

U.S. threatens bombing of Syria despite diplomacy



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Washington's agreement to pursue a diplomatic route to secure the disarmament of Syria's chemical arsenal produced sighs of relief the world over from opponents of a new Middle East war. The threat of an imminent U.S. missile attack on that nation, an attack that would undoubtedly lead to civilian deaths and a weakening of the position of the grassroots democratic elements in the struggle against Assad, has appreciably lessened.

It is important to recognize, however, that the threat of war remains real. The Obama administration is, on the one hand, using the UN process to lay the groundwork necessary to garner future international support for a direct U.S. intervention. On the other hand, it is stepping up the flow of arms to the sections of the anti-Assad forces they deem most useful to their long-term project of maintaining U.S. dominance over the

resources of the broader region.

On Sept. 27, the UN Security Council approved a resolution that demanded that Syria allow an international team to destroy its chemical weapons. This resolution is understood as *not* authorizing automatic punitive action if the process is not completed to the UN's satisfaction. At the same time, however, the resolution does assert that should Syria not comply fully, the UN should impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Chapter VII mandates sanctions, and if sanctions fail, "such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security."

The Sept. 27 resolution is interpreted by *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* as requiring a second Security Council vote for the instigation of military action by a UN-authorized force. Nonetheless, the vote marks the first time that the Security Council, previously constrained by Russian and

Chinese objections, has unanimously moved to censure the Syrian government. The U.S. is unlikely to have agreed to a resolution that could not be used, if necessary, as a stepping stone on the path toward greater international support for direct imperialist intervention.

Indeed, according to a Sept. 29 Reuters article, just a few days after the passage of the chemical weapons resolution, Security Council members began considering the demand that Syria allow humanitarian convoys from neighboring countries to enter and travel inside of Syria.

While the actual humanitarian crisis of the Syrian people is very grave—the U.S. and its allies have not come close to fulfilling their already inadequate aid quotas for the nearly 2 million refugees already *outside* the country—the demand to allow convoys from Turkey and Jordan, both of which are collaborating with the CIA to send arms and fighters to Syria, is suspect. "Humanitarian cor-

(Above) New York demonstration on Sept. 7 against U.S. intervention in Syria, sponsored by a broad range of antiwar organizations.

ridors" and like proposals have more than once been used for the very non-humanitarian and imperialist ends of weapons and troop supply.

In short, the UN Security Council action is a double-edged sword that has delayed U.S. missile strikes but given new authority to outside intervention into Syria. According to a Sept. 11 article in the *Washington Post*, the administration's shift to diplomatic strong-arming was also accompanied by a very public boost in arms deliveries to the pro-imperialist sections of the opposition forces. A July 2 article by David Ottaway in *The National Interest* reports that the U.S. is also looking the other way while the Saudi government supplies non-U.S.-made surface-to-air missiles.

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ObamaCare: Not in business for our health

As we go to press, the U.S. Congress has pushed the government into a shutdown—laying off at least 800,000 federal workers and crippling businesses and households that rely on federal services. Right-wing Republicans hoped the shutdown would stall the Affordable Care Act, known as ObamaCare. Below are excerpts from Bill Onasch's commentary on the Act. The full article is at www.kclabor.org.

By **BILL ONASCH**

[Open enrollment through the exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act has begun.] The important health sector of the ruling class, despite the occasional kvetch, are pleased. They should be—they wrote the law and the rules for implementing it. If all goes as planned, they will have millions of new customers.

Paradoxically, the traditional favorite party of Big Business is fighting like the Japanese garrison on Iwo Jima to stop or cripple this bonanza for the insurance robber barons. Perhaps even more bizarre, our labor statespersons have assumed the role of Marines aiming to triumphantly raise the flag of ObamaCare on Mount Suribachi.

If the mean-spirited cracked teapots were to succeed in killing or maiming ObamaCare, with no alternative readily available at this late stage, it would be bad news for millions of uninsured individuals and unions who have been bargaining with employers in anticipation of major changes in insurance.

For these reasons opposing the loony right sabotage is an understandable reflex. But I have been bombarded by appeals from labor, women's, and civil rights groups to not only denounce Republican kamikazes but to also hail the Affordable Care Act as the greatest thing since sliced bagels. Such a position is merely the flip side of the teapot opportunist coin. Both camps subordinate the health of American workers to the perceived short-term political needs of a boss party.

The Affordable Care Act does not resolve America's health-care crisis. In many ways it makes things worse. The unexpectedly low premiums touted by the President and Secretary Sebelius do not take in to account the extremely high deductibles and co-pays that accompany these "bargains" in affordable care. The cheapest plans would require spending thousands of dollars out of pocket before insurance starts paying 60 percent of further costs.

The best alternative to commodity health care that is expanded by the new law would be socialized medicine such as the British Labor Party established in that country 65 years ago. That hasn't gained much traction yet in the USA.

Less comprehensive but still significant and worthwhile [would be] single-payer reform—an improved version of Canada's Medicare won by the NDP labor party north of the border. In all the pre-ObamaCare polls in which single-payer was included as an option it consistently received the most support. ...

Newly elected AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka tried very hard to be a "player" in the long struggle to get a health care bill through Congress. He immediately jettisoned single-payer and eventually even the symbolic "public option." In the end, he did his duty for his White House friend through heavy-handed lobbying to get single-payer supporters—whose votes were sorely needed—on board for ObamaCare. The bill would have never passed without Trumka's diligent efforts.

Since then both the AFL and Change to Win unions have tried to justify their cave-in by being the most energetic and exaggerating apologists for their "friend's" signature achievement. ...

ObamaCare will likely survive the current Republican assault [despite the] government shutdown. But this is no victory to crow about from our side. We'll still be saddled with a substandard health-care system devouring a far bigger share of our GDP than any other country. ■



Malalai Joya tours U.S.

On the 12th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the United National Antiwar Coalition (unacpeace@gmail.com), with the Afghan Women's Mission, is sponsoring a national tour of former Afghanistan legislator, women's rights and antiwar leader, Malalai Joya. The tour began Oct. 3-5 with forums in New York City.

- **Oct. 6**, 7 p.m., First Parish Church, Cambridge, Mass.; Oct. 7; 3:30 p.m., U. Mass Boston Campus Center; 7 p.m., Wellesley College; Oct. 8, 1 p.m., Suffolk U. Contact marilyn@alumni.new.edu.
- **Oct. 8**, 7:30 p.m., Food for Thought Books, Amherst, Mass., cmgavreau@me.com.
- **Oct. 9**, Albany, N.Y., jlombard@nycap.rr.com.
- **Oct. 10-12**, Chicago, Phunt45@aol.com.
- **Oct. 15**, 7 p.m., Foss Center, Augsburg College, Minneapolis. Oct. 16: U of M Law School; Macalester College. scrn@yahoo.com.
- **Oct. 17**, 12 p.m., U. Cal., Berkeley, Wheeler Hall. For other Bay Area locations: jmackler@lmi.net.
- **Oct. 19**, 7 p.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena. Other LA events: sonali@sonaliandjim.net.
- **Oct. 21-22**, San Diego. For all events: aka0001@hotmail.com.

A WORKERS' ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

We propose an EMERGENCY CONGRESS OF LABOR to discuss and take steps to implement the following demands —

- 1) Bail out the people, not the bankers! Open the account books of the banks to full public inspection. Nationalize the banks to be supervised by workers' committees.
- 2) No foreclosures! No forced evictions! Cancel usurious debt payments, and reduce mortgage payments in proportion to their capitalist-caused decline in value.
- 3) Full employment at union wages! An emergency public works program to employ all jobless workers and youth! Employ people to build what we need — low-cost quality housing, efficient mass transportation, cheap and renewable sources of power, schools, clinics — and to conserve our water, forests, farmland, and open space.
- 4) Immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops and mercenaries from Iraq & Afghanistan! No war on Iran! Close all U.S. bases abroad! No money for the military — use funds instead for public works! Convert the war industries to making products for people's needs and to combat global warming.

- 5) Reduce the workweek to 30 hours with no cut in pay, and cut the retirement age to 55. Provide unemployment and retirement payments at the level of union wages and benefits.
- 6) To combat inflation: A sliding scale of wages and pensions that matches the rises in consumer prices. To combat high medical costs: A free, universal, public health-care system.
- 7) Immediate citizenship for all undocumented workers. No job discrimination; equal pay for equal work — regardless of gender, sexual orientation, skin color, or national origin.
- 8) Nationalize manufacturing, big agribusiness, energy, and transportation corporations and place them under the control of elected committees of workers.
- 9) To mobilize support for the demands it adopts, the EMERGENCY CONGRESS should organize ACTION COMMITTEES in every workplace and neighborhood threatened by the crisis. These committees can draw up more concrete demands than the ones outlined above.
- 10) To put all these measures into effect, we need a LABOR PARTY — based on a fighting union movement and all people who are oppressed and exploited. For a workers' government!

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Fed bails out rich at workers' expense

BY JEFF MACKLER

In the old days—very old days like the last Great Depression of 1929—most people understood the term “economic stimulus” to mean some form of government investment in the economy aimed at directly producing jobs for working people through various kinds of public works programs. Considerable investment in ventures like construction of massive dams to promote agricultural development, rebuilding deteriorated urban and even rural infrastructures—like schools, hospitals, and highways—and national parks and cultural projects were, in the Keynesian tradition, sometimes employed by crisis-ridden capitalist governments to create jobs and serve the “public good.”

This Keynesian “pump-priming,” or productive job creation aimed at increasing the purchasing power of working people directly, was in significant part aimed at relieving the political pressure arising from unprecedented working-class discontent that threatened to exceed the bounds of capitalist reform. The massive Depression-era unemployment rate—up to 40 percent, with many of the remaining 60 percent having only part-time employment—and the generalized degradation of the human condition inherent in the capitalist system contributed to an historic rise in workers’ class consciousness, the formation and rapid growth of powerful industrial unions and socialist organizations.

But even this Keynesian (named after the British liberal capitalist economist John Maynard Keynes) pump priming proved inadequate to revive capitalism’s flagging economy. The relatively token investment in jobs and social welfare programs aimed at heading off an even deeper anti-capitalist mood in a few years gave way to the world’s greatest arms race. Led by major U.S. corporations, “industry” was “revived” by its near total conversion to war production. Steel and auto plants, mining, and most all other manufacturing industries became war industries. The jobs created were war-related and the profits generated in a near monopolized war economy went overwhelmingly to the super-rich.

The Great Depression was “ended” via a catastrophic war to re-divide the world’s colonies—a war that cost the lives of over 60 million around the globe and reduced entire continents, minus the U.S., to ruin. On the ashes of this conflagration, capitalism, especially the victorious American brand, was presented with a unique opportunity to play the leading role in rebuilding the infrastructures of destroyed European cities and dominating new markets without the slightest concern for competition. Indeed, U.S. allies and enemies alike were incapable of offering the slightest resistance. It was to be truly, according to capitalism’s pundits, “the American Century.”

In sharp contrast, today’s ongoing five-year “recession”—in fact, a depression for most Americans—finds the ruling-class few, the great banks and financial institutions and the government that serves them, incapable of even the most modest investment or “stimulus” to the “real economy” to create real jobs, and especially manufacturing jobs that produce commodities to meet human needs and that are a product of human labor.

So deep is the worldwide capitalist economic crisis that with few exceptions average profit rates in manufacturing are so low given the unprecedented global competition among and between the leading industrialized nations, that it simply doesn’t pay (at this time, I stress) to invest in yet another round of super-modern factories that have consistently proven to become obsolete soon after they are built. Instead, U.S. capitalism’s “solution” to this dilemma has been, especially since 2008, to bail out failing banks and corporations directly to the tune of incredible trillions of dollars.

The most recent example is the great debate on Wall Street and in ruling-class circles over the policies of the nation’s quasi-private central bank, called the Federal Reserve (Fed), and headed by Benjamin Bernanke. That Bernanke will be removed post haste is not disputed by anyone, including by President Obama and his capitalist superiors, who really run the country and the nation’s banks and major corporations.

What is in dispute is the Fed’s so-called QE or Quantitative Easing policies. QE began in 2008 shortly after the near collapse of the U.S. banking system. It consisted largely in the Federal Reserve Bank’s pumping trillions of dollars into the banking system by printing virtually unlimited amounts of dollars or their paper/computer equivalents, to purchase essentially failed or near worthless bank-held mortgage bonds. The essence of the matter was and remains that the government paid trillions to the banks based on the banks’ declarations of the value of their mortgages as opposed to the reality that these same mortgages were near worthless.



