

Women protest attacks on Planned Parenthood



By CHRISTINE MARIE

On Sept. 29, women in at least 90 cities around the United States demonstrated in defense of the health provider Planned Parenthood.

"Pink Out Day," the organizers state, provided the opportunity to say: "Listen to over a million Americans who are sick and tired of the relentless attacks on reproductive health care. Listen to the one in five American women who has received care at a Planned Parenthood health center ... Tell anti-abortion extremists and politicians that we are everywhere and we will not let them use fraud and deception to shut down the health centers so many women rely on for care. ... We're not backing down, not today, not ever."

These actions were only one element of the response to an extreme right-wing campaign to deprive one of the most important sources of woman's health for low-income and young women in the country of the \$500 million a year in federal funding that it receives mostly through Medicaid reimbursements and grants.

In an electronic version of the tribunals organized by women in the fight for reproductive rights before the U. S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973, women are countering the right wing's attempt to stigmatize abortion on social media. According to the *Guardian* newspaper, three defenders of reproductive justice—Amelia Bonow, Lindy West, and Kimberly Morrison—started #ShoutYourAbortion on Sept. 18,

and tweets quickly climbed into the tens of thousands.

The demonstrations and social media campaigns are in response to the latest outrages in an orchestrated campaign of lies and efforts to defund the health-care provider that took off after undercover videos, edited to make it appear that Planned Parenthood trafficked in fetal tissue, began to be posted to YouTube in July.

In response, Planned Parenthood head Cecile Richards testified before a Sept. 29 House of Representatives hearing that "the outrageous accusations leveled against Planned Parenthood, based on heavily doctored videos, are offensive and categorically untrue."

On Sept. 18, the House passed two sensationalist bills that furthered a propaganda war on reproductive justice. One bill defunded Planned Parenthood for a year, supposedly in order to allow Congress to investigate the organization's supposed profiting from the sale of fetal tissue. The other bill was a piece of legislation designed to convince the public that doctors who perform abortions are often the murderers of fetuses who "survive" the procedure.

Both bills were introduced by conservative "moderates" who hoped to assuage right-wing "radicals" determined to link defunding of Planned Parenthood to the big spending bill that would provide government operations funding for the fiscal year beginning on Oct. 1 and a potential government shutdown.

The Senate defeated the Republican efforts to use the funding extension bill to cut off Planned Parenthood, but both houses continue to look for ways to

mollify the right-wing "radicals."

Even though defunding bills, no matter what the form, are likely to be vetoed by President Obama, a member of the House Republican leadership, Steve Scalise, told *The New York Times*, "We're going to keep attacking this [abortion] on many fronts" (Sept. 24, 2015). This includes legislation being introduced in the states. On Sept. 1, the governor of Louisiana ended that state's contract with Planned Parenthood, ending service for 5200 Medicaid patients. The Wisconsin Assembly voted on Sept. 24 to ban the state from using federal family-planning money from going to Planned Parenthood.

The Republican presidential debates have also been the occasion for a level of virulent and misogynist attacks on female dignity and reproductive justice that have not been heard on mainstream media since *Roe v. Wade* became the law of the land more than four decades ago.

Unfortunately, the Democratic Party has never proven itself to be a reliable defender of abortion rights. The willingness of Obama to throw women under the bus during the Affordable Care Act debates was only the last of a string of concessions to reactionary thought that began almost as soon as abortion was legalized.

The most devastating blow to availability of reproductive choice began in 1976 with the passage of the Hyde Amendment, which prohibited the use of Medic-

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An upturn in U.S. labor struggles

By **BILL ONASCH**

Tony Savino / Socialist Action

The following is an edited excerpt of a report by Bill Onasch on trade-union work presented to a recent meeting of the Socialist Action National Committee.

Overall, the state of American unions is still mostly negative. The warm embrace of UAW president Dennis Williams with Fiat boss Sergio Marchionne, celebrating a tentative deal at Chrysler, graphically illustrates that class collaboration remains entrenched in the most important industrial union. Dennis even promised his new *amico* help in trying to merge with General Motors.

But, in my opinion, there are also a lot more positive and promising exceptions than we have seen in quite some time. Within a diverse, broadly defined labor movement there are, of course, many permutations and local variations. But I think we can identify three distinct, though sometimes overlapping, camps.

The biggest mainstream includes most of the industrial, transportation, construction, and public-sector national unions. Nearly all are highly bureaucratized top-down. Worse yet, they are mostly dedicated to partnership with the employers and practice give-back bargaining in the forlorn desire to maintain their dues-paying base.

But even in this regimented sector we have seen some stirring. The 30,000-member refinery division in the Steelworkers—a remnant of the old Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers—used selective strikes, backed by public appeals to communities, which even won some support from environmentalists, to win solid gains in their national contract.

There is a smaller but significant camp of more adversarial national and local unions, issue groups, and internal opposition forces fighting the mainstream bureaucracy. Traditional mavericks like National Nurses United and the United Electrical, Radio & Ma-



chine Workers (UE) are being augmented by such notable examples as the Chicago Teachers Union.

The CTU's rank-and-file mobilization, exemplary strike, and alliances in the communities have inspired fight-backs in Los Angeles, Seattle, St. Paul, and other local areas in both the AFT and NEA. Now the CTU is again battling City Hall, the school administration, and a right-wing governor for a new contract.

Likewise, the new leadership of the Amalgamated Transit Union has been training thousands of rank-and-file members to mobilize community support against privatization and austerity attacks.

The Labor Network for Sustainability is having some success in winning political and material support in unions for climate action, around a perspective of Just

Transition. The Labor Campaign for Single-Payer is keeping that issue alive and is co-hosting a big strategy conference in Chicago in a few weeks. And last but certainly not least, there is Teamsters for a Democratic Union, whose thousands of rank-and-file members are campaigning around a militant slate that appears to have a real shot at ousting the Hoffa regime in next year's election.

Finally, there is a third camp that is partially inside but largely outside the traditional trade union structure—the movement of low-wage workers who are mad as hell and not going to take it anymore. Long ignored by the union bureaucracy as being more trouble than they're worth, some of the working poor are organizing through worker centers that have popped up in communities throughout the country and in coalitions like Jobs with Justice.

Until recently, the UFCW dipped a toe in the icy water of Walmart, but they have now given up. However, the OUR Walmart rank and file are still carrying on their important fight against the world's biggest private employer. Over the past couple of years the Service Employees International Union has transformed this camp into a high-profile mass movement, especially among Fast Food workers—but also among home-care and airport-service workers, and adjunct faculty.

SEIU has collaborated with parallel 15 NOW community movements working for municipal and state \$15 minimum-wage laws. Early breakthroughs in SeaTac and Seattle were largely led by Socialist Alternative and benefited from Kshama Sawant's election to the Seattle City Council. Dozens of cities have now adopted similar ordinances.

Looking ahead to the next election, Governor Cuomo responded to pressure from the SEIU-dominated Working Families Party by ordering administrative action granting \$15 for Fast Food workers in New York state, and legislation is being introduced in the legislature to expand this to all workers. These new laws, along with raises negotiated by SEIU and AFSCME for home-care and child-care workers in a number of states, are transferring many millions of dollars from the exploiters to the working poor.

SEIU appears to be in for the long haul. Their financial

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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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Syriza wins, Greek workers lose

By MARTY GOODMAN

The Sept. 20 Greek national election, held in a rush, resulted in the reelection of the Syriza party's Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. The election occurred merely 30 days after its announcement. It was timed cynically to take place before the onset of a new wave of punishing austerity conditions—the worst ever—agreed to by Syriza and imposed by European Union (EU) financial institutions and the International Monetary Fund.

Defying the pollsters, Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) nevertheless received 35.47% of the vote, easily beating its neoliberal rivals and only slightly down from the Jan. 25 election that brought it to power. Syriza's nearest competitor, the New Democracy Party, received 28.3% of the vote.

Voter turnout was a mere 56%, down 800,000 voters from January, the lowest percentage since the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974. The small turnout reflected disgust with capitalist politicians, "left" or right, who promise relief but deliver more misery. In contrast, 70% voted in the July referendum before Syriza's sellout to the EU and the banks.

Syriza won 145 seats, down from 149, a minority in the 300-seat parliament. Syriza once again sought a coalition partner in the right-wing Independent Greeks (ANEL), which has opposed the austerity agreement. ANEL won a total of 10 seats, down from 13. In September, Dimitris Kammenos, ANEL's Deputy Minister for Infrastructure, tweeted anti-Semitic remarks and resigned hours after the new cabinet was sworn in.

The capitalist media reacted to the Syriza victory with delight. Syriza is a capitalist government, not a worker's government. Said the New York-based Ferro, which manages about \$1 billion in assets, "The Greek election result is the best one from a market point of view." Indeed, a leader who will mislead and betray working people after echoing their demands is often a much better option for the capitalist class than a despised reactionary politician.

Syriza first came to power based on its promise to demand "not one sacrifice for the euro," the currency of 17 countries in the European Union. Called "the memorandum," the agreement is for an EU loan of 86 billion euros (U.S. \$96 billion) with brutal "free market" anti-worker conditions attached.

Unemployment in Greece stands at 26%; 60% for youth. A medical study found that 54% of Greeks are undernourished. Public services are devastated; 50% of children live in poverty. National debt is 180% of the Gross National Product.

The memorandum was rejected by 62% in a July 5 voter referendum. Then, in an astonishingly rapid betrayal (but not the first!), the memorandum was nevertheless accepted within 72 hours of the vote by the pseudo-radical Syriza government.

Incredibly, the deal accepted by Syriza cost 4 billion euros more than the version rejected July 5 by the Greek people. The memorandum wielded additional cuts to pensions, including special aid to the poorest; a hike in taxes on food and other goods and services; a "liberalizing" of the labor market (that is, voiding labor protections and job security); and the privatization of 50 billion euros worth of public institutions.

Clearly, the EU rulers sought to punish Greek working people for daring to vote against austerity (attacks on workers) by voting Syriza in January and voting "no" in July. Indeed, Greece has become a testing ground for capitalists everywhere, including the U.S., probing how far a working class can be bullied into poverty in the age of capitalist crisis.

Defections from Syriza

Some 40 members of Syriza's "dissident" parliament members, known as the Left Platform, voted "no" in a final memorandum vote in late August, prompting Tsipras to call for the September election. The former boosters of Syriza in the Left Platform quickly found themselves purged from government and formed an anti-memorandum party called Popular Unity. Eight out of the 11 Left Platform leaders resigned from Syriza.

According to Syriza officials cited in a *Financial Times* article: "In the aftermath [of the memorandum] at least one third of Syriza's membership defected to other parties, including those to its left, with others leaving political campaigning altogether."

On Sept. 1, the majority of the Syriza youth group leadership signed a statement of resignation. An organization of up to 2500 members, it was a force in Greece's important student movement. The youth



(Above) Syriza's Tsipras celebrates election victory.

group cited Syriza's political "bankruptcy" in accepting the memorandum as a major reason for its split. It also cited "the depreciation of internal democracy and collective decisions of the party by the government's leadership."

Indeed, calls for a Syriza party conference before the final vote on the memorandum and the election were rebuffed by the Tsipras leadership.

Popular Unity did not receive a seat in parliament, falling just short of the 3% threshold with only 2.9% of the vote. "We lost the battle, but not the war," said PU leader Panagiotis Lafanazis, the former Syriza energy minister. The PU promoted a "Grexit" (Greek exit from the EU) in a capitalist, not socialist, Greece.

Other memorandum opponents in the election included the Greek Communist Party (KKE), a sectarian Stalinist party, which increased its vote only slightly to 5.5% and retained its 15 seats in parliament. Despite the crisis, the KKE has rejected any form of unity with other forces, including telling its members not to participate in the memorandum referendum. It's well known, however, that most KKE members voted "no" anyway.

