

Disaster capitalism rages in Puerto Rico

Ricardo Arduengo / AFP / Getty Images



By KEITH LESLIE

“The only thing we need now is a hurricane.” These were the words of a financial advisor in Puerto Rico this summer, anticipating the business opportunities the devastation of a hurricane would produce.

This framework—which understands disaster as an opportunity for profit—is not unusual. As Naomi Klein showed in her famous book, “The Shock Doctrine,” capitalism exploits both natural and manmade disasters as a chance to tear down social reforms, privatize public services, and implement neoliberal economic policies.

From the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile to post-Katrina New Orleans, we have seen the program and tactics of disaster capitalism persist and expand. Today, we can see the same forces seeking to bring disaster capitalism to Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The most immediate disaster capitalist proposals for privatization came after Hurricane Irma. The storm did not hit Puerto Rico directly, but knocked out power to more than a million people. The executive leadership of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, PREPA, warned that the island might face power outages for six months or more. This immediately prompted calls for the privatization of PREPA on the grounds that it was inefficient and incompe-

tent. In fact, PREPA was able to restore power for most of its customers within a few weeks.

PREPA’s current executive leadership was installed through an agreement with its creditors after the previous, anti-privatization administration was ousted. Four of the board’s seven members had signed a letter in June calling for PREPA’s privatization. The Electrical Industry and Irrigation Workers Union, which represents PREPA’s workers, accused the leadership of exaggerating its estimates and delaying the deployment of available workers to promote the prospects of privatization.

Hurricane Maria, with a far more devastating impact on Puerto Rico, has likewise intensified the disaster capitalist pressure. The calls for PREPA’s privatization have intensified. They have also been joined by the likes of Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla, who has attempted to put a green veneer on this push by proposing to build a renewable grid in Puerto Rico—but on a privatized basis.

One of the key objectives of advocates of PREPA privatization is the breaking of the electrical workers’ union. Musk has a history of opposing union drives at Tesla and elsewhere. The fiscal control board installed in Puerto Rico by Washington has invoked a legal provision that would allow it to approve public-private partnerships with almost no public or environmental review.

(Above) A street in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, after the Arecibo River overflowed in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

Of course, Hurricanes Irma and Maria were not the start of austerity and privatization programs in Puerto Rico. Even before the hurricanes, Puerto Rico faced a debt of \$74 billion—more than 70% of its GDP—as well as nearly \$50 billion in unfunded pension liabilities. In 2016, the U.S. Congress passed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, or PROMESA. PROMESA established a fiscal control board with broad authority over Puerto Rican finances and over its elected government.

The main causes of this debt crisis include massive tax breaks for corporations and wealthy individuals in Puerto Rico. Restrictions on the Puerto Rican government and economy due to its status as a U.S. colony have also contributed. This includes the Jones Act, which restricts non-U.S.-flagged ships’ ability to ship goods to Puerto Rico but also extends beyond it: when Puerto Rico attempted to raise taxes on large corporations that imported goods, Walmart successfully sued to block the tax in a U.S. federal court on the basis of federal law.

Nonetheless, the austerity program in Puerto Rico

(continued on page 5)

Bonn talks underway; scientists see grim future for climate

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

At the same time that Donald Trump was galavanting around Asia, in a quest to re-arm Japan with U.S. missiles and to cajole China into the plan to isolate North Korea, other heads of state were in Bonn, Germany, for the 23rd annual "Conference of the Parties" (COP23) UN-sponsored climate talks. The two weeks of discussions, Nov. 6-17, were aimed at negotiating ways to implement the goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord.

As the conference opened, the World Meteorological Organization released data showing that 2017 is apparently the hottest non-Niño year on record, and is expected to join the two previous years as the three hottest in modern history.

Several days earlier, scientists with the U.S. Global Change Research Program published a report with similar conclusions. They affirmed from "thousands" of scientific studies that human activity is likely to be the cause of the steady increase in global temperatures. The amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere (over 400 ppm) is at a concentration unsurpassed in the last three million years, when global temperatures and sea level were significantly higher than today—and the concentration is still rising.

