratory technicians, nursing-home workers, and home-care workers. There are another million workers who work in public services in state and local governments and school employees like bus drivers and child care providers. They also include 225,000 workers in property services who work as security and janitors in commercial and residential office buildings. Fifty-six percent of our workers are women, and 40 percent Black and Latino/a. SEIU represents more immigrant workers than any other union in the United States.

When SEIU announced to the membership that they had decided to assist in organizing Fast Food Strikes in New York City in 2012, I was as surprised as anyone. In the 1980s, there were sporadic strikes by state government workers, and in the 1990s, SEIU organized janitors working for small cleaning companies in the Justice For Janitors Campaign. The tactics of the janitors were unorthodox and included mass civil disobedience with the closing of freeways in Los Angeles and blocking bridges into Washington, D.C.

But from 1998-2010, under the presidency of Andy Stern, we went through a horrible period of vicious fights with other unions. In addition, the top union leaders were purging on fake charges some elected leaders that they saw as disloyal. Some of those who were put in charge were later convicted of corruption. There also were contracts negotiated behind closed doors and deals made with the bosses.

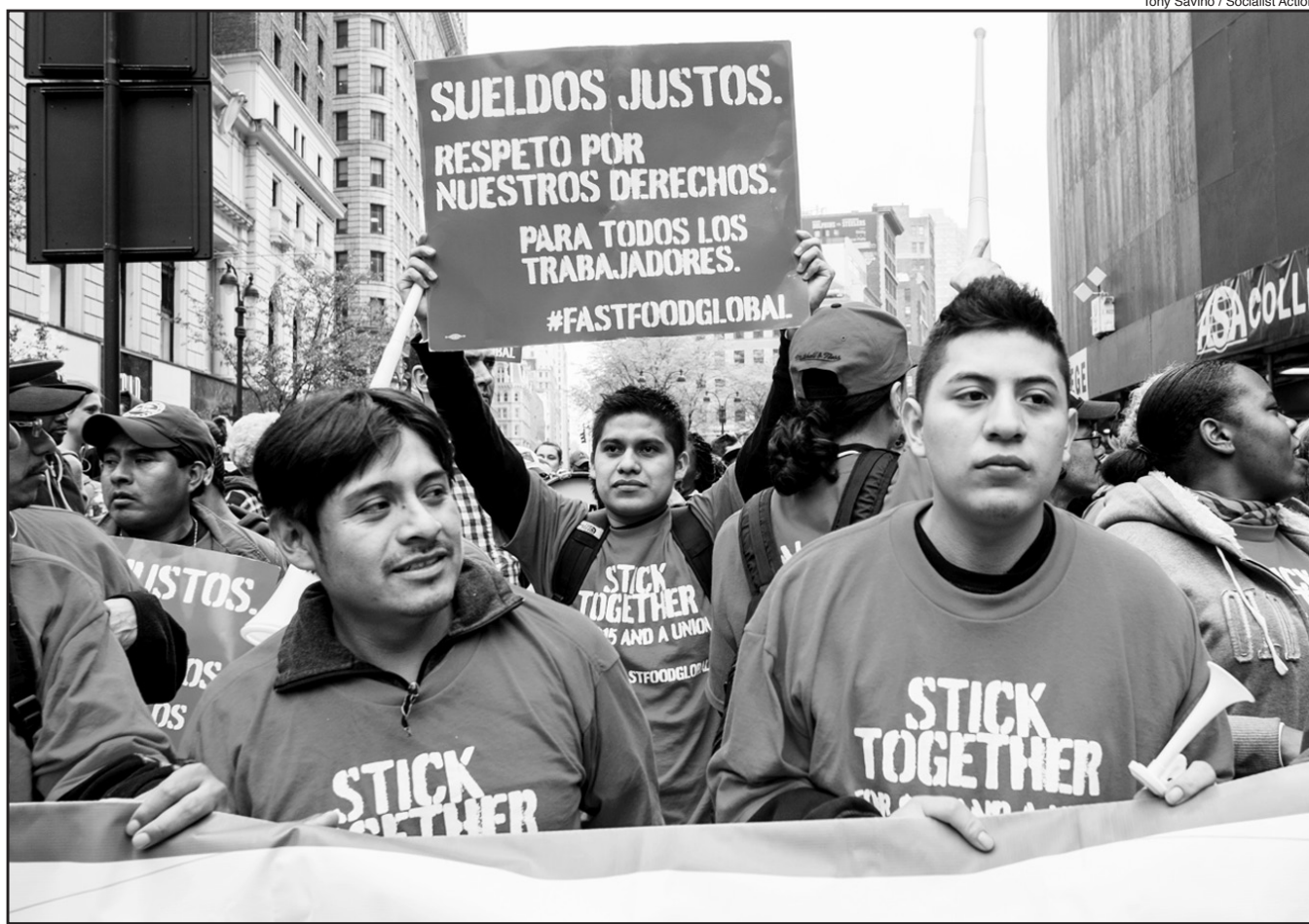
By 2010 the union bureaucracy was divided. Some complained about Stern's authoritarian leadership style, and in the middle of his term he was forced to resign. Saying they were looking for a consensus builder, they voted for Mary Kay Henry. She promised to rebuild relationships with other unions and clean up the corruption. The bureaucracy chose her to lead SEIU.

In 2012, Henry brought forward to her Executive Board the controversial proposal to put staff and resources into organizing fast-food workers. Not to bring them in as members but to raise wages of the entire sector. One wing of the bureaucracy was against it, and while Henry prevailed, it was believed that if the campaign were not successful, and all that money were spent on workers who are not even members of SEIU, she would not be re-elected. Her argument was that if they could raise wages in an entire labor sector that it would impact all wages.

**AR:** How did this movement start?

**AM:** In 2012, a group called New York Communities For Change was working on affordable housing in New York City. They soon realized that the fast-food workers they talked to could not even afford low-cost apartments. They were sleeping in homeless shelters and on the floors of friends' apartments. As a result, SEIU started organizing meetings over the low pay for fast-food workers. The workers soon decided that they wanted \$15 an hour and a union and that they were willing to strike.

The first strike was in New York in November 2012, when 200 workers walked off the job, and their numbers



have continued to grow. In May of this year, there were strikes in 150 cities and 33 countries. On Sept. 4 was the seventh strike, and it was larger, including more cities in the South and Southwest. There was civil disobedience, and in eight cities home-care workers marched with fast-food workers demanding \$15 an hour.

**AR:** What are the main demands?

**AM:** For now, there are only two demands. They are: \$15 an hour and the right to a union without intimidation. In the United States there is a Federal Minimum Wage that applies to all 50 states. Some states have one that is higher. Currently, the Federal Minimum Wage is \$7.25. In his speech at the March On Washington in 1963, Martin Luther King called for a \$2 minimum wage. Adjusted for inflation today, that \$2 would now be \$15.27. In general \$15 is considered to be a "living wage" while anything below that is a "poverty wage".

**AR:** What is the government's response?

**AM:** The main government response has been silence. We are entering elections in November. Politicians know that the people support raising the minimum wage, so they cannot openly oppose an increase.

President Obama finally came out with a proposal to raise the Federal Minimum Wage to \$10.10. This was to undercut the strikes and demonstrations. However, they were unable to stop the momentum of this movement.

The labor organizations that are the most obedient servants of the Democratic Party are trying to get workers to support a state minimum wage of \$11, but they are not having much success. The argument they cannot overcome is that anything less than \$15 is a "poverty wage." While the Democrats are experts at derailing social movements so far, they have not stopped the "Fight For \$15 and a Union" struggle.

**AR:** How about retaliation?

**AM:** There has not been a lot of retaliation. Federal law permits "concerted activity" by workers. This means that workers are allowed to join together to complain to employers about working conditions.

The Fast Food Strikes are not traditional strikes where workers leave their job and picket their workplace to try to prevent other workers or customers from entering the place of business. These workers leave work for one day and are joined by community members and others who support them in demonstrations and rallies throughout the cities. Generally it is not all the workers in one restaurant but workers from many different fast food restaurants joining together.

Also there is what is called a "walk back." The following day, when they go back to work, they are never alone. The staff of a union or other supporters go back into the restaurant with them. Generally, the response by other workers is applause, thanks, and congratulations.

I have heard that in a few places these workers have their work hours cut or are "written up" for some small

infraction. But often a higher up manager has intervened. It seems the bosses understand that reprisals run the chance of sparking more protests, and possibly next time more workers will join the strike activity.

As these actions spread from big cities to smaller cities there may be some problems. This month Tucson, Ariz., had its first fast-food strike, and there are reports that there was some retaliation when the strikers returned to work. Arizona is a very anti-union state, and Tucson is a small city. However, supporters of the strikers are planning ways to pressure bosses to end harassment of these workers, and SEIU will take legal action based on the right to "concerted activity."

**AR:** In some cities we saw union members join the Ferguson protests. What are the links between the two movements?

**AM:** Historically, there was a strong link between the Black civil rights movement and unions. Martin Luther King worked closely with many unions whose members were predominately Black. In fact, he was in Memphis to show his solidarity with striking sanitation workers who were members of AFCSME, a large public sector union, when he was assassinated. A. Philip Randolph was a leader in both the civil rights and the labor movements. He organized and led the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first predominantly Black labor union.

While there is a strong history of racism in many unions, some public sector unions have a legacy of human rights and social justice. The American union tradition of solidarity, and the motto of "an injury to one is an injury to all," is still strong in some unions.

But more important is the fact that the victims of police brutality and their families are also union members. Members of SEIU 1199 in New York City were active in demonstrations against the police policy of "Stop And Frisk." In the Black community, most young men have been harassed, stopped, and searched by the police without cause.

Ferguson is in Missouri, which is a relatively strong union state. There were big fast-food strikes in Kansas City and St. Louis—cities with large Black communities. In Kansas City, workers walked out of 60 restaurants. Most of the strikers were Black or Latina.

In Ferguson, contingents of a group called "Show Me \$15" were active in the demonstrations. Shermale Humphries was one member who said that she used to work at the McDonald's across the street from where Mike Brown was killed. "This [protesting] is something I had to do," she said. "I'm African American, and this could be anyone I know. I just can't let it go on any longer." She credited her experience organizing fast-food strikes as helping her organize in Ferguson. Also, Michael Brown's mother was a member of the United Food And Commercial Workers (UFCW). The head of

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# 400,000 call for climate action

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activist working to shut down a petcoke (petroleum coke, a carbon-dioxide-heavy byproduct of tar sands) operation that coats her South Side Chicago neighborhood with carcinogenic slime, and author Naomi Klein, who told the crowd that “there are no non-radical options left” to stop the climate crisis. Organizers estimated that 2500 people attended.