The anti-capitalist coalition known as "ANTARSYA" increased its vote marginally from .64% to .85%. ANTARSYA suffered a split by two Maoist formations, ARAN and ARAS, which joined PU. ANTARSYA was extremely active in the "OXI" (no) memorandum vote campaign and anti-fascist mobilizations. Socialist action's sister party in the Fourth International, OKDE-Spartakos, is in ANTARSYA.

The violent Nazi-inspired Golden Dawn (GD) party, whose hard-core members are from the police and army, has gained support by posing as the most uncompromising opponent of the memorandum. GD received 6.99% of the vote, allowing these racist thugs to increase their seats in parliament from 17 to 18. The GD vote has risen on the Greek islands that have seen an influx of immigrants.

According to Alternate Shipping Minister Christos Zois, about 230,000 undocumented immigrants, mostly from Syria, have arrived in Greece over the previous eight months. Many come to Greece as a stopping-off point in their migration to Germany and other European countries. Molotov cocktails were thrown at refugees on the Greek islands of Lesbos and Kos. Amnesty International witnessed "thugs" with bats attacking them in Kos. Moreover, human rights groups have repeatedly criticized Greek police for heavy-handed tactics against the refugees.

GD says that all "illegal immigrants" should be rounded up and deported. A united mobilization of the entire working class is needed to smash fascism.

The dead-end Syriza strategy

Syriza's strategy, hailed by many on the international left as the wave of the future, is based on the lowest common denominator of divergent radical forces. Syriza stressed the electoral road to socialism (when socialism was even mentioned!), not popular mobilization. Its base is considered small within the union movement.

Syriza is led by the former "Eurocommunist" wing of the Greek Communist Party. Eurocommunism was a trend within the Stalinist parties of Europe, begin-

ning in the 1970s, which tended to seek reforms under capitalism while abandoning the Marxist perspective of proletarian revolution. Tsipras himself and PU leader Lafanazis were Eurocommunists. Syriza also includes various Trotskyists, Maoists, anarchists, and others. They all promised radical change and party democracy. They got neither.

A fighting working class—alongside allies such as students, women, LGBT people, and immigrants—is the *only* class capable of leading the fight for socialism. Socialists say, "Cancel the debt! For a workers government in Greece!" ■



Corporate Pinocchios

The world is still buzzing about the lies told by Volkswagen, whose diesel cars were designed to cheat on emissions tests. The public is still stunned by the price gouging of Turing Pharmaceuticals that bought the rights to manufacture a 62-year-old drug and raised the price from \$13.50 to \$750 per pill.

But the Hall of Shame would be incomplete without registering this: General Motors agreed to pay \$900 million (U.S.) to resolve criminal charges over its concealment of an ignition-switch defect. The flaw is linked to at least 169 deaths, U.S. federal prosecutors said on Sept. 17.

The settlement calls for two charges—wire fraud and scheming to conceal information from government regulators—to be dropped after three years, if the auto giant cooperates fully.

GM announced that it would spend \$575 million to settle many of the civil lawsuits filed over the scandal. This brings to over \$5.3 billion the amount GM has spent on a problem prosecutors say could have been fixed at a cost of less than a dollar per car. The expenses include government fines, compensation for victims, and the recall and repair of millions of affected vehicles. No GM officials were arrested.

—BARRY WEISLEDER



How capitalist politicians dilute social reforms

By JOE AUCIELLO

Every four years the U.S. presidential election season sprouts another set of politicians singing songs of social reform, a chorus as predictable as carolers at Christmas. Winter voices ring with words of cheer: “Peace on earth, good will to men”—words as routine and meaningless as any campaign promise of “hope and change” or “Make America Great Again.”

Every four years candidates vow to improve on the failed policies of their predecessors. New slogans and new reforms are freshly wrapped, as if they had never been offered before, as if they were tidings of comfort and joy. The election-time promise of change and reform is like catnip to capitalist politicians.

Even with a do-nothing Congress, though, new laws are passed. What happens when reform legislation is adopted? Why do the reforms that were to deliver so much so often fail to live up to their promise? Is it really possible to overhaul the political and economic systems of this country by a series of reforms, a kind of New Deal for the new millennium?

A look at several reform movements and laws is revealing in the kind of pattern that emerges, one that shows how reforms are made to be limited.

First, one major change initiative this season centers on income inequality. Currently, a national effort is underway to oppose the worst excesses of executive salaries and to create more equitable workplaces. The standard difference in pay between the top floor and the shop floor is simply staggering. The disparity and injustice are real and almost beyond belief.

Number One on a CEO Rogue’s List would be the chief of Discovery Communications (owners of the Discovery Channel, TLC, and Animal Planet), whose income is 1951 times higher than a worker in the company. Second place goes to the CEO of Chipotle Mexican Grill, whose pay ratio is a more modest 1522, which still yields bragging rights against the CEO of CVS Health, who lags behind with an income only 1192 that of a typical CVS worker.

These are the most extreme examples, but they are not so far removed from the typical corporate CEO, in whose heart the spirit of Scrooge still lives. According to the Economic Policy Institute, 50 years ago a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was paid 20 times more than the average worker. By 2013, the difference had skyrocketed to 300 times a worker’s income.

It’s no surprise, therefore, that income inequality is the rallying point for the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign. Sensing the importance of this issue and the likelihood of popular support, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton also criticized income inequality in America when she formally announced her campaign. When a candidate so closely connected to Wall Street makes some noise against her corporate sponsors (presumably with their permission), the situation must be dire indeed.

Is there, then, much comfort to be found in the reform legislation that has already been proposed or put into place? For people with faith in the system, the answer is a disheartening “no.” Reforming capitalism

by changing the laws is as effective as tying up Jell-O with rope.

In California, for instance, legislation has been proposed to offer incentives to companies that exploit their workers less obscenely. Let the CEO be paid only 25 times more than the median income of the company’s workers, and the business tax rate for the company will be lowered to 7%. When the CEO is paid 250 times or more than the average worker, the business tax rate would remain at 9%. But even this modest legislative reform has not been passed.

Of course, if some incentive-reform rule is enacted, companies have at their disposal numerous ways to beat the intent of the law. Numbers can be rigged and legal definitions can be rewritten. Companies could “outsource” their lowest-paid workers by re-hiring them as “independent contractors” who are not technically part of the workforce. As a result, the “average” worker salary would automatically rise, even if the same people were still doing the same jobs, and the CEO pay ratio would look better to government regulators. The result would be lower taxes for the company and no change at all in the CEO salary.

Progressive groups across the country that have been campaigning for corporate responsibility are excited about changes that are afoot. A new rule by the Securities and Exchange Commission, to take effect in 2017, will require large companies to disclose pay ratios and thereby expose the exorbitant rates of CEO salaries.

But public disclosure is the full extent of the reform. Within the law itself, no further action is intended or implied. Corporations are required to make no changes whatsoever. Having forced out the truth about the executive pay scale, the power of Law and Government dares do no more. The people’s elected officials approach Private Profit, not with a raised fist, but with the raised hands of surrender.

When the Law trembles before Capital, who will force real change? Workers have the greatest potential to resist corporate greed, but workers also bear the greatest risk. Most public workers are not in unions, which could provide them some support and protection. Companies find plausible-sounding excuses to isolate and fire potential “trouble-makers.” The dangers of “going-it-alone” will likely limit the amount and extent of organized resistance, especially in an economy where jobs are scarce and precarious.

Yet, pushed too far, workers still fight back. At Walmart, where the CEO received \$25.6 million last year—about half a million dollars a week—workers organized as OUR Walmart have been agitating for a \$15 hourly minimum wage. They have forced a company concession: a pay raise to \$10 an hour in 2016 for 500,000 of the company’s 1.4 million workers.

Of course, Walmart offered something so that it will not have to give up even more. The company intends to divide the OUR Walmart workers between those who will accept the concession and those who will reject it and keep fighting. The dilemma is difficult. Many Walmart workers are so badly off that the certainty of a small pay raise will outweigh the possibil-

ity of a larger and more equitable settlement. The hungry cannot easily afford to look scornfully on “half a loaf.” At this point, though, OUR Walmart workers are continuing their struggle. (See the website <http://forrespect.org>.)

Of course, a company like Walmart can maintain its profits in many ways. What’s lost on one front can be regained on another. Walmart has joined with other companies to lobby for a reform more to its liking: seeking changes in workers’ compensation laws. Corporations are asking for the standards to be rewritten so that companies themselves determine the extent of a worker’s injury and the rate of compensation. Needless to say, corporate America intends to grant injured workers even less money and require them to make more effort to obtain it.

The Wall Street influence on Washington is such that reform legislation is conceived from the beginning to have the least impact, to make the fewest inroads into private profit. When, for instance, a different Clinton was president, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 was passed and celebrated with much public commendation. It was, in fact, Bill Clinton’s first law as chief executive. Even today, former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich says he is “proud” of his efforts to implement it.

The limits of the law have become quite obvious over time. First, to qualify for 12 weeks of leave, full-time workers must have been employed at the same firm for 12 months. Most important, all of the leave is unpaid. Without an income, it’s estimated that only 40 percent of eligible workers can make much use of the law that was supposed to help them. In reality, this reform applies best to those with a trust fund or with a spouse earning an outsized salary—a corporate CEO, for instance.

Last January, in his State of the Union Address, President Obama said, “We are the only advanced country on Earth that doesn’t guarantee paid sick leave or paid maternity leave to our workers. Think about that.” In Washington, “thinking” is definitely encouraged. The Secretary of Labor has put together a program that would offer \$500,000 to any state willing to conduct a paid leave feasibility study. But that amount of thinking has not led legislators to action.

No actual law has been passed. No federal law is likely to be enacted in the foreseeable future. The United States will continue to offer a Family and Medical Leave Act that will prevent most women from taking a medical leave when they start or add to their family.

Reforms with built-in limitations

This apparent paradox—reforms designed to make no substantial changes—is evidenced throughout the political system. Consider President Obama’s Home Affordable Modification Program, intended to provide mortgage relief to struggling homeowners. A report by government officials charged with overseeing the program shows that 887,001 borrowers have obtained loan modifications, but some four million have been rejected.

A recent *New York Times* article (Aug. 2, 2015) notes, “It appears that the program has allowed big banks to run roughshod over borrowers again and again.” How is it possible? The answer is that this reform legislation was built with “two design flaws: making the program voluntary for the banks and letting those banks that participated run the process on their own.” The result is that 72% of eligible applicants have been rejected, since the actual criteria for relief is profitability for the banks, not assistance to the homeowners.

The history of federal campaign finance reform is another story beyond any paradox. Significant bipartisan measures had been achieved, at least on paper. A 2002 federal law prohibited unlimited contributions to political parties, and while the Supreme Court later shredded the substance of that law, its loopholes were always huge.

In real life all the presidential candidates from both parties find it easy to skirt the laws, including the \$2600 limit that a single donor can give to a single candidate. According to a *New York Times* report (July 26, 2015), “[P]residential hopefuls have been romancing donors, hiring staff and haunting the diners and senior centers of Manchester and Dubuque.” All this activity, all this fundraising and spending, technically occurred outside of campaign finance law.

Regulations can be made to disappear; money can be shifted into different accounts; candidates can even pretend not (yet) to be candidates—scenes from an “Alice in Wonderland” world. An illusion of legality is even better than the real thing. Candidates need only claim that “the much-promoted campaign staff they hired had other jobs. And their many, many trips to New Hampshire and Iowa had nothing to do with running for president.” It is an outrage to common sense

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but agreeable to the law.

