

U.S. imperialism and the Ukraine coup



BY JEFF MACKLER

The recent Ukrainian Maidan (Independence Square) mobilizations are a grotesque caricature of the mass protests of workers and youth in Egypt that led to the demise of the U.S.-backed dictator, Hosni Mubarak.

At the recent Kiev “mass mobilizations” of 250,000 that drove Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich out of the country to seek refuge in Russia, the best organized forces were those of the fascist, anti-Semitic, hyper-nationalist groupings—most prominently, the Svoboda (“Freedom”) Party, formerly the Social-National Party, which traces its ideological roots to the pro-Nazi Ukrainian movements of World War II.

These armed, club-wielding, and often Molotov-cocktail bomb-throwing beasts had been let loose by the rump Fatherland Party “opposition” Ukrainian parliamentary oligarchs. And this was accomplished with the complicity, if not overt support, of U.S. officials, who likely seized on the charge (now highly suspect) that Yanukovich had employed snipers to attack and murder 89 demonstrators and wound 100 others on Feb. 20 as the perfect moment to shift the debate over a European Union vs. Russian “trade agreement” toward a violent mobilization for Yanukovich’s removal.

A now confirmed taped phone call between the Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and European Union Foreign Affairs Minister Catherine Ashton, originally reported by a Russian press agency and then in the British *Guardian* and other newspapers, reveals Paet’s view that forces among the Maidan protesters had orchestrated the deadly sniper fire on Feb. 20. Paet stated in the taped conversation that “the same snipers [were] killing people from both sides. ... There is now stronger and stronger understanding that behind the snipers, it was not Yanukovich, but it was somebody from the new coalition.” The call took place after the Estonian



(Left) U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry shakes hands with Ukraine post-coup President Oleksandr Turchynov (l.) and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenuk.

(Right) Fascist forces were prominent in anti-government protests in the Maidan.

foreign minister had visited Kiev on Feb. 25, at the height of the Maidan protests.

The Estonian government later denied that Paet “was giving an assessment of the opposition’s involvement in the violence.” There is little doubt, however, that U.S. officials have applied pressure on the Estonians to “reinterpret” the tape.

While the full truth may never be revealed, it is unquestionable that U.S. imperialism has never rejected using manufactured “smoking guns” to achieve reactionary ends. Need we refer to Saddam Hussein’s “weapons of mass destruction” and the Vietnam-era “Tonkin Bay incident,” both of which were consciously manufactured by the U.S. government to justify the mass murder of the people of Iraq and Vietnam—in the latter case 4 million Vietnamese? Even today, reports by independent investigators question U.S. intelligence allegations that Syrian government missiles carrying deadly sarin gas killed hundreds of civilians.*

This rump Ukrainian government, convened without the presence of Yanukovich or his Party of the Regions, cleared the streets of the official police and military in order to give free rein to the extreme right. The tiny handful of revolutionary socialists who were present, intent on trying to present a working-class and socialist alternative to Ukrainian

and Russian capitalism to workers who had legitimate grievances against government corruption, violence, and the selling of Ukraine to the highest bidder, included a few Ukrainian members of the Fourth International. They and other socialists were run off the streets, their flyers torn to shreds.

Evidence of the reactionary nature of the new Ukrainian regime appears in a March 5 on-line British Channel 4 news account: “The man facing down Putin’s aggression as secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council is Andriy Parubiy. He oversees national security for the nation, having previously served as security commandant during the anti-government protests in Kiev.” Channel 4 identifies Parubiy as a member of Svoboda and a founder of its pro-Nazi predecessor, the Social National Party. Moreover, “overseeing the armed forces alongside Parubiy as the Deputy Secretary of National Security is Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of the Right Sector—a group of hardline nationalist streetfighters, who previously boasted they were ready for armed struggle to free Ukraine.”

Other Svoboda leaders in the top echelons of the new government include Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Sych, Ecology Minister Andriy Mokhnyk,

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Celebrating Lynne Stewart's Freedom



(From left) Lynne Stewart; chairperson Sara Flounders; and Jeff Mackler, who gave an appeal for funds.

BY JEFF MACKLER

This was a stupendous victory celebration indeed. Nearly 600 activists from a wide-range of fighting social movements and left parties rallied in New York City's St. Peter's Church on Feb. 14 to welcome home Lynne Stewart, the courageous radical attorney who had been sentenced to 10 years in prison for her courageous defense of the "blind sheik" Mohammad Abdel Rachman.

Following a massive petition drive that gathered over 70,000 signatures around the world, a massive phone campaign to the White House and to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and countless protests and

rallies in cities across the U.S., Stewart, suffering from stage-four breast cancer, was granted compassionate release by federal authorities.

An ebullient Stewart attributed her freedom to the collective efforts of the entire progressive movement. Her infectious smile and enthusiasm brought the jam-packed crowd to their feet time and again.

Rally speakers included Ralph Poynter, Lynne's husband and a major leader of the effort to obtain her freedom; co-chairs Mimi Rosenberg of radio station WBAI and Harlem Tenants Union co-founder Nellie Bailey, as well as former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark; West Coast Lynne Stewart Defense Committee coordinator Jeff Mackler; Sara Flounders, of the Inter-

national Action Center and key rally organizer; and a host of musicians and performers, including Jeanine Otis and members of the St. Marks Choir. Brief greetings were also presented by a dozen social activists who had fought for Lynne's freedom, including Joe Lombardo of the United National Antiwar Coalition, whose coordinating committee included Stewart, despite her incarceration.

Stewart was commandeered by the popular Raging Grannies to join in the singing during a pre-rally reception of a song about her freedom struggle to the tune of "Sweet Betsy from Pike." This writer gave a fund pitch that raised \$16,000 for Stewart's ongoing medical and related expenses.

Two weeks after the rally, Lynne won a second victory when she was granted Medicaid. Sloan Kettering Cancer Center had agreed to provide the most modern of treatments, which may extend Stewart's life for perhaps years to come, as opposed to the nine-month to 12-month prognosis of the medical staff at FMC Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas. But Sloan Kettering had declined to begin until Lynne's Social Security coverage, terminated while she was imprisoned, was fully re-instated.

Lynne has thus been without treatment for the two months since her release from prison, while her Medicaid application remained stalled in a morass of bureaucratic entanglements. With this victory, the life-giving therapies now available will begin post haste.

Contributions to Lynne's medical care and related expenses can be made payable to the Lynne Stewart Organization and mailed to 1070 Dean Street, Brooklyn, NY 11216. ■

Partial Victory in Case of Targeted Antiwar Activists

By CHRISTINE MARIE

On Feb. 26, the U.S. District Attorney in Chicago was forced to unseal the applications and affidavits submitted in advance of raids involving over 70 FBI agents on the homes of nearly two-dozen antiwar and Palestine solidarity activists in Minneapolis, Chicago, and Grand Rapids, Mich.

The documents reveal that the government carried out a McCarthyite operation based on a collection of lies and out-of-context statements collected over a period of years by a government informant sent into the Twin Cities Antiwar Coalition at the time of the Republican National Convention held in that region in 2008.

A number of those targeted were antiwar leaders who also held positions of responsibility in trade unions and the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. The materials were finally produced by the government as the result of a lawsuit filed by the antiwar activists and by continuing public activity in defense of these activists by civil libertarians, peace activists, trade unionists, and socialists from around the nation.


The activists, whose story is told on the website of their defense group, the Committee to Stop FBI Repression (<http://www.stopfbi.net>), are meeting with their attorneys to discuss what the release of the documents might mean to their legal prospects. They remain under threat of long-standing subpoenas to appear before a Grand Jury investigating "domestic terrorism." Grand Juries have long been used by the political police in the U.S. to intimidate and silence leaders of the movements for social change.

While consulting with their attorneys on a longer-range response, the victims of this probe have called upon the U.S. District Attorney to immediately and publically announce that his investigation of them has ended and that the case is closed. All supporters of the right to free speech and politi-

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cal association should rally behind this demand. National petitions, protests, and news coverage have so far thwarted the government's effort to demonstrate its power to intimidate and silence antiwar and socialist activists. Now is the time to keep the pressure on.

The Committee to Stop FBI Repression has run a model defense campaign, which should be emulated by all victims of government spying and harassment. Its example, along

with that of many other successful defense campaigns, including that of Lynne Stewart, will be discussed at the upcoming regional civil liberties event in Connecticut entitled "One Nation – Under Surveillance: A One-Day Conference about Building Networks of Solidarity in Defiance of NSA Spying & the Erosion of Democratic Rights." To register or find out more about this event: <http://ctstopindefinitedetention.com>. ■

SOCIALIST ACTION'S 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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By ERNIE GOTTA

As rebellions spread across the globe in response to the harsh realities of neo-liberal austerity, it is important to examine each uprising closely. We need to understand the reasons people mobilize in the streets. We can't lend support to every protest movement because they are not all progressive, democratic, or fighting for workers' rights. All too often the issues are quite complex, and news stories in the mainstream media will simplify or distort them in order to advance the agenda of the economic rulers.

Today, Venezuela is ensnared in a social upheaval spurred on in the wake of an economy devastated by massive inflation, food shortages, and corruption on many levels. Eager spectators are having difficulty understanding the forces in play. The situation is made even more confusing by social media saturated with messages such as #PrayForVenezuela, #LaSalida, or "8 Things You Should Know about the Venezuelan Protests" that call for the ouster of the president. Yet others point out that the class base of the protesters embodies wealthier Venezuelans and the interests of big business.

Which side is right? Who should honest working people support? On one hand, those claiming leadership of the protest movement are clearly looking to restore the full power of Venezuela's capitalist class. This movement is most vigorously represented by Leopoldo López, trained and educated in the U.S. and a leading figure of the violent 2002 coup attempt against then President Hugo Chavez.

On the other hand, there exists a militant working-class and trade-union movement that has taken over factories, thwarted a coup, and organized resistance from the poor barrios through decades of struggle against the brutal capitalist classes of Venezuela and the United States.

In between the workers and the capitalists sits President Nicolas Maduro of Chavez's Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). The PSUV is only socialist in name and presides over a capitalist economy. Leaders in the party have walked a thin line vacillating between the interests of the workers and the demands of the capitalists. Such a contradictory set-up cannot function in favor of Venezuela's working poor for long,

U.S. hands off Venezuela!