## Discussion on movement demands

The march and surrounding events sparked vigorous discussion about what that movement should look like and how it can best be built. The Convergence event partially arose out of critiques of the Climate March by leftist writers, several of whom quite rightly criticized the decision of organizers to include neither a major rally nor any specific demands.

The slogan put forward by march organizers was “to change everything, we need everyone.” As journalist Chris Hedges wrote in a piece titled “The Last Gasp of Climate Change liberals,” the march’s appeal to concerned capitalists opened the door to sponsorship by corporate-backed fronts like The Climate Group, which counts among its members British Petroleum, Dow Chemical, and JP Morgan Chase. Hedges dubbed the march “a climate-themed street fair” and encouraged marchers to also participate in more “radical” events like the Convergence and Flood Wall Street.

Leftist writer Arun Gupta pointed out that march organizers spent \$220,000 on New York subway advertisements “inviting Wall Street bankers to join a march to save the planet,” and labeled the event “a corporate PR campaign.”

We certainly concur that the spectacle of Hollywood celebrities and Al Gore marching alongside anti-capitalists points to some serious political contradictions of march organizers. However, this is nothing new to public marches organized by liberal outfits, such as the 2004 pro-Choice “March for Women’s Lives,” which featured Hillary Clinton as a keynote speaker. The fact that the march took place at all—that even liberals like McKibben no longer feel they can put faith in establishment politics to press for change—represents a stepping stone to building an effective, multi-faceted movement.

McKibben pointed to successful mass movements such as those against the Vietnam War and Jim Crow segregation as the way forward for climate change activism, and we agree. While in those cases marching alone did not win the movement’s victories, the mass marches shifted political awareness throughout the country and acted as catalysts for revolutionary organizing.

Likewise, the Climate March opened up opportunities for socialists and other radicals to speak with many, many people—particularly young people—who are looking for solutions to the myriad crises created by capitalism. The march gave expression to many

urgent struggles taking place around the country and the world against tar sands pipelines, strip mining, oil and gas drilling, and environmental contamination heaped upon Indigenous and other marginalized communities.

We would also quibble with several of the leftist critics for complaining about the march’s lack of a clear message but failing themselves to provide a message that the masses of working-class people who attended could get behind. As their alternative to “corporate PR,” Hedges, Gupta, and other leftist critics supported the Flood Wall Street civil-disobedience action—which didn’t have any demands either!

Styled after Occupy Wall Street, the demonstration’s slogan was “Stop Capitalism: End the Climate Crisis.” But *how* to stop capitalism is a key question that such anarchist-style events fail to address. Protesters might cheer the arrest of a man in a polar bear suit as symbolic of capitalism’s crimes, but clear, immediate, and winnable demands would make a much better point out of such arrests. They would demonstrate that capitalism is incapable of addressing the climate crisis.

It is easy to be incensed at the presence of corporate front groups at a liberal march. But the larger problem with the lack of unifying demands at both liberal and “radical” protests is the missed opportunity to measure the actions of political “leaders” against a concrete yardstick and hold them accountable for their utter failure to act to avert global catastrophe. As environmentalist Anne Petermann put it in an article in *The Daily Kos*, “The media will not cover a march with no demands. They will find a message, and if it’s not The Climate Group’s “business will save the planet” message, what will it be?”

To answer this question, the critics might look to those who *attended* Flood Wall Street and suggest that similar events in the future incorporate explicit demands such as “end fossil fuel extraction!” and “100% renewable energy now!” We should also try to draw lessons from the Converge for Climate conference sessions, where various groups put forward a myriad of demands: for environmental justice, government-sponsored climate jobs, mass transit, fossil-fuel divestment, clean energy, and a halt to fracking, mountaintop removal coal mining, tar sands mining, and their filthy offshoot industries, to name a few.

## Obama’s false “solutions”

The overarching goal to “stop capitalism” can be viewed as implicit in all of these demands, as capitalism simply cannot meet them due to its requirement of constant expansion. Yet we cannot wait for a revolution to start addressing the imminent crisis that threatens all of humanity. Nor will simply sitting on the steps of the Stock Exchange precipitate one.

Thus, when President Obama spoke at the UN Climate Summit two days after the march, he could tip his hat to protesters and still claim with a straight

face that the U.S. is meeting its obligation to cut carbon emissions. He didn’t have to address the demands of the mass movement—because none were put forward in a unified voice.

The obligation that Obama hypocritically referred to—the pledge to cut carbon dioxide emissions “in the range of 17 percent below 2005 levels by the year 2020”—was of the president’s own making at the 2010 COP (Conference of Parties) Summit in Copenhagen.

Immediately after that gathering, which was supposed to work out an international treaty to replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the U.S. was roundly condemned by climate change activists for being the wrecking ball that caused the talks to collapse. In the middle of that conference, a conspiracy of U.S. and European negotiators to strong arm conference attendees into a one-sided agreement was revealed, throwing the negotiations into turmoil. In the wake of the uproar and mass arrests of activists outside the conference, Obama jetted in and announced the back-door non-binding agreement between the U.S., Brazil, China, India, and South Africa that he now ballyhoos as being nearly met.

The 17%-by-2020 “accord” was denounced by the rest of the world as an undemocratic sham and ecocidal. A team of scientists from MIT modeled the pledges made at Copenhagen and estimated that they would entail a 3.9-degree

celsius global mean temperature rise. This level of warming could melt the global ice caps entirely and trigger what scientists call “runaway climate change,” where melting permafrost and warming seas release massive amounts of methane trapped in tundra soils and in clathrates (methane ice) on the ocean floor. Methane is a greenhouse gas about 20 times as potent as carbon dioxide on a 100-year timescale.

In his speech to the UN, Obama also paid lip service to helping poorer nations through “climate assistance” programs. But this assistance has not come from the international “Green Climate Fund” set up by the sham Copenhagen Accord, which promised to raise \$100 billion a year from developed nations by 2020. From 2009 to present, the fund—which is presently controlled by the World Bank, infamous for pushing poverty-inducing “structural adjustment” policies on debtor nations—has raised a paltry \$2.3 billion *total*. In comparison, the U.S. military budget for FY 2015 is \$756.4 billion.

What money has been given to other countries by the U.S. for “adaptation” to rising seas and stronger storms comes with many strings attached. The forms of it mentioned by Obama are grants to African “entrepreneurs,” funding African farmers to “plant more durable crops,” and “launching a free trade agreement for environmental goods.”

In fact, Obama was referencing three programs designed to promote economic colonialism in Africa, where the U.S. increasingly finds itself in competition with Chinese business interests. The first is a new African Renewable Energy Fund, which is controlled by Berkeley Partners LLC. This company’s website calls it “an investment manager founded in 2007 to capitalise on the attractive yet relatively untapped opportunity identified for private equity investment into renewable energy infrastructure in developing markets.”

The fund seeks to develop privately held renewable energy projects throughout the continent. These projects have no intention of replacing existing fossil-fuel energy sources. Rather, the goal is to wring profits out of new energy consumers, turning what absolutely should be developed as a common good into a private commodity for the benefit of wealthy investors.

The second Obama program is the “Feed the Future Initiative,” launched by USAID in 2010 and incorporated into the World Economic Forum’s “New Vision for Agriculture” in 2011. At that gathering of the business elite, the head of USAID ballyhoos the program’s 17 agribusiness “champions”—among them Archer Daniels Midland, Kraft Foods, Wal-Mart, and Monsanto—who will receive \$3.5 billion in U.S. taxpayer subsidies to invest in “profitable, modern commercial farming and agribusiness” in sub-Saharan Africa (according to the Pesticide Action Network).

The kind of large-scale export-oriented agriculture this vision entails plays a significant role in *worsening* climate change. The countless small farmers it will displace use far less polluting pesticides and petroleum-based fertilizers, and “may be best poised to lead the way in adapting to a warmer world and ensuring the security of the global food supply,” according to a May 2 article in *National Geographic*.

The third program—establishing a “free trade agreement for environmental goods”—was announced in 2013 and includes 13 WTO member nations. According to the White House fact sheet on the initiative, “the

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# Hong Kong protesters demand democratic rights

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

As we go to press, Hong Kong is witnessing the most massive street protests in its history. Many thousands of people have stood up to police repression, and others have constantly added to their number to maintain an Occupy-style presence in streets surrounding the financial district. The protests have become known as the “Umbrella Revolution” for the umbrellas that demonstrators have employed to help shield their faces from tear gas.

The protesters’ main demand is for democratic suffrage rights—for citizens of Hong Kong to have the full ability to choose their chief executive, in opposition to the Aug. 29 edict of the Chinese government that would require any candidate for the office to be vetted by Chinese authorities. The protesters are also demanding the resignation of the current chief executive, Leung Chun-ying, since he has presided over the police attacks on the demonstrations.

The mobilization began on Sept. 22 as a student boycott of classes. Two days later, about 10,000 students marched from the university of Hong Kong to the major government buildings. The violent police attack on demonstrators on the weekend of Sept. 27-28 only served to swell the number of demonstrators, as popular outrage quickly mounted. By Sept. 29, crowds estimated as approaching 180,000 people, predominately students, were in the streets. In some localities, barricades were erected for defense.

Sean Starrs, an assistant professor at the City University of Hong Kong, wrote an eye-witness account of the police violence in the Canadian on-line publication *The Bullet*: “The main organizer of the week-long boycott of classes, the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS), had planned on ending the strike and sit-in in front of the government buildings on Friday evening [Sept. 26], but late that night some 200 or so students stormed a police line and fence to occupy a square within the government complex. The police reacted violently with batons and pepper spray, making over 70 arrests, including one of the most high profile student leaders, 17 year-old Joshua Wong, co-founder of the mostly high school student group Scholarism.

“As news of the violent police repression swiftly spread, masses of students and other supporters poured into the whole area, eventually blocking major roads (on Monday afternoon there were still some abandoned BMWs and public buses in the middle of the road surrounded by throngs of students).”