The same *New York Times* article quotes a former lawyer of the Federal Election Commission who said, "We're in uncharted territory." Campaign reform, in other words, has been bypassed, and big money will continue to dominate the elections. It's another reform that made few or no changes.

In recent years the most significant and divisive social reform has centered on the health and medical industry with the enacting in 2010 of the Affordable Care Act (A.C.A.), or "Obamacare." It has withstood repeated "no" votes by Congressional Republicans, Senate filibusters, a government shut-down, and a legal challenge brought to the U.S. Supreme Court. With this much right-wing opposition, it would seem that the health-for-profit system itself is on life-support.

Though much about the A.C.A. is complex and confusing, that conclusion would be ill-founded. Book-length evaluations of this controversial legislation are beginning to appear, and more will certainly be published in the future. Sufficient time has passed, though, for reasonable judgments to be made.

The Washington Post summarized the findings of journalist Steven Brill's new book, "America's Bitter Pill," by noting that his study "details the backroom deals that allowed the Affordable Care Act to become law ... and why he believes the law won't do anything to keep health care costs from running wild. His assessment: the deals Democrats struck with industry to get the law passed ensured that the flawed system would remain intact" (Jan. 5, 2015).

A July 2015 article in *Harper's* magazine, ("Wrong Prescription? The failed promise of the Affordable Care Act,") points out, "The A.C.A. was sold to the public on the pledge of 'affordable, quality health care.'" The result, given the history of reform legislation in the U.S., was predictably different. "Instead, the A.C.A. was a canny restructuring of the American health-care market place, one that delivered millions of new customers to insurance companies, created new payment mechanisms for hospitals, steered more business to pharmaceutical companies, and dictated expensive, high-tech solutions for a wide range of problems."

Obamacare is riddled with shortcomings, not because of a failure of legislators' intelligence, but "because of a failure of nerve and the immense power of health-care stakeholders [so that] the A.C.A. has reinforced and accelerated many of the system's most toxic features." Designed to prevent a movement for universal health care, which would have been in the people's interest, and to preserve a market-driven health-care structure, on behalf of business interests, Obamacare has actually succeeded in its most important objective.

The example reveals the general rule. The apparent paradox in logic of any particular reform can be clarified by understanding the nature of the contradictory social forces that shaped it. Less a compromise, a reform is a hostile stand-off between ultimately competing class interests. Or, as Neil Young once sang, "They give you this/But you pay for that."

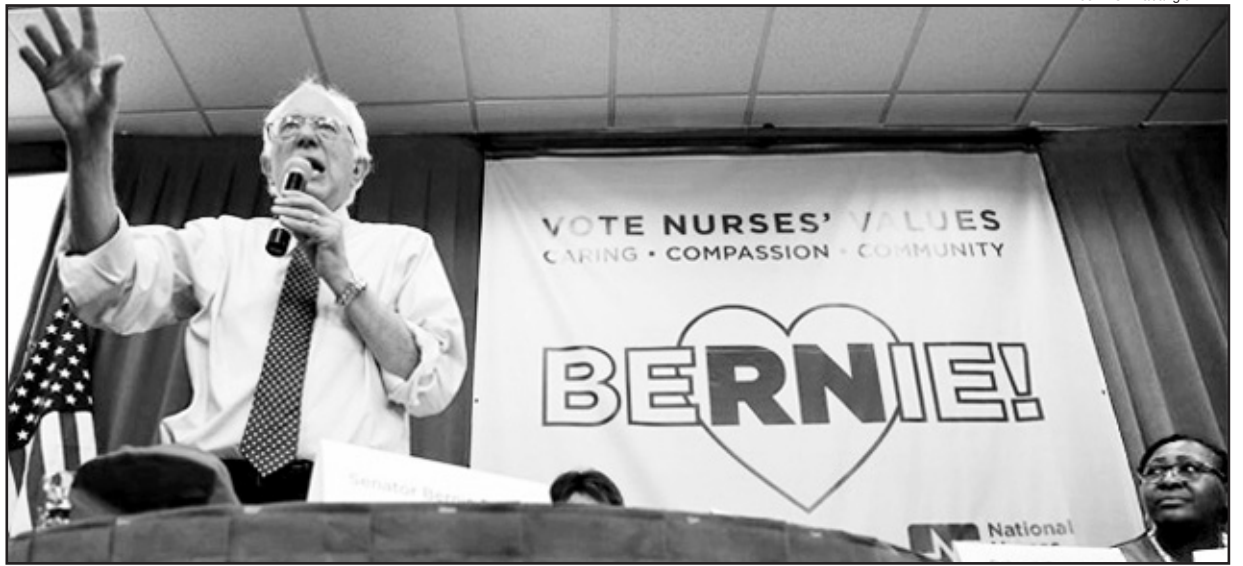
Of course, when the needs of the working class—the majority of the population—are represented by one of the two ruling-class parties, the conflict between them is an argument over the best and most effective means of sustaining corporate rule. In the debate on health care, a debate on the quality and even the saving of people's lives, the people never had a voice.

Hillary Clinton has declared her desire to be that voice, to run for president because "everyday Americans need a champion." Bernie Sanders calls for people to stand with him and start a political revolution, one that draws its inspiration from the New Deal. His is a politically adroit move, as recent polls show, but not one that will ever lead to any revolution.

In the popular imagination, the most far-reaching and successful reform of the past century was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. The reality of that program is more complex and troubling than many realize. Howard Zinn, author of "A People's History of the United States," wrote that the New Deal was "tentative, cautious."

Zinn pointed to the limits of the New Deal reforms: "It created many jobs but left 9 million unemployed. It built public housing but not nearly enough. It helped large commercial farmers but not tenant farmers. Excluded from its programs were the poorest of the poor, especially blacks. As farm laborers, migrants or domestic workers, they didn't qualify for unemployment insurance, a minimum wage, Social Security or farm subsidies" (*The Nation*, April 7, 2008).

The lessons of the recent past and current practice point to the same conclusion: The intent of a political reform—its potential socio-economic benefit—can be blunted or neutralized in its implementation or enforcement. Limits may be found, exceptions can be made, and loopholes can be created. A reform meant to aid workers and youth runs counter to the logic of capitalism, counter to the imperatives of a profit-



(Above) Bernie Sanders receives the endorsement of National Nurses United in August.

making system. *The value of a new law must never threaten the law of value. People must never be placed above profit.* Hence, the promises of a reform are often unrealized when the reform is retrofitted to a system not designed or prepared to accept it.

And yet, history also shows that ruling classes can be forced to make concessions; the profit system, in order to continue, must bend when popular pressure becomes sufficiently powerful. Reforms, however partial and fragmentary, are valuable in themselves. Certainly, Obamacare is thoroughly inadequate and no substitute for single-payer, universal health care, but the Affordable Care Act did provide medical insurance to 17 million people who had previously gone without. A small raise in pay—again, not adequate—will better enable half a million Walmart workers to buy groceries *and* pay the rent.

Reformism's dead end

In addition to any specific reform, or series of reforms, there is much to consider about the best and most practical way to bring them into being. Lobbying efforts, mailing campaigns to Congress, even confrontations with presidential candidates may seem necessary to many activists. Some would argue, with apparent logic, that reforms can best be implemented by support for a reform party, like the Green Party in the United States. Some supporters of reform go further to suggest that the creation of reforms, one by one, can ultimately replace capitalism. That belief can be a fatal illusion, as it was for President Salvador Allende and the Chilean working class in 1973.

A few years prior to that catastrophe in South America, veteran socialist George Breitman wrote, "Revolutionary Marxists, starting with Marx, have never been opposed to the struggle for reforms. ... The essence of Marxist strategy, of any revolutionary strategy in our time, is to combine the struggle for reforms with the struggle for revolution. This is the only way in which to build a revolutionary party capable of providing reliable leadership ... in action, from the struggle for reforms to the struggle for power and revolution" (see Breitman's "Malcolm X and the Third American Revolution," page 230).

Unfortunately, these ideas and insights are not well known or yet understood among many supporters of reform-minded Democrats. Revolutionary Marxist organizations that have acquired tactical and strategic lessons from decades of political struggle have been

too small and have too little influence to transmit their programmatic heritage. So, a new generation of activists has no road map for the difficult route it travels. A new movement must even learn the basic but not-so-obvious task of distinguishing friend from foe.

Not all the advice is helpful. For instance, some socialists argue that the Bernie Sanders campaign and the Black Lives Matter activists should merge to create "the program needed by our society" and "perhaps a movement for socialism." This is the position of Solidarity National Committee member Dan LaBotz: <http://newpol.org/content/sanders-and-black-lives-matter-great-debate-our-time>.

Yet, neither the Sanders campaign nor the BLM movement is explicitly anti-capitalist, and no platform that such a "merger" might adopt in the electoral arena would go beyond the call for reforms within the present system. To paraphrase Lenin, bourgeois reformism is not a step towards socialism but is instead a means of combating socialism.

Such hard-won lessons from the past are markers on today's political road map. As another socialist veteran once wrote: "It is clear that any further advance—whether in health care, public housing, labor law reform, Social Security benefits, civil rights, or any other area of badly needed social legislation—will be made only through strikes, massive protest demonstrations, and other forms of independent political action against the employers and their political agencies" (Frank Lovell, "Health Care: key issue in coal strike," *The Militant*, Jan. 27, 1978).

A political struggle independent of any bourgeois party, a fight aimed directly at the dictatorship of capital, is not a new idea, but it is still a necessary one. Political principles are not commodities subject to the mantra of Madison Avenue, which holds that "new" always means improved. An older idea may prove to be better.

The movement today requires the leadership of an independent and revolutionary socialist organization that can offer clear alternatives to the reformist programs of the Sanders campaign, the Green Party, etc., which would limit political action to the orbit of capitalist elections. The most urgent and ultimately most effective task for activists is to join in the effort to build that kind of anti-capitalist party. ■

... Labor struggles

(continued from page 2)

cial disclosures indicate they have already committed at least \$25 million to these campaigns—more than they can ever reasonably expect to recoup in dues. There hasn't been this level of staff and financial support for low-wage organizing since the Miners under John L. Lewis bankrolled new CIO unions in the 1930s.

Like Lewis, the present leadership of SEIU undoubtedly has motives other than pure altruism, but in any case, SEIU president Mary Kay Henry has charted a far different course than the rotten regime of Andy Stern that she replaced. We, of course, don't know what will be the duration or ultimate destination of this journey in a new direction. It probably remains to be determined. But for now, the door is wide open, the welcome mat is out, for all who want to participate in these struggles of and for low-wage workers.

I believe these examples are sufficient to refute claims that the labor movement is terminally ill. Despite the decline in union density, despite the low numbers of major strikes, despite the spread of "Right-to-Work" legislation—all legitimate con-

cerns—we are seeing workers wanting to fight still gravitate to the traditional mass working-class organizations. Even the worker centers that arose in a period of union inaction are mostly pursuing partnership alliances with trade unions.

The recent Browning-Ferris ruling by the NLRB has a real potential for galvanizing greater organizing and bargaining advances than at any time since the passage of Taft-Hartley. The shared responsibility of companies who contract out much of their work, or who operate through franchises, makes it possible to not only take on the fast food chain franchises. It will also put wind in the sails of organizing efforts among independent port truck drivers, warehouse workers such as those in the great Chicago Logistics Belt—long a target of UE—airport service workers, taxi and "ride share" drivers, newspaper delivery carriers, and much more.

Whether this potential can be realized is far from certain. But certainly there will be some major attempts. Socialists can both learn and teach in these efforts, possibly influence some of them, and surely recruit out of them. ■

Readers of *Socialist Action* who have suggestions for labor-oriented news or analytical articles for our paper can contact billonasch@kclabor.org.