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

This QE bailout alone, since 2008, has amounted to a virtual gift of \$4.5 trillion to the rich, or an average of a nearly one trillion dollars per year. Add to this the additional forms that the bailout has taken, including congressional legislation that amounts to the same gifting to the corporate few, and the total bailout figures are even more astounding, in the tens of trillions of dollars—that is, more than the nation’s entire annual GDP.

Bernanke lit the ruling-class fuse in May 2013 when he announced that, given the much-hyped “strengthening” of the economy, the Fed might “taper” off the monthly amount of money printed (which is gifted to the rich) from \$85 billion to perhaps \$5-\$10 trillion dollars less. Plus, Bernanke hinted that the Fed might increase the banks’ borrowing rate from zero to perhaps a few percentage points or tenths thereof.

The latter would represent a move away from essentially “lending” banks free money, or close to zero percent, supposedly to invest in the real economy to “stimulate” job growth. In truth, the banks and associated recipients of the government’s free money used the occasion to invest in the stock market and other speculative endeavors, driving it to all-time highs. Meanwhile, the real economy continued to decline, all government assertions to the contrary.

Thus, when Bernanke even hinted several months ago that the government’s money trough might be tapered off a bit, the corporate/banking hierarchy responded with what became known as a “taper tantrum.” This amounted to a modest decline in the stock markets here and abroad and a decline in speculate investments abroad, including those that helped fuel China’s “shadow” banking system—which has led to a spectacular real estate bubble, wherein literally millions of new housing units and whole cities were constructed with no one to live in them.

The “taper tantrum” response to Bernanke ended with his backing off for the moment, but not without his returning to the matter a few months later, again sending shivers down the spine of the bankers and all other financial speculators who had become “addicted” to a gambling casino economy without roots in real production—that is, without manufacturing real commodities in the U.S.

Indeed, from 2000 until today the U.S. manufacturing employment has declined from 18 million to 12 million jobs. President Obama’s much touted creation of one million jobs since January 2013 neglects to reveal that 600,000 are low-wage, part-time, and no-benefit jobs. Another 100,000 are temporary work. In truth, since the beginning of this year 250,000 full-time decent-paying jobs have been lost.

A serious look at U.S. employment figures reveals the devastating state of the real economy. Of the 155 million non-supervisory workers in the country today, some 50 million are either unemployed, part-time, or temporary workers—that is, approximately one-third of the entire workforce! Further, the average weekly earnings of those who do have work, adjusted for inflation, is less than it was in 1982.

And even these figures could be called into question when one considers that in today’s economy for some

time now, a two-person income is required for a family to live at the same level that one person could earn a generation ago. However approximate this estimate, it reveals that the income of workers in general has declined in the neighborhood of 50 percent over this period.

Today’s top 10% of the income brackets consume a higher proportion of the national income than ever before in U.S. history, while working people are made to pay the price of the government’s funding the follies of the rich, or better, the cost of bailing out a failing capitalism. This is reflected in every arena of public life, from massive assaults on wages, working conditions, health care, pensions, education, and social services—and now planned assaults on Social Security, Medicare, and food stamps.

Bernanke’s “Surprise Move To Maintain Pace of Stimulus,” headlined in the Sept. 19 *New York Times*, was explained by his supposed concern that unemployment rates continued to be troubling, thus indicating that the economy had not sufficiently recovered to discontinue the present monthly \$85 billion in gifts to the banks. Capitalist ideologues have today re-defined “stimulus” to mean giving free money to the rich and maintaining low interest rates for the purpose of supposedly benefiting working people. The rich, according to this logic, will invest in new job-creating industries, and low interest rates, so the fiction goes, will enable workers to buy cars and homes at affordable mortgage rates.

These stated intentions of capitalist ideologues have nothing in common with the reality. The re-opening and booming of the textile industry in South Carolina after a two-decade absence is a prime example. U.S. textile manufacturers like Parkdale Mills, the largest cotton buyer in the U.S., according to *The New York Times*, have returned to the U.S. and are in full swing—producing for the domestic market and for export, fabric and clothing at profit rates competitive with their previous production in Bangladesh, China, India, and Mexico.

The Times interviewed Bayard Winthrop, who heads the clothing manufacturing behemoth American Giant. “When I framed the business,” said Winthrop, “I wasn’t saying ‘From the cotton to the ground to the finished product, this is going to be all American-made.’”

“This wasn’t some patriotic quest,” Winthrop insisted. And indeed it wasn’t. Like all capitalists his loyalty was to the dollar, not to the working class. In addition to the savings in transportation costs, the turnaround time, and other technical matters, what interested this capitalist the most was the fact that, according to *The Times*, “wages aren’t that much more overseas.” By wages, of course, Winthrop included in his calculations not only the low-wage, zero-benefit and part-time non-union labor force that is likely employed throughout the reconstructed industry but the fact that today’s largely automated textile plants use some 200 low-wage workers to do the work that 2000 did just a decade or two ago.

Capitalist globalization has always been predicated on the hunt for low-cost labor. In the course of the past three or four decades of outsourcing U.S. jobs the U.S. workforce has been reduced to pitiful wage levels that

(continued on page 5)

Outrage as fascists kill rapper in Greece

Marty Goodman / Socialist Action



By MARTY GOODMAN

Rage filled the streets of Greece at news of the Sept. 18 stabbing death of Pavlos Fyssas, 34, a well-known rapper and anti-fascist activist. Witnesses say Pavlos, nicknamed Killah P, was ambushed as he was leaving a cafe by about 25 thugs of the Greek fascist Golden Dawn party in Keratsini, a working-class neighborhood in Athens.

Alex Soutos, a Golden Dawn (GD) member who works in the jewelry business, admitted to the murder and was arrested. Pavlos was knifed in a lung and twice in the heart. Cops were said to have told passersby not to intervene. Golden Dawn has denied involvement in Fyssas' death.

Some 2000 mourners chanted, "Pigs! Fascists! Murderers!" and "Immortal!" as they carried Pavlos' coffin from the murder site to his grave. The defiant Pavlos had told Golden Dawn that he did not fear death and would never retreat from his anti-fascist convictions.

The news of the rapper's death came amidst big street mobilizations by workers during a national two-day "general strike." Thousands poured into the streets against massive layoffs and service cuts imposed on Greece by what is called "the Troika," which include the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund, the European Commission, and the European Bank. Outrage at news of Fyssas' assassination brought additional thousands into the streets, especially working-class youth.

After national outcry over Pavlos' murder, the conservative New Democracy/PASOK government arrested four top GD leaders on Sept. 27—Nikos Michaloliakos, a holocaust denier, and three members of parliament—on charges of forming a criminal gang. Cops say at least 10 more have been arrested. More than 30 warrants were issued. The government has itself been criticized for echoing GD propaganda against immigrants and competing with GD for votes.

The GD national symbol closely resembles a Nazi

swastika. The group openly sells Adolph Hitler's autobiography "Mein Kampf" and parades with Nazi salutes. It has targeted urban immigrant neighborhoods, mostly North African and Pakistani ones.

GD's club and knife-wielding attacks have been mostly in Athens and have taken the lives of at least six immigrants. In the election campaign last year, one GD candidate boasted on video of wanting to put immigrants into gas ovens and to make them into soap. GD has trashed immigrant-owned market stalls and distributed food on a "Greeks only" basis.

On Sept. 12 about 50 black-shirted GD goons, armed with crowbars and bats studded with nails and screws, attacked Greek Communist Party (KKE) and Communist Youth (KNE) members distributing flyers in Athens. The unprovoked attack led to the hospitalization of eight victims. In a video taken on Aug. 8, appearing on the GD's official website, GD MPs brag of their plans to use violence against workers fighting job cuts.

In exchange for \$321 billions in loans to Greece since 2010 the Troika has demanded 25,000 public job cuts by 2015, and that 15,000 public workers be fired by 2014.

The official Greek unemployment rate is now 27.9%, twice that of the rest of Europe. Unemployment for workers younger than 25 is 65%. Since 2008, average income has declined by about half; pensions have been slashed and a 40% cut in health-care funding has been imposed. Suicides have doubled between 2009 and 2011, a three-year trend that shows no sign of declining.

Nevertheless, the Greek capitalists are "coping," to say the least. The Greek rulers are said to have more than 600 billion euros stashed away abroad (1 euro = \$1.30 U.S.) and quietly out of reach. It is estimated that Greek capitalists pay only about 50% of their outstanding taxes. A recent report, commissioned by the European parliament, said Greece was the most corrupt state in the 28-nation bloc.

During the capitalist imposed austerity, Golden

(Above) Golden Dawn leader Nikos Michaloliakos. (Left) Sept. 27 anti-fascist demonstration in New York.

Dawn has seen dramatic growth. In 2012, after six years of recession and social dislocation, GD won 12% of the popular vote in the national election. Back in 2009, GD polled a mere .3% but it now has 18 members of parliament. It has risen in the polls to about 15% this year, but dropped about 2% after the Pavlos murder (see the statement by Greek Fourth Internationalists, OKDE-Spartacos, below).

Also growing is a left-of-center coalition known as SYRIZA. SYRIZA is led by reform-minded—but hardly revolutionary—"Euro-communists." It also includes some forces on the "far left." SYRIZA received 26.8% of the vote in the June 2012 national election, barely losing out to the right-wing New Democracy, which received 29.6%. SYRIZA says it rejects the Troika's austerity, while pledging to remain within the European Union.

On Sept. 27 in New York City, the AKNY-Greece Solidarity Movement (www.AKNY.org), SYRIZA-NY (www.SYRIZA-ny.org), and the Campaign for Peace and Democracy demonstrated at the UN to protest Greek Deputy Prime Minister Evangelos Venizelos' speech to the General Assembly. Their statement said, "Groups here today condemn ... attempts on the part of Golden Dawn to cultivate a climate of violence and civil war. We stand with the thousands of people who flooded the streets of Athens ... to protest against violence and to condemn the complicity of the police."

Banning Golden Dawn, as some have asked, is no solution to the fascist threat. And the government could use such a measure to ban the workers' movement as it mobilizes against austerity.

Capitalist society breeds division and hate. Only mass mobilizations of workers will clear the streets of fascist scum. It is up to the Greek labor movement to put differences aside and to form a united front to smash fascism before it's too late. ■

Fascism shall not pass!

This statement by OKDE-Spartakos, Greek section of the Fourth International, was issued on Sept. 18.

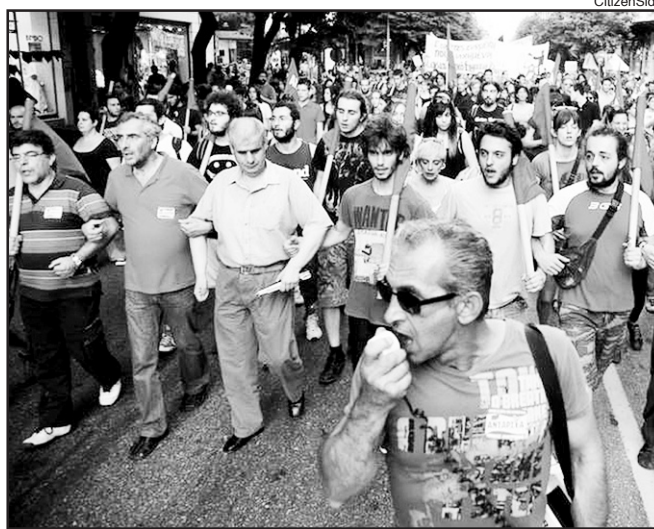
Last night in Keratsini, the 34-year-old antifascist Pavlos Fyssas was murdered by members of the Golden Dawn. The murderers ambushed Pavlos on his way from a cafe back home. It was a political murder. Pavlos, also known as Killah P, a well-known militant of the antifascist movement and a hip-hop singer, did not suffer the attack randomly. According to the testimonies, only a few meters away from the murder scene there was a motorcycle police squad, who did nothing to prevent the attack.

This murder is not an isolated incident. We should put it in the framework of the ever-increasing aggression of the Golden Dawn against not only immigrants any more, but also systematically against militants and organizations of the mass movement. It is the continuation of the

aggressive action of the Golden Dawn, that started with the violent attack against the antifascist concert in Kallithea and went on with the murderous assault against Communist Party members in Perama a few days ago.

These attacks show which are the real targets of fascism. Aiming to prove their loyalty to every kind of boss, the GD neo-nazis hit workers' unions, militants of the workers' movement, immigrants, and antifascists.