(Left) Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro

aries are exploiting the current economic situation to undermine his successor and begin a campaign to regain control. The unwillingness of Chavez before his death, and now President Maduro, to lead the working class in completely smashing all institutions of capital has left a wide gap for the potential defeat of any gains won by workers in Venezuela.

There are countless examples of how worker's movements are defeated when revolutions are only made halfway. "Lessons of Working Class Defeats," a pamphlet published by Socialist Action, goes into greater depth regarding historic defeats in Spain, Chile, and Peru. Workers and students should study closely these lessons from the past as they watch events around the world unfold. While life may look different today, the same social forces that gave rise to those defeats are still very much in existence.

Venezuelan workers are perfectly capable of organizing and waging their own struggle for power. Yet there is no doubt that U.S. imperialism would welcome and actively support a coup, as it has in the past. A powerful puppet could more effectively extract profits and resources for the benefit of big business abroad. Revolutionary-minded workers and students in the United States can best show their solidarity by organizing against U.S. intervention. We need to make it politically impossible for the U.S. to aid the enemies of the working class. ■

and indeed, the reforms are falling apart. For example, the national health system is crumbling. This affects a large section of the country's 600,000 primary school teachers, who have no health coverage (see *Marea Socialista*, "The Bolivarian Process without Chavez").

The capitalist class, however unhinged by the struggles of the masses, still control the majority of the country and have been anxious to intervene. Disdaining all of the reforms made under Chavez, reaction-

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Court backs NYPD spying on Muslims

On Feb. 20, U.S. District Judge William Martini dismissed a lawsuit filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights and Muslim Advocates against NYPD/CIA spying on the Muslim communities of New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey. The lawsuit was filed on behalf of an army veteran, a council of New Jersey Muslim religious leaders, and an association of Muslim student groups in the wake of the revelations of police misconduct enumerated in a special Associated Press investigative report in August 2011.

The AP report brought to light NYPD documents that proved that stakeouts were set

up in New Jersey to monitor those eating at Middle Eastern restaurants, that informants were sent on the ski trips of Muslim Student Association chapters, and that small communities meeting for religious observance in a residential home in Connecticut became the object of scrutiny.

Students at 16 universities in the Northeast were victimized by such activity. In none of these cases was any threat of criminal activity asserted. Instead, the sweeping surveillance was instigated as part of a massive effort to gather seemingly innocuous information with the hope of finding an ex-

cuse for the intelligence services to respond. The data collection disturbingly paralleled a rise in government entrapment of Muslim-Americans as part of their domestic so-called "War on Terror."

Center for Constitutional Rights spokesperson Baher Azmey told the *Bergen County Record* that it "gives legal sanction to the targeted discrimination of Muslims anywhere and everywhere in this country, without limitation, for no other reason than their religion."

Judge Martini's decision will be appealed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third

Circuit in Philadelphia, and several other lawsuits arising from the AP expose—one initiated in Brooklyn and one in Manhattan—still await court rulings. These upcoming legal events can provide a focus for education about the continuing attacks on the civil liberties of Muslim Americans.

The Council on American Islamic Relations, for example, is partnering with the ACLU, the Connecticut Coalition to Stop Indefinite Detention, and others to host an educational event called "One Nation—Under Surveillance: A One-Day Conference about Building Networks of Solidarity in Defiance of NSA Spying & the Erosion of Democratic Rights" (see ad on page 2). ■

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UPS targets workers who walked out to protest firing

By DAVID BERNT

On March 6, some 250 UPS workers were given notice of termination after engaging in a workplace protest of the firing of one of their union brothers. The UPS workers at the Maspeth hub in Queens had walked off the job in an impromptu work action on Feb. 26 to protest the firing of a fellow worker and active union member.

The workers, members of Teamsters Local 804, a local headed by a militant reform leadership, took the action when UPS failed to abide by the grievance procedure and fired the worker without cause.

The walkout was the product of pent-up anger at UPS management's tactics of intimidation and use of discipline to silence union activists. Workers who stand up are routinely harassed, disciplined, and fired on ridiculously trumped-up charges. The workers are then starved into submission as they wait months, without pay, for their case to be heard before an arbitrator.

Maspeth workers had enough of this on Feb. 26 and took matters into their own hands by stopping production at their hub for the day. The ability to disrupt production is a union's main source of leverage in any dispute with the boss. These Teamsters bravely ex-

ercised this leverage despite the great risk to themselves and their careers, instead of relying on a broken grievance procedure. For this act of solidarity all 250 workers who walked off the job are being threatened with the loss of their livelihoods.

Shop-floor actions like this were once the norm in the labor movement, and gave workers a measure of protection against management harassment and contract violations. Reactionary labor laws and weak union leadership have made such workplace actions nearly extinct. Even when unions engage in contract strikes, the bosses courts make them ineffective by issuing injunctions limiting picketing. In effect, the law has made the labor movement's best tactic illegal.

In order to build a fighting labor movement, workers will have to engage in collective action that challenges the bosses' laws. The brave UPS workers in local 804 have provided an example for how workers can collectively challenge such laws. The fate of these 250 workers will have consequences far beyond a trucking barn in Queens. All who stand on the side of working people must take up their fight.

Local 804 is asking supporters to circulate paper petitions and sign an on-line petition to defend the brave brothers and sisters; both are available at <http://teamsterslocal804.org/>. Local 804 released the following statement: "On Feb. 26, UPS fired a Maspeth driver and long-time union activist and denied him his 'Innocent Until Proven Guilty' rights. What should have been a routine disciplinary matter exploded into a full-blown crisis, because UPS once again violated our basic rights under the contract. 250 drivers walked off the job in protest.

"Local 804 has been in talks with UPS management to try to resolve the dispute and address the underlying problems that led to it. We held several meetings and we were making progress toward an agreement. Instead of completing these talks, UPS unilaterally announced it was firing 250 drivers. Continuing down this road does not serve UPS, its brand, or our customers. Local 804 remains committed to resolving this dispute through negotiations. UPS expects its rights under the contract to be respected. So do Local 804 members." ■

Chattanooga Shoo-Shoo

By BILL ONASCH

In a stunning setback for labor, workers at a Volkswagen assembly plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., voted 712 to 626 this month to reject affiliation with the United Auto Workers.

It was supposed to be a lead pipe cinch. United Auto Workers President Bob King, with the backing of fellow union bureaucrats in Germany, convinced Volkswagen America that it would be in their interest to have a German-style works council in their Chattanooga plant.

A works council requires a union. Today's UAW is not the same union VW dealt with when they built Rabbits in Pennsylvania 35 years ago. No more confrontation, King's UAW is all about the shared interests of partnership.

VW couldn't simply designate the UAW as the union participant in the new coun-

cil. Since the Obama administration never delivered on their 2008 card-check pledge, the union needed to be certified as a bargaining agent through an NLRB election.

In preparation for this process the company and union negotiated a Neutrality Agreement that granted the UAW access to VW workers while management refrained from the anti-union captive audience meetings that have become the norm in representation elections. VW issued a public neutrality declaration as well and asked outside third parties to mind their own business.

The Agreement also contained commitments from the union about bargaining for a contract if they won Labor Board certification—which I'll come back to.

This was as good a scenario as union organizers could hope for, and they quickly signed up a majority of VW workers. Most experts expected the union would

win and started speculating about the prospects of the UAW's organizing Mercedes and BMW plants in the South along the same lines.

But, as should have been anticipated, there were powerful outside third parties who considered the encroachment of even meek unionism in the Volunteer State to be their business. Prominent Republican office holders, assisted by a billboard campaign furnished by Carl Rove, warned that the UAW would bankrupt Chattanooga just as they had Detroit. Convincing threats of denying future government incentives for expansion to a unionized VW plant also had a chilling effect. Undoubtedly, some votes were swayed by this last-minute fear mongering.

But that alone wasn't what sunk the UAW boat. In my opinion, the union bureaucracy had sewn their own seeds of failure. Historically, workers seek

unions to better their wages, benefits, and working conditions. The UAW for decades was the pace setter for what came to be called middle-class jobs—but those days are long gone. Especially since the historic 2007 Big Three contract surrender—later enhanced by bankruptcy terms imposed by President Obama at General Motors and Chrysler—Solidarity House has focused on just the opposite.

Through big concessions, the UAW has succeeded in making their core employers competitive with transplant rivals. But the flip side of these give-backs is that the workers in the transplants now get wages and benefits competitive with UAW workers—in fact, sometimes better.

One of the conditions of the Neutrality Agreement committed the UAW to "maintaining and where possible enhancing the cost advantages and other competitive advantages" that the company "enjoys relative to its competitors in the United States and North America, including but not limited to legacy automobile manufacturers." Legacy refers to the UAW-organized Big Three.

This commitment to the company to make competitive advantage supreme law was made by King without any consultation with VW workers. It is little different than the sweetheart deals former SEIU President Andy Stern used to cook up with CEOs. It became the main issue of the in-plant "vote no" forces and had more impact on votes than any politicians' threats.

The inconvenient truth is that the UAW, under its present mis-leadership's helping the boss to hold down labor costs, has little to offer to the unorganized. I'm frankly surprised there were so many votes for the union (626 for, 712 against, 89 percent voting). The only hopeful sign in this disaster is that so many had the foresight to recognize that a bad union that can be changed for the good is better than no union at all.

This defeat in Chattanooga is a fresh confirmation that give-backs to the boss not only fail to maintain existing jobs; they can also doom efforts to organize what is now an unorganized majority in a once virtually all-union industry. ■

No to Keystone XL pipeline!



By JOHN SUMMERSON

On March 2, over a thousand people protested the Keystone XL Pipeline in Washington DC. Starting from Georgetown University, where last summer Obama made his first noncommittal comments on the controversial project, the demonstrators marched to the White House. A black tarp was laid down as a mock oil spill, and demonstrators lay down on the street. Many zip-tied themselves to the White House fence. Together, 398 people were arrested for engaging in the mass civil disobedience.

If approved by Obama, the pipeline would bring 30,000 barrels of crude every day from Alberta's oil sands to Gulf Coast refineries. According to Oil Change International, emissions from tar sands extraction are between 3.2 and 4.5 times higher than equivalent emissions from conventional oil drilling in North America.

The crowd was made up mainly of students and young people. A contingent from the "System Change, Not Climate Change" coalition was present, raising the important point that that capitalism, with its unsustainable drive for profits and incessant demands for growth, will never be sustainable.

