

GOP health-care plan threatens Medicaid



Timothy D. Easley / AP

By JOHN LESLIE

As *Socialist Action* goes to press, the health-care debate in Washington is on hold. The GOP plan, which was hatched in secret in a Senate back room, is wildly unpopular. Yet the Republicans seem intent on passing something that will give the appearance that Trump kept his campaign promise to “repeal and replace Obamacare”—no matter the consequences for working people.

Democrats posture as advocates for the people, but their rhetoric won't pass the test. The “alternative” they put forward is the continuation of Obama's neoliberal health-care reform, the Affordable Care Act. Regardless, the health and well-being of working

people is in the crosshairs.

The new GOP health plan has stalled in the face of massive opposition, including skepticism among some Republican lawmakers. The stalemate on Trumpcare culminated in the Senate's going on recess for the July 4 holiday without any forward motion. Frustrated with Senate inaction, Trump tweeted, “If Republican Senators are unable to pass what they are working on now, they should immediately REPEAL, and then REPLACE at a later date!” This contradicts his earlier promises that there would be “insurance for everybody.”

A couple of weeks before the inauguration, on Jan. 3, Trump spokesperson Kellyanne Conway promised that there would be a replacement plan, saying, “We

(Above) Protesters in Elizabethtown, Ky., on June 30 greet Sen. Mitch McConnell (R.-Ky.), a backer of the new health-care bill in the Senate.

don't want anyone who currently has insurance to not have insurance.” This “repeal now, fix later” notion has gained some support among Republicans.

The differences among GOP lawmakers are split between those on the hard right, who argue that the bill is too much like the Affordable Care Act, and more moderate forces, who worry that the bill will place too great of a burden on states, as well as cutting coverage for at least 22 million people currently covered under the ACA.

(continued on page 5)

Interview: The Puerto Rico student strike

By ERNIE GOTTA

For two months, 50,000 students on campuses across Puerto Rico participated in a strike against the U.S.-imposed Fiscal Control Board, which was proposing \$500 million in cuts. Mikael Rosa, a member of the student movement at the University of Puerto Rico, shares his experiences.

Ernie Gotta: What demands pushed students to go out on strike?

Mikael Rosa: Our demands are related to the general situation of our country, and others are specific about the university. We are asking for an audit of the debt, a process of reforms for the university, no increase in our tuition and no budget cuts to the institution.

EG: What was the atmosphere like on campus during the strike? What type of actions did students take?

MR: The period of the strike gave the opportunity to have deep political discussions that generated different initiatives. The most important part of the process is that we could prepare many young people for the struggle against colonialism and austerity imposed by the Fiscal Control Board. We combined a model of participation, direct activities, and political education, as key facts to organize the indignation that was expressed in more than four student assemblies.

EG: Did the working class support the strike? Organized labor?

MR: Many working-class people were in solidarity with our process. It is very important to point out that as a result of the strike, different groups from profes-



COURTESY: Victor Torres

Victor Torres / Democracy Now!

sors and workers from the university were organized and had a very important presence, not only at the daily development of the strike, but also as part of the discussions and direct activities that we made.

EG: Former political prisoner Oscar Lopez Rivera opened his speaking tour in the U.S. on June 8 in the Bronx. What does his freedom mean to students?

MR: Oscar is an inspiration for all of us. He openly and fearlessly supported the students' strike, from a solidarity and patriotic love perspective. The fact that he was released during the strike was a direct message for us: There is no victory without sacrifice and effort.

EG: The majority of Puerto Rican students voted June 8 to end the strike. What did the strike gain?

MR: Organization. That is the summary of what we won during the strike. That is the most basic thing that you

need to transform a country and to decolonize a nation. In terms of the concrete claims, we were able to start a process of university reforms, move forward on the topic of the audit, and we still have a series of pre-agreements on the table. We hope that they will be signed by the new administration of the university.

EG: What about the Humacao campus? Why have they remained on strike?

MR: What happened with Humacao was that they did not have a date for their assembly. But the most important part of the Humacao campus is the many sectors that they were able to involve during their process. In Humacao it moved from a student strike to become a strike from the different sectors of the campus.

EG: Articles have mentioned that students may not receive Pell Grants and other federal funding because of their

strike actions. Have students faced other retaliation? Did the police attack students during the strike? Other threats from the government?

MR: Regarding the Pell Grant, the reality is that the problems with it are related to administrative irresponsibility and inefficiencies. That situation was not created because of the strike, but still it was used as a repressive mechanism. During this strike, what they basically did was to randomly put under arrest different students, and make them face the judicial system.

EG: Does the vote for statehood play a role in debates on campus? What do students think is the way forward for Puerto Rico?

MR: We all know that the vote for statehood was a fraud. It is a lack of respect to say that the majority of Puerto Ricans want the annexation for our homeland. In terms of the students, the composition of the student's movement is very diverse and heterogeneous, but we do not recognize statehood or our colonial status as a solution for our political situation. The only winner of this plebiscite was the boycott and the abstention.

EG: What can Puerto Ricans at home and in the diaspora do to fight back against austerity on the island? What will it take to end austerity?

MR: The response is very simple: organization. We must work on our responsibility of organizing as many people as we can to stop austerity and promote a real decolonization process. ■

JOIN SOCIALIST ACTION!

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. 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.

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.

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, LGBT people, 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. We maintain fraternal relations with the Fourth International.

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. 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. 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!

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Socialist Action newspaper editorial offices: socialistactionnews@yahoo.com
 Website: www.socialistaction.org

WHERE TO FIND US

- BOSTON: socialistactionboston@gmail.com
- BUFFALO, NY: wynsocialist@google.com
- 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) 952-5385
- 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
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By JOHN LESLIE

On June 9, 2017, a Philadelphia police officer, Ryan Pownall, shot David Jones multiple times in the back as he ran away. Pownall had stopped to search Jones, who had been riding a dirt bike. While police claim that Jones had a gun, according to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, he “had already dropped the loaded 9 millimeter gun” when the shooting occurred.”

Reports state that this is the second time that Pownall shot a fleeing “suspect” in the back. The question of why a police officer would fire at an unarmed and fleeing person remains. David Jones was not a threat at the time he was shot.

Jones’s father, Thomas Jones, said, “I didn’t think my son would get shot in the back, I thought there was a procedure where you would tase a person first, or shoot a person in the leg. I didn’t think you would shoot to kill if a person is running away. If someone is running away from you, why shoot him in the back like an animal?”

On June 16, a Minnesota jury acquitted the police officer who gunned down Philando Castile last year during a traffic stop. Castile, a legal gun owner, had notified the officer that he was in possession of a firearm and had a permit to carry. The cop opened fire, killing Castile. The failure of the system to convict the cop who murdered Philando Castile is just one more in a long series of outrages that expose the lack of justice under the current system. The courts will not protect our rights when the police are involved.

Epidemic of police violence

According to the *Washington Post*, police nationwide shot and killed 492 people in the first six months of this year. At this rate, police killings will exceed 1000 for the year—for the third year in a row. A quarter of the deaths have been Black men, although they represent only six percent of the population.

Police brutality, and the ex-judicial murder of people of color, extends back as far as the history of police. In cities both North and South, police have enforced the existing social order against any perceived threats. These threats could be communists, labor organizations, LGBTQ people, or oppressed nationalities.

Recent years have seen countless victims of police murder and violence. Many incidents have been caught on video by witnesses, with little or no consequences for the police involved. The Black Lives Matter movement, which began in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin, has continued to mobilize as police murdered Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and so many others.

Of course, there has always been resistance to police repression. In Houston, in 1917, Black U.S. Army troops took up arms against local police after cops attacked a member of their unit. During the 1960s, there were rebellions against police repression in Detroit, Los Angeles, Trenton, and other large cities. In the 1990s, the Los Angeles rebellion followed the acquittal of cops who savagely beat Rodney King. More recently, Ferguson, Mo., and Baltimore exploded after the cop murders of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray.

Capitalism, police, and the state

The question of the police and their relationship to society is an important one for socialists. Many unionists, members of oppressed nationalities, and social movement activists have experienced police repression. Any worker who has been on strike knows that cops are called to suppress workers’ picket line actions and break strikes.

The police attack on counter-protesters during a recent far-right demonstration in Portland is another example of the reactionary role of cops. During the far right “free speech” mobilization, there were friendly exchanges and “high fives” between police and ultra-right protesters. Cooperation with rightist “Oath Keepers” extended to one of the reactionaries assisting police with the arrest of a counter-protester.

The state is not something particular to capitalism. The state is the expression of the division of society into social classes with conflicting interests. In “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” Frederick Engels writes that the state is “a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state.”

The state does not exist to “reconcile” the interests of the various classes; The state exists for the subjugation of workers and oppressed people by the dominant, or ruling, class. This is expressed in the formation of police, armies, prisons, and other instruments of coercion aimed at keeping working people in line.

What’s the role of police under capitalism?

Scott Olson / Getty Images



(Above) Cops confront protesters in Ferguson, Mo., after the Aug. 9, 2014, killing of 18-year-old Michael Brown by a white police officer.

In the U.S., policing cannot be separated from the racist nature of the system. The origins of police in the U.S., especially in the South, can be partially traced to the slave patrols formed to catch runaway slaves. Later, police were the enforcers of Jim Crow segregation. They remain an essential component of the regime of mass incarceration, which imprisons hundreds of thousands of young Black and Brown men and women.

Police and fascism

In Italy and Germany, during the rise of fascist movements, there was cooperation between police and fascist groups. This cooperation extended to Italian police training of Mussolini’s Black Shirts. In the U.S., there have been demonstrated links with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and neo-Nazi groups.

For instance, in Houston, in the 1970s, it was estimated that as many as 40% of the police department were members of the KKK. The same could be said of police departments across the South.

Racist policing is not something isolated to the South. Northern cities have enforced de facto segregation for years through racist policing. Philadelphia, supposedly the “city of brotherly love,” has a long history of racist cops. The most famous is the former police commissioner and mayor of Philadelphia, Frank Rizzo. Rizzo’s cops were infamous for attacks on the Black community. This included dropping young Black people in hostile white neighborhoods so that they had to run for their lives to get home.

Under Rizzo, the police violently attacked the Black

Panther Party and Black civil rights organizations.

The racist attitudes of the Philadelphia police department culminated in the May 1985 bombing of the MOVE house on Osage Avenue. On May 13, police surrounded the house, firing more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition at the home and used fire trucks to spray the house with more than 450,000 gallons of water. Later, a police helicopter dropped a bomb on the roof, sparking a fire. Rather than use the fire department to extinguish it, the decision was made to “let the fire burn,” ultimately destroying 61 homes, leaving 250 people homeless, and killing 11 members of the MOVE organization, including five children.

The only person to be imprisoned after this crime was MOVE’s Ramona Africa, the sole adult survivor of the attack (one child, Bertie Africa, also came out alive). No police or public official faced any legal consequences.

