

U.S. backs Saudi bombing of Yemen

BY JEFF MACKLER

Backed by U.S. logistical and intelligence support, the Saudi Arabian petro-monarchy and its allies have pounded Yemen with devastating air strikes aimed at preparing the way for a possible ground invasion.

Saudi Arabia's "coalition of the willing" oil monarchs and other Saudi allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab League are threatening to send some 150,000 troops to oust the Houthi tribal-based rebels from Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and other rebel-controlled cities throughout Yemen.

Yemen has now been subjected to what amounts to a full naval blockade, accompanied by almost total control of its airspace. This is enforced by 100 Saudi warplanes, supplemented by fighter jets from its "coalition partners" and U.S. "allies"—the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco, and Sudan.

The U.S. has approved the airstrikes and provides logistical support by locating targets and related surveillance techniques. Britain, the former colonial master of Yemen, is also lending military intelligence for the operation. Egypt's naval fleet is bombarding the Yemeni coast.

The terror bombing operation in Yemen is named Determination Storm, (reminiscent of the 1990-91 U.S. mass slaughter in Iraq, Operation Desert Storm). Reports recount almost continuous bombings—as in Tikrit, Iraq, in recent days, where reporters counted U.S. bomb blasts at the rate of twice a minute throughout the evening hours.

In Yemen, civilian casualties have risen into the hundreds. Saudi officials, like their Israeli counterparts during the Gaza slaughter, are blaming civilian deaths on the Houthis, with spurious accusations that they have been using civilians and public buildings as human shields. The state-run Saudi Press Agency has chimed in, insisting that the saturation terror strikes were conducted with "precision weapons to avoid collateral damage." The Saudi media neglected to mention that Yemeni media outlets as well as the offices of the Arab-language news network, Al Jazeera, have been destroyed.

The rapidly unfolding Yemeni events, including the Houthis' occupation of almost the entire country, impelled the U.S. in late March to hastily remove its Special Forces units in the south and to

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Tony Savino / Socialist Action

Fight for \$15 on April 15

By BILL ONASCH

Fight for Fifteen 4/15 — It's an easy date to remember; April 15 is income tax day in the USA. This year there will be marches and rallies in most cities across the country. But these protests are not against the tax—unfair as it may be. Instead, they are the next step forward in mobilizing broad working-class support in the communities for boosting pay of the working poor to at least \$15 an hour.

There are two distinct components of this movement. One is union based, targeting specific employers or industries. SEIU's Fifteen and a Union campaigns in Fast Food, Home Care, and Airport Service industries have been the vanguard, but there have been significant efforts by UFCW, AF-SCME, and UE as well—going after big-box retail, logistics, and state-funded child care workers.

(Photo) Fast-food workers rally in New York City in 2014.

There has also been a complementary fight by 15 Now coalitions working to win municipal and state 15-dollar minimum-wage laws covering all workers. The first big breakthrough for this wing came in Seattle, where 100,000 low-paid workers are receiving substantial raises in stages on the road to fifteen. While state and local legal opportunities and obstacles vary considerably, there are promising coalitions in Oregon and Minnesota among others.

These actions have already won some material gains through modest hikes in the minimum wage in several states and cities, as well as "voluntary" raises by all of the major big-box retail chains. Most have been in the \$9-\$10 range. While any raise is welcomed by the low paid, these have to be considered token down payments on the \$15 goal.

Fast food has not been so "generous." Its industry trade group recently went to court in Seattle seeking exemption from the new minimum

wage law for franchises of national chains. So far, its defense of "small business" has been rejected, but it will likely continue to pay lawyers \$400 an hour to try to get out of \$15 for their workers.

I've been on the SEIU mailing list since back in the day of Chairman Andy's Purple Army. It's not often that I have occasion to favorably quote top union officials, but an excerpt from an e-blast from current SEIU president Mary Kay Henry is worth passing along:

"This movement that was started by fast-food cooks and cashiers has exploded to include people who work at Walmart, airport baggage handlers and passenger service attendants, home care providers, child care workers, adjunct college faculty, and other underpaid people who want to create jobs that pay people enough to actually live on. Together, we are fighting for an economy that works for all of

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Philly rallies for \$15 wage

Chris Fascenelli / Philadelphia Inquirer



(Left) Rev. Mark Tyler of Mother Bethel AME Church holds megaphone for Rabbi Shawn Zevit at rally calling for \$15 an hour minimum wage.

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Forty-seven years ago, Martin Luther King was shot down while engaged in an ambitious effort called the "Poor People's Campaign." The goal was to organize a massive march to the seat of government in Washington, which had tolerated poverty throughout the country while wasting billions of dollars on the war in Vietnam. The marchers, King explained, would proclaim: "We are here; we are poor; we don't have any money; you made us this way; ... and we've come to stay until you do something about it."

As part of the Poor People's Campaign, King traveled to Memphis, Tenn., to help sanitation workers who were on strike. He was assassinated there on April 4, 1968.

On April 4 of this year, in Philadelphia, the MLK Dare Coalition organized an event to commemorate Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign and to highlight the cause of ending poverty today. Participants brought the issues of 1968 up to the present, raising the call for

a \$15-an-hour minimum wage and the right to a union.

As the Rev. Mark Tyler of Mother Bethel AME Church explained, "Fifty years later, we're still marching for the same thing." He pointed out that the demand for "\$15 an hour" is "the same amount that King was calling for with the \$2-an-hour wage back in the 1960s—when you adjust it for inflation."

Over 250 people rallied in New Vision Church in North Philadelphia's Black community—the poorest neighborhood of any big city in the nation. Speakers included fast-food workers at McDonald's and other businesses. The crowd then marched up Broad Street, chanting, "We work, we sweat; put \$15 on our checks." The march and rally were seen as a building action for the nationwide strike for \$15 an hour on April 15.

Two days earlier, low-wage workers organized another stirring event in Philadelphia. About 500 baggage handlers, wheelchair attendants, and airplane cleaners walked off the job at Philadelphia International Airport and briefly occupied a five-story stairwell in City Hall.

They dropped two huge banners from a railing, one of which stated, "Poverty wages don't fly!"

The workers, who work for independent contractors and are not unionized, charged that their employers had failed to raise their wages after the mayor had signed an executive order mandating a minimum raise to \$10.88 an hour for new or renewing contracts. After the protest, a member of Philadelphia's city council told the press that the body would look at whether airport contractors that do not pay the higher wages are in violation of their leases with the city.

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us, not just the wealthy few.

"Powerful CEOs could pay people more, but they simply choose not to. When large, profitable companies attempt to pay as little as they can get away with, even full-time jobs can pay so little that workers qualify for food stamps. Working moms and dads can't afford basic needs for their kids. Young people can't afford to go to school to upgrade their skills. Entire neighborhoods fall behind.

"When we demand and win a higher floor for wages, we will help not just individuals and families but also our communities and the larger economy. That's why it's so important that you are with us to Fight for \$15 on 4/15."

Though we've said it before, it deserves repeating—this Fight for Fifteen is, in my opinion, the single most important venue for working-class action in the USA today. *Socialist Action* urges every reader to join the April 15 action in your area and to try to bring along some family, friends, and coworkers too.

Please go to <http://april15.org/> to RSVP and endorse the action. You will be offered a search box to locate the demonstration nearest your Zip Code. All Out 4/15!

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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By CARL SACK

MADISON, Wis.—On March 6, police officer Matthew Kenney shot and killed 19-year-old Tony Terrell Robinson. The case has galvanized the Black community here and shaken Madison's self-image as a socially aware, progressive city.

Robinson, a recent high school graduate with plans to attend business school, was identified by police as a Black male who was jumping in and out of traffic on Williamson Street, in the Marquette neighborhood of Madison. Officer Matthew Kenney responded to the call. The cops say that Kenney went looking for Robinson at his house, and after hearing a disturbance inside, broke into the house, had an altercation with Robinson, and shot Robinson five times, killing him. Robinson was unarmed.

After taking Robinson's body to the hospital, police did not let his mother, Andrea Irwin, see his body—on the basis that it was “evidence.” Meanwhile, the police picked up and detained two of Robinson's teenage roommates, Javier and Anthony, holding them for four hours. They were denied access to an attorney despite their requests for one. It was Javier who had called 911 seeking help for Robinson because the latter was reacting badly to hallucinogens he had taken.

The killing rippled through the community, sparking weeks of protests, and has further exposed the deep racial divide in Madison. Although Madison has a population of a quarter-million, it is a tight-knit community where neighbors know each other and community networks run deep, especially among the city's youth. Robinson attended four high schools in the county and was known and loved by many. On the night Robinson was killed, dozens gathered at the scene, and then marched to the City-County Building, where his roommates were being detained. The following two weeks saw three marches of over a thousand, including a citywide high school walkout.

The events have been led by Madison's Young, Gifted, and Black (YGB) Coalition, which formed in solidarity with protests in Ferguson and has been mobilizing protests against a proposal for a new county jail. They have received support from Milwaukee's Coalition for Justice, organized to demand charges be brought against the Milwaukee cop who shot and killed Dontre Hamilton, a mentally ill man who had been sleeping in a park, in March 2014.

One march of over 3000—mostly young people—was jointly organized by YGB, the Coalition for Justice, and Wisconsin Jobs Now, a statewide organization funded by SEIU to organize fast-food workers and push for a higher minimum wage. Popular chants included, “Who can we trust? Not the police!” and “Indict, convict, send those killer cops to jail! The whole damn system is guilty as hell!” as well as chanting Tony Robinson's name.

While African Americans have been the target of racially biased policing, Madison cops have killed unarmed whites as well. Robinson's family has received support from the family of Paulie Heenan, an unarmed white man who was shot dead in the street by cops as his neighbors looked on. The MPD conducted the only investigation into the shooting and, unsurprisingly, the officers involved were cleared of any wrongdoing.

Robinson's shooting puts the lie to the theory that police violence is the result of “a few bad apples” on the force. Kenny, the cop who shot Robinson, was a poster-child for Madison's liberal façade. When a court struck down the state's ban on gay marriage last year, a photo of Kenny carrying a wedding cake into the county building where clerks were marrying gay couples was published in the *Wisconsin State Journal*. As it turns out, even liberal cops can be killers. They work for an institution that exists to protect the interests of the ruling rich by using racism to divide the working class and violence to subdue it.

Nor is racist police violence just a fact of life in ghettoized urban areas with high densities of poor Blacks like New York, Oakland, or Ferguson, Missouri. People of color are oppressed everywhere in the U.S., but the systemic racism that denies them jobs, fair housing, and personal freedom is often worse where their numbers are small compared to the white population. African Americans make up about seven percent of the population of Dane County, where Madison is located, yet are arrested at a rate of 11-to-1 compared with whites, three times the arrest rate disparity of Ferguson. Almost half of those held in the county jail are Black.

A 2013 ‘Race to Equity’ report found that while the quality of life for Madison's overall population is better than the national average, economic prospects for the Black population are far more dismal than even the average for Blacks nationally. Only 8.7% of whites here live in poverty, compared to 54% of Blacks and a whopping 75% of Black children. Only half of Black high school students here graduate on time, compared to 85% of their white peers. Wisconsin is the worst state in the nation, and Madison the worst city in the nation, to grow up Black.