China's decline exposes world capitalist crisis

Claudio Muñoz / The Economist



By GARY BILLS and JEFF MACKLER

Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen announced in mid-September that interest rates charged to U.S. banks would once again remain unchanged—close to zero. She also expressed concerns about the still “weak U.S. recovery” since the disastrous collapse beginning in 2008 that shook financial markets and caused unprecedented harm to working people.

China's troubled economy also figured into Fed policymakers' calculations. The Chinese economy is touted as the second largest in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and is heavily invested in by many of the largest U.S. and world corporations as a chief source of superprofits.

In late August, headlines around the world featured daily accounts of China's plunging stock markets, sharp drops in China's trade balance, multiple currency devaluations, government exaggeration or falsification of growth rates, and a generally cooling economy—1.7 percent growth rate in the second quarter.

To cheapen the cost of its exports against rising competition from even lower wage Asian nations, China devalued its currency, the renminbi or yuan, five times in a matter of weeks after pegging it to the dollar for ten years. Bank loan interest rates were lowered five times this year along with cash reserve (liquidity) requirements for banks.

The mis-named Chinese Communist Party, a capitalist outfit if there ever was one, spent more than \$485 billion to prop up Shanghai Stock Exchange prices and ordered the sale of pension funds to buy \$313 billion in floundering stocks and other assets, “as soon as possible.” The panicked top bureaucrats encouraged middle-income and higher paid workers to buy stocks by putting up their houses as loan collateral. To stem the cascading stock-market decline, the selling of stocks was criminalized while some stocks were frozen in place—withdrawn from sale outright to prevent further panic selling.

A Sept. 10 *New York Times* article captures the psyche of China's elite as they sought to stem the free fall of China's stock markets: “Anxiety in the industry surged last week after Li Yifei, the prominent China chief of the world's largest publicly traded hedge fund, disappeared and *Bloomberg News* reported that she had been taken into custody to assist a police inquiry into market volatility. Her employer, the London-based Man Group, did little to dispel fears, declining to comment on her whereabouts.

“Ms. Li resurfaced on Sunday and denied that she had been detained, saying that she had been in ‘an industry meeting’ and ‘meditating’ at a Taoist retreat.” Few believe that “meditation” was central to the mo-

Perhaps a billion Chinese still live in poverty while the ruling bureaucracy privatizes and dismantles state-owned businesses and social services.

tives of a top leader of the world's largest publicly traded hedge fund!

The Times article drives home this point by quoting another top hedge fund speculator: “There is, generally, a very nervous atmosphere, as people wait to see the outcome of some of these investigations and how deep the rabbit hole goes,” said Effie Vasilopoulos, a partner at the Hong Kong office of the Sidley Austin law firm who works with hedge funds that invest in mainland China. “How wide a net is the government going to cast in terms of looking at foreign firms and their operations—not just onshore, but also offshore as well?”

Indeed, according to data presented by Australian socialist scholar Sam King, “Foreign direct investment, foreign joint ventures, foreign contracts and foreign technology have been the drivers of China's expanded commodity production” (see King's “Lenin's Theory of Imperialism: a defence of its relevance in the 21st century”).

It's not surprising that Chinese stock market prices have fallen. Prices had skyrocketed some 250 percent in the last year, peaking in mid-June and then declining into late August, losing about 43 percent—nearly half of the yearly gains in a matter of weeks. At the height of China's August stock-market free fall, the world's combined stock-market losses erased nearly \$3 trillion in value in three days!

Working people who followed the government's advice to throw their economic fate to the stock market winds have surely been hurt. Yet the Chinese stock market's mad gyrations, as with its U.S. counterpart, is not the real economy, but rather a reflection of the more general crisis of the world capitalist system. China's GDP growth rate has been cooling since 2010, when it was reported at 10 percent or more annually. Today the growth rate is 7 percent or less.

The Chinese government has employed several economic stimulus programs that parallel those in the U.S., but the economy has responded with less vigor

each time. For 30 years, China has followed a growth strategy that emphasized exports and huge domestic infrastructure projects. This was heavily promoted by foreign investments, pushing China ahead of Germany and Japan, similarly focused on commodity exports but with a qualitatively greater per capita internal market.

China's per capita GDP ranking, 79th in the world, is not very impressive considering its huge population. Hundreds of millions, perhaps a billion, Chinese still live in impoverished conditions while the governing capitalist bureaucracy systematically privatizes and dismantles the country's state-owned businesses and social services.

In truth, China's “successful” export-driven economy and its GDP figures mask a cruel reality. A huge proportion of Chinese exports are the commodities of thousands of non-Chinese multi-national corporations (MNCs), owned and controlled by the world's great imperialist powers, with U.S.-dominated transnational corporations number one on the list.

In July 2010 China's Ministry of Commerce reported that “foreign invested enterprises account for over half of China's exports and imports; they provide 30 percent of Chinese industrial output, and generate 22 percent of industrial profits

while employing only 10% of Chinese labor” in basic industry as compared to the past. The high productivity set in motion by the highly automated plants of transnational corporations combined with an intensification of the labor process to produce wonders for the foreign-owned companies (for a time) and misery for the Chinese masses.

These are the figures from a half-decade ago. The proportion of foreign direct investment (FDI) even increased since that time—until recently.

When China was admitted to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001, its capitalist leaders willingly accepted the “free market” terms that were imposed, including massive and virtually unrestricted foreign investment, ownership, and control by the world's imperial powers of the corporations it established. China became the imperialist world's central commodity assembly and export platform, free to employ near slave labor at will—with the usually corrupt local capitalist “Communist Party” oligarchs siphoning off enough to produce 213 Chinese billionaires, not counting Hong Kong's 53.

Imperialism has seen China's 1.3 billion working people, at least until recently, as nothing less than the world's largest source of cheap labor. The U.S. corporate shift of production from the formerly highly-unionized northern U.S. states to the low-wage non-union South, and then to Mexico's border maquiladora super-low-wage assembly plants, to Haiti and El Salvador, and finally to Asia, was a conscious decision to lower production costs to remain competitive on world markets. Without doubt, China's emergence as the world's greatest cheap labor export platform comes at the expense of the displaced workers in the rest of the world. The Chinese “miracle,” a non-Chinese MNC-driven model, is nothing less than world imperialism's legacy to poor people everywhere, not to mention workers in the U.S.

The world's competing multi-national corporations similarly had no alternative to stay in the never-ending race to dominate world markets. They too moved to China and other poor Asian nations. In virtually every case, the “secret” to their “success” was to transfer industrial production from the central capitalist nations to the periphery—to the poor nations of the world where workers could be had for a pittance.

Further, with this growing “de-industrialization” of the U.S. and Europe, the world's imperialist nations build state-of-the-art productive factories that require fewer Chinese and Asian workers to produce ever more commodities to sell in the increasingly saturated world market. This has had the triple effect of

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reducing the price of labor in the “advanced” nations—the perpetual “race to the bottom”—while employing less and less workers in the periphery, while temporarily increasing profit rates for the super rich.

Without doubt, Chinese capitalists increasingly understand that Chinese-owned factories, many operating at extremely low levels of labor productivity, are no match for their MNC rivals. Between 2007 and 2012 labor productivity rose 11 percent annually in contrast to Thailand’s 8 percent and Indonesia’s 7 percent.

In 2013 China became the largest market for robots, buying 20% of all those made that year, according to the International Federation of Robotics. But it still has just 30 robots per 10,000 workers in manufacturing, compared with 323 in Japan. Foxconn, the Taiwanese firm that makes Apple’s iPhones and has more than a million employees in China, says that it wants robots to complete 70% of its assembly-line work within three years.

China’s aim at creating an internal market of middle and high-income professional functionaries and a small layer of higher paid workers, as is the case with all the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is coming to an end. The last decade of 10 percent or higher growth rates in all these nations is likewise winding down, with Brazil’s GDP, for example, stagnant along with most of the others.

Indeed, the world’s central imperialist nations have no compunction against moving their plants to even lower-wage Asian nations as they are doing with Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, etc. And why not? Chinese factory workers, on average, earn \$27.50 per day as compared to their counterparts in Indonesia, who earn \$8.60, or the Vietnamese who labor at \$6.70 for multi-national corporations.

For the world’s transnationals, investment in China is contingent on its continued subservience and profitability. This includes massive tax breaks to foreign corporations and giant infrastructure improvements, like the construction of untold miles of rail lines leading deep into China’s even lower-wage interior. When Chinese officials decline to intervene in labor strikes against foreign corporations, usually to promote their less efficient Chinese-run companies, the result can only be the eventual transfer of entire plants to even lower-wage nations, as with Vietnam, where capitalist “Communist Party” tops are more than eager to sell their workers for less.

A few decades ago, China’s average wage in some instances amounted to six cents an hour; teenage women from the countryside were virtually locked in dormitory factories and forced to work up to 80 hours per week. Today, most factory assembly-line workers labor at \$3.44 per hour, if they are paid at all. Indeed, the great proportion of China’s increasing number of labor strikes, an estimated 200 per month) are over “arrear payments,” that is, the workers were not paid by Chinese corporate owners, who sometimes disappear and/or abandon their less competitive plants or otherwise rely on their corrupt crony superiors to enforce labor discipline.

The case of Apple Computer, among the world’s most profitable corporations, reveals a bitter truth about China’s development. Not long ago, Apple’s i-Pods sold in the U.S. for \$300. Of this, U.S.-based retailers got \$75. Apple’s share was \$80. Another significant portion went to a variety of transportation and distribution outfits. Chinese workers and bosses got \$2.61 between them!

Sam King, debunking the myth that China operates as one of the world’s great economic superpowers, cites a 2013 Milberg and Winkler study that expresses the Apple data above in a different form. He writes, “In 2010 Apple imported iPhones for \$179 and sold them for \$600 on the US retail market. Such a mark-up would be impossible if Chinese capital, or even Foxconn, Apple’s Taiwanese subcontractor, controlled the high-tech aspects of production. iPhone exports from China to the US in 2009 were \$2 billion. The portion of that revenue going to Chinese workers, bosses, and all other Chinese costs was only \$73.3 million or 3.6 percent.” With Apple’s intention to more fully automate its Foxconn facilities, that percentage, as well as the number of Chinese workers employed, must continue to decline.

King presents some additional data demonstrating that high-tech corporations operating in China, or anywhere else in the world, secure profits far exceeding the relative low-tech Chinese corporate entities.

He writes, “A capitalist economy encompassing one sixth of the planet’s population must possess some gigantic companies. China does. Four of the world’s top 10 corporations by gross profits are Chinese. However, this doesn’t really tell us much. Here is the list in



Imperialism has seen China’s working people as the world’s largest source of cheap labor.

(Above) A garment factory in China.

order of gross profits, with each company’s *return on assets (RoA)* in brackets: Exxon Mobil (13), Apple (24), Gazprom (10), Industrial Commercial Bank of China (1), China Construction Bank (1), Volkswagen (7), Shell (7), Chevron (11), Agricultural Bank of China (1) and Bank of China (1). Thus, according to *Fortune*, imperialist giant MNCs’ average return on assets is 12 times higher than that of Chinese monopolies!”

Were this not the case—that is, were Chinese workers the actual beneficiaries of rapid super-exploitive capitalist development—there would be little or no multi-national corporations operating in China today.

Undoubtedly, there is an affluent layer of the population, including many directly related to the ruling elite or consciously selected talented people the elite need to run a large, sophisticated economy. But, as with all the BRICS nations, this is a relatively thin layer, perhaps 10-20 percent—insufficient to stimulate the larger economy over the long term. To increase its economic weight, this layer has been extended significant amounts of easy credit to purchase or invest in speculative real estate ventures and the stock markets. This has resulted in huge price bubbles, in which vulnerable groups stand to lose everything quickly.

