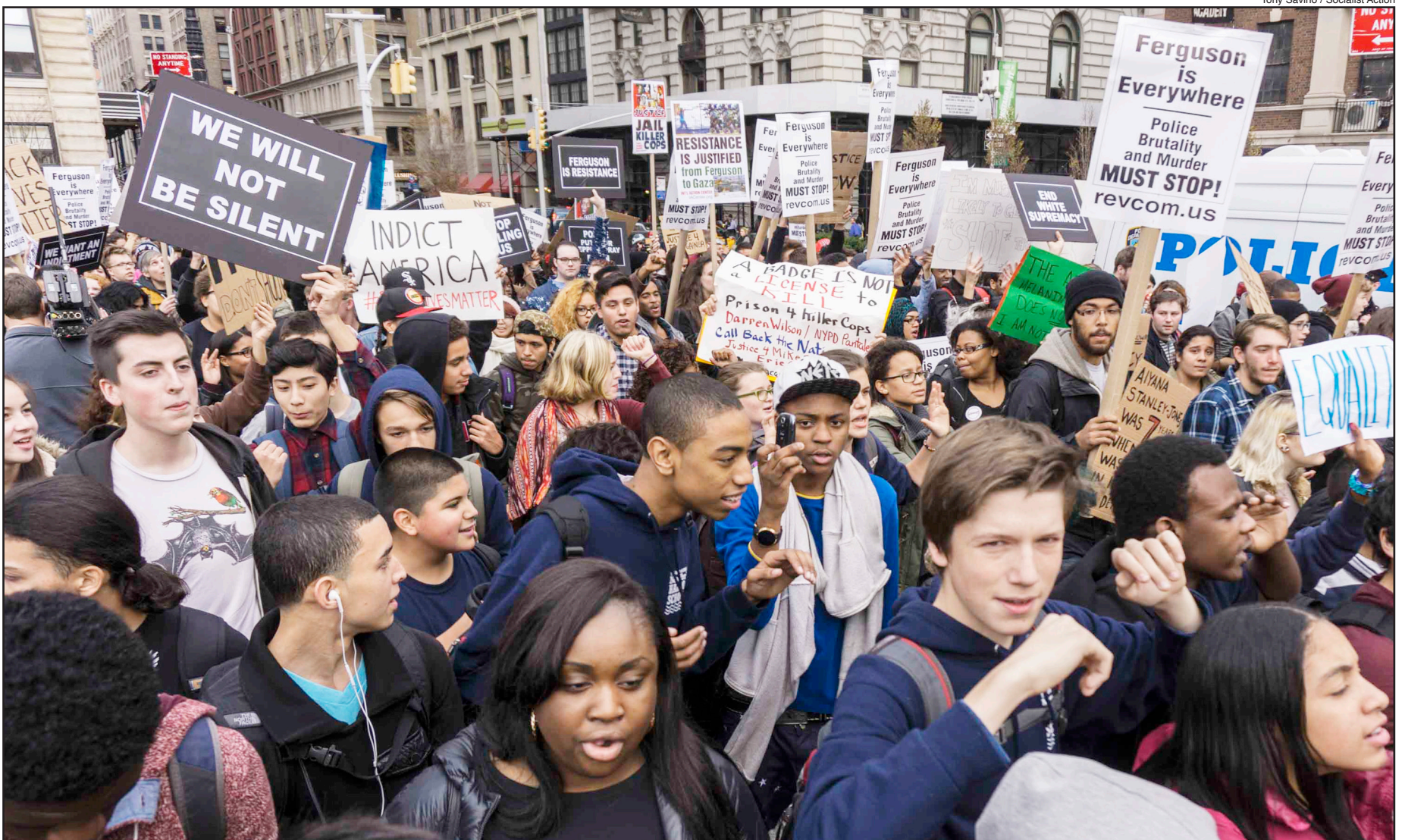


Outrage at racist grand jury decisions



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

By MARTY GOODMAN

Outrage erupted coast to coast at the grand jury decision not to indict Darren Wilson, the white cop who murdered Michael Brown, an unarmed African American youth, on Aug. 9 in Ferguson, Mo. Brown, 18, was shot six times, twice in the head. In testimony and interviews, Wilson says he has no regrets.

As the decision was announced on the evening of Nov. 24, an enraged crowd gathered outside the Ferguson police station. Brown's mother, Lesley McSpadden, pointed to the cops, "Y'all know you're all wrong!" She continued with tears in her eyes, "Everybody want me to be calm; do you know how many of them bullets hit my son?" Brown's father, Michael Brown Sr., later told CNN, "I feel like they killed him again."

The announcement of the grand jury decision by Prosecuting Attorney Robert McCulloch contained too many half-truths and prejudicial statements for people to swallow. Immediately af-

ter the decision, protests and clashes with police broke out in Ferguson and over 120 U.S. cities, as thousands upon thousands of African American and anti-racist activists, mostly youth, poured into the streets.

Across the nation, major roadways were blocked and bridges seized, some for hours, by protesters stirred to a molten rage by the decision. In New York City, protesters closed down three major bridges and the Lincoln Tunnel.

Not since the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, a Black teen shot dead by racist vigilante George Zimmerman in Florida, has mass outrage been so deep. Said one protester in Ferguson, "The system failed us again." A New York driver stuck in a Midtown protest told reporters, "I'm a Black man. I have two Black children—and enough is enough!"

Veteran New York police brutality activist Jose Lasalle, a member of the Cop

(continued on page 10)

Justice for Eric Garner!

The horror of Ferguson was repeated on Dec. 3 when a 23-person grand jury in Staten Island, N.Y., failed to indict Officer Daniel Pantaleo in the death of Eric Garner, a 43-year-old Black man. The cause of death was ruled a homicide by chokehold by the medical examiner. Garner was being arrested for selling single untaxed cigarettes.

In the cellphone video of the July 17 attack, Garner was heard repeatedly crying out, "I can't breathe!" as Pantaleo choked him and five more cops pinned him down. A peaceful protest of thousands followed on Staten Island.

At *Socialist Action's* press time, Dec. 3, hundreds of outraged protesters marched through Manhattan, conducted a die-in within Grand Central Station, blocked the West Side Highway, and blocked off Times Square. Garner's stepfather, Ben Carr, said, "It's like being stabbed in the heart."

"I will fight until the end," Eric's widow, Esaw Garner, vowed. "I am determined to get justice for my husband because he should not have been killed in that way." She also spurned the statement of sympathy released by Daniel Pantaleo following the grand jury's decision, stating, "The time for remorse was when my husband was living and breathing."

More protests are to follow. The Rev. Al Sharpton has announced that he is seeking to organize a march on Washington, D.C., on Dec. 13. ■

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Socialist Action convention sets national goals

By THE EDITORS

Tony Savino / Socialist Action

Socialist activists across the United States and international co-thinkers from France and Canada participated in Socialist Action's 16th National Convention, Oct. 17-19, in Minneapolis.

The opening rally, "Imagine Living in a Socialist USA," was attended by some 75 activists and featured a dozen speakers with whom Socialist Action has collaborated.

The speakers included Hakim Guesso, a leader of the Anti-Capitalist and Revolution current in the French New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA); Barry Weisleder, federal secretary, Socialist Action (Canada); Chris Gray, Socialist Alternative; Mick Kelly, Freedom Road Socialist Organization; Fred Magdoff, *Monthly Review* magazine; and Michael Steven Smith, co-editor of the new Harper Collins book, "Imagine Living in a Socialist USA."

Other speakers were Ricardo Levins-Morales, Twin Cities artist and cultural organizer; Chris Mato Nunpa, Dakota elder and educator; Mel Reeves, African American journalist and organizer; Kim Serrano, Speak Out Now; Linnea Sommer, granddaughter of socialist trade unionist and 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strike participant Chester Johnson; Sanna Nimitz Towns, social justice activist and lecturer; and Sabry Wazwaz, Palestinian rights leader.

Heather Bradford, a member of Socialist Action's Duluth branch, spoke for Socialist Action. The enthusiastic rally, chaired by Socialist Action's Stephanie Levi, raised funds to help defray the long-distance transportation costs of young delegates from areas such as Texas, California, and East Coast cities.

Most rally speakers brought solidarity greetings and expressed appreciation for Socialist Action's participation, collaboration, and support in advancing critical social and political struggles, defense campaigns against government repression, opposition to all U.S. wars—and especially the ongoing Israeli occupation and slaughter of the Palestinian people, backed to the hilt by American imperialism.

The Socialist Alternative speaker expressed appreciation for Socialist Action's political and financial support



(Photo) New York SA member Marty Goodman hawks the Socialist Action pamphlet, "Free, Free Palestine!" The convention approved a new set of topical pamphlets to be issued in 2015.

detailing the massive attacks on all aspects of working-class life, major foci of the text are on U.S. imperialism's ever-expanding wars on nearly every continent and on the catastrophic threats to the world's environment posed by world capitalism's fossil-fuel-induced global warming and parallel pollution of the planet.

The resolution noted that despite the anger, frustration, and hatred of oppression and exploitation that broad layers of the working class, especially youth, daily experience as capitalism imposes unprecedented austerity measures and repression, the level of organized broad and coordinated resistance struggles and the number of significant victories remain low. This was attributed in significant part to the ongoing political degeneration of the traditional mass workers' organizations and trade unions and the present marginalization of the forces of the revolutionary socialist left.

Nevertheless, delegates across the country noted the growing receptivity of working people—again, especially youth and oppressed nationalities—to socialist ideas. This has been reflected in Socialist Action's winning new layers of radicalizing youth to its banner.

The adopted Organizational Report set out Socialist Action's goals for internal education, regularization of branch activities, and a series of national speaking tours of SA's experienced and emerging leaders. The report also adopted impressive goals to increase the circulation of the party's revolutionary press and publications, improve party finances, and, above all, to deepen Socialist Action's efforts to engage in the critical struggles that are increasingly winning the hearts and minds of workers and youth, and to recruit that broadening layer of radicalizing activists to the revolutionary party.

The convention was preceded by a two-day educational conference that featured discussion on Building the Leninist Party, The Revolutionary Role of the Working Class, The Struggle for Palestinian Freedom, and Women's Liberation: A Contemporary Debate. ■

to the 2013 election campaign of Ty Moore, whose impressive bid for a seat on the Minneapolis City Council narrowly lost by some 250 votes.

Freedom Road Socialist Organization leader Mick Kelly similarly expressed his party's appreciation for Socialist Action's consistent solidarity work in defending FRSO and all of the 23 activists who are victims of threatened government prosecution—facing possible federal grand-jury indictments on frame-up charges of conspiracy to aid and abet terrorism.

Socialist Action's convention featured four major presentations covering the different sections of the 42-page Draft Political Resolution that had been submitted to the party's ranks to initiate a three-month internal pre-convention discussion and debate. Based on a system of proportional representation of all points of view, convention delegates were elected from Socialist Action units in a dozen major cities, as well as from smaller units with sufficient members to qualify for delegate status.