The murderous action of the GD is an escalation of the attack unleashed for a long time by the government itself against all workers' rights and all workers' struggles, against youth movements and squats, against immigrants. Taking advantage of the anti-communist climate nourished by the government and the cover offered by the police, the GD present themselves as



CitizenSide

(Left) Anti-fascist march in Athens in 2012.

any symbolic measure against the GD with actual measures against the workers' movement.

But the workers' movement will not remain passive. It is time to eradicate fascists from every workplace and every neighborhood. With massive, united and militant antifascist initiatives from below. With an immediate central antifascist demonstration against their headquarters, in order to thrash the murderous neo-nazi organization of the Golden Dawn. The dozens of thou-

sands of the protesters in Keratsini prove that we can do it. Let's turn our rage into organized power to smash them!

Grigoris Lamprakis, Sotiris Petroulas, Nikos Temponeras, Pavlos Fyssas: It is a promise in your memory—fascism shall not pass! ■

... U.S. threats against Syria

(continued from page 1)

In the last year, most U.S. military aid has been delivered covertly, in collaboration, variously, with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Libya.

Heavy arms, and well-armed Islamist forces backed by these countries, have been flowing into the country for some time. *The New York Times* estimates that around 6000 foreign fighters, from countries as far afield as Chechnya, are part of the coalition in northern Syria that has just declared its independence from the exile opposition Syrian National Council. A conservative estimate of the total number of foreign fighters currently in Syria is 10,000. These forces, along with Syrian sectarian allies, have been fighting not only with the Syrian government forces, but also against the militias of local grassroots activists who fear Islamic rule and oppose an Islamic state.

While reactionary Islamist forces remain only a portion of the opposition forces under arms, they control large swaths of northern Syria. Their touted fighting skills have undoubtedly contributed to the fact that, according to the Syrian Observatory on Human Rights, over 40% of the 120,000 deaths caused by the fighting so far have been well-equipped Syrian soldiers.

While many grassroots community groups have protested Islamic rule, many of the secular bourgeois leaders of the Free Syrian Army have, instead, collaborated with the foreign and Islamist troops. On Sept. 7, on the occasion of the seizure of the al-Menagh airbase by a multinational group of foreign fighters, the British *Telegraph* reported that the Free Syrian Army chief in Aleppo, Abdul-Jabbar al-Aqidi, had confirmed that the FSA was providing weapons to these foreign fighters.

The Syrian youths and working people who justifiably rose up in March and April of 2011 to protest the corruption, economic policies, and authoritarianism of the Assad regime thus find themselves in an increasingly difficult position. According to Dr. Vijay Prashad from Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., many towns in northern Syria are now under the control of reactionary Islamist forces that have imposed harsh and unpopular social restrictions on the population. In the south of the country, despite several well-publicized attempts by democratic-minded local leaders to bring the military struggle under the political control of local town councils that have remained loyal to the goals of original struggle, the secular armed forces seem to have been increasingly consolidated in the hands of Syrian elites who have marginalized the town committees, welcomed foreign fighters, and demanded direct U.S. military intervention.

How did this situation come about? According to the Syrian human rights leader, Haytham Manna, the original demands of the first demonstration of the uprising in Dar'a in March of 2011 were "Death rather than Oppression" and "Rami the Thief." Rami Makhlof,

the subject of the second slogan, is a cousin to Assad, and the wealthiest man in Syria. Makhlof, considered a reliable political ally to the Assads, was granted extraordinary opportunities to amass wealth during the privatizations of Syria's national patrimony that came with the Assad family's introduction of neoliberal economic "reform." His obscene wealth and power were a symbol of the corruption that ordinary people deem responsible for the downward spiral of the standard of living in Syria.

For the ordinary Syrian, opposition to joblessness, corruption, and authoritarianism were inextricably intertwined with their fight to enter fully into the real political life of Syria. For a great number of Syrians of the upper middle classes, however, opposition to Makhlof's plundering was not based on egalitarian concerns, but on getting their fair share of the loot.

According to Manna, who sat on the exile Syrian National Council representing a coalition of 13 political parties associated with the old Stalinist and Nasserist movements of Syria, many of the businessmen who funded the SNC conferences were former partners of Makhlof who had fallen out with him over business deals. Relationships between these businessmen and the main U.S. ally in the region, Saudi Arabia, had been built over time through commercial and financial negotiations. It is no surprise that the elite forces that dominated first the Syrian National Council, and now dominate the Syrian National Coalition, are focused on salvation via imperialist intervention.

Thus, from the very beginning of the armed struggle, there has been a bifurcation of interests among the different classes set into motion by the neoliberal economic reforms carried out by the Assad regime. The journalist Anand Gopal, speaking on a Syria panel at the 2013 Left Forum in New York, explained that the loss of control of local committees over the armed struggle was apparent at the very onset of the militarization of the upsurge. To fund a military brigade, you need money, and businessmen asserted their political primacy in the old fashioned way—by setting up their own militias.

If one's goal is a more self-serving division of the spoils among elites, pragmatic alliances with foreign fighters sent by your economic allies in the Gulf States, those who are in turn allied with the imperialist U.S., is just business as usual. In addition, nothing creates the opportunity for material aggrandizement quite like the conquest of territory in the midst of war.

Those intrepid local activists struggling on the ground for justice for the tens of thousands killed by Assad, scraping to survive war-induced deprivation, working to develop democratic functioning, defending women's rights, creating solidarity economies, and dreaming of a society informed by humanitarian values, are thus faced with tremendous obstacles.

Today, some Syrian towns are con-



trolled militarily and politically by reactionary Islamist forces. Others are controlled by those whose aim is booty or the theft of more seriously substantial economic resources. Without real influence over the conduct of the war that will determine who politically rules Syria, the possibilities open to the egalitarians will likely be very limited.

Those forces also seem to lack the kind of political instrument that will allow them to hold their own and then defeat the pro-imperialist bourgeois leadership of the Syrian opposition. Historically, that kind of contest has required a revolutionary working-class party. Only that kind of formation can defend the interests of those who began the rebellion in Syria against the intervention of local and regional elites, and U.S. imperialism.

Many radicalizing youth in the U.S. and Europe, shaken by the shift of the relationship of forces in the opposition from those who struggle for economic justice and democracy to those pragmatically allied with imperialism, the Gulf States, and foreign fighters associated with reactionary Islamist politics, wonder if they can escape the unsavory logic of the war and give their political support directly to the town councils organizing independently of the Syrian National Coalition and the leadership of the Free Syrian Army.

At a recent panel on Syria held at Yale University, featuring Vijay Prashad and Syrian-American intellectual Basam Haddad, a student asked, "What if we want to escape the binary of the proxy war between the U.S. and Iran, or the U.S. and Russia, and just do direct

solidarity with those trying to create collective structures on the ground?" Prashad answered, firmly, that while "solidarity is the most noble sentiment on earth," those experiments in social justice on the village level in Syria can only survive, ultimately, if "we take the imperialist boot off the neck of the nations of the Middle East."

The United National Antiwar Coalition has been attempting to build the kind of movement with the power to do just that. During the first two weeks of September, UNAC helped to call and coordinate over 100 protests to demand: No More War! End the U.S. War on Syria! These actions, while not large, were, in general, successful efforts to unify all the forces that were ready to march to oppose the U.S. missile strike on Syria. In most cases, speakers with many different points of view on the origin of the civil war in Syria came together respectfully to create events that could attract media attention and inspire those new to the movement to venture into the streets. This strategy—one of unity in action around the principled demand of U.S. Out Now!—is as critical to movement success as ever.

Recent polls show that an overwhelming majority in the United States is opposed to U.S. military intervention in Syria under any circumstances. War weariness and deep skepticism regarding U.S. war aims have been fueled in part by the extraordinary revelations of Edward Snowden. This presents a challenge to antiwar activists to find a way to close the gap between mass antiwar sentiment and the numbers ready to mobilize in protests. ■

... Fed bails out the rich

(continued from page 3)

today include the poorest and most oppressed sectors of the population as well as immigrants and now prison labor. Neither Bernanke and his bosses, nor indeed any self-respecting capitalist profiteer or banker, ever intended to stimulate the economy by investing in jobs at a living wage. Whatever jobs might return to the U.S. are based on the assumption that workers must pay dearly to keep the failing system alive.

Today, overall profit rates in the super-heated competitive capitalist world are eroding to the point that it's simply not profitable—or better, it's financially impossible—to effectively compete on world markets, except by the extreme super-exploitation of workers everywhere.

In view of this fact, the world's tiny ruling strata prefer to invest at profit rates that are virtually guaranteed by official government policy. Technically, or for public consumption, this is expressed in the corporate-controlled media terms of debates over government "stimulus" programs. In truth, what is under debate is how best to cut all social programs, lower wages, and destroy pensions and all other hard won social gains to keep a degenerating social system afloat. The war against working people at home and the wars for resources and cheap labor abroad are inseparable elements of the system's inherent functioning, as is the associated destruction of the environment.

Bernanke's concern about the government's seemingly endless subsidies to speculative endeavors stems from a deeper understanding that the resulting speculative U.S. bubble must inevitably burst, and along with it the world economy that is heavily dependent on valueless U.S. dol-

lars intervening on currency and credit markets and in every other crevice of a world system that today can only exist by inflicting misery on the world's people.

For the ruling rich there is no other way out other than at workers' expense. For working people, there is no way out other than the revolutionary transformation of the predatory capitalist system itself. While this is the music of the future, it is sounding louder and understood by greater numbers than in modern memory.

Today, approval of socialism, as opposed to capitalist plunder and ruin, registers higher than ever before. The gap between the thought and the struggle to bring it into being still remains large, but it is far from insurmountable. Marx was on the mark when he noted that "capitalism creates its own gravediggers," that is, a working class that can rapidly become conscious of its power and capacity to end a social system that has become intolerable. ■

The counter-revolution gains momentum in Egypt



(Left) The face of General al-Sisi is draped on shopfronts throughout Cairo.

BY JEFF MACKLER

Egypt's Cairo Court for Urgent Matters on Sept. 23 stamped the "legal" coup de grace on the now fully unmasked face of the U.S.-backed military dictatorship. The court dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood in all respects, confiscated its assets, seized its buildings and banned all MB activities.

Egypt's state newspaper *Al Ahrām*, reporting on the court's decision, stated that the Brotherhood had "violated the rights of its citizens, who found only oppression and arrogance during the MB reign." MB rule, *Al Ahrām* continued, had been ended when "fatigued citizens had risen up this summer under the protection of the armed forces—the sword of the homeland inseparable from their people in the confrontation with an unjust regime."

The court's decision followed three months of brutal terror, which was meticulously organized by the refurbished Mubarak-era reactionary military headed by the July 3 coup leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. This included the arrest or murder of virtually the entire leadership of the MB.

The decimation of the MB became a public spectacle covered by Egyptian state television broadcasts that pictured the military and police as "defenders of the nation" while they slaughtered Muslims in cities across Egypt, including house to house searches, according to the Sept. 20 *New York Times*. The stated objective was "to flush out Islamic militants" everywhere.

All media, foreign and domestic, not associated with the military state power were banned from observing the carefully orchestrated annihilation of any Egyptians suspected of being MB supporters. The state media took pains to portray the massacres as armed conflicts between the "Islamic terrorists" who supported Morsi and the patriotic and nationalist-minded military and police, who postured as the "people's saviors."

The Egypt-wide purge of Muslims followed the military's July 14 slaughter of some 2000 sit-in protesters in Cairo, 11 days after the July 3 arrest of Egypt's elected President Mohamed Morsi and his immediate associates, ordered by al-Sisi. Under pressure from irritated U.S. officials, who had previously hailed Morsi's election as "the most democratic in Egyptian history," al-Sisi then promised new elections that would include MB participation. But al-Sisi's words quickly gave way to monstrous deeds wherein MB and supporting Muslims were to be killed like "rats." U.S. officials to this day remain silent on the mass purge, other than to advise the murderers to pursue a more moderate approach, including allowing the MB to participate in some far-off election process!

Tamarrud mobilization exaggerated

The July 3 military coup followed on the heels of the June 30 nationwide massive mobilization orga-

The court's ban of the Muslim Brotherhood followed three months of brutal terror organized by the military.

nized by the Tamarrud (Rebellion) movement, which claimed to have collected between 17 and 22 million signatures on its petition demanding Morsi's resignation and new elections.

In a similar vein, widely reported figures of over 20 million people who mobilized in the streets on June 30 were employed to demonstrate the overwhelming national support for Morsi's resignation. A Reuters account quoted a "military source" as stating that 14 million took part. Were any of these figures accurate, they would have represented the largest mass mobilization—virtually a quarter of Egypt's population—recorded in human history.