Protesters carried banners that read, "Obama: stop this pipeline or the people will," and "We did not vote for KXL." Protesters chanted, "the people are rising, no more compromising!"

Only sustained mass action will push Obama to deny the completion of the pipeline. Demonstrations such as this one need to be supported by all working people. To achieve success, we must build a climate justice movement independent of the two capitalist parties. No to tar sands oil! No to the pipelines! ■

Rank and file reject SEIU local mega-merger

By ANN MONTAGUE

Oregon saw a rank-and-file victory on Feb. 1 when members of SEIU 503 organized to reject a top-down merger with SEIU 49. The merger would have eliminated both locals and created one new mega-local composed of 55,000 members from Local 503 and 10,000 members from Local 49.

When the initial exploration was launched by the board of directors, most Local 523 members thought it was a good idea to look at formalizing our ongoing relationship with our sister local. After all, there had been discussions with Local 49 about affiliating with Local 503 since the 1980s. But as members of joint committees looked at various aspects of issues like vision, finances, and governance, individuals were told that they would not be discussing any specifics—only a “framework.” Also, at the statewide informational meetings, there were no answers to members’ questions. By this time, the leadership had strongly pushed a “yes” vote for nearly a year, using union resources and staff organizers to promote a pro-merger vote.

Questions started to arise as it became clear that the plan was to unite and create an entirely new union. The union leadership had posed the question: “Do you want a bigger, stronger union?” The major argument was that the only way to fight upcoming anti-union ballot measures aimed at the public sector was to join with a predominately private-sector local. This made no sense, as the two unions always coordinated work on ballot measures.

But everything became clearer when, just 24 hours before a board of directors’ conference call, the new “draft” Constitution and By-laws were sent out. They turned the governance structure on its head and eliminated the Local 503 governing documents that had meticulously enshrined our local as a member-run union.

As numerous members noted, they were truly imposing a corporate structure on this new union. It restricted General Council—the supreme governing body—to every three years. And the board of directors, which was an interim body that governs in between General Councils, would have been a bloated 80-plus members, meeting only four times a year. The rest of the year, a tiny Executive Committee, dominated by executive staff would be set to govern the union.

As the new C and B’s were released, members were suddenly told there would be no opportunity to amend them. The only options were voting “yes” or “no.” All the staff were sent out to deluge the member leaders and were expected to deliver a “yes” vote.

Committee For A Strong Union

The linchpin of organizing to oppose the proposed merger was the Committee For A Strong Union (CFSU). They began as a Facebook group for members to freely discuss and organize against a concession contract bargained by the state worker arm of the union three years ago. One year ago, different “sub-local” presidents and other officers organized themselves under the grouping Committee for a Strong Union [CFSU], to educate General Council delegates about the merger, with the aim of winning a local “no” vote. The retir-



ees local of SEIU 503 was against the merger, and the CFSU worked with the retirees to release a statement signed by two SEIU 503 past presidents, as well as the current retirees’ local officers.

A section of the statement reads: “We [retirees] spent years writing, amending and voting on our Constitution and By-Laws that protect and define us as a member-run union. This is our legacy to future union members. Vote NO for this proposal [merger] to make our union strong!”

A crucial point in the campaign occurred when the immediate past president of the union, Linda Burgin, came out strongly against the merger in a Board of Directors meeting leading up to General Council. Burgin participated in some of the appointed committees that were planning the merger, and came out fiercely against it.

Burgin’s statement at the Board of Directors includes: “When [merger] committee members raised issues, we were told to trust our leaders, who would fix things later ... The [new] Constitution and Bylaws were written not by our General Council, but by Locals 49 and 503 staff. Committee members suggested changes, but they were clearly not welcome suggestions, and most were not incorporated in the document. The Unified Constitution and Bylaws totally changed our union structure.”

Social media and traditional union organizing

The use of social media was able to bring members in a large statewide union together. About 10 years ago, there was an organizational change in the union that eliminated Districts. These monthly District Meetings were places where members from all the employment groups in a geographical area could meet with each other and their representative on the Board of Directors. Now many workers feel like

they are in separate silos, isolated from their fellow union members. This was broken down through the use of social media. Now state workers from different agencies and county workers and home care workers were all coming together.

Once it was clear they needed to organize to defeat the merger proposal, traditional organizing clicked in. They knew the only way to win was to engage members one on one. The CFSU organized phone banks and members created talking points to engage delegates in discussion well before General Council. They were listening to workers and answering questions. On the day of General Council, the CFSU prepared by putting together a packet of information that was written to combat the main pro-unification arguments put forth by the union leadership. Many delegates were still undecided when they arrived.

The vote

The union staff had been using hyperbolic and false statements to pressure “yes” votes. On the day of General Council, the only members engaging members were the advocates for “no” votes. They were organized with rational arguments and documentation showing not only the other members opinions about unification but side by side comparisons of the current and proposed by-laws.

But the staff was still trying to pressure votes. The arguments they used included ludicrous attacks on the opposition. They said that the opposition had fear of change, and that state workers did not want to be in a union with custodians and security guards.

One home care worker was still being bombarded by staff right before the vote, but her “no” vote did not change. When discussion of the resolution began, the CFSU had organized many “no” vote speakers so that a diversity of arguments were expressed. They also encouraged many other members who were voting “no” to speak out against the resolution on the floor. The number of “no” speakers outnumbered the “yes” speakers three to one. The final vote was 118 “no” votes, 75 “yes” votes, and three abstentions.

After the “no” vote was announced, the member organizers were ecstatic. The two most common statements were, “We out-organized the staff organizers” and “We got our union back.”

This attempt at creating a mega-local with a corporate-style governance is something that has occurred before. It was definitely more of a softball approach than the travesty in California when Andy Stern was International president. Local 790 was told that the international could “impose” a merger on the locals without a vote. But the end result could have been the same. It wasn’t the same because there was already a rank-and-file organization in existence that had stated goals that included increasing union transparency and union democracy.

The CFSU is moving forward by increasing its numbers and running candidates in upcoming elections. General Council, the unique democratic institution that was saved by the “no” vote, will be meeting in August, and members can submit new resolutions to steer the union’s policies towards transparency and democracy. But first on the agenda must be to watch for the signs of a push for a revote. Just three days after the vote, the current leadership was already trumpeting, “We are getting calls from ‘no’ voters who say they want ‘unification’ (merger).” ■

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... U.S. imperialism & Ukraine



(Left) U. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland poses with neo-Nazi Oleg Tyahnybok of the Svoboda Party (l.), politician and former boxer Vitali Klitschko (ctr.), and new Prime Minister Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk (rt.).

Nuland preferred Yatsenyuk, believed a proven friend of Western interests, over Klitschko as the head of the new Ukrainian regime.

(Below) Tyahnybok gives Nazi salute.

significant compared to those of the American behemoth, whose multi-trillion-dollar banking houses (JP Morgan Chase has \$4.4 trillion in assets) control vast arrays of the leading U.S. and multi-national corporations that do “business” around the world. Half of the multi-nationals in China, for example, are U.S. owned, while the Russians have none. Indeed, *The New York Times* recently noted that close to half of the income of Russia, a “petro-dollar state,” comes from the export of fossil fuels. But today, for the first time, Russia is second to the U.S. in the export of shale gas. The United States seeks to push aside all its “competitors,” and now especially in the Ukraine.

Yanukovich and his government’s original intention to resolve its virtual bankruptcy via the EU austerity plan momentarily gave way to Russian President Putin’s counter-offer of \$15 billion in bail-out loans to the Ukrainian oligarchs—mostly former Stalinist bureaucrats themselves—which are peanuts in comparison to the \$51 billion the Russians spent on the Sochi Olympic spectacle. The latter, aimed at glorifying Russia’s pretended emergence as a great power (it came in first in the medal total in Sochi!), was a trifle as compared to what U.S. and Western imperialism had to offer to buy Ukraine’s near bankrupt government

and its workers and resources. The Russians’ subsequent offer to reduce the price of oil and gas by 55 percent to the heavily oil-dependent Ukraine was nearly instantly countered by EU pledges to substitute Polish coal and other fossil fuels.

The coup regime has also agreed to a deal with Chevron Corporation for large-scale shale-gas fracking operations in western Ukraine. The Yanukovich government, before its ignominious demise, had previously signed production-sharing agreements with Shell and Chevron. The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that Ukraine has Europe’s fourth largest shale-gas reserves.

EU-IMF economic agenda for Ukraine

The original EU offer to Ukraine (the one that Yanukovich temporarily rejected on Nov. 21) had certainly come with strings attached. These debilitating conditions were outlined by Marilyn Vogt-Downey, a revolutionary socialist with a long career as an analyst of Ukrainian and Russian politics, in a Feb. 27 *CounterPunch* article entitled, “An Imperialist Invasion Without an Imperialist Army: Whither Ukraine?” Her assessment rings with a truth that has rarely entered the discussion.

Vogt-Downey suggested that Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich might have “easily calmed the rebellion in Independence Square in Ukraine’s capital Kiev early on if he had simply told the crowds the truth about what the Association Agreement with the European Union would mean to their lives and futures.” She pointed out that the “Free Trade section alone—removing tariff barriers and export duties—would convert Ukraine into one big “free trade zone,” where the anti-environment, anti-labor, and pro-business laws would prevail. ... It would create the economic devastation of the type that NAFTA has created in Mexico.

Vogt-Downey said that Yanukovich might then have “gone on to outline what the pending IMF ‘financial aid package’ would do to further worsen their lives.” She cited the Feb. 23 *New York Times* report on Yanukovich’s flight, which summarized

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Agriculture Minister Ihor Shvaika, and acting Prosecutor General Oleh Makhnitsky.

Top U.S. officials visit Kiev

U.S. Republican Party firebrand and former presidential candidate John McCain had paid a previous visit to the Maidan, sharing the stage with Svoboda’s anti-Semitic leader Oleg Tyahnybok. McCain tried to rouse the crowd with cries of “democracy” and promises of “freedom and independence”—American style. But “democracy” was to be granted only after the looting government of oligarchs had approved the austerity terms that came with the European Union’s (EU) proposed “bailout” package, called the “Association Agreement.”

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Victoria Nuland had also participated in the protests—to pass out cookies, no less—in a well-orchestrated imperial stage-crafting effort to present the United States as a nation with the most benevolent and generous of intentions. She had previously boasted about U.S. funding of the “democratic opposition” to the tune of \$5 billion over the past 10 years, not to mention the creation of some 40,000 NGOs to spread the “democracy” of U.S. imperialism.