A portion of the Draft Political Resolution, which will soon be produced in booklet form and at socialistaction.org, was published in the November issue of *Socialist Action* newspaper. The resolution analyzes the deepening crisis of the world capitalist system and its ramifications for U.S. workers and the oppressed. In addition to

Socialist Action: Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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WHERE TO FIND US

- ASHLAND, Ore.: damonjure@earthlink.net
- CHICAGO: P.O. Box 578428 Chicago, IL 60657, chisocialistaction@yahoo.com
- CONNECTICUT: (860) 478-5300
- DULUTH, MINN.: adamritscher@yahoo.com. www.thenorthernworker.blogspot.com
- KANSAS CITY: kcsa@workernet.org (816) 221-3638
- LOUISVILLE, KY: redlotus51@yahoo.com, (502) 451-2193
- MADISON, Wis.: Northlandiguana@gmail.com
- MINNEAPOLIS/St. PAUL: (612) 802-1482, socialistaction@visi.com
- NEW YORK CITY: (212) 781-5157
- PHILADELPHIA: philly.socialistaction@gmail.com

- PORTLAND, ORE.: (503) 233-1629 gary1917@aol.com
- PROVIDENCE: ADGAGNERI@GMAIL.COM (401) 592-5385
- SALEM, ORE.: ANNMONTAGUE@COMCAST.NET
- SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: P.O. Box 10328, OAKLAND, CA 94610 (510) 268-9429, sfsocialistaction@gmail.com
- WASHINGTON, DC: christopher.towne@gmail.com, (202) 286-5493

SOCIALIST ACTION CANADA

NATIONAL OFFICE
526 Roxton Road, Toronto,
Ont. M6G 3R4, (416) 535-8779
<http://socialistaction.ca/>

Obama's fake immigration reform

By JOHN ORLAND

The Great Deporter's new executive order for a "sweeping overhaul of the immigration system" deserves no praise. If there is anything "sweeping" about President Obama's immigration policy, it is his six years of deporting 2.4 million immigrants, his repeated lies regarding his so-called legal incapacity to issue presidential executive orders to mitigate the horrors that immigrant communities have been subjected to, and his total failure to pursue anything resembling "comprehensive immigration reform."

What Obama did do, as with his all-pervasive surveillance system, was to order the implementation of a vicious program to criminalize immigrants in order to jail or deport them at will and to spend countless additional billions to militarize the border to keep them out.

Obama made clear that his executive order was "no different than all previous Democrat and Republican Party presidents over the past half century." This statement alone immediately conjures up the heinous "bracero programs" of decades past, when strictly controlled cheap or near slave-wage labor was systematically imported from Latin America to serve the needs of the nation's major agricultural titans and their associated industries.

The price to be extracted by Obama's "promise" to refrain for three years from deporting undocumented immigrant parents of children born in the U.S. is a requirement that all such immigrants officially register their names, addresses, employment records, wages, salaries, and other data with the government, thus subjecting them to immediate persecution or deportation if they don't pass Obama's muster. Those with previous felony convictions or perhaps lesser "infractions" of America's racist system of "law and order" remain subject to immediate deportation.

Obama's decree, purportedly affecting four to five million undocumented immigrants, was described by administration officials as *prioritizing* the deportation of "felons, not families," as if the remaining seven to eight million immigrants not covered by his plan were little less than dangerous criminals. Indeed, immigration officials will be instructed to prioritize the hunting down and deportation of so-called "gang members, felons, and suspected terrorists."

"Today our immigration system is broken, and everybody knows it," Obama said. But Obama's "fix" to date has been to deport more immigrants than any and all previous U.S. presidents combined!

Obama's order supposedly offers those who qualify the chance to remain in the U.S. temporarily for three years, as long as they *pass background checks and pay back taxes*—to be determined, no doubt, by tax collectors who will have the final word. Not a single immigrant will be offered a "path to citizenship"; nor will any be eligible for federal benefits or mandated health-care coverage.

Obama failed to mention that these same immigrants have often had state and federal taxes deducted from their salaries or wages by merciless employers while simultaneously being denied benefits supposedly mandated to all taxpayers! Obama's order will demand the extortion of *back taxes*, but there will be no retroactive back payment to immigrants for their exclusion from the benefits of paying these taxes. Obama's program is still worse; it will now demand that back taxes be deducted from those who register to comply, while all benefits will still be denied.

To demonstrate his fidelity to his Republican "critics," who will undoubtedly appreciate Obama's supplying corporate America with a steady supply of cheap, no-benefit labor who will be required to pay enormous sums in "back taxes" for future corporate plunder, the president issued his decree in condescending and threatening language: "If you meet the criteria, you can come out of the shadows and get right with the law. If you're a criminal, you'll be deported. If you plan to enter the U.S. illegally, your chances of getting caught and sent back just went up."

But Republican "critics" were nevertheless more than willing to partake in the great American charade that passes for real politics. "Instead of working together to fix our broken immigration system, the president says he's acting on his own," Republican House Speaker John Boehner said in a YouTube video released before the president's speech. "The president has said before, that he's not king and he's not an emperor. But he's sure acting like one."

In truth, what Obama "unilaterally" proclaimed was likely what the twin parties of capital had previously agreed to during their multi-year "debate" on im-



Tony Savino / Socialist Action

Mexico protests: 'Bring them home alive!'

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

On Nov. 20, rallies took place in Mexico and around the world protesting the disappearance of 43 students after a police attack in the state of Guerrero, and demanding that the Mexican government account for their fate. From Mexico City to Buenos Aires to London to New York City, chants rang out for "Justicia!" (Justice!).

The abducted youths were enrolled at the Teachers College of Ayotzinapa, a school whose student body is known for its social activism and leftist politics. On Sept. 26, they were riding on buses into the city of Iguala, Guerrero, on their way to a protest in Mexico City, when police intercepted them and opened fire on the buses. They shot and killed six of the students and detained 43 others who had not managed to flee. The bodies of the murdered students were left in the street for five hours until the authorities decided to intervene.

Over a month later, federal officials apprehended members of a criminal gang, who allegedly confessed that the police in Iguala had turned the 43 students over to them. Supposedly, the gang members shot the students, burned their bodies, and then threw bags containing their ashes into a river. To date, however, these allegations have not been verified by independent forensics teams that were called in to investigate. The demand remains, "Vivos los queremos!" (We want them alive!)

It was discovered soon after the abductions that the police were responding to orders from Iguala's

mayor, Jose Luis Abarca, whose wife was scheduled to give a political speech the same day close to where the police attacked the buses. Her family has been linked to the drug syndicate, Guerrero Unidos. After being confronted with the charges, Abarca and his wife fled the area, but they were located and arrested on Nov. 4.

In the past decade, more than 100,000 people have been confirmed killed in abductions in Mexico, while well over 22,000 others (according to official figures) are still missing. Mexicans have increasingly expressed their indignation over the federal authorities' reticence to take effective measures to locate the victims, and to put an end to the violence, lawlessness, and corruption that has become endemic throughout much of the country. The police attack on the Ayotzinapa students and the disappearance of the 43 were the last straw for many people.

Tens of thousands of protesters converged in Mexico City's central square, the Zocalo, on Nov. 20 to demand action from the federal government in finding the 43. Many chanted, "We are all Ayotzinapa!" Students from the teachers' college have been in several confrontations with the police over the years. On Dec. 12, 2011, state judicial police shot and killed two Ayotzinapa students during a protest.

More and more, demands call for the resignation of President Enrique Peña Nieto, who in turn has accused protesters and "outside agitators" of trying to "destabilize" the country. ■

migration legislation. All sections of the ruling class understand well that cheap labor with zero benefits is a prized commodity. Obama's supposed three-year reprieve from government deportation is little more than existing policy, in which immigration officials, in collusion with corporate America, selectively determine who will be deported and who are still urgently required to service corporate interests.

This unofficial selective persecution and deportation policy serves capitalism well. Lower wages to immigrants, if wages are paid at all via employer pre-planned deportations arranged before pay day, always exercise a downward pressure on the wages of all U.S. workers, including and especially union members. The wage differential also serves capitalism's need to divide workers by race and legal status, with the ruling class ever placing the blame for unemployment not on its failing system but rather on immigrants who "illegally" take the jobs of "Americans."

Government-promoted reactionary patriotism is routinely employed to scapegoat the most oppressed and exploited. Obama's spokespersons took care to stress that the new plan was both temporary and subject to cancellation at any time by any president.

"Deferred action [that is, postponing deportation punishment] is not a pathway to citizenship. It is not legal status. It simply says that for three years, you are not a law-enforcement priority, and [we] are not going to go after you," said one senior official. "It is

temporary and it is revocable."

Working people have nothing to gain by faint praise or other attributions of support to Obama's racist and anti-immigrant policies—in this case, a policy likely announced with great fanfare to crudely manufacture Obama's future "legacy" as a humanistic president concerned with the plight of the poor and oppressed.

All "reforms" extracted from corporate America are derived from the independent self-organization and fightback of working people. The growing immigrant rights movement has increasingly demanded an immediate end to all deportations, immediate amnesty and legalization, full benefits to all undocumented workers, and an immediate end to the militarization of the borders. The unity of the broad working class in defense of full rights for immigrants is a prerequisite to winning real victories for all the oppressed and indeed, for all workers.

Subordination of this critical struggle to support for "The Great Deporter," or any other posturing politician, only furthers illusions in the credibility of the racist capitalist system.

The massive mobilizations in virtually every U.S. city, in which people expressed their rage against the racist grand-jury decision in the case of the police murder of the unarmed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., was an important step toward awakening the American people to the real source of oppression in

(continued on page 5)



Postal workers fight privatization

By MARTY GOODMAN

The insurgent new leadership of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) has begun a nationally coordinated campaign to fight the accelerated privatization and dismantling of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS).

The APWU announcement came on the heels of a union-busting deal between Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe and Staples stores in October. A pilot program that established non-union post office services in 82 Staples stores will now be expanded to all of its 1500 Staples outlets.

What's more, a private firm called "Goin' Postal" has just signed a deal with USPS to set up shop in 2000 Walmart department stores with non-union labor. It will offer not just USPS services but also UPS, DHL, Fed-X, and other postal services.

In 2006, legislators of both parties sponsored and passed by voice vote a bill that mandated the pre-funding of postal worker pensions 75 years into the future—requiring a \$5.5 billion per year investment for workers not even born! The poison pill legislation sought to financially cripple the USPS and make it

appear that the public service and its union are economically unviable. No other government agency or company must do this.

In 2013, a so-called "White Paper" and a subsequent corporate-backed study both recommended the privatization of all postal services except delivery. New York activist John Dennie, a retired postal worker, calls the bosses' onslaught "privatization on steroids."

The USPS bosses like Donahoe and the corporate bloodsucker class have their eyes fixed on destroying the diverse 500,000-strong unionized postal workforce, the second largest workforce in the U.S. next to Walmart. They aim to rob what they can of the estimated \$110 billion in postal resources and rip off its customer base—that is, all of us!

APWU President Mark Dimondstein called Postmaster Donahoe "Wall Street's Trojan Horse, the privatizer from within." The APWU's slogan is, "The U.S. Mail is not for Sale!" APWU represents some 196,000 maintenance workers, truck drivers, and clerks, whose jobs include numerous activities from processing mail to selling stamps (see APWU.org).

A National Day of Action was called for Nov. 14 by all

four postal workers' unions. The postal unions are the APWU, the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU), and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA). The slogan for Nov. 14 was "Stop Delaying America's Mail!"

The Day of Action was the first time the four unions have united to oppose USPS since 2011 (for information: Stopthemaldelays.org). Although the turnout on Nov. 14 was modest, from several dozen up to a few hundred in some cities, it laid the basis for more united actions of postal workers.

Said the APWU, "On Jan. 5 the Postmaster General and the Board of Governors are poised to make devastating cuts in service to the American people—cuts so severe that they will forever damage the U.S. Postal Service." On Jan. 5 a total of 82 Mail Processing and Distribution Centers will be closed or "consolidated."

These cuts, in sync with the privatization drive, virtually eliminate next-day delivery within cities and lower all delivery standards for medicine, on-line purchases, local newspapers, etc. The elimination of Saturday delivery, although defeated in Congress for fiscal 2015, remains a key goal of the postal bosses.

The sale to corporate entities of USPS facilities, some of which have been named "National Landmarks" for their architectural beauty or for the artworks that they contain, has continued at an accelerated pace since 2009. According to www.Saveourpostoffice.org, it adds up to about \$546 million in revenue.