Based on a range of sources from left to right in Egypt, *Socialist Action* and this writer in earlier articles unfortunately reported the above figures as fact. Since then, however, they have proven to be gross exaggerations and a correction is in order. A more accurate account of the size of the June 30 mobilizations can be found in a September article published in the *London Review of Books* by Hugh Roberts, entitled "The Revolution That Wasn't."

Roberts writes: "The target of 15 million signatories for the petition was clearly chosen because it exceeded the number of Egyptians—13.23 million—who voted for Morsi in the presidential election of June 2012. It was subsequently claimed that at least 14 million marched against him on 30 June. This figure was soon overtaken by others: 17 million, 22 million. The veteran Egyptian feminist Nawal el-Saadawi even claimed that 34 million had been there, a majority of the total electorate.

"These figures were fairy tales, the tallest of tall stories. But the Egyptians who bombarded the world's media with such whoppers can't seriously be faulted for trying it on: the West made itself the gallery; they played to it....

"The numbers question was investigated by Jack Brown, an American writer who has lived in Cairo for several years and who on 11 July published a detailed article in *Maghreb émergent*, an indispensable source of serious coverage of North African developments, republished in English on the website *International Boulevard*. Brown worked out from the actual area of Tahrir Square and the streets leading to it that on the

most generous estimate the demonstration can't have exceeded 265,000 people."

Including a related Cairo demonstration on June 30, the author puts the total in the city at perhaps 500,000. Including other protests throughout Egypt, the figure might approach one million, according to Roberts. The British *Guardian* gave a slightly higher estimate of "up to 500,000" massing in Tahrir Square alone. Still, all these figures are a far cry from the 20-plus million widely reported.

It cannot be denied, however, that the Tamarrud mobilizations were massive and included a majority of working-class and student forces. But while they included in their leadership young activists who had played important roles in the 2011 Tahrir Square mobilizations, they were overwhelmingly driven forward by pro-capitalist parties, not to mention billionaire capitalist funders who had either previously backed the Mubarak regime or participated in the 2011 elections as capitalist opposition parties.

The evidence is also clear that key forces in the military encouraged the protests, more than likely waiting in the wings for the moment to seize the opportunity to transform Tamarrud's demand for new elections into a fait accompli—that is, Morsi's immediate removal.

Indeed, prior to June 30, protesters at the Presidential Palace that housed Morsi were given virtual free reign as the military and police refused Morsi's call for aid. The military and police disappeared! Morsi was compelled to call on his followers in the countryside to defend his residence. Pitched battles, with an estimated one thousand on each side, ensued. Neither the police nor military intervened until hours later, signaling their intention to leave the elected president's fate to the protesters.

It was no accident that many of the leading chants on June 30 were demands that the *military* remove Morsi, as opposed to the formal Tamarrud demand for Morsi's resignation.

Revolutionary Socialists' mistakes

Tragically, when the military stepped in, some components of the Tamarrud mobilization, including Egypt's tiny Revolutionary Socialist (RS) group, hailed the coup, claiming that it represented nothing less than the "second Egyptian Revolution." The RS insisted that the military was compelled to step in to prevent the people from going further and challenging the state power itself! This delusion was accompanied by RS leaders' calling on the "new authorities" to "bring to trial" Morsi and his regime's supporters for their crimes against the Egyptian people. The crimes of the 30-year Mubarak dictatorship were not mentioned, as if al-Sisi and his army were new and unconnected entities with no past record.

The July 3 statement by the RS is amazing for its hyperbole, not to mention the fact that the group mistook a counterrevolution for a revolution. The RS wrote: "An unprecedented revolutionary situation has developed over the demand that the failed president and his group leave power. Practical steps towards taking power are being taken, by shutting down provincial governors' offices, and expelling the governors who are affiliated to the Brotherhood in many provinces, confirming the principle of direct democracy in governorate elections. In order to achieve this we call on the workers and the masses to form their popular committees in the workplaces and neighbourhoods.

"The speech by the Minister of Defence [General al-Sisi!] raised more questions than it answered, with its vague wording and expressions open to varying interpretations. It gave government and opposition 48 hours to agree to a way out of the crisis but raised fears of deals and compromises, such as the temporary handover of power to the president of the Shura Council (Morsi's brother-in-law).

"The failed regime is still resisting, and this is unacceptable to the masses of 30 June, who have rejected the Brotherhood's rule. And although the Minister of

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Defence's statement began by stressing non-interference in politics, it ended by indicating his participation in the drawing up [of] a road-map for the transitional period, building it into the political process."

We need not further recount the bloody aftermath of the July 3 coup. It was only weeks later that the Revolutionary Socialists, who a year earlier had campaigned for the capitalist Morsi's presidency, calling him the "right wing of the Egyptian Revolution," finally saw the forest for the trees and denounced al-Sisi's slaughter of MB supporters, while making sure to also condemn the crippled and beheaded MB, whose entire leadership had been jailed or murdered.

Revolutionary leadership required

The Sept. 23 "legal" banning of the MB and the preceding months of massive murder and repression of its ranks, as well as the persecution of regime opponents more generally, represents a tragic turn in the promising April 25, 2011, Arab Spring mobilizations that forced a reluctant Egyptian military, closely advised by its U.S. imperial backers, to remove 30-year dictator Hosni Mubarak.

While Egypt's Arab Spring galvanized mass forces to express the deeply felt anger and hatred at the horrific conditions that the regime had imposed in the course of driving through its neo-liberal programs, the central institutions of capitalist power remained virtually untouched.

The momentarily masked "democratically-minded" generals who replaced Mubarak had every intention of stacking the ballot boxes to achieve an electoral result that would rubber stamp their political, economic, and military rule. The generals who conducted the elections violated an Egyptian law that prohibited soldiers from voting, thus allowing 700,000 soldiers and military personnel to add their votes to the military regime candidate's total—though still an insufficient number to prevent a Morsi runoff victory.

The same military then declared the election to the upper house of the Egyptian parliament illegal and abolished the body entirely.

Mohammed Morsi, whose MB had for decades made its peace with the Mubarak dictatorship and who was a latecomer to the Tahrir Square mobilizations, emerged as the unexpected victor. But as a capitalist politician, Morsi was incapable of challenging any aspect of the economic and social system that he had supported for a lifetime. His regime was destined for defeat from day one; it was only a matter of time until the proper pretext was employed to formally restore the real power behind Egypt's economy and military.

Whatever modest reforms Morsi might have contemplated, his government's myriad ties to Egyptian capitalism and to world capitalist institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, made them impossible.



New unions have been formed across the country. But none are free from government or bureaucratic control. All of them backed the coup.

In fact, his most important measures were directed against Egyptian workers and farmers.

Egypt's 2011 revolution demanded justice, freedom, and equality but lacked a single working-class institution or deeply rooted revolutionary party to achieve these objectives. The Egyptian capitalist state power remains essentially unchallenged and intact, with no organized mass force on the scene to codify or realize even the most minimal democratic demands.

This is not to say that the Tahrir mobilizations did not open the door wide to important working-class and community organization. New unions have been formed across the country, and protests of all kinds, until the recent crackdown, were the norm. But none of these organizations has been consolidated, and few, if any, have developed into independent formations free from government or bureaucratic control. All of Egypt's trade unions, and especially the new and

barely coherent independent trade-union federation, backed the al-Sisi coup and supported this new dictator's call for a national mobilization to provide the military with a "mandate" to crush the MB.

The impressive June 30 Tamarrud mobilizations proved to be easy prey, if not the conscious product of a military-engineered tactic to remove Morsi and put Mubarak's regime, minus Mubarak, back in the "official" driver's seat of state power.

The future of the Egyptian revolution lies in the capacity of conscious revolutionary fighters to build a mass revolutionary socialist party of the working masses and oppressed.

This will inevitably include new independent formations where workers begin to exercise real power, with a leadership intent on challenging capitalist rule itself.

There will be no "democratic revolution" in Egypt separate and apart from the socialist transformation of society. The absence in Egypt today of even a semblance of socialist groups that have significant roots among the masses weighs heavily on the now indisputable need to transform the angry anti-capitalist sentiments that have motivated millions to fight back into a force capable of storming the heavens and ending capitalist rule.

The lessons of today's setback for the revolutionary process must be carefully evaluated by serious fighters as they prepare for the future. ■

Wadjda explores the role of women in Saudi Arabia

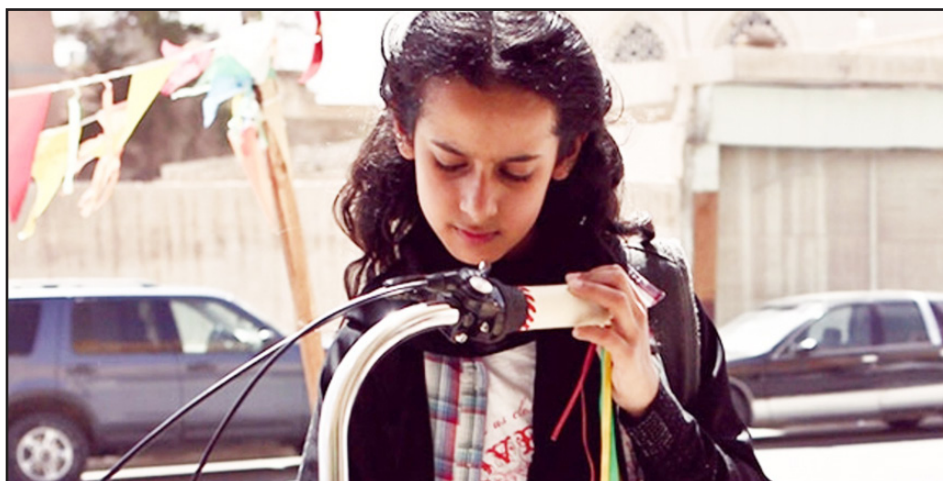
By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

"Wadjda," a film written and directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour. In Arabic with English subtitles, filmed in and around Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Al-Mansour's beautiful, thought-provoking film focuses on a mother and daughter who live in socially, religiously, and culturally male-dominated Saudi Arabia. Here, females are so devalued they are not included in depictions of family trees, which are prominently displayed in living rooms.

The eponymous lead role of lanky 10-year-old Wadjda is played by soulful-eyed Waad Mohammed. Right off, you get that she wants to go her own way. Wadjda listens to modern, American rock music on her CD player in her bedroom; she wears black and white Keds. She is a rebel; she speaks her mind to elders and tells the truth. Besides giving audiences a look into the lives of ordinary people in the capital city of Riyadh, the film hints that Wadjda herself could be seen as the new face of women in that country.

Wadjda's best friend, Abdullah (Abdullah Al Gohani), is a younger boy with flashing black eyes, who lives across the dusty, sandy street. A madras student, he wears a white gown and a white crocheted skullcap, as do his friends, even when playing and riding their bikes. He talks openly about idolizing suicide



bombers. Though his father is a politician of a different tribe running for office, Mansour thoughtfully and intelligently understates this aspect of the characters' lives.

Not yet teens, boys and girls play together and hang out. Wadjda envies Abdullah because he rides a bike. She wants one, feeling that it will allow her freedom. "You'll lose your virginity. You can't have children if you ride a bike," her mother warns. Wadjda is not dissuaded; a bike becomes her goal.

Backpacks are routinely inspected at her school, run by Ms. Hussa played by Ahd, and forbidden items (music tapes, baseball cards) are tossed out. Ms. Hussa, though a strict principal (Wadjda is often called in to her office and threatened

with expulsion), sports modern dress and hairstyle. Indoors, away from men, women can wear whatever they please. But before going out, they put on a full black abaya and black headscarf. Some go so far as to throw over their face a diaphanous, black scarf.