The YGB Coalition has sought to mobilize action around clear demands for an end to racist state violence and Black poverty. They are calling for a policy of immediately firing any cop who kills an unarmed civilian and a community-appointed police review board. In January, the group sent an open letter to the city's police chief, Michael Koval, demanding the release of 350 Black people from the county jail, an end to the barbaric practice of solitary confinement in the jail, an immediate 50 percent drop in the number

Madison cop kills Black youth

Carl Sack / Socialist Action



(Above) Madison protesters demand justice for Tony Robinson.

of arrests of Black people and poor people, and a plan to minimize police contacts in Black neighborhoods.

“The relationship that we desire to have with the police is simple: no interaction,” the letter states. “Our ultimate goal is to be able to hold our own communities accountable and to expel what we consider an occupying force in our neighborhoods.”

Koval responded by ridiculing the group's demands on his blog. Since Robinson's death, the city's top cop has waged a defensive smear campaign against protesters while mouthing apologies for the shooting. In one letter to the County Board chair, Koval claimed that protesters the night of the shooting were chanting “kill the cops” and “we have guns too,” a bald-faced lie.

Koval's rhetoric has fed into a false media comparison of Madison and Ferguson. YGB and their allies have rightly seen Koval's PR campaign as the kinder, gentler form of pacification, in contrast to the militaristic responses of cops in places like Ferguson. As bloggers for *Madison Mutual Drift*, a local left politics blog, write, “Attempting to juxtapose police responses in the wake of these murders—one responding with brute force and the other with intelligent control—simply demonstrates the wide range of tools used to enforce white supremacy and police repression.”

Although protesters here haven't broken windows or set fire to any businesses, Madison's police state is every bit as oppressive to Blacks as Ferguson's, if not more so.

The shooting is being investigated by the state's Department of Criminal Investigation under a new state law,

pushed for by Heenan's family, requiring outside investigations of police killings. Irwin, Robinson's mother, has said she trusts the investigation to be fair, but YGB has urged people not to put any faith in the agency, which is run by the Justice Department of reactionary State Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen and made up of—you guessed it—cops. The capitalist state will protect its enforcers, and the prospects of justice for Tony are slim.

A revolutionary socialist government would disarm and disband every police force and replace them with workers' protection committees from within and directly accountable to the local community. A society not built for the profits of a tiny minority at the expense of the vast majority would eradicate crimes of poverty and could enact novel, humane solutions to rehabilitate those who exhibit unstable or antisocial behaviors. Jails and prisons would cease to exist but for a few museums, relicts of a barbaric past.

But we can't wait for a revolution to demand justice. Sending killer cops to jail—i.e., accountability through equal treatment under the law—is a necessary first step in eradicating state violence against people of color. The YGB Coalition is right to call for the removal of police—an occupying force—from Black neighborhoods. We must continue to rebuild the mass movements for civil rights and Black power until we can finish the unfinished business of liberating all oppressed nationalities in the U.S. ■

Concessions in tentative ILWU contract

By KAREN SHIEVE

SAN FRANCISCO—The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), headed by President Robert McEllrath, reached a tentative contract agreement at the end of March with the Pacific Maritime Association and other West Coast employer groups. The agreement included major concessions on a broad range of critical issues.

The negotiations, conducted in secret over the past 11 months—that is, secret from the rank and file—took place while ILWU members continued to work the West Coast ports from the Mexican to Canadian borders. In decades past, the militant ILWU had insisted that negotiations be open to the membership and that at the expiration of the contract work on the docks would be halted. “No Contract No Work!” was the historic ILWU credo. But no longer!

The outlines of the agreement were discussed at a March 31 San Francisco meeting of some 70 people called by the Transport Workers Solidarity Committee, an independent group of retired ILWU members, rank and filers, and labor activists.

It appears that central to the contract is a major move by the bosses to take the next steps in massively automating all port facilities, especially the jobs of lower

paid workers. While the contract provides for significant pay increases for top grade ILWU crane operators, who may also be replaced in significant numbers as the super-automation proceeds, it appears that many other jobs will be eliminated. Previous contract language specifying jurisdictional issues between Teamsters and the ILWU has been eliminated, implying that truckers may now be allowed to drive their trucks into the port and place them directly under the cranes, eliminating additional jobs.

Previous language regarding the right of ILWU members to respect picket lines has also been altered, thus potentially ending the ILWU's historic contract right to refuse to cross picket lines. In decades past, ILWU locals have used this language to organize one-day solidarity strikes on a wide range of issues, including opposing U.S. imperialist war. Other losses include the insertion of contract language that further weakens the ILWU's traditional union hiring hall—an historic bulwark of union power—measures to reduce pensions, and weakened arbitration procedures.

A number of ILWU rank-and-file activists who spoke at the meeting indicated the need for the ILWU to return to its historic traditions of working-class solidarity—within the ILWU itself and across the broad labor movement. Sadly, most speakers felt compelled to recognize that a combination of factors operating today, including the major obstacle of the almost total absence of a fighting class-struggle union leadership, would likely result in the adoption of the new contract. ■



Speak out for Mumia!

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

Supporters of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal are on emergency alert concerning his deteriorated health. Protests have been held around the world demanding that prison authorities grant Mumia his right to proper medical treatment.

On March 30, Mumia fainted in prison and was taken to the Schuylkill Medical Center in Pottsville, Pa., where he was diagnosed as having been in diabetic shock. His blood sugar level had shot up to 779 (a count of 800 often results in coma).

As we go to press on April 6, Mumia is back in prison, at SCI Mahanoy, but he is still in medical danger. His blood-sugar levels are still high; he has lost a great deal of weight and receives visitors in a wheelchair.

At a news conference at the hospital on March 31, Mumia's family members and supporters charged that the prison health-care staff never gave Mumia the proper care for his ailments, which made his con-

dition worse, leading to nearly fatal consequences.

Johanna Fernandez, of the New York Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, stated: "That Mumia had diabetes was a complete shock to all of us. For the last three months, he has been under medical care in the prison and diagnosed with eczema. And since he had three 'comprehensive' blood tests since February, diabetes should have been diagnosed and treated accordingly. But it never was. Instead he has been subjected to hell by the prison medical system.

"In January Mumia was shaken out of a deep sleep by guards during count. For the infraction of not being awake during count he was punished for two weeks, without calls or yard. Deep trance-like sleep and lethargy were the first signs of the problem.

"In addition to the physical depletion produced by untreated diabetes, he was/is also dealing with a severe outbreak of eczema. He likened his skin to that of an elephant's. It was raw, blistered and bloody all over. He was so sick that he was not taking visitors.

The 'meds' he was given for his skin produced an extreme adverse reaction. His skin swelled and ruptured and he was put in the prison infirmary for two weeks."

Fernandez drew the obvious conclusion: "We are calling for Mumia's immediate release. It's time to bring our brother home."

Mumia Abu-Jamal's brother, Keith Cook, stated, "The rules that the prisons have are very arcane. They don't give out any information about prisoners to their families or anyone else. It's like you have your hands tied because you don't know how the prisoner is and you have no way of talking to him. I remember a month ago, Phil Africa [of the MOVE organization] exercising in the prison—next thing they know, they moved him to a hospital and didn't tell his family where he was, and three days later he was dead."

"It's scary," said Cook. "This situation needs to change. The prison authorities need to be more humane to the families of prisoners."

Prison Radio, which has steadily released updated bulletins on Mumia's health, states: "Let us be clear: The prison is enacting arbitrary and capricious rule changes each time folks call or visit. Yet, the pattern is not in the direction of access and care. In fact, the prison is limiting communication and preventing a treatment plan from being put in place. Rise up for Mumia. Take Action Now. Call, rally, and demand he receive care." Mumia's supporters are urged to phone SCI Mahanoy prison superintendent John Kerestes at 570-773-2158, ext. 8102.

On the same day that Mumia was sent to hospital, March 30, trial hearings proceeded in Harrisburg, Pa., concerning what has become known as the Silencing Act, the Pennsylvania law that restricts the rights of prisoners to publish or speak out in public if such endeavors might cause "mental anguish" to victims of personal injury. The law was passed by the legislature last October in retribution against Mumia following his commencement address to the graduating class at Goddard College. Mumia has authored six books, and his commentaries have been read and listened to around the world.

Mumia Abu-Jamal and several other prisoners are plaintiffs in the suit, and are asking that the censorship law be invalidated on constitutional grounds that protect the right of free speech. ■

The American gulag: A call to action

By RALPH SCHOENMAN

The following talk was given via Skype at a Feb. 20 meeting at St. Peter's Church in New York City to celebrate the first anniversary of the release of civil-liberties attorney Lynne Stewart from prison. Ralph Schoenman is the past general secretary of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and a frequent radio commentator. Jeff Mackler, national secretary of Socialist Action, sent greetings to the meeting.

This is a joyous occasion: we are able tonight, despite all odds, to celebrate the first anniversary of the liberation of our sister in struggle, Lynne Stewart, buried alive by a vicious system for the crime of defending an innocent man—her persecution and prosecution aimed at every citizen seeking defense against a criminal state—targeting her through her punishing plight every lawyer brave enough and rare enough to take the challenge and turn the finger of accusation against a criminal system.

We never had the support of those unwilling to accuse the court, the judges, the federal injustice system and their appointed persecutors, beginning with the notorious lawyer for the death squads of Colombia, Attorney-General Eric Holder, terrorist-in-chief, let alone his sugar-coated master and spinner of deceit, Barack Obama.

Never forget that the fearless and relentless exposure of these truths before masses of people in over 40 countries raised the political price for the design murder of Lynne Stewart by this ruthless ruling class. That alone is why we are able to embrace her tonight—our determination to speak truth to power altered the calculus of their vicious design.

The United States has the largest prison population in the world. Of every major nation on earth, the United States of America has the highest per capita rate of



Civil rights attorney and former political prisoner Lynne Stewart.

incarceration. Only the tiny island of Seychelles, with 786 prisoners, has a higher percentage, and its regime is a creature of our own.

U.S. Bureau of Justice statistics show 2,266,800 adults incarcerated in federal, state, and county prisons, but 4,814,200 were on probation or parole with a constant recycling back into prison. Of adults under "correctional supervision" the total cited is 6,977,700.

The Vera Institute of Justice reported in 2015 that jails and prisons throughout the United States have become warehouses for the impoverished, unemployed, under-employed, mentally ill, those suffering from addiction, and those lacking the ability to post bail.

The 2014 Report by Human Rights Watch states that "tough on crime laws," adopted in rapid succession since the 1980s, have filled prisons across the United States with non-violent offenders.

In a vast system of maximum-security prisons, "Super-Max" prisons secreted

across the length and breadth of the United States, prisoners are held in 24-hour solitary confinement with sensory deprivation, as in ADX Florence in Florence, Colorado.

The United States of America maintains an ever-expanding gulag of people buried alive, people without funds, people without adequate defense, people without advocates, human contact or the prospect of relief.