China’s real estate market is a case in point, with speculation in the construction of entire new cities, and associated massive condominium complexes aimed at accommodating millions standing empty. The expected mass emergence of middle-class buyers failed to materialize. Those who financed the projects—U.S. shadow banks and hedge fund speculators, as well as China’s speculating elite, and illegal lenders—stand to lose big time.

The rapid and extreme measures recently taken by the ruling bureaucracy reveal that they are in a state of panic. The restoration of a capitalist system in China under Communist Party tutelage, so the bureaucracy pledged, would lead to a booming economy with a rising standard of living for all, without the crushing crises that inevitably accompany the system of private profiteering. But it is now becoming clear that there is no “Chinese miracle” just as the rise (and subsequent fall) of yesterday’s free market, neo-liberal export-oriented “Asian tigers” proved to be ephemeral, at least for the vast working-class majority.

Indeed, China’s repeated currency devaluations aimed at lowering the cost of Chinese commodities in the U.S. and other foreign markets can be expected to bring on similar devaluations across Asia as each nation and its elite vie for ever shrinking markets. Such “currency wars” among and between export oriented peripheral/poorer nations are the inevitable result of a highly globalized world system in deep crisis. A stagnating U.S. economy with a working class suffering from ever-deepening austerity and real wage declines coupled with faltering European and Japanese economies, certainly cannot count on China to “save the world.”

In a real sense, China’s current policies implemented to stabilize its fragile economy parallel those implemented in the U.S. following the 2008 meltdown. Tril-

ions of dollars were pumped into the coffers of failing banks and major corporations to prevent their imminent collapse. Virtually free money, to the tune of \$89 billion monthly, was injected into the economy, supposedly to stimulate growth and provide “trickle down” jobs to a hammered working class.

In truth, the injection went straight to corporate America, which in turn invested this “free money” into stock-market ventures that drove prices to all-time highs, while employment remained at lows unseen since the Great Depression—as measured by the government’s 65 percent labor participation rate. (This statistic blatantly contradicts the government’s falsified 5.1 percent unemployment rate.)

During this fake recovery and before, some million union jobs were lost annually as manufacturing shifted to low wage nations—China in particular and now elsewhere.

After seven years of this “pump priming” of corporate America, important elements of the ruling rich have come to understand that the endless printing of money to keep the capitalist system afloat has perhaps reached a limit. With every passing month, Wall Street riveted its attention on whether Janet Yellen’s Federal Reserve would end the free flow of money. Wild swings of the stock market, led the speculator gang to seek potentially more profitable outlets, including in China’s then booming stock markets. Undoubtedly, a number were burned in the effort.

Capitalism by its nature is an unplanned, boom and bust, anarchistic economic system, driven forward by the pursuit of private profits by individuals and corporations come hell or high water. Capitalism’s apologists claim, through some twist of magical thinking, that the social good of society is automatically maximized if capitalists are allowed to maraud freely, within and without national borders, doing whatever they need to do regardless of the cost in human lives or to the planet earth itself.

China’s ruling class, as with most others, hold to the belief that it can control capitalism’s wild nature. They are not the first to engage in such self-delusion. For more than 35 years, China’s so-called Communist Party has transformed itself from a dictatorial, Stalinist bureaucracy, controlling a socialized, command (undemocratic) economy into a true capitalist ruling class overseeing a privatized economy that remains in large part subordinate to the great imperialist powers.

The key flaw in this plan is that capitalism does not and never will lend itself to command control of its currents.

China’s recent dramatic moves to stabilize its faltering economy essentially exposes the myth that BRICS nations or any others can escape the central contradictions inherent in the predatory system itself. World capitalism’s hope that opening up China’s vast markets and people to capitalist penetration and exploitation would, at least for a time, save the world is coming to an ignominious end.

Today’s perpetual wars and associated headlong rush to climate-crisis/global warming-driven oblivion are inseparable from the uncontrolled and anti-human operations of the vicious for-profit-only capitalist system. Its replacement at the hands of the world’s working masses, and the establishment of a socialist world, where human needs are given preference in all spheres, is a prerequisite to humanity’s future. ■

Remembering Eugene V. Debs

By MARK T. HARRIS

In the annals of American socialism, the name of Eugene V. Debs stands out as the most prominent personality in the movement's history. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, the self-described independent socialist now campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, considers Debs one of his heroes.

It's almost certain Debs would not have approved of Sanders' running for nomination in the Democratic Party. As a leader of the early 20th-century Socialist Party, Debs once said he was more proud of going to jail for leading a rail workers' strike than early in his career serving in the Indiana state legislature as an elected Democratic representative.

Unfortunately, there's a tendency among defenders of the status quo to turn great historical figures into harmless icons, saintly martyrs to high ideals who loved everyone and threatened no one. This to a degree has happened with the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., a radical fighter for civil rights in his day that the political establishment now treats with a kind of perfunctory reverence.

Sanders may have his own ideas about Debs' legacy, but at least he recognizes the historical significance of the socialist leader's life. These days Debs (1855-1926) is not nearly as well known as King, or as he was in his own lifetime. In this way the historical legacy of Debs has endured a similar affront, reducing him in popular culture to more or less a historical footnote. As such, conservative AFL-CIO bureaucrats probably don't mind referencing the old Debs legend as a labor hero once in a while, forgetting his militant opposition to World War I or support for the Bolshevik-led 1917 revolution in Russia.

Radical vision, principled politics

Actually, some of the sanitizing occurred while Debs was still alive, as in socialist editor David Karsner's sympathetic biographical portrayal of Debs published in 1919, when he was in federal prison for attacking the war effort and supporters were trying to win public sympathy to his case. But Debs was far more than the benevolent humanitarian with a little book of "kind sayings," as writer Floyd Dell of *The Liberator* complained about Karsner's portrayal, which he and others thought downplayed his revolutionary principles.

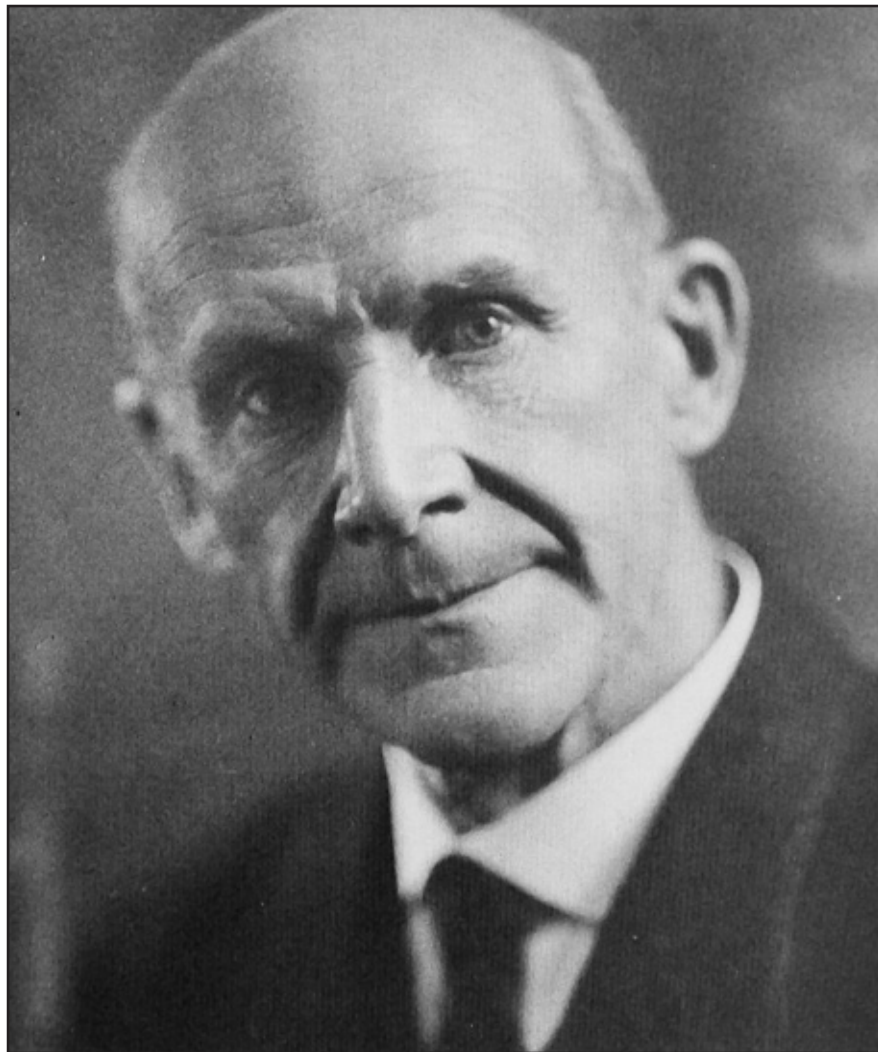
In fact, Debs was an articulate, far-reaching critic of American society, staunchly anti-capitalist and opposed to both the Democratic and Republican parties, which he saw as controlled by Wall Street. In his five campaigns as the Socialist Party candidate for president of the United States, Debs excoriated the economic exploitation of workers, including the then rampant abuses of child labor, with rare oratorical skill. He advocated for unions in all major industries and promoted a vision of socialism as grassroots economic democracy. In a deeply racist, patriarchal society, he was also staunchly anti-racist and pro-women's rights.

When war hysteria swept the country, Debs openly defied the warmongers to oppose U.S. entry into World War I. He did so not as a pacifist, but because he saw the world war as an inter-imperialist dispute among the ruling classes of competing capitalist nations. He saw no reason for working people to die for a war they had neither started nor in which they had any real stake.

Such was the climate of wartime intolerance that Debs was charged with sedition for *making a speech* against the war in Canton, Ohio, in June 1918. His sentence was 10 years in prison. The sedition charge fell under the Espionage Act of 1917, a law promoted by President Woodrow Wilson that essentially criminalized free speech. Indeed, under the wartime repression several thousand labor, anarchist, socialist, and pacifist voices were similarly prosecuted. Even distribution of antiwar literature through the U.S. mail became illegal. For his part, Wilson labeled Debs a "traitor."

Debs appealed the conviction, but in 1919 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld his original 10-year sentence. The court took precedent from a similar case earlier that year involving another convicted Socialist Party leader. Then Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes had made the famous argument that free speech didn't mean the right to yell fire in a crowded theater. Holmes's metaphor was specious. In this case, the crowded theater was a European battlefield red in blood and violence, the fire of inter-imperialist war and millions of casualties very much a reality.

In truth, Debs was yelling fire in a burning theater, engraving the likes of the sanctimonious Wilson by identify-



ing the ruling classes of Europe and America for what they essentially were—arsonists of human hope and civilization. Mass murderers.

If the "liberal" Wilson had his way, the aging Debs would have stayed in prison for the full sentence—and likely died there. When word came in 1920 of Wilson's refusal to commute Debs's sentence, despite notable public pressure to do so, the socialist leader smuggled a statement out of the prison denouncing Wilson as "the most pathetic figure in the world. It is he, not I, who needs a pardon," declared a defiant Debs.

Ironically, it was Republican President Warren G. Harding who would commute Debs's sentence in December 1921. Considering that even A. Mitchell Palmer, the U.S. Attorney General who led many of the wartime raids and arrests of radicals, had come to favor Debs's release from prison, Wilson's personal vindictiveness toward Debs was likely fueled by the way the latter's principled antiwar stance exposed the hypocrisy of the president's moralistic posturing as some sort of progressive visionary of "world peace."