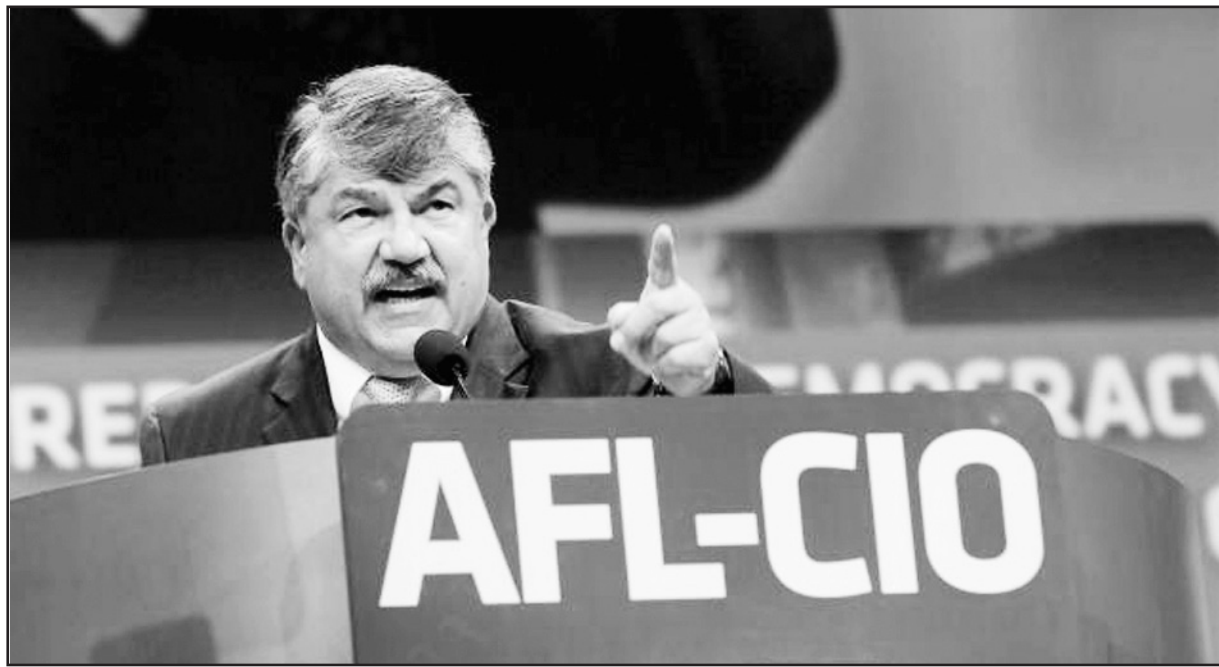
There's a scene where Wadjda and her friends sing and talk loudly; an older woman shuts them up, saying that men can hear their voices. The film points out that females cannot attract attention to themselves in any way. Women themselves enforce these rules. Still women can transact business with shopkeepers, i.e. men in lowly positions. There is something hauntingly beautiful in watching a group of covered, veiled women in black, only their eyes visible, flowing past

the garish display windows of a modern shopping mall.

The film allows the audience to view how everyday life is lived in Wadjda's home between her mother and father, where their culture is very different from that of the West. We also see a scene where religious police stop women on the street, rail at and threaten them for some perceived minor infraction. Yet men freely spew lewd remarks at women as they walk by.

Wadjda's mother and her handsome, fit father (Sultan Al Assaf) have separated because she could not give him a son. Wadjda adores him, as does her mother, played by voluptuous, dark-eyed Rheem Abdullah. When visiting, he and Wadjda play video games. The mother is misinformed about an impending marriage, and the truth is devastating. Crushed, she and Wadjda watch the festivities from their balcony.

A contest for the best recitation of the Koran is offered, with the prize being more than enough to buy a bike; Wadjda changes her ways. She impresses everyone with her devotion to studying the Koran. When the contest is over, Ms. Hussa decides how the money will be spent when Wadjda unabashedly blurts out her intention. One of the final scenes between Wadjda and her mother brought tears to my eyes. On her new bike, Wadjda heads for the open road and symbolic freedom with her friend, Abdullah. ■



Scoring the AFL-CIO convention: Style — 10, Substance — zero

By BILL ONASCH

It was during the Great Recession, and the first year of the Obama administration, when the AFL-CIO 2009 convention met in Pittsburgh. The number of unemployed had doubled over the previous 18 months and stood at a rate of 9.8 percent. Workers at General Motors and Chrysler were going through a gut-wrenching bankruptcy restructuring imposed by the new White House—and hailed by the unions as “saving the American auto industry.” Times were grim but the leaders of organized labor were relieved and optimistic now that the evil Bush had been replaced by a “friend of labor.”

When the 2013 AFL-CIO convention assembled in Los Angeles Sept. 8-11, General Motors and Chrysler are again profitable—and corporations in general are making record profits and sitting on a mountain of cash. The official unemployment rate has receded below the eight percent line. The economists explain that we have long been in recovery. Yet grim times are still palpable in the House of Labor despite their friend in the highest of all places.

Much of the fall in the unemployment rate is attributed to workers’ dropping out of the labor market in despair or accepting part-time employment that doesn’t pay the bills or provide benefits. There are still 22 million looking in vain for full-time jobs. For the first time in living memory, there is massive and growing unemployment in the public sector.

Inflation-indexed real wages of the working class continue their decades-long decline as income disparity favoring the wealthy is setting new records. The cynically titled Affordable Care Act—aka ObamaCare—which never could have passed Congress without labor’s heavy-handed lobbying, turns out to be fraught with setbacks and uncertainty even for unionized workers.

The few substantial social gains won in past struggles—such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid—are in imminent danger, not just from the Republicans but especially from the White House “friend” twice elected only with indispensable labor support.

The unions themselves have been in alarming decline. Less than one in eight workers today are represented by a union. In the private sector it’s less than seven percent. In recent years the number of strikes has dramatically fallen, even though nearly all employers have demanded substantial give-backs in wages, benefits, and working conditions.

As union officials shy away from actions in the workplace they increasingly look to politics for salvation. But they continue to reject the path taken by unions in Britain, Canada, and numerous other countries, who formed parties of their own to advance working-class interests.

Except in fund-raising—union PACs and SuperPACs now dole out hundreds of millions of dollars—their political strategy differs little from that proclaimed by Sam Gompers more than a century ago: “reward your friends and punish your enemies” within the two major boss-controlled parties. But many are beginning to wonder whether those they have rewarded so richly are not now punishing them.

Growing numbers of union office holders are starting to recognize that these trends threaten not only the “Middle Class” prosperity of their members for which they have always claimed credit—but their own as well. Federation president Richard Trumka told a journalist that the more astute “feel like it’s five min-

utes to Midnight.”

This recently manifested urgency to “do something” was reflected in a sharp departure from the same old, same old in preparing and staging the convention. Over the last several decades, typical union conventions in this country had become boring, pro-forma affairs, with politicians as guest speakers, and motions and resolutions adopted by voice vote after little or no debate. They are often held in prime tourist venues. The Amalgamated Transit Union, to which I pay retiree dues, once held a convention afloat a chartered Caribbean cruise ship. In many cases conventions became little more than junkets to reward faithful followers of the top bureaucracy on the local union level.

Such attributes were not entirely absent in Los Angeles. Political “friends” and even some good corporate citizens brought their blessing to the conclave. President Obama had been scheduled to address his generous supporters in person. Unfortunately, he was tied up in Washington lobbying for Congressional support for a new war against Syria, and the delegates had to be content with a video feed. Hospitality rooms offering food and beverage to hungry and thirsty delegates could still be found.

But the last remaining labor-beat reporter at a major newspaper, Steven Greenhouse of *The New York Times*, was wowed by what he saw in Los Angeles: “At the center of the welcoming hall, brilliantly colored 10-foot-tall posters of workers and union slogans towered over the convention delegates. One giant orange-and-yellow poster resembled an over-size woodcut, showing a farmworker hunched over a wheat field with bold letters, saying, ‘Workers Are the Backbone, Not the Blame.’ All this was a far cry from the dark, drab, lugubrious scenes found at many union gatherings of the past. After decades of decline, the energy and focus—and, yes, the artwork—at this week’s AFL-CIO convention signaled, as one union president put it, ‘our need to put some movement back in the labor movement.’”

Greenhouse noted a change in rhetoric as well as graphic decoration. He quoted Trumka, “At the end of the day it’s on us to build a movement not for the 99 percent but of the 99 percent. Not just the 11 percent we are right now.”

Trumka prefers the catchy if mathematically inaccurate slogan of the Occupy movement to the stodgy old class formulations of past militant unionism. The taboo imposed on the very concept of class by the class that rules is seldom breached even today by those who represent “working families.” Still, recognition of the need for unions to reach out to social movement and community allies is to be applauded.

Some of the allies invited to partner with, if not join the AFL-CIO, are similarly structured. The NAACP, National Organization for Women, and the Sierra Club have mass memberships numbering in the hundreds of thousands—but are top-down formations currently intimately connected with the political Establishment. They too are overdue for debate that can lead to a more useful utilization of their potential.

Starting months prior to the convention, the AFL-CIO leadership invited these courted allies to join union activists in “listening sessions” to discuss what needs to be done. Thousands purportedly participated in live audience, conference call, or internet format. The listeners then prepared a list of 45 “Action Sessions” at the convention open to “delegates, community members and other stakeholders.”

The present predicament of those who need to toil

to live is full of potential “teachable moments.” But the menu offered in Los Angeles by those chefs who listened had only a few tempting appetizers, lots of thin soup—and some questionable sushi.

There was a timely session about “Veterans and Labor Community Partnerships”—but nothing about ongoing war. The only oblique reference to global warming that is posing a threat to our very biosphere was “Infrastructure, Jobs, and Reducing Emissions: Upgrading Natural Gas Distribution Systems.” One entitled “Workers’ Voice: An Independent Movement to Elect Progressives,” amounted to a tweaking of the present policy of trying to advance “accountable” candidates within the two boss parties—especially the Democrats—with a fall-back position of supporting a Lesser Evil when necessary.

Greenhouse was also impressed with some symbolic changes in Federation leadership. Bhairavi Desai, executive director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, was added to the Executive Council. Her organization is an example of “alt-labor,” worker centers and other nonstandard formations that take up worker issues without being legally certified for bargaining rights. Tefere Gebre, an immigrant from Ethiopia, and head of the Orange County California AFL-CIO, was elected executive vice-president, the number three ranking office in the Federation.

Some established union-based issue groups were not given such a hearty welcome. US Labor Against the War and the Labor Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care had to be content with information tables.

Greenhouse completely ignored the anger expressed in Los Angeles about the threat to so-called Taft-Hartley multi-employer health-care plans arising from interpretation of ObamaCare. Delegates passed a resolution detailing immediate steps necessary to protect these plans covering hundreds of thousands of workers and their dependents. A delegation led by Trumka was dispatched after adjournment to meet with President Obama about this urgent matter.

At least they got a prompt answer. The same White House that had granted reprieves to employers on some sections of the law without even being asked piously told labor’s leaders they couldn’t make exceptions to the law just to help their friends.

As all polls clearly demonstrate, the working-class majority in the USA is thoroughly disgusted with the political Establishment. Many good union people are likewise turned off by the emphasis on politics advanced by the mainstream union bureaucracy and clamor for more direct action against the bosses.

Certainly, workplace-centered direct action is the main and indispensable tool of choice in pursuing the primary mission of unions. Likewise, mass actions in the streets are essential to advancing the goals of the social and community movements tardily targeted as partners by union officialdom. But the political monopoly of the bosses and bankers makes any gains through these traditional and still needed struggles tenuous and temporary.

The problem created by those in charge of the House of Labor is not their emphasis on politics but their refusal to recognize the need for class-based politics. Our side should be directly fighting for political power, not begging or bribing politicians beholden to our class enemy. There is no more important question for the American working class today than launching a party of our own. Despite their present weakness and disorientation, our unions, and the allies they now solicit, are the foundation upon which such a party can be built. ■

... Linda McQuaid

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dogged insistence on a more progressive tax system marks her as a radical on the political landscape. Her policies on equality, housing, and the environment may rally grassroots NDP members and voters against Justin Trudeau’s Liberals and Stephen Harper’s Tories, and also against an increasingly conservative NDP establishment.

That’s why a bevy of party bureaucrats pushed and plumped for her opponent, former network TV journalist Jennifer Hollett. And that made McQuaid’s win all the sweeter. It also opens up space for the party left, including the Socialist Caucus, which actively backed her candidacy, to fight for socialist policies. The biggest winners in this episode are working-class people who want more democracy in the party and in the unions, and who are looking for leadership in the fight against rising inequality and deadly austerity measures.

The date for the Toronto Centre by-election is not yet set. But when it is, those who want the NDP to turn left should pull out all the stops to get Linda McQuaid elected MP. ■

By MIKE ROGGE

A socialist for Minneapolis city council

Here in Minneapolis, students and professors have returned to class, the temperatures are plummeting, and the leaves on the trees are changing from green to red. That can only mean one thing, election season is here again, but this time around, it looks to be a lot more interesting.

Ty Moore is running in the 9th ward of the Minneapolis city council on the Socialist Alternative ticket. The campaign has been endorsed by many prominent local activists, the SEIU Minnesota State Council, and the Green Party. Moore has been on the front line of the Occupy Homes struggle, a movement that has successfully stopped several evictions with mass actions and civil disobedience—one of which he was arrested at.