Nuland has since become famous for her off-the-cuff “Fuck the EU” statement, which has been circulated by bloggers around the world. A Russian surveillance team caught her red-handed in denouncing the European Union negotiating team for its deal with former President Yanukovich. Nuland’s Russian-acquired exchange with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt called for the U.S., rather than the EU, to determine who would compose the new Ukrainian government. Yanukovich’s agreement with EU top officials from Germany, France and Poland, his third reversal regarding who would plunder and subject his country to imperial control, had him appointing top opposition leaders to major government posts. Nuland disagreed with key appointments, indicating that “Yats” was to be the U.S. choice. Indeed, “Yats,” or Arseniy P. Yatsenyuk, is today’s Ukrainian Prime Minister. Nuland preferred figures who had shown themselves to be loyal to Western interests and to IMF-type austerity.

If there is a “war” in Ukraine today, it is between which of the imperialist Western powers will have priority “rights” in absorbing this nation of 46 million people into its orbit to become yet another sub-colony of imperialism, along with the other nine nations that two decades ago constituted the former Soviet Union and today are largely incorporated in Europe’s capitalist economy and military alliance, NATO. With the U.S.-instigated coup, Russian capitalism has been effectively marginalized as a player in the Ukraine.

Nuland’s apology for her poor choice of words was not accompanied by any apology for U.S. moves to dominate the future neoliberal exploitation of Ukraine, as opposed to handing over this right to



longstanding U.S. competitors—not to mention to the wannabe imperialist Russian President Vladimir Putin and his billionaire oligarch regime. He and his predecessors gave birth to the Russian oligarchy some 20-plus years ago when the USSR’s wealth and resources were stolen, with U.S. complicity, by the tiny layer of former Stalinist bureaucrats who now preside over capitalist Russia, today a minor player in the world imperialist configuration.

Assistant Secretary Nuland directed her ire not against Russia but rather Germany, France, and Poland—who brokered the deal as to the future composition of the Ukrainian government and the distribution of that nation’s industrial strength and rich and fertile agricultural resources. This was an unacceptable arrangement in the eyes of imperial America.

The irrefutably recorded discussions between Nuland and Pyatt revealed their choice of United Nations “glue,” said Nuland, to cement any Ukraine deal. In that scenario, the U.S.-handpicked and subservient UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon would be called in to “negotiate” the nation’s future, rather than a more pro-EU assortment of capitalist plunderers.

On March 4, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Kiev in a further attempt to shoulder aside EU competitors in a deal. Kerry offered \$1 billion in loan guarantees to the Ukrainian coup-makers and promised to send in a host of U.S. “technical experts” to help re-align the country’s national bank and finance ministry.

In today’s game of re-dividing and re-colonizing the world, the Russians are bit players as compared to the U.S. imperialists and their not-too-happy lesser competitors in the EU, ever scrambling to maintain their perceived share of the booty extracted from their former colonies and new ones to be assimilated across Eastern Europe. At the level of military power, Russia’s few bases outside its borders pale before the 1100 maintained by the U.S. around the world and another 1000 or so stationed in the U.S.

The handful of Russian billionaires and their virtually non-competitive industries are almost in-

(continued from page 6)

what the “EU option” would mean. “The economy will remain the greatest problem facing the country,” *The Times* reported, and then went on: “The International Monetary Fund remains a potential source of financing to replace the \$15 billion that Russia had made available before the protests. But that comes with an insistence on austerity and economic changes that will inflict considerable pain.”

Marilyn Vogt-Downey continued: “Considerable pain, indeed!! The IMF loans will require in Ukraine, as they do everywhere, that the government undertake broad-scale privatization of resources and basic public services, cut government spending on education, health care, pensions, housing, and benefits for the needy, as well as laws that hinder the accumulation and free movement of capitalist profits. And that’s just for starters. All this will further lower the wages and standard of living of the mass of the population of Ukraine, which are already lower than the European average.”

Vogt-Downey pointed out that Ukrainian acceptance of the Association Agreement with the EU and the IMF aid package would remove any semblance of independence for the country. She listed the following points to back up her thesis:

“1) It stipulates that Ukraine cannot accept any financial support from Russia.

“2) It would make impossible any Ukrainian economic planning that did not follow the guidelines established by the IMF and other imperialist lending agencies.

“3) Because of the nature of the IMF-imposed economic agenda, Ukraine would find it very difficult to ever escape the debt cycle. The IMF mandates, for example, that capitalist profits be only minimally taxed, the government provide generous financial support and tax breaks for capitalist ventures, public services be privatized, and restrictions on transfer of capitalist profits abroad be minimal. As a result, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for any Ukrainian government to raise funds for basic institutions people need to live a quality life.”

“However,” Vogt-Downey continued, “Yanukovich could not say such things. It is not just that he is not a man of integrity. The problem is that during his time in power, he—like all the Ukrainian rulers since Ukraine became independent with the collapse of the USSR in 1992—had already been pursuing measures similar to those the IMF would impose. These include measures such as privatizing public resources, cutting public spending, cutting subsidies for major industries—leading to stagnation, non-payment of wages, and benefit cuts—and imposing market mechanisms.” And while the standard of living has fallen for the majority of the population, “politicians and their cronies have managed to considerably enrich themselves and acquire vast fortunes from resources that should belong to the Ukrainian working people.”

Russian troops enter Crimea

Despite the onerous conditions that it imposed, Yanukovich’s deal with the EU was initially approved by the parliament but quickly unraveled when the fascist-led and undoubtedly U.S.-instigated protests caused Yanukovich to flee, in his own words, for his life. In a matter of hours, Ukraine’s rump parliament changed course, adopted some 21 of the most reactionary and chauvinist laws imaginable, and effectively agreed to the terms imposed by the Western powers. The super-nationalist regime now in power even eliminated the Russian language as one of the country’s official languages, disregarding the fact that half of all Ukrainians speak Russian as their primary language.

Putin’s response was to send Russian soldiers to the Crimea, a semi-autonomous region of Ukraine where Russia maintains its North Sea fleet via a lease that expires in 2045. The corporate media initially sounded the alarm, along with the new Ukrainian regime’s proclaiming that Russia has issued a “declaration of war.”

But the real war in Ukraine is over. U.S. imperialism and its subservient EU allies have won, at least for the time being—that is, until the Ukrainian working masses absorb the lessons of imperialist exploitation and organize independently of their capitalist oppressors everywhere, in the West and in the East. Indeed, the terribly poor Ukrainian people have already tasted the effects of Western “aid.” Eighty percent of all Foreign Direct Investment in that country has been from the West, with little or no tangible results for the Ukrainian people and billions in profits, as always, for the corporate investors and financial speculators.

Clearly, Putin is alarmed at the prospect of having a slavishly pro-EU and American regime established on Russia’s border. The Western powers



Opposition to U.S. imperialism must be a top priority of any successful antiwar movement.

(Above) Republican Party politician John McCain shakes hands with fascist leader Oleg Tyahnybok.

are salivating at the possibility of establishing oil-drilling rights on Russia’s Arctic frontier, and perhaps eventually in Russia itself. But his momentary display of “power” by sending in some 16,000 soldiers to the Crimea, according to the new Ukrainian regime, is his version of imperial stagecraft, more akin to his Olympic victory than a military threat to the Ukraine. Not a single shot has been fired to date. Putin is fully capable of compromising with Western imperialism in a deal that would require him to withdraw the troops in the not too distant future. Indeed, as of March 4, Putin was already in negotiations with Secretary of State John Kerry. In truth, the future of the people of the Crimea will be determined by their own independent and revolutionary mobilization as opposed to reliance on any capitalist power, West or East.

Putin had no problem voting for the UN’s “humanitarian” resolution that paved the way for the NATO/U.S. devastation of Libya and its subsequent sequestration of Libyan oil. We hear no Russian objections to the recent U.S. declaration to send an army of 5000 U.S. troops to Libya, with that nation now reduced to warring and out-of-control fundamentalist militias.

After a few rhetorical threats, the Obama administration made clear that it had no intention of going to war with Russia—a largely defanged and pathetic world power, although one with a nuclear arsenal. The worst that the Obama administration could threaten were possible economic sanctions or staging a boycott of the upcoming G-8 conference in Sochi.

Legacy of Great Russian chauvinism

Whatever threat Russia poses to the people of the Ukraine reflects its legacy of plunder and repression, beginning with the pre-1917 Tsarist era. This was interrupted with magnificent results immediately following the 1917 Russian Revolution, which guaranteed not only the right of self-determination to all of Russia’s former colonies but the right to independence and succession. The leadership of Lenin and Trotsky during this historic period brought enlightenment, solidarity, and equality between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples. But this was abruptly ended with the coming to power of Stalin and his counter-revolutionary bureaucratic regime.

Since that time, the Ukrainian people have once again been subjected to the brutal tyranny of Great Russian chauvinism, including after the break-up of the former USSR. The very same Stalinist core of largely Soviet-era bureaucrats-cum-oligarchs that dominated the Ukraine then still prevails today. They have continued the Stalinist policy of subjugating the Ukraine, today in the name of capitalism and aimed at the enrichment of the few at the expense of the many. This is central to understanding the receptivity to pro-Western propaganda of Ukrainians who have suffered greatly under both the grotesque caricature of socialism that Stalinism always represented and the present capitalism brought in by these same bureaucrats.

The absence of a mass revolutionary socialist alternative in Ukraine, as well as in

the Middle East and worldwide, weighs heavily on the world’s working masses, who have proved capable of rising up in the tens of millions time and again against the most powerful of tyrants and dictators, only to suffer setbacks and defeats because an authoritative, deeply rooted, and revolutionary mass party of all the oppressed and exploited has yet to be constructed. This is the critical task for revolutionary-minded activists everywhere.

Vogt-Downey pointed out in *CounterPunch* that “what is unfolding right now in Ukraine is not a revolution but imperialist consolidation of the capitalist counterrevolution by imperialist finance capital and the army of international capitalist investors who seek unfettered opportunities to milk every ounce of profit they can from the Ukrainian working class and the resources in their territory.”