Cop “unions”

Building resistance to police violence means exposing the reactionary role of police unions in society and the labor movement. Cop unions not only make excuses for the murderers in their ranks, they support racist and reactionary policies like mass incarceration. Within the ranks of organized labor, cop unions play a reactionary

(continued on page 5)

Verdict for Castille's killer protested

By JOHN SCHRAUFNAGEL

ST. PAUL, Minn.—Four to five thousand people rallied at the State Capitol and marched through the streets on June 16, outraged over the unfair trial and unjust verdict in the case of Officer Jeronimo Yanez. Yanez shot Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minn., on July 6, 2016, after pulling over Castile’s car for a broken tail light.

This is the first time a Minnesota police officer has ever been charged when a civilian is killed. The officer was put on trial for second-degree manslaughter, and two counts of dangerous discharge of a firearm.

The atmosphere at the June 16 rally was tense and angry. Many speakers indicted racism and capitalism, as well as the “criminal justice” system, for the verdict. “The system continues to fail black people,” said Philando’s mother, Valerie. “My son loved this city and this city killed my son, and the murderer gets away!”

The make-up of the crowd was overwhelmingly young and extremely diverse. Indigenous people, people of Asian descent, many Somalis, Latinos,

and whites joined the African-American community in expressing anger that yet another killer cop walks free. ■

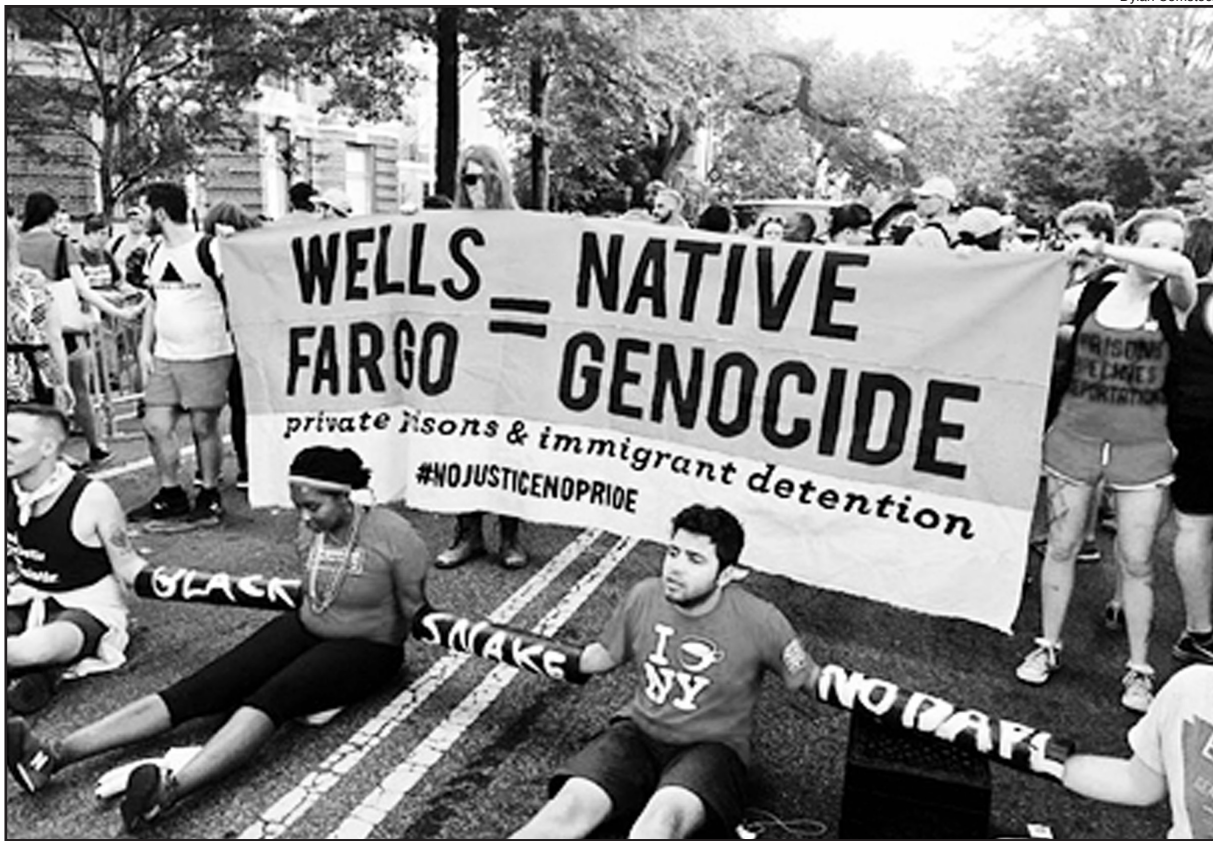
Duluth: For police accountability

DULUTH, Minn. — On July 27, about 30 people rallied at Minnesota People’s Power Plaza to demand the accountability and transparency of the police. The protest came in the aftermath of demonstrations against the “not guilty” court decision for Philando Castile’s murderer.

Signs included “Black Lives Matter,” “Stop Police Brutality,” “Abolish the Police,” and “Hold Police Accountable.”

Many racist police incidents have taken place against homeless people in the Twin Ports of Duluth and Superior. The next step is to coalesce an organization around police issues. So far, the “Twin Ports Cop Watch” has organized events.

— LUCAS ALAN DIETSCHKE



Dylan Comstock

(Left) No Justice, No Pride demonstrators in Washington, D.C.

Ambivalent Pride

By JERICHO JONES

This time of year we have reason to look with rejoicing at Gay Pride celebrations around the world. Their number, persistence, and exuberance were unimaginable to this lonely queer kid growing up in the 1970s. To think there was any place you could be openly, even flagrantly gay was like oxygen. Today, hundreds of pride celebrations offer queer kids almost anywhere the hope of finding a place of relative freedom.

Yet in spite of our advances, we still live under the threat of violence driven by hate. Not two weeks ago, we marked the first anniversary of the Pulse Nightclub shooting, the deadliest mass shooting by one person in U.S. history. Barely a week seems to pass between reports of vicious and deadly attacks on transgender women. Stonewall may have been nearly 50 years ago, but we are still awash in hate.

Experience shows that facts and argument don't counter hate, but knowing a queer person and feeling empathy can. Decades of painful, frequently dangerous coming out have given many of us a world where queer people can hope to find a place to live and prosper. The importance of showing pride to the world hasn't become any less urgent.

Even so, Gay Pride is the season of ambivalence for me. Early on, it represented a radical demonstration that queer people not only refuse to be silent but in-

sist on making their presence undeniable. In the years since, it has become something distinctly different. What once celebrated the freewheeling sense of possibility at the heart of queer life has become an opportunity for corporate marketing and for solidarity among queers who happen to live and look like the majority.

This was demonstrated recently by the interruption of Washington Pride by a radical group called No Justice, No Pride. Primary among their issues was the inclusion of the police in Pride, with its obvious approval by Pride organizers.

It's stunning; never mind the obvious fact that the police have long been one of the threatening forces that queer people battle to live normal lives, Washington Pride (and others) included and celebrated an institution that regularly murders African Americans. Yet there was widespread condemnation of No Justice, No Pride for interfering in the party, not for the organizers who planned a party that pointedly included racist killers.

Then there is the corporatization of Pride. These celebrations nearly always include corporate sponsorship, i.e., plastering the event with company logos for advertising. Washington Pride was sponsored by a number of corporations, among them Wells Fargo Bank.

On the surface, this is normal—the bank is looking for customers, the organizers are looking for someone

to pay the bills. But No Justice, No Peace was aware of something critical that Washington Pride organizers ignored: Wells Fargo is an investor in the Dakota Access Pipeline, which is being built by force, with (of course) police protection, next to the water supply of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, while the pipeline studiously avoids the white city nearby. Wells Fargo has also been forced to pay \$175 million for discrimination against Black and Latinx customers.

Thus, with the police/corporate invasion, Pride has become an opportunity for pinkwashing, which is the use of gay inclusion to cover institutional misdeeds. In the cases of Wells Fargo and the police, the cover is for murder and economic violence committed by powerful institutions at the heart of the establishment.

And it isn't just corporate sponsorship or the welcoming of authoritarian institutions that mark Pride's dedication to established power; it's also observable in the make-up of Pride organizers and celebrants, who are mostly white and cis, and often mostly male. Why would Pride be any more responsive to the needs of outsiders than Wells Fargo or the police when they are all overwhelmingly controlled by insiders?

Even tragedy has not moved Pride. The victims and survivors at Pulse Nightclub last Pride season were mostly Latinx. The murdered transwomen mentioned above have mostly been women of color. The names of Black people murdered by police—the ones deemed newsworthy—appear in the media almost every week. How do we celebrate Pride when so many are ignored while Pride celebrates the wealthy and powerful?

All I can offer is a reminder of the outsiders who gave us the origin of Pride, the patrons of the Stonewall Inn who, early on the morning of June 28, 1969, decided they had had it with police harassment and rioted. That is, they protested with violence, smashing windows, setting fire to cars, and throwing pieces of the street at police. The rioters were not polite, well-connected cis gay men in suits, but marginalized queers, trans women of color, butch lesbians, and drag queens.

And they did not quit, as the rioting continued a second night and went on to inspire the gay liberation movement in ways polite white homophile organizations like the Mattachine Society never did and never could.

These queer forbearers showed us that change does not come from appealing to wealth and power, but from standing against them without apology. The struggles for Black civil rights and the history of the labor movement showed us the same. That Pride would leave trans people and queer people of color behind is unconscionable. Red Rose Socialists stands—always—with the marginalized, the powerless, and the voiceless in their struggles. ■

The author is a member of Red Rose Socialists in Lancaster, Pa.

By BILL ONASCH

A Bundle Including DirecTV—After mass informational picketing, the Communications Workers of America won a renewed contract for 17,000 AT&T workers in California and Nevada that includes modest wage and benefit improvements and, for the first time, covers employees of the satellite television competitor with cable the carrier acquired in 2015.

Follow the Food—*Workday Minnesota* reports from Rochester: “More than 500 food service workers who were outsourced last year in a controversial decision by Mayo Clinic have reached a tentative agreement with their new employer, Morrison Healthcare, their union announced. Food service workers from across multiple Mayo facilities in Rochester, Albert Lea, Faribault, Fairmont, and Mankato were represented on the bargaining team that has worked for months leading up to July 1, when the final food service workers officially transition to Morrison.

In a unique arrangement, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota food service workers joined with food service workers represented by the AFSCME Council 65 and Teamsters Local 120 unions to bargain the first contract with Morrison.” All of these workers will receive at least modest raises. Those previously employed by Sodexo, who just recently joined SEIU, get boosts of up to 42 percent.