I will not bandy words here about "justice"—justice ignored, justice delayed, justice forever denied: Albert Woodfox has been imprisoned for 43 years in solitary confinement, first in the Louisiana State Penitentiary known as Angola—23 hours a day confined to a small cell, four steps long and three steps across, with no social interaction. No physical evidence tied him to the death of a prison guard. The widow of the guard testified that he was innocent.

Federal Courts overturned his conviction three times. Despite this, the State of Louisiana spent millions of dollars appealing three times to keep him buried alive. The U.S. Department of Justice stood behind them in thundering silence and intimidating resolve.

On Feb. 18, two days ago, the Electronic Frontier Foundation revealed that hundreds of South Carolina inmates have been sentenced to prolonged terms of solitary confinement for seeking to access Facebook, an offense placed on a par with "murder, rape, rioting, escape and hostage taking."

Since 2012 the South Carolina Department of Corrections made the putative crime of "Creating or Assisting with a Social Networking Site" a Level One offense. The penalty is years in isolation in solitary confinement. All privileges are permanently removed, including visitation or telephone access. Sixteen inmates were sentenced to over a decade to such "disciplinary detention." One inmate

received for this offense more than 37 years in isolation.

The process is veiled in secrecy. In May 2014 Jonathan McClain received 24.6 years in such "disciplinary detention" for making 25 posts on Facebook. South Carolina Department of Corrections investigators created fake social media profiles to entrap inmates and to fabricate such charges against them. All information regarding these operations is shielded from disclosure under the state's Freedom of Information Act.

This is now being replicated in Alabama, Arizona, and New Mexico. The Florida Department of Corrections has adopted a policy similar to South Carolina's. The ACLU has filed a lawsuit in Indiana where prison officials so penalized an inmate because his sister had launched a social media campaign documenting his innocence and seeking his freedom.

The U.S. Department of Justice is a co-conspirator.

Every single one of the multitude of prisoners buried alive in this vast gulag is a political prisoner—a design-victim of the criminalization of poverty, a target of a minute ruling class that has established a dictatorship of finance and corporate capital that conducts a relentless war of terror against the mass of our people, ever targeting the most vulnerable among us as an object lesson to us all.

It is time for freedom—for all the millions of victims of this vicious system, yes, as the indispensable commitment on which the freedom of us all depends. For, all who live and work in America are in their gun-sights. All who struggle with day-to-day survival are on their radar. All who oppose genocidal war and the drumbeat of fear and incitement that would cow and silence us are on their lists.

That is why, Sisters and Brothers, when we advance the cry "Bring Them Home Now!" we follow this with a Survival Summons—a Revolutionary Call to all those with eyes to see, hearts to feel, and the will to overcome: FREE THE LAND! FREE THE LAND! FREE THE LAND! ■

Minneapolis meeting on disappeared Mexican students

By LISA LUINENBERG

MINNEAPOLIS—“Vivos los llevaron y vivos los queremos!” (“They took them alive and we want them back alive!”), chanted participants in a recent forum in solidarity with the parents and friends of 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa, Mexico.

On Sept. 26, 2014, municipal police opened fire on students of the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers College of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico. The students, who were part of a school known for its radical activism, were traveling by bus on their way to join a protest. Six people were killed and 25 injured in the shootout. Policemen then forced many of the students into police cars, and the whereabouts of 43 remain unknown.

Since that time, only one body has been identified, although several mass graves have been discovered in the region. “These are the worst atrocities we’ve seen in Mexico in years, but they are hardly isolated incidents ... these killings and forced disappearances reflect a much broader pattern of abuse, and are largely the consequence of the longstanding failure of Mexican authorities to address the problem,” stated José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch.

In fact, it is estimated that as a result of the drug war in Mexico, over 100,000 people have been killed, and more than 23,000 are missing since 2006.

But the Mexican government has been rife with corruption and has done little to ameliorate the problem. In fact, the Mexican government recently declared that they would end the investigation into the disappearance of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa, despite any conclusive scientific evidence of what occurred on that day or as to the whereabouts of the disappeared students.

The parents of the students have been ceaselessly seeking justice for the past six months, demanding a continuation of the official investigation and organizing mass protests of tens of thousands of people



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

in Guerrero and in Mexico City. This month, parents and students from Ayotzinapa are touring the United States in an effort to raise awareness and to put international pressure on the Mexican government to act.

In March and April, the Caravana 43 is touring the West and East coasts as well as the central United States. On March 29-30, they stopped in the Twin Cities, Minn., to participate in several events organized by the Frente Unido 43 (United Front 43), a coalition made up of Morena Minnesota and other local groups who formed to organize local events surrounding the tour. Hundreds of people attended the events, which included a cultural event and panel discussion on Sunday, March 29, and a protest outside the Mexican consulate on March 30.

Panelists included parents and a student from Ayotzinapa, as well as local representatives from Witness for Peace and Black Lives Matter. A student from Ayo-

tinapa and a survivor of the attack spoke eloquently about the need to continue the struggle for justice. He maintained that the government intends to breed fear in the Mexican population. They want Mexicans to believe, “this will happen to you if you resist,” he said. “But we will not be silenced...walking together, we can change this situation.”

He spoke about the need to raise consciousness and inspire action through mutual defense, and mentioned the similarities between what happened in Guerrero and what is happening to people of color at the hands of the police here in the United States. He concluded his speech to a standing ovation for his bravery and passion for justice.

The people of Ayotzinapa have demonstrated that they are ready for anything, and we can learn from their example. They have lived through hell but refused to give up the fight for justice for their children who were forcefully disappeared. Ayotzinapa is a beacon of hope for the rest of Mexico, a spark that was ignited by campesinos and indigenous people from a rural area, who have historically been the flame behind the big transformations in Mexico, such as the Mexican Revolution.

The attack in Ayotzinapa was a blow against the rural schools, against the people of Ayotzinapa and Guerrero, against Mexico, against Latin America, and against humanity. Through this incident, the corruption of the Mexican government, a bourgeois government that continues to persecute and oppress its own people, has become clear.

Ayotzinapa teaches us that in the struggle for justice, we must become the architects of our own destiny. Disunity among the left does not serve this purpose. We must come together in solidarity in order to advance towards the justice for the oppressed and the liberation of all peoples.

To donate to the Caravana 43, send checks to Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, 3611 Golden Tee Lane, Missouri City, TX 77459. Make out checks to the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. ■

By JOE AUCIELLO

Does Tsarnev deserve the death penalty?

BOSTON—“I don’t favor the death penalty, but this case makes me question my beliefs.” “Give ‘im what he deserves—the electric chair!” “There is no way this guy ought to live.” “Let him get the most gruesome death possible.”

These are a sample of the comments readily heard in Boston and throughout Massachusetts as the federal trial of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev continues to unfold. Tsarnaev, 21, is on trial for his life for his role in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing and faces 30 criminal charges, most of which could earn him the death penalty.

Four days after the bombing, Tsarnaev’s brother died in a gun battle with police. A campus police officer was also killed.

It is understandable why many people would call for the death penalty. The defendant’s guilt, murderous intent, and lethal consequence are not in question. The Tsarnaev brothers purposefully planted bombs at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, where the explosion would kill the largest number of innocent bystanders.

The bombs killed three people and wounded 260 others, including more than a dozen whose limbs were sheared off by the nails and ball bearings of the homemade explosives. The youngest victim was an eight year old boy. His death was not random. Tsarnaev placed his bomb-laden backpack close enough to the child so that he could have touched it.

Tsarnaev’s lawyers have conceded the obvious and admitted that their client committed the crime. So, there is no confusion or uncertainty in these proceedings, as there often is in other murder cases, about whether the wrong man has been brought to trial.

(While admitting Tsarnaev’s guilt, the defense claims their client was under the sway of his elder brother. If even one member of the jury agrees, the death penalty cannot be applied, since the jury must be unanimous when deciding in favor of capital punishment).

No jury will excuse the defendant’s



Accused bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnev (center) at his federal trial in Boston.

motives. The political logic behind the attack—the United States kills innocent Muslims throughout the world, so innocent Americans deserve to die—is morally repugnant and indefensible.

The political goal behind the attack—to punish the United States for its crimes—was utterly foolish and, as anyone could predict, thoroughly useless. A random bombing, no matter how horrible, was never going to change U.S. policy in the Middle East and, in fact, only served as fodder to justify the reactionary “war on terrorism.”

Those in Massachusetts who call for capital punishment have a friend in the top lawyer in the land. U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has instructed federal prosecutors to pursue a death sentence in this case, saying, “the nature of the conduct at issue and the resultant harm compel this decision.”

Capital punishment is state-sanctioned murder, a method for the capitalist system to remove society’s discontents in the interests of maintaining “order” and the status quo. Only the heat of emotion—the swirl of sorrow, anger, and frustration—can explain why so many working people accept it.

Yet the rationale given in support of capital punishment is irredeemably

flawed. No argument for the death penalty holds up to even the slightest scrutiny.

A majority of people in Massachusetts, a state that abolished capital punishment, agrees with this criticism. Despite the brutal crime at the Boston Marathon that harmed so many innocents, most people in the state do not favor the death penalty. A recent editorial by the *Boston Globe* has opposed the death penalty in the Tsarnaev case.

In every local and statewide poll since the bombing, a majority has consistently favored life imprisonment without parole for Tsarnaev. One person who was polled spoke for many when she commented that she does not “support taking lives for the sake of taking lives.” A life taken is never a life returned.

The case against the death penalty is thorough and incontestable. Although there is no mistake about Tsarnaev’s guilt, the death penalty has been applied to innocent people. If it is maintained, innocent defendants will continue to suffer.

This is the view of the Boston Bar Association, whose membership numbers some 12,000 lawyers. The Association President, Paul T. Dacier, stated, “With-

out equivocation, the death penalty has no place in the fair administration of justice and makes no sense on a practical level.”

The judge who presided over the last capital punishment case in Massachusetts, in 2001, also supports this view. Judge Michael A. Posnor has commented, “The most profound realization I took from [a death penalty sentence] was that human beings getting together to decide whether someone should be executed, even when they are supervised by a judge, will make mistakes.”

Moreover, death penalty convictions are fraught with racial bias. More racial minorities than whites are executed compared to the minority percentage of the population. A death row defendant is much more likely to be executed if the victim of the crime is white, despite the fact that African-Americans constitute almost half of the murder victims nationwide. Racial equality in sentencing and executions simply does not exist.

It is well known that a sentence of death is no deterrent to crime or murder. Oklahoma and Texas frequently apply the death penalty, but executions there have not diminished the murder rate. The South, which carries out more executions than any other region in the country, also has the highest murder rate.

In fact, year after year, fewer people are killed in states that have no death penalty. Throughout the country, the number of murders has steadily been declining since 1991, regardless of the laws supporting capital punishment.