Such was the world of that time that the man who sent some 116,000 young Americans to their battlefield deaths, who took a hammer blow to the free speech rights of peace advocates, would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919. Yet Debs, who never killed anyone and was guilty only of the deed of the word, had his freedom cruelly taken away.

Such our world also remains. Now another Nobel Prize winner in the White House embraces this same Espionage Act with vigor unprecedented since Wilson's day. This time the persecuted include Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden, John Kiriakou, and other "whistleblowers" who dare to expose U.S. war crimes and threats to political freedoms by the U.S. national security state.

A man of a different cloth

As a principled left-wing socialist, Debs was cut from a different cloth than most mainstream politicians, then and now. How many career politicians today would be willing to go to prison for their views and ideals? In the 2008 primary campaign, then Democratic Senator Barack Obama couldn't even bring himself to openly declare his support for same-sex marriage rights, which he did in fact privately support. Instead, fearful of losing votes, he publicly insisted he only supported "civil unions" for gays and lesbians.

This admission comes from former Obama advisor David Axelrod in his recently published book, "Believer: My Forty Years in Politics." Obama was following Axelrod's advice to lie about the issue, counseling the future president that he would lose support from conservative Black churches. That's not to particularly single out Obama. After all, that's just politics!

Actually, for Debs that was not politics. For him, political leadership always meant telling the people the truth. "I am not going to say anything that I do not think," declared Debs in the 1918 speech that earned his conviction for sedition. Debs believed in organizing working peo-

ple to realize their own power, through independent social and political action, union organizing, and building grassroots mass movements for social justice. It was a vision of a new society that inspired him, one in which popular economic democracy would rule and inequality and exploitation would be vanquished to history's proverbial dustbin.

Sustained by his identification with the socialist cause, Debs went to prison at the age of 63 characteristically optimistic and defiant. After a few months in a West Virginia facility, he was transferred to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta.

Debs did not exactly languish in prison. In 1920 he ran for president in the national elections on the Socialist Party ticket, earning over 900,000 votes, or about 3.5 percent of the total vote. Indeed, his fighting spirit remained strong. But Debs was also in poor health in prison. He suffered from chronic myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart muscle, a condition he had for much of his adult life. The stress of the prison environment, including poor nutrition, caused his health to worsen. At times he was hospitalized, while his weight dropped from 185 pounds to 160.

When finally released in December 1921, Debs returned home to Terre Haute, Ind., greeted by an enthusiastic crowd of more than 30,000 people. There he hoped to rest and regain his strength, but as the months passed his health did not improve. In the summer of 1922, Debs decided to register as a patient at the naturopathic Lindlahr Sanitarium in the Chicago suburb of Elmhurst, Ill.

Debs stayed at Lindlahr for more than four months, benefiting from a strict but healthful diet, exercise, physical therapy, nature walks, and other restorative treatments. He became fond of the Lindlahr staff, telling his brother that his palpitations, back pain, and exhaustion had lessened considerably as a result of the "nature cure" regimen he was following.

Debs returned to work for the Socialist Party, speaking around the country, and returned again to Lindlahr in 1924. Unfortunately, by 1926 Debs health began to take another turn for the worse. Larger doses of digitalis prescribed by his Terre Haute physician, Madge Stephens, MD, could not reverse his failing heart condition. In the final weeks of his life, Debs returned to Lindlahr on Dr. Stephen's advice, hoping for yet another reprieve from his suffering. After collapsing while walking back from a visit at the nearby home of friend Carl Sandburg, Debs lapsed into a coma and died on October 20. He was 70 years old.

The political legacy

As a politician, Debs was primarily a speaker and writer, skills he used to great effect in his campaigns for elected office. As a party leader, Debs had a tendency to avoid the many internal factional debates in the all-inclusive Socialist Party. In doing so he sometimes became, as contemporary socialist and early Communist Party leader James P. Cannon later recalled, a pawn of those who by every measure were far less the leader Debs was.

Yet perhaps even this weakness stemmed from one of Debs's attributes. By nature Debs was an engaged, generous personality, capable of "beautiful friendliness," as Cannon described. As a man steeped in the spirit of human solidarity, it went against the grain of his personality to engage too much in the sometimes heated, vituperative debates that can mark the internal life of a political party. Instead Debs preferred to reserve the full flame of his words and spirit for those who oppressed the ordinary people, the poor, the dispossessed and exploited whose cause he spent his life championing.

Whatever his limits, the record of Debs stands in tribute to the heights an individual can ascend in devoting their life to the cause of human liberation. Unlike a wealthy narcissist like Donald Trump, Debs saw himself essentially only as an instrument of the cause he served.

When in the 1920s Carl Sandburg told him he hoped to write a tribute to his friend, Debs begged off, telling the great writer and poet he feared there was "not enough of me to warrant any such venture." Nor was Debs a politician like Hillary Clinton, long ensconced in the visionless "realpolitik" of the Washington beltway, a liberal war hawk and friend of Wall Street, charging private groups \$200,000 or more a speech.

Neither was his brand of socialism limited to democratic reform of capitalism, to softening the harsh facts of inequality under capitalism without getting rid of capitalism itself, as Bernie Sanders represents.

The life and legacy of Eugene V. Debs stands as a rich

(continued on page 9)

Leon Trotsky: Revolutionary Fighter

By JEFF MACKLER

Leon Trotsky, By Paul LeBlanc, "Leon Trotsky," Reaktion Books, distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2015, 224 pages, \$16.95 paperback

Paul LeBlanc's new and admirable brief biography of Leon Trotsky comes on the 75th anniversary of Trotsky's assassination in Coyoacan, Mexico, at the hands of Stalinist agent Ramon Mercader. Trotsky, along with Vladimir Lenin, was the co-leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, the world's first socialist revolution. This was an event that changed the course of world history in establishing for the first time a government and state of the working class—a workers' state—which abolished capitalism and ruled society through democratic working-class institutions (soviets) that advanced the interests of the vast majority.

Interest in the ideas of Leon Trotsky, as LeBlanc aptly notes, has far from waned in recent decades, with one or another book, novel, and other works—poems, plays, films—focusing on Trotsky's revolutionary socialist ideas published on average every six months. LeBlanc is a lifelong revolutionary socialist activist and scholar, currently Professor of History at La Roche College in Pittsburgh. He is the author of "Unfinished Leninism" and co-editor of "Trotsky's Writings from Exile."

LeBlanc sets out to focus on the latter period of Trotsky's life when, following his failed Left Opposition efforts to challenge Stalin's bureaucratic regime, he was expelled from the central leadership of the Bolshevik Party and exiled, first to Siberia and then to Prinkipo, a small island off the Turkish coast. As with any serious scholar, however, LeBlanc does not refrain from covering critical aspects of Trotsky's leading role during the Soviet Union's revolutionary period.

LeBlanc writes that "to understand the man, we must, of course, look at his entire life—but in some ways the most decisive qualities of this revolutionary are to be found in the Trotsky who, in order to remain true to the ideals that animated his entire life, followed a trajectory that took him out of the center of power. This was the doomed but determined fighter who sought to defend and explain the relevance of the heroic best that was the early communist tradition.

"He expended immense energy to place the recent revolutionary experience—including achievement, mistakes, and failures—into perspective, and to use such insights for analyzing and battling global crises, new totalitarianisms and the deepening violence that engulfed humanity from 1929 to 1940."

While LeBlanc properly refers to Trotsky as a "brilliant innovative theorist," early on in his book he nonetheless, and strangely, refers to "aspects of unoriginality in Trotsky's thought, especially in relation to the much-vaunted theory of permanent revolution, his analysis of Stalin-



(Above) Leon Trotsky (rt.) in Mexico with Farrell Dobbs of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party.

ism, his prescriptions for defeating Hitler, and the much misunderstood Transitional Program" (emphasis in original).

Here LeBlanc's weak side, or super-objective "scholarly" impulse to present a "balanced" view of Trotsky's politics, at least at first, is far off the mark. While he attributes this "unoriginality" to the fact that Marx and other revolutionaries had previously dealt with similar issues, none did so in the context of the actuality of the Russian Revolution, not to mention Trotsky's Marxist epic analysis of the conditions that led to the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the rise of fascism in Germany, and the necessity of the workers' united front to thwart Hitler's drive for power.

Using LeBlanc's method, one might easily point to the "unoriginality" of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity since Einstein undoubtedly based his ideas on the accomplishments of the mathematicians and physicists who preceded him. Indeed, were we to apply this ahistorical conception to any human field of endeavor, we would be compelled to discount as "unoriginal" the contributions of Beethoven in music or Manet and Picasso in art. The latter artists were trained in the school of classical realism, much as Marx trained in the classical economic theories first advanced by Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Fortunately, LeBlanc's "unoriginal" label with regard to a number of Trotsky's key contributions to Marxism, gives way to a valuable and accurate exposition of Trotsky's central ideas.

Indeed, perhaps forgetful of his initial evaluation, LeBlanc spends considerable time explaining the brilliance and uniqueness of Trotsky's ideas, especially when contrasted to their twisted distortions at the hands of Stalin, his heirs, and Trotsky's pro-capitalist critics.

Undoubtedly, Trotsky himself sought to root in Marxist theory his views and

the absolutely necessity of their relevance in the fight against Stalin, but to the end of returning the Soviet Union to its revolutionary roots as opposed to affirming some religious-type dogma.

At times, I did find LeBlanc's effort at balance a bit disturbing. He has the habit of making statements that are patently untrue or distorted, only to soon afterward present the other side of the equation, in which he almost always returns to a clear-sighted affirmation of Trotsky's political conceptions and practice. Perhaps this is just the required or acquired academic expression of LeBlanc's work, wherein "balance" is a prerequisite to publication.

Like this reviewer, LeBlanc received his initial education in revolutionary socialist politics from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), founded in 1928 by James P. Cannon and other expelled U.S. Communist Party members. Trotsky himself played a key role in the formation of the SWP, once the preeminent revolutionary socialist party in the U.S. until its degeneration beginning in 1979. That LeBlanc retains the essential lessons preserved in the SWP's half-century of leading revolutionary Marxist work is a testament to his integrity.

In a few important instances, however, Paul LeBlanc briefly challenges Trotsky's views on critical questions, as with his interpretation of the events surrounding the 1921 Red Army's crushing of the Kronstadt Rebellion during the height of the civil war. Without a single reference to Trotsky's writings on this subject—one that has inflamed anarchist passions and anti-Leninist/Trotskyist sentiment to this day—LeBlanc faults Trotsky, who led the Red Army's quashing of this "rebellion" that threatened the very existence of the nascent Soviet state by opening the door to a possible British imperial invasion.

Trotsky was the central leader of the 1.5 million-person Red Army that successfully and heroically defended the belea-

guered Soviet Union when it was invaded by the armies of 14 nations, including armies from opposed sides of the first world imperialist war.

Similarly, and again without a single reference to Trotsky's writings, LeBlanc comes close to identifying Trotsky's views with those of Joseph Stalin with regard to the latter's disastrous 1929 collectivization of agriculture and associated slaughter of untold tens of thousands or more of Russian peasants. Serious students of Marxism and its revolutionary practice would do well to revisit these questions from Trotsky's vantage point.

Despite these significant lapses, LeBlanc's book is a modest but important contribution toward the education of today's emerging youthful revolutionaries. The author properly references a number of Trotsky's key writings as landmark accomplishments and necessary readings in revolutionary socialist literature, including Trotsky's magnificent three-volume "History of the Russian Revolution" and his autobiography, "My Life."