New Life for Free-Loaders?—Public sector workers are excluded from the

Labor Briefing

national Taft-Hartley Act covering most in the private sector. The ruling class is trying to impose a new law through the courts. The first cynical campaign by the boss groups National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation and Liberty Justice Center to use First Amendment rights to defund public-sector unions ended with the death of Justice Scalia—deadlocking the Supreme Court over the case known as *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. Since the confirmation of Trump's replacement for Scalia, the champions of what would in effect become a national “Right to Work” law for government employees have selected a new case from Illinois, which is expected to be acted on in the September Court session.

They've Got the Power—The *Los Angeles Times* reports that 9000 unionists in L.A.'s Department of Water and Power have negotiated a five-year agreement providing raises amounting to 22 percent.

No Right to Pay Dues?—Agricultural labor is also excluded from Taft-Hartley. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, an AFL-CIO affiliate, has sometimes used this to their advantage in organizing secondary boycotts in support of union recognition and contract negotiations. They have at times had organizers and hiring halls in Mexico to protect the rights of migrant farm

workers.

The North Carolina legislature, which has long outlawed public-sector collective bargaining, is now trying to cut off dues to FLOC. The *Raleigh News-Observer* reports: “It may get harder for farmworkers in the state to win job benefits negotiated by unions. A measure the legislature approved Wednesday night would prevent farms from transferring workers' dues directly to unions or labor organizations.

“The proposal also would prohibit farmers from settling workers' lawsuits by agreeing to union contracts. The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, the only farmworker union in the state, said it is the measure's target.”

In Sickness and Wealth—There have been some advances in legally protected benefits for workers. *Workday Minnesota* reports: “Some 150,000 workers in Minneapolis and St. Paul will start accruing earned sick and safe time Saturday, July 1, thanks to ordinances approved by their city councils and protected by a veto from Governor Mark Dayton. Advocates say it is a victory for all of Minnesota and should lead to similar policies in other communities.

“Starting Saturday, workers will accrue one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, up to 48 hours per year.

They may use their paid time for illness or medical care for themselves or their families. They may use it for ‘safe time,’ to seek counseling, legal support or to relocate in the event of domestic or sexual violence or stalking. The ordinances also cover parents needing to stay home because of the closure of childcare centers or schools.”

The mentioned veto spiked a “preemption bill,” a tactic now widely used in Republican-controlled legislatures to prevent local ordinances beneficial to workers. Dayton's veto also cleared the way for enactment of a Minneapolis minimum wage that will reach \$15 an hour in incremental raises affecting 71,000 workers.

A Blurred Picture—At the deadline for this column, 160,000 members of the Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists were working on a day-to-day basis after contract expiration while continuing to negotiate with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers that represents studios, broadcast, and major cable networks.

Stop Thief!—City officials in Los Angeles are demanding the fast-food Carl's Jr. company pay \$1.5 million in fines and restitution for paying workers less than the city's minimum wage. The then CEO of the parent company of Carl's Jr. was Trump's initial nominee for Labor Secretary but withdrew when he appeared to be short of votes in the Senate.

If you have a story suitable for this column please contact billonasch@kclabor.org.

Protesters: 'Muslims are welcomed here'

By KAREN SCHRAUFNAGEL

On Saturday, June 10, the Islamophobic group ACT (American Congress for Truth) for America held "Marches Against Sharia" in over two dozen cities across the United States. Emboldened by President Donald Trump and his strong anti-Muslim rhetoric, the group that the Southern Poverty Law Center considers one of the top hate groups in the U.S. decided to organize a show of force.

In some places, far-right groups such as the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers "guarded" the rallies. Some demonstrators held banners with pro-Trump and anti-immigration slogans.

But in almost every city, the numbers of right-wingers were dwarfed by allies and friends of the Muslim community who came out to say: "No hate, no fear. Muslims are welcomed here." In a few areas there were as many as 10 times as many present to show support for the Muslim community as those who came to denounce Islam, under the pretence that Sharia law poses a threat to "American democracy."

In the Twin Cities, about 30 terrified bullies gathered in the Capitol Rotunda while over 400 people rallied



(Left) New York City counter-protest against "anti-Sharia" demonstration.

on the Capitol steps in near hundred-degree heat. Facebook posts beforehand assured the bullies that they had a private parking lot and plenty of security to get them inside safely. The attendees were also encouraged to come "armed and ready."

Meanwhile, outside in the sun, counter-demonstrators heard from speakers who explained what Sharia

law really says—something the people inside the Capitol certainly did not learn. An anti-Zionist Jew relayed some of the requirements of Talmudic law for comparison.

While the anti-Sharia fanatics imagine a country living under Biblical law, all of the Abrahamic religions contain elements from times long past that would not translate well into the present day. While condoning slavery, for example, the Bible condemns to death anyone who touches the skin of a pig. Remember that the next time you watch a football game.

While Socialist Action does not believe it is accurate to label these bigots "fascists," we do recognize the growing threat to communities of color and non-Christians (especially Muslims) posed by

the empowering of haters who believe their increasingly violent assaults are sanctioned by God and the U.S. administration currently in power. We stand together against this rising tide of ignorant hatred and say: "No to bigotry. Yes to freedom of religion. We stand with our Muslim neighbors." ■

... GOP health plan

(continued from page 1)

The proposed law also includes a massive tax cut for the rich, meaning that the cost of Trumpcare will be balanced on the backs of workers and the most vulnerable. Federal subsidies for coverage would be reduced by \$424 billion.

Under the new law, premiums would increase significantly, especially for older people. Insurers could charge older people five times as much as younger people for coverage. The bill also eliminates the individual mandate included in the ACA and also the mandate that companies with more than 50 employees provide insurance.

The measure under consideration includes deep cuts to Medicaid and will leave millions without coverage. Medicaid expansion would be ended and funding slashed. Funding for Planned Parenthood also faces elimination.

Some 80 million people depend on Medicaid for their health care. Of these, 31 million are children, 19 million are adults, (mostly low-income wage earners), 9 million are people with disabilities, and 5 million are senior citizens. Medicaid is the largest single health insurer in the United States.

Defending Obamacare?

The ACA is only marginally better than Trumpcare. The ACA keeps for-profit insurance companies at the center of the medical care system. The ACA system is based on a sliding scale of cost tiers referred to as the metal plans—bronze, silver, gold and platinum—in which the costs are managed through differing plans based on varying premiums and out-of-pocket expenses.

For example, the "bronze" plan has lower premiums and higher co-pays while the "gold" plan has higher premiums but offers more coverage options and lower out-of-pocket expenses. Lower-income workers are more likely to choose a plan with a lower premium, but their out-of-pocket expenses can be prohibitive if a health crisis occurs.

Premiums continue to rise, with a projected 24% increase in 2017 and health-care costs continuing to rise across the board. The massive overhead due to administrative costs of private, for-profit, insurance companies continues to contribute to the high cost of health care.

Obamacare amounts to neoliberal health care designed to cut across any movement towards single-payer health care. Candidate Obama had been in favor of single payer, but changed his perspective after receiving millions of dollars in contributions from the insurance industry.

The aspects of the ACA that are progressive, such as extending coverage for children until the age of 26, coverage for pre-existing conditions, and those provisions protecting women's reproductive health, should be defended. As we build a movement for universal health care, we should make it clear that the price for cutting Medicaid and Medicare will be high for politicians of both capitalist parties.

As the health-care debate rages, socialists should try to redefine the terms of that debate. First, we believe that quality, affordable, health care is a basic human right. We also believe that the profit motive must be removed

Cuba's health system shows what's possible

Capitalist politicians, both liberal and conservative, argue that taking the profit out of health care stifles innovation. The staggering number of vaccines, cancer treatments, and other medical breakthroughs made by the Cuban health-care system stands as a sharp repudiation of the assertion that a profit-driven system is best for patients and providers.

Working under conditions of scarcity, and under siege by U.S. imperialism, the Cubans have managed to build a system of medical care unlike any other. The Cuban people don't have to worry if they will be able to afford a doctor or vital medicines. Medical school is free, unlike the U.S., where doctors often graduate with a huge student debt.

In Cuba, the emphasis is on preventative care,

with doctors and nurses working in neighborhoods and workplaces. Cuba's infant mortality rate is lower than in the U.S. and ranks as one of the lowest worldwide. Life expectancy is 78, among the highest in the Americas.

The Cuban government has famously sent medical aid, including doctors, to war-torn regions and to the care for the victims of natural disasters. Thousands of Cuban doctors and other medical personnel are currently in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean.

Imagine what benefits there would be to the world if this model of internationalism and concern for human need over greed were applied in the U.S.

— JOHN LESLIE

from the health-care system. The political influence of health-care corporations, private insurance companies, and pharmaceutical giants is an obstacle to basic human needs.

Republicans excoriate Democrats for saying that the new bill, especially cuts to Medicaid, will result in people dying, but this is undoubtedly true. People will die, but the GOP doesn't care as long as their rich paymasters get tax breaks. However, the Democrats have proven that they are not allies in the struggle for a just health-care system. Recently, in California, the Democrats scuttled an attempt to pass a statewide single-payer bill in the state. Democratic leaders, including Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have made it clear that single payer is not going to be part of the discussion.

Winning a real alternative to both the ACA and Trumpcare will require building an independent mass movement based in the unions and organizations of youth, oppressed nationalities, and women. Health-care workers, including doctors, who are increasingly wage earners and not single practitioners, are natural allies in this struggle.

We must fight uncompromisingly against cuts to current programs as we struggle for a single-payer health plan. Single payer should be seen as transitional towards a national health system that places the health-care infrastructure under public ownership. A socialist contribution to the health-care debate must include the clear demand that health care in the U.S. include full prescription, vision, mental health, and dental coverage. ■

... Role of police

(continued from page 3)

role by opposing progressive initiatives.

The Fraternal Order of Police and Police Benevolent Association are the largest police unions. The Teamsters, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and the Service Employees International Union also represent police and prison guards. Building labor solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement within the labor movement means challenging the role of police unions and demanding that labor federations cut ties to these reactionary anti-worker organizations.

Revolutionary socialists reject the notion that police are a legitimate part of the workers' movement. While police may be drawn from the ranks of the working class, they serve the interests of a racist capitalist social order.

It's the role they play as enforcers of the existing

state and economic set-up that is decisive.

Leon Trotsky, writing about cops in the 1930s, said, "The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Of late years, these policemen have had to do much more fighting with revolutionary workers than with Nazi students. Such training does not fail to leave its effects. And above all: every policeman knows that though governments may change, the police remains."

Socialists reject calls for more cops and for "law and order," since these policies always disproportionately target oppressed nationalities and workers. This is why, for example, we must oppose Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's call for adding thousands of more police in Britain in the wake of terror attacks.

We must continue to mobilize and unite the struggles for justice against police violence and work to expose the links between neo-fascist groups and cops. This means holding the system's enforcers in blue accountable. ■

This Is Not *Our* Revolution



By WAYNE DELUCA

The special House election in Montana at the end of May saw Republican Greg Gianforte defeat Rob Quist, a Bernie Sanders-endorsed progressive Democrat. This feat was made remarkable by the fact that Gianforte had physically assaulted *Guardian* reporter Ben Jacobs the day before the election.