Behind the corporate privatization drive are forces like the Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service, created in 2004 as the stealthy name for the large mailer association whose industry is estimated at \$1 trillion. Another player is the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), funded by donors like the ultra-conservative Koch brothers.

Benefitting from the corporate raid is CBRE, the world's largest commercial real estate broker and sole manager of all USPS property sales. The chairman of CBRE is Richard Blum, husband of California's powerful U.S. Senator, Democrat Diane Feinstein.

In 1971, President Nixon, under the Postal Reorganization Act, changed the USPS into a government-owned "public corporation," rather than being entirely owned by the government and responsible to voters. The changes were based on recommendations of a commission established by Democratic President Lyndon Johnson. Since the early 1980's the USPS has not received a penny in government funding.

Socialists say to the corporate raiders, "Keep your hands off our Post Office!" Keep postal work union! As the APWU says, "The U.S. mail is not for sale" ■

CORRECTION: A version of this article was scheduled to appear in the November 2014 edition of Socialist Action. By mistake, we published an article on the postal service that had already appeared in our paper a year earlier, in November 2013. We apologize for the error.

Indigenous people protest racist NFL team mascot

By CHRISTINE FRANK

MINNEAPOLIS—In the largest demonstration yet, 5000 Indigenous People and their supporters marched and rallied to demand that Dan Snyder, owner of the Washington NFL franchise, change the racist name of his team, the "Redskins." On Nov. 2, the team was in Minneapolis to play the Minnesota Vikings at TCF Stadium on the University of Minnesota campus. That morning, they were met by three separate feeder marches—two from campus and the other from the community—which converged in an enormous rally held on the adjacent Minnesota Tribal Nations Plaza, which honors the state's 11 federally recognized Native American tribes.

The action was sponsored by Not Your Mascot and the National Coalition Against Racism in Sports and the Media, with support from over two dozen other groups. Busloads of activists came from as many as 10 states, with the Upper Midwest tribal communities being well represented. They chanted, "We Are Not Your Mascots!" and "Change the Name!"

Rally speakers included Clyde Bellecourt, co-founder of the American Indian Movement, and Winona La Duke of



Honor the Earth, along with many tribal leaders, including Ray Halbritter of the Oneida Nation in upstate New York. Also, present were Native athletes Joey Browner, formerly of the Vikings, and Billy Mills, an Olympic Gold Medalist and one-time hockey player.

Expressing solidarity from the Black community were activist/comedian Dick Gregory and Spike Moss of the Minneapolis NAACP, who spoke of how runaway slaves frequently sought refuge among the Southern tribes, where they were welcomed, intermarried with them, and bore Native American children.

There were many politicians on the platform, including Rep. Betty McCollum (Democrat), who co-chairs the Native American Congressional Caucus,

and Mayor Betsy Hodges. The rally was chaired by Susan Allen, the first Native American woman in the Minnesota legislature. All were unanimous in declaring the team name an offensive racial epithet long overdue for a change. In addition to the speeches, there were ceremonies, drum circles, and dances.

Many speakers pointed to the genocidal history of the word. For instance, during Minnesota's campaign of extermination waged against the Dakota people in 1862, a bill was posted publicly that read: "The state reward for dead Indians has been increased to \$200 for every Redskin sent to purgatory." Not only were scalps taken from Native women, children, warriors, and elders but the dead were mutilated in other ghastly ways when soldiers and bounty hunters offered proof of their systematic butchery.

The term is linked to a 500-year legacy of genocide, ethnocide, and ecocide waged against Native North America. This legacy continues today with not only racist team mascots and other misappropriations of Indigenous culture, but the destruction of tribal lands and the health of their people by polluting corporate extraction industries, and the continual violation of treaty rights that are part of a

long trail of broken promises.

While 5000 protesters expressed their disapproval of Dan Snyder's unwillingness to change the name of his NFL team, the arrogant owner sat in his box watching the game with private security guards at the door. He had previously told the press that he would *never* change the name despite the growing number of people, including President Obama, opposed to the racial slur.

In 2006, Navajo social worker Amanda Blackhorse had filed a petition against the name with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, which responded this June, ruling that six Redskins trademark registrations should be canceled. Losing the trademark wouldn't get rid of the name, but it would cost the team exclusive merchandising and licensing rights and big revenue losses. Since money is the only thing that Dan Snyder apparently understands, he turned around and filed suit against Blackhorse and her four fellow plaintiffs after the ruling.

At the rally, activists pledged to follow the Washington team to its remaining home and away games this season to demand that it be renamed to something that does not offend 365 million Indigenous People around the globe. ■

Low-wage workers unite for \$15 Now

By ANN MONTAGUE

PORTLAND, Ore.—On Dec. 4, the 2nd anniversary of the first Fast Food strikes—when 200 workers walked out—the actions have increased in number to include over 190 cities in the United States alone. Moreover, workers at convenience stores have joined them.

As we go to press, reports indicate that home-care workers have turned out in solidarity, and airport workers are striking in 10 cities. In some cities, workers in stores such as Dollar Tree and Big Lots are walking out with the demand of “\$15 and a union.”

SEIU President Mary Kay Henry addressed the growing movement, “The Fight for \$15 movement is growing, as more Americans living on the brink decide to stick together to fight for better pay and an economy that works for all of us, not just the wealthy few.”

Workers in industries beyond fast food have joined the fight because they face the same struggles, says Arun Ivatury, with the National Employment Law Project. “These are all some of the fastest-growing occupations in the country, and they’re also some of the lowest-paying, as little as \$8 or \$9 an hour in terms of the median wage in these occupations. These are struggles these workers are facing across these industries—they’re facing the same struggle for respect and decent schedules with advance notice and enough hours to make a decent living.”

Airport worker strikes were planned in New York, Newark, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston, Minneapolis, Oakland, Fort Lauderdale, Seattle, and Atlanta. Protesting airport workers sent a letter to the CEOs of the six largest airlines, saying, “As airport workers we have pledged to stand together with people who work in home care and fast food to fight for \$15 an hour.”

“Like many other airport workers, I make only minimum wage with no benefits,” said Abera Siyoum, a disability cart driver at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. “When I look at the fight of fast-food workers, I see my fight. We live in the same community and suffer the same problems and that’s why we’re all fighting to make a change.”

In recent months, some of the most promising organizing efforts have been taking place in Oregon. The 15 Now group started last March, with Portland (PDX) as the center of its activities. The constant activity has gained hundreds of supporters and endorsers.

In the last couple of months, the strategy has been to go statewide and add additional regional representatives and more organizations to its steering committee. The first successful organizing outside the Portland area has been in southern Oregon, where 15 Now is working with Jobs With Justice and Oregon Strong Voice. New chapters are starting in six other cities.

The work of 15 Now Portland has accumulated endorsements of over 20 union locals. Some endorsements are from statewide organizations, including American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), Oregon Education Association (OEA/Teachers), Service Employees International Union (SEIU 503), Oregon State Association of Letter Carriers (OSALC), and Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA). Rank-and-file activists from these and other union locals will help with moving 15 Now throughout the state.

Both AFSCME local 88 and Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) 483 asked 15 Now PDX to join them in their campaign for a \$15 floor in their contract. This resulted in winning raises for Multnomah County workers, Seasonal Park Rangers, and workers at Home Forward (Housing Authority of Portland).

Minimum-wage ballot measures

The midterm elections had a low turnout average of 34 percent nationally. But even where Republican candidates won election, ballot measures to raise the minimum wage also won—with percentages as high as 68 percent. None of the raises on the statewide minimum-wage ballot measures were for \$15 an hour and were even below Obama’s proposed \$10.10. Clearly, the Democratic Party was calling the shots on the wording of these measures. However, thousands of workers will get raises in Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

The Illinois ballot had only a “non-binding advisory” calling for \$10, which also passed. Two cities had important victories: Oakland, Calif., raised its minimum wage to \$12.25, with rapid implementation and cost of living increases. San Francisco was the only place that \$15 was on the ballot, and it passed by the most votes—76% voted yes.

Since it had become clear that San Francisco would score a victory for \$15, 15 Now and Labor Notes in Portland started early to organize an event featuring one of the major leaders of the S.F. ballot campaign, Alysabeth Alexander, SEIU 1021 Vice President for Politics, along with Nicole Grant, representing Washington State Young Emerging Labor Leaders (YELL), who worked on the



Seattle \$15 campaign. The event was geared to union members and called, “Unions and the Fight for \$15.”

Seventy-five union members from both public and private sector unions met to engage with these labor leaders about their struggles and the strategy for Oregon. Alexander introduced herself as a rank-and-file member of SEIU 1021 who ran and was elected as a reform candidate for vice president. She encouraged everyone to work for a statewide ballot measure in Oregon.

She cautioned to not let people dismiss the San Francisco win by saying, “Oh, of course that is San Francisco.” She pointed out that the cities of Richmond and Berkeley, Calif., both have “left-leaning” elected officials, but their minimum wage is not close to \$15.

The difference, she emphasized, is that in San Francisco they worked to build the movement for two years before it was on the ballot. As soon as the pressure of that movement had moved the mayor to come out in favor of raising the minimum wage, they immediately decided to try to put the question on the ballot, so there could be no negotiating downwards.

Midterm election in Oregon

Oregon was an anomaly in November’s election. We had twice the turnout of the national average because we have vote by mail and usually have controversial or incisive ballot measures. In this election, driver cards for undocumented Oregonians, GMO labeling, and legalizing marijuana were all on the ballot. As a result the Democratic governor was re-elected, and the Democrats have increased majorities in the State Senate and House.

Democrats campaigned generically about raising the minimum wage, but all of the candidates refused to be specific. So with the expanding 15 Now movement being the only ones talking explicitly about the minimum wage, that is the number people are discussing.

Surprisingly, a state Senate Democrat and two state Representatives told 15 Now that they would introduce a \$15 minimum wage bill. It ended up as authorizing a \$15 minimum wage in 2016 for businesses with 10 employees or more, with a two-year implementation for small businesses of nine or less. No one believes that the bill will pass, but it will facilitate \$15 Now’s conducting public hearings across the state in preparation for launching a ballot measure.

(Above) Cleveland home-care workers and consumers join together in \$15 wage campaign.

On Saturday, Jan. 24—before the legislature is even in session—there will be a statewide rally at the capitol in Salem, which will be a platform for low-wage workers to talk about why they are fighting for \$15 an hour. Afterwards, a statewide 15 Now gathering will take place for workers across the state.

How can we win 15 for millions?

There is no question that the movement to raise the minimum wage to \$15 has been developing into an important component of working-class organizing. In just two years it has spread from a single city, Seattle, to 120 cities. There have been eight one-day strikes. In April 2015, a second global strike of low-wage workers will take place—with actions throughout South America, North America, Asia, and Europe.

Organizing in the United States so far has been uneven. In some cities, unions have managed the organizing efforts in a top-down manner. In some areas, coalitions have been formed, although not yet on a very broad basis. But the movement continues to broaden and grow with each mobilization—including workers who have no union, as well as union members who are winning a \$15 floor in their contracts. Union members in the public sector have especially shown their support, although no union strikes for \$15 have taken place.

To win \$15 for the nation’s workers, a national movement must be built. Although more victories can be won in city and state ballot measures, the movement’s tactics must progress to the level of national actions. A broad sector of the working class must be involved in organizing activities, including the unemployed and workers who make more than the minimum wage.

All-inclusive coalitions must be constructed in every city to encompass every possible organization, community group, or individual that is willing to make a commitment to the fight to make \$15 a minimum for all workers throughout the nation. An indication of the potential power of a united movement was seen in the Ferguson protests on Black Friday (Nov. 28) when an activist in New York City pointed out to the media, “There is no racial justice without economic justice.” ■

... Immigration

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the United States.