While there is certainly nothing new about socialist electoral campaigns, this one has been getting a lot of buzz in the local papers. Moore and his campaign stand on the shoulders of another Socialist Alternative candidate, Kshama Sawant, in Seattle. In last year's elections, Sawant received over 20,000 votes (29%) against House Democratic incumbent Frank Chopp, which was not only the largest number of votes an openly socialist campaign had won in Seattle in decades but also the greatest electoral challenge Chopp had received in all the 18 years he was in office. But even those figures pale in comparison to those in the August elections of this year, when Sawant won over 44,000 votes (35%) in a three-way race



against two Democrats in the Seattle city council election.

While we in Socialist Action are critical of Socialist Alternative's Green Party endorsement, since the Greens are a pro-capitalist organization, we see any openly socialist campaign as a step forward for working-class independence.

Socialist Action views Socialist Alternative's electoral successes as a big opportunity for working-class candidates to step up to the plate and challenge the Democrats on their own turf.

Socialist Action critically supports all of Socialist Alternative's candidates—including Kshama Sawant in Seattle, Seamus Whelan in Boston, and Ty Moore in Minneapolis.

(Above) At least 60 people filled the May Day Bookstore in Minneapolis in a Sept. 28 campaign event for Ty Moore (standing). The event was sponsored by Socialist Alternative, Socialist Action, May Day Bookstore, and the local chapter of Democratic Socialists of America. \$2500 was raised for the campaign. ■

... Climate change

(continued from page 12)

of the warming that has occurred since 1980. Its heat content is two times that of the lower layer located 700 to 2000 meters down.

Over the last decade, the upper layer has warmed more slowly. This apparent slowdown is closely related to the global surface temperature because the temperature of the overlying atmosphere is strongly linked to that of the ocean surface. The reduced warming of the ocean's upper layer is due not to less heat from above but rather, greater heat loss to below. Thirty percent of the heat is now going into the deep ocean. Cool, deep water rises to the ocean surface, displacing warmer surface water, which in turn gets buried deeper down. This upwelling simultaneously cools the atmosphere.

The ocean is still getting warmer, but the temporary cooling of the Pacific's surface has constrained global surface temperatures somewhat. This is reflected in ENSO's La Nina phase. According to a paper by Kevin Trenberth of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, trade winds in the subtropical Pacific have become stronger and altered ocean currents, strengthening subtropical sea water circulation and transporting heat into the deep ocean. This vast body of water—70% of Earth's surface—continues to grow ever warmer, proving that global heating hasn't taken a hiatus. Scientists warn that it is only a matter of time until the "missing heat" that's being sequestered is released to blow up in our faces.

Rapidly disappearing ice masses

Further proof that conditions are getting warmer is the shocking loss of ice on the planet. The melting of Earth's cryosphere is accelerating. Last year, summer Arctic sea ice extent reached another record low, and it is not recovering. Because of darkening seawater from lack of reflective snow, the polar ocean is absorbing more sunlight and warming up. The warm seawater makes for slower ice formation in the wintertime. Therefore, there is far less multi-year ice, making it much thinner and reducing not just the extent but the volume of ice as well.

We have radically altered the regime in the Arctic, which in turn, affects weather conditions in the lower latitudes. By heating the Arctic two times faster than elsewhere on the planet, the temperature gradient between it and the temperate zone has been reduced, upsetting the heat balance.

Meandering air streams that encircle the globe draw warm air from the tropics when they swing north and draw cold air from the North Pole when they swing south. These have slowed or ground to a halt in recent summers. These gigantic airwaves can stretch from 2500 to 4000 km (1500-2500 mi.) from crest to crest.



(Left) White House protest on Feb. 17 against XL Pipeline.

An altered or super jet stream can form deep loops, block weather patterns, such as blistering heat waves and withering droughts, and hold them in place for weeks on end. In winter, prolonged, severe cold snaps can occur for the same reason.

In the last two decades, Greenland has lost 140 billion tons of ice each year, and from 2005 to 2010, it lost ice five times faster. This is occurring by two means:

1) Basal melting as warm sea water erodes the ice tongues from underneath,

2) water boring down into the ice through *moulins* from vast melt ponds on top and lubricating the ice's flow to the ocean. In addition to enormous blue lakes forming, the ice is becoming pockmarked with thousands of heat-absorbing dark holes filled with a combination (known as cryokinite) of melt water, desert dust, soot from combustion, and algae. This feeds back on warming.

Similar conditions exist on the Antarctic Peninsula and West Antarctic Ice Sheet (WAIS), with the South Polar region losing 1320 billion metric tons of ice over the last two decades. Together, the losses in the north and south, which are accelerating, have contributed 11.1 mm in sea level rise. Since 1901, sea levels have risen 7.5 inches (19 cm), with significant contributions from alpine glaciers, which are also shrinking at an alarming rate and seriously undermining freshwater supplies for mountain communities and ecosystems.

Antarctica is in a somewhat paradoxical situation. The continent is gaining sea ice but losing land ice, which has accumulated over thousands of years through snowfall. There are two reasons sea ice is gaining in the cold season, which reflects the complexity of the changes humans have wrought. Ozone depletion over the region causes stratospheric cooling that increases winds. By making it stronger, the ozone hole is also affecting the polar vortex that swirls around the bottom of the globe. Converging air currents, blowing in different directions, push the ice around, causing it to pile

Richard Clement / Reuters

up in thick ridges. This leaves more open water that can freeze. Also, the Southern Ocean is freshening. There has been an increase in snow and rainfall due to greater volumes of water vapor in a warming atmosphere. In addition, melting ice from the peninsula and WAIS provide more freshwater that freezes more easily than salty.

Fresher seawater, being less saline, means there is more stratification and less mixing between the warm and cold layers, and thus less melting of sea ice. Eighty percent of the sea ice growth can be explained by changing prevailing winds and 20% by ocean circulation. The southern sea ice increase has been at a rate of 1% per decade on average over the past 30 years. This pales in comparison to the 15.5% loss per decade in the north.

While the interior of East Antarctica's ice sheet—considered much more stable than the peninsula or WAIS—grew some between 1992 and 2011, it has been discovered that persistent wind scour on the surface actually erodes and sublimates the snow, reducing its accumulation. Because of that, researchers have found that surface-mass-balance has been overestimated by 11 to 36.5 gigatons per year. So the East Antarctic ice mass is not growing as much as had been previously assumed.

This removes further ammunition from skeptics who claim that Earth's ice masses have always had ups and downs and always will, when the actual trend is toward loss rather than gain.

Another dire consequence of warming temperatures at the poles is the thawing of permafrost both on land and the continental shelf. Vast plumes of methane (CH₄) have been found by a Russian research team in the Siberian Arctic. As frozen seafloor sediments become unstabilized by warming sea water, they are releasing hundreds of methane fountains from the seabed, some more than a kilometer across. CH₄ eventually oxidizes to CO₂ and would ordinarily do so in the water column in the deeper ocean, but in this case, because of the shallow depths over the continental shelf, there is no time for the methane to oxidize before reaching the surface. Therefore, it is outgassing straight into the atmosphere, with 23 times more global heating potential. This is an extremely powerful feedback that could get out of control very quickly.

That is why working people the world over must take matters into their own hands and demand a *system* change, *not* climate change! ■

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

CSF: Only right wing would gain from student federation split

By TYLER MACKINNON and BEN ROSTOKER

With the Quebec student strikes still fresh in mind, one would expect a push for solidarity in student unions to fight austerity measures and tuition hikes. Sadly, the opposite seems to be the case. Before the fall semester, students from 15 different universities across the Canadian state campaigned to get their local student unions to leave the Canadian Federation of Students.

The CFS was formed in 1981. It has been a critical tool for organizing cross-country activities to protest rising fees. Originally the CFS was identified with grassroots actions and advanced working-class demands for the abolition of tuition fees. However, by the mid-1990s what was once a meeting place for progressive student activists had turned into a vehicle for careerist liberals. Many of these careerists sought to downplay radical demands and weaken the CFS as a forum for student union organizing. Under an increasingly opportunist leadership, the CFS became riddled with corruption, including such practices as ballot box stuffing. CFS activism shrivelled.

This altered somewhat in the spring of 2012, when tens of thousands of Quebecois students hit the streets against the tuition increases imposed by the Jean Charest Quebec Liberal government. The CFS rose from hibernation and supported the Quebec students; it even dusted off its old demands for free-post secondary education. As the Quebec student strikes evolved into a general movement against austerity, the CFS claimed it sought to reform its own top-down style of conventions comprised of delegates, and replace it with the Quebecois system of gener-

al assemblies that encouraged all students to participate.

Sadly, the promises of the CFS leadership never materialized. It has been over a year and not a single student protest has been organized by the CFS. There has been no move to adopt Quebec's more democratic institutions. Indeed, the idea of a Quebec-like student strike spreading to English Canada has been condemned by the CFS, which claims it would be divisive, since the student body is "not ready yet." This is where we see some of the basis for the split emerging.

Despite the threats voiced by various spokespersons for the students seeking to disaffiliate from the CFS, it seems unlikely that the 6000 to 8000 signatures needed at Ryerson University to cause a referendum on this issue will be gathered.

Ryerson Student Union President Melissa Palermo expressed surprise that students would even consider such a move. "We have had such widespread support across Ryerson for what we are doing with the CFS," Palermo told Socialist Action. She said that despite the many flaws of the CFS, it still provides post-secondary students with a variety of services, such as the community food rooms. Right-wing students tried to push disaffiliation in 2009, and the RSU is confident it will fail again.

However, the last split effort does pose key questions: Why and how can this be done? It seems clear that those who support the split want to form a new student union, but they seem to have no plan to accomplish it. There is no broad, grassroots organization working to unite those who want to create a new union.

Part of the problem is the political makeup of the split

campaign. At its heart is an anarchist-inspired "apolitical" movement of right wingers, anti-unionists, anarchists, new left socialists, and others who claim that this is a movement that everyone, both "right and left," have their reasons to support. Thus we have right wingers saying that they never wanted to be in a union, and leftists denouncing the lack of concrete CFS solidarity with Quebec students. So the guiding light seems to be "let's break the CFS and let its members spill out into the ether."

The prevalence of anarchist misconceptions on organizing without leadership, and so-called "diversity of tactics" (which all too often means no planning and condoning the actions of a substitutionist, violent minority) means that there is no plan to replace the CFS with a superior structure. Plus, there is no attempt to build a movement inside the CFS to address the corruption, unaccountability, and lack of internal democracy—even as part of a plan to build a better and separate union.

And with no visible organization, or coordination, those wishing to leave the CFS will either be left to their own devices, and substantially weaker. Less effective equivalents to the CFS could emerge, or a disjointed and isolationist political landscape for student unions may result.

The CFS is a union and it should be treated accordingly. There should be an organized fight within it. Only as a last ditch effort, and provided that there is a mass base for real change, and only if the route to internal democratic change is totally barred, should a split be contemplated.

Youth for Socialist Action argues that there should be a fight within the CFS to push its leadership to the left, or to replace it and return the CFS to its democratic roots as a bottom up organization. In addition, the local student unions should encourage its members to get involved in campaigns for social justice, such as the "drop tuition fees" and "abolish student debt" campaigns, the Justice for Sammy movement, opposition to war spending and social cuts, and the fight for affordable housing and free mass public transit.

Youth for Socialist Action contends that it is vital to show the connection between the attack on the students' movement and the corporate austerity drive. To fight inside, as well as outside the CFS, is the only way the students' movement can hope to win against the capitalist rulers and their anti-student, anti-worker agenda.

UNIFOR: Will action match the rhetoric?

By LINDSAY HINSHELWOOD

The author is an assembly line worker at Ford Oakville, and was candidate for Unifor president on Aug 31.

As a 15-year member of the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW), I couldn't buy the line that my union was merging with the Communication, Energy and Paper Workers Union (CEP) just to have greater strength in numbers. The labour movement already had the numbers; what it needs is greater solidarity in action. So why this merger to form Unifor?

The CAW name was tarnished for many reasons, not just the lack of democracy and vision, or the plague of appointed reps, or nepotism and tokenism. It was also because of the 2009 auto bailouts in exchange for massive concessions, and for not supporting any other workers.

Here are two examples from my own experience: (1) My Local (now Unifor Local 707) president tried to get a court injunction against the CEP-represented workers at the Ford Oakville Assembly Complex, both in 2006 against an information picket line they set up, and in 2010 for being locked out by the company, instead of supporting those workers and blaming the company. (2) The Local invited Lisa Raitt, the former federal Minister of Labour, to the union hall as a guest speaker after her government had legislatively broken the strike of Air Canada and CP Rail workers.