Exactly how Quist, a folk singer noted for his cowboy hats, was meant to be a progressive is somewhat unclear. His platform stood for small business, never mentioned single-payer health care, failed to call for any change to America's imperialist foreign policy, talked up tax reform, and embraced the fairy tale of "clean coal" pushed by energy conglomerates. There was a very modest call for economic nationalism—taxes on companies "that ship American jobs overseas"—but barely a major challenge to the orthodoxies of the modern Democratic Party. Quist's appeal as an outsider was simply a question of his image and his willingness to stand with people like Sanders identified with the "left wing" of the Democrats.

Quist's opposite also lost his election. Jon Ossoff, who came in as a surprise first-place finisher in a jungle primary, failed to defeat Republican Karen Handel. Ossoff was a tabula rasa, a candidate without really any substantial policy platform. He represents the "Resistance" of the so-called establishment wing of the Democrats, attempting to essentially run a candidate against the Republicans by hanging Trump on them as an albatross.

But despite considerable outside support, Ossoff's campaign, too, withered and lost. The Sanders wing crowed at this, claiming that only they would be able to run substantial candidates with energetic support and defeat Trump and the Republicans at the polls.

As Quist and Ossoff were losing, a candidate in Philadelphia chosen by the Sanders wing was winning his election. Larry Krasner, a civil rights attorney, won the Democratic primary in the race for District Attorney. Krasner ran a campaign to the left of the other candidates, and the Democratic decision makers in the city failed to coalesce around a single candidate, with all other comers being flawed.

Krasner was supported by Reclaim Philadelphia (a group that had its beginnings among Sanders's primary campaign volunteers and staff) and the

For socialists, the strategy of backing candidates in the Democratic primaries is a dangerous mirage.

Philadelphia branch of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), with hundreds of phone bankers. Krasner won a plurality (around 38% of the vote), and turnout only added up to about 17% of voters, but his victory was hailed nationally and by groups such as Socialist Alternative as a progressive win.

Mere days later, Krasner was making friends with the head of the Fraternal Order of Police, which has spent the last 35 years campaigning for the state to murder political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal.

These were three of the campaigns that shaped the dialogue when Bernie Sanders took the stage at the People's Summit on June 9 to 11 in Chicago, a gathering of the self-declared left wing of the Democratic Party. Supporters included National Nurses United, Our Revolution, Progressive Democrats of America, and Democratic Socialists of America.

Sanders presented his grand strategy to "open up" the Democratic Party's ranks to youth and trade unionists, and bring about a political revolution. This does not mean a revolution against the racist, imperialist, capitalist government of the United States but a transformation of the Democratic Party into something that is, well, sort of "progressive."

Exactly what this means, as we see in Quist's case, is unclear. The "progressive" and establishment wings of the Democratic Party are less about substantial policy issues, which Sanders and the groups supporting him are muddled on, and more a pair of brands vying for the affection of the Democratic voting base.

The "establishment" brand, until the catastrophe of Hillary Clinton's loss, typically sold itself as cool, collected, and competent. Its brand was very much that of former President Obama, whose supporters would often share images branded "Everyone Chill the F--- Out, I Got This." Now it wants to build its credentials as a "resistance" to Trump, as seen in the recent sit-in on

health care held by New Jersey Senator and likely 2020 presidential candidate Cory Booker.

The "progressive" side has primarily branded itself around support for Sanders, who has put forward a cantankerous form of New Deal liberalism and support for single-payer health care. Especially after the recent near-victory for Jeremy Corbyn's revitalized Labour Party in Britain, the chorus from this section has been "Bernie Would've Won." It has taken up the idea of class, although often in muddled terms such as "middle class" (an amalgam based on income rather than on the relationship to production) and Sanders' "billionaire class." In retribution the establishment wing has taken up the mantle of being feminist and antiracist, despite its obvious failings in advancing the liberation of women, LGBTQIA+ people, and oppressed nationalities.

Advancing this, Our Revolution has put forward a plan to "retake" the Democratic Party by convincing former Sanders supporters to run for Democratic county committees. A tedious and bureaucratic process, this serves not to build power under the radar for progressive causes, but rather to rebuild the very machinery that the establishment wing of the Democrats long neglected.

Unfortunately, once Democrats are elected, the right wing of the party structurally holds all of the cards and will demoralize and disappoint its young adherents—just as it did those who went into the party after the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

More vigorous than Our Revolution, Democratic Socialists of America has seen an uptick in running candidates, mainly as Democrats. DSA has grown significantly since Donald Trump's election, and has swapped its old "realignment" strategy for an "inside/outside" relationship to the Democrats. It also has encouraged its members to run as "open socialists." Unfortunately, this has made no difference in policy; DSA members are mostly running for

(Left) "Progressive" Democrat Rob Quist with Bernie Sanders.

local offices on good-government platforms. Their being known as socialists is only remarkable because of the long and ugly history of repression of the left in the United States. The campaign content is less radical than the Sewer Socialists of early 20th-century cities like Milwaukee.

None of these forces or strategies can overcome the class character of the Democratic Party. It is a party of capital, and has never been otherwise. It is not the openly draconian face presented by the Republicans, but the Democrats remain a prop of forces in Wall Street and Silicon Valley that want a relatively flexible, dynamic, and modern capitalism rather than the brute *laissez-faire* model desired by the energy and manufacturing companies that group mainly behind the Republicans. Capital in the United States has the luxury of two parties.

A strategy rooted in the Democrats can never be anti-imperialist. The "progressive" wing of the Democrats, including Sanders, continues to support the state of Israel and its brutal occupation of Palestine. The Democrats have never been an antiwar party; Obama was president for eight years and never had a single day of peace. Many support imperialist bombing and intervention as long as it can have a humanitarian gloss, as was seen in pressure on Obama to bomb Libya and Syria.

For socialists the strategy of backing candidates in the Democratic Party primaries is a dangerous mirage. Groups like Socialist Alternative thought that they could endorse Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary, only to switch to an independent candidate in mid-stream once he was defeated. Instead, they wound up as builders for Sanders's long operation in the Democratic Party, and have lost credibility when they speak about independent working-class politics.

Socialists run in elections not because we believe that capitalism can be reformed, as the "progressives" in the Democratic Party do. Socialist campaigns are a method of bringing revolutionary socialist ideas to a broad audience and allowing voters to register their discontent with the capitalist sys-

(continued on page 10)

Good Morning, America!

By BRUCE LESNICK

It's a sleep that puts Rip Van Winkle to shame. The long, fitful slumber has lasted for more than a generation. But the alarm has sounded and the snooze button is wearing out. Sooner or later, the giant that is the American working class will awaken. When that happens, the game will be dramatically altered; the majority, so used to playing defense, will take the offense; the score, so long lopsided, will begin to even up.

What will it look like once that celebrated last straw has been added to the camel's back? How will we know that the long slumber is over? Oh, we'll know!

Union power

The place to focus our attention is on the working class. This is not for abstract, doctrinaire reasons, but because that is where the power lies. It is there that numbers and proximity to production combine to yield a force capable of challenging the 1% for control.

Control of what exactly? The whole works, including which class should be running the country!

When working people finally decide to stop hating their friends and loving their enemies (as Malcolm X put it), the pent-up rage and fire from centuries of deceit and exploitation at the hands of corporate elites will be turned toward forging a new normal. People will insist on painting outside the lines, refusing to be bound by convention as they search for effective answers.

We know that greater organization and labor militancy correlate directly with stronger social safety nets and public policies that benefit the majority. On the other hand, a weaker labor movement goes hand-in-hand with increased exploitation and income inequality. So, as with the rise of the CIO in the 1930s, the end of the current big sleep will be signaled by waves of strikes and other labor battles. New, militant labor leaders will come to the fore and bigger, stronger unions, encompassing an ever-growing percentage of the working population, will take root.

In 1933, at the peak of the Great Depression, more than 12.8 million people were out of work. In response, crucial labor battles were fought in Minneapolis, Toledo, San Francisco, New England, and throughout the South. These were followed by other crucial contests, including the historic Flint sit-down strike of 1936 and the coal miners' strikes of 1941 and 1943. For the first time in a long while, this wave of labor militancy moved the ball down the field, scoring important points for our team.

Meanwhile, at the height of the most recent recession (2009), 17.1 million were listed as unemployed—over four million more than at the height of the great depression. While today's figure represents a smaller percent of the total working population, that distinction provides little comfort to the millions who have had to scrape by. And still the giant sleeps.

House cleaning

As with the labor battles of the last century, the battles this time around will be led by socialists and other radical workers who have come to understand the class nature of the playing field. Politicians—including Bernie Sanders-type *socialists in name only*, whose first loyalty is to the capitalist system—will either stand aside or get trampled along with other obstacles that get in the way.

It's an open secret that the union leadership today is overwhelmingly corrupt, bureaucratic, and ineffective. But as the working-class torpor comes to an end, so too will the reign of the bureaucrats. We will see more efforts like Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Steelworkers FightBack, and Miners for Democracy. The effective, fighting unions of the near future will amplify their strength through rank-and-file democracy.

The outrageous salaries and perks enjoyed by top union officials today—benefits that set them apart from the ranks and make it easy to cozy up to corporate execs who enjoy similar riches—will no longer be tolerated. More and more, we'll see rank-and-file movements insisting that:

- Union officials receive no more in compensation than the workers they represent.
- Complete union democracy, from the local to the international level, with the highest authority and final word resting with assemblies of the rank-and-file members.
- Open and democratic elections for all officials, with immediate recall of any official not meeting the needs of the ranks.

As this revitalization process unfolds, the new fight-



ing unions will spread to new factories, offices, and shops. Workers never before organized will join or form unions of their own. Even the unemployed will become organized.

At some point, committees may form in factories, shops, offices, and fields, where people gather to discuss their grievances and map out a strategy for fighting back. Both local and national issues would be taken up.

Here, the lack of democratic rights in the workplace could be addressed head-on. The workplace—where people spend most of their waking hours, where all of society's wealth is produced, where, for centuries, those who do the work have had no say in what is produced or how—will become a hotbed of discussion and rebellion. Everything will be up for debate, from who should be supervising the shop floor to who should be running the enterprise.

These new committees will not be limited to places that are unionized. In some cases, more radical unions will promote the formation of the new committees; in others, the committees may precede formal union organizing. Yes, it will be an upheaval like no other. But there's more:

Political power

If we were to point to one thing that has held back the U.S. working class more than any other—one ingredient that, like an anesthetic, has induced and prolonged the big sleep it would be illusions in the Democratic and Republican parties. Touted by the union bureaucracy as "friends of labor," the two corporate parties have proven time and again to be a deadly trap for the working class. Their aim is to tame any discontent.