Similarly, the five million immigrants who struck nationwide in 2006 against the racist immigration bill proposed by Republican Congressmen James Sensenbrenner and Peter King entitled, “Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act” offered a living example of the power of mass opposition and protest that raised the level of political consciousness of all. It is no coincidence that Obama’s executive order employs Sensenbrenner-type language—“terrorism, border protection, and immigration control.”

Obama’s fake decree was nothing less than a ruling-class effort to set the stage for the next round of electoral debate, in which the “lesser evil” will be once again counterposed to the so-called greater

evil. But the massive 2014 election abstention rate of Latino workers—and indeed, the vast majority of all the oppressed and youth—was a stinging rebuke to Obama’s across-the-board policies of austerity, racism, environmental destruction, endless war, and atrocities against immigrants.

There are no capitalist “saviors.” The gap is narrowing between the growing hatred of capitalism’s brutality and the still modest number of acts of resistance.

The prospect of explosive events that can bring millions into the streets and into the political arena—making use of a new fighting labor movement, mass organizations of struggle, and independent working-class political parties—was significantly advanced when tens of thousands took to the streets to express their solidarity with Ferguson’s Black community and to condemn the inherent racism of corporate America and its militarized police-state-like criminal “justice” system. ■

Unmasking the hype in capitalist economics

Stan Honda / AFP/Getty Images



BY JEFF MACKLER

Activists beginning to challenge 'the system' must ask whether something fundamental is at the root of the crisis.

The U.S. working class, the nation's poor and oppressed, and the youth won a resounding victory on Election Day 2014 when they cast their "votes" for the most popular candidate of all—"None of the Above." Indeed, "None of the Above" won the much-hyped midterm election "contest" hands down, when 64% of eligible voters declined to participate in the orchestrated U.S. charade that poses as real politics.

The 34 percent Election Day turnout, the lowest in 72 years, registered in large part the mass dissatisfaction with the policies of the twin parties of capitalism, who spent a combined and record total of \$4 billion in efforts to turn out their supporters.

The stunning election returns confirmed a number of national polls indicating that Congress' approval ratings a few months before the elections had sunk to near all-time lows, at 14 percent or less. An earlier poll put that figure at 8 percent!

The figures are consistent with a Gallop Poll finding a year earlier, in which "60% of Americans say the Democratic and Republican parties do such a poor job of representing the American people that a third major party is needed. That is the highest Gallup has measured in the 10-year history of this question. A new low of 26% believe the two major parties adequately represent Americans."

The traditional "lesser evil" charade, in which the Democrats are portrayed as more receptive to working people than the Republicans, gave way to a massive rejection of both parties. The under-30 youth vote participation declined from 19 to 13 percent, with similar dramatic declines in the participation of Blacks and Latinos, who registered unprecedentedly high turnouts in 2008—a higher percentage than white voters.

This growing disillusionment with capitalist politics is in direct proportion to the concerted bipartisan attacks launched against working people on every front at every level of society. Rigged figures on unemployment notwithstanding, participation in the U.S. workforce, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, stands at a record low over the past decade, registering 62.7 percent in 2014. Wages during the same period have been in steep decline. Part-time, non-union, minimum-wage, no-benefits, and sub-standard working-conditions jobs are increasingly the norm.

While the quality of life of the nation's working masses has been driven down to new depths, the ruling rich have prospered as never before, with the

rich-poor gap among the highest in earth. By every measure, government policy has been to transfer trillions of dollars and vital social services of every kind from working people to the miniscule minority ruling elite—whether it be to their banks, insurance companies, corporations, military-industrial complex, or any other private for-profit institution that, in the context of the world capitalist crisis, cannot operate other than at the expense of the people.

It is not just the American ruling class that robs the working masses but the crisis-ridden ruling classes across the globe. Europe's economy is stagnant or in decline. The same with Japan. China's growth has significantly slowed, as have the other BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Africa and the even poorer regions all suffer the consequences as the rich plunder their resources, exploit their people and bring war and devastation everywhere. There are no exceptions!

At the level of the world economy, again with no exceptions, the crises are "resolved" through the imposition of massive austerity programs implemented with abandon, as social services, health care, education, wages, and working conditions are continually eroded, regardless of which capitalist party is in power.

A late November *New York Times* headline that reads, "Banks are Fined \$4.5 Billion in Currency Investigation" is but the tip of the iceberg." The offenders include the top U.S. banking institutions, JP Morgan Chase and Citigroup, who were charged with and admitted to "conspiracy to manipulate foreign currency markets. "No leaders or executives were charged with wrongdoing," according to *The Times*.

Last year the same banks and several others were fined to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars for misstating the value of the mortgages and bonds they sold to the government during the 2008-9 corporate/banking "bailouts." The fines paled in comparison to the trillions of dollars gifted by the Federal Reserve

to "prevent" a meltdown of the U.S. financial infrastructure. Again, despite the trillions stolen, no one went to prison because the government's "regulators" and "investigators" were partners in the rip off—cut out of the same class of interchangeable private and government functionaries. Yesterday's corporate bankers routinely become today's "investigators" of wrongdoing and visa versa.

Political activists who are beginning to challenge "the system" must ask, "Why is this happening today?" What is the reason for the crisis? Does it stem from the base greed of the trillion-dollar ruling rich and their billionaire underlings, who spend hundreds of millions on Andy Warhol paintings of Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor auctioned off at Sotheby? Can President Obama be reduced to a cheap, lying politician whose every well-publicized "progressive" utterance is contradicted by his heinous deeds?

Or even a more serious question: Are the elite few, the "one percent," (actually less than 0.1 percent) who really rule the country, *evil* because they crave ever more trillions for their bank accounts? Or is there something more fundamental that goes to the root of the crisis?

A worthy article in the Business Section of the Nov. 13 *New York Times* offers an unusual insight into what amounts to a debate between an apparently critical writer, Jesse Eisinger, and his seemingly intended prey, Peter Singer, the top officer of the \$25 billion hedge fund, Elliot Management. Eisinger, a regular *Times* columnist, economic specialist, and Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist, who was ahead of the curve in predicting at least in part the 2008 economic meltdown, seemingly takes issue with a recent Singer letter to his hedge-fund investors.

Singer wrote: "Nobody can predict how long government can get away with fake growth, fake money, fake jobs, fake financial stability, fake inflation numbers and fake income growth." Singer continues: "We do not think this optimism is warranted and we think a lot of this optimism is cooked or misleading."

To set the stage for what initially appears to be a stinging rebuttal, Eisinger refers to Singer as having an "Edvard Munch moment"—an allusion to the 19th-century artist's agonized or existential series of works called "The Scream," which evoke images of looming catastrophe. Eisinger similarly rejects the notion that the "zillionaire's spending billions on inflated real estate" is a "harbinger of Zimbabwe." The latter is a reference to Zimbabwe's November 2008 hyperinflation rate of 79.6 billion percent at a time when the angered imperial powers cut off all credits to the Mugabe government to punish it for nationalizing the land of the previous white colonial settlers. Mugabe printed untold sums of currency to pay the nation's bills, quickly rendering its currency worthless.

But after briefly debunking any notion that Singer might be on to something real, Eisinger writes, "There really is a lot that seems 'fake' about the economy and markets. The paranoia is rooted in troubling episodes."

Eisinger's list of troubling "episodes" is extensive. "Then came the 2008 crash," he writes, "and a series of government-orchestrated moves that relied on the collective suspension of disbelief. Take the 2009 stress test of the country's largest financial companies. It was a policy miracle, the crowning achievement of the rescue from the crisis. The market was still panicking months after the government and the Federal Reserve had lowered interest rates to zero, engaged in extraordinary lending facilities, infused billions in equity of all the top banks, taken over the American International Group and Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and allowed the two top investment banks, Goldman

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Sachs and Morgan Stanley, to tap the Federal Reserve lending window."

Eisinger adds that, in point of fact, the whole banking and hedge-fund industry understood that any *real* stress test of the banks at that moment would have revealed that they were all "insolvent."

In short, Eisinger, a reporter for ProPublica, an independent non-profit public interest newsroom that supports investigative journalism, reveals in a few sentences that the capitalist government and all of its key financial institutions bailed out the nation's leading but bankrupt banks, insurance companies, and related private institutions. The rough total amounts to some \$30 trillion dollars!

And where, we should ask, did this estimated \$30 trillion come from? Was it hidden away in Fort Knox in the form of gold, as was the case before the U.S. was compelled to abandon the gold standard in 1971? In truth, today there is no correspondence between the value of gold or any other commodity, and the currency in circulation. The only approximate measure of "value" today is the U.S. dollar, the world's official reserve currency, that is, the currency that most of the world recognizes as the basic medium of exchange or trade for all commodities.

But here a question of critical importance is posed. Can the U.S. government or Federal Reserve simply print money or issue paper bonds to meet its financial obligations—money that has no basis in value other than the "good faith and credit" of the U.S. government? That was the case with the \$30 trillion bailout!

The government literally printed the money or issued bonds (promises to pay). For the sake of argument, could the U.S. simply and instantly pay off its unprecedented national debt of \$17 trillion, an amount exceeding its total GNP, by ordering its technicians to rev up the presses to print \$17 trillion in cash or in government bonds? If this were the case, chaos would ensue instantly and everywhere.

But this is a subject for another article, including whether or not the unchecked printing of paper money poses, in time, the threat of inflation levels never before seen, perhaps closer to the Zimbabwe type, or perhaps a bit less! If every nation could simply pay off its massive debts in a single day of printing money, the world would be a strange place, to say the least.

But the unprecedented 2008 financial crisis was "resolved," so they say, when the government gifted the rich trillions of dollars in bailout funds. They purchased essentially worthless bank-held mortgages at full value—i.e., at the value reported to them by the banks—not the real value. Further, by reducing interest rates charged to banks for loans to zero, any and all of the top corporations and banks virtually instantly appeared at the government's trough, if for no other reason than they understand that the government's free money could be re-invested almost anywhere at rates far greater than zero percent.

Eisinger curiously ends his "rebuke" of billionaire Singer by noting a truth that cannot be denied. He writes, "There has been a shift from making investments for the health of the company and the economy toward cutting jobs and elevating share prices ... No one can say how long this can go on. But it's not sustainable. At the risk of sounding like a Singerite, doesn't it sound just a bit—what's the word?—fake?" Well said!

Here we get to the nub of the matter—an explanation that best reveals why the ongoing and deepening world economic crisis has nothing to do with the posturing public politics of the Democrats or Republicans, whether they be of the "liberal," "conservative," or ultra-reactionary Tea Party variety.

The capitalist system is mired in a long-term economic crisis because of its very nature—the absolute imperative to expand and grow or die. Today's giant corporations are in constant battles with each other on a world scale to secure markets for their competing commodities. Each technological innovation in the productive process employed by one is quickly matched or exceeded in productive capacity by the rest. What was a state-of-the-art auto factory yesterday becomes obsolete within months.

The same holds for every sphere of capitalist production. Those who employ the best, most efficient, cost-saving technologies (as well as cheapening the cost of labor) win the game, that is, until the remaining competitors are either compelled, at great expense, to introduce the next level of technology or go out of business. Wall Street's current return to massive mergers and acquisitions is nothing less than one of capitalism's imperatives to consolidate the power to dominate by absorbing the productive facilities of lesser competitors. Small corporations are daily eaten and digested by their larger superiors.

In the same manner, the introduction of each new technology has the effect of substituting super machines for human labor. Hence, we see the worldwide



The 'new jobs' claimed by Obama are largely low-wage, part-time, zero-benefit, and temporary.

rise in unemployment and the associated worldwide decline of the manufacturing sectors in the world's advanced capitalist nations.

The shift to low-wage poor nations is a prerequisite to survival. As Marx explained long ago—and his words today have come back to haunt the floundering capitalist world—the inherent "law of the tendency of the rate to profit to fall" is central to the explanation for the system's periodic and unavoidable crises. Capitalists worldwide understand full well that investing in yet another round of technological innovation to beat their competitors is less and less profitable, if at all. This was the case with the world's once largest corporation, General Motors, whose negative profit rates forced it to declare bankruptcy.