Trotsky bibliographer Lewis Sinclair long ago told this reviewer that Trotsky's life works constituted some 80 volumes, making him perhaps the most prolific revolutionary among socialist writers. That he was also among the pantheon of Marxist thinkers, the central organizer of the insurrection that toppled capitalist rule, the founding leader of the revolutionary Soviet Army, and the most important post-revolutionary expositor of Marxism makes LeBlanc's contribution all the more valuable.

I am sure that he would agree that reading Trotsky's work is similarly a necessity for those who would follow in this great revolutionary's trailblazing and heroic footsteps. ■

... Gene Debs

(continued from page 8)

and vibrant testament to one man's dedication to a liberated future. Indeed, Debs was an individual for whom solidarity with his fellow humans was in his blood.

Debs also thought for himself, and he evolved. His experience as a labor organizer for the American Railway Union pushed him toward socialism, which he didn't embrace until he was nearly 40 years old. Once he did he never looked back, abandoning the more conservative outlook of his younger years.

As a socialist, Debs denounced as irrational and unjust a capitalist system that created extravagant wealth for a few at the top, while millions of ordinary working people struggled to get by.

Most important, he thought it was possible to build a new, cooperative society, to transcend the irrationality, waste,

and greed of the capitalist economic system, and to end wage slavery and all forms of social oppression. He called this socialism.

Rose Karsner: "He belonged to us all"

Coincidentally, during Debs's last stay at Lindlahr in 1926, Cannon, then national secretary of the International Labor Defense (ILD), a civil rights group established by the Workers (Communist) Party to defend political prisoners, was also a patient at the Elmhurst clinic. When the ILD was established the year before, Debs in typical fashion had offered to serve on its national committee.

While at Lindlahr, Cannon's partner, Rose Karsner, recalls how they wanted very much to talk to Debs, but under the circumstances were hesitant to intrude upon the ailing man. On the day after their arrival, Karsner saw Debs sitting in the reception room while waiting for his room to be made up. In the moment she decided to very briefly say hello to Debs.

"I went over to Gene and attempted to make myself

known, but I believe he did not get my name," recalled Karsner in a letter written on ILD letterhead to Theodore Debs a week after his brother's death. "It was quite clear to me that he was very weak and I tried to get away. But Gene, in his characteristic way, would not permit me to leave. He did not know who I was, but he heard me say 'comrade' and that was enough for him. He sat and spoke to me for a few seconds."

As Karsner concluded, "Personally, I feel that Gene belonged to us all and especially to those of us engaged in work which characterized his activities most—the united action of ALL in behalf of the working class, regardless of political, industrial, or philosophical opinions. He rose above party differences and factional lines, and we love him for it. The tradition of Gene is the greatest treasure of the younger generation."

In the twilight of his days, there was revealed perhaps in that fleeting moment with Rose Karsner something of the full measure of Eugene V. Debs, a man for whom the word "comrade" was always enough for him. ■

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

Inside Election 2015: The war not mentioned

By BARRY WEISLEDER

We are on the threshold of momentous change. Around the world, working people are deeply dissatisfied with the status quo. We face endless economic crisis, endless wars abroad, with ever-rising surveillance and repression at home. We see fabulous wealth accumulation for the super-rich and bitter austerity for the rest of us. We witness merciless plunder of our fragile environment by a profit system that threatens the very survival of civilization. The signs of discontent are everywhere.

The latest is Jeremy Corbyn's decisive win to become Leader of the British Labour Party. This is a blow against capitalist austerity and a warning to pro-capitalist leaders of labour-based parties around the world, like Tom Mulcair in Canada's New Democratic Party, that the rank and file have an appetite for radical change. Yet his victory on Sept. 12 was just the latest marker of an extraordinary transformation of the political left, one that is fueled by disenchantment with the traditional parties and their leaders after the failures of the Iraq war and the Great Recession.

In Greece, the Syriza party became the first supposedly leftist party to govern in the European Union by sweeping to victory in January. Syriza subsequently betrayed the Greek working class, but in the election on Sept. 20 the combined vote of working class parties increased, including that of the Stalinist KKE, and of Antarsya, a revolutionary coalition that has led anti-fascist and anti-austerity movements in the streets.

In Spain and Ireland, left-wing parties are vying for a kingmaker role in upcoming elections. In Scotland, nationalists dethroned the Labour Party, which had been dominant there for decades, by exposing Labour as too timid to challenge the ideology of austerity.

In Canada, the labour-based New Democratic Party is poised to form the federal government, for the first time ever, after the Oct. 19 election. Even if it does not, the old Conservative-Liberal two-party system that dominated Parliament for the past 150 years is now a thing of the past.

In the United States, Bernie Sanders tops Hillary Clinton in New Hampshire polls, and is drawing equal to her in Iowa. Sanders' bid for the U.S. Democratic Party presidential nomination is a distorted example because the Democratic Party is a ruling class institution. It is the chief instrument of capitalist rule and of imperial wars abroad for over a century. But Sanders' popularity shows an appetite among millions for radical change.

However, without revolutionary organization, humanity is doomed to a very ugly demise. The millions of desperate refugees from the Middle East and Africa currently on the move give us a glimpse of what's in store without a social revolution.

Looking at the situation in Canada, what do we see? We see a war not mentioned in the commercial media—a war on wages. Between 1981 and 2011 the real median hourly wage of full-time workers rose by only \$2, according to Statistics Canada. Males between 25 and 34 years of age saw almost no real wage gain during those 30 years. Why?

The Bank of Canada, encouraged by Liberal and Conservative governments, worsened recessions in the 1980s and 1990s to reduce inflation by boosting unemployment and squeezing wages. In the mid-90s, another Liberal government gutted Canada's social safety net. It cut employment insurance and welfare benefits, so the jobless would be desperate to work for any wage.

The weakening of unions is another reason wages have stagnated. Unionized workers make \$5.67/hour more than non-union workers. That's something the bosses can't stand. The export of factory jobs has hit unions hard. Today only 30% of the Canadian work force is unionized, down from 38% in 1981. In the private sector, only 17% are union members. Harper's Conservatives are doing their best to weaken unions more. Law C-377 forces unions to disclose all expenditures, while business and professional organizations are not required to do so.

Another law ended the rule that government contractors must pay fair wages. Tories break strikes with

legislation, as they did to Air Canada, Canada Post and railway workers. Liberals did it to transit workers and teachers in Ontario. The Tories further reduced access to Employment Insurance. They expanded programmes that allow business to import cheap, temporary foreign workers. The number doubled in just a few years.

It is an outrage that none of the major parties is talking about the war on wages. None are proposing to make it easier to unionize low-wage workers. None are pointing to the danger to good-paying jobs posed by globalization and so-called "free trade" deals. None say they will scrap the temporary foreign worker programmes. The NDP promises to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15/hour. But that would affect only 100,000 workers.

We need a major public works programme to fix the country's crumbling infrastructure. We need to expand industry under public ownership, coupled with pro-union, work place democracy legislation.

This writer attended a rally for Tom Mulcair in Toronto on Sept. 8 with about 1000 people. In his speech, Mulcair said he will go as prime minister to the COP21 Climate Summit in Paris, Nov. 30–Dec. 12, to fight for climate justice. But how can he do that if he is open to the construction of the Energy East pipeline, and the continuation of the Tar Sands development?

He said he wants tax fairness. But how can he deliver that by keeping the Tories' Universal Child Care Benefit and the GST? He said he stands for economic justice, yet he does not oppose the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement and the Canada-Europe Trade Agreement. And how can Mulcair commit to a balanced budget, come hell or high water, without taxing corporations and the super-rich a hell of a lot more, or without breaking his promise to establish a national childcare service?

Socialists may succeed in pushing Mulcair to the left. Anything is possible. In 2006 the NDP Socialist Caucus forced Jack Layton to demand 'Canada Out of Afghanistan'. Last year it won the policy 'For free post-secondary education' in the Ontario NDP. And who thought, even a year ago, that the NDP would form the government in Alberta?

The main point is this: to raise class consciousness and advance struggles for fundamental change, socialists need to be organized as such. We need to fight for socialist policies in the unions, in the NDP and other working class organizations.

We urge you to join us in this effort. But let's be clear: There is no electoral solution. There is no market solution to the crisis of capitalism. The capitalist market created the problem. Only a social revolution can solve it. Only by taking control of the major means of production, like the Cubans did 54 years ago, only by instituting democratic planning, in harmony with nature, does humanity have any hope of survival. ■

Sid Ryan: Victim of a bureaucratic coup

By JULIUS ARSCOTT

The president of the Ontario Federation of Labour announced on Sept. 22 that he would not seek re-election after three terms in office. Sid Ryan, 63, is considered by many to be the most progressive leader of the Ontario House of Labour in generations. His legacy includes: active international solidarity, a willingness to speak directly to rank-and-file members over the heads of the affiliated unions, and mobilizing tens of thousands of workers for labour solidarity rallies across the province.

He was openly critical of the rightward drift of the Ontario New Democratic Party under Andrea Horwath. While he toned down support for the labour-based NDP in the June 2014 Ontario provincial election, he rallied the labour movement to defeat the union-hating Conservative Party leader Tim Hudak.

In a CBC radio interview, Ryan stated that he believes there is general agreement on the necessary direction for the labour movement, but that certain labour partners would not work with him personally. The truth is that there is no consensus across the labour bureaucracy on policy or action. While much of the "turf war" occurring amongst the bureaucracy appears superficial and personality-centred, it is clear that there are major differences over how to oppose austerity at home and how to approach international



working class solidarity.

Sid Ryan openly criticised the leader of the Ontario NDP, while other unions such as the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union supported her shift to the right. Ryan is a vocal supporter of a Free Palestine, and the boycott of Zionist apartheid. He denounced police violence and racism. He is critical of capitalism, and argued for a stronger fight back against capitalist austerity by labour unions and the NDP.

These are issues in which very few labour leaders participate today. And that is why a number of labour bureaucrats have sought to undermine and remove Sid Ryan since day one of his presidency at the OFL. He was the victim of a bureau-

cratic coup from the right. Socialists were correct to defend him, and to work with him whenever there was a convergence of views, which was often. Ryan says he will continue to be active in the House of Labour, and that's good.

What is clear from this experience is that the change needed to effectively fight austerity, two-tier pay, the wage freeze, erosion of pensions and health benefits, racism, environmental destruction, and capitalism in general, cannot occur simply by replacing "mis-leaders." Workers need to take concrete steps to build a class struggle, left-wing caucus in every union to challenge the labour leadership *from the bottom up*.

The OFL, and all unions, should focus on how to defend workers from continuing austerity. Take the example of education workers. Leaders of public secondary school teachers, Catholic, and French school board teachers reached bad deals with the Ontario government. They left the largest teachers' union, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, as well as education sector workers represented by CUPE Ontario, to fight alone against the bosses' regressive demands. Unions should coordinate and work together in order to defend one another. In unity there is strength.

Unions are made up of two parts. The labour bureaucracy and the rank-and-file membership. These two are separated by the material benefits that accrue to

the bureaucracy. Perks and privileges tend to change the perception of full-time union leaders. They come to see things closer to the point of view of the boss class, and farther from the outlook of their working-class membership. Not all leaders are the same; there can be significant differences. Still, we should not rely on the bureaucracy, but seek to continuously challenge and to replace them when necessary and possible.

The Workers' Action Movement (www.workersactionmovement.com) is one attempt to challenge the status quo. WAM is a positive force for change, inside and outside the ranks of organized labour—one that is determined to break the hold of capitalist austerity and to end the downward spiral of concessions bargaining. We are working to establish a cross-union, class-struggle caucus that is anti-capitalist, anti-austerity, anti-concessions, and pro-union democracy.

We believe workers should strive 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.