Like Tai Chi masters, the big business parties are experts at channeling the anger and energy of the working class back against itself. There will be no awakening, no end to the current nightmare, without breaking decisively with the capitalist politicians and their parties.

For this reason, one of the best indications that a new day has arrived will be the building of a *political arm* of the labor movement that can take the fight beyond the shop floor, out into the streets and to society at large. Such a political arm will be both an organizing tool and a weapon to fight for political power. That fight will be waged against the very parties that have held society captive for so long, and against the class that pulls their strings.

By constructing a party of its own, the labor movement will for the first time in U.S. history move from begging for crumbs from the slave masters to openly moving to supplant them.

Solidarity

While everyone who lives from paycheck to pay-

check under capitalism is exploited, some are exploited more than others. Immigrants, African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos all face higher rates of unemployment and persecution. Women still earn 79 cents for each dollar earned by men for equivalent work. Classical economist Adam Smith understood that while workers outnumber capitalists, this asymmetry makes it harder for workers to act collectively.

The key to overcoming this disadvantage is *solidarity*. The ascendant labor movement will either champion the struggles of the most oppressed or it will quickly slip back into a coma. Black Lives Matter, immigrant rights, Native American rights, and the fights against racism, sexism, and xenophobia in all of their forms are life and death struggles for the labor movement as a whole.

This is not just because each of these causes is morally right, but because each is used to sow divisions among working people—divisions that, if not overcome, would prevent building the momentum necessary to change society, thus ceding the advantage to our exploiters.

Learning from the past

When the working class rose up in the 1930s, many gains were won. All of the progress attributed to Roosevelt's "New Deal" was a direct result of the militant labor upsurge that forced his hand. Unfortunately, the most effective weapons of the working class, the unions, were captured by reactionary bureaucrats who steered labor toward a century of somnambulist class-collaboration.

The most militant, conscious leaders were driven out of the labor movement.

The victories achieved were never protected on the political front by breaking with the capitalist parties and launching a labor party. The unelected titans of industry were kept in charge and given ample time to regroup. As a result, all of the gains of past struggles have been constantly under attack, and some have been severely rolled back.

History can repeat itself—but it doesn't have to. We can learn from the past and avoid making the same mistakes.

Is this image of the coming awakening is overly idealistic? Far from it. We're not painting a picture of how things *might* look if we were to turn around the decades-old corporate assault on our lives, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Rather, this is a sober assessment of what we *must* see if we are to have any possibility of beating back that assault.

Mapping out the path ahead—navigating around multiple obstacles, through difficult terrain—is not utopian. On the contrary, it's *how* you win. When the giant reawakens this time around, hold onto your hats. We'll be in for quite a ride. ■

President Trump's 'no fly zone' escalates U.S. war on Syria



(Left) Damage in a street in Raqqa following bombing by U.S.-led forces.

By JEFF MACKLER

The lie that the U.S. is fighting Islamic State (ISIS) terrorism in Syria was publicly exploded on June 18 when a U.S. F/A-18 "Super Hornet" fighter jet launched from the *George H.W. Bush* aircraft carrier shot down a Syrian government aircraft. Syria said its plane had carried out a mission against ISIS in the countryside near Raqqa—the capital of ISIS's proclaimed caliphate.

State Department officials asserted that the downing of the Syrian jet was in accord with U.S. policy to operate under its unilaterally established "rules of engagement" that include the "collective self-defense" of its "Syrian partners." Translated, the quoted phrases amount to a declaration that the U.S. and its imperial allies in Syria will attack any and all forces that seek to interfere with U.S. imperialist objectives.

In addition to its virtual "no fly zone" over the Raqqa region, U.S. generals have set up a similarly "protected" garrison at al-Tanf in southern Syria, on the key highway between Damascus and Baghdad, and where its "Syrian partners" and U.S., British, and Norwegian advisers are based. Here too, U.S. military tops have warned pro-Assad forces to stay out, having tagged this region with the newly coined euphemism, "zone of deconfliction."

After the June 18 downing of the Syrian jet fighter, U.S. officials cynically asserted that "the coalition does not seek to fight the Syrian regime, Russian, or pro-regime forces partnered with them ... [but] will take appropriate measures to protect our forces." Then, just two days after they shot down the Syrian aircraft, U.S. warplanes shot down an Iranian drone near the al-Tanf military base.

Establishing U.S. "No Fly Zones"

On several occasions, U.S. warplanes obliterated pro-Assad forces, including Iranian-backed militia, that had ventured inside its "protected zone" near al-Tanf.

After a May 18 U.S. attack, Defense Secretary James "Mad Dog" Mattis declared: "We should not take this U.S. strike as a sign that the U.S. is getting more involved in Syria," an example of Orwellian doublespeak if ever there was one.

CBS News reported that on June 6 and again on June 8, when "27 [pro-Assad] regime vehicles drove within 18 miles of al-Tanf, which breached the [U.S.-declared] 34-mile radius of the army convoy's operations, U.S. aircraft first attempted to buzz the regime, but when the convoy didn't turn around, they [the U.S. forces] conducted a strike against some of the vehicles."

"The rebels being trained at al-Tanf are from a number of Arab rebel groups, referred to by the U.S. as Vetted Syrian Opposition, or VSO, who oppose both the Assad regime and ISIS," according to an article by Joshua Keating on the *Slate* website. Keating noted that "U.S. Special Forces have been increasingly fighting alongside these rebel groups in Southern Syria."

The Wall Street Journal's Yaroslav Trofimov reported: "The U.S. attack at al-Tanf is significant not because the U.S. has once again struck Assad's forces, but because it did so in defense of Syrian rebels." The same

report observed, "Once skeptical about U.S.-backed anti-Assad 'rebels,' Trump stated in a 2015 election debate that 'we have no idea who they are.'" Trump had suggested that they might be ISIS and added that "We can't be fighting ISIS and fighting Assad." Today, the U.S. is indeed fighting Assad, directly and indirectly, but its focus on ISIS is more complicated.

A June 10 *New York Times* article, for example, noted that U.S. forces in Raqqa were attacking ISIS from the North, East and West, but not the South. ISIS forces were allowed to evacuate Raqqa, weapons and military gear in tow, heading south along the Euphrates Valley toward Deir Al Zour, where obviously they might be useful in assisting the ISIS attempt to blockade Syrian forces in the city.

U.S. contemplates "stabilization light"

The public policy of the U.S. was presented in bold outline by several U.S. officials and top imperialist planners and reported in the June 23 *New York Times* under the headline, "U.S. Sends Civilians to Stabilize Recaptured Syrian Areas." The referenced "civilians" include representatives from the CIA-directed Agency for International Development and representatives from the array of countries that are supporting the U.S. war in Syria. Billions of dollars are to be expended in this effort, not to rebuild Syria, but to insure the stability of the occupying force in the regions the U.S. seeks to establish under its control.

A *minimum* of 1000 U.S. troops would remain in these "recaptured" regions, according to *The Times* report, and undoubtedly qualitatively more if the U.S. warmakers believe they can further leverage their intervention.

In the same article, Linda Robinson, a senior international policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, expressed a note of caution: "Syria is not a country that we control. This is *stabilization light*. We do not have, nor do we intend to get, control of the place, which would enable us to move and do these state-building activities" (my emphasis).

She added, "What is also very important to understand is what is the tolerance of the Syrian government for the U.S. to go in and do these activities. There have been increasing tensions with the regime, with the Iranians and with the Russians and the possibility that we are backing into a war with the Assad government and its backers." Needless to say, such a war has been underway for years despite the U.S. lie that its illegal, uninvited presence in Syria is to fight ISIS.

The June 18 attack on the Syrian aircraft was not the first such overt assault since 2011, when the short-lived Syrian Arab Spring was quickly hijacked by covert U.S.-backed terrorist forces aimed at the same "regime change" operation in Syria that the U.S. had previously orchestrated in Iraq, Libya, and Egypt. Since the April 7 U.S. Tomahawk missile attack on the Syrian Shayrat air base—under the pretext of retaliation for the unproven claim that the Assad government used sarin gas—U.S. threats and overt attacks on Syrian government forces and its supporters have become routine.

(A June 25 detailed article refuting President

Trump's accusation that the Syrian government used sarin gas in the town of Khan Sheikhoun in April 2017 has been published on the German on-line website *Welt N24 Politik*. Its author, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh, cites several top U.S. military advisers to President Trump as insisting that "this was not a chemical weapons strike." But even after receiving reports that sarin gas was not used by the Assad government, or anyone else, the advisers noted that Trump proceeded to bomb Syria anyway.)

The longstanding covert U.S./NATO/Gulf State monarchy regime-change war against Syria, wherein billions of dollars have been secretly extended to train and arm virtually all forces that aim to remove the Syrian government, has now become open. The notion that a civil war between competing Syrian factions prevails in Syria is a terrible fraud—one that is employed by both the U.S. government and its bipartisan propagandists, but also, tragically, by sections of the U.S. left. Syria, as with all poor and oppressed nations, is the undeniable victim of a U.S.-orchestrated imperialist attack, little differ-

ent from the imperialist conflagrations that plague oppressed people and nations around the world—from the Middle East to Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Hillary Clinton's election-time advocacy of a "no fly zone" in Syria—aimed at preventing Syrian and allied forces, including Russia, Iran and the Lebanese-based Hezbollah, from ridding Syria of U.S.-backed forces—has now become President Donald Trump's official policy.

"Deconfliction" is the new U.S.-invented term to designate the ever-expanding and always changing U.S. "no-fly zones," that is, portions of Syria that the U.S. hopes to occupy now to maximize its leverage in a contemplated postwar Syrian negotiated settlement wherein Syria's future is to be determined not by the Syria people or government but rather by the U.S.-established military relationship of forces on the ground. As U.S. air war Middle East chief Lt. General Jeffrey Harrington stated, "Every war must come to an end, and when it does there will be a negotiated settlement." In this context, Harrington bragged to the *New York Times* that his success in Syria resided in his efforts to increase the "space" controlled by U.S.-backed forces.

With the Syrian government's September 2015 request to the Russian and Iranian governments and Hezbollah forces in Lebanon to intervene on its behalf, Syria has retaken large parts of the country that were previously occupied by ISIS and other U.S.-backed forces. Some estimates put that previously occupied figure at two-thirds of the country. Syria, a sovereign nation, has every right to self-determination, that is, to defend itself from imperial attack and to seek the support of allies to challenge U.S.-led war and regime change efforts.

Al Udeid, in Qatar, is the U.S. Central Command headquarters in the Middle East—the nerve center of its air campaigns in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It is from Al Udeid that the U.S. conducts its now 16-year war in Afghanistan and its current wars in Iraq and Syria. Al Udeid supplied the air and ground forces in the U.S./NATO "humanitarian war" that destroyed Libya's infrastructure. U.S.-backed mercenaries from Qatar then proceeded to "liberate" Libya's capital of Tripoli using the pretext that the Gadhafi government was about to exterminate 50,000 unarmed civilians in Benghazi. British authorities now admit that there was no such threat. Neither did the Saddam Hussein government have the "weapons of mass destruction" that the U.S. warmakers insisted were about to be unleashed on the world.