Starrs wrote that “the riot police were formally taken off the streets by noon Monday, officially because the ‘illegal protesters’ have ‘mostly calmed down.’ In reality, the riot police were the ones that calmed down once they realized they could not defeat the students. During the climax of repression on Sunday night, I was in one area that was tear gassed around 4-5 times (each barrage with multiple canisters) in only two hours. The police formed two lines and fired tear gas in order to advance toward the epicenter in Admiralty [an area of government buildings], after which most of the crowd would flee and then quickly regroup, surrounding the police on both sides with hands in the



(Left) Hong Kong protesters give the Ferguson, Mo., “Hands Up!” sign.

air to show non-violent intent.” The gesture of hands in the air, together with the chant “Hands up!” was borrowed from the scenes that demonstrators had witnessed on social media of people in Ferguson, Mo., and other U.S. cities who were protesting the police murder of Michael Brown.

Some unions responded with calls for workers’ solidarity actions. Starrs reported, “The Confederation of Trade Unions and the Professional Teachers Union both called on its members to strike in support of the students. At least 1000 social workers, high school and university teachers joined the strike, as well as pupils from at least 31 schools. HKFS extended the student class boycott indefinitely. The Chairperson of Swire Beverages Employees General Union, distributor of Coca Cola in Hong Kong, announced to cheering students in Admiralty that more than 200 workers joined the strike, while 100 more reduced their hours. There were also reports of some taxi drivers striking.”

In calling for its members to participate in a Sept. 29 strike, the Confederation of Trade Unions demanded that police release all of the demonstrators who had been detained. The federation’s statement read in part: “Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) strongly condemns the police for their violent attack on unarmed students and people. We strongly condemn the government for suppressing the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly in Hong Kong. HKCTU calls for all workers in Hong Kong to strike tomorrow, in protest of the ruling of the National People’s Congress, as well as the brutal suppression of peaceful protest by the Hong Kong government. Workers and students must unite to force the totalitarian government to hand state power back to the people...”

“Workers must stand up against the unjust government and violent suppression. Workers must stand up, as the totalitarian government has to back down when all workers protest in solidarity. To defend democracy and justice, we cannot let the students fight the suppression alone.”

Hong Kong’s current governmental system was established in 1997, when the former British colony was restored to China. The official mantra at the time was “one country, two systems.” This slogan could be understood in two ways: first, that Hong Kong might remain relatively “democratic” (in bourgeois terms) as opposed to China’s authoritarian regime, and secondly, in reference to the fact that the Chinese economic

system had been that of a Stalinized and highly bureaucratized workers’ state, while Hong Kong was a capitalist financial center.

By then, however, the “Communist” bureaucrats had already begun a restoration of capitalism in mainland China, with bargain handovers of state resources and industry to the burgeoning capitalist class, together with a steep reduction of social services to working people. The Chinese rulers saw the advantages of using Hong Kong’s financial institutions to facilitate the entry of foreign capital into the mainland.

Today, there is no real difference in essential economic terms between the systems of Hong Kong and the rest of China,

while the fiction of Hong Kong’s being “democratic” has been torn away for all to see. Nevertheless, the current protests come at a worrisome time for the Chinese Communist Party, whose top echelons are concerned over indications of economic slowdown and increasing popular discontent. This has magnified the fear of party bureaucrats that the Hong Kong protests might get “out of hand” and spread to workers on the mainland.

Sean Starrs points out, “With President Xi Jinping’s ‘anti-corruption campaign’ so far targeting only his rival factions, the CCP is currently in the midst of the one of the most serious tests to its unity in decades. More broadly vis-à-vis the Chinese people, the CCP is increasingly using nationalism and China’s ‘glorious’ past, including reviving Confucianism, once reviled by the CCP as a product of feudal and patriarchal authoritarianism, in order to replace ‘communist’ ideology.

“Indeed, the CCP announced that class struggle was officially over in China, and therefore removed the right to strike from its constitution in 1982. Yet, since especially the Nanhai Honda strike in 2010, there have been hundreds if not thousands of increasingly daring strikes across China, the largest of which was earlier this year when 40,000 workers at a Dongguan shoe factory went on strike, less than 100 km north of Hong Kong. ...”

“Hence, especially over the past ten years, burgeoning social unrest in China seems to be increasingly rattling the upper echelons of the CCP. Since 2009 China spends more on domestic security than external military defense. And the CCP has reacted to the Umbrella Revolution with record Internet censorship on the Mainland, banning many search words such as “Class boycott,” “Occupy Central,” “Hong Kong police,” and “Hong Kong tear gas ...”

The Chinese rulers are hesitant to send army units into Hong Kong to put down the protesters, fearing that brutal repression would only spread the revolt. Their hope is that moderate elements among the protesters might be utilized to “calm things down.”

What has not yet come to pass in the Hong Kong protests is the formation of a resolute central leadership, which can unite all the disparate groupings within the protests, and with a clear direction for the struggle. Ultimately, Chinese workers and their allies both in Hong Kong and the mainland must build a mass working-class party, with a full program for the workers to

## ... Climate action

(continued from page 4)

[Environmental Goods Agreement] aims to eliminate tariffs on environmental technologies such as wind turbines, water treatment filters, and solar water heaters.” In other words, it seeks to increase global dependence on U.S.- and E.U.-manufactured renewable energy systems and prevent any homegrown renewable energy manufacturing from taking hold in poorer countries where such jobs are desperately needed.

This is to say nothing of those initiatives that went unmentioned in the speech, such as the Obama administration’s push for development of fracking overseas. Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, was exempted from most U.S. environmental regulations in 2005 and has poisoned the water supply of thousands of farmers and rural residents. The half-million active fracking wells in the U.S. release 4-8% of the heat-trapping methane they produce directly into the atmosphere.

The administration has pursued a gung-ho fracking

policy—at home, as part of Obama’s “all of the above” energy strategy, and in the form of “technical assistance” to dozens of countries that the U.S. regards as strategic allies to enable them to develop their own fracking operations (with investments by U.S. fossil-fuel companies, of course).

Taken together, these three initiatives create a web of dependence on U.S., European, and to some extent Chinese capitalists designed to ensnare those nations most at risk from climate change, using that very risk as PR bait.

These Obama-style “development” initiatives simply paint a Green veneer over the same profit-driven mentality that has led the world into the current climate crisis. Instead of pushing corporate hegemony, the advanced capitalist countries should be paying poorer nations directly to develop their own renewable energy systems and support small farmers who use techniques to grow food that work best with the local ecology.

And future protests should put this demand for real climate justice front and center, diametrically op-

posed to the corporate colonialism pushed by Obama and company.

We should build on the momentum generated by the Climate March to generate organizing for immediate fights like stopping tar sands pipelines, oil trains, and fracking wells. But we also need more mass actions to promote unifying demands. These will be the demands that best draw in new forces to not just broaden but to deepen and strengthen the movement against climate change.

Let us stand for 100% renewables, for an end to all fossil fuels, and for a massive *public* investment in climate jobs to fuel the transition. Let us demand the government support the conversion of defunct auto factories into worker-run mass-transit-vehicle production facilities. Let us require a heavy tax on the sources of carbon emissions, and let us also outlaw those sources over the next decade. Let working people, environmentalists, farmers, and anyone who represents the interests of the 99% come together to decide upon next steps and shared demands for future mass actions. ■

# The socialist program to avoid climate disaster



The following article is a work in progress. It is based on portions of the Socialist Action (U.S.) Draft Political Resolution, which is now under discussion by the SA membership. The entire resolution will be further discussed, amended, and voted on at the Oct. 17-19 Socialist Action National Convention in Minneapolis.

By definition, global warming is a global issue. All will suffer the consequences of advancing climate change. International coordination of remedial efforts is vital. But, not surprisingly, UN-sponsored conferences invariably divide among “rich-poor” country lines—with a few, like China, cynically claiming a role in each camp.

Impoverished nations are already bearing a greater burden from global warming, with the rising of seas and more frequent outbreaks of mosquito-borne infectious diseases disproportionately affecting tropical areas of the global South. Such countries also can least afford the services necessary to shelter and protect their populations, or the technology to transition to cleaner fuel sources. Their forests and minerals are ever more in demand for exploitation by advanced capitalist powers, adding to the ecological devastation and carbon emissions.

U.S. imperialism’s diplomats and politicians deny any special obligation to help the poor countries and point out that China is now the number one generator of carbon emissions. They conveniently ignore at least two important factors in their prime culpability for the climate crisis:

1) Much of China’s alarming pollution problem comes from production outsourced by American companies—with the products coming back across the Pacific to the USA in super-sized container ships. Along with jobs, American employers have also offshored their fouling of the atmosphere. While China currently is responsible for about a quarter of the world’s total carbon emissions, even with all of the off-shoring the United States is still number two, contributing 17 percent. India (6.5%), Russia (5.1%), and Japan (3.7%) round out the present top five. In terms of per capita emissions, the U.S. is in a tight three-way race with Australia and Canada for top fouler.

2) The accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has been building since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The leaders in shared responsibility over that time span are: the USA, 28 percent, China 9.9%, Russia 6.9%, Britain 5.9%, Germany 5.6%.

## To the capitalist class, the destruction of our biosphere is collateral damage in their ruthless pursuit of profits.

Those who have profited from industrialization that created global warming over the course of two centuries have the accumulated wealth as well as moral obligation to pay the lion’s share of the costs of global remediation. Above all, that means the finance and industrial-capitalist ruling class in the United States.

To the capitalist class, destruction of our biosphere is, at best, “collateral damage” in their ruthless pursuit of profits in a global economy that has become increasingly dependent on fossil fuels. In this sense, they see no alternative within the framework of a world order that prioritizes profit above human existence. We live at a time when the irrational and the inherent contradictions of capitalism portend a bleak, if not devastating, future for all life on earth.

It’s not just the energy giants. There are more registered cars and trucks in the U.S. than there are licensed drivers. Plug-in electric vehicles, which could start to make a dent in domestic fossil fuel consumption if coupled with vast increases in the proportion of electricity generated by renewable sources, account for only about one half of one percent of new car production. An enormous amount of the economy, including tens of millions of jobs, is tied to the use of personal transportation powered by fossil fuels.

According to the latest figures from the U.S. Energy Information, the USA remains the world leader in electricity generation; 39% is coal fired, 27% is natural gas, 19% is nuclear. Only 14% comes from clean renewables, over half of which is from hydroelectric dams. A paltry 4% of the nation’s electricity comes from wind and solar. Meanwhile, the suppliers of dirty fuels continue to rake in mind-blowing sums of money, with just the largest five oil companies making more than \$90 billion in 2013.