The report presented a grim prognosis for the future, in which the Atlantic coast of the United States could be swamped by rising seas and regularly battered by heavy storms. The report predicted heat waves becoming common, an increase in forest fires in the American West, and drastically reduced water resources with possible chronic drought in the United States by the end of the 21st century. Worldwide sea levels could continue to rise for centuries to come, as the ice sheets and glaciers melt.

The chairman of the Bonn conference, Fiji Prime Minister Voreqe "Frank" Bainimarama, opened the sessions with greetings "from one of the most climate-vulnerable regions on earth" and called on the delegates to "make the Paris Accord work."

"The need for urgency is obvious," he said, referring



(Left) Nov. 5 protest in Germany's coalfields.

to the tremendous hurricanes, floods, droughts, and forest fires of the last year and more. "Our world is in distress from the extreme weather events caused by climate change."

It musn't be overlooked, however, that the goals agreed to in Paris were far from sufficient to keep rising temperatures from reaching even more catastrophic levels. Even if the current pledges for cuts in carbon emissions were attained, they would still mean at least 3C of global warming above pre-industrial levels—which would likely result in rising seas that inundate island and coastal areas, widespread drought and crop failures, famine and mass migrations, tremendous loss of species, and countless other tragic and unchecked consequences.

The Bonn conference is entrusted with creating a mechanism to achieve the objectives of the Paris Accord, while leaving space for those goals to be raised higher. But success, even on limited terms, is not assured. On the first day of the conference, less developed countries, led by India, questioned whether the wealthier countries could be trusted, since they had failed to meet many of their pledges to reduce carbon emissions made at earlier COPs.

And in turn, some wealthier and more developed countries have been complaining of initiatives requiring them to contribute \$100 billion a year to help poorer nations

deal with the effects of climate change. Since Trump announced that the U.S. is pulling out of the Climate Accord, it is not clear whether the U.S. will contribute at all to the fund for poorer nations.

The United States, the world's second largest polluter, sent an official delegation to the talks, although their agenda seemed ridiculously out of sync with the professed goals of the conference. The U.S. said that it planned to use the venue to promote American energy resources, particularly fossil fuels, as a way that poorer countries could meet their energy needs.

The U.S. presentation was called "The Role of Cleaner and More Efficient Fossil Fuels and Nuclear Power in Climate Mitigation." Speakers from Peabody Energy, a coal company; NuScale Power, and nuclear engineering firm; and Tellurian, a liquefied natural gas exporter, were on the program.

Plans by the Trump administration, and other world leaders, to sell more fossil fuels on the world market were given a loud rebuke by German climate activists. Just a day before the opening of the COP23 conference, about 4500 protesters, some holding signs reading "system change, not climate change," gathered in the Rhineland coalfields in Germany.

"Germany's lignite mines are among the biggest coal mines in the world," Zane Sikulu, a Climate Warrior from Tonga, said in a statement. "If we don't shut them down, we have no chance as Pacific Islanders. We're here to protect our land, our culture, and our identities as Pacific people."

Janna Aljets, a spokesperson for the environmental alliance Ende Gelände, which helped organize the action, said in a statement: "On the international stage, politicians and corporations present themselves as climate saviors, while a few miles away, the climate is literally being burned."

"Fossil fuels must stay in the ground," Aljets added. "We are here at the scene of destruction to send out a clear signal for climate justice." ■

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!

SOCIALIST ACTION Closing news date: Nov. 8, 2017
 Editor: Michael Schreiber Canada Editor: Barry Weisleder

Socialist Action (ISSN 0747-4237) is published monthly by Socialist Action Publishing Association, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Socialist Action, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. RATES: For one year (12 issues, 1st-class mail): U.S., Canada, Mexico — \$20. All other countries — \$30. Money orders and checks should be in U.S. dollars.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of Socialist Action. These are expressed in editorials. Socialist Action is edited, designed, and laid out entirely by volunteer labor.



For info about Socialist Action and how to join: Socialist Action National Office, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610, (510) 268-9429, socialistaction@lmi.net

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

Socialist Action

Subscribe now!