For the moment, U.S. imperialism, the central player in a crisis-ridden world economy in decay, has undoubtedly scored a significant victory in Ukraine, again at the expense of the working masses. Opposition to U.S. imperialism in all its manifestations must be a top priority of any successful antiwar movement.

Ukraine demonstrates in bold relief that oppression and exploitation can be achieved in more ways than overt military intervention. Privatized death squads and drone warfare around the globe, surveillance of the world’s people and the corporate media’s manufacture—Orwellian style—of a pseudo-democracy in America that masks mass murder, racism, and plunder everywhere are also in today’s imperialist arsenal. The imperial beast takes many forms, all aimed at advancing, by any means necessary, the interests of the ruling-class minority. ■

*A Jan. 15 McClatchy news report states, “A team of security and arms experts, meeting this week in Washington to discuss the matter, has concluded that the range of the rocket that delivered sarin in the largest attack that night was too short for the device to have been fired from the Syrian government positions where the Obama administration insists they originated.”

In the report, titled “Possible Implications of Faulty U.S. Technical Intelligence,” Richard Lloyd, a former United Nations weapons inspector, and Theodore Postol, a professor of science, technology, and national security policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, argue that the question about the rocket’s range indicates a major weakness in the case for military action initially pressed by Obama administration officials.

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Tangled Up in Dogma

Religious free-domin or reproductive freedom?

By MARK T. HARRIS

If there weren't already enough problems involved in the start-up to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), here come the Little Sisters of the Poor to further complicate matters.

Whatever charity work the sisters do, their lawsuit challenging the contraception mandate in the new health-care law reveals the fanaticism at work in the group's thinking about reproductive rights. Unfortunately, the order of nuns and other religious groups started the New Year with a victory of sorts, winning a temporary U.S. Supreme Court injunction to the ACA's provision that employer health plans cover contraception (with no co-pay) under its preventive medicine requirements.

If you think fanaticism is an unfair description, consider that the ACA already allows for a religious exemption for employee group coverage of contraception and related reproductive services. A religious organization simply has to sign the form, requesting an exemption. But the Little Sisters of the Poor object to even signing the exemption form. That's because employees would need the form if they want to get birth control directly through their insurance provider.

Ironically, the insurance provider for Little Sisters of the Poor, the Christian Brothers Employee Benefit Trust, already excludes contraception as a covered benefit. Such "church plans" are also allowed by law to opt out of contraception coverage. But Little Sisters of the Poor object even to the hypothetical possibility that their third-party insurer might be obligated to provide contraception benefits, which they claim signing the exemption makes possible. Thus, the Little Sisters of the Poor refuses to participate in a health-care arrangement they view as ultimately designed to enable the "sin" of artificial contraception to occur.

"Miscarriage of Medicine"

Importantly, challenges to reproductive health care rights posed by archaic religious ideology are hardly a fringe threat. In a new report [December 2013]. "Miscarriage of Medicine: The Growth of Catholic Hospitals and the Threat to Reproductive Health Care," the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the advocacy group MergerWatch document the impact in recent decades of the growth of Catholic health systems on community access to reproductive care.

As the report explains, since the 1980s the days of traditional stand-alone hospitals have mostly gone away, as investor money and market pressures drive new business mergers and affiliations, creating ever-larger health-care hospital systems. Catholic health care organizations are

very much savvy players in these market rearrangements. Accordingly, 10 of the 25 largest health systems in the United States are now under Catholic management. In Washington State, for example, Catholic health systems now comprise more than a quarter of all health care organizations. In some rural regions, a Catholic-affiliated health care system may be the only health resource serving the public.

While formally "non-profit" and excluded from paying taxes, these days religiously-affiliated health-care systems operate almost indistinguishably from for-profit health care. They are different, however, in one important aspect of the medicine they deliver—or more accurately, don't deliver. Abortion, assisted suicide, sterilization, contraception, and infertility treatments are all prohibited at Catholic hospitals. These prohibitions are mandated in the "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Healthcare Services" adopted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In some instances, warns the report, health-care facilities may not even provide counseling about condom use to prevent transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. Decisions about end-of-life care can also be compromised, such as when religious doctrine won't honor a family's wish to refuse or remove a feeding tube. In the future, treatments derived from embryonic stem cell research could also be banned.

What's insidious about the merger trend is that secular or otherwise affiliated health-care systems that join with Catholic health systems are typically expected to adhere to the Church's ethical and religious directives. When Swedish Medical Center's seven hospitals in the Seattle area affiliated with Providence Health & Services, for example, the large Catholic health system serving Washington and Oregon, the former was required to discontinue elective abortions.

Nor are the religious objections to abortion or contraceptive care limited to an abstract refusal to offer these services. As "Miscarriage of Medicine" documents, it is about the inherent prejudice that Catholic health policy can introduce into the ongoing delivery of health care.

Consider the report's description of the experience of Tamesha Means at Mercy Health Partners in Muskegon, Mich.: "In 2010, a pregnant mother of three suffered unnecessarily and her health was jeopardized because Mercy Health Partners, a member of Trinity Health, put the Directives above her health needs.

"Tamesha Means arrived at Mercy Health Partners after her water broke and she began having contractions. She was 18-weeks pregnant. The hospital diagnosed her with

preterm premature rupture of membranes (PPROM) and sent her home to wait, telling her there was nothing it could do. It did not tell her that, given the stage of her pregnancy and her condition, the fetus she was carrying had almost no chance of survival and that prolonging the pregnancy could put her health and possibly even her life at risk. Nor did the hospital tell her that the safest treatment option was to induce labor and terminate the pregnancy.

"The following morning, Ms. Means returned to the hospital with painful contractions, bleeding, and an elevated temperature. The hospital monitored her contractions and gave her two Tylenol. After Ms. Means' temperature went down, the hospital again sent her home.

"Later that night, Ms. Means returned to the hospital in extreme distress. Hospital staff again told her there was nothing they could do. While staff began preparing the paperwork to send her home yet again, Ms. Means began to deliver. The hospital then began tending to her miscarriage. She gave birth to a very premature son, who died within hours. Ms. Means' medical records show acute chorioamnionitis and acute funistis, infections that Ms. Means developed after her water broke.

"By failing to inform her about her options, the likelihood that her baby would not survive, or the risks of delaying treatment, Mercy Health Partners unnecessarily put Ms. Means' health at grave risk and ultimately, failed to follow medical standards for PPROM with signs of infection."

Notably, Mercy Health Partners was the only nearby hospital for Ms. Means. The ACLU, which has documented a pattern of similar cases across the country, has filed a negligence lawsuit against the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, blaming its Directives for putting patient health at risk. They're also calling for an investigation by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Under the law, hospitals receiving government funds cannot deny patients required health care in an emergency.

Such experiences may indeed be just the tip of a larger iceberg. According to a 2012 study in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 52 percent of obstetricians and gynecologists working in Catholic-affiliated institutions report having experienced conflict with their employers over religiously based policies.

Birth control is a human right

It's hard to believe it's been almost 100 years since Margaret Sanger championed birth control as a human right. Yet still advocates of modern reproductive medicine must fight the political battle for the rights of women to such care.

In fact, last year 22 states enacted 70 new provisions to further restrict access to abortion services, according to a recent Guttmacher Institute report. Since 2011 there have been 205 new abortion restrictions passed by state legislatures, more than in all the previous 10 years.

Should hospitals run by religious groups using public funds be allowed to impose their religious beliefs on medical staff and patients, regardless of whether they share those beliefs? Should hospitals be allowed for religious reasons not to fully explain to a patient what all of her medical options are? The answer to both questions should be No.

While in recent years there's been something of a sea change for gay and lesbian marriage rights, and evidence of more tolerance and respect in the popular culture for transgendered rights, too. Compared to decades past, women have also made many social advances. There is also widespread public acceptance of the value of contraception, including even among Catholic women.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 88 percent of women of reproductive age between the years 2006 to 2010 have used "a highly effective, reversible method such as birth control pills, an injectable method, a contraceptive patch, or an intrauterine device."

But progress in human rights hardly ever proceeds in clear, straightforward fashion. Women's reproductive rights remain under assault, fueled by entrenched religious and right wing ideology. ■

... Immigrants

(continued from page 11)

Broward Transitional Center, is one of the largest for-profit prison companies in the U.S., which along with Corrections Corporation of America, had a combined profit of \$296.9 million in 2012. Many immigrants in detention get so discouraged that they sign their self-deportation papers rather than facing more months in jail fighting to stay with their families.

But some groups of DREAMers, undocumented students and youth who are fighting for their right to stay in the United States are resisting in creative ways. Bogado re-

ported that the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) recently decided to defend the case of Claudio Rojas, a 47-year-old undocumented immigrant who was facing deportation in Florida after he had helped his son pick up his car when he was stopped over for driving without a license.

Under guidelines issued by ICE in 2011, judges are allowed prosecutorial discretion for low-priority detainees (those without a criminal record, which make up the majority of undocumented detainees). NIYA believed that Rojas should be eligible for release under these guidelines.

Marco Saavedra, a 23-year-old undocumented activist who works with NIYA, voluntarily turned himself in to ICE in order to

infiltrate the Broward Transitional Center. Once inside, Saavedra worked with Rojas to make lists of detainees in similar situations, which they passed along to NIYA. NIYA eventually defended almost 70 cases, securing the release of several prisoners including Rojas. Saavedra was also released, but is facing deportation hearings.

Deportation cases like the ones defended by NIYA and other immigrant rights groups across the country expose the hypocrisy of the Obama administration.

On the one hand, undocumented immigrants are being offered a chance at citizenship that they desperately need. But the price that they have to pay is high—more deaths on the border, guest worker visas

that will legalize on-the-job exploitation of immigrants, and thousands of dollars spent to gain an uncertain second-class status that could last for decades while they "go to the back of the line."

In the meantime, there is no end in sight for the detainees who are daily being torn from their families to await their deportation in for-profit detention centers. The government expects these undocumented workers and their families to be too afraid to fight back, but groups like NIYA are proving otherwise.

Immigrants proved their power in the streets in 2006, and they will do so again. When they march, we must all be ready to join the fight. ■

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Gaiutra Bahadur, *"Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture."* University of Chicago Press, 2013.

March 8 was declared International Women's Day by the Socialist International in 1910. On this day, we can gain inspiration for the battles ahead through a look at the dramatic entrance of working women into history.