It’s no wonder that any talk of replacing the fossil-fuel industry’s source of astronomical profit with clean renewable alternative energy and transportation makes the class that rules very nervous. For them, the

bottom line trumps any concern about future generations.

### Capitalist climate strategy

Some sectors of the ruling class—typified by the now notorious Koch family—have opted for denial. They call climate change “junk science,” peddled by film-flam scientists looking to stuff their pockets with private grant money. Should we fall for this fraud, we are told, tens of millions of good jobs would be needlessly lost, and America would be left immobile, dark, and cold.

Anxiety about job loss is palpable. But most have now seen too many anecdotal examples on the evening news of climate change unfolding to accept denial of science. The best and brightest of the captains of industry have developed more sophisticated tactics.

Big Coal offers the promise of Clean Coal through carbon capture/sequester. This involves grabbing the carbon before it goes up the chimney and storing it either in water or underground. While it looks promising in controlled lab experiments, few not on the coal barons’ payroll believe that the carbon will stay put for long in its “seque-

ter.” It’s a pipedream.

Not long ago, corn ethanol was promoted as an alternative fuel by agri-business and received billions in subsidies. The result was a spike in food prices that left millions hungry and no reduction in overall carbon emissions. Today this food-to-fuel scam is now recognized as a bust not only for the environment but commercially as well.

Despite the still ongoing crisis at Fukushima, and memories of past disasters such as Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, there is a major push to revive nuclear power as a profitable alternative to coal and gas. It is an alternative, certainly—but it’s not clean, not safe, and not renewable. Even if catastrophic accidents are rare, all reactors generate radioactive waste that remains dangerous for centuries. And the “rare” catastrophic disasters have deadly and permanent global repercussions.

Three and half years after the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan, the three melted reactor cores remain unchanged in a tangled mass of hundreds of tons of highly radioactive uranium, plutonium, cesium, and strontium wrapped around and through the reactors’ inaccessible structural parts. Meanwhile, the radioactive water stored in ever-leaking tanks flows into the world’s oceans.

There are no known ways of safe, secure disposal of spent nuclear material. And, while nuclear power plants don’t directly release carbon emissions, plenty of fossil energy is expended in the mining, processing, and transportation of their fuel. That’s why Socialist Action continues to say, “No New Nukes!”

Some environmentalists have taken heart from the fact that, unlike the global trend, carbon dioxide emissions have slackened in the United States during the Obama administration. There are two principal reasons behind this likely brief respite:

1) Reduced production and consumption during the Great Recession and Jobless Recovery.

2) Wide substitution of natural gas to replace coal in electricity generation.

While sensible conservation measures are needed in a response to climate change, unemployment and reduced earnings of workers are hardly a good way to reduce wasteful consumerism.

Natural gas produces only about half of the carbon dioxide emissions of coal when burned. While that’s qualitatively better, it is far from zero. Replacing coal

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with gas—trading one fossil fuel for another—hampers rather than helps a transition to clean, renewable energy sources by keeping electricity generation in the pockets of the fossil-fuel billionaires who are unmotivated to change.

The switch to gas should not mitigate our concern over the emission of greenhouse gases. The widespread growth of hydraulic fracturing—fracking—has produced a glut of gas that is at least temporarily cheaper than coal. But this bonanza carries such a big environmental price—paid in the form of unbreathable air and drinking water so poisoned it can be lit on fire—that it had to be exempted from most federal environmental laws before it could be widely used.

Perhaps worse, recent tests have found that 4-8% of all fracked natural gas escapes directly into the atmosphere as methane, a greenhouse gas 20 times as powerful as carbon dioxide over a 100-year period. After a decade of holding steady, methane levels in the atmosphere have climbed since 2005, when the U.S. fracking bonanza began in earnest.

#### How can we move forward?

In his sixth year in office, President Obama is finally pressing an energy plan that purports to address climate change. While the media often refers to it as an executive order, it in fact relies largely on proposed EPA regulations that will be subject to a lengthy period for comment—and an almost certain court challenge, with a decision to be made before yet another institution designed to defend the interests of private property above all.

Obama's plan aims to reduce emissions—in electric utilities only—by thirty percent from 2005 levels. This would be done through cap-and-trade quotas administered by each state along lines set by them to reach an assigned goal. Since the 2005 benchmark allows them to incorporate the gains already registered by the economic downturn and coal-to-gas conversions, 10 states have met their goal before the program even kicks off!

While Republicans have denounced the Obama plan as a new “war on coal,” a vice-president of a power company with coal fired plants in 11 states told *The New York Times*, “We view cap and trade as having a lot of benefits. There are important design considerations that would have to be factored in to consider each state's circumstances. But we think it's definitely worth looking at. It could keep the cost down. It would allow us to keep coal units running for a more extended period. There are a lot of advantages.” That sounds like more gain than pain is expected by this “newly-regulated” industry. We can expect little impact on climate change.

In 1997, the late Barry Commoner, an eminent biologist who also became a multidisciplinary ecologist and social/political activist, wrote in *Scientific American* magazine: “The environmental crisis arises from a fundamental fault: our systems of production—in industry, agriculture, energy and transportation—essential as they are, make people sick and die.

“What is needed now is a transformation of the major systems of production more profound than even the sweeping post-World War II changes in production technology. Restoring environmental quality means substituting solar sources of energy for fossil and nuclear fuels; substituting electric motors for the internal-combustion engine; substituting organic farming for chemical agriculture; expanding the use of durable, renewable and recyclable materials—metals, glass, wood, paper—in place of the petrochemical products that have massively displaced them.”

We can, of course, today add wind, tidal, and geothermal to the list of proven clean, renewable, and free for the taking energy sources. The science, technology, and conservation sketched in Commoner's compact statement of alternatives identifies practical measures that can be done *right now* to halt global warming while still maintaining and even improving quality living standards.

While Socialist Action supports even modest reforms, our goal is to advance consciousness and levels of struggle in the direction of the socialist future through the methodology of transitional demands. Certainly, the reforms advanced by Barry Commoner were way beyond modest.

Bill McKibben, the central leader of 350.org, and NASA scientist James Hansen propose as a solution a heavy “carbon tax” on fossil fuels at the point of extraction, with all of the resulting funds reimbursed directly to consumers. Such a proposal would no doubt be more effective at reducing emissions than cap-and-trade. But even under the unlikely scenario that it could pass through Congress despite the massive political clout of the industry it targets, the carbon tax is aimed at promoting market-based reform and would not address the underlying system that is causing the crisis in the first place.

This is why we call for nationalizing all sectors of



## Our program would launch the biggest job creation project in history: one that would last for generations.

the energy industry under democratic workers' management, which would allow for novel and effective solutions to be instituted without profit-driven roadblocks.

The most relevant historical analogy in American history was the emergency economic mobilization during World War II. The U.S. imperialist government did not rely on market forces to support its fighting, and that of its allies, on six continents and all oceans. It simply took control of virtually the entire economy and operated it according to plans worked out by a vast core of scientists, technicians, and functionaries. The war itself was a criminal human disaster. But the economic mobilization was the most successful crash program in history, a powerful argument for the superiority of centralized planning.

We will adapt this method to use by the working class when it holds the levers of power instead of war-profiting corporations. We can adapt the organizational successes of that war-time experience to our far different goals—restructuring an economy to support a society based on ecological sustainability that is inseparable from forever ending imperialist wars for plunder and conquest.

Some initial steps by a “Workers & Climate Justice Government” would:

- Declare a Climate Emergency and create a new Climate Emergency Public Sector beginning with nationalization of key sectors such as Finance, Energy, Transportation, Agri-business, and Auto.

- Institute a fundamental restructuring of the economy, planned by workers, scientists, and environmentalists, and managed by elected worker representatives, with a top priority of rapid, total replacement of fossil and nuclear fuels with clean, renewable sources such as solar and wind.

- Dismantle the polluting, wasteful, and dangerous war machine used to support imperialism. Close all foreign bases and bring all soldiers and military contractors home. We need only mention briefly here that virtually every U.S. war in the recent past, directly or indirectly, focused on the conquest of fossil-fuel resources. Today's U.S. military doctrine is centered on Energy Wars.

- Halt and reverse land-devouring urban sprawl by renovating and repopulating our collapsed urban cores; restoring wetlands, forests and farm land wrecked by irrational capitalist “development,” and ending the need for car dependency by greatly expanding clean, safe, free, and convenient mass transit.

- Support working farmers and farmworkers with livable wages and benefits and resources to shift from chemical to organic agriculture.

#### Just transition for jobs

The single biggest obstacle to winning working-class support for meaningful climate action is fear of job loss by the employed and the desperate struggle for new jobs by the unemployed. This requires applying the traditional concept of Just Transition. Whenever jobs are eliminated for the good of society, society has an obligation to support the affected workers' income and standard of living, and to retrain and relocate

them if necessary, until they can be placed in suitable new quality and environmentally sustainable jobs.

Our program would eliminate millions of jobs, even entire industries. But it would also launch the biggest job creation project in history, one that would last for generations. Indeed, in a rational society, the use of sustainable and advanced technologies should lead to a decrease in the length of the workday with no cut in pay, as opposed to capitalism's credo, wherein technological progress is inseparable from layoffs and ever-rising unemployment, coupled with *more* overall work hours with less pay for those remaining employed.

Socialist Action continues to demand a 30-hour standard workweek with no reduction in take-home pay, as well as demanding that Social Security be strengthened, not cut, to provide earlier retirement.

Nor can we abandon those in other countries who have been unfavorably dependent on and subjugated to U.S. imperialism's ceaseless drive for cheap labor and raw materials. We must take what is needed from the greatest concentration of wealth in history, currently in the hands of the ruling 0.1%, to assist and collaborate as equal partners with the poor and oppressed in the world who are in many ways already leading the fight to stop climate change short of climate disaster.

As we work to revive a fighting labor movement, educate on the need for a labor party, and support evolving mass movements such as the fast-food workers, \$15 Now, immigrant rights, women's rights, and LGBT rights, we will work to integrate these working-class forces into the climate/environmental movement. Based on the lessons of past social movements, we believe there should be periodic open, democratic decision-making conferences to determine the strategy and tactics for a united action movement for class and climate justice.

#### The metabolic rift

Here we must also be prepared to raise and discuss issues that to date have rarely been a part of the national debate but have been made so by the extremely worthy contributions of individuals like *Monthly Review* editor John Bellamy Foster. Foster correctly argues against what we used to call “productivist” solutions to environmental crises. These center on the idea that a socialist society can always find a technological fix to correct any fundamental flaw in the operations of capitalism.