— \$10 / six months — \$20 / 12 months — \$37 / two years

Name _____ Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ E-mail _____

— I want to join the Socialist Action Newspaper Supporters Club.
 I enclose an extra contribution of: — \$100 — \$200 — Other

Clip and mail to: Socialist Action newspaper, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610.
 Or subscribe on-line with a credit card at www.socialistaction.org.

WHERE TO FIND US

- BUFFALO, NY: wmysocialist@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
- MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL: (612) 802-1482, socialistaction@visi.com
- NEW YORK CITY: (212) 781-5157
- PHILADELPHIA: (267) 989-9035 organizer.philly@gmail.com
 Facebook: Red Philly

- PROVIDENCE: ADGAGNERI@GMAIL.COM (401) 952-5385
- SALEM, ORE.: ANNMONTAGUE@COMCAST.NET (971) 312-7369
- SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: P.O. Box 10328, OAKLAND, CA 94610 (510) 268-9429, sfsocialistaction@gmail.com
- WASHINGTON, DC: christopher.towne@gmail.com, (202) 286-5493

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

New tax plan: Rob the poor to pay the rich

The Wall Street Journal

By NICOLAS BRANNON

In the last month, the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress have begun preparing a tax cut bill that would be a huge benefit to rich people and corporations. The details are still being negotiated among the representatives of the bourgeoisie, but the basic goals are clear.

The bill would cut income taxes by \$1.5 trillion over a decade, with massive tax cuts for the wealthy, while shifting the tax burden further onto the working class. The few small crumbs that it has for working people will mostly be phased out after several years—often ending up with people paying higher taxes than they do now—while tax cuts for the wealthy are immediate or phased in and permanent.

The corporate income-tax rate would immediately be cut almost in half, to just 20 percent from its current 35 percent—the largest rate cut in history, at a time when corporate income tax as a share of GDP is already at an all-time low and corporate profits are at an all-time high.

The estate tax, which affects only the richest 0.2% of Americans, would be cut immediately by doubling the amount of inherited wealth that is exempt from taxation (up to \$11 million per person, \$22 million for couples) and then be gradually eliminated altogether over the next six years.

Donald Trump and his family would benefit directly from many of the cuts. For example, lowering the tax rate of so-called “pass-through” corporations—whose income is taxed as part of the owner’s income, which many of Trump’s companies are—to 25% would save Trump millions every year. Repealing the Alternative Minimum Tax, a provision that counteracts the endless tax deductions taken by the wealthy, would have saved Trump \$31 million in 2005, the year of his most recent leaked tax return. In addition, eliminating the estate tax would save Trump’s heirs



(Above) House Speaker Paul Ryan touts tax plan.

over \$1 billion in taxes.

Meanwhile, the bill offers little to workers and the middle class, who instead will bear the brunt of many of the tax increases that the bill contains to offset the massive cuts for the rich. One way it does this is by eliminating deductions and credits that primarily benefit the poor and middle class.

The deductions for student-loan interest is eliminated, as well as the deduction for medical expenses higher than 10% of a person’s income. The personal deduction of \$4050 for every member of a household is replaced with a larger standard deduction, which

Republicans claim is a counterweight, but which would leave many households paying more in taxes.

The bill would also raise taxes on immigrant parents by making them ineligible for the widely used child tax credit. The child tax credit, which is taken by low-income and middle-income parents, would be raised very slightly for a couple years, and then phased out altogether, in order to raise taxes on the working class right around the time that the estate tax is scheduled to be eliminated. ■

Labor Briefing

By BILL ONASCH

No VIPs in St Louis—The AFL-CIO quadrennial convention to elect officers and pass policy resolutions was held in St. Louis, Oct. 22-25. While many of the biggest unions—the National Education Association, Service Employees International Union, Teamsters, and Carpenters—are not affiliated, the federation still represents 12.5 million workers.

In response to police killings of African Americans, racial profiling, and voter suppression, St. Louis became the launching pad for the Black Lives Matter movement. A pre-convention conference on Diversity and Inclusion attracted hundreds of arriving delegates along with many in the local communities.

When speakers from Black Lives Matter didn’t show, it was discovered that entry of a BLM contingent had been blocked by Convention Center management. Hundreds of delegates then took the conference outside to join them in solidarity. After only a few minutes, management relented and all marched in to the scheduled venue.