U.S. general espouses policy objectives

"If the Syrians were going to make a run at our guys, we were going to be in a position to defend them ourselves," said Lt. General Harrington in a May 23 *New York Times* interview. "Our intent was to be in position to support our guys and get back into fighting ISIS." The reference to "our guys," of course, includes NATO and U.S.-financed and abetted terrorist forces aimed at Assad's removal. There are no other forces in Syria

(continued on page 9)

300 register for UNAC antiwar conference

By JEFF MACKLER

RICHMOND, Va.—Three hundred antiwar and social justice activists and leaders from 31 states registered for the 2017 national conference of UNAC (United National Antiwar Coalition). The conference was entitled “Stop the Wars at Home and Abroad: Building a Movement Against War, Injustice and Repression.”

The unifying and optimistic conference, UNAC’s first in the South, took place in the context of the U.S. military’s declaring a no-fly zone over key areas of Syria—euphemistically called a “zone of deconfliction”—its shooting down another Syrian plane, and yet another racist acquittal of a murdering cop (this time, the innocent victim was Philando Castile in Minnesota).

It was the most diverse attendance—by age, race and geography—of any antiwar gathering in recent history, with participants from seven countries present.

The unanimously adopted Action Plan stated, “UNAC reaffirms its commitment to the organization of independent, mass action, united-front mobilizations against all U.S. wars at home and abroad. Unity in action against the endless imperialist wars for power and profit is inseparable from the same necessary unity at home against the inherent racism, sexism, homophobia, and anti-working-class policies generated by a society ruled by the one percent.”

The proposal committed UNAC to organize and support local, regional, and nationally-coordinated actions, to expand its leadership bodies and to broaden and strengthen its capacity for mass mobili-

zation at a time when support for antiwar and social justice issues is on the rise.

The conference was hosted in Richmond by the UNAC-affiliated Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice and Equality. All sessions were professionally live-streamed and recorded (see unacepeace.org).

Fifty-six speakers made presentations at seven plenary sessions and an equal number of workshops. The conference focused on exposing and challenging the U.S. government’s ever-expanding and unending wars, the inseparable threat of nuclear annihilation, and catastrophic climate change—as well as the wars against working people at home.

This includes the broad destruction of the social safety net, repression of political dissent, the racist mass incarceration and repression of society’s most oppressed and exploited, union-busting, persecution of immigrants, government-promoted Islamophobia, and the rise of neo-fascist and alt-right groups.

“We are at the eve of a new movement in this country,” said the keynote speaker, Ajamu Baraka of the newly formed Black Alliance for Peace. “I believe that this conference, this coalition, will be able to lead and build the kind of antiwar, anti-imperialist movement that is needed today. Baraka’s remarks were underlined by an impressive range of African-American leaders at the conference, including



Lawrence Hamm, Peoples Organization for Progress; Margaret Kimberley and Glen Ford of the Black Agenda Report; Ana Edwards, Richmond Defenders’ Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project; Lee Robinson, AAPRP; Joribu Hill, founder, Mississippi Workers Center for Human Rights; Saladin Muhammad, founding member, Black Workers for Justices and Clarence Thomas, past secretary-treasurer, ILWU Local 10.

A broad range of other nationally prominent antiwar activists added their voices to UNAC’s unifying themes, including Kevin Zeese, co-director, “It’s Our Economy”; Ann Wright, antiwar activist and

(Above) UNAC conference ended with march to Richmond’s African Burial Grounds, where Gabriel Posser, leader of 1806 slave rebellion, was executed.

former U.S. Army colonel and diplomat; Bruce Gagnon, coordinator, Global Network Against Weapons Nuclear Power in Space; and Medea Benjamin co-founder of Code Pink and Global Exchange.

Socialist Action’s literature table and newspaper were well received.

Jeff Mackler is a member of UNAC’s Administrative Committee.

... Syria

(continued from page 8)

today that operate independently of U.S. imperialism and its coalition partners.

This May 23 article entitled, “Inside the Air War Over Syria: A High Altitude ‘Poker Game,’” offers what *The New York Times* calls “a rare glimpse into how the [U.S.] military plans and orchestrates the complex ballet of strike, surveillance and refueling aircraft that keeps the war going around the clock.”

Syria’s right to self-determination

This seemingly endless war has taken a terrible toll on the Syrian people. A respected polling organization—ORB International, which does polling for Western nations, including the U.S. government—nevertheless demonstrated that support for the Bashar Assad government and its Iranian allies far exceeds support for the U.S. and its “coalition partners,” including the Free Syrian Army, al-Qaeda and similar groups. Support for ISIS was miniscule.

Regardless, recognition and defense of Syria’s right to self-determination—an inalienable right of all poor and oppressed nations under imperialist attack or threatened by colonial occupation—is the critical dividing line in the U.S. antiwar movement today. While not taking any position on the Assad government itself, U.S. antiwar organizations like the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) are staunch defenders of Syria’s right to self-determination. UNAC unanimously re-affirmed this stance at its recent June 16-18 national conference in Richmond, Va., where over 300 activists from 31 states drew up plans for future coordinated, independent, mass mobilizations against U.S. imperialist wars. (See UNAC’s adopted Action Plan at unacepeace.org.)

The principle of the right of self-determination of oppressed nations has its origins in the worldwide struggles of oppressed people to win their freedom from the world’s chief colonizing and imperialist great powers that had previously divided and re-divided the world and subjected poor and conquered peoples to their rule. The history of the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia is in great part a history of the just struggles of the conquered and occupied nations for freedom and self-determination.

Socialists and other democratically minded organizations have traditionally supported all such struggles against imperialist intervention, whether their

leadership was socialist, bourgeois nationalist or even downright reactionary. This was the case, for example, when fascist Italy invaded feudal Ethiopia at the beginning of WWII, or more recently when the U.S. invaded Iraq and deposed the Saddam Hussein government. (Hussein had previously been a U.S. ally and surrogate when he invaded Iran in 1980 in a six-year war that took the lives of one million Iranians and 800,000 Iraqis.)

In all cases, the key criteria for opposition to imperialist war has been the understanding that, freed from direct colonial control, the working masses of these oppressed nations have the best opportunity to deal with their own indigenous oppressors. The resultant weakening and defeat of the imperialist occupier upon its forced withdrawal is an added bonus that factors into any world balance sheet measuring the relationship between imperialist subjugators and their victims.

The right of self-determination includes Syria’s right to call for help from Russia, Iran, and others as they see fit. Such support—however equivocal and for whatever opportunist reasons it may be given—can have a significant impact on thwarting U.S. imperialist objectives. As compared to late 2015, much of Syria today is free from the direct control of the forces let loose by U.S. imperialism. It is these forces that are overwhelmingly responsible for the estimated 500,000 Syrians killed, including 100,000 Syrian Army soldiers as well as the 1.5 million Syrian refugees that are today scattered across the Middle East and elsewhere.

This is not to say that the Russia’s or Iran’s primary objective is the liberation of Syria from imperialist control, and certainly not the establishment of a socialist or even democratic Syria. Vladimir Putin’s objectives are simply to use Russian influence in Syria as a bargaining chip to negotiate with the U.S./NATO cabal and win some concessions with regard to NATO’s threatening encirclement of Russia and its imposition of stinging sanctions arising out of Russia’s opposition to the neo-fascist, US/EU-backed coup in Ukraine.

The recent widely televised two-part “Putin Interviews” with filmmaker Oliver Stone revealed Russian perspectives and politics in bold relief when Stone felt compelled to correct Putin’s repeated assertions of friendship with his “U.S. partners.” Stone asked, “How can you repeatedly call the U.S. your partner when it is ever surrounding you with NATO troops and imposing hurtful sanctions?” Putin could only smile and repeat his solidarity and claimed “partner-

ship” with the U.S. while holding out his hopes that peaceful negotiated solutions of their differences would be forthcoming.

Putin, a spokesperson par excellence for a weak and isolated Russian capitalism, basked with Stone in the splendor of his ornate state-owned Russian dacha home, while praising the Russian Orthodox Church, expressing his solidarity with U.S. imperialism’s “fight against terrorism,” and ridiculing the great 1917 Russian Revolution. Putin, who supported the U.S./NATO war that reduced Libya to rubble, lacked the good sense to hide his reactionary social views as he disparaged women and LGBTIQI people. No liberating friend of the Syrian masses, Putin seeks a negotiated accommodation with U.S. imperialism. This is similar to other lesser capitalist nations that are increasingly compelled to bend to the dictates of the world’s sole superpower.

Yet Russia’s role in forcing the U.S.-backed armed forces in Syria to retreat cannot be dismissed, if for the sole reason that, absent an overt imperialist conquest, opportunities for future struggle of Syria’s working masses to advance their own interests will be that much greater. Tragically, history does not always offer a clear and straight path to liberation. Absent Russian and Iranian intervention in the Syrian conflict, the likelihood of US/NATO imperial victory would be virtually assured. The alternative to Russian and Iranian support for Syria can only be Syria’s return to imperialist-imposed great power domination or perhaps formal division or incorporation into neighboring states.

Today, Syria’s future rests less on the intentions of Russian or Iranian capitalists than it does on the future emergence of an independent anti-imperialist and socialist force inside Syria that champions the interests of the Syrian working masses and on capacity of antiwar forces in the U.S. and around the world to mobilize millions in the streets demanding “U.S. Out Now!” “Self-determination for Syria!” and “Money for Jobs, Not War!” These are the starting points for the mass antiwar movement that can best serve the interests of the Syrian people.

In addition to marches, rallies, and teach-ins, the economic might of the U.S. working class must be brought to bear. Indeed, the struggles against all U.S. wars abroad and the fight against the ever-intensifying wars against working people at home cannot be separated; in many ways it is the same fight. We must say no to the wars of the one percent both at home and abroad. Not one more dollar, not one more bullet for Washington’s wars!

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

British Columbia turns left

By CAITLIN BROWN

The May 9 election in British Columbia (B.C.) showed a dramatic attempt by voters to break from 16 years of austerity under the Liberal Party towards a left social-democratic program. Like other regions of Canada, the western-most province was hit hard by the 2008/9 economic meltdown. Its staple natural resource industries—fishing, mining, and forestry—are plagued by continuing lay-offs and now face U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs. Intense real estate speculation fostered immense income inequality. The shift to the left electorally was a response to this situation.

However, the election did not result in a decisive parliamentary victory for the New Democratic Party. Instead, while the NDP and Green Party won a combined popular vote of 57.10% (40.25% and 16.85% respectively) to the ruling Liberal Party's 40.38%, this resulted in a near tie in seats. The 87 seats in the BC legislature, under the first-past-the-post system, are now divided between 43 for the former ruling Liberal Party, 41 held by the NDP, and three occupied by the Green Party.