Eisinger hits the nail on the head when he proclaims an astonishing and rarely reported fact: "The largest United States corporations took 91 percent of their earnings from 2003 to 2013 and plowed them into buying back their own stock or paying out dividends..." This is the essence of what he means by the shift from "making investments for the health of the company and the economy toward cutting jobs and elevating share prices."

Why invest in building relatively unprofitable factories that produce commodities that have already saturated world markets and whose rate of profit is ever declining? Why hire workers to do this? This simple statistic, "91 percent," goes a long way in explaining why today's U.S. stock market stands at an all-time high when jobs are at an all time low—since the last Great Depression.

Historically, capitalists "plowed" some 15 percent of their earnings into speculative ventures like the stock market and banking institutions. The rest went into ever new and expanded "means of production"—that is, giant factories and new machinery to extract and process needed raw materials. These required workers in the tens of millions and more.

But in today's world of "casino capitalism," stock market, hedge fund, and other such speculative financial ventures that play with capital are the rule, not the exception, and ever more so when the government essentially offers free money to the corporations that do so.

For the past seven years, to supposedly save the economy from collapse, the government's policy of "quantitative easing," or buying near worthless bank mortgages and bonds at massively inflated prices determined by the banks themselves, has poured trillions of dollars into the coffers of the major banks and corporations, which, in turn pour it into the stock market, thus driving indices to historic highs that result in incredible gains—on paper, that is. The fortunes of the ruling class are thus "grown" massively while they produce in the real world of jobs and commodities, in proportion, little or nothing!

The "success" of this American "model" today has led to virtually the entire capitalist world following suit. Japan's new Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's economic formula, dubbed "abonomics," was patterned after the U.S.'s "miraculous recovery." Massive Japanese Central Bank subsidies to failing corporations were combined

(Above) Wall St. protest against 2008 bank bail-out.

with massive attacks on workers, including a major sales-tax increase aimed at robbing the many to save the few.

The result? Initially, but briefly, a terrific success took place for the banking elite. But today? Japan's second quarter growth declined 7.3 percent, followed by a 1.6 percent decline just announced for the third quarter. Similar figures have been posted for virtually all of Europe, matched by major declines in growth in nearly all of the BRICS nations. China's growth rate has declined by close to 50 percent.

"Recession in Japan Stirs Worry in Europe" was the mid-November headline for a *New York Times* article that stated, "The US is about the only growth beacon in the global economy. ... But it looks like the rest of the world is going to be relying on the U.S. as consumer of last resort."

But is it? Another *Times* article few days later, Nov. 22, headlined, "Is the Economic Outlook Great or Awful?" noted several major weakness in the so-called U.S. recovery, including a major drop in the price of gas and oil stemming from both a decline in world demand and a likely domestic slowdown as well. The article notes that previously optimistic estimates in U.S. GDP growth have been reduced from 3.5 percent to 2.5 percent.

Furthermore, a Nov. 21 National Employment Law Project report, entitled, "Manufacturing Low Pay: Declining Wages in the Jobs That Built America's Middle Class," included some startling figures:

- "Nine out of ten Americans believe that a strong manufacturing base is very important to our country's standard of living, according to a poll conducted by the consulting firm Deloitte for the Manufacturing Institute. When asked what type of facility they would support to bring jobs to their community, a manufacturing plant was at the top of the list." But the report continues:

- "Manufacturing wages now rank in the bottom half of all jobs in the United States."

- "While in the past, manufacturing workers earned a wage significantly higher than the U.S. average, by 2013 the average factory worker made 7.7 percent below the median wage for all occupations."

- "The perception that manufacturing jobs are highly paid disguises how many workers are stuck at the bottom. Today, more than 600,000 manufacturing workers make just \$9.60 per hour or less. More than 1.5 million manufacturing workers—one out of every four—make \$11.91 or less."

- "Manufacturing wages are not even keeping up with inflation. Real wages for manufacturing workers declined by 4.4 percent from 2003 to 2013—almost three times faster than for workers as a whole."

Perhaps a final comment on the economic recovery is in order. Median-adjusted income for 2013 was \$2100 less than when President Obama took office in 2009 and \$3600 lower than when President Bush took office in 2001.

President Obama's \$30 trillion bailout to corporate America was accompanied by devastating attacks on virtually all social programs as well as unprecedented attacks on the wages and quality of life of the American working class—euphemistically called "the middle class" by corporate America's media pundits and politicians. The "new jobs" claimed by Obama are overwhelmingly low-wage—often minimum-wage—zero-benefit, part-time, and temporary. Banks and corporations routinely stuff their coffers with trillions of dollars more by utilizing rigged "laws" written by

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Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

Hollow victory for NDP Leader Horwath

By BARRY WEISLEDER

After months of intense campaigning, drawing on all the resources of the organization, Ontario New Democratic Party Leader Andrea Horwath managed to hang onto her position, but only after promising to atone for her crass opportunism, and pledging to turn left.

The mandatory leadership review occurred at the biennial convention of the labour-based party held in Toronto, Nov. 14-16. Horwath, 52, received 76.9% support from the gathering of 1055 district association and union delegates, only slightly more than the 76.4% she got two years earlier.

The move to dump Horwath sprang from the discontent of NDPers with the June 2014 provincial election campaign she led. It embraced conservative populist themes and discarded social justice issues. Moreover, the turn to the right had no internal mandate, and it strained relations with large segments of the labour movement.

The NDP policy shift mostly helped the Liberals. They campaigned for pension improvements and a wage increase for low-paid workers, while Horwath promoted a Ministry of Cost Savings that seemed to target jobs in the public service. She also pledged to hold the line on wealth taxes.

Once the Liberals emerged with a majority government, and the NDP had lost three key seats in downtown Toronto (although its overall seat count remained static), Andrea Horwath purged her senior staff and apologized to the party's Provincial Council. She told the Convention that she would "keep talking about our ultimate values and goals and not just our first steps." While this is thin gruel for socialists, it persuaded many members to give her another chance—especially as there is no heir apparent to the Leader. Still, the mood of the convention was angry, and quite critical of the party tops.

Although the establishment dominated elections to the provincial executive with an official slate, the organized party left-wing and independent candidates did remarkably well.

The Socialist Caucus ran or supported over a dozen candidates for executive posts. They garnered from 20 to 44 per cent of the votes cast. For General Members-At-Large, Tyler Mackinnon received 44%. For Vice-President slots, Elizabeth Byce got 28%; Julius Arscott 25%; Barry Weisleder 20%.

Independent candidate for an At-Large spot, Michael Erickson, broke the stranglehold of the official slate. Unfortunately, party staff did not reveal detailed vote results for Region and equity-seeking committee reps to the executive.

Debates on convention procedures and resolutions produced a number of upsets. In the opening minutes of the convention, delegates voted to amend the agenda, forcing the vote on Leader to occur late Saturday afternoon, rather than immediately following the Leader's rah-rah speech set for the morning.

This meant that hundreds of delegates summoned by conservative riding and union leaders to vote to sustain Horwath had to hang around an extra seven hours. As it happened, between Friday and Saturday, convention attendance jumped from 527 to over 1000. By Sunday morning it had dropped below 800.

Motions of referral, with instructions to integrate tougher language into otherwise pabulum-like resolutions from the official vetting committee, succeeded in a number of cases. This radicalized the policy on Social Assistance, Post-Secondary



ondary tuition, the bitumen pipeline known as Line 9, the Ontario Municipal Board, and nearly did so on Minimum Wage.

The rebellious feeling also produced a win for more time to debate Labour issues, and it led over 30% to vote against acceptance of the Provincial Secretary's Report, a report that was clearly identified with the failed election campaign.

By far the biggest upset to the establishment was the victory for Free Post-Secondary Education, Abolish Student Debt—a long-standing Socialist Caucus cause celebre, fought for relentlessly by SC activists, led by Tyler Mackinnon.

On Sunday morning, Ontario Federation of Labour President Sid Ryan stirred the convention with a hard-hitting presentation. Following perfunctory congratulations to Leader Andrea Horwath, Ryan eviscerated the ONDP June election platform. He reminded delegates that environmental issues were conspicuous by their absence. Likewise, he singled out pension reform, an easier path to union recognition, a much higher minimum wage, workers' health and safety issues, employment equity, public auto insurance, and the need for free post-secondary education.

"Don't be afraid to advance bold policies," said the chief of the provincial labour federation to which over one million workers are affiliated.

Ryan outlined his strategy to win more of the 54 unions in the OFL to the NDP banner. In part, this entailed a defense of the OFL's Spring campaign that focussed on defeating the openly labour-hating Tim Hudak and his Conservative Party, an effort which tended to condone so-called strategic voting for Liberal Party candidates.

But the overall impact of Ryan's speech was electrifying, brilliant and militant. It was a shot of political adrenaline much needed to rid the sour taste left by the vote on Saturday to prop up Horwath, and to shake off the hours of mind-numbing tutorials on the finer points of fund raising.

Another exception to dull-time was an outstanding presentation by Kelsey Mech, National Director of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition. Her articulate, energetic remarks on the theme "Engaging Youth" came very close to challenging NDP federal and provincial policies that condone oil and gas pipeline construction. Her remarks highlighted the yawning gap between youth and the conservative powers-that-be at the summit of the party and labour.

This was a point echoed at the Socialist Caucus public forum on Saturday during the dinner break. Speakers Lana Goldberg, an organizer working with Aamjiwnaang First Nation members against Line 9, along with this writer,

stressed the need to devote society's resources to meeting urgent human needs. Needs at the forefront include housing, transportation, and health solutions, as well as the conversion of energy systems to green alternatives to carbon-burning, rather than investing in wasteful, profit-oriented pipeline construction. "It is increasingly clear that environmentalism and capitalism are incompatible," said Goldberg.

The Socialist Caucus played a very prominent role at the ONDP convention, consolidating about 25 per cent support on a range of issues and initiatives, and winning policy battles. Mass media coverage (*Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, CTV and CBC) frequently quoted SC spokespersons. No other tendency on the left came close to matching this standard of performance. Delegates and observers snapped up nearly 1000 copies of the full-colour, glossy SC magazine *Turn Left*, and donated funds on top of the thousands of dollars collected prior to the convention to cover the cost of production. Volunteers staffed an SC literature display table throughout the convention.

NDPers are looking for change, but they settled for Horwath under the circumstances. As *Toronto Star* columnist Martin Regg Cohn observed, "New Democrats are sticking with their leader largely because they are stuck with her."

That's cold comfort for the Leader who pledged to change her ways, and who will have to keep looking over her shoulder, for the next four years, as the party left and progressive union leaders continue to press for a Workers' Agenda.

Excerpts from Barry Weisleder's campaign speech for ONDP Vice-President:

• "Good afternoon, sisters and brothers, my name is Barry Weisleder. I'm the chair of the Socialist Caucus and a candidate for Vice-President. I am a union organizer, writer, editor, political campaigner, and a member of Trinity-Spadina NDP.

The Spring election campaign was a mistake, but it was not an accident. It was a decision to embrace right-wing populism. And it was the product of an undemocratic process. The party needs a provincial executive that will act to ensure that such a thing never happens again.

Here's a riddle: Why does it take 100 NDP officials to run a local campaign? One is needed to rent the campaign office. One to write the platform. One to put up signs. And 97 to phone members every day at dinner time to ask for money. The truth is that members want to be involved as intelligent political activists, not treated like milk cows.

I am running for V.P., alongside other Socialist Caucus candidates for Executive, to offer you a new direction. We stand for socialist policies and democratic action. Concretely, that means the NDP should be the champion of workers, women, youths, seniors, immigrants, and indigenous peoples.