The three top officers—Richard Trumka, president; Liz Shuler, secretary-treasurer; Tefre Gebre, executive vice president—were reelected without opposition. In their acceptance speeches all three spoke to the convention theme—Join Together; Fight Together; Win Together. But underlying this surface of unity were currents of major differences that often were responsible for glaring omissions and compromises in the 56 adopted resolutions.

There was a resolution “War Is Not the Answer,” but unions in the war industries insisted on another, “Support 100 Percent Buy American In Defense.” The Labor Campaign for Single-Payer did a good job in putting the federation on record supporting the “Medicare For All” campaign. But the same resolution said they would for now also keep on championing the Afford-

able Care Act, aka ObamaCare, written by and for the insurance Robber Barons.

Perhaps the most contentious issue of all is climate change. The building trades, rail, and mine worker unions, eager to get fossil-fuel-related jobs, take a position similar to Trump’s. Other affiliates like National Nurses United and the Amalgamated Transit Union are part of the Labor Network for Sustainability, which advocates a Just Transition approach to protecting workers whose jobs will be lost in the switch to clean, renewable energy. The two sides faced off and nearly came to blows during the Tribes’ occupation at Standing Rock, which attempted to block construction of the Dakota Access pipeline.

Resolution 55, “Climate Change, Energy and Union Jobs,” was in most respects a big advance. It unequivocally endorsed the consensus of climate scientists about the devastating impact of global warming resulting from carbon emissions and urged the U.S. government to implement commitments in the Paris Climate Accords. And it advocates Just Transition for displaced workers and their communities affected by energy restructuring.

But while promoting clean, renewable energy alternatives that are crucial to ending carbon emissions, it also throws a dangerous sop to coal miners and the building trades by including gimmicks like the coal industry pipe dream of “carbon capture and storage”—and nuclear power.

There is never going to be “clean coal.” Nuclear reactors don’t emit greenhouse gases but they do leave behind radioactive waste that remains dangerous to humans for centuries. There is no known protocol for securing this threat over such a time span. And, of course, there is the danger of catastrophic accidents like Chernobyl, Fukushima, and Three Mile Island. Nukes



(From left) Liz Shuler, AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer; Richard Trumka, president; Tefre Gebre, exec. vice president—all reelected.

have no place in our energy future.

There were other good resolutions on immigration, public education, fighting fascism, \$15 minimum wage, and the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico. But all 56 share a common attribute—their objectives cannot be achieved through collective bargaining. They are all essentially political questions. And unions in the United States are the only labor movement in the English-speaking world not to have a labor party of their own.

Past AFL-CIO conventions typically featured speeches by big-name Democrat “friends of labor.” Usually, that was about all that interested the corporate media. But such Establishment VIPs were not invited this year. This was a belated recognition of what polls have shown over the past several years—the working-class majority is fed up with both major parties and think there should be a new alternative.

Resolution 2, “An Independent Political Voice,” begins: “For decades, the political system has failed working people. Acting on behalf of corporations and the rich and powerful, the political system has been taking away, one after another, the pillars that support working people’s right to good jobs and secure benefits.”

That’s true enough—though socialists would begin the time line around the Industrial Revolution. Resolution 2 continues: “Against this, we have one choice. We must give working people greater political power by speaking with an unquestionably independent political voice, backed by a unified labor movement.” But “voice” is

not a party, and power cannot be shared between hostile classes.

There appeared to be three distinct camps with incompatible visions among the delegates:

- The bureaucracy that still follows the advice of Samuel Gompers, the first president of the American Federation of Labor, to reward your friends and punish your enemies among the candidates of the two boss parties.

- Leaders of several major activist unions that support the effort of the “socialist” Bernie Sanders to transform the Democrats into “labor’s voice.”

- A smaller but significant group that wants to revive the once promising, now defunct Labor Party.

The first two strategies have a long, well-documented track record of failure. It’s high time that American workers, like our British class siblings, choose option 3.