Socialists traditionally discuss the magnificent strike of 20,000 shirtwaist workers in New York City that was kicked off in 1909 by the daring decision of 23-year-old Clara Lemlich to defy the conservative and very male trade-union leadership and to declare that immigrant women *would* go on strike against sweatshop conditions. We also refer to the 1917 International Women's Day march of women in Petrograd calling for "Bread and Peace!" Some 50,000 factory workers responded to that call, beginning the February Revolution that overthrew the Tsar.

We sometimes forget, however, just how many other stories of working women are yet to be told. This International Women's Day, we can marvel at a less well-known story, culled from ship manifests, reports written by British labor recruiters and ships surgeons, from village folklore and family history, and from plantation books and police files. It is a new story for me, told in a new way, by Gaiutra Bahadur, about her great grandmother and thousands just like her, in *"Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture."*

"Coolie," a pejorative term that the British first took from the Tamil word for "wages," was the word that the imperialists used to refer to low-wage, unskilled laborers from Asia that they recruited with varying levels of coercion to work colonial plantations or carry out other "menial" labor in their far-flung territories around the globe.

Bahadur's great grandmother Sujaria, a high-caste woman from the village of Bhurahapur in the part of northern India called Bihar, boarded a ship called *The Clyde* in 1903 as an indentured contract worker and sailed to British Guiana, on the northern coast of South America. After the abolition of slavery, the British turned to a new kind of labor regime to keep the colonial profits rolling in. Indentured workers, who could theoretically work off their obligation and be released from their contract, definitely had it better than slaves, and abolitionist public feeling was appeased. Nonetheless, over one-fifth of indentured workers were brought up on criminal charges for not working hard enough or had their contracts lengthened arbitrarily; many died from the brutal conditions on the job.

The genius of Bahadur's book lies in her decision to explore the special meaning of indentured servitude for Indian women and the way that women's oppression, as lived in both British colonies, came together to provide a cheap labor force. The author naturally wondered why a Brahmin woman—most high-caste indentured servants turned out to be female rather than male—from a rural village would end up as a near-slave two oceans away.

There were famines and the disruptions of peasant

Books: The story of a 'Coolie woman'



(Above) A coolie woman in Trinidad.

life due to colonial policy, of course. Bahadur learned, however, that many of the women who ended up as indentured laborers were child brides fleeing punitive in-laws or widows deprived of their inheritance. Others were fleeing abusive men. Some, like Bahadur's great grandmother, were pregnant and had no husband to list on a birth certificate.

Ironically, the lure of indentured servitude for vulnerable Indian women was perceived as so powerful that provincial Indian authorities kept trying to enact laws intended to keep married women from deserting their homes for the colonies. British labor recruiters, on the other hand were eager to address the shortage of women in the colonies, where men greatly outnumbered women and where the absence of sufficient unpaid female labor in domestic settings led to difficulties for the planters. They fought such laws.

Bahadur combs the records to find hints of the motivations of particular women who ended up in Guyana, and snippets of many women's lives come together in her text to paint a picture of a contradictory whole, in which some approached indentured servitude as victims and some as agents of their own partial liberation.

The conditions of the journey to South America were equally complex. Women were the victims of coerced sex with ships doctors and sailors and often sought protectors among the Indian male laborers onboard. But sometimes those fleeing bad marriages made new lasting ones on board ship before arriving at the plantations. Once at work, these same women were vulnerable to the planters and overseers, to colonial policy-induced racial tensions with the former

African slave population, to a separate and lower wage scale, and to the realities of life in a place where there were 41 indentured women to every 100 indentured men. Plantation managers often simply "assigned" arriving women to the households of male workers, and women were often shared by a group of men.

But Bahadur's investigations turned up an interesting twist. She quotes a Guyanese archdeacon who was disturbed that women were so scarce in the colony that "they feel their power. They are also sure they can exchange one lord and master for another with the greatest ease." Sadly, this freedom, too, could bring terrible pain because indentured male servants often directed their anger toward the women who had left them.

Bahadur devotes a chapter to the fury with which violence could be enacted upon these women who freely left old unions to pursue new ones. And, not surprisingly, rebellions by sugar-plantation workers were sparked by planters' abuse of indentured women as often as they were by low wages and other poor working conditions.

By the time, a reader reaches the end of *"Coolie Woman,"* she has been privileged to explore the inner workings of British imperialism, the social impact of colonial policies on two continents, and the poignant yet powerful stories of numerous turn-of-the-century working women who, consciously or unconsciously, tried to fight their way out of the restrictions of capitalist patriarchy. All feminists and socialists should be sharing it with fellow activists. ■

Celia Sanchez: Cuban revolutionary heroine

By JUDY KOCH

Nancy Stout, *"Celia Sanchez, Heroine of the Cuban Revolution."* Monthly Review Press, New York, December 2013, 441 pp.

Celia Sanchez was one of the few women leaders of the Cuban Revolution. Little has been written about Cuba's female leaders. Celia had a close relationship with Fidel Castro, who understood that Celia's great political and revolutionary strength lay in her organizational capacity, as well as her sacrifice and commitment.

Award-winning author Alice Walker states in the foreword that Celia Sanchez was the extraordinary expression of a life that can give humanity a very good name. The author talked to many people who knew Celia, both family and friends, to get an overall account of what she was like and her accomplishments.

Born on May 9, 1920, she had seven siblings. Her mother died when Celia was six. She suffered anxiety from this loss. Her father was a country doctor, who Celia helped in his clinic. Everyday she would talk to his patients, to find out why they came. He was consulted about family matters, heard confessions, and

sometimes acted as a marriage broker. He did not expect all patients to pay. Celia did that work for 15 years. She managed his accounts and soon organized his life completely. He was a political activist who wanted a better future for all Cubans. He also had a taste for history and a library of many books.

Celia liked outdoor activities, deep-sea fishing, picnics, and flowers. Every Christmas she bought toys in bulk to give to children of poor parents. This helped to provide a cover for her revolutionary activities.

Celia's lover, Salvador Sadurni, died on June 9, 1937, when she was 16. After that she was inoculated against love.

Celia was key in setting up a network of people to plan the return of Fidel and his men to Cuba from exile in Mexico. She was also assigned to get Fidel's men out of the region after they had landed. She talked to local farmers, most of whom were against Batista; they were given basic military training. She was instructed to select people who did not know each other.

Since Celia had played a key role in the landing of the Granma boat on Cuba's shore, dictator Fulgencio Batista ordered her capture—dead or alive. Her escape

was aided by the fact that she was the granddaughter of Juan Sanchez Barro, one of the richest men in Cuba. As a result, upper-class people offered to hide her.

Celia founded an induction center to help assemble, train, and house the new recruits to the Rebel Army. She also found an inconspicuous way to get them food. She was preparing to go into the mountains with the guerrillas when rebel leader Frank Pais got arrested. She had to take over Frank's work. Still Celia was the first woman inducted into the rebel army. She considered her time in the Sierra Maestra to be the best time of her life.

Celia and Fidel worked in rebel activities long before they ever met. Later, they became inseparable until the day of her death. They had a thriving revolutionary partnership, both devoting their lives to freeing the Cuban people. She was responsible for making sure that the rebels had enough food. She set up a telephone system so that Fidel could communicate to the front from his headquarters, and set up a chain of couriers. Celia also kept records of almost everything those around her did during the revolution.

After the revolution, she helped develop



production of Cuban cigars, especially the Cohiba, and established hotels all around the island. She founded the famous Coppelia ice cream park, the convention center, and the Lenin Park. She established an official residence for all five members of the rebel junta, Fidel, Che, Camilo and Raul as well as herself. She began working on her archives. In 1969 she concentrated in giving Cubans footwear. She worked to protect gays and lesbians.

Celia Sanchez died from lung cancer on Jan. 11, 1980. Fidel cried at her funeral. All people interested in changing the world should read this book as it shows how one woman did it. ■

Budget targets federal workers

By BARRY WEISLEDER

New Democratic Party MP and Finance Critic Peggy Nash called the Feb. 11 Conservative federal budget a “do nothing budget.” We should be so lucky!

In reality, it is a broadside assault on workers. Federal public service retirees, including from the military and the RCMP, will be asked to pay 50 per cent of premiums for their health-care plan. The average annual retiree contribution will jump from \$261 to \$550, saving Ottawa \$7.4 billion. This goes towards a whopping \$12.3 billion in targeted cuts. The government will also require of its employees six years of service before qualifying for the health plan at retirement.

Combined with the Tory-backed Canada Post Corporation decision to end door-to-door mail delivery, which will eliminate about 8000 letter carrier jobs over the next four years, the Conservative financial statement deepens the one-sided class war known as “austerity.”

What about job creation? After all, officially there are 1.3 million unemployed—more if you count the hundreds of thousands of “discouraged” workers. On that score Finance Minister Jim Flaherty claims that a centre piece of his budget is the \$500 million a year earmarked for “skills training.” But training for what jobs? At the same time he scrapped a \$200 million annual hiring credit for small business.

Compared to \$279 billion in overall federal spending, the sums that are allocated to training and related initiatives, like the \$12 million-a-year loan programme to

help apprentices pay for training, the \$10 million a year to help boost new companies, and \$500 million over two years in repayable loans for new vehicle technology, are truly miniscule.

The 419-page fiscal document offers nothing to improve pension security, nothing to provide affordable medical drugs, or fund care givers to the growing senior segment of the population. Yet there’s plenty of money for prisons, spying and the armed forces. If Prime Minister Stephen Harper has his way, between 2010 and 2017, federal spending will have been slashed by \$90 billion.

The only visible spark in the financial parleys arose from the dispute among Tory politicians over “income splitting,” a measure designed to reduce the taxes of couples with children and a stay-at-home spouse. Flaherty sidelined this Tory promise of the 2011 election campaign because, according to him, it would mostly favour the rich. But Harper wants to keep it. The \$5 billion it would cost, ironically, could fund a national childcare programme.

So, what is this exercise really about? “It’s all about next year’s budget,” said NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair. Actually, counting the government’s contingency fund, a slim surplus already exists, after a decade of deficit slaying. In 2015 the surplus is expected to hit \$6.4 Billion. That’s enough to generate more tax cuts for the affluent, and a few pre-election gimmicks aimed at winning another Harper majority.

The budget, as political pundits are wont to say, is a political document. The next Omnibus bill is where the

government will tightly pack its goodies for the rich, together with an array of anti-social and undemocratic measures. That’s where the rubber hits the road.