The evidence is now in to demonstrate that the implementation of the best sustainable technology possible cannot in and of itself solve the fundamental problem. This is the simple fact that the future society of full equality that we envision cannot continue to develop along the same lines as the present society. Perhaps a clearer way to state this is that we cannot base ourselves on what exists today as the norm in capitalist “development” and, within this context, come up with a technological “fix” to change it.

We cannot build the same kind of cities in poor and underdeveloped nations as capitalism has done in the advanced nations. This includes the same houses, roads, and infrastructure as well as the production of vast numbers of commodities that are taken for granted and that are readily available to perhaps half or two-thirds of the world's people.

If we expend the energy and natural resources to do so—that is, to repeat the previous paths of capitalist development—we will irrevocably breach the already dangerous “metabolic rift” between human society and nature. Living within the bounds of nature, in harmony with nature rather than furthering its destruc-

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# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

## Toronto rally defends postal services

Over 400 people rallied on Saturday, Sept. 20, outside the uptown Toronto constituency office of Conservative Finance Minister Joe Oliver to demand a halt to Tory and Canada Post Corporation plans to eliminate home mail delivery and set higher prices for postage.

Participants came from as far away as Vernon, B.C., and Charlottetown, P.E.I. They included retired autoworkers from Oshawa, and a group of posties who hired a bus in Hamilton, Ontario.

Rally chair Elizabeth Byce, a proud retired member of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, past secretary of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, and a leading member of Socialist Action, welcomed the crowd. In the breezy, warm sunshine, she led-off the proceedings with a few chants: "1,2,3,4, mail delivery door-to-door, 5,6,7,8, stop increasing postal rates," "Stop the Cuts at Canada Post," and "They say Cutback. We say Fightback!"

"I say to Finance Minister Joe Oliver, you can hide, but you cannot escape our anger, and you cannot avoid our determination to hold you and your government accountable for cuts to the postal service that Canadians hold dear. Keep your bloody hands off our public services!" Byce told the gathering.

"Many organizations have endorsed this rally. They are listed on the newspaper ads and the leaflets you've seen.

New endorsers include: the Workers' Action Centre, York Region Catholic Teachers, United Steel Workers - Toronto Area Council, and the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP). We thank them all."

She then introduced the rally speakers as follows: "Denis Lemelin, the leader of the fight to save vital postal services and good jobs, is the president of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. His involvement in the union began in 1979 when he started as a postal clerk in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

"Marie Clark-Walker comes out of CUPE-Ontario. She celebrates her Jamaican heritage, and is a vice president of the Canadian Labour Congress. Sid Ryan, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour, is a past-President of CUPE-Ontario, and is former Ontario Tory Leader Tim Hudak's worst enemy. Sharon DeSoussa is the Regional Executive Vice-President in Ontario for the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

"Barry Weisleder is the person who organized the rally from scratch. He is a teacher, union activist, journalist,



Julian Arcot / Socialist Action

and the federal secretary of Socialist Action / Ligue pour l'Action socialiste. (See the text of his speech below.)

"Mark Brown is Education and Organizing Officer for the Metro Toronto Region of CUPW, and is also a member of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

"Hockey has its Hall of Fame, and so does Labour. Buzz Hargrove is a past president of the Canadian Auto Workers. He speaks today on behalf of Unifor, Canada's newest and biggest private-sector union.

The Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, which generously contributed to the publicity tools that made this rally a success, is represented by a vice president of OPSEU, Myles Magner.

"The Canadian Union of Public Employees in Ontario played a key role in promoting the protest. Fred Hahn is the president of CUPE-Ontario, and a long-time fighter for LGBT rights and dignity. Liz Rowley is the Ontario leader of the Communist Party and a former school board trustee.

"Carolyn Egan is president of the United Steetworkers' Toronto Area Council and a member of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council executive. Chris Clay is a leader of CUPW in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island.

"CUPW Union Rep Mike Palecek, based in Ottawa, is here today to sing his new anti-austerity, anti-Stephen Harper song, which debuted on Parliament Hill at the People's Social Forum rally on Aug. 21."

The rally chair reminded everyone that the campaign to Save Canada Post continues, and called on people to attend a meeting of the Toronto Organizing Committee to plan the next steps. Extensive coverage of the Toronto protest featured prominently on that day's 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. news broadcast of CITY-TV. ■

## 'We can win this issue!'

Following is the text of the remarks of postal rally organizer Barry Weisleder on Sept. 20 in Toronto.:

Sisters and brothers, it's great to see such a large crowd here on this beautiful day. Did you enjoy the summer? I did. I spent much of it organizing this rally, and I'd like to tell you why.

Firstly, I'm sick and tired of Tory lies. Canada Post is profitable. And it could be even more profitable if we had postal banking. We need good jobs. Killing over 8000 letter carrier jobs makes no sense—unless you are a corporate vulture planning to dine on the dismembered parts of a vital public service.

Secondly, I love the postal workers' union. The first picket line I walked was with posties in 1972 when I was still a student.

CUPW is a militant democratic union—one of the best. It has always led the way. With a wildcat strike in '65, it won the right to collective bargaining for all public-sector workers. It won big wage increases with

strikes and walkouts in the early '70s. It gained job security in the '70s in the face of new technology. In 1981 it struck to win maternity leave for its members, a gain that spread to all organized workers. CUPW has been in the forefront of solidarity campaigns with workers' struggles, at home and abroad, for generations. That's why it has legions of allies.

Now is the time to return that solidarity, and to stop the onslaught against public services and workers' rights. It is also a golden opportunity to boot the Harper Conservatives from office, and to bust up the bosses' offensive.

That brings me to the third reason. We can win this issue. How do I know? Look at the doctor's note fiasco. Deepak Chopra made that brainless suggestion because he and Harper are on the defensive.

They're feeling the pressure. The plan to terminate home mail delivery is possibly the most unpopular policy of the Tory government. But it's tied to many others. Like undermining pensions and E.I. Gutting health and safety in the workplace. Promoting dirty oil pipelines. Plundering aboriginal lands. Victimized migrant

workers. Sending troops to Iraq. Backing the siege of Gaza. Giving tax breaks to big corporations. Watching our cities descend into the despair of gridlock and homelessness.

We in Socialist Action believe that the common denominator of global social misery is the destructive and dying capitalist disorder.

There's a funny saying: "Capitalism is just a phase we're going through." Unfortunately, this phase is killing the planet and its inhabitants. Its stale date is well over a century old. We need ways to break the grip of the 0.1%. The fight to keep our valued postal services is just such a way. This issue is Harper's Achilles heel. If, together, we can drive this campaign forward, there's no telling what we can achieve.

We can bring down the Tories. We can restore and expand public services. Broaden the battle for social equality and a genuine economic democracy. And perhaps, we can shake this rotten system to its core, and bring to birth a cooperative commonwealth in our time. Let's make the most of it. Let's fight to win, in solidarity. ■

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her union issued an immediate statement condemning the behavior of the police and standing in solidarity with Michael's mother in calling for an investigation and justice.

The issue of intersecting movements for economic justice was addressed by SEIU's president on a news program, "Democracy Now": "There is an incredible intersection of the immigrant rights movement and the fast-food workers' movement. We understand it is necessary to grow a powerful movement so 11 million people can join in the fullness of our economy. And we are not going to stop our movement building on immigrant justice or economic justice until we win."

AR: What is the meaning of this movement for the rebirth of the labor movement?

AM: I am not sure I can answer that yet. I can say that this is the most important working-class struggle in the United States at present, and its national scope is like

nothing I have witnessed.

For there to be a rebirth of the labor movement, there needs to be a break with the Democratic Party. As you probably know, we have no working-class party in this country. We have two capitalist parties, and as long as the union bureaucrats are at the beck and call of the Democratic Party, the word "rebirth" just seems too strong.

This month a striker was quoted saying, "We are a movement now!" This was significant. There will be a point when the ruling class will say, "Enough is enough". They will try to co-opt this movement, divide it, or buy it off. But if the movement is big and strong enough, the workers will fight back, and the struggle will expand.

What occurred recently in Seattle was significant. An open socialist candidate named Kshama Sawant, who is a member of Socialist Alternative, ran for Seattle City Council. She is a member of the American Federation Of Teachers (AFT), and she won by centering her campaign on winning a \$15

minimum wage for all city workers. She used her campaign to organize the Fight For \$15 movement in Seattle, and she took on the Democratic Party. As a result, 100,000 workers will be lifted out of poverty.

One of the important things that happened after Sawant's victory was the formation of "15 Now," which became a national movement with chapters across the country. While SEIU is currently supporting \$15 an hour, there have been times that the leaders went in and negotiated less than \$15. But with another organization of community residents, union members, and low-wage workers, the pressure for \$15 can increase, and the movement will become larger and stronger.

AR: What do you think can be done?

AM: The advances in the Fight For \$15 actions on Sept. 4 were important. Not only did the strikes expand to new cities but they also expanded to new workers who are under attack. In Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and Seattle, home-care

workers joined with fast-food workers in support of the demand for \$15 minimum wage. The home-care workers' union rights had been attacked just two months earlier by the U.S. Supreme Court. They are 90% women and 40% Black and Latina.

In addition to expanding to a new layer of oppressed workers, the demonstrations themselves were more militant. They included civil disobedience and more strikes in the South. In Charleston, S.C., a bystander was watching as fast-food workers were engaged in a sit-in in the middle of the street. He commented to reporters, "This is just not something you see in Charleston."

We need to be in the streets supporting our brothers and sisters. We want the numbers to increase, the issues and demands to increase, and all workers who are victims of austerity to join together. One of our comrades who is most experienced in the labor movement said it best, "Our goal is to advance the interests of our class." I can say it no better. ■



## OPINION

By **ROBBIE MAHOOD**

In June 2014, Quebec became the first jurisdiction in the Canadian state to legalize euthanasia. Entitled “An Act respecting end-of-life care,” the bill passed by a substantial majority in a free vote in the National Assembly. Quebec joins three American states—plus Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Switzerland—in legalizing some form of assisted dying. The new law would allow a doctor with the consent of the patient to administer medication to cause death.