UE Beats Koch Brothers—The Trumpite Iowa state legislature hoped to wipe out public-sector unions by requiring them to be recertified every year in which they negotiate a contract. That means winning an election with a majority of the bargaining unit, not just of those voting. The independent United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers has six contracts coming up. The UE won all six, with 87 percent opting to stay union.

Glad Grads—Finally overcoming objections and delays by the University of Chicago administration, U of C graduate student workers got their chance to vote in an NLRB representation election in late October. It wasn’t close—1,103 to 479 in favor of Grad Students United, affiliated with the Illinois Federation of Teachers. This necessary first step now leads to the challenge of negotiating a first contract. ■

If you have a story for the Labor Briefing please contact billonasch@kclabor.org



No to Article 155! Solidarity with the Catalan people!

On Oct. 27, the parliament of Catalonia voted for independence from the Spanish state. However, on the same day, the central government in Madrid, citing Article 155 of the constitution, dissolved the Catalan parliament and nullified its vote.

Below is a response to those events, issued on Oct. 30 by the Izquierda Anticapitalista Revolucionaria (IZAR), an organization of revolutionary socialists in the Spanish state that is in solidarity with the current inside the Fourth International supporting the "Platform for a Revolutionary International."

What economic growth is in danger?

In this escalation of the sharpening of the conflict between the Spanish state and Catalonia, the ruling classes continue pressing in order to paralyze the process. With the interests of the Catalan bourgeoisie threatened due to the increasing polarization between the Catalan government and the central government, a large part of it has begun to align its discourse with that of the Spanish bourgeoisie, pointing out that continuing to follow the road map of the DUI would place the entire economic recovery in danger.

This recovery has been exclusive to capital, with estimated benefits for the IBEX 35 companies this year of some 43.4 billion euros, while the situation of the working class continues to worsen day by day due to the cuts and the job insecurity that we have suffered

from the beginning of the crisis.

It is indeed ironic to listen to members of the PP [People's Party, the main party in the Madrid parliament] talk about the detrimental effects of instability in Catalonia on pensions, when they have spent years in cutting them, or to listen to the PDeCAT [Catalan European Democratic Party] and ERC [Republican Left of Catalonia] denounce the PP's adjustment policies, when during all these years their own policies have hardly been better than those of [Spanish Prime Minister Mariano] Rajoy.

However, we must try to see beyond the politics of fear when we analyze the relocation of the headquarters of more than 1000 companies outside the territory of Catalonia, or when they speak of the brake on foreign investment and the fall of tourism in Catalonia and its catastrophic repercussions in the Spanish economy.

The extension of the budgets of 2018, with a forecast of a GDP below 2.6%, or the drop in public spending on education and health to historic lows in the forecasts for 2018, show that the capitalists want to continue making us pay for the crisis while they earn money. And the consequences of this new economic recession will be none other than a new attack on the working class to alleviate it.

The instability in Catalonia will be simply the mantle that they use to cover up the structural weaknesses

within the growth of these years and those of the capitalist system itself. Therefore, let's not allow them to deceive us. In the whole of the Spanish state we have more in common with the Catalan worker than with the Spanish capitalist. Defending a democratic right as basic as the right to decide remains a component of elementary solidarity among peoples.

Let's not allow them to deceive us. If Rajoy, the IBEX 35, the King, and the EU, which have battered the working class and the youth so hard in these years, are so nervous, it is not because the possible independence of Catalonia would be detrimental to the interests of working people, but simply because it calls into question the rule of the regime of '78, the monarchy, and the immediate interests of the Spanish capitalists—and above all, because the struggle for the right to decide can unchain other social struggles in Catalonia that put deeper changes on the table.

Against their repression, our solidarity

With the presentation of Article 155, any doubt has been removed about the reactionary attack that was to take place as soon as the [Catalan] government backed down.

The dismissal of [Catalan President] Puigdemont, [Catalan Vice President] Junqueras, and the councilors, and the designation of newly created figures for the ministries; the disqualification of the parliament for any function that is not administrative, and the capacity of Rajoy to suspend it leaves the Catalan Chamber as a merely decorative element.

For now, we do not know how long this situation can last—set for six months at the maximum and supposedly ending with the call for new elections in Catalonia, and leaving in doubt how they will avoid the triumph of a new pro-independence candidacy.