This month, the Supreme Court will hear a case regarding the use of lethal injections for those condemned to die. The Court could now reverse its previous support for the death penalty and rule broadly to outlaw the practice. Capital punishment truly is and should be justly defined as “cruel and unusual punishment.” The Supreme Court should abolish it as inhumane, illegitimate, and ineffective. ■

Legalized theft

Capitalist economics, U.S. style



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

BY JEFF MACKLER

The multi-trillion-dollar world of American banking institutions holds its collective breath every month and fine tunes its eyes and ears when Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellin issues her report assessing the progress, or lack thereof, of the U.S. economy.

For several years now, and especially since the 2008 massive recession/depression that shook world markets to the point of near collapse and shattered the lives of countless millions who lost their homes and jobs, the Federal Reserve, in association with the U.S. Treasury Department, has been central to bailing out failed banks. The recipients include virtually *all* of the largest U.S. banks, not to mention many of the lesser such institutions that were also “too large to fail.”

Note the emphasis here on the word *all*. This is no rhetorical excess. Having invested all but their last pennies in a myriad of super-high-yield speculative ventures (the financialization of capital as opposed to the investment of capital in commodity production), U.S. “casino capitalism” suffered from a liquidity crisis of major proportions. That is, when the 2008 crash hit, almost all banks had little if any cash on hand to cover the massive and mushrooming mortgage defaults and related obligations.

This fact was largely hidden from public view when the top banking officials found themselves rushing to develop “stress tests” wherein even the largest of the failed banks were granted an official clean bill of health to avoid public panic, massive withdrawals, and a 1929-style crash.

The subsequent bailout mechanisms, to the tune of an unprecedented \$30 trillion over the following years, focused on the government’s essentially buying failed banks’ near worthless defaulted mortgages at *full value*, essentially infusing trillions of dollars into the corporate pockets of the top institutions of the ruling rich.

Of course, the government had little or no “real money” on hand, so it printed money, bonds, and other financial instruments that were based on little more than the “good faith and credit” of the U.S. government. They “sold,” or better, “exchanged” these pieces of paper or computer-rendered equivalent transactions to foreign investors and governments around the world, who purchased them on the theory or hope that the world’s greatest capitalist power would not default and would also pay a modicum of interest as well. Hence, the U.S. debt has mushroomed

When billions of dollars are at stake, legal niceties are ignored to facilitate the gifting of lavish sums to those who play the profit game.

to unprecedented levels.

To make sure that the stricken system of the rich stayed afloat, the Federal Reserve and Treasury Department continued this process by regular infusions to the banks, averaging \$89 billion monthly for several years until very recently, when the gifted amounted was “tapered” off a bit.

“Quantitative easing” was the new term applied to giving away money to stressed corporate America. The essence of this fix amounted to the Federal Reserve’s making sumptuous funds available to the rich at interest rates close to zero.

The recipient banks, in turn, invested this “free money” in new speculative ventures—not in the real economy that might have created jobs by investments in updating obsolete plants and hiring workers. The banks grew richer than in any time in history while working people received virtually nothing other than massive cuts in social expenditures, pensions, wage, benefits, and the like. Workers sunk further into the quagmire that is inherent in the for-profit-above-everything capitalist system. In short, workers paid to bail out the rich! The gap between the rich and everyone else has widened as never before.

When, in late March, Janet Yellin’s monthly pronouncement omitted the constantly inserted and banker-assuring word “patience” with regard to the government’s being patient before it begins increasing interest rates, and thus cutting into the profits of the super rich, the stock markets responded with huge gyrations—that is, until Yellin felt pressed to say that removing the word “patience” did not necessarily signal that the government was impatient.

Accordingly, the threat to turn off the free money spigot subsided for the moment, but Yellin’s “linguistic forensics,” as one *New York Times* staff writer noted, did not go unnoticed. A March 19 *Times* headline concluded, “Fed creeps closer to raising key [interest]

rate.” Yellin’s “words accompanying her announcements,” according to *The Times*, “conveyed the message that the Yellin Fed had no intention of taking the support struts of low interest rates away until she is absolutely confident that economic growth will go up without them.”

This perhaps inadvertent *Times* statement confirmed once again that the “self-regulating free-market capitalism” has always been a myth. The truth has been confirmed for the zillionth time that the elite ruling-class .0001 percent own the government, this time with hard facts that include gifting \$30 trillion to the capitalists in times of “need.”

Yellin’s machinations and delicate language served as a warning coming from the highest circles of the U.S. ruling class, who understand fully that the government’s unlimited and unending printing of “fake” money must inevitably lead to massive inflation. For now, the fact that this fake money is being pumped into the pockets of the super-rich only, and for speculative purposes as opposed to the productive commodity-producing sectors of the economy, has held the inflation rate to two percent, considered sufficient for the time being by the ruling rich to guarantee a steady bite out of what remains of workers’ frozen or declining real incomes.

But the spigot of “free money” to the rich is but one of a myriad of devices to keep the predatory system afloat. A prime example is the misleading March 15 *New York Times* “Business Section” headline, “S.E.C. [Securities and Exchange Commission] Wants The Sinners To Own Up.” The reference is to the hundreds of corporations and financial institutions, including some of the nation’s largest—like Bank of America and J. P. Morgan Chase—who broke the law in multiple ways to insure that government bailouts would

be forthcoming. This included overstating the value of failed mortgage portfolios sold to the government, massive accounting fraud employed by the four major firms employed to “cook the books” of the corporate giants, and a host of insider trading violations—increasingly the norm in corporate functioning.

The Times notes, “For decades the S.E.C. has allowed companies and individuals to make settlements without admitting any wrongdoing. Even a company committing an egregious sin that cost investors millions of dollars could walk away from the proceedings without ever acknowledging its role.”

The S.E.C., very tentatively for sure, is now contemplating a “seismic shift” or “about face” in its previous policy of allowing crooked companies, among the world’s largest, to simply pay a modest fine for what had amounted to million-dollar, if not multi-billion-dollar, violations of the “law.” The S.E.C., exercising extreme caution, will now seek “admissions of wrongdoing” from these corporate offenders who previously had been immune from criminal prosecution.

But the S.E.C. is undoubtedly fully aware of how the “legal system” works in capitalist America. Here’s how *The Times* subtly explains the S.E.C.’s dilemma: “After two years [since 2013] the S.E.C. has generated admissions of culpability in 18 different cases involving 19 different companies and 10 individuals. Given the hundreds of settlements struck by the S.E.C. over this time, it is clear that most of the time defendants are still being allowed to settle without admitting to or denying the agency’s allegations.”

The “kicker” comes in *The Times* conclusion: “S.E.C. officials say this *age-old practice* saves it from having to bring—and possibly lose—a case in court and allows the agency to return money to victims more quickly and conserves resources for other investiga-

(continued on page 9)

FILMS

'She's Beautiful When She's Angry'

By CHRISTINE MARIE

"*She's Beautiful When She's Angry*," a documentary film directed and produced by Mary Dore, 2014.

When the noted documentary filmmaker Mary Dore set about to tell the story of the beginning of the feminist movement that burst onto the scene in the mid-1960s, she could find no funders. Dore was supported when creating such famous historical films as "The Good Fight" about the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War or "Children of Labor" about immigrant Finnish labor in America, but when she applied for grants from leading progressive funding sources to make a film about the women's liberation movement of the 1960s, she found no takers.

The refusal of corporate liberal cultural gatekeepers to facilitate the popularization of the lessons of the real and unvarnished revolutionary-minded upsurge of young women will make a little sense after you watch "She's Beautiful When She's Angry."

After 21 years of refusals, Mary Dore and her team finally managed to scrape together the funds to produce an honest and invaluable look at the early years of one of the most transformative movements in U.S. working-class history. And the story is nothing like the bundle of clichés that have come to stand for history in gender studies departments around the country.

Challenging academic version of feminist history

Instead of the simplistic story of a supposedly white middle-class movement with little to teach today, the film details the movement's early expressions in the radical cauldron of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the antiwar movement, and the leftist Students for a Democratic Society; the means of political clarification in journals like *Notes from the First Year* and position papers from the Women's Union of the Young Lords; and the process by which thousands of young women, some middle class and some working class, found their way into small consciousness-raising and action groups from one coast to another.

It also tells the story of young female intellectuals who attempted to use the analytical tools of political economy and psychology to explain the oppression of their sex and to urge their sisters to bravely take on the social questions—rape, incest, the right to female sexual pleasure, domestic violence—that until a mass movement said NO, resulted in shaming, job loss, and ostracism from family and friends.

One of the most poignant moments of the documentary involves a veteran of the period explaining how her group would anxiously wait for each new analytical effort and quickly gather when a position paper came in to savor the golden nugget of a new theoretical contribution.

A revolutionary mindset

The demands of these women remain unfulfilled and revolutionary today—free abortion on demand, an end to forced sterilizations of women from the oppressed nations and nationalities, the right to raise healthy children regardless of income, 24-hour free educational childcare, full incorporation into the public sphere of work and politics without discrimination of any kind. These demands are still to be taken up seriously by the organizations that purport to represent working women.

In addition, these feminists began writing a new social history that, for the first time, included women as agents of change. They struggled to imagine a completely new social order, based on radical alternatives to the heartless economic competition and the rigid nuclear family pattern of capitalism but different from the bureaucratic nightmare of the Stalinized Soviet Union.

As part of this process, they rediscovered the history of the women's movement of the suffrage years and of the early Russian Revolution. They re-introduced the broad movement to the ideas of Marx and Engels regarding a human epoch of primitive communism prior to class society and the subordination of the female sex, and inspired a feminist anthropology that, despite fits and starts, continues to demonstrate the



These feminists imagined a new social order, based on radical alternatives to the economic competition of capitalism.

"false normal" of gender oppression.

Mass protest independent of capitalist parties

Perhaps most important of the lessons that this movement bequeathed to the social movements today was the absolute conviction that they could win the majority to their side by deconstructing the logic of the capitalist economic system and by protesting for the change they wanted in actions independently of the Democratic and Republican parties.

While the boldest demands remain to be won by today's generation, the women who birthed the Second Wave of feminism nevertheless transformed U.S. politics and the working-class movement in the most fundamental ways. The legalization of abortion and the partial halt to forced sterilizations will be judged to be the most important material gains, but struggle around those central issues had an impact on consciousness and law in so many arenas that today it is difficult for young women to imagine life as it was for those born female before the 1960s.

And, as the documentary shows, the women's liberation movement achieved these gains by mobilizing in the streets in the many thousands for abortion rights.

A living movement full of debate

The nature of the women's liberation movement 1965-1971 remains in contention. Mary Dore comes down hard on the side that refuses to ignore the fact that the radical wing of the movement, the women's liberation wing, emerged out of the Black and anti-imperialist movements of the day and was the work of female activists of the left. She illustrates the way in which struggles within the Black power movement, the Puerto Rican movement, and the broad left ran parallel with and intersected small town and university consciousness-raising and abortion rights groups.

"She's Beautiful" does not shy away from depicting some of the defining moments in hard fought battles inside both the liberal and left wings of the movement over how forcefully to integrate the fight for the rights of lesbians and transwomen activists, over priorities in terms of forced sterilization and other racialized issues, and over the questions of what kind of leadership and organization were actually feminist and effective.