The euthanasia debate in the Canadian state has been periodically re-ignited by high profile cases. More than 20 years ago, a former left-wing NDP MP, Svend Robinson, campaigned eloquently for a British Columbia woman, Sue Rodriguez, who in the terminal phase of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS or Lou Gehrig’s Disease) wished to end her life.

The decision of the Quebec government reflects a shift in public opinion. In the presence of intractable suffering, a strong majority across the Canadian state supports the option of euthanasia or assisted suicide. Not surprisingly, support for legalization is highest in Quebec. Attitudes are consistently more liberal in Quebec than in the rest of Canada on many contested health and social questions, from abortion to the treatment of youth offenders.

In contrast, physicians in their majority have traditionally opposed euthanasia. This reflects in part the conservative mentality in the profession. More significantly, the Hippocratic injunction to “do no harm” was understood as an obligation to always preserve and extend life. However, medical and social investment in end-of-life care has modified this view. The palliative care movement has brought death and dying out of the shadows. This has resulted not only in better techniques to relieve suffering, but an appreciation of the limits of medical intervention and an affirmation of the needs and wishes of the dying patient.

Professional opinion has shifted. For example, the Canadian Medical Association in a recent statement on euthanasia recognized that a more open approach was necessary, even if it stopped short of recommending de-criminalization.

It remains to be seen whether the Harper regime in Ottawa will launch an appeal. The federal government fully backs the ban on euthanasia in the (federal) criminal code. Quebec is determined to defend the new law, based on provincial jurisdiction over health care.

In any case, there will certainly be a court challenge from anti-euthanasia forces in Quebec. The Canadian Supreme Court is also set to rule on another case of assisted suicide, which will expose the federal criminal statute, once again, to legal scrutiny. The Court’s last ruling in 1993, upheld the constitutionality of the ban on euthanasia. In the meantime, however, both public and medical opinion has shifted, as has the composition of the Court.

Were the Supreme Court to rule in Ottawa’s favour, this would pose a direct challenge to the new Quebec law, and in the process raise the question of Quebec’s national rights.

Euthanasia is a contentious issue, bringing out a variety of strongly held opinions, both personal and philosophical. It can divide those who would otherwise make common cause. For example, the Mon-

# Quebec legalizes euthanasia



(Left) “The Angel of Death” by Evelyn De Morgan, 1881.

to legalizing euthanasia. Expanding end-of-life options, up to and including assisted suicide, is part of a trend toward greater individual rights and less control by the state and organized religion, a trend that socialists and the labour movement should support.

At present, only a minority of patients (25-30% in Canada) have access to specialized palliative care at or near the end of life. The claim is made by some that legally sanctioned euthanasia would divert attention from the need for more services, or could even lead to cutbacks to palliative care. Cutbacks, in turn, could increase the pressure to euthanize, whether from health care providers, patients or their families.

The potential for abuse should be squarely faced. A criticism of the new Quebec legislation is that it opens the door to abuse because it gives exclusive power to doctors to authorize and carry out euthanasia. Indeed, for this reason, many palliative care physicians are uneasy about the new law.

With or without de-criminalization, there is potential for abuse. We have only to recall the events at New Orleans’ Memorial Medical Centre during Hurricane Katrina. Twenty-three patients were apparently euthanized by medical staff after evacuation was refused by Tenet Healthcare, the owner of the hospital. Under duress, all of the class and racist assumptions endemic

to capitalist society came to the fore, and combined with the arbitrary power of the medical profession, and a profit-hungry corporate health care conglomerate, and resulted in the killing of vulnerable patients (cf. “Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital,” by Sherry Fink, Atlantic).

Making the case for de-criminalization, the Canadian ethicist Arthur Schafer points out that “not all slopes are slippery.” He notes that the gradual acceptance of so-called “indirect” and “passive” euthanasia (withholding or withdrawing life support and the prioritization of symptom relief even if it might hasten the patient’s death), far from brutalizing end-of-life care has been accompanied by a greater sensitivity to patient needs and respect for their autonomy. He argues persuasively that “Canadians (and Quebecois) should be able to choose from among a full range of options, including first rate palliative care and physician-assisted suicide ... with proper safeguards to ensure openness and accountability” (“The Great Canadian Euthanasia Debate,” A. Schafer, *The Globe and Mail*, Nov 5, 2009).

What would constitute “proper safeguards” may therefore become an important issue. But it should not alter the position in favour of de-criminalization. We should agree with Schafer, that there is no contradiction in fighting for greater access to high-quality palliative care, with euthanasia as a last resort where the overall goal is to provide “death with dignity.” ■

*Robbie Mahood is a physician in Montreal.*

trepreneurial Physicians for Social Justice, staunch defenders of publicly funded health care, are vehemently opposed to the new provincial euthanasia law.

Not surprisingly, the anti-abortion lobby, together with the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant sects, are opposed to de-criminalizing euthanasia. But many who are not influenced by religious doctrine fear that sanctioning euthanasia will prove to be the “slippery slope to a generalized “cheapening” of human life leading to abuse of vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled. The eugenics movement of the first part of the 20th century, reaching its apogee in the crimes of the Nazi era, is often invoked. However, those who favour legalization can also stake a claim to compassion, arguing that assisted dying provides relief of suffering and embodies respect for individual choice.

What position, if any, should socialists adopt on this question, and how should we participate in the debate? A first step should be to support de-criminalization. Euthanasia already occurs outside the law. Legalization would bring the whole question into the open and allow critical inquiry to shed light on practice.

In several studies, a substantial proportion of palliative care patients wanted to have the choice to end their lives if their condition became unbearable. Yet, in those jurisdictions where euthanasia has been legalized, the option is exercised infrequently (less than 1% of deaths in Oregon, for example).

References to Nazi atrocities should not be ripped out of historical context. With the exception of some libertarian currents, today’s right wing is opposed

## Canada marches for climate solutions

By **BARRY WEISLEDER**

While hundreds of thousands paraded in Manhattan, thousands took to the streets in cities across Canada to warn that climate change threatens civilization and life on Earth.

Demonstrations took place in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Calgary. In Toronto over 3000 walked from City Hall through the downtown core. Hundreds travelled from Toronto by bus, train, and car to participate in the huge New York march. Around the world, from Lon-

don to Melbourne to Mexico City to Bogota to Berlin people paraded and rallied.

The protests were spurred by reports that the world had pumped an estimated 36.1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide into the air last year by burning coal, oil, and gas. That is 706 metric tons or 2.3 per cent more than in the previous year, according to the Global Carbon Project international team that tracks and calculates global emissions annually. The results were published in peer-reviewed journals *Nature Geoscience* and *Nature*

*Climate Change* in September.

The leading carbon polluters are China, the United States, and India. But Canada’s tar sands industry in northern Alberta is one of the biggest single contributors to the climate-change malaise.

The three largest parties in Parliament, the governing Conservatives, the Official Opposition labour-based New Democratic Party, and the Liberal Party all favour the construction of new pipelines to pump more bitumen-laced oil to thirsty markets—at the expense of nature, and to fuel private profit. ■

**NEW!**

# UKRAINE IN TURMOIL

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(Left) Saigon residents welcome troops of the North Vietnamese People's Army and the National Liberation Front as they enter the city.

## A riveting but flawed documentary — *The Last Days of Vietnam*

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

*"The Last Days of Vietnam," a documentary film produced and directed by Rory Kennedy.*

Director Rory Kennedy, daughter of environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy, has created a riveting and heartwarming, yet heartbreaking, full-length documentary film, *"The Last Days of Vietnam,"* which takes place in South Vietnam from 1973 to 1975, the last years of the war.

That said, she gives us a highly shortsighted view of a war that involved the U.S. government's strategy to stop the spread of "Communism" in Southeast Asia. The U.S. sent over 2,500,000 soldiers to Vietnam, in an ultimately futile attempt to maintain a neo-colonial U.S. puppet government in the South while defeating all attempts to unify the country.

Kennedy artfully skirts taking a political stance, leaving it up to the audience to decide whether or not her film is a U.S. mea culpa to the Vietnamese people for destroying much of their country before being compelled to abandon the war effort.

She avoids subjects such as the U.S. forces' wanton destruction of villages (such as Mai Lai), and their killing of innocent farmers and other civilians. According to the Vietnam War Crimes Working Group Files, atrocities committed by U.S. forces numbered more than 300.

Kennedy's team interviewed scores of both American and South Vietnamese retired Army men, Marine officers, Embassy guards, CIA agents, and other significant personnel. Unfortunately, the film does not include interviews with people who supported the National Liberation Front or North Vietnam in the conflict, or with any U.S. antiwar activists from the period. The film makes use of well-known, iconic photos as well archival film footage.

"Last Days" focuses mainly on the 24-hour evacuation of many South Vietnamese on April 29-30, 1975, as the People's Army of Vietnam and National Liberation Front closed in on Saigon. Initially, White House orders were to evacuate only U.S. citizens who worked in the embassy, or provided support services, and other U.S. personnel. Kennedy had a difficult time getting the film made because as one interviewee, former U.S. Army Colonel Stuart Herrington, said, "No one wanted to see a film about a bunch of people waiting for airplanes to rescue them." It appears he was wrong.

In April 1975, President Gerald Ford ordered the 6000 Americans still in Vietnam to leave. Yet, life went on for the people in Saigon. We see footage of people shopping, going about their business as the North Vietnamese army makes its inexorable way south. A college student at the time, Binh Pho, says that classes were being held, but no one was interested in going to school, as many went to work for Americans for up to a thousand dollars. Later, in

his interview, he states that he and a naval officer were incarcerated in rebel "re-education" camps, although both eventually made their way to the U.S.

U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam Graham Martin denied that the North Vietnamese army was closing in on Saigon, believing that the South Vietnamese AVRN troops could prevail. When Congress refused the funds to evacuate Vietnamese citizens, in-country military officials organized a makeshift plan in opposition to both Martin and prevailing U.S. government policy: Black Operation or BlackOps. Right or wrong, legal or illegal; they risked being charged with treason. Some evacuees were airlifted to the Philippines.

Meanwhile, the South Vietnamese army was eroding. Ford went before Congress asking for enough funds to save as many South Vietnamese collaborators as they could and to "bolster America's honor." Kennedy includes the rare clip of him swearing when his plea was denied, calling Congress "those sons of bitches." As ships waited in the harbor, a four-step plan was drawn up. The last resort was to evacuate by helicopter.

Kennedy utilizes clear, 3D animated graphics and maps to illustrate not only the evacuation plans, but also the rapid march of the People's Army through South Vietnam. Vivid clips show the destruction of unoccupied ships in Saigon harbor to avoid their falling into enemy hands.