So, what should the labour-based NDP do about it? The Official Opposition NDP should show where the deficit and debt originated: in the government bail-out of the big banks and giant auto firms, in tax cuts for the corporate elite, and in military spending (\$3.1 Billion of which has been simply deferred, for the sake of appearances).

The NDP should demand an end to ‘socialism for the rich’, including the \$1 Billion in subsidies to oil companies whose tar sands oil produces deadly spills and fuels climate disasters.

The Council of Canadians responded to the federal budget arguing that it is being used to distract public attention from the government’s actions on trade, water, climate and energy, mining, health care, and democracy.

The Harper government “remains on track to cut \$90 billion in federal spending by 2017. This hurts our public health care system, it denies help for seniors and veterans, it withholds needed funding for the Great Lakes, and it fails to invest in clean water for First Nations and a renewable energy future for all of us. This is not a ‘do-nothing budget’, it’s an intentional assault on the public interest”, said Brent Patterson, CoC Political Director.

These are points the NDP should make, instead of focussing on high bank fees and repeating the mantra about “making life more affordable.”

Mulcair should follow the lead of the labour-backed Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in demanding national childcare and pharmacare, affordable housing, improved employment insurance, lower university tuition, restoring 65 as the age of eligibility for Old Age Insurance, getting decent housing and water for First Nations, and reinstatement of the funding for the Interim Federal Health Programme.

It’s clear that the fight for such measures, as part of a Workers’ Agenda that includes public ownership under workers’ control of big industry, will have to be advanced outside of Parliament by working people, from the grass roots up. ■

OPS benefits cut: NDP’s Horwath is silent, OFL’s Ryan disturbed

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Following the lead of the federal Conservative regime, the Ontario Liberal government announced that, starting in 2017, it will force its public service workers to pay more and work twice as long to qualify for retirement benefits such as life insurance and health coverage.

The measures, which require retirees to pay half their benefit premiums, now fully funded by Queen’s Park, and necessitate 20 years’ service instead of the present 10, are not subject to negotiation, which they will be at the federal level. Liberal Government Services Minister John Milloy simply imposed the changes, aimed at saving \$1.2 billion over five years. This will be directly at the expense of provincial workers, and indirectly harms all workers by the example it sets.

Ontario Public Service Employees’ Union President Warren (Smokey) Thomas denounced the “out of the blue” move. “We are looking at our options.”

According to President of the Ontario Federation of Labour, Sid Ryan, when Ontario NDP Leader Andrea Horwath was asked by reporters about this, she said “No comment.” That was coupled with Horwath’s avoidance of the minimum wage issue for months. Then she proposed a measly increase, over two years—just \$1 more than the insulting Liberal increase of 75 cents to take effect this spring. While Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne sets the poverty wage at \$11/hour, Horwath would make it \$12/hour (in 2016). Labour and many anti-poverty groups demand a \$14/hour minimum now, indexed to the rate of inflation. Socialists, and some unions like CUPE-Ontario, call for \$17/hour now, fully indexed. Apparently, that doesn’t fit with Horwath’s appeal to “middle-class” voters, and to “making life more affordable.”

Sid Ryan gave a scathing report to the Ontario NDP provincial council on the morning of March 2. He said he was “perplexed” by the process and the weak position taken on the minimum wage. Ryan minced no words in stating how disturbed he was to hear that NDP MPPs voted in the Ontario

Legislature for a Conservative motion that opposes any increase in corporate taxation.

He additionally denounced Horwath’s call for a reduction in taxes on small business, from the present 5% to 3.5%, to support a tiny increase in the minimum wage. “How will an NDP government pay for improvements in transportation, health, education and other vital services if it doesn’t plan to tax those who can afford to pay more?”

On the topic of pensions, Ryan bluntly warned that if Queen’s Park initiates an Ontario pension plan because Ottawa refuses to increase the CPP, it had better be a universal plan, with no opt-out feature, or Labour will vigorously oppose it. He explained, in advance, his reasons for concern. “There is no consultation with unions by the party leadership. Policy decisions are just announced. There may be a wise and grand strategy behind it all, but it’s certainly not evident to me,” Ryan complained.

Finally, the OFL president insisted on the importance of the campaign to defend postal services, to reverse the Tory-backed Canada Post plan to eliminate door-to-door mail delivery. He pointed to this writer as the organizer of a mass picket, set for March 15 at the Toronto office of Conservative Cabinet Minister Joe Oliver, and urged everyone to participate in the protest.

To those who claim that, no matter what the NDP does, labour has no where else to go, the OFL head warned: “Look at what happened in B.C. Workers were alienated by the NDP, and when the election came, many just stayed at home.”

Sid Ryan concluded by confiding to the council that the harsh things he’d said were necessary to say, all true, and told from the heart—and that being frank about these matters may be the only way to get a real dialog going. And he’s correct. But much more must be said, and done, to force the ONDP leadership off its present course, increasingly distant from the union movement, and increasingly cozy with the business class. ■



(Above) Socialist Action member and photographer Malu Baumgarten speaks to an evening rally Feb. 6 in Toronto in front of the building housing the Russian Consulate, the day before the start of the Winter Olympics at Sochi. Called to protest Putin’s anti-gay law and increased oppression and violence against queer people in Russia, the event drew about 200 participants in bitterly cold weather.

Speakers included Richard Elliott of the HIV/AIDS Legal network, a leading organizer of the event, and two Russian LGBT activists, Nadine Tkatchevskaia, and 18-year-old Justin Romanov. Justin was assaulted by Russian police and is applying for refugee status in Canada. Following the rally, a spirited march down Church St. ended at Ryerson University where participants held an indoor meeting.

Toronto Labour activists Rally to Defend Postal Services

About 60 union activists and supporters rallied to the call of Socialist Action on Feb. 21 at U of Toronto, to Defend Postal Services and to Defeat the Attack on the Public Sector.

The leaders who addressed the gathering included Marie Clarke Walker, vice president of the Canadian Labour Congress; Denis Lemelin, national president, Canadian Union of Postal Workers; Sid Ryan, president of Ontario Federation of Labour and past-President of CUPE-Ontario; Sharon DeSousa, regional executive VP for Ontario for the Public Service Alliance of Canada; Julius Arscott, V.P. of OPSEU Local 532, speaking on behalf of Myles Magner, V.P. of the Ontario Public Service Employees’ Union (who was unable to attend due to illness), Valerie Gaynor from

UNITE HERE Local 75, currently a shop steward at U of T St. George campus, and John Clarke, provincial organizer for the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty.

People at the rally, voted unanimously to call for a mass picket at the office of Conservative Cabinet Minister Joe Oliver on March 15. Needed is a cross-country wave of protest against the postal cuts. Eglinton-Lawrence MP Joe Oliver is Minister of Natural Resources in the Stephen Harper Cabinet. He voted in Parliament against the NDP motion to keep door to door mail delivery. Oliver’s constituency office is the most accessible Tory target for Toronto area supporters of the postal service.

Workers are asked to obtain the endorsement of organizations for the March 15 picket, and to indicate what they are prepared to do to make the next phase in this campaign a success. — B.W.

Immigrants ask: “When will deportations stop?”

By LISA LUINENBURG

President Obama stated in a recent speech on immigration reform, “Real reform means stronger border security, and we can build on the progress my administration has already made, putting more boots on the southern border than at any time in our history and reducing illegal crossings to their lowest levels in 40 years. Real reform means establishing a responsible pathway to earn citizenship, a path that includes passing a background check, paying taxes and a meaningful penalty, learning English, and going to the back of the line behind the folks trying to come here legally.”

This may sound on the surface like a promise for change, but as the legacy of Obama’s mass deportations of 400,000 immigrants a year continues to haunt communities across the country, many immigrants are asking when the deportations will stop.

Young people across the country like Hareth Andrade of Dreamers with Virginia, whose father Mario is facing deportation, are speaking out against Obama’s policies. Hareth said at a recent AFL-CIO convention where she asked union leaders for support: “My dad is just one of the faces of the thousand facing deportation, just one of the many who has to see his children cry. My dad was home for my sister’s ninth birthday in August, but who’s to say that because of an ICE decision, he won’t be there next year?” Recent immigration reform proposals coming from Congress have included harsh measures like thousands of dollars in fines, the requirement that immigrants prove their work history, pay back taxes, and learn English, and even a requirement that immigrants maintain a certain level of income, all before they can “earn” their legal status, a process that could take well over 10 years. In fact, in an analysis of the immigration reform proposal from the summer of 2013, the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law estimated that the “pathway to citizenship” being offered was so onerous that 4-5 million undocumented immigrants would be excluded be-



cause they could not meet its conditions or pay its fines. And all of this was contingent on the implementation of increased border militarization, including the use of drones on the U.S.-Mexico border, and the nationwide use of guest-worker visas and E-verify.

While politicians twiddle their thumbs and argue back and forth about how harsh the terms of the new immigration law will be, over a thousand people are being deported every day. Many detainees spend months languishing in for-profit detention prisons while they wait for their deportation, often cut off from contact with their families.

As recently reported by Aura Bogado in *The Nation*, detainees who work in the kitchen or in maintenance at the

(Above) Demonstrators at March 12 Philadelphia city council meeting demand police curtail cooperation with federal immigration round-ups. The city now states it will only cooperate if a suspect had previously been convicted of a violent felony.

Broward Transitional Center in Florida are paid \$1 a day to keep the detention center running. Immigrants who are being deported because they don’t have a permit to work in the United States are being paid the wages of an indentured servant to maintain the very prison that holds them captive. GEO Group, the private company that runs the

(continued on page 8)

... 1934 strike

(continued from page 12)

cal, had a small number of members (somewhere between 75-150) and were organized in one coal yard only. They had AFL jurisdiction in the industry, but the AFL was notorious for practicing “business unionism.” Their goal was to gain acceptance in government and boss circles by practicing class collaboration, and they operated through a high level of bureaucracy, with cushy salaried jobs for the union officials on top of the ladder.

Local 574, chartered in 1923, had failed in earlier attempts to organize successful union drives. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters at this time was generally only open to truck drivers, usually driver-salesmen in occupations like milkman, ice delivery, and so on, called “cash wagon” drivers by the workers. Members were subdivided into local trade unions that were separated based on jobs and governed by the Teamsters Joint Council. AFL union bureaucrats like Daniel J. Tobin, president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), were afraid of successful union drives because a large influx of new workers could easily get out of hand before they were able to control it from the top down.