The viewer is privileged to hear testimony from activists on both sides of the issues that split groups and coalitions, and also led to consider the fact that these sometimes terrible debates might have been part of the strength rather than the weakness of a new social protest movement being built by hundreds of thousands learning on the job.

One weakness

The documentary can be criticized for failing to explicitly explore the role of revolutionary socialist women in the theoretical and practical building of the movement. The viewer does get a sense from the film of the incredible work that they did to revive the Bolshevik tradition on women's liberation inside a revolutionary socialist movement far in time from 1917. But one can infer from the film clips showing male leftist leaders trying to shout down feminist speakers at conferences and demonstrations that, without the irresistible force of the mass movement, even the organizations of the far left would have been slow to regain their revolutionary heritage on this question.

The key role, however, that the women who led these fights internal to the left played in shaping the broader discussion through practical leadership and the dissemination of Marxian anthropological thinking and theory is only suggested. Some comfort can be taken in the knowledge that the documentarians' notes, along with the historic photographs that were selected for the film, will now be archived.

Some future researcher will find pictures of *The Militant* newspaper advertising a talk on "Black Women's Liberation" by Maxine Williams, a photo of Evelyn Reed's book on women's evolution, and a picture of Mary Alice Waters, a leader at the time of Socialist Action's predecessor organization, the Socialist Workers Party, and the author of one of the best codifications of Marxist analysis of the position of women at the time of the Second Wave and of Marxist theory regarding the way forward. The latter is still available at the website of *International Viewpoint*: <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?rubrique133>.

This minor weakness should not stop anyone from going to see "She's Beautiful When She's Angry." It can be the occasion to introduce young revolutionaries to one of the most important chapters of U.S. working-class history and a time when the women's movement seriously fought for a complete transformation of the social order. It will provide the revolutionary-minded with a real feel for the complexity, richness, and messiness of a mass movement driven from below by a generation forced into new circumstances by the crises of the system.

The film will remind anyone who views it how quickly consciousness can change and propel millions into motion around a completely new vision of the world. Learn more about the film, the process, and the places at which it may be viewed at <http://www.shesbeautifulwhenshesangry.com>. ■

Memoirs of a French revolutionary



(Photo) Bensaïd (left) marches with LCR leader Alain Krivine, at funeral of Maoist Pierre Overney, killed by security guard at a Renault plant, February 1972.

By **ROBBIE MAHOOD**

"An Impatient Life: a Memoir," by Daniel Bensaïd (foreword by Tariq Ali). Translated from the French by David Fernbach. Verso, 2013.

Daniel Bensaïd (1946-2010) was an important Marxist thinker and leader of the former French section of the Fourth International (FI), the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR). His memoir, very ably translated from the French, "Une Lente Impatience," is a dense but rewarding read, part personal odyssey and part meditation on revolutionary politics.

Bensaïd grew up in Toulouse, where his parents ran a "solidly red" bistro frequented by a mixture of native French and foreign-born workers, including refugees from the Spanish Civil War, veterans of the International Brigades, and the anti-Nazi resistance. The local cell of the French Communist Party (PCF) held its annual meetings there.

His father was a Sephardic Jewish immigrant, a former amateur boxing champion of Algeria. His mother was descended from a long line of proletarian militants who opted for the Communist Party when the French Socialist Party split after the First World War. A determined and combative woman, she successfully lobbied the authorities in Vichy France for the release of her husband, who had been interned at Drancy, where French Jews were held before transport to the death camps. Two uncles and two young cousins on his father's side were not so fortunate.

Against the backdrop of the Algerian war and the Cuban revolution, Bensaïd helped form a Jeunesses Communistes chapter in his high school. Revolt against the rigid catechism and bureaucratic heavy-handedness of the PCF leadership was not long in coming. He and his young comrades wanted to know why Trotsky and Luxemburg were not published, and he recalls asking in a "pale and hesitant voice" what the Party had to say about the Hungarian revolt of 1956, crushed by Soviet troops. "Scarcely enrolled, we had an openly contestatory spirit. And from insubordination to conspiracy is only a short step."

Summarily expelled from the Communist Party and gravitating towards Trotskyism, the young "left oppositionists" went on to found the Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires (JCR) in 1966 and played a significant role in the mass student and worker upsurge that shook De Gaulle's regime in May 1968. The JCR then contributed to founding the re-constituted French section of the Fourth International (Ligue Communiste, and later Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire). By 1969, the Ligue had grown to 1000 members, with an average age under 24. In Bensaïd's words: "In the unceasing rush of the 1970s, we remained torn between a bohemian impatience for combat and the patient burrowing of the mole."

While becoming an accomplished orator and political educator, Bensaïd was deeply involved in producing political tracts and the party newspaper, *Rouge*. At the same time, he was responsible for the party's Service d'Ordre (stewards charged with defending

demonstrations from the police and the far right).

In April 1973, the Ligue mobilized the far left to prevent an anti-immigrant rally in central Paris by the fascist organization, Ordre Nouveau. Bensaïd and the Ligue's Service d'Ordre were centrally involved. In the ensuing battle, both the police and the fascists were put to flight. The following day, the Ligue was banned and its public leaders, Alain Krivine and Pierre Rousset, imprisoned. Bensaïd defends this initiative while revealing that the Ligue's trade-union fraction condemned the action as ultra-left.

Inflated expectations and adventurist temptations were also reinforced by the rising curve of struggle internationally, above all in Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula. In Spain, the death of Franco was expected to unleash a period of class contestation that in an optimistic scenario would be amplified by the revolutionary dynamic in Portugal.

The 9th World Congress of the International in 1969 had endorsed the perspective of armed struggle in Latin America. This provoked a deep division within the FI and a split in its Argentine section, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT). A significant minority in the International, led by the American Socialist Workers Party, allied with Nahuel Moreno's PRT-La Verdad in Argentina, opposed the armed-struggle line.

In the end, the hopes aroused from 1968 to 1974 were not fulfilled. First, a CIA orchestrated coup overthrew the Allende government in Chile. Then the revolutionary surge in Portugal was turned back. With the death of Franco, Spain saw a more or less orderly transition to a constitutional monarchy. And in Argentina, the ruling class brought back Perón before turning to a military dictatorship to crush the mass movement. The FI majority, led by its French section, had clearly underestimated the bourgeoisie's capacity to restore order using the Social Democratic, Stalinist, and Populist apparatuses, or when required, by unleashing a reign of brutal repression and terror.

Bensaïd served at this time as a kind of roving ambassador for the FI majority, travelling to Spain, Portugal and Argentina as well as Brazil and Mexico. Recollections of his trip to Argentina in advance of the 1974 World Congress make particularly heart-rending reading: "Our comrades were young and intrepid, full of confidence in the socialist future of humanity. Three years later, half of the people I met at these meetings had been arrested, tortured and murdered."

In discussions with Argentine comrades of the FI majority, Bensaïd was dismayed to find armed struggle viewed as the dividing line between reformists and revolutionaries. He realized "we were clearly on a wrong path" and "running headlong into an open grave." This premonition was to be tragically confirmed after 1976 when the Argentine generals ordered the extermination of the country's left-wing vanguard. Bensaïd does not say whether he tried to press his assessment on the FI leadership. But it was not until the 1979 World Congress, after the bloody setback in Argentina, that the FI abandoned its line

on armed struggle.

After he became ill in the 1990s, Bensaïd was less active in the LCR leadership, turning to teaching and writing. In "An Impatient Life," details of his personal and party life are interspersed with ruminations on diverse theoretical and historical questions.

Whether it is on the nature of revolutionary crisis, the decline of journalism, the post-'68 retreat of French intellectuals from their erstwhile revolutionary enthusiasm, or Trotsky's years in Mexico, Bensaïd can be counted on for a few paragraphs or pages of stimulating and insightful prose rich in historical, theoretical, and literary references.

The text is weighted toward the French context but fortunately is generously annotated. Attention to these notes can serve as a primer on the history of the French and international workers movement.

Lenin's notion of crisis was the subject of Bensaïd's thesis in philosophy. He concedes that in his formative years his thinking (and the politics of the Ligue) tended to an excessive "voluntarism." This was the time of "a hasty Leninism," with May 1968 seen as a "dress rehearsal" for the première event, analogous to 1905 in Russia.

For him, the current fashionable dismissal of the (Leninist) "party form" is "above all a way of avoiding contents and projects." A party is essential to prepare for crises ("the impromptu of the event") and as a repository of "strategic thinking." The social movements cannot substitute for this necessary political task. In this, he sides with Lenin against Luxemburg—or at least, against her acolytes. For the latter, politics is "an almost organic product of struggle" while for the former, "politics is not the reflection of the social (but) a transposition of it."

Beyond this theoretical commitment to Leninism, Bensaïd has little to say on the concrete measures to be applied in building a party on the Leninist model in France or on how to move the project of a revolutionary international forward.

Bensaïd speaks of his generation of revolutionaries' having to learn a "slow impatience." He shows how a lack of patience in the early years of the French section led to certain ultra-left tendencies. But is it possible to see the LCR as yielding again to impatience, this time in the opposite direction, with the hasty formation of the Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste (NPA) in 2009? The memoir is notably silent on the NPA, into which the party dissolved itself. The option of maintaining an organized revolutionary current within the broader formation was apparently rejected. The absence of comment on this important decision is disappointing. It is true that Bensaïd breaks off his memoir around 2005. Nonetheless, one presumes he was privy to discussions preceding this turn away from Leninist party building.

Part of the reason for this silence may lie with his preference for leadership consensus. In the introduction to the memoir, Tariq Ali gently chides his friend for unwillingness to address political errors if it meant clashing with the party majority.

To the non-European reader, Bensaïd's references can sometimes be obscure and his language opaque. This reflects his early induction into the intellectual world of French philosophy and social theory, so heavily influenced by the weight of the French working class in political life and the student and worker revolt of May 1968. On the positive side is the lyrical quality to his writing nourished by his love of literature.

One wishes that other topics had been more fully addressed—for example, the accelerating eco-crisis under capitalism or the impact of second-wave feminism. However, if the memoir comes up short in some respects, there is much that is positive to be gleaned from it. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Bensaïd was loyal to the course on which he embarked. His memoir stands as an excellent inoculation against social democratic reformism degenerated into social liberalism—and equally against the disastrous legacy of Stalinism (including its Maoist variant). Reflecting on past errors, Bensaïd warns of the temptations of ultra-leftism. Against the anarchist and spontaneist tendencies in the contemporary generation of militants, he defends the need for a revolutionary party.

He is eloquent in dissecting the nature of commitment to revolutionary politics, to communism, which "despite the infamies committed in its name remains the most pertinent word, the word most freighted

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... Yemen

(continued from page 1)

suspend its drone strikes aimed at the forces of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Popular support for the government of Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi declined in part because of its collaboration with the U.S. drone operation, which caused a number of civilian deaths. So complete was the Hadi government's collapse that the Saudis were compelled to use its naval armada to evacuate what remained of this regime, along with UN observers.

A "negotiated settlement" is not to be excluded, as when Yemen's "Arab Spring" protests were shut down through Saudi intervention in 2011.