The NDP should fight for a \$17/hour minimum wage, the elimination of student fees and debt, no funding for religious schools, no new gas or oil pipelines, free mass public transit, and a sharp increase in corporate and wealth taxes. We should call for public ownership, under workers' control, of runaway companies.

The federal party's plan for \$15 a day national childcare shows the way forward. But most importantly, it is members who should determine the path.

As V.P. I will make every effort to ensure that convention will set election platform priorities. No longer will the EPC be permitted to rescind the nomination of a member in good standing, or to block a New Democrat from seeking a nomination.

There should be much more time for policy discussion at convention. We should be proud of the prominent role of Labour in this party. After all, this is a working-class party. Together we can build it as a party of the social movements, a party of the streets and the ballot box. A party of the millions, not the millionaires. The party of Peter Kormos." ■

NDP child-care plan: A step forward

Though federal New Democratic Party Leader Tom Mulcair rules out hiking taxes on corporations and the super-rich, and promotes investment in climate-wrecking fossil fuels and pipelines, the party's campaign for a cross-country child care plan is a breathe of fresh air.

Stealing a march on the ruling Conservatives and the third party Liberals, the labour-based NDP Official Opposition launched its general election platform in October, more than a year before the anticipated 2015 vote. It did so with a pledge to create one million \$15-a-day child-care spaces across the country within eight years.

While the time frame for the plan resembles the agonizing pace recently proposed by Mulcair for raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour (i.e., by the year 2018), it has the merit of putting child care back at the top of the political agenda.

It also represents a step away from years of retrenchment and towards the expansion of public services.

The NDP plan depends on partnership with the provinces. Ottawa would fund 370,000 child-care spaces at

a federal cost of \$1.87 billion. The annual cost to create or maintain one million affordable spaces would rise to more than \$5 billion by 2023 when the plan is fully implemented.

The provinces would be responsible for 40% of the program's costs. Mulcair points out that some provinces like Ontario, which has two years of full-day kindergarten, are already spending heavily in early childhood education and care. The aim, which may miss-fire on this point, is to have most provinces signed on to the program.

The prospect of success is a testament to the demands of millions of working parents who clamour for economic relief. While workers' incomes have been frozen or shrinking for decades, the cost of living continues to rise. Toronto parents can pay up to \$2000 a month for child care with average costs eating up more than 18 per cent of average Canadian family income. A \$15 a day, or \$300 a month plan would be a real boon. Quebec now provides \$7 per day childcare.

Across Canada there are licensed child-care spaces for

just 22.5% of children under age 5 at a time when more than 73% of young mothers are working.

After the Conservatives won the 2005 federal election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper scrapped a Liberal child care plan, which the Liberals spent 13 years discussing, and replaced it with a \$100 monthly payout for parents with young children. In late October, under mounting pressure from the NDP, Harper said his government will increase the benefit next Spring to \$160 a month—which is still far short of the private costs most parents face. A public plan could meet the social need, and do so at a higher standard of care.

The question is, assuming there is broad provincial agreement, how would Mulcair fund the federal share of the program he proposes? And how would he meet similarly urgent needs in the areas of education, health care, social housing, public transportation, and conversion to a green energy system?

There is no indication that Mulcair is prepared to cut the military budget, make industrial polluters clean up their mess, and steeply tax big business and the banks—all of which would be modest but necessary steps towards implementing a Workers' Agenda. —B.W.

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Book Review: Adrienne Mayor, "The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women Across the Ancient World." Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Marx and Engels, when developing their understanding of the relationship between class society and the oppression of women, relied heavily on the ethnology and archaeological science of their day. They wrote on these questions in the wake of publication of many articles by the most famous and controversial theorist of a matriarchal stage of cultural evolution, Johann Jakob Bachofen.

Bachofen's opus, "Mother Right: An Investigation of the Religious and Judicial Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World" (1861), pointed generations of scholars to the examination of Greek myth, in which the overthrow of non-patriarchal social norms seemed to be a strong theme.

In the 1970s, Bachofen's ideas were popularized in the United States by a Doubleday translation from the German of the 1930 text, "Mothers and Amazons: The First Feminine History of Culture," by Helen Diner (Bertha Eckstein-Diener), and influenced a generation of young feminists eager to find evidence of any kind that the patriarchal nuclear family was a relatively recent development in human social organization.

Today, virtually all students of academic anthropology believe that gender roles and social organization in prehistory were variable; the degree to which alternatives to male dominance existed is always in debate in the academy.

Collections of works by Marxist feminist anthropologists such as Eleanor Burke Leacock are kept in the public eye thanks only to small radical publishing houses. And so, when academic publishers commit to printing a new book that challenges the mainstream on these questions, it should be celebrated.

The recent publication, and attention in popular magazines such as *National Geographic*, to the new book by Adrienne Mayor entitled "The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women Across the Ancient World," deserve notice. Mayor, who is an independent scholar of Classics and the History of Science with an affiliation to Stanford University, has done research in diverse areas, including the ways in which fossil discoveries in the ancient world contributed to myth. But her work is unified in that in all of it she investigates scientific realities embedded in myth and classical antiquity.

In "The Amazons," Mayor provides documentation for the historical existence of the women warriors that obsessed the ancient Greeks. She makes use of physical evidence gleaned from nomad skeletons from Central Asian kargans; the services of an expert on rare languages such as Circassian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, and Ubykh; recently translated ancient Greek and Egyptian texts; oral traditions from Central Asia that only began to be put into written form in the Soviet era; and contemporary studies of nomadic cultures.

In response to Classicists who argue that the Amazons so prevalent in ancient Greek vase painting, myth, and history writing were merely a symbol of gender anxiety in a male-dominated society or stand-ins for fearsome Persians, Mayor persuasively argues that Central Asian nomadic society in the first millennium BC included not only skilled women warriors and leaders but a broad range of possible social roles for women and men. She puts one more nail in the coffin of an anthropology and an archaeology that still begin, more often than not, with the assumption of a normative male dominance.

'Amazons' — One more challenge to the myth of male dominance



(Left) "Wounded Amazon" in New York's Metropolitan Museum. Roman copy of a Greek sculpture, c. 425-450 BC.

of 519 in the Kindle edition). In some cases, warrior women were buried with their children. In other cases, the children were buried alone with biologically male skeletons, suggesting that gender assignments were anything but normative by contemporary standards.

Another amazing scientific advance allowed Mayor to be confident in her assertions about the historical reality of the women warriors that populate so many Greek vase paintings. For a century of study, the writing accompanying the portrayal of Amazon warriors in combat on Greek vases was assumed to be "gibberish." The letters did not form words in Greek, and thus were considered to be nonsense and simply decorative.

On a hunch, Mayor and the curator of the Getty Museum translated these inscriptions into what would be their phonetic sounds in Greek. They then sent these phonetic transcriptions without any explanation to a linguist, John Colarusso, who is an expert on the rare languages of the Caucasuses. He was able to translate the inscriptions into proper names in ancient forms of Iranian, Abkhazian, Circassian, Ubykh, and Georgian,

yielding at least 70 new names of warrior women celebrated on Greek vases that can be added to the other 130 already known from Greco-Roman literature, history, and art.

These new names have deepened the certainty that these combatants and "queens" were actual personages that roamed the edge of and sometimes intruded into the world known to the ancient Greeks. The proudest event in Greek mytho-history, says Mayor, was the defeat of an Amazon army led by one Oriythia, which swept across the Aegean, invaded Attica, besieged the Acropolis, and was only defeated by the Greek founding hero Theseus and his Athenian cohorts. Mayor assumes that this was a mythic scenario based on the need to bolster spirits in the face of the real Persian threat but rooted in the historical reality of female-led Scythian and Samartian conquests in the ancient world.

Mayor departs from the traditional explorations of Amazons in Greco-Roman myth and historical accounts alone to look at the oral traditions of Caucasia, Persia, North Africa, Arabia, China, and Central Asia. The prevalence of stories of "autonomous fighting women who behaved as the equals of men" in the ancient and oral literary traditions *beyond* the Greek world, she argues, "lay to rest the Hellenocentric argument that Amazons were the exclusive creations of fantasizing Greeks."

One can only hint at the abundance of stories, some myth, some history, that she found of the lives of "riders, hunters, herders, raiders, fighters, lovers, and leaders who happen to be women" that seemingly correspond to figures buried with their horses and bows in the many hundreds of Scythian archaeological sites described above.

It is not surprising that these stories have played little role until now in the exploration of gender diversity in the ancient world. It was only in the Soviet era and the mid-20th century that the oral myths, ancestral lore, and folk memories of the many ethnic groups of Central Asia were recorded into writing. Many of them are set in medieval times, but linguists note elements that suggest archaic roots.

Mayor bolsters the specialists' claims by introducing customs still visible among steppe peoples in contemporary Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. These include horse races, wrestling matches carried out on horseback, and other matches of combat skills by prospective brides and grooms, all reminiscent of folkloric battles said to assure companionable marriages based on mutual physical strength and respect.

In these days when cartoonish Amazonian action figures with voluptuous bodies dreamed up by greedy game designers with bad politics populate the videogame world, young feminists might give Adrienne Mayor's "Encyclopeda Amazonica" only a passing glance. That would be a mistake. She offers a glimpse into the hard science that can burst apart the biggest myth of all time—what Eleanor Leacock called the myth of male dominance. ■

Some of the more spectacular finds anchoring Mayor's work in myth, folklore, and linguistics have been in the field of osteoarchaeology, also called bioarchaeology, or the study of human remains from archaeological sites. This new discipline has recently been used by Jane Peterson ("Sexual Revolutions: Gender and Labor At the Dawn of Agriculture") to study the relationship between types of work carried out by each biological sex before and during the Neolithic period.

Osteology, which now can determine biological sex from skeletal remains, is overturning a lot of previously held assumptions about gender and social organization. For example, bioarchaeologists have fairly recently determined that a large number of the graves of Scythian warriors from the fifth and fourth centuries BC, which had been assumed because of the nature of the goods found within them to be holding the skeletal remains of males, were in fact the resting place of females.

In one instance, in the ancient Thracian-Scythian region that lay between the Danube and Don rivers, archaeologists discovered 112 graves of women warriors, most of them between 16 and 30 years of age. In the area in which the ancient Greek historian Herodotus located the Samartians, an archaeologist recently found 40 additional graves of female warriors. Another group of excavators has recently determined that in the Black Sea-Don-Volga region, up to one fifth of the graves that contain weapons are those of female burials.

Archaeologist Elean Fialko found 130 graves from the same time period in southern Ukraine in which women were buried with lances and arrows. Natalia Berseneva, who opened Sargat Culture mounds from the sixth to fourth centuries BC, found that 20 percent of the female graves contained weapons.

The skeletal remains often indicate a lifetime on horseback and the reality of life-threatening combat. The archaeological record as a whole suggests, Mayor argues, that hunter-warrior horsewomen "were a historical reality across a great expanse of geography and chronology, from the western Black Sea to northern China, for more than a thousand years" (page 64

tacles—are designed to camouflage the daily theft from working people of their livelihoods.

The unprecedented rejection of this reality in 2014 was an act of wisdom of the great majority. In time it will be reflected in massive working-class mobilizations in the streets and at the point of production, and in the formation of a mass fighting workers' party that will challenge the capitalists for government power and open the path to socialism. This fundamental organization of the working class and all its allies requires the patient building of a revolutionary socialist party deeply rooted in the day-to-day struggles of workers everywhere. ■

... Capitalist hype

(continued from page 7)

their government "representatives" at every level to collude with banks around the world to establish tax havens to shelter their profits from U.S. taxation (see several reports from the Bureau of Economic Analysis). Separating the truth about the functioning of the corporate world from the "fake" world created by its paid media defenders is a not an unimportant issue. Capitalism's "democratic" election antics—today virtually year-round, corporate-organized, and almost theater-like spec-



... Outrage at racist verdicts

(continued from page 1)

Watch Patrol Unit, told *Socialist Action*, "When someone is killed, we're going to take any step that is necessary." After the Ferguson decision, Lasalle participated with hundreds of others in shutting down FDR drive, a major highway, and later marched from Times Square to Harlem, where protesters closed the Triboro Bridge. As for the role of the Rev. Al Sharpton and other Democrats, Lasalle warned, "They're really just pacifying the people. We need to rely on our own people."