The hypothesis that we in Izquierda Anticapitalista Revolucionaria (IZAR) are putting forward is that it will serve as a prelude to a constitutional reform with a marked reactionary character, with a strengthening of state centralism in all its forms—not only territorial but also in repressive matters. There are numerous historical examples of how exceptional governmental measures were applied in a more generalized form to suppress social struggles.

In fact, beginning in 2011, when the social response to the cutbacks policies arose, the response was a hardening of repression through the Gag Law. Consequently, in the face of new cuts and adjustment policies that can be glimpsed on the horizon, there is no doubt that the bourgeoisie is preparing to prevent possible responses from the working class and youth. We need to understand state repression in the sense that, while today it is the Catalan people, surely in the distant future it will be the rest of the working class in the Spanish state.

Mobilization for the power to decide

The workers in Catalonia are the only ones who can assume the right to decide, at the same time that they are the ones who can best counteract the repression of

(continued on page 5)

Puerto Rico & the U.S. — 'All Wall Street cares about is profit'

In October, Socialist Action reporter Ernie Gotta connected with Mikael Rosa of the Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano to see what the political situation was like in Puerto Rico following the devastating hurricanes. Mikael also spoke in New Britain, Conn., on Nov. 4 during the "The Solution is Socialism" conference.

Socialist Action: What is the situation on the ground? Can you explain how relief efforts are progressing?

Mikael Rosa: Is very important to make a distinction between what is happening in the metropolitan area, and the rest of the island. The reality is that there are areas that the local and imperial authorities have not even looked at. We still have people without basic supplies like water and food. People have lost their entire houses, and others are facing the challenge of acquiring medicines and treatment for serious diseases like diabetes and cancer. While this happens, our hospitals are having energy problems, and their generators are not working.

SA: FEMA had this to say about the crisis in Puerto Rico: "Not our job to de-

liver water and food." President Trump echoed that sentiment when he made a statement about pulling back federal relief. What is your response to the U.S. government?

MR: Those statements are just part of their public policy as colonizers. Colonies are a business, and all they care about is profit. If this situation related to Hurricane Maria endangers their interests, they prefer to let the Puerto Rican population suffer, instead of providing the humanitarian aid required.

SA: Trump took to Twitter and made the following remarks: "Puerto Rico survived the hurricanes, now a financial crisis looms largely of their own making," says Sharyl Attkisson. A total lack of accountability, says the governor. Electric and all infrastructure was disaster before hurricanes." In reality, it is not hard for one to imagine that the legacy of colonialism alongside the forced placement of the fiscal control board has had a major impact. Can you explain the real root causes of the disastrous infrastructure and financial crisis?

MR: The economy of a colony functions for the colonizers' interests. For decades, U.S. corporations have taken large

amounts of profit from us, thanks to tax exemptions. We don't have the tools to create our own economic project, nor to protect our national production. Federal-imposed laws do not let us develop local industries.

So, as time passed, the Puerto Rican economy was based on speculation—and now we all know the consequences of that. Actually, I think President Trump knows very well the roots from our crisis, since he was one of those who took advantage from the economic speculation here in Puerto Rico.

SA: How does Wall Street view the situation? Do they stand to benefit? Is there a real possibility of developers and banks taking over large sections of land?

MR: All Wall Street cares about is profit. I don't want it to sound like a dogma or a mantra, but it is proven that all they care about is their money. Before hurricane Maria it was extremely difficult to pay our debt, but now it is impossible to pay it. If they insist in making us pay an illegal debt, they will make even worse the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico.

SA: Can you explain role of the governor and local politicians in Puerto Rico in relation to the exploitation by the United

States?

MR: The best answer to this question is to take a quick look at the visit by President Trump to Puerto Rico. Our local politicians are allies of U.S. interests. They were smiling while Mr. Trump was making fun of our situation. They thought that the federal government would quickly solve our situation. Instead, what we are facing is humiliation, with the consent of our local politicians.

SA: Please explain for our readers the meaning of the struggle for independence in the wake of the current crisis.