Following a year of mass protests against unemployment and corruption, the 2011 rebellion ended when Yemen's military strongman president of 33 years, Ali Abdullah Saleh, agreed to a "pact" pressed by the Saudis. Under the terms, Saleh would step down and be replaced by his vice president, Hadi, who served as president until he fled last month to Saudi Arabia. The Houthis, while rejecting this 2012 "pact," have allied today with defecting military forces that are still loyal to Saleh.

The Houthis are a populist movement based on the Zaidi Shiite expression of Islam, and represent some one-third of the population. They have been periodically and brutally oppressed by the essentially Saudi-installed Hadi regime and by the Saleh dictatorship before him.

The Houthi drive to power in this impoverished nation began in August 2014, when its leadership took advantage of discontent over the government's removal of fuel subsidies, and called for protests. Tens of thousands demonstrated in Sana'a, with demands against corruption and calls for the government to resign. The following month, the Houthis took over key government buildings, before signing a UN-brokered pact to form a "unity government" with Hadi's regime. In January 2015, Houthi forces occupied the presidential palace, demanding that a new constitution be drafted to ensure more representation for minority groups. Instead, Hadi and his government resigned and fled the capital.

Hadi initially took refuge in the southern port city of Aden—capital of the formerly independent and pro-Soviet People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen and a major center for the transport of oil in the region. He is currently partaking in secret negotiations in Saudi Arabia to "resolve" the conflict. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, representatives of the Arab League, and it seems, all other Saudi allies are involved. There have been no reports to date that the Houthi rebels are party to these discussions.

The imperialist powers are pressing for a "solution" aimed at re-establishing the capitalist status quo and its Hadi government enforcers. But Saudi officials have repeatedly warned that nothing but total rebel surrender would be acceptable.

Saudi intervention in the past

The Saudi regime is not new to intervention in neighboring Yemen. To thwart a republican alternative to the reactionary clerical government of North Yemen in the 1960s, the Saudis smashed the insurgent movement with the support of Britain and weapons supplied by Israel.

Similarly, the Saudis were first on the scene to brutally crush the 2011 Bahraini pro-democracy movement. Some 1000 Saudi troops to support the Sunni monarchy headed by King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa in the face of massive protests by the island's Shiite majority against their marginalization. Under Saudi pressure, the United Arab Emirates sent in another 500 troops to secure the oppressive regime. Mass Bahraini mobilizations exceeding 100,000 were crushed, with thousands arrested and many tortured.

Under worldwide pressure, Al-Khalifa was compelled to agree to an independent commission of inquiry, which issued a report on Nov. 23, 2012, confirming "systematic torture and other forms of physical and psychological abuse on detainees, as well as other human rights violations." The report rejected the monarch's claim that the protests were instigated by Iran.

Likewise, Saudi Arabia, almost always with U.S. agreement, is no newcomer to "regime change." In July 2013 it colluded with the Egyptian military coup led by U.S.-backed General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to remove the elected president, Mohamed Morsi.

The unleashing of 150,000 oil monarch troops in Yemen, backed by promised U.S. air support, will amount to yet another major escalation of the regional catastrophe set in motion when the U.S. first intervened in Iraq with 250,000 troops and devastated that nation, beginning in 2003.

There is yet another dimension to the events unfold-



... Economy

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tions" [emphasis added].

Departing from this "age-old practice" of allowing the criminals to get off scot free except for a modest fine—almost always qualitatively less than the amount stolen—the S.E.C. is now contemplating throwing a bit of a scare into the corporate world. This is projected at a time when corporate crime extends to major corporate players' ripping off other major corporate players, as when the American International Group (AIG), the insurance corporation, attempted to rip off the Bank of America after the latter had filed an insurance claim demanding AIG payment for monies lost from B of A's failed mortgages. In the end, this matter was resolved to everyone's satisfaction, and especially so when the government agreed to bail out both to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars.

Modern-day capitalism always requires a semblance of "honesty among thieves," lest the whole

ing in Yemen today. Houthi mosques in Sana'a have been systematically attacked by Islamic State suicide bombers, according to IS's own claims, although others point to al-Qaeda terrorists as the culprits. A recorded IS release stated: "IS soldiers will not rest until they stop the Safawi [Iranian] operation in Yemen."

Houthi leader Abdul Malik al-Houthi released a March 22 statement accusing U.S. and Israel of supporting the terrorist bombings. He also scored Saudi Arabia and regional Arab states for financing terrorist groups operating inside Yemen. Indeed, the Saudi government itself, if not forces high in the Saudi monarchy, was central to the organization and financing of IS when its immediate objective was the removal of Syria's Bashar al-Assad government. In Syria as in Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Egypt and elsewhere, U.S. and Saudi-backed insurgencies and coups—whether led by kings, military dictators, or terrorists—are the primary "weapons of choice."

A religious war?

Although the corporate media promotes the notion that the events in Yemen are at base a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran or a religious war between Sunni and Shiite versions of Islam, every recent war in the modern era refutes this caricature of historical analysis.

The foundational politics of the Middle East today were established at the dawn of the colonial era, when expanding imperialist capitalism sent conquering armies around the world to secure resources and establish new markets for its ruling-class elite. In the course of this genocidal venture, tens of millions were slaughtered, as in Africa, where in the "Belgian" Congo alone, 12 million Africans fell victim to King Leopold II's imperial aspirations. Millions more perished in every African colonized land.

In the name of "civilization" itself, usually "Christian civilization," and the racist notion of the "white man's burden," whole continents were enslaved and their historic territories divided and re-configured, while compliant puppets were set in place to administer the conquered peoples. "Divide and conquer" became the worldwide imperialist modus vivendi; ethnic divisions and hierarchies were created where none had previously existed. Today's protests have been qualitatively more an expression of massive outrage against the neoliberal capitalist austerity imposed on poor nations by a flagging world capitalist order than the product of differences in religious beliefs.

Yemen is a case in point of the underdevelopment and poverty that imperialism fosters throughout the world. The country is beset by 40 percent unemployment. A quarter of the economy rests on oil drilling—

predatory operation descend into chaos of a magnitude that threatens the workings of the system itself.

Here it is critical to note the fact that the S.E.C. is keenly aware that it does not or cannot always win in the courts of capitalist justice—and not for the lack of trying. The corporate "legal" system in capitalist America operates far from the myth of "blind justice." Judges are appointed far more often based on their past political loyalties and benefactors than for their legal "expertise."

Indeed, after the ambitious U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara succeeded in winning convictions in some 18 cases of Wall Street insider trading last year, he was not alone in being

shocked when his convictions were overturned by a higher court.

Few, if any, serious players on Wall Street, in this writer's humble opinion, believe that "inside knowledge" remains secret when the leaking of such knowledge can result in millions, if not billions, of dollars in benefits to the takers—not to mention under the table benefits to the leakers.

When billions or trillions of dollars are at stake, as is more the case today than in any time in the modern era, legal niceties are ignored in order to facilitate the gifting of lavish sums to those who play the profit game and also run the country. Capitalism, in truth, is a system of legalized crime that operates across a spectrum extending from the exploitation of individual workers to entire nations, and today throughout the globalized economy.

Working people have no interest in the preservation of this system and every reason to organize to replace it forever with a socialist economy and society that forever advances the needs and interest of the vast majority, as opposed to the .0001 percent who rule with impunity today. ■

which some believe will run out in several years, leading to even higher joblessness.

In present day Yemen, the Zaidi Shiites have had a long history of peaceful and collaborative relations with Sunni Muslims. The same can be said for virtually all parts of the world. In Iraq, for example, the initial U.S. invasion was in significant part opposed by both Sunni and Shiite forces, whose experience with previous eras of imperialist conquest was far from distant in their consciousness.

The notion that the demise of the Arab Spring and the subsequent chaos in the region is the product of historic differences among Muslims fades before the reality that the U.S. and its European imperialist partners—aided by client states like Saudi Arabia and Israel—remain the chief sources of terror and discontent in the world today.

Iran, whose secular president Mohammed Mosaddegh was removed in a 1953 CIA coup and replaced with a king (the Shah) is a prime example. When the earthshaking Iranian Revolution removed the Shah 26 years later, in 1979, the U.S. retaliated by arming and financing Iraq's Saddam Hussein, then a touted U.S. ally, who proceeded to conduct a 10-year war against Iran that caused the deaths of one million Iranians as well as close to the same number of Iraqis.

The present U.S.-imposed sanctions against Iran, supposedly over Iran's right to refine nuclear fuel, are nothing less than a pretext to force Iran back into the imperialist orbit in order to once again secure control of a nation with fossil fuel resources. The sanctions, have had devastating effects on the Iranian people—including a decline of some 30-40 percent in the standard of living.

The demise of the Arab Spring, a regional movement in almost all cases characterized by the massive rising of poor and oppressed peoples against their capitalist rulers, is tragic proof that whatever momentary gains are won by mass struggles cannot be maintained or expanded without a challenge to the capitalist system, including a break with U.S. and other imperialist exploiters. Employing one reactionary means or another, the U.S. was quick to intervene in the Arab Spring popular mobilizations, with the central objective of subordinating them to imperialist control.

It is essential to construct mass revolutionary socialist parties to lead the masses in the struggle against austerity and oppression and in revolutionary action aimed at bringing about a fundamental transformation of society. A new world can be brought into being—one in which socialist equality and freedom will flourish, based on the rule of the vast majority as opposed to the private profits of the elite few. ■

Harper's agenda: Fear & loathing in the Great White North

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The move by Canada's Conservative government to extend for a year the bombing mission in Iraq, and expand it into Syria, won't make much difference in the U.S.-led war on the Islamic State. But it will appease the arms industry, mobilize the party's right-wing electoral base, and poison the political climate.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's foreign policy is largely about re-shaping the domestic agenda—for years to come. War in the East helps to fuel the flames of hatred and bigotry at home, and strike fear in the hearts of working people, especially social justice seekers.

By spending \$122 million and bombing 53 targets, Ottawa is no closer to eliminating ISIS. Instead, it is treading the path that turned Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya over to ruthless, sectarian, reactionary forces. It also ensures more costly contracts for makers of military hardware and surveillance technology.

The ideological offensive, however, is priceless. For

Canada's ruling elite, that is. By distracting huge swaths of the population with security paranoia and islamophobia, the Conservatives sidelined discussions about job insecurity, tax giveaways to the rich, rising economic inequality, eroded pensions, long ignored child-care needs, and the scourge of climate change. The diversion worked, for a while, and now shows signs of waning.

Harper continues to inflate the "jihadist monster"—even as the Canadian Security Intelligence Service says that Muslim terrorists are less of a threat than white supremacists. Lone wolf attackers are more likely to be radical right wingers than radical Islamists, according to CSIS. But Arabs and Muslims fit the profile Harper prefers to employ to rationalize more police powers and longer jail sentences.

His so-called Anti-Terrorism Act (C-51), condemned by the 36,000-member Canadian Bar Association for curtailing liberties without increasing public safety, casts a widening net. Its vague wording is a gaping snare, potentially for anyone who engages in protest that "undermines national security." Workers on strike, indigenous land defenders,

and so-called "anti-petroleum ideologues," take note.