On Dec. 1, thousands of students nationwide, including in Ferguson, ignored the rules and walked out of class to protest the grand-jury decision. It is clear that a whole new generation of anti-racist activists has proven that it is up to the challenge!

At our press time, the protests are continuing unabated. On Nov. 30, five players for the St. Louis Rams football team captured national attention when they entered the stadium displaying the "Hands Up! Don't Shoot!" gesture that has been repeated in protests across the country. Although they have had to endure condemnation in the

media for their action, the Rams players affirm that they wished to show solidarity with their community.

"Prosecutor" defends Wilson

Ferguson, a city of 21,000, is 70% Black. The police department is 94% white. The grand jury in the case was made up of six white men, three white women, two Black women and one Black male. Grand juries are conducted without cross-examination and are usually considered easy to obtain an indictment from—if prosecutors really want to.

St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney Robert McCulloch is a "tough on crime" Democrat; his father, a cop, was said to have been killed by a Black man. Tens of thousands signed a petition demanding that McCulloch step down in favor of a special prosecutor. But Gov. Robert Nixon (Dem) brushed aside the demand, and McCulloch refused to step aside. The wheels of racist injustice kept turning.

Numerous legal observers have said that Darren Wilson needed to be tried for the simple reason that he had shot an unarmed man. During deliberations, however, McCulloch acted like a

defense lawyer for the police officer. McCulloch put much of his focus on undermining witness accounts. In addition, he took the highly unusual step of not suggesting a specific charge. Noah Feldman, who teaches constitutional law at Harvard, said, "The prosecutor didn't want an indictment ... and didn't want to be blamed for not getting one."

Outrageously, Michael Brown's body was left to rot in the sun for four hours by police as a symbol—just as the Klan used to do. The Ferguson police investigator didn't even photograph Michael Brown's body due to "dead batteries," leaving items like the position of the body and the location of the spent cartridges unavailable for detailed study. The investigator even said that he had discarded much of his own notes of the murder scene!

On top of it all, Officer Wilson was permitted to drive himself back to the station unaccompanied and then wash the blood off his hands. He was also allowed to carry his gun to the police station himself, eject the magazine, and place it in an evidence bag without any supervision. Incredibly, fingerprints were never taken from the weapon.

The story line given by Wilson to the grand jury was vague and inconsistent—as well as being contradicted by witnesses—and demonstrates why a court trial is so necessary. Wilson testified, for example, that he thought Brown had hit him with his right hand, although he did not have a clear view since he was shielding his eyes with his arms. Yet he told the prosecutor a moment later he was certain that Brown was holding a box of cigarillos in the same hand as he hit him.

A member of the jury asked Wilson whether, since his vehicle's engine was running, he had thought of driving away from the confrontation with Brown. His answer, which sheds light on his state of mind at the time, quite likely would have been explored further if he had been indicted: "No, I didn't. ... You know, we're trained not to run away from a threat, to deal with a threat, and that is what I was doing." Added to that, Wilson described Brown to the grand jury as "a demon" from a "not very well-liked community."

After Wilson shot Brown at the police car, Brown ran away while Wilson chased him with his gun drawn. Suddenly, said the police officer, the youth turned and faced him. Sixteen witnesses testified that Brown had his hands up, although Wilson's testimony made no reference to it. According to Wilson, Brown then "charged" into his smoking gun, only to be shot many times: "At this point it looked like he was almost bulking up to run through the shots, it was making him mad that I'm shooting at him. And the face that he had was looking straight through me, like I wasn't even there, I wasn't even anything in his way."

There is no indication in Wilson's testimony that he had bothered to consider that Brown might have been gravely wounded at that point, and in pain and shock. The final shot, apparently while Brown was bent over deeply at the waist, was one that Wilson aimed at the young man's head.

The (in)justice system in action

In Ferguson, where protests were ongoing since Aug. 9, Gov. Nixon, an anti-abortion, pro-death-penalty Democrat, declared "an emergency" and a "no fly zone." He sent in the Missouri National Guard to supplement Ferguson's racist cops. Rep. John Lewis, once a civil rights activist and now a Democrat, had called on Obama to declare "martial law" in Ferguson to "protect people as they protest." The Democrats got their wish!

Under martial law, Ferguson looked like Iraq under U.S. occupation. Armored trucks, with sharpshooters perched on top, rolled down Ferguson streets, using military equipment supplied by the Obama administration to police departments across the U.S. Tear gas flooded the streets.

Although most protesters were peaceful, some cop cars and businesses, several of which sucked wealth out of the community, were torched. The white mayor, Democrat James Knowles, said, "We've never seen this kind of ... tension between the races. I know we've always gotten along." Knowles blamed violence on "outside agitators," echoing the racist cry of Southern segregationists during the civil rights era.

On the first night alone, dozens were arrested in Ferguson. Between Aug. 13 and Oct. 2 alone—before the decision—at least 19 journalists were arrested or harassed. Police shot at least two journalists in the back with rubber bullets.

The entire metropolitan St. Louis area is one of the most segregated in the country. In the area around Ferguson, unemployment is 20% higher for Blacks than the 6.2% rate for whites. In Ferguson, the poverty rate is 22%, ten

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The militarization of the police

The military weapons we saw on display in Ferguson are part of the militarization of police forces across the U.S.

Its roots began with the SWAT teams under Democrat Lyndon Johnson, whose war of extermination against the Black Panther Party was continued under Republican Richard Nixon. As Michelle Alexander explains in "The New Jim Crow," the drive received massive funding in the 1980s under the Reagan administration's "War on Drugs."

In 1997, the Clinton administration passed the "1033 program," which allowed for surplus military equipment to be issued to local police departments, including college campus police. Another impetus was the tragic 9-11 attack. Today, under Democrat Barack Obama, the program has mushroomed with grants from Homeland Security, the Justice Department, and the Pentagon. Such equipment has included M-16 rifles, high-powered .50 caliber rifles, full body armor, and the BearCat ar-

mored truck seen in Ferguson.

Since its start, the 1033 program has transferred more than \$5.1 billion worth of equipment. In 2013, under Obama, \$450 million worth of property was transferred to law enforcement agencies. More than 8000 law enforcement agencies have enrolled in the program. On Dec. 1, Obama affirmed that the 1033 program would continue.

According to Peter Kraska, a professor at Eastern Kentucky University's School of Justice Studies, SWAT teams have skyrocketed in use from a few thousand instances per year in the 1980s to more than 50,000 per year in 2005.

The numbers are expected to have risen since then. The majority of SWAT raids were used to serve warrants against non-violent drug offenders. A state investigation in Maine found that in some areas 100% of warrants were carried out by SWAT teams, regardless of the suspected crime. Some 90% of large cities now have SWAT teams as well

as 80% of small towns.

Glen Ford, editor of the *Black Agenda Report*, summed it up this way, "Since President

Obama took office, the Pentagon has transferred to police departments tens of thousands of machine guns; nearly 200,000 ammunition magazines; thousands of pieces of camouflage and night-vision equipment; and hundreds of silencers, armored cars and aircraft.

"All the nation's police departments are following the same drill, with the same tools and weapons, under the same mandate: keep the Blacks in check; terrorize them as a matter of policy; provoke them, when it is politically convenient; and keep them imprisoned at rates never experienced over time by any group that was not formally enslaved."

A majority of the Democratic Party "Congressional Black Caucus" voted against a liberal reform bill modifying the 1033 program. Said *BAR's* Glen Ford, "These Treasonous 32-27 'Nay' votes and 5 abstentions, out of 40, can never be forgiven, and should be denounced and shamed at every opportunity." — M.G.

Mockingjay: The Revolution will be televised

By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

Hunger Games, Mockingjay, Part I, directed by Francis Lawrence, with Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, and Liam Hemsworth.

How to build a revolution: Start with a tyrannical, revengeful president with a well-armed military; add a charismatic, self-effacing, yet heroic persona whose homeland was destroyed by his government; enhance with a wise, capable rebel president of the people; mix well with a savvy production team whose producer is asked by said president to create a revolutionary leader from a reluctant hero.

"Mockingjay" starts where "Catching Fire" ended. Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) had been rescued by rebels. Her boyfriend, Peeta, her partner and co-winner in the first Games, was captured. There is an ongoing war now between Panem (the country of the rebels) and the Capital. The people who escaped and defected from the Capital have gone underground—way underground—like in an inverted high-rise building, in a maze of highly technical "cities" or enclaves, which are reached by banks of descending elevators.

Capital President Snow (Donald Sutherland) had fabricated a food and water shortage under the guise of population control, which, of course does not affect the rich (call them the 1 percenters). It kills thousands.

Snow seeks revenge after the accidental hero, Katniss, who bends rules to the delight of the wealthy viewers, totally destroyed the president's and the rich's *Survivor*-like super-popular reality TV show, "Hunger Games," with a well-aimed arrow (the end of "Catching Fire.") So he retaliates by bombing cities and districts, killing, wounding and disap-



pearing the people of Panem.

Katniss meets the president of Panem, Alma Coin (Julianne Moore) and her advisor, Plutarch (the late Phillip Seymour Hoffman). Coin wants her to start a revolution—which will be filmed and beamed to the masses. But apolitical Katniss only wants to rescue Peeta. A trip to District 12, her home, destroyed by the Capital, changes her mind. It looks as bombed out as today's news clips show of cities in Palestine, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq.

Plutarch works on the propaganda film, and Katniss agrees to play along—with conditions. Plutarch films her in the midst of a real battle with bombs going off, buildings burning, and aircraft streaming overhead. It's a propaganda war, like the one conjured up in "Wag the Dog," with Katniss as the secret weapon. As an *Entertainment Weekly* writer put it, "a Che Guevara T-shirt made flesh."

Chris Nashawaty of *Entertainment Weekly* wrote: "Director Francis Lawrence and his writers deserve some credit for daring to sneak any political cheekiness into a movie this corporate," though he went on to say that their hands were still tied too tightly.

But I thought the film got a "subversive" political message across rather well—despite being padded with boring talking scenes that do nothing to further the story.

It's unfortunate that Hollywood chopped the film into two parts (to make even more money on the sequel). And so, we must wait a year for "Mockingjay, Part Two," to see whether the revolution is successful. ■

Cuba expands reproductive rights of women

By ANN MONTAGUE

Abortion has been legal in Cuba since the victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959 and was codified into law as a women's "sovereign right" in 1968.

Vilma Espin, a feminist and revolutionary fighter, was made the head of the new Federation of Cuban Women and later created the National Center For Sex Education, now headed by her daughter Mariela Castro Espin. As a result of Espin's role in the revolution and heading an organization of over three million Cuban women, women's reproductive rights were always on the agenda. Not only was abortion legalized; all women have access to free contraception.

Cuba is now launching a new campaign to address the low birth rate, which is due to the choices Cuban women have been making for decades.

Most women in Cuba today only have one child. Luis Ernesto Formoso, director of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital in Havana, explains it this way: "In health matters we behave like the developed world, and now women only start to think about having children once they're established in their careers. For instance, my grandmother had 16 children; my mother, four; and I have only one child."

The assistant director of the hospital's nursing unit, Caridad Fuentes, points out that these changes are in a country where, "we have a public health system that provides free medical care for all women throughout pregnancy and childbirth. The number

of teenage pregnancies has also been cut thanks to the 'arsenal of information' that teenagers receive and their use of safe birth-control methods. And our infant mortality rate is lower than the United States."