Not surprisingly, Minneapolis Local 574 immediately ran into opposition from Tobin when they attempted to start their union drive in 1933. However, a rank-and-file committee was formed with the crucial support of Local President Bill Brown to advocate for inclusion of other workers, and after the local agreed to allow it, they launched a general organizing drive.

After recruiting many new workers to the campaign, they came up with platform of demands to present to the bosses, which included: recognition of the union, an increase salaries and a decrease in hours worked per week, a right to overtime pay, and better working conditions. Although Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 gave workers the “right to unionize,” the Minneapolis coal industry employers refused to negotiate with the workers.

But the workers in this situation were up against much more than simply the regular industry bosses. They also had to fight against the Citizens Alliance, a kind of bosses’ organization, a “union against unions.” Inspired by a 1917 Teamsters strike that was broken, the Citizens Alliance was dominated by a wide range of rich and powerful capitalists in Minneapolis (including the Daytons) as well as about 800 small businesses. They counted on support from the police force

and the city council, and they had even infiltrated many unions.

The Citizens Alliance existed to break strikes. David Parry, the president of the National Association of Manufacturers, called for a national open-shop drive in 1903. Parry said, “I believe we should endeavor to strike at the root of the matter, and that is to be found in the wide spread socialistic sentiment among certain classes of people.” He later admitted that this was “a war between the owners of American industry and the working class.”

After coal workers’ demands were rejected by the bosses, Cliff Hall, 574’s business agent, initially blocked the vote to strike. After union leaders organized a second meeting with more rank and file who were present, a strike was declared on Feb. 7, 1934. But many workers never forgot the betrayal of the union bureaucracy and were reticent towards the official union leadership afterwards. The Communist League leaders used this to show workers the bankruptcy of the union hierarchy and to show the power of the rank and file.

This power was soon evident in the well-organized and strategic strike. Within three hours of the strike being declared, workers had closed 65 of the 67 coal yards in the city; all 67 were closed by the end of the first day. One of the innovative tactics developed and used by the Minneapolis strikers was the “cruising picket.” In this strategy, strike leaders used vehicles owned by workers to distribute pickets where they were needed around the city, thus maximizing the forces they had to stop scab trucks as they attempted to move goods around the city. Picket Captain Harry DeBoer and his cruising picket squads soon became known as “hell on wheels.”

Despite early clashes with the police, the workers held firm, and under growing pressure from the public, who were clamoring for coal to heat their homes during a sub-zero cold snap, the industry agreed to negotiate after only three days on strike.

The bosses agreed to recognize the right of the union to represent its workers in negotiations, but this depended on the outcome of a collective bargaining vote. If the union won the vote, the bosses would negotiate a salary increase. This meant that the strikers would have to go back to work without a guarantee of salary increase or other demands. Although Miles Dunne wanted to continue the strike, Business Agent Cliff Hall convinced the majority of workers to accept the deal.

After preparing for the vote on collective bargaining in mid-February, Local 574 won by a landslide. As Miles had predicted, the bosses then refused to negotiate with the union except through the Labor Board.

The negotiations resulted in a new wage scale that gave small raises to most workers and time and a half after 48 hours of work. Despite its limitations, this was an important victory—it meant recognition for the union, which opened up Local 574 to even more workers, and gave it a stronger rank-and-file base than ever. And for the first time in 20 years, the workers had won a strike, building their confidence.

But the victory wouldn’t last long. Because work in the coal yards was seasonal, the bosses figured the wage increases would only last a few months, and then they could purge the ranks of strikers and reds in the next wave of hiring in the fall. But the union wasn’t about to give up without a struggle. The stage was being set for the drama that was to unfold on the streets of Minneapolis in the months to come.

To be continued ...

80th anniversary event

“To observe the 80th anniversary of the 1934 Teamsters strikes, organizers are beginning to plan a street festival for Saturday, July 19, and a picnic for Sunday, July 20,” *The Minneapolis Labor Review* reports in its January issue.

“We are looking for men and women who are descendants of the people who took part in the strikes of 1934 in Minneapolis and who heard stories,” said Linda Leighton, 65, who is a granddaughter of key strike leader Vincent “Ray” Dunne. Leighton is a member of SEIU Local 284 and union steward.

Leighton told about showing a film about the strike, “Labor’s Turning Point,” at one of her local union meetings, the article said. “People broke into spontaneous applause,” she said. “The strike continues to inspire workers.”

The commemorative project has obtained broad support from the state labor movement, including the four central labor union bodies and the two largest Teamster groups, Locals 120 and 320. Local 120 is the successor to General Drivers Locals 574 and 544, which led the strikes and capitalized on the momentum of the victory to “Make Minneapolis A Union Town.”

Monthly planning meetings have been held since early January. More information is available on Facebook page “Remember 1934.”

— DAVID JONES

80 years ago: Teamsters strike in Minneapolis



By LISA LUINENBURG

The year was 1934. It was a cold February in Minnesota, as many Februaries in Minnesota are cold. The temperature had dropped below zero, and people were scrambling for coal to heat their homes and businesses. But no coal was to be had. Teamsters Local 574, along with other workers in the Minneapolis coal yards, had gone on strike. Sixty-five out of 67 coal yards were closed within three hours of the strike, and no coal was being moved anywhere in the city. After three days, the bosses agreed to negotiate, and after a vote on collective bargaining in mid-February, the union won the right to recognition along with small wage increases for most workers.

But this was just the beginning of what was to become one of the most important sequences of strikes to take place in the United States during the Great Depression. They were the strikes that “made Minneapolis a union town,” eventually opening up many industries to successful union organization.

The entire working class was radicalizing during this time, as low wages and long hours ground them down into a life of poverty, and strikes were on the rise. The difference in Minneapolis was that Local 574 was led by a small layer of Trotskyist socialists, who used their revolutionary experience to lead the strike to victory.

Before the Teamsters strike in 1934, Minneapolis already had a long and storied history of radical workers’ organizations and militant strikes. In Minneapolis, the working class was made up of a mixture of U.S.-born workers, and immigrants from countries like Norway, Sweden, Germany, Finland, and Russia. The shifting Minnesota workforce mainly worked in booming industries such as logging, mining, milling, and on the railroads.

These workers made up the majority of the militant Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Minneapolis; in the 1910s IWW Local 10 was one of the largest in the Midwest, and the fact that many Wobblies and socialists also belonged to the American Federation of Labor (AFL) had a big influence on the workers’ movement in Minneapolis. Many railroad workers were socialists, following leaders such as Eugene Debs. When Debs ran for president in 1912, he carried four counties in the U.S., three of which were in Minnesota, and dominated politically by railroad workers.

Many of the immigrant workers who made Minnesota their home were already Socialists when they came to the United States, and many already had significant union experience in their home countries. In fact, Debs’s Socialist Party had so many immigrant members that it was organized into separate language federations. These factors combined to result in a large



The strike in the coal yards was the beginning of a series of strikes that ‘made Minneapolis a union town.’

(Right) Local 574 Women’s Auxiliary serves a meal to striking truck drivers.
(Left) Minneapolis cop attacks striker.

militant and socialist influence in the labor movement in Minneapolis, making the time ripe for a strike like the one that happened in 1934.

V.R. (Ray) Dunne and Carl Skoglund (known by his friends and comrades as “Skogie”) were prime examples of this type of worker in Minneapolis. Dunne, who grew up near Little Falls, Minn., traveled around the country, working as a logger or field laborer, and gaining strike experience before finally settling in Minneapolis and getting a job as a driver for an express service and later in the coal yards. Skoglund, originally from Sweden, immigrated to the U.S. in 1911, after being blacklisted for his involvement in strikes and socialism, and unable to find a job in his home country. After working as a lumberjack in Northern Minnesota and injuring his foot, he moved to Minneapolis and got a job in the railroad industry, joining the Socialist Party and becoming a leader in the Scandinavian Socialist Federation of the SP.

Dunne and Skoglund were founders of the Communist Party in 1919. Both were also elected as delegates to the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly (AFL), and were expelled from the AFL in 1925 during a witch hunt in the unions for “reds.” Both men were also expelled from the Communist Party in 1928 for supporting James P. Cannon and Trotsky’s International Left Opposition against Stalin, and went on to form the Communist League of America (Left Opposition)—the Trotskyist organization that would later become the Socialist Workers Party.

In the early 1930s, the Communist League decided to start a unionizing drive within the coal industry in Minneapolis, through Local 574. This was planned in order to reach the ever-growing layer of workers who were radicalizing during the Great Depression and organize them into joining the union and taking action against the boss class. Both Carl Skoglund and

V.R. Dunne were working in the coal yards at the time, and they were soon joined by other comrades from the party, including Dunne’s brothers Grant and Miles, and a young coal-yard worker named Farrell Dobbs.

Working conditions in 1934 were harsh. According to William Millikan in his book “A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor,” between 1929 and 1933, 25% of factories in Minneapolis went out of business, and in 1932 the unemployment rate in Minnesota was 23.4% (just under the national average). During this time, the wages of workers in Minneapolis fell by 27%, and almost half of the workforce saw their working hours cut below 40 per week.

To put this into perspective, Farrell Dobbs described the working conditions in the coal industry in 1934 in his classic account of the strike, “Teamster Rebellion.” According to Dobbs, drivers at this time made between \$10-\$18 a week for 54-90 hours of work; many worked from 3 a.m. to 6 p.m., six days a week. Farrell himself was barely making ends meet for his family on \$18 a week for 60 hours of work. When his hours were suddenly cut to 48 (with a \$2 cut in pay), it made the difference between subsistence and poverty.

That’s when Dobbs decided to join the union. He says, “If workers in their daily lives are more or less able to keep afloat and expect to be able to gradually move ahead, they will not tend to radicalize. It’s different when they are losing ground and the future seems precarious. Then there begins a change in their attitudes, something which is not always immediately apparent. Any spark can light the fire, and once lit, that fire can rapidly expand.”

And that fire was ready to explode late in 1933, when the organizing drive began in earnest. At this time, Teamsters Local 574 was an “open shop” union. “Open shop” was defined in the employers’ propaganda as a workplace where the workers could elect to be union or non-union. In reality, “open shop” meant no union at all. Union supporters could and were summarily fired. Local 574, chartered as a “General Drivers” lo-

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