Meanwhile, greater police spying, more frequent use of cop agents to disrupt social movements, and arrests increasingly made without due process, combined with mounting civilian casualties from CF18 air strikes abroad, will likely help ISIS to recruit—and round and round it goes.

This is the political treadmill for more war, more austerity for the vast majority, and many more lies. Remember the Fair Elections Act that made elections less fair? The Access to Information Act that made information inaccessible? The Privacy Act that invaded your privacy? The noncombat mission in Iraq that put Canadian troops in combat, leading to the death of one soldier, and the maiming of three others from "friendly fire" on an Iraqi battle front line in March?

To his credit, New Democratic Party leader Tom Mulcair condemned the extension of the war. He said in Parliament that an NDP government would end Canadian intervention in Iraq and Syria, and bring the troops home. If only he would similarly denounce the Zionist occupation of Palestinian territory and reverse his stridently pro-Israel stance.

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau opposed Harper's expanding belligerence, mostly on the dodgy basis that the mission lacks clear objectives. However, Trudeau and his Liberals are voting for repressive law C-51, they say, for fear of handing Harper an election issue. Such a principled opposition.

Fortunately, the parliamentary critics increasingly echo the changing mood of the population, which is questioning permanent war abroad, and challenging repressive legislation at home.

On March 14 over 90,000 people rallied and marched across English Canada and Quebec against Bill C-51. More protests are in the works. That is the best bet for changing the channel on Harper's 'fear and loathing' agenda. ■

University workers strike blow against austerity

By YASIN KAYA

Teaching assistants at the University of Toronto, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3902, voted by a margin of 942 to 318 to send all outstanding issues to binding arbitration. That ends the strike for about 6000 TAs at U of T.

During four weeks on the picket lines the issues in dispute narrowed. Still outstanding are the following: a guarantee of a minimum per-student funding amount, and tuition assistance for members. A "neutral" third-party arbitrator, selected by agreement of the union and management, will issue a decision.

Although it is not preferable to place the concerns of the working class in the hands of an arbitrator—a representative of the capitalist state—CUPE 3902 should be proud of the intense struggle it waged against an aggressive employer, and for already achieving significant gains towards a decent contract. It appears that the U of T bosses opted for



arbitration as a face-saving measure.

Meanwhile, it looks like striking educators at York University have achieved an historic victory. Back on March 9, Unit 2 of CUPE Local 3903, which represents contract faculty, accepted a new collective agreement. But Units 1 and 3, representing teaching assistants and gradu-

Socialist Action

(Left) Socialist Action joined a Toronto march for striking educators.

ate assistants, rejected the university's deal and remained on strike. Then on March 29, the CUPE 3903 Bargaining Team (BT) and York University management reached a tentative agreement for Unit 1 (teaching assistants) and for Unit 3 (graduate assistants). The deal, which, as we go to press is expected to be ratified, addresses the three core demands of the Union.

Firstly, York University has agreed to tuition-offset language, indexed to 2012 rates. This means that if tuition fees for domestic or international students rise above 2012 rates, the university will increase funding for all in-program and incoming students to offset the tuition fee increase. It also means that the international students

will receive increased funding equal to the amount of the recent international student fee increases. Secondly, York University has agreed to make LGBTQ an employment equity group.

And thirdly, for Unit 3, the employer has agreed to increase summer minimum funding from \$1750 to \$3000, in addition to previously agreed-upon Graduate Financial Assistance and wage increases. This represents a further increase of \$750 over the employer's last offer, a rise of over 70 per cent.

The two strikes should not be seen merely as economic disputes; they are also political strikes that challenge capitalist austerity parameters. They essentially confront a hardening, global, corporate agenda. For that reason, workers need to follow suit and escalate these efforts right across the labour movement, and head towards sectoral action, industry walk-outs, and a general strike.

If the objective is to stop and reverse the cuts, and to end precarious, poorly paid employment, it will be necessary to establish a workers' government, the harbinger of a socialist transformation of society. ■

WAM it to the bosses!

By BARRY WEISLEDER

TORONTO—The new Workers' Action Movement—a fledgling, positive force for change inside and outside the ranks of organized labour—has an ambitious goal. It is determined to break the hold of capitalist austerity and to end the downward spiral of concessions bargaining. The founders of WAM seek to establish a cross-union, class struggle caucus that is anti-capitalist, anti-austerity, anti-concessions, and pro-union democracy.

WAM strives for change based on policies, not on personalities; to replace misleaders on political grounds; to affirm union democratic principles from the bottom up; and to build an independent, class-struggle movement from below that is inclusive, transparent and accountable. That means change to the overall direction of our unions, and support for union activists who battle concessions and anti-democratic practices.

Not confined to unionists, WAM aims to work with social justice movements, and welcomes all workers and activists from those movements.

This body of union radicals emerged from the Take Back the CLC campaign, which sought to elect Hassan Husseini to the position of president of the Canadian Labour Congress in May 2014. Although Husseini did not win, the cross-country organizing effort contributed significantly to the defeat of Ken Georgetti—the first time a sitting incumbent lost.

Take Back campaigners decided to convene a grass-

roots labour assembly at the People's Social Forum in Ottawa in August 2014. Over 150 activists attended. They agreed to form an anti-capitalist, pro-democracy body in the unions, and to include civil society organizations and individuals in that effort. Over 20 people volunteered to serve on a temporary steering committee. Via telephone conferences and e-mail, we formulated a Basis of Unity and set WAM in motion.

The campaign to save home mail delivery is one of its current priorities. Why? Because the attack on public services is at the forefront of the corporate agenda. The plan to eliminate home mail delivery would eliminate over 8000 good jobs and weaken one of Canada's most democratic unions.

At the same time, the postal service cuts are deeply unpopular, and could be the Achilles heel of the Harper Conservative government. But mass action is needed to win. Unfortunately, the union leadership required is not forthcoming.

The Workers' Action Movement is trying to make a difference but cannot substitute for the mass organizations. Our ideas are strong, but our resources are meager. That is why we are trying to change the leadership and overall direction of existing unions. Potentially, militant and democratic unions are the key to unlocking the power of the working class to create a better world for all.

A constitution and an elected steering committee will be put in place over the coming year. To become a voting member of WAM send \$2 a month, or \$24 a year to: www.workersactionmovement.com. ■

... Memoirs

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with memory, the most precise and most apt to name the historic issues of the present time." He cites the Polish dissident, Karol Modzelewski, who, when asked why he persevered in the face of setbacks and disappointment, responded: "loyalty to persons unknown." It is a virtue of this book to name some of "those unknowns to whom we are tied by an irredeemable debt."

Revolutionary politics he describes as a "wager on the uncertain ... unavoidable as long as the necessary and the possible remain in disagreement."

Bensaid takes the measure of the retreat that has been registered but is not discouraged: "Today's political landscape is devastated by battles lost without even having been fought, [but] the forces needed for reconstruction exist, and the relationship between capital and labour remains as asymmetrical as ever: the former cannot dispense with the latter, while the same is in no way true the other way round."

"An Impatient Life" is recommended not just to those who came of age politically in the 1960s and '70s but equally to younger militants already involved in, or open to, the construction of a revolutionary organization. ■

FILMS

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

A documentary film directed and written by Robert Kenner and Kim Roberts.

Director Robert Kenner's film *Merchants of Doubt* may sicken and disgust you, but it is worth seeing because it exposes the means by which climate change deniers try to debunk scientific facts.

Kenner begins his film with a slight-of-hand magician performing card tricks to an awestruck, gullible audience. Kenner includes this act throughout the film, and even ends with it. I felt that his use of this metaphor for climate change deniers, while appropriate in some respects, lessened the seriousness of the subject.

The real "merchants of doubt" don't resort to magician's trickery. They downright lie, dissemble, omit, and obfuscate scientific facts that have been developed over a half-century, proving undeniably that the earth is warming.

It is unfortunate that a large and widespread audience will probably not see this film. Its major audience will be those who already believe in and have experienced the results of climate change: higher than usual temperatures, melting glaciers, devastating floods, hurricanes, drought, crop-die offs, decimated stock herds, and disoriented wild life whose centuries old migratory routes have been altered.

It is sad that many of the deniers were and maybe still are scientists themselves, who have been bought by oil and coal corporations and think tanks like the Heritage Foundation for six-figure commissions. Kenner shows clips of compromised scientists opining on mainstream news shows, mainly on media giant Fox News.

One archival clip shows deniers laughing at the idea that polar bears are drowning due to the melting of ice floes. "Hell, there are plenty of polar bears! They come right into towns in Alaska." They never stop to ask why.



The film begins with the public confrontation of the tobacco industry, specifically R.J. Reynolds. From 1954 to 1994, the corporation denied that nicotine was addictive and that smoking and second-hand smoke cause cancer. There is a scene where scientists force cigarette smoke into the lungs of monkeys—trapped in Lucite boxes—to prove that their product is safe.

Captains of the tobacco industry published paper after paper written by its own in-house "scientists" denying the findings, and paid "doctors" to proclaim that smoking was harmless to one's health. Yet, hidden files, which turned up during hearings (clips of which Kenner included), showed the opposite.

The corporate strategy is: blame the consumer for any health problems or damages. Corporate naysayers state that "doubt is our product." Create conflict and confusion. The confusion extends to their printing alleged "facts" in publications that mimic in design those of scientists backing the findings of global warming.

Kenner interviewed James Hansen, a NSA climate change scientist who in 1988 studied the earth's atmosphere. He explained at the time how the "greenhouse effect" works on Venus, stating that this could be the earth's future if we don't cut emissions. He also stated, "We can't assume so-

ciety will press the government to do something." More public awareness is needed.

Clips show think-tank operatives funded by oil and coal industries who shape public policy, stating that curtailing emissions will devastate U.S. economy. Kenner's film points out how journalists fell for the line of the corporate "experts." A self-proclaimed blowhard publicist, Marc Morano, boasts in clips of sending crude, threatening e-mails to scientists who warned about climate change, copies of which Kenner shows on screen.

Still, there is hope. Consider Michel Shermer, founder of *Skeptic* magazine, whom Kenner interviewed. He confessed that he had been a denier and wrote about the "hoax" in his magazine. Then he began doing massive research, he said, which totally turned him around.

Clips show him at a debate attended by a majority of scientists who deny global warming. Shermer tried to present facts that he felt certain would change minds. Instead, most walked out. One group published a paper, which Kenner shows, signed by about 32,000 scientists refuting the idea that humans were the cause of global warming. It made huge headlines: "32,000 scientists agree!" Turns out, many of the "scientists" names were of dead celebrities and presidents.

Unfortunately, government and corporate heads—even those who say that they "accept" the conclusion of 95 percent of climate scientists that climate change is caused by human activities—refuse to take the necessary steps to curtail the greenhouse gases that have the earth hurtling toward disaster.