In most countries around the world women are fighting for reproductive rights, which means the right to abortion and access to birth control. In Cuba they are increasing services for women who want to have children but have been unable due to infertility.

Cuba's Council Of Ministers announced recently that they have increased fully paid maternity and paternity leave to one year. There are also plans to expand day-care facilities, as 53% of mothers with children four or younger work.

The big announcement was that Cuba would be opening special centers for infertile couples in each of the country's 168 municipalities. The government says it treated 3000 couples for infertility in 2010, and more than doubled that number in the following three years. The country has also tripled the number of special reproductive technology centers, to three, and there have been 500 births by artificial insemination. They are also increasing the special maternity units where women with high-risk pregnancies can stay full-time.

Dr. Bartolome Arce, chief of Endocrinology and Assisted Reproduction Services, pointed out that the cost of invitro fertilization in most other countries—for example, the United States—is more than \$10,000.

While there are increased options for women who want to have more children, Cuban women who choose not to have children will still have that option. Cuba's National Office of Information and Statistics reports that 80% of the population use contraception. ■

... Outrage

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percent higher than the county average, and 51% of homeowners owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth. Despite the Black majority, the mayor is white, and five of the six city council members are white.

Studies have shown that Ferguson has the highest rate of warrants issued in the state for a city of its size, as well as fines collected and non-traffic violations filed. According to a Reuters report, "Municipal court fines, most of which arise from motor vehicle violations, accounted for 21 percent of general fund revenue, and at \$2.63 million last year, were the equivalent of more than 81 percent of police salaries before overtime." In other words, the city's white rulers exist by ripping-off African Americans, with Ferguson's cops playing the leading role!

A human rights report by Amnesty International in Ferguson, conducted from Aug. 14 to Aug. 22, found that "numerous human rights abuses" included the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and high-frequency acoustic devices to disperse crowds—which can cause the loss of balance, ruptured eardrums, and nausea.

The Amnesty report called on the U.S. government to "do much more to address systemic racial discrimination and ensure policing practices nationwide are brought into line with international human rights standards." The report also noted that Ferguson cops kept their guns pointed at the Amnesty delegation.

In the meantime, the Obama administration has remained neutral in the



struggle against racism in Ferguson, despite the strong support that the president still garners in the Black community. Inaction by his appointee, outgoing U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, represents a new low in the Democratic Party's betrayal of its key constituent. In fact, Democratic politicians, Black or white, fashioned their November campaigns specifically to avoid all reference to Ferguson in campaign speeches!

Holder has stated that Wilson will not be tried on civil rights charges. The Attorney General instead promised to launch a civil rights investigation of the Ferguson Police Department—even though the Obama administration has been reluctant to prosecute police on human rights charges.

The death toll from racist police violence across the U.S. grows with mind-numbing regularity. Whether it's the

racist "Stop and Frisk" or the "Stand your ground" law in Florida, coast to coast it's all the same. A study by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, conducted after Trayvon Martin's death in Florida in 2012, found that a Black person is killed once every 28 hours by a cop, security guard, or vigilante.

In this era of economic crisis, the capitalist state is tightening its noose on democratic rights. The Edward Snowden and Wikileaks revelations brought that home to hundreds of millions worldwide. First in its sights will be the oppressed communities.

In the capitalist courts, the game is rigged against the working class and in favor of cops. To prove a civil rights violation, you have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a cop did so "willfully." Even murkier Missouri law adds that cops can use deadly force if they

"reasonably believe" that the person to be arrested has committed or "attempted" to commit a felony, or is attempting to escape by use of a deadly weapon, or "may otherwise endanger life" or inflict "physical injury" unless arrested without delay. Essentially, the high bar set by the law gives cops, especially in Missouri, free rein to kill.

In 2013, the FBI tallied 461 "justifiable homicides" committed by law-enforcement authorities in the United States. This was the highest number in two decades, even as the overall homicide rate continues to drop. A *USA Today* analysis of the FBI database over seven years found an average of about 96 homicides a year in which a white officer killed a Black person.

On Nov. 20, yet another African American, Akai Gurley, 28, was shot dead by one of two cops in an unlit Brooklyn stairwell. The NYPD said it was an "accident" and admitted that Gurley was completely "innocent." Gurley was in the stairwell with his girlfriend because of a faulty elevator.

What must be done? Ultimately, to multiply our forces, we need to build a mass united national front of all principled organizations that oppose police brutality and racial profiling. Jail for Darren Wilson and all killer cops! Cops out of all Black communities!

There can be no solution to police brutality with the two parties of the 1%. We say organize, mobilize, and stay in the streets! Socialists blame the capitalist system of greed for racism, police brutality, poverty, unemployment, and war. We need a revolution! ■

The promise of Beijing

By BILL ONASCH

It was a startling sidebar to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Beijing. The heads of state of two economic and military titans, who between them are responsible for nearly half of all greenhouse gas emissions warming our planet and altering our climate, announced measures to reduce them. President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed hope that their action will contribute to a new global climate accord, succeeding the expiring 1997 Kyoto Protocols, to be hammered out in Paris next year.

While this was the first formal joint declaration of the two on climate matters, there is history of back-channel collaboration going back to their division of labor in wrecking the most promising chance yet for meaningful international climate action—the Copenhagen Climate Summit five years ago. Neither government wanted to see binding quotas for reducing emissions adopted there.

The Guardian reported at the time, “After eight draft texts and all-day talks between 115 world leaders, it was left to Barack Obama and Wen Jiabao, the Chinese premier, to broker a political agreement. The so-called Copenhagen accord ‘recognizes’ the scientific case for keeping temperature rises to no more than 2C but does not contain commitments to emissions reductions to achieve that goal.”

At that gathering China defended the right of poor nations to develop without restrictions imposed by the rich ones. The tensions of rich-poor are real and need to be addressed in a just way by the rich, supporting sustainable development of the countries they have long exploited.

A token promise of help for the poor majority of humanity was made in Copenhagen by then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, pledging the USA would help put together \$100 billion over 20 years. Not much has accumulated in that fund so far, though President Obama announced several days later at the G20 (now 19) meeting in Brisbane that he was sending another three billion. That is less than half the amount he ordered for inspection and maintenance of America’s nuclear weapons arsenal.

Certainly, we will not have a satisfactory resolution to the climate change crisis without both China and the USA doing the right thing—and pronto. But what was dished up in Beijing wasn’t a healthy diet change plan for a world overdosing on carbon.

United Nations officials, as you would expect, praised the two presidents for their initiative. UN climate scientists were much more reserved in their comments—and no comments. The governments of Poland and Australia, who had earlier in the week rejected any reduction in the use of coal, didn’t rush to recant. The global warming denier Republican leadership in Congress, flexing their muscles after giving the president’s party a shellacking in the recent midterm elections, promised a fight to the finish against the White House “war on coal and jobs.”

Naomi Klein, who recently published a book entitled “This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate,” promptly wrote a short piece for *The Guardian*, “Some Very Initial Thoughts on the US-China Deal” (see <http://thischangeseverything.org>). While duly noting the inadequacy of this deal, and reiterating the need for a climate movement, she is surprisingly nuanced in her *Guardian* piece, finding some positive attributes in “context.” She states that “the US-China climate deal is a badly needed piece of good news. It signals that Barack Obama is willing to expend political capital fighting for his climate legacy.”

In her book, however, Klein minces few words, concluding, “Only mass social movements can save us now.” You can read a useful review of her book by Canadian eco-socialist John Riddell at climate&capitalism.com.

America’s most prominent environmentalist, Bill McKibben, called the promises at APEC “historic,” claiming they represented a limited victory for the movement. He wrote, “Today is an achievement for



everyone who’s held a banner, signed a petition, and gone to jail—and a call for many more to join us going forward!” While I respect McKibben’s dedication and heartily endorse his call to swell the ranks of the climate movement, I suspect that he, and most other traditional environmentalists, still have lingering illusions about Obama’s wanting to do the right thing and that our movement can help him to do so.

Just what was pledged in China? *Aljazeera America* summarized, “President Barack Obama announced that the U.S. would move much faster in cutting pollution, with a goal to reduce it 26 percent to 28 percent by 2025 from 2005 levels. Earlier in his presidency, Obama set a goal to cut emissions by 17 percent by 2020.

“Chinese President Xi Jinping, whose country’s emissions are still growing as it builds new coal plants, didn’t commit to cut emissions by a specific amount. Rather, he set a target for China’s emissions to peak by 2030 or earlier if possible. He also pledged to increase the share of energy that China will derive from sources other than fossil fuels, such as solar and wind.”

In my view, paraphrasing Naomi Klein’s book title, *this changes nothing*. As China continues to build on average a new coal-fired power plant every 10 days, they also pledge to keep expanding use of solar and wind as well. They want all the energy they can get. Declining to quantify a cap on emissions 15 years down the road means the cap will be whatever they are churning out at that time. In Midwest vernacular, President Xi is giving us snow in the wintertime.

No less disingenuous is President Obama’s promise. The Republican Congress has made clear that among their top priorities is reversing the EPA authority to regulate carbon emissions. A bipartisan effort to guarantee approval of the Keystone XL pipeline—often called the Gettysburg of the North American environmental movement—passed the House but on Nov. 20 was narrowly rejected by the lame-duck Senate, still controlled by the Democrats.

Nevertheless, Senate Republicans have promised to re-introduce the bill early next year. There is zero chance of Congressional support for the modest Beijing pledge during the final two years of the lame-duck president.

That pledge is a slightly enhanced version of the president’s carbon cap-and-trade initiative for power plants, announced with great fanfare a few months ago. Its legality rests on EPA directives submitted by the White House that must go through a lengthy process of “industry and public comment,” vulnerable to corporate filibuster. Like the Affordable Care Act, it would be structured around state or regional

exchanges. What could possibly go wrong with that?

Obama selected a peak year for emissions as his baseline for reductions. As well as cuts in energy consumption during the Great Recession and weak recovery, there has been widespread conversion of power plants to natural gas, which produces about half of the carbon emissions of coal. This low-hanging fruit has yielded quick results even before Obama’s plan has been launched—which may not be sustainable over the long haul.

In any case, the president’s cap-and-trade reform, which the electric utilities have indicated they can live with, is far less than even the European Community has agreed to. It is certainly nowhere near the actions that climate scientists tell us are urgently needed.

“Promise” is a word that is found in the dictionary somewhere between two apt descriptions of the one in Beijing—phony and protracted. Too many who should know better are treating it like a good-faith hesitant first step that should be welcomed and nurtured, as they politely suggest more has to be done. The only context for seeing the hype at APEC as promise is the lack of any previous goals. Its timing has helped divert attention from several new dire warnings from science calling for much more far-reaching measures *now*.

Bill McKibben was spot on in regard to one point: we wouldn’t see their Beijing hype at all if they didn’t see the need to answer an insurgent climate action movement that in September brought hundreds of thousands into the streets on all continents—as well as the growing, sometimes successful localized protests against pollution in China.

Obama and Xi are neither ignorant nor bashful. We don’t have to explain anything to them. They know full well, as they advance the interests of their respective ruling classes, that they risk leaving an irreparably degraded biosphere for future generations. They frankly, dear reader, don’t give a damn.

Those who know the truth need to tell it like it is. I believe our task is to expose the scam at APEC and answer it with an action plan of our own. We must address our plan not to the con artist politicians looking out for the climate wrecker class but to the workers, farmers, and students who have the material interests and power to save us from climate disaster. We must *do* as Naomi Klein says—build and unite the mass class and social movements that are our only hope for salvation. ■

This is an edited and updated version of an article that first appeared in the Nov. 16 “Week in Review” at kclabor.org/wordpress.