We seek to change the overall direction of our unions, and to support union activists who battle concessions and anti-democratic practices in unions. We aim to work with those who engage with social justice movements, and we welcome all workers and activists from those movements. WAM will host an open forum at the OFL Convention, Nov. 23-27, at Toronto's Sheraton Centre. ■

The real story on immigration in Canada

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Since 2008 immigrants have found it more difficult to come to Canada, to stay permanently, and to become citizens. This situation is the result of many changes to the federal government's immigration and refugee policy.

Most of the changes were made without public debate, and often were hidden in omnibus bills. Some changes are made by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration simply issuing instructions to immigration officers.

The number of immigrants accepted over the past 10 years has been about 260,000 a year. But the folks selected are drawn more from the economic class, fewer from the family class, and there are far fewer refugees. In 2014, refugees were less than 9 per cent, as compared to 14 per cent in 2005, while the economic immigrants rose to 63.4 per cent, heading towards a target of 70 per cent.

Who are those economic entrants? Increasingly they are temporary workers or international students. The first group is often utilized as a source of cheap labour. Members of the second group typically pay very high fees to attend a Canadian university.

Many temporary workers, especially those in low-skilled jobs, are ineligible to apply for permanent residence. The result is a growing number of people without access to services, supports and mobility rights. Some of them stay anyway, going underground—where they have no recourse to being poorly paid.

The most egregious changes since 2008 are those aimed at refugees. They are denied essential health care. Many are considered not to be legitimate refu-



(Above) Syrian refugees shout their demands in Syntagma Square in Athens.

gees, simply because they are from countries deemed to be "safe." Hungary is considered by Ottawa to be "safe" despite its horrendous treatment of Roma and other minorities.

The Harper Conservative government publicly committed to accepting 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next three years. Barely over 2000 have been admitted—a grossly inadequate response to the desperate millions now fleeing Africa and the Middle East due

to wars and environmental disruption—products of the savage global profit system.

Stephen Harper's priority is to portray refugees as a security threat, and to cite them as a justification for more military spending and wars of intervention abroad. ■

... Parenthood

(continued from page 1)

aid funds to pay for abortion. This has meant that one out of four women using this health support funding has been forced to carry an unwanted fetus to term. Versions of the Hyde amendment have been attached to spending bills under both Republican and Democratic majorities and presidents for nearly 40 years.

The current right-wing "radicals" attack was made possible by the failure of both capitalist parties to accept the Supreme Court's recognition of the power of the women's movement, in the streets, during the 1960s and 1970s. This political failure has not only impacted the availability of abortion but the availability of women's health care in general.

Today, according to a study commissioned by Con-

gress, created by the Guttmacher Foundation and using 2010 statistics, Planned Parenthood serves 36% of the 6.7 million women that get contraceptive care from "safety-net family-planning health centers." In 11 states, Planned Parenthood serves more than half of the women getting this kind of care. The other "safety-net" providers serve far fewer women, offer a much narrower range of contraceptive methods, less frequently offer oral contraceptives on site, and are less likely to offer same-day appointments.

The organization's ability to provide nearly same day service means that for low-income women, Planned Parenthood is often the most easily accessible care for ailments not only of the body but for all kinds of everyday anxieties arising from the effort to organize one's ability to survive and thrive in capitalist America.

The recent attack on Planned Parenthood is an especially cruel assault on the health of the underem-

ployed and youthful unemployed, as well as a genuine threat to the defense and expansion of reproductive justice in the U.S. The continuous and insufficiently answered misogyny of those who have targeted its funding is part of an ideological offensive designed to whittle away at the support that the majority of Americans have given to abortion rights since the second wave of feminism and to create pockets of the population that could be mobilized for assaults on all the movements for social change and economic justice.

Pink Out Day and #ShoutOutYourAbortion are important first steps in the effort to counter the latest of these efforts. The movement needs to move quickly, however, toward mounting the kind of mobilization that occurred last September when half a million people marched in New York for climate justice. This is how abortion was legalized and contraception destigmatized, and this is our strongest weapon for their defense. ■

... Climate action

(continued from page 12)

medial measures for communities of the oppressed nationalities, who, as the victims of racism, have endured decades of breathing foul air, drinking contaminated water, and suffering from damaged health while living and working in neighborhoods or on tribal lands besieged by petro-chemical plants, toxic incinerators, uranium mines, and now, fracking drill pads and tar sand pits.

Environmental clean-up, ecosystem restoration, and the best health care for those communities must be given top priority and be a vital part of achieving justice and ending environmental racism.

On the international level, people of the Global South are suffering even more intensely from the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Pathogens and disease vectors are on the rise from warming temperatures. Island nations are drowning due to rising sea levels. Poor infrastructure and health-care systems in developing nations make it that much harder to cope with natural disasters. Famine is more likely because of the destruction of subsistence food production and its replacement with cash luxury crops grown for northern markets.

The imposition of GMOs by transnational biotech companies has further weakened food production and the ability to survive by contaminating the drought-resistant heirloom seeds developed by indigenous farmers. Developing nations must be ensured the aid they need to adapt to climate change and improve their quality of life while avoiding the destructive path to development of the advanced industrial North.

This means that the big polluting nations must pay not only for their transgressions against the climate but also for their super-exploitation and disproportionate overconsumption of natural resources, many of which have been stolen from other countries and taken by force at the cost of millions of lives. Clean technologies such as wind turbines, solar voltaics, and mass transit systems should be produced for export and given free to developing countries.

Furthermore, climate change cannot be used as an excuse to further rob and exploit. There can be no more phony carbon-trading and offset schemes devised, for example, to replace natural forests with sterile, monocultural tree plantations of palm oil used to produce biofuels in Europe. These "green deserts" are leading to even more deforestation. Instead, every measure must be taken to preserve the tropical rainforests as essential carbon sinks, sources of oxygen, and drivers of climate.

The crimes of colonialism and imperialist oppressions are many, and they began with the wars of conquest and genocide against indigenous peoples on every continent outside of Europe. Therefore, indigenous peoples must be ensured the right to live sustainably on their ancestral lands

without any further interference from transnationals, which aim to ruthlessly exploit the energy and other resources.

As the climate crisis movement places environmental justice at the center of its program for change, these necessary points will become more widely adopted. ■

Two rallies to challenge U.S. racist wars at home and abroad:

Stop the Medical Execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal! Free Mumia Now!

- Pam Africa, Intern. Concerned Family & Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal
- Ramona Africa, the MOVE Organization
- Alice Walker, Special message from afar
- Jeff Mackler, Dir., Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal
- Other representatives of activist organizations will also speak

**San Francisco: Friday, Oct. 16, 7 pm,
Freedom Archives Hall, 518 Valencia St.**

**Oakland: Saturday, Oct. 17, 7 pm,
Niebyl Proctor Library, 6501 Telegraph Ave.**

**Sponsors: Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal;
International Concerned Family & Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal;
United National Antiwar Coalition**

Climate activists call for an end to fossil fuels



By CHRISTINE FRANK

The New York Times recently reported that even if all nations were to achieve their current greenhouse gas reduction pledges (it is doubtful they actually have the will to do so.), a disastrous level of planetary warming of 6.3 degrees Fahrenheit would still take place by the century's end—which is to say that the goals are completely inadequate. This is according to Climate Interactive, a group whose calculations are used by U.S. negotiators and others.

World leaders are reaching way too low, with only a 30% reduction at most when 80% or more is needed immediately. They are content to just scrape by and hope that the world can burn hydrocarbons indefinitely and still avoid catastrophic consequences when they know better. That is because none of them have the guts to break with their capitalist masters, and reduce all greenhouse gas emissions to zero as soon as possible.

They know it would take a crash program that leaves all fossil fuels in the ground while converting to clean energy and transport. But they are not prepared to take such drastic measures to protect Earth's climate system because they are more interested in protecting the capitalist system.

In response to this sorry state of affairs, the activist group, 350.org has laid out an ambitious campaign to lead the climate crisis movement down "the road to power through Paris" preceding and following the UN summit to take place there at the end of the year. Their executive director, May Boeve, recently outlined a series of events and actions that began with 350's "Off & On" event on Sept. 10, at which author/activists Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein called for turning off the fossil-fuel industry and turning on 100% renewables.

McKibben and Klein spoke of defusing the world's biggest carbon bombs in the form of extreme energy such as filthy tar sands, fracked oil and gas, deepwater drilling, and their delivery systems—explosive oil trains, tankers, and leaking pipelines.

To build up to Paris and beyond, other actions have been held, such as an "Under One Sky" multi-faith rally and prayer service on UN Plaza to force the Vatican to divest from fossil fuels and get Pope Francis, how-

ever progressive he is on climate change and social and economic inequality, to put his money where his mouth is.

Also, a series of planning and strategizing workshops in New York City took place on Sept. 26 at Goddard Riverside Community Center. In addition, the Hip Hop Caucus just completed a 16-city, nationwide Act On Climate Tour that began at the 10-Year Katrina Anniversary in New Orleans.

To put pressure on negotiators in Paris and make them accountable to the principles of justice and science, a massive march is planned there, in which organizers hope to get hundreds of thousands into the streets in a global day of action. But 350.org and others do not intend to stop there. They are projecting an escalating wave of activity involving national and continental mobilizations targeting dirty fossil fuel projects around the world in April 2016.

Speakers at the Sept. 10 program also envisioned a world that takes seriously justice for the poor and oppressed, who suffer the most from industrial pollution and the natural disasters caused by climate change—unlike the rich, who profit handsomely from a system that equally brutalizes workers and the planet. Consequently, the program had a strong environmental justice focus with speakers such as Eddie Bautista of the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance; Cynthia Ong of the Land, Empowerment, Animals, People project in Borneo; and Rev. Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus.

The speakers also drew upon the legacy of past movements for social change such as the struggles to abolish slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and Apartheid with the understanding that we must absorb those lessons in order to build a powerful and successful movement to avert climate chaos.

Many environmental groups are now recognizing the intersection between social oppression, ecological devastation, and economic injustice and the need to confront all three simultaneously, which is an important step forward for the movement. This new understanding will enable us to confront not only the power of the industry but the state as well and the role it plays in the extraction, refining, and distribution of fossil fuels and the exploitation of the work-

ers required to bring them to market.

The issues of class and climate justice must be linked by raising the demand for a just transition for all workers in order to make the shift from dirty jobs to green ones without being left languishing on the unemployment line. A just transition must include free training with union wages, full benefits, and safe conditions guaranteed so that workers can continue to sustain themselves and their families through the training process and afterward.

While environmentalists are beginning to understand this, union leaderships are not—at least in the United States. For instance, because of the increased conversion from coal to natural gas for electrical generation, coal mines in Colorado and elsewhere are closing. This has meant the loss of as many as 500 jobs in a single community and a lot of hardship; yet, the leaders of the United Mine Workers are failing to raise the demand for a just transition for coal miners.

They foolishly blame environmentalists—who rightfully want to shut down coal-fired power plants—for the job losses instead of blaming the bosses, who are the owners of a dangerously outmoded energy system and who stubbornly resist change to satisfy their own greed. Failing to recognize this, the UMW bureaucracy continues to hitch their star to the employers' wagon.

That is not where the future lies for any worker. On the contrary, trade unions that organize dirty industries need to link up with the climate crisis and broader environmental movements and demand the conversion to green, sustainable production powered by clean wind and solar energy.

With the union movement representing only seven percent of workers in this country, building that sort of powerful alliance is one of the best ways to strengthen workers' organizations.

Likewise, grasping the larger picture of how communities of workers and oppressed are the victims of capitalist industry's "externalities" of polluted air, water, soil, ill health, and ecosystem degradation will give the climate crisis movement a stronger emphasis and draw more people into the struggle to save Mother Earth for human habitation.

That is why special emphasis must be placed on re-

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