Evacuations began: All Vietnamese dependants of U.S. officials and military—wives, common-law wives, children, and relatives. Martin did all he could to slow it down, believing a rush would cause panic. Getting out depended on whether you worked for Americans, who you knew, and money or goods you could trade. The airport was to be kept open as long as possible. Still Martin refused to allow evacuation.

Detailed on-the-spot footage from April 29, 1975, shows North Vietnamese forces bombing and shell-

ing the airport. We see clips of Martin stubbornly boarding a vehicle to inspect the situation with his own eyes. He finally relented. So, it was down to Option 4: Evacuate by helicopter.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Ford reluctantly gave the go-ahead—everyone out in 24 hours. To throw off the invading army, the code for the order was, "105 degrees and rising," weirdly backed by a broadcast of Bing Crosby's recording of "White Christmas." Kennedy includes a surreal clip of people going about the streets, and readying for evacuation as Crosby's soothing warble is heard on every radio and PA system in Saigon. Ten thousand people rushed the embassy, gathering on the rooftops of American-occupied homes and office buildings, waiting for helicopters (hence the iconic photo of hundreds of people climbing a ladder to a roof, then into a helicopter).

All official documents were shredded; and up to one million dollars in U.S. currency was burned to avoid its going to the invaders and/or their collaborators. Helicopters deposited people on ships; one Vietnamese pilot landed a huge Chinook in his front yard and loaded on his family. In a later, amazing scene, we are shown a clip of his Chinook hovering above the deck of a ship with him and his family on board, much too big to land. He hovers low and we see his wife toss their infant daughter from the copter to the deck, where she's caught by a crewman. She and the others jump to the deck.

The pilot skillfully ditches the Chinook into the sea; he climbs out as it sinks, disappears into the waves, and then re-appears. He's then rescued. The narrator says that he's never seen anyone as calm and collected after what he went through for his family.

There are incredible, unforgettable shots on the deck of a ship as hundreds of people push the now empty helicopters overboard. Sadly, we also see the eyes of desperate, hopeful people clinging to the Embassy fences and gates, waving papers or just frantically waving; there are thousands of people, many who claimed to have worked for Americans.

All told, about 17 helicopters brought over 150 people on to the ships, each one holding only 40 evacuees and one or two Americans. As crewmen distribute food, clothing, and toys among them, a camera catches dolphins leaping alongside the bow, in an amazing shot.

A little over 400 were left behind. The last Americans huddled on the roof as roughly a thousand Vietnamese tried to push through the closed hatch. The Americans managed to save half of them. A military officer at the scene felt that he had betrayed them. The evacuation went on for little over eighteen hours straight.

With the Americans gone and many Vietnamese collaborators as well, Saigon was left to the invading North Vietnamese People's Army and the National Liberation Front. Film clips show the plundering of the city and armed reprisals against South Vietnamese military personnel and anyone thought to be collaborators with them. To avoid identification, South Vietnamese soldiers stripped themselves of their uniforms. There is film footage of them walking away almost naked. We see a deserted street with boots lying helter-skelter. The abandoned American Embassy is looted.

An American military officer asks on film: "Is this what America fought for? I have no answer." Nor does Kennedy's film offer any answers. And that's a pity since thousands of soldiers and civilians who became casualties of the brutal American incursion into Vietnam would like to have known why they were sacrificed. ■

### ... Climate disaster?

(continued from page 7)

tion, is the only way to avoid doom for humankind itself.

But posing the issue as we have done above raises a critical question that socialists must be prepared to answer without equivocation lest we be charged with "environmental racism"—the idea that poor nations and people are permanently barred from enjoying the same benefits of industrialization and technology as their counterparts in the developed world. That is, in the name of environmental "sanity," so this fundamentally flawed view proclaims, the present poor must be

relegated to a lesser, if not permanent, second-class status.

We hear variants of this view with regard to immigrants in the United States, where reactionary environmentalists argue that U.S. society simply lacks the resources to accommodate immigrants in health care, housing, and other essential aspects of a decent life that are available to "citizens."

Eco-socialists today must envision a future in which all poor nations and people have free and full access to quality housing, education, medical care, technology and all other aspects of life that *maximize the potential for the free and full development of everyone*. How this can be accomplished is among the most decisive questions of our time. ■

# ... U.S. bombs

(continued from page 12)

Ghraib in Iraq or in Guantanamo?

The Qatar monarchy, which has no army of its own and yet is a major military power in the region, relies on a U.S.-established massive military base—the largest in the region—staffed with a U.S.-funded mercenary army of the Blackwater-associated death-squad variety. It was Qatar's mercenary army (U.S. directed) that “liberated” Tripoli during the U.S.-led “humanitarian” war against Libya. And yet, Qatar also funds ISIS and other U.S.-designated “terrorist” groups.

That war too, according to a recent Obama statement, was a “mistake.” Said the apologetic president, we helped to remove the Gadhafi government, “but we didn't have a plan for the day after.” Today, both Qatar and Saudi Arabia are bombing Libya but aim their fire at their own designated “terrorist” enemies, while the U.S.-backed Egyptian military coup government is calling on the U.S. to join them in bombing Libyan “terrorists” on the “other side”!

We should recall that the U.S. and NATO pulverized Libya for almost a year with saturation bombing—destroying, in the name of a “humanitarian war,” that nation's infrastructure and murdering tens of thousands. This was done in the name of aiding the “rebels,” who were touted as democrats. The U.S., as we repeatedly documented in this newspaper, created a “Libyan Transitional National Council” led by U.S., French, and other NATO-appointed millionaires/billionaires and other pro-imperialist forces that soon afterwards disintegrated into warring factions, each aiming to control Libya's significant oil reserves and facilities. When the dust clears, there is little doubt that, as in Iraq, U.S. corporations will emerge with the lion's share of the oil booty.

ISIS, an offshoot of the U.S.-created al-Qaida going back to the 1979 war in Afghanistan, was virtually ignored in Syria when its weapons were pointed at Assad's forces. Repeated U.S. “diplomatic efforts” to create a unified opposition against Assad, including virtually all anti-Assad groups, met with repeated failure as the preferred U.S. political choices proved to be little more than pro-U.S. Syrian elites living in exile and attending endless U.S.-sponsored conferences to establish a Syrian government in exile overseen by former Secretary Hillary Clinton and now John Kerry. Indeed, President Obama now derisively refers to these Syrian “rebels” as nothing more than a bunch of “doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists.”

All previous and failed U.S. efforts were aimed at establishing which groupings, jihadists included, would rule over which parts of Syria, after Assad's removal, to exploit its resources and people. All understood that regardless of what kind of new “government” might be established, the real “government” behind the scenes would subordinate that nation's sovereignty to the interests of U.S. imperialism. We might point out that the U.S., through the CIA in Turkey and other covert and now overt agencies, has been arming Syrian “rebels” from close to day one. Even the al-Qaida-associated Nusra Front, deemed terrorist by the U.S. government, was an informal U.S. ally in past efforts to impose “regime change” in Syria. Today, U.S. bombs are aimed at the Nusra Front forces as well!

In the early stages of the U.S. war against the Iraqi people, both Sunni and Shiite forces often joined to oppose U.S. intervention, as in the infamous Battle (slaughter) of Fallujah in 2004 perpetrated by Blackwater death squads and U.S. troops. In one of the bloodiest battles since the Vietnam era, the largely Sunni city was virtually leveled, with 60 percent of its building obliterated and half its population forced to flee. The beleaguered Sunnis at that time were aided by the Madhi Army led by the dissident Shiite cleric Muqtada al Sadr.

Yet, the U.S. government, soon afterwards, had no problem in enlisting and heavily financing the Sunniled Awakening Group to fight alongside U.S. forces. These were the same Sunni groups that previously had backed the Saddam Hussein regime that was ousted by the U.S. intervention! Today, most of the Awakening Group is allied with ISIS or otherwise disinclined to join the latest version of the U.S. “coalition” that is preparing for yet another long war in Iraq.

President Obama now bemoans the fact that the previous U.S.-installed Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, alienated virtually the entire Iraqi population, persecuting and victimizing the Sunni minority as well as the Shiite majority through government corruption, fraud, massive theft, intimidation and murder—none of which U.S. officials objected to as long as his power was secure and he protected and advanced U.S. interests. These included the covert granting of the lion's share of Iraq's vast oil reserves and their exploitation by U.S. corporations.

Maliki, U.S. imperialism's “democratic ally” who had been often praised by Bush and Obama, belatedly saw his government majority coalition crumble under U.S. pressure. The associated diplomatic intrigues aside, he was forced to resign and take the blame for implementing U.S. policy. Today, few believe that Obama's proposed re-division of the vast resources that Maliki kept for himself and his U.S. corporate allies will suffice to stabilize the present catastrophic breakdown. Indeed, senior U.S. officials, scrambling to patch together yet another government coalition that includes sections of the previously persecuted and excluded Sunni elite, who will presumably lay down their arms for a share of the booty, are unlikely to stem the tide of mass outrage at both the policies of Maliki and any other government that eventually emerges.

From one vantagepoint, U.S. policy in the Middle East has been a disaster. The original U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, 2003–2011, was “justified” by “proof-positive” evidence presented by then head of the U.S. military, Colin Powell, and virtually all other government “national security experts,” as well as President George W. Bush, that the Saddam Hussein government possessed “weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)” None were ever found, yet the war continued. Absent the WMD false flag, the Bush administration enunciated a more accurate explanation for the U.S. slaughter, “regime change,” more politely referred to as the establishment of a pro-U.S. government for the Iraqi people. The Obama administration continues this policy with abandon in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and everywhere on earth where working people struggle, although in confused and distorted ways, to rid themselves of the modern day Crusaders.

In truth, every disaster and horror in the Middle East today flows from U.S. imperialist policies aimed at domination, conquest, and exploitation. The twisted term “U.S. national security” is used around the world to justify every atrocity committed, including the spying on every e-mail and phone call of every American.

“Civilized” America executes by electrocution more citizens than any nation on earth. It is one of the few nations on earth that retains the barbaric death penalty. It incarcerates the largest number and percentage of its population than any nation on earth and routinely tortures through solidarity confinement and other means tens of thousand of its citizens, mostly the poor and oppressed nationalities.