The merger also provided an opportunity for the founding unions to rewrite their constitutions and tighten up their Policies and Procedures. Which is exactly what they did. The new Unifor constitution protects the National Officers a little more, it reduces the role of the Public Review Board, diminishes the appeal procedure for members who want to grieve decisions, and it allows the union to collect dues from laid-off workers who have found other jobs to help them pay bills while they are waiting for a return to work call from their employer.

Back in 2009, during the auto industry bailouts, the CAW was not prepared with a plan. It has yet to come up with a vision, other than the Auto Policy Plan, which is full of absurdities, often enacted at the expense of other industries and taxpayers. At the Unifor founding convention, officials made claims about union renewal and moving forward. So why didn't the National Officers, who brag about their experience and knowledge, implement a measure of democracy at the initial convention?

It was an opportunity to implement One Member One Vote, and to invite nominations for the new 25 National Executive Board positions elected at the convention. But this didn't happen. Retiring National Officers declared it wasn't the right time—an excuse I've been hearing for 15 years.

However, I did get nominated by Bruce Allen, Vice President of former CAW Local 199 and one of the most outspoken militants. I proudly accepted. Never in CAW history had the top positions been contested. It was necessary that Unifor's first National President be elected instead of following the usual practice where people at the top pick and choose the people at the top.

With a modest grassroots leaflet and only four minutes to speak, I managed to snag 17.49% of the vote. That sent a strong message that members want change at the top. It hopefully set the precedent that these positions in future will be contested. The other 24 nominees, all promoted by the National Officers of both unions, were acclaimed. Acclamation should be a dirty word in an organization that purports to be democratic.

In 2012 many autoworkers were hoping for a strike. But a strike was avoided by hyping threats of plant closures, followed by more frightful concessions. Unifor has since "moved forward" by ratifying the same massive concessions for GM Cami workers. It accepted that the "supplementals" in those bargaining units will now become full time—but with a 10-year phase-in period to reach the top pay rate, so these workers will be working nearly 15 years

before they achieve it. And they will never receive the same benefits as those on the first tier. This is shameful.

Unifor's new National President, Jerry Dias, was at the Ford Plant in Oakville on Sept. 19 along with Lisa Raitt, now federal Minister of Transportation, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, and company executives to celebrate the \$135 million in taxpayers' money to bribe the car bosses to retool for new product lines. Sadly, this P.R. Exercise came on the heels of Unifor Local 707's

fundraising for school supplies.

These latest examples show why the union needs to be independent of, and not a lobbyist for, the government and corporations, because the outcome of subservient lobbying is almost always in favour of the employers and not workers.

Unifor needs to acknowledge the dissension in the rank and file and come up with a vision to bring the "supplemental" and lower waged workers up to a living wage, and address the plight of youth unemployment and underemployment, to truly move forward. It will not thrive if it refuses to lead the fights workers are facing now. ■

NDP: McQuaid nomination challenges Mulcair's policies

By BARRY WEISLEDER

When close to 400 New Democrats crowded a YMCA auditorium on Sept. 14 to choose Linda McQuaig to be their candidate in the Toronto Centre federal by-election, they bucked a trend. The trend is exemplified by federal NDP Leader Tom Mulcair's embrace of the status quo: pipelines to the east, pro-Israeli apartheid foreign policy, reliance on the private sector to generate jobs, and no new taxes on big corporations and the super-rich.

Particularly on the latter point, Mulcair now has a vocal challenger—one with a good chance of joining his parliamentary caucus. The labour-based NDP placed a close second to the Liberal Party in the riding in the May 2011 general election.

Linda McQuaig, former *Toronto Star* columnist and author of many books on economic inequality, proclaimed after her nomination victory in Toronto's downtown core that she has no intention of backing down.

"They should pay more," she told the *Huffington Post* on Sept. 16. Over the

past 20 to 30 years the very rich have got richer, but the proportion of taxes they pay has dropped. "We definitely need higher taxes on the rich," she said. "First of all, we need the revenue to do what we want to do and, second of all, we need a better distribution of income in the country. We've developed too big a gap between the rich and the poor."

McQuaig co-authored a book with Neil Brooks, "The Trouble with Billionaires," calling for steep marginal tax rate increases of 60 per cent for the rich (those earning above \$500,000 a year) and 70 per cent for the super-rich (those earning \$2.5 million a year) in order to address income inequality in Canada.

The problem right now, McQuaig said, is that the top marginal rate kicks in at about \$135,000 at the federal level but stays flat after that. "So, whether you are earning \$135,000 or \$1.5 million or \$3 million, you pay the same top marginal tax rate," she said. But Mulcair has categorically ruled out taxing the very rich.

While McQuaig is no anti-capitalist, her articulate, well-documented, and

(continued on page 8)

By ROBBIE MAHOOD

Controversy over the rights of religious and cultural minorities has once again taken centre stage in Quebec, ever since the minority Parti Quebecois (PQ) government of Pauline Marois declared its intention to introduce a Charter of Quebec Values. Purporting to strengthen the separation of church and state, the charter would outlaw “ostentatious” religious symbols or clothing worn by government workers and in public institutions such as primary schools and daycares. This would target women wearing the hijab (head scarf) and extend as well to the Sikh turban and possibly even to the Jewish kippah.

The numerous Christian crosses that dot the Quebec landscape, including the large crucifix hanging in the National Assembly and the giant illuminated cross atop Mont Royal overlooking Montreal, would be exempted on the grounds of belonging to the province’s “patrimoine” or cultural heritage.

The proposed charter has split the population down the middle, with 43% in favour and 42% opposed, according to one poll. Support for the charter is seemingly on the rise especially outside of multi-ethnic Montreal. However, there is strong opposition from diverse quarters, including important women’s organizations.

Sept. 14 saw a demonstration in Montreal of over 20,000 against the bill, organized by the ad hoc Quebec Collective Against Islamophobia. The Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF, Council on the Status of Women) expressed grave concern that the charter would further marginalize Muslim women. The Marois government is now trying to reverse that position by packing the CSF with its own appointees.

The charter is supported by the provincial government employees’ union, but the large union centrals—the FTQ, the CSN and the largest teachers’ union, the CSQ—have so far remained non-committal. The union leaders are caught between rejecting clearly discriminatory legislation and their traditional loyalty to the PQ.

The federalist forces in Quebec are all opposed to the Charter. This includes the provincial Liberal Party and the three federalist parties representing Quebec in Ottawa, the New Democratic Party, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Party of Canada.

Passage of the Bill in the National Assembly will depend on whether the PQ can get support from the right-wing populist Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ). Thus far, the CAQ wants restrictive dress codes applied to higher civil servants only. But it will have its eye on the polls, and its position could shift.

Reaction in English-speaking Canada has been entirely predictable. There, the media and a wide swath of politicians have worked themselves into quite a self-righteous lather about the alleged superiority of Canadian multiculturalism over backward Quebecois ethnic nationalism.

The left-wing party, Quebec Solidaire, with two deputies in the National Assembly, opposes the Charter from the standpoint of “laïcité ouverte.” That means separation of church and state, yes, but not to the extent of dictating clothes and ornaments worn by public employees.

Noteworthy is the opposition the PQ charter has provoked from within the nationalist and sovereignist camp. The Bloc Quebecois (the sovereignist counterpart of the PQ in the federal arena) expelled one of its five MPs because she had publicly criticized the repressive aspects of the charter.

Quebec’s new Charter of Values not the road to national liberation

M. Breton Fontaine



(Above) Quebec student strike in 2012.

Jean Dorion, a respected sovereignist who was a Bloc MP and a former president of the nationalist St. Jean Baptiste Society, describes the PQ initiative as a gift to the federalists. Likewise, sovereignist intellectual Michel Seymour termed the PQ approach to immigrant minorities shameful and saluted Quebec Solidaire for opposing the charter.

A petition titled “For an inclusive Quebec” has garnered over 12,000 signatures, including many supporters of independence. The authors of the petition refer to the “staggeringly high unemployment rate among Quebec immigrants” and go on to point out that “a ban on religious symbols in public service, schools and daycares would ... further exclude immigrants from the Quebec labour market, ... increase the vulnerability of women wearing the hijab and exacerbate inequalities between men and women.” This in a nutshell is the refutation to the PQ’s claim that it is promoting social cohesion and defending women’s equality.

Hitherto, opposition to the xenophobic tendencies in Quebec society has rested on defense of individual rights and cultural pluralism. This is the position, for example, to be found in the report of Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor in their 2008 report on “reasonable accommodation” of immigrant communities in the province. Missing in this stance is any consideration of the fragile identity of the Quebecois as a small national minority within a vast English-speaking North America.

The problem of overcoming Quebec’s national oppression is key to building an inclusive society for immigrants. In former times the PQ leadership stressed its commitment to “civic nationalism.” This concept lay behind the introduction of mandatory French schooling for children of new immigrants to Quebec. The result is a much more diverse francophone population. Now, the PQ is trying to rehabilitate a retrograde ethnic nationalism. Ironically, those predominantly targeted by its new legislation would be women who are French speaking!

It might be countered that all nationalisms promote chauvinism and sow division. Indeed, some socialist currents reject the struggle for Quebec independence on that basis. But precisely because Marxists uphold the highest stan-

dards of internationalism, they must take up the cause of oppressed peoples whose national development is thwarted to one degree or another by the capitalist order. That continues to apply to Quebec, in our view.

Socialists should welcome this most recent crisis of perspectives in Quebec’s sovereignist movement and pay close attention to how it unfolds. But not as do the federalists (and some on the left) who oppose an independent Quebec. To the contrary, we agree with those who say the PQ’s racist gambit weakens the fight for national liberation. Our perspective is for a political party rooted in a revitalized labour movement, which advances a program for independence and socialism.

The PQ’s Charter of Quebec Values should be defeated for the following reasons:

- It punishes women coming from conservative patriarchal cultures while ignoring the sexism rampant in more ‘modern’ capitalist societies. These issues will be settled by women themselves and not by state dictat.

- Some supporters of the charter are motivated by anti-clericalism. Quebec only recently emerged from the domination of the Roman Catholic Church. Against all evidence, these people are haunted by the spectre of regression. Where this is not a mask for Islamophobia, it is based on a faulty understanding of religious belief and its social role (cf. Marx’s often misinterpreted discussion of religion as the “opium of the people”).

- The premise of shared values in a class society like Quebec is an oxymoron. Irreconcilable differences exist on every front from university tuition fees to fossil fuel exploitation and transport. The values discourse is an attempt to create a phony consensus to help maintain social order.

- Finally, socialists want to deepen the unity of the working class by recognizing oppression within its ranks as well as in society, and by building solidarity. Defense of the most vulnerable sections of our class is not just a question of justice (although it is certainly that) but is also an important strategic principle. ■

Nationalize telecoms, don’t Canadianize them

By YASIN KAYA

In June 2012 the Conservative federal government made changes to the Telecommunications Act to allow foreign telecom companies to buy domestic operators that own less than 10 per cent of market share. The social democratic NDP and many labour unions found this “very problematic.”

When the plans of Verizon, an American telecom giant, to purchase Wind, a small operator in Canada, became public in June 2013, the shares of the big three “Canadian” firms (Bell, Rogers, and Telus, which have a combined 90 per cent share in Canada’s market with 26.9 million wireless subscribers) tumbled. But the stocks bounced back when Verizon indicated it would not be entering Canada after all. The debate intensified over the upcoming new wireless 700 MHz spectrum (high speed internet) auction. That’s when each of three Canadian giants can bid for 25 per cent of the spectrum, but others can buy up to 50 per cent.

Canadian bosses and workers reacted with rage. Thousands of unionized workers marched in protest. The Canadian Federation of Pensioners declared its concerns over the fate of Canadian telecom giants’ revenues; pensions are invested there. The telecom giants ran a “Fair for Canada” campaign with full page ads in newspapers. They argued that Canadian jobs in the sector would be lost, rural communities’ access to wireless would drop, and Canadians’ privacy would be at risk

if a foreign cell phone provider dominated the domestic market. But the government claimed, “More choice, lower price, better services,” encouraging more competition in the telecom industry with its own campaign titled “Consumers First.”

Both sides are wrong, but for different reasons. It is true that the Canadian telecom market is dominated by giant firms. This is hardly a surprise since there is monopoly control over most of the telecom markets in the world. Inviting Verizon, a gigantic corporation with enormous capital, to enter the Canadian market would not foster but rather impede competition.