Although Kenner's film outlines the problems, it comes up short on indicating what must be done to protect the environmental health of the planet. As eco-socialists, we believe that a worldwide mass movement must be built, demanding a fundamental reordering of society in accord with the principle of putting human and environmental needs ahead of capitalist profits. ■

... Climate movement

(continued from page 12)

movements are mobilising impressively, with projects like Nov. 27-29 mass actions aimed at municipalities; a Brussels-Paris activist train; a "run for life," with 1000 people running 4km each from northern Sweden to Paris; the "Alternatiba" alternatives project with 200 participating villages from the Basque country to Brussels, which will culminate on Sept. 26-27; and getting warmed up, on May 30-31, an anticipated 1000 local climate initiatives around the country.

Yet the local context sounds as difficult in 2015 as it was in South Africa in 2011. As Malika Peyraut from Friends of the Earth-France pointed out, national climate policy is "inconsistent and unambitious" and the country's politics are poisoned by the rise of the far right to 25 percent support in municipal elections. French society will be distracted by regional elections from Dec. 6-12 and "there is a high risk of co-optation," she warned.

Indeed, there are no reliable state allies of climate justice at present, and there really are no high-profile progressives working within the COPs. It's a huge problem for UN reformers because it leaves them without a policy jam-maker inside to accompany activist tree-shaking outside.

Although once there were heroic delegates badgering the COP process, they are all gone now: Lumumba Di-Aping led the G77 countries at the Copenhagen COP15—where in a dramatic accusation aimed at the Global North, he named climate a coming holocaust requiring millions of coffins for Africa—and so was lauded outside and despised inside, but then was redeployed to constructing the new state of South Sudan; President Mohamed Nasheed from the Maldives—also a high-profile critic at Copenhagen—was outed by WikiLeaks for agreeing to a \$50 million deal to get support for the Copenhagen Accord, was couped by rightwingers in 2012 and, earlier this month, was illegitimately jailed for a dozen years.

Bolivia's UN Ambassador Pablo Solon was booted from his country's delegation after the 2010 Cancun COP16, where, solo, he had bravely tried to block the awful deal there; an Amazon jungle road-building controversy divided Evo Morales' supporters, and in 2013 the COP's progressive leadership void grew wide after the death of Hugo Chavez and the battle by Rafael Correa against green-indigenous-feminist critics for his decision that year to drill for oil in the Yasuni Amazon (after having once proposed an innovative climate debt downpayment to avoid its extraction); and Filipino Climate Commissioner Yeb Saño had a dramatic 2013 role in Warsaw condemning COP19 inaction after his hometown was demolished by Super Typhoon

Haiyan, but he was evicted by a more conservative environment ministry (apparently under Washington's thumb) just before the Lima COP in 2014.

If you are serious about climate justice, the message from these COP experiences is unmistakable: going inside is suicide.

Framing for failure

It is for this reason that the original protest narrative suggestions that CAN's Mark Raven proposed were generally seen as too reformist. Acknowledging the obvious—"people losing faith in the broken system, corporations sabotaging change" and "we need a just transition"—his network then offered these as favoured headline memes: "Showdown in 2015 leads to a vision of just transition to fossil-free world" and "Paris is where the world decides to end fossil fuel age."

Yet with no real prospects of reform, the more militant activists were dissatisfied. Nnimmo Bassey from Oilwatch International was adamant, "We need not merely a just transition, but an immediate transition: keep the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, the tar sands in the land and the fracking shale gas under the grass." That, after all, is what grassroots activists are mobilising for.

The movement's principles were further fleshed out at the April 2010 World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia, to include emissions cut targets—45 percent below 1990 levels in the advanced capitalist economies by 2020—plus a climate tribunal and the decommissioning of destructive carbon markets which have proven incapable of fair, rational, and non-corrupt trading.

Dating to well before the CJN! split from CAN in Bali, that latter fantasy—letting bankers determine the fate of the planet by privatising the air—remains one of the main dividing lines between the two ideologies of climate justice and climate action.

Concrete actions against the emitters themselves were suggested, including more projects like the Dutch "Climate Games," which saw a coal line and port supply chain disrupted last year. There are coming protests over coal in Germany's Rhineland, and we will likely see direct actions at Paris events such as Solution 21, a corporate "false solutions" event where geo-engineering, Carbon Capture and Storage, and carbon trading will be promoted.

Radical alternatives

Likewise, ActionAid's Teresa Anderson reported back from a Narrative Working Group on lessons from Copenhagen: "Don't tell a lie that Paris will fix the climate. People were arrested in Copenhagen for this lie.



No unrealistic expectations—but we need to give people hope that there is a purpose to the mobilisation."

Most important, she reminded, "There is Global North historical responsibility, and those who are most vulnerable have done the least to cause the problem." This is vital because in Durban, UN delegates began the process of ending the "common but differentiated responsibility" clause. As a result, finding ways to ensure climate "loss & damage" invoices are both issued and paid is more difficult. The UN's Green Climate Fund is a decisive write-off in that respect; a different approach to climate debt is needed.

Looking at more optimistic messaging, Anderson concluded the report-back: "Powerful positive actions are in play. We are life—fossil fuels are death. Paris is a moment to build movements, to show we are powerful and will fight into 2016 and beyond to solve the climate crisis. It takes roots to weather the storm ahead."

Responding, said former Bolivian negotiator Solon (now Bangkok-based director of Focus on the Global South), "I think we need a clearer narrative: let's stop an agreement that's going to burn the climate. We are against carbon markets, geo-engineering and the weak emissions targets."

But the clearest message of all came from veteran strategist Pat Mooney of the research network called the etc group, describing to the mass meeting what he wanted to see in Paris: "It should start like New York and end like Seattle. Shut the thing down."

Back in 2009, just weeks before he died, this was what Dennis Brutus—the mentor of so many South African and international progressives—also advised: "Seattle Copenhagen!" The Paris Conference of Polluters also needs that kind of shock doctrine, so that from an activist cyclone a much clearer path can emerge towards climate justice in the months and years ahead.

A slightly longer version of this article was originally published by teleSUR at the following address: <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/opinion/Climate-Movement-Across-Movements-20150326-0035.html>. Patrick Bond directs the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society in Durban. ■

Climate Movement Across Movements



By PATRICK BOND

We reprint below the report of South African socialist Patrick Bond, who attended the March 23-24 Climat21 conference in Tunis. The conference, to be followed by another in June in Europe, focused on strategies and tactics to in anticipation of the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, set for Paris in November-December 2015.

Bond takes note of the important political divisions that marked the Tunis proceedings, ranging from “reformist” perspectives that looked to capitalist governments and market-based solutions to those presenting a “radical” perspective that looks to “Seattle”-type actions that imply “closing down” the system.

The Tunis conference took on a sense of urgency due to leaked reports that none of the world’s great polluters would be offering real solutions to stop and reverse the present trend, in which a rise of two degrees centigrade in the global mean temperature would bring with it irreversible and catastrophic consequences for life on earth.

In this context, it appears from Bond’s report that few, if any, perspectives were seriously considered that saw the independent and united actions of working people and their class allies organizing on a broad front to challenge capitalist prerogatives—that is, mobilizing the only mass forces that can effectively fight for “System change, not climate change.” Until such an independent class-based movement emerges to lead the climate struggle, the efforts based on reformist forces will achieve very little.

See the pamphlet, “The Fight for Class and Climate Justice,” by Bill Onasch and Carl Sack, containing portions of the resolution approved by the 16th National Convention of Socialist Action. Order from Socialist Action, \$2 plus \$1 postage.

TUNIS—Looming ahead in eight months’ time is another Conference of Polluters, or COP (technically, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). The last 20 did zilch to save us from climate catastrophe. Judging by early rough drafts of the Paris COP21 agreement recently leaked, another UN fiasco is inevitable.

The Coalition Climat21 strategy meeting on March 23-24 began in Tunis just before the World Social Forum. I had a momentary sense this could be a breakthrough gathering, if indeed fusions were ripe now, to move local

‘Keep the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, the tar sands in the land, and the shale gas under the grass.’ — Oilwatch International delegate at Climat21

versions of “Blockadia”—i.e., hundreds of courageous physical resistances to CO2 and methane emissions sources—towards a genuine global political project.

The diverse climate activists present seemed ready for progressive ideology, analysis, strategy, tactics, and alliances. Between 150 and 400 people jammed a university auditorium over the course of the two days, mixing French, English, and Arabic.

It was far more promising than the last time people gathered for a European COP, in 2009 at Copenhagen, when the “Seal the Deal” narrative served to draw activist lemmings towards—and over—a cliff: first up the hill of raised expectations placed on UN negotiators, before crashing down into a despondency void lasting several years once leaders of the US, Brazil, South Africa, India, and China did a backroom deal that sabotaged a binding emissions follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol.

In “Hopenhagen,” even phrases like System change, not climate change” were co-opted, as green capital educated by NGO allies agreed that a definition of “system” (e.g., from fossil fuels to nuclear) could be sufficiently malleable to meet their rhetorical needs. That precedent notwithstanding, the phrase “a climate movement across the movements” used here seemed to justify an urgent unity of diverse climate activists, along with heightened attempts to draw in those who should be using climate in their own specific sectoral work. Unity—without clarity, responsibility, and accountability?

Over the last nine months, since an August gathering in Paris, a great deal of coalition building has occurred in France and indeed across Europe. The proximate goal is to use awareness of the Paris COP21 to generate events around the world in national capitals on both Nov. 28-29—just before the summit begins—and on Dec. 12,

as it climaxes. There was consensus that later events should be more robust than the first, and that momentum should carry into 2016. (The December 2016 COP22 will be in Morocco.)

Christophe Aguiton, one of Attac’s founders, opened the event: “In the room are Climate Justice Now! (CJN!), Climate Action Network (CAN), international unions, the faith community, and the newer actors in the global movement, especially 350.org and Avaaz. We have had a massive New York City march and some other inspiring recent experiences in the Basque country and with the Belgium Climate Express.”

But, he went on, there are some serious problems ahead that must be soberly faced: there is no CJ movement in most countries; grounded local CJ organisations are lacking; we need not just resistances but alternatives; and there are some important ideological divisions. Still, he explained, “We won’t talk content because in the same room, there are some who are moderate, some who are radical—so we will stress mobilisation, because we all agree, without mobilisation we won’t save the climate.”

But this unity-seeking-minus-politics was reminiscent of a process four years ago in South Africa known as “C17,” a collection of 17 civil society organisations that did local preparatory work before the UN’s COP17 Durban climate summit. Actually, fewer than a half-dozen of the 17 representatives really pitched in throughout, and the moderate organisations which had promised to mobilise financial resources, media attention, and bodies ultimately did none of these.

South Africa’s Big Green groups and trade unions failed to take C17 ownership, to commit resources and to add the institutional muscle needed. The Durban counter-summit messaging was rapid, and virtually no impact was made on the COP or on South Africa’s own reactionary emissions policy. The final rally of 10,000 activists midway through the COP17 unfortunately presented UN elites and local politicians with a legitimating platform. Nor did we use the event to build a South African climate justice movement worthy of the name. So my own assessment of the “state failure, market failure, and critic failure” in Durban strongly emphasised the problem of excessive unity, without ideological clarity, institutional responsibility or political accountability.

Maybe it will be different in France, because their

(continued on page 11)