In our view, the U.S. government has no standing to impose its standards of “civilization” anywhere on earth. It has never brought peace and prosperity to any nation, anywhere at any time in history. This is not the objective of the imperial beast that represents the elite one percent (actually 0.1 percent or less) of the U.S. population. All U.S. wars, without exception are conducted to advance the interest of this ruling-class elite, fully capable of military and political alliances with the world's most reactionary and barbaric forces to achieve its predatory ends.

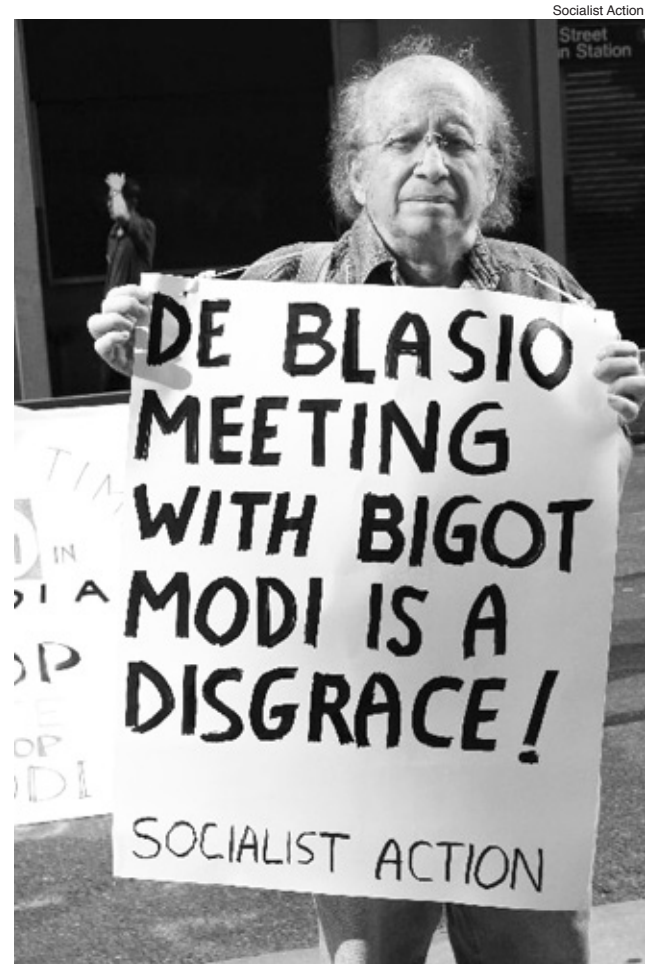
## U.S. Out Now! End the Bombing!

The solution to the mayhem in the Middle East begins with the total removal of all U.S. troops, mercenaries, death squads, drone armies, and associated tools of war. The responsibility for this belongs to the American working masses, who have no interest in the murder and destruction of poor people anywhere.

We demand “U.S. Out Now!” from every nation of the Middle East and around the world in which the U.S. has a presence. We have zero confidence in U.S. imperialism or any forces they support or have supported to bring about freedom for the poor people of the world. We stand opposed to U.S.-orchestrated “regime change” to remove the Assad government, just as we opposed the U.S. “humanitarian war” against the Gadhafi government and the U.S. war against the Hussein government in Iraq. All of these wars were aimed at the oppression and exploitation of these nations, not their liberation. Indeed, all of these deposed dictators had been previous allies of the U.S. when they served U.S. objectives.

Tragically, in Syria today, we know of no “rebel” force that has not been aligned with the U.S. war machine or its allies. There are no “rebels” with any progressive credentials, whether they are of the ISIS variety or those backed directly or indirectly by U.S. imperial-

## India's Modi picketed in NY



Outside Madison Square Garden on Sept. 28, about 1000 protested the presence in New York of the right-wing Hindu bigot, Indian Prime Minister Nereन्द्रa Modi. Inside the Garden, some 18,000 attended a speech by the prime minister. India is seen as an economic and military player in Washington's plans to outflank China. Modi is an extreme neoliberal and “free-trade” ideologue.

For several years, Modi was denied a U.S. visa because of his open chauvinism against Indian minorities, including targeting Sikhs and Muslims. In 2002, when Modi was chief minister of the state of Gujarat, 1000-2000 Muslims were slaughtered there by Hindu extremists linked to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. In 1984, like-minded reactionaries had massacred several thousand Sikhs. Human Rights Watch says those responsible for the 1984 massacre were never prosecuted.

Before Modi headed off to Washington for discussions with Obama, he met with New York's “progressive” mayor, Bill de Blasio. Modi's welcome by officials in the United States has outraged Human Rights advocates. The Sept. 28 rally was mostly made up of Indian immigrants, with a large contingent of Sikhs. Joe Lombardo addressed the crowd for the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC). — MARTY GOODMAN

ism—such as the so-called Free Syrian Army. We are for the defeat of them all. Self-determination of the Syrian masses can only emerge when all foreign imperialist forces are withdrawn.

The only way that working people in the Middle East can end the ongoing cycle of war, repression and poverty, and drive the imperialist invaders from their lands, is for them to construct their own independent mass workers' parties—armed with socialist programs that welcome peoples of all nationalities and religious groups. Councils of democratically-elected workers' representatives can be built to organize the defense of communities and workplaces from the death squads and armies promoted and financed by imperialist forces and from reactionary fundamentalist sects that seek to impose their views by violence and terror.

The right to self-determination of historically oppressed nationalities like the Kurds must be recognized and supported, including the right to form their own nation, if they so choose. Ultimately, the borders that the imperialists erected following their post-WW I conquests and colonization a century ago, must fall—replaced by a united socialist confederation of the Middle East.

The central responsibility of antiwar activists in the United States remains to mobilize the American people in massive, united protests to demand “U.S. Out Now!”



## U.S. bombs away!

By JEFF MACKLER

A new coalition of the not-too-willing nations is in preparation as U.S. imperialism prepares for yet another war in the Middle East, its sixth or seventh in the past half decade. These include wars of conquest, resource exploitation, and covert bombings in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, and Egypt—where the U.S., behind the scenes, backed the military coup that removed the elected president of that country.

This time around, the imperial focus is on the forces, appropriately demonized beforehand by the jingoistic corporate media, of the Islamic State, often known by the acronym “ISIS” (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), a group essentially unknown to the world before 2014. All current “coalition partners”—feigning allegiance to the dictates or entreaties of President Barack Obama and his international road warrior/diplomat, Secretary of State John Kerry—are delivering little or nothing on the Iraqi battlefield, which U.S. warplanes now bomb daily.

The British, French, and German militaries make the record with a few bombing runs aimed at the “enemy” and deliver token supplies to the new Iraqi government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, essentially installed by Washington. But none dare enter this U.S.-created quagmire with any illusions that the Islamic State can be routed anytime in the near future, if at all.

Virtually all of the major imperialist “partners,” it should be stressed, have declined to bomb Syria or otherwise commit serious forces to the covert (and now overt) U.S.-sponsored war to remove the Bashar al-Assad government of Syria. Like Assad himself, whose foreign minister

## *Iraq & Syria:* U.S. imperialism prepares for next Middle East war

gave the “okay” to U.S. bombing of ISIS in Syria, they believe that defeating ISIS is inseparable from aiding Assad. The Gulf monarchies, Saudi Arabia in particular, on paper agree to use their territory to allow U.S. training of anti-ISIS Syrian “rebel” forces, but only the naïve believe that the Saudis and Qataris, *who have to date been ISIS’s main backers* in their effort to remove Assad, will do more.

Given the U.S.-created catastrophic disarray in the region, no one seriously believes that any coalition can bring stability or a “solution” to the present crisis. General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, states that it will take 15,000 U.S. troops on the ground to “destroy ISIS.” While President Obama has already sent initial detachments of some 1400 troops and “advisors,” U.S. warplanes conduct daily bombing raids on suspected targets in Iraq and Syria, including in heavily populated civilian areas. Meanwhile, almost all military experts note that it will take six to seven years or longer to defeat ISIS—that is, almost another decade of perpetual war, once again in Iraq and now, likely in Syria as well.

To date, Obama’s insoluble dilemma revolves around how to defeat ISIS, which now occupies one-third of Northern Iraq

and significant portions of Northern Syria, while defending the already discredited and newly U.S.-installed Abadi government, without aiding the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad. U.S. policy is confounded by the fact that its most hated opponents, the governments of Syria and Iran, are engaged in combat against the same ISIS forces that the U.S. is now seeks to destroy.

“We made a mistake in Syria,” said Obama in late September 2014 as the U.S. military began its bombing there. “We underestimated the power of ISIS.” The alleged “mistake,” despite the deployment of the world’s most sophisticated military and intelligence apparatus, was to underestimate the very force that the U.S. government created and helped to arm and finance, directly or indirectly, when they believed it would be a reliable ally to depose the Assad government of Syria.

ISIS, with the full knowledge of U.S. officials, got its arms and sophisticated equipment from the Saudi and Qatar monarchies or their homegrown billionaire patrons, who preferred to overthrow Assad by al-Qaida Sunni forces rather than the “moderate” Free Syrian Army, which is directly backed by the United States.

(Above) Children play in rubble of wartorn Homs, Syria, in 2012. Now the U.S. is directly bombing Syrian cities, with increasing incidents of civilian casualties.

The Saudi monarchy—one of the most repressive governments in the world—gets its weapons from the U.S. The “civilized” Saudis routinely behead opponents, prisoners, and dissidents without allowing them a trial or any other “democratic” recourse. (For lesser crimes, they merely sever an arm or leg of offenders.) Some 15 Saudi beheadings have been conducted in the last few months—perhaps 100 over the past year, according to several sources—including some when President Obama was a visitor in that wondrous nation.

Saudi Arabia’s routine executions merit zero mention in the corporate media, but beheadings were front-page news in virtually every U.S. newspaper when two American journalists and a British aid worker fell victim to that “barbaric” practice. I am compelled to use quotation remarks around the word “barbaric,” a term daily repeated by scores of bloodthirsty U.S. politicians who decline to use the same term to the qualitatively more monstrous deeds of the U.S. in all nations of the Middle East. Need we mention the 1.5 million Iraqis murdered over the past decade and longer by U.S. bombings of civilian neighborhoods across Iraq, or the thousands slaughtered in Pakistan by the “civilized” device of drone war, or the tens of thousands slaughtered in Egypt and more recently in Gaza by “civilized” U.S. allies? Or need we cite the “civilized” torture conducted by U.S. soldiers and interrogators at Abu

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