The NDP managed to reach a four-year agreement with the Green Party to form a minority government with 44 seats. This may prove to be unprecedented. Previous minority governments in Canada have not held together for more than two years. The parties involved remained in election mode. If a left agenda is to go ahead, it will have to proceed quickly.

As elsewhere in Canada, workers and the poor in B.C. have been suffering. Students are burdened with debt, people have been priced out of their homes, renters face unprecedented rent increases, seniors face poverty in retirement, workers work harder for longer hours without a wage increase, and precarious employment abounds. Not surprisingly, the desire for change is widespread.

The NDP pledged to increase the minimum wage to \$15/hour, freeze ICBC (government car insurance) rates, freeze B.C. Hydro power rates, eliminate medical insurance premiums, improve renters' rights, stop the runaway prices of real estate, reinstate the Vancouver School Board (trustees were fired by the Liberal government for refusing to implement cuts), and introduce \$10/day childcare. The NDP also promised elec-

toral reform and to hold a referendum on proportional representation, to implement electoral finance reform including eliminating corporate and union donations to political parties, and place a cap on individual donations.

The NDP also pledged to stop construction of the Kinder Morgan oil pipeline, to put the Site C Dam before the B.C. Utilities Commission for review, and to deliver carbon tax rebate cheques to citizens. The party also promised to create 96,000 jobs in infrastructure spending including on new roads, schools, hospitals, and carbon emissions reduction up-grading. While it is a tall order for a minority government, it reflects the mood in the province.

Towards the goal of creating a stable legislature, the NDP signed a "confidence and supply" agreement with the Green Party whereby the Greens pledged to support the NDP for four years in parliament. The Greens have agreed not "to move, nor vote non-confidence" for the next four years, to have all their elected members at all sittings of the House, and to vote in favour of all confidence motions, including the overall budgetary policy of the government.

At the time of writing, the official transition of power to the NDP with Green Party support is expected to begin in early July. The position of Speaker of the House will be difficult to fill, as the speaker breaks tie votes in the legislature. If the legislature dissolves, the province would head towards another election. It could result in a sweeping victory for the NDP.

This is the first time in decades voters in B.C. endorsed a left program, albeit one that seeks to reform capitalism in crisis, rather than opt for socialism, but it will be an important experience. Workers and the poor in B.C. have decided that austerity has to end and a sweeping set of changes must be put into place to turn the economic situation around. ■

\$15 an hour: A rising tide lifts all boats

By STEFAN PETERS-HNATIUK

At the end of May, the Ontario Liberal government announced "sweeping" labour law reforms, inclining them to bask in the glory of their freshly appropriated "progressive values," eliciting the ire and indignation of Conservatives, while causing New Democrats to utter a collective "well, duh!"

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce were "shocked and appalled" at the suggestion that working people should be paid a living wage. Conservative leader Patrick Brown, somewhat more cautiously stated: "Everyone wants higher wages, but when a worker wakes up in the morning, they need a job." Now, is Brown exuding obstinate blind faith in the debunked neoliberal nostrum that higher wages mean higher unemployment, or is he venting the natural instinct of a bourgeois to prey on the desperation of working people?

In the end, the Conservative position seems quite clear: Capital is happy to provide jobs, but the question of whether "a worker" earns a living wage from that job; that's a problem for "them." Well, if you're a working person, "they" are "us." And we want a living wage (which actually requires an amount closer to \$20/hour).

As Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath stated in a recent radio interview, for labour-based New Democrats, the sort of labour law reforms proposed by the Wynne government aren't just a populist Hail Mary tossed up at the 11th hour; they're "in our DNA!"

The biggest talking point of the announced reform, of course, has been the increase in minimum wage, from \$11.40 to \$14 an hour in 2018, and to \$15 in 2019. Right-wing critics say this measure will spur inflation and drive up the cost of living, thus hurting the very people it is designed to help. However, the most significant expenditures by low-income earners (i.e., shelter and transportation) are not labour-intensive, and are therefore not likely to be affected by an increase in minimum wage at all. So, any increase in the cost of living of low-wage earners is likely to be nominal, while clearly the purchasing power of wage earners will increase considerably.

Another criticism is that a higher minimum wage will make it harder for small businesses to survive because of the added cost of labour for those businesses already operating on tight margins. This view is short sighted because it focuses entirely on expenses and ignores opportunities for revenue generation.

Take, for example, a neighbourhood bakery. The bakery owner needs a certain number of employees to staff the shop. Those employees represent a fixed-cost; regardless of how much sales revenue the bak-

ery generates, the cost of paying employees remains the same. If you increase the minimum wage, the cost of operating the bakery increases. But the increase in minimum wage also means that workers *across the board* now have more money to spend at the bakery.

Indeed, higher wages lead to increased demand. For an efficiently run business, higher demand should translate into a higher volume of sales, thus offsetting the increase in the fixed-cost of labour. In fact, the higher demand might even create an opportunity to expand the business, requiring additional staff, thus contributing to an *increase* in employment. For examples of colossal corporate expansion based almost entirely on catering to low-income earners, look no further than *Tim Hortons* and *Dollarama*.

Indeed, a higher minimum wage is actually more likely to bolster the economy and be particularly beneficial to small business because low-income earners—who spend rather than save their earnings—will have more money to spend on leisure and non-necessities, stimulating local economies in the process.

Certainly, not all businesses will be able to keep their head above the tide of a \$15/hour minimum wage. Some will drown. But to employ the "sink-or-swim" mantra so beloved by proponents of laissez-faire economics: if certain businesses are unable to adapt to the new market reality of a higher minimum wage, let them drown. Their fitter counterparts—those who can pay a decent wage to workers—will survive, and working people, not to mention society as a whole, will be the better for it. ■

Don't close schools — Amalgamate school boards

By JOHN ORRETT

Toronto Star columnist Martin Regg Cohn reported on May 16 that Ontario's school boards might close as many as 300 local schools. Many are in rural areas. He writes that the "elephant in the (class) room" is the fact that Ontario has four different school boards: English Public, English Catholic, French Public, and French Catholic—and that this is costing the public a lot more than a unified school system would.

The fear of losing Catholic votes makes the subject "taboo" for the ruling Liberal Party, the official opposition Conservatives, and the labor-based New Democratic Party. Gilles Bisson, NDP Member of the Provincial Parliament, calls the Catholic school issue the "third rail" of politics in Ontario.

This is despite the fact that opinion polls show a majority of Ontarians are in favor of amalgamating school boards and ending a blatantly discriminatory system that funds schooling for one religion, while denying it to all others.

In 2010, the NDP Socialist Caucus presented a policy paper to the Ontario NDP Task Force on Education that showed how \$500 million was wasted annually by bussing students to schools far from their homes, duplicating school boards and administrative services, and failing to rationalize of the number of schools in parts of rural Ontario with shrinking student populations.

Catholic Schools are anachronistic and discriminatory. The separation of church and state is an ongoing issue in Ontario. Public funds should not go to religious or private schools of any kind.

The millions of dollars saved would be better spent improving schools for indigenous students, which are in a deplorable state, and providing much needed early childhood education and special needs programs. ■

... Not Our Revolution

(continued from page 6)

tem and its attendant racism, sexism, imperialism, and other oppression. As Lenin put it, our model is to be "tribunes of the people," speaking against every wrong and laying bare the unpleasant truths of our society.

Modern capitalist parties are more like corporate brands than substantial political organizations; the success of Donald Trump should make that painfully clear. We cannot win by associating our-

selves with a brand that is not clearly based on the working class and its allies and oriented toward goals that are in their interest. Even the halfway-house of the Green Party is no way to build a mass-action-oriented socialist movement.

As groups like Our Revolution and DSA turn more of the anti-Trump sentiment into ground work for the Democrats, their role—and the legacy of Bernie Sanders—will be in rebuilding this discredited capitalist party, not in building toward working-class power and socialism. We need to do the opposite—build an independent party of workers and the oppressed. ■

Mieville's compelling 'October'

By SAM PAGANO

Most people know China Mieville as a writer of innovative genre fiction. He's made a name for himself over the years as a pre-eminent figure within the science fiction and fantasy scenes in large part because of his radical jumps between different genres, styles, and ideas.

Within the 10 novels and two short story collections that Mieville has written, there's everything from the subversive but grounded detective story of "The City & The City," to the baroque magical capitalist dystopia of the "Bas" series. Even within a body of work marked by radical departures, though, his most recent book, "October: The Story of the Russian Revolution," still marks an exceptional shift.

When it was first proposed, Mieville apparently had the idea of writing a straight historical fiction piece, telling the story of the Revolution as a novel. However, over the course of writing, it evolved into a much broader general history of the Russian Revolution from February to October, meant as a general introductory work on the topic.

The way that the publisher, Verso, has advertised "October" emphasizes its origins as a historical fiction piece and attempts to sell it as "The Story of the Russian Revolution" in a fairly direct way. But that description undersells the quality and depth of the book.

"October" is one of the better in-depth and effective introductions to the politics that shaped the Russian Revolution that has been written in the past few decades. It fills an important niche within socialist literature to bridge the gap between journalistic accounts—like John Reed's "Ten Days That Shook The World"—and Leon Trotsky's "History of The Russian Revolution," which covers many of the same topics in far more detail and is the definitive work on the subject.

Mieville tells the story of the Revolution in a compelling way that manages to get across many of the more complicated political phenomena in Russia in the lead-up to October.

The chief virtue of "October" as compared to most bourgeois histories of the Russian Revolution is that China Mieville understands Marxist theory and

the concept and role of a vanguard party. In contrast to those bourgeois historians who would focus on the persons within the Bolshevik leadership and their role in engineering the situation, October's chief protagonist and subject is the Russian working class itself.

Mieville shows that the shifts in class consciousness of the working class, and the movement they built, is ultimately what made the first successful workers' revolution in history possible. The workers were not controlled or manipulated by a body outside themselves, but were active agents in their own right who fully understood what they hoped to achieve by the Revolution.

The Bolsheviks are still central historical actors, but it is in the role of the people at the forefront of this emerging movement that they were central. This isn't to say that the workers were a purely spontaneous element; the revolutionary movement shaped their actions and consciousness.

The relationship of the Bolshevik Party to the masses was dialectical and reciprocal, and wouldn't have been possible if the workers weren't receptive to their calls, or if the situation didn't push them to listen. The Bolsheviks' agitation pushed forward mass consciousness, which in turn led the masses to take action, in which the Bolsheviks played a leading role in many cases due to their audience trusting and respecting them.

Where "October" most thoroughly criticizes the Bolsheviks is in situations in which they failed to act as a vanguard. One moment was immediately after the February revolution, when various Bolshevik leaders took steps towards burying the hatchet with the Mensheviks and adopting support for the Provisional Government. And then in the July Days, when they failed to give a decisive response to the workers' actions, were effectively blindsided by events out of their control, and temporarily forced to go underground.