“We would not allow that to happen,” the government might claim. But if the government has that kind of power over these firms, then why doesn’t it use it to reduce consumer prices and foster investment by trimming the profit margins of the domestic “big three”? Or if it really prioritizes consumers’ welfare over the corporate interest, it could follow the socialist course of producing telecom services for people’s needs, not for private profits.

“Protection” against the “foreign” firms is what makes the Canadian telecom market peculiar. “The barriers of entry” facing foreign corporations should be preserved. But much more should be done to build a truly beneficial industry. Nationalist sentiments that favour Canadian firms over American ones are wrong-headed for several reasons:

First, workers (a majority of the population) and bosses (less than 1%) have conflicting interests. Firms, be they Canadian or American, aim to maximize profits. They intend to give the workers less, and make the consumers (who are mostly workers) pay more. It may be true that many Canadian pensioners’ financial interests

are now tied to the shares of “the big three.” However, doesn’t this ongoing process prove the need for an independent pension fund, which is controlled by the pensioners themselves—rather than workers’ earnings being invested in corporations that they cannot control whatsoever?

Secondly, Canadian and American bosses are linked to one another through a myriad of investment ties. Since the end of World War II, multinational corporations have dominated. U.S. firms began building branch plants or subsidiaries inside Canada in order to bypass tariff restrictions—which, by the way, taught the U.S. firms how to enter the European market, a process which is dubbed “Canadianization” by some Marxists.

Today, the U.S. is the largest foreign investor in Canada, and U.S. investors hold 54.5 per cent of Canada’s total internal investment stock. U.S. and Canadian capital are inter-connected to such an extent that it is difficult to find a purely “Canadian” firm. The “nationalist” bourgeoisie that social democrats and Stalinists wrongly present as a strategic ally for the working class does not exist. The interests of the Canadian bosses lie in collaborating with their American counterparts to accumulate capital around the world. Canada is not a “neo-colony” but an imperialist state, one that is a junior partner of U.S. imperialism.

Last but not least, communication is a right! Isn’t it ironic that many who see people’s revolts as “Twitter revolutions” decline to make the case that the wireless industry, on which all social media depends, should be publicly owned and managed? Nationalization, not Canadianization of the telecommunication industry is the way forward for a sector that should serve popular needs, not the priorities of private profit making. ■

Climate change panel reports global warming is 'unequivocal'

By CHRISTINE FRANK

Just as it seems readily apparent to most of us when we stick our noses out the door, the warming of the planet's climate system is "unequivocal." This is according to the over 1000 scientists of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), who released the first part of their Fifth Assessment on Sept. 27, in Stockholm. The "Summary for Policymakers" states that each of the last three decades has been successively warmer on Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850, and the human influence on rising temperature due to fossil-fuel combustion is clear.

Using the term "extremely likely," the scientific body is 95% certain that the warming is anthropogenic, as compared with a 90% "very likely" in its 2007 report, and only 66% "likely" in 2001's report. This is because the evidence is more firmly established than ever, coming from 9200 peer-reviewed studies, two-thirds of which were published after 2007.

Little has changed since the first assessment of 1990, so we may ask what good this great search for answers on the part of the UN is when nothing has been done to preserve the climate from rampant destruction thus far. In 2012, carbon dioxide emissions were at a record high and rose 1.4% to 31.6 billion tons.

In May of this year, seasonal CO2 concentrations in the Northern Hemisphere reached 400 parts per million for the first time. Their rate of increase has accelerated since the last century, and it is now at 2 ppm per year.

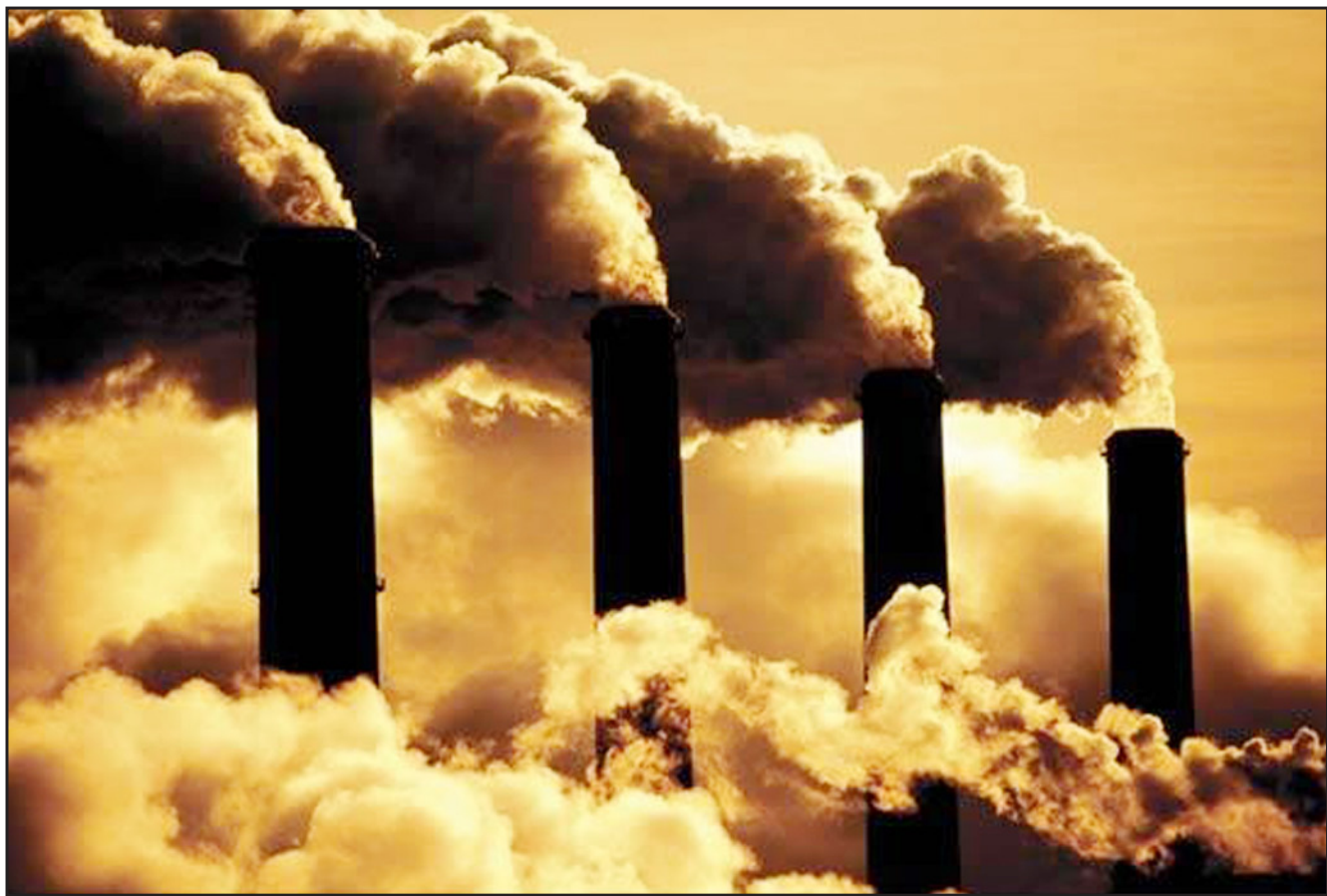
Thirty percent of our carbon dioxide emissions have been absorbed by the ocean, causing it to acidify and imperil marine life. The IPCC expects acidification to increase and amplify warming by 0.9F because of the restricted ability of the ocean to take up more carbon. Another important observation the report makes is the eventual thawing of the permafrost down through the top 10 feet, which would release twice as much carbon into the atmosphere. It behooves everyone to pay attention to these and other dangerous feedbacks at work.

Critics often accuse the IPCC of being conservative. This is because of its consensus-based way of drawing conclusions, the undue influence government leaders and environment ministers have on decision making, and the unwillingness of any scientist to be absolutely 100% sure about anything given the gaps in human knowledge. Nonetheless, the IPCC has strengthened its general conclusions: Climate change is indisputably real, caused by humans, and proceeding unabated. The overwhelming evidence is found in warming oceans, vanishing ice masses, rising sea levels, and raging weather extremes due to unrelenting fossil-fuel emissions.

However, some scientists fear that pressure from skeptics may have forced the panel to "low-ball" some of its predictions on sea-level rise and climate sensitivity—the projected effect a doubling of CO2 over pre-industrial levels would have on global temperature if business proceeds as usual. Their new sea-level rise projection is 28 to 97 cm by 2100, which is 50% higher than the old one, but many glaciologists expect a one meter rise (39 inches) by then. Future IPCC temperature ranges from 1.5 to 4.5 Celsius (3-8 F), with a doubling of CO2.

On the other hand, climatologists such as Michael Mann at Penn State believe the low-end effect of doubling CO2 should be 2C. The people of island nations threatened with inundation by rising seas prefer there be no greater than a one-degree rise, but they have little say in the matter since it would appear that the Carbon Barons are hell bent on allowing the situation to play out to the nightmarish doubling scenario.

Whether sea levels and temperatures rise to great extremes, things are already bad enough, and we must stop spewing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere immediately lest they get any worse. Depending upon



30% of our CO2 emissions have been absorbed by the ocean, causing it to acidify and imperil marine life.

how grave, some believe the IPCC's forecasts actually would have an effect on the behavior of the capitalist class and its politicians, who together hold the power of life and death over the rest of us. Based on the experience of the last quarter century, they are undoubtedly unwilling to lift a finger to mitigate and adapt to runaway climate change, and instead have been actively and consistently blocking any efforts to do so. The real question is whether or not the world's masses will feel moved to rise up and demand fundamental change based on what the IPCC reports.

Over the next year, more of the 4000-page document will be released, with further details and impacts. This is to be followed by another UN climate conference in Paris in 2015, where the extremely hopeful are expecting an agreement among world leaders to be finalized. Given their history, we have our doubts.

A warming pause?

A big issue that was debated hotly before the release of the report was the so-called warming slowdown that has supposedly occurred over the past 15 years despite the continuous rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Industry-funded professional climate-change deniers, trying to cast doubt on the science, had been harping about it for some time. Of course, they gained attention because the media dutifully reports every inane utterance coming out of the skeptics' mouths, giving the vocal minority equal time on every occasion in the phony name of objectivity, regardless of the truth.

As some defenders of climate science have pointed out, the blip in the meteorological data is really just a statistical mirage that reflects random fluctuations. Although the rate of warming between 1998 and 2012 was half the average rate since 1951 (0.05 C compared with 0.12 C per decade), the globe is still heating.

Using 1998 as the starting point, makes the temperature graph look flatter than it would appear if one began with records from the turn of the century. That particular year, 1998, was the third-hottest on record,

when there was an intense El Nino. Beginning instead with 1999 or 2000 yields a more upward-pointing curve because every year after 2000 has been warmer.

From a statistical point of view, it is still the case that the 10 hottest years on record have occurred within the last 14 years, and they occurred during major cooling factors. Because climate is weather averaged out over multiple decades, centuries, and millennia, looking at an isolated 15-year time span can be misleading and not truly reflective of actual trends.

Also to consider are the natural variables that can turn down the temperature dial—volcanic eruptions, the solar cycle, and the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) when it is in a La Nina phase. Since 1998, there have been a series of medium-sized volcanic eruptions in the Pacific region that have ejected volcanic ash into the atmosphere and reflected incoming solar radiation back out to space.

In addition, an unusually long solar minimum occurred from 2005 to 2010. Stefan Rahmstorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research believes that the transition from the solar maximum to minimum probably contributed as much as a 15% decrease in planetary heat absorption. Yet, despite the volcanism and a reduction in solar insolation, the planet managed to warm.

ENSO is one of the major engines that drives the world's climate. It consists of an El Nino phase with warm Eastern Pacific Ocean surface waters and the release of heat into the atmosphere, often with a tendency to shed moisture over the ocean. Its counterpart is the La Nina phase, with cold surface waters and the absorption of heat with a tendency to shed moisture over land in some areas.

There have been a cluster of La Ninas in the last decade, (5 LNs compared with 4 ENs). Even so, both El Nino and La Nina years were warmer overall from 1950 to 2010. Therefore, the noise associated with natural variation does not mean a change in the signal of global warming. Climatologists believe that the next El Nino could produce a new global mean temperature record because of all the heat the oceans are absorbing.

Ocean warming dominates the increase in energy stored in the climate system, accounting for more than 90% of the heat accumulated between 1971 and 2010, according to the IPCC. This is because the atmosphere holds only 2%, and the land is a poor heat conductor, absorbing slowly. The ocean is thermally stratified. The upper layer—the top 700 meters—holds two-thirds

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