"October" makes clear that the Bolsheviks were fallible, that they made mistakes throughout the Revolution—



(Above) Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin addresses Russian workers.

although this did not automatically discredit them as leaders.

Of course, any attempt to try to explain a very complex topic in simple ways will tend to be inexact in some places. Where this is most evident in "October" is in the contradiction between the desire for a speedier and less dense read, and presenting issues in their full complexity.

This issue is at its worst when Mieville turns his attention to the debates within the Bolshevik party in April 1917—when Lenin returned to revolutionary Russia from exile and wrote his "April Thesis." His goal appears to be to present them in light of recent debates around historian Lars Lih's analysis of whether or not the Bolsheviks were "fully armed" in their perspectives toward the Provisional Government and whether Lenin's militant thesis constituted a rupture or continuity with the old politics of the Bolshevik Party.

Unfortunately, to someone uninitiated in the works of Lars Lih ("Lenin Rediscovered" and other books), Mieville's presentation is almost entirely opaque. He fails to get across the core issues involved, or why the debate about the nature of Lenin's "April Theses" as rupture or continuity is significant. Moreover, Mieville fails to state any definite conclusions or ideas.

Along similar lines, there's a sort of

Petrograd-centrism to the book, which is acknowledged by the author in the introduction, but doesn't really justify the lack of focus on events outside of the city. This is most problematic where the oppressed nationalities of the Russian Empire are concerned. They occasionally come to the forefront, but never in great detail.

For example, the relationship and position of the Bolsheviks on the emerging national liberation struggles is only referred to once in the entire book, in a specific reference to a statement on the part of the Baku Bolsheviks.

This is probably the greatest failure of the book to demonstrate the full scope of the Russian Revolution because the nationalities question was an incredibly important aspect of the revolutionary process, and worthy of more attention than many writings on the Revolution give it.

Nevertheless, "October: The Story of the Russian Revolution" is highly worthwhile reading for anyone with an interest in the topic, and especially for today's political activists. Even people who know a lot about the Revolution will still be able to engage with it as a very entertaining book that presents Russia in 1917 in a novel way. ■

... British Labour

(continued from page 12)

system of self-policing by local councils.

As investigations into the Grenfell tragedy continued, it came out that residents had complained for years that the 24-story public-housing block was just waiting for catastrophe to hit. It lacked fire alarms and sprinklers. There was only a single staircase to be used as a fire escape.

There were also concerns about the aluminum façade, which whisked the flames upward. One observer said, "It burned like a fire that you pour petrol on." The flames consumed the tower so quickly, and smoke was so thick, that firefighters had difficulty getting to the upper floors to rescue people.

Formal inquiry has begun into the panels, consisting of two sheets of aluminum that sandwich a combustible core. The panels were produced by the American manufacturing giant Alcoa, now renamed Arconic, which has marketed them in Britain for years. Arconic's website says that their use "depends on local building codes."

The panels were first used for public housing blocks when Tony Blair was in office. For years, members of Parliament have tried to get restrictions on the cladding, which is banned in many countries. Manufacturers argued against more tests or regulations. Using fire-resistant materials was more expensive, so it was opposed by the industry.

July 1 anti-austerity demonstration

Soon after the Grenfell Tower disaster the call went out from the People's Assembly Against Austerity for a national demonstration to oppose the new Tory-DUP gov-



ernment. July 1 was chosen for the event to take place.

On June 14, Labour Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell told the annual conference of the food workers union BFAWU: "What we need now is the TUC [Trades Union Congress] mobilized, every union mobilized, get out in the streets. Just think if the TUC put out the call—that we want a million in the streets of London in two weeks."

When the day came, the press reported that tens of thousands marched on Parliament, and some who attended said it was as high as 100,000. Everyone was angry. They wanted the prime minister to resign, but most of the energy was aimed against austerity and the recent tragedy of the Grenfell fire.

In an interview with Sky News, Matt Wrack, general

(Left) Protest in London following the Grenfell Tower disaster.

secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, made the connection between decades of austerity and the deaths in public housing: "This is a result of the obsession for deregulation, the obsession for privatization and against health and safety protections. Those who said, 'health and safety is a monster to be slain' need to be held accountable."

Len McClusky, the general secretary of the public sector union Unite, spoke to the rally: "You have to come from across the land to fight for a people's government. ... Prime minister, for the good of the nation, go and go now."

Members of UNISON, the largest health-care union, were more specific. Mark, a UNISON rep from Manchester, said, "There is a different mood from work now. People gather to discuss protest and industrial action whenever someone mentions it. ... I'd like to see the union at a regional level getting branches connected more and start pushing for action." Mona Kamal told the rally to loud cheers that she was one of the junior doctors that went on strike last year: "If and when my nursing colleagues do the same, they will have 50,000 junior doctors standing behind them in solidarity."

Before Jeremy Corbyn spoke at the rally in London, he spoke to a rally of thousands in Hastings, East Sussex, where he is targeting Tory Amber Rudd's constituency. She won her election by only 346 votes and is generally considered to be the successor to Prime Minister Theresa May. Corbyn said there are 73 constituencies in England, Wales, and Scotland that Labour can win. He and his shadow cabinet will be visiting every one of them. "Labour is the government in waiting." ■

British Labour Party gains muscle as Tories decline



(Photo) Jeremy Corbyn (ctr.)

By ANN MONTAGUE

The British Labour Party has emerged with more than 200,000 new members and 30 additional seats in Parliament. This has surprised the Tories as well as some of the Labour Party Members of Parliament (MPs), who were shocked to hear union members shouting, “We killed Blairism.”

The party’s resurgence gathered steam with the 2015 Labour Party leadership election after the resignation of Ed Milliband and the party’s defeat in the 2015 elections. Jeremy Corbyn was considered a dark horse candidate in a field of four candidates but won in a landslide with 59.5% of the vote. Less than a year later, Corbyn won another leadership election, this time with even more votes.

Corbyn won the elections with such high numbers because of the decision of major unions, such as Unite and UNISON, to endorse him as the only candidate who will oppose austerity and the Tories’ planned anti-union legislation. Unite is a merger of the Transport and General Workers unions and is the largest union in Britain and Ireland, with 1.4 million members. UNISON is a public-sector union, with 1.3 million members.

While there were bureaucratic attempts to keep Corbyn off the ballot, none were successful. The combination of major unions’ energizing their membership, young workers and students volunteering to walk the neighborhoods, and the fact that in June 2015—for the first time in several years—an anti-austerity protest drew tens of thousands of people in to the streets, all worked together to see an emerging left Labour leadership victory.

All the cries of warning from former Prime Minister and “New Labour” leader Tony Blair and others that Corbyn would be the death of the Labour Party fell on deaf ears.

The Labour Party is a membership-based party. Before the leadership election, 100,000 people signed up as registered supporters, but twice that many signed up as full members. Unlike in the Democratic Party in the U.S., all members of the Labour Party vote for the leader of the party—one member, one vote.

Membership numbers increased again before the June 9 British general election and continue pouring in after the election.

“Change is the word,” said Kate Taylor, a feminist and Labour councilor who was elected at 18, three years ago. “I am about sick of having to constantly put aside my own opinions and beliefs for the Labour Party. I would like to get the Labour Party back to what it was made to be, for working people.”

The Labour Manifesto includes demands that would benefit the working class, such as massive public investments, taxing the rich, and ending privatization of the Royal Mail, British Rail, regional water systems, and the creeping privatization that is eroding the National Health Service. It also calls for nationalizing power companies under local control, with increased emphasis on renewable energy.

Jeremy Corbyn has a background as a trade-union official, an activist with the Stop the War coalition, and as a Labour Member of Parliament. He calls himself a “democratic socialist.”

Corbyn started receiving additional union endorsements, which meant that he had a well funded electoral machine. This also indicated that the leaderships of trade unions were backing Jeremy Corbyn. They were moving from a stance of bargaining for minor concessions within the existing structure of the Labour Party to trying to fundamentally alter it.

Journalist Nicolas Watt told the *Guardian* that the rationale for the Communication Workers Union’s endorsement was clear: “A Corbyn victory will help break the grip of the Blairites ... once and for all.” There are 14 unions affiliated with the Labour Party, representing 3.5 million members. They were joined by non-affiliated unions like the PCS civil servants’ union and RMT transport union, which urged their members, friends, and families to vote Labour.

Tories slide in general election

Conservative Party Prime Minister Theresa May might have kept her position and her clear Conservative majority in the House of Commons for another three years. However, she decided to call a snap election to get a larger majority and strengthen her

hand as she negotiates Britain’s exit from the European Union. At the time, polls were predicting a landslide victory over the Labour Party of 35%. Undoubtedly, May made the decision based on the public attacks on Jeremy Corbyn led by Tony Blair and the remnants of his “New Labour” MPs in Parliament.

The Tory plurality plummeted to just 2% over Labour before the June election, and they lost 13 seats in the vote, which left them seven short of a majority. Labour gained 30 seats. After the election, the BBC, which rarely mentioned Jeremy Corbyn’s name during the election, did say that the diversity of the House of Commons had greatly changed in the election. There are now 208 women Labour MPs (45 percent); 52 MPs are ethnic minorities, and 45 are LGBT. In addition, the past president of UNISON won election in a major upset of the Conservative Party.

While the Labour Party had its 35-page Manifesto displaying an anti-austerity program for British workers, Theresa May’s campaign basically sold her administration as “strong and stable leadership” and “Brexit means Brexit.” While there were calls for her to step down from within her own party, she decided to stay and form a minority government with the Democratic Unionist Party in Ireland.

The DUP is an extreme right-wing party that doesn’t believe in evolution or climate change, and opposes marriage equality, a woman’s right to abortion, and birth control. Its candidates were endorsed by the Ulster Defence Association, a violent gang involved in racketeering and drug dealing. The new government is seen by everyone as a weak coalition that threatens the peace process in Ireland.

The Grenfell Tower disaster

Five days after the election came reports of the fire at Grenfell Tower. Angry protest rallies and marches immediately took place, which included friends, neighbors, and relatives of the victims. They demanded accountability; they did not want an inquiry, they wanted an inquest. Since then, the government has deemed 120 more public-housing buildings in Britain unsafe, and people have been evacuated from some of them.

Jeremy Corbyn called for immediate housing for those who cannot return to their homes. He told the fire victims to occupy the empty homes in the area: “People with a lot of money buy a house, buy a flat, keep it empty. There are properties like that all over London.”

The prime minister, in contrast, has once again managed to enrage people dealing with tragedy. May went to the site of the disaster but because of “security concerns” did not meet with the bereaved and homeless.

Many have blamed the disaster on budget cuts enacted by the Tory government, as well as by the local council, which ignored the needs of working people and the poor. May has replied by pointing out that Tony Blair’s New Labour government made a number of deregulatory decisions adversely affecting public safety.

For example, a 2005 law ended the requirement for regular checks by fire inspectors and changed it to a

(continued on page 11)