MR: A basic requirement for the development of a country is the capacity to have open and free negotiations with the whole world. In this context, it is essential to receive aid and relief from every part of the world. Our political situation does not even let us have direct contact with other countries in order to move forward in our recuperations.

The fact that we are not an independent country means that we won't be able to build a new country under our terms. Instead, the recuperations will be in function of U.S. interests. As a consequence, we will go back to the same problems and crisis. ■

Drexel professor suspended following right-wing attack

By WAYNE DELUCA

PHILADELPHIA—George Ciccariello-Maher, a controversial left-wing professor at Drexel University in this city, was placed on administrative leave after a string of death threats from far-right internet trolls. All of his classes were cancelled for the quarter without a replacement. The university has stated that this is a step meant to “ensure the safety of our campus.”

Last December, Ciccariello-Maher came under intense fire for a Twitter post saying, “All I want for Christmas is White Genocide.” As a Political Science professor, Ciccariello-Maher has repeatedly criticized the concept of “white genocide” as a fiction used by far-right reactionaries, and the tweet was clearly satirical. At the time, Drexel “condemned” the tweet but did not take action. Now, after tweets blaming Las Vegas shooter Stephen Paddock’s actions on white supremacy and patriarchy drew the ire of internet Nazis, he has been suspended.

There have been rumors that classes may continue on-line. A student in one of Ciccariello-Maher’s courses told *Socialist Action*, “We don’t want that; the class was meant to be in person since it’s heavily discussion-based.”

As a professor teaching radical theory and vocally opposing the far-right in their on-line stomping grounds, Ciccariello-Maher has drawn attention. In an editorial in the *Washington Post*, he wrote, “As a scholar and teacher, giving context and depth to contemporary debates is an important part of what I do, and it’s a calling I take seriously.”

The Intercept, an on-line platform funded by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and lent credibility by journalists such as Glenn Greenwald and Jeremy Scahill, published an attack by Zaid Jilani called “Left-Wing Drexel Professor Who Opposes Free Speech Has His Curtailed.” This cowardly article quotes “The College Fix,” a right-wing blog with connections to Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and implies that, because Ciccariello-Maher thinks that racist educators should be fired, he does not deserve free speech or academic freedom. This is not the quality journalism that *The Intercept* touts, but rather an open and personal attack.

Ciccariello-Maher told *Socialist Action*: “It’s disap-



(Above) Drexel Prof. George Ciccariello-Maher.

pointing to see *The Intercept* publish a poorly timed and poorly thought-out personal attack at a time when solidarity is more necessary than ever to block the right-wing campus takeover. Jilani’s screed is an embarrassment for himself and for *The Intercept*.”

This is far from the only recent attack on left-wing academics. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, an African-American socialist who teaches at Princeton, had to cancel public speaking engagements due to death threats. Johnny Williams, at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., was suspended because of a quote on Facebook. And a recent rule change by the University of Wisconsin regents could punish students for actions that “[disrupt] the free speech of others.”

Following a few high-profile protests, particularly at the University of California at Berkeley, the far right has created a false narrative (echoed in the capitalist media) about “free speech” being in peril for rac-

ists and fascists. In reality, though, the chilling effect is strongest against the left wing on campus. This is particularly true of supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement for human rights in Palestine. Laws such as that passed in the state of New York, as well as pro-Israel groups, have been on the offensive against professors and campus groups fighting for justice in Palestine.

Socialist Action opposes any restrictions by universities or governments on free expression. We believe that fascists and racists need to be opposed, not by regulating their speech, but by counter-mobilization through mass action.

We support George Ciccariello-Maher and demand that he be reinstated immediately and allowed to teach without censure or restriction. ■

... Catalonia

(continued from page 4)

the state and the capitalists. Faced with the take-over of TV3 [the main Catalan TV channel] by the Rajoy government, who could be better to contravene that intervention than TV3’s own workers? The editorial board ought to become the wage-earning employees of the media.

Faced with the supposed flight of companies and banks in Catalonia, what better measure is there to respond to these pressures than nationalization under the control of the workers of those banks and companies?

If the bankers and the businessmen want to leave, let them go! But let the money and the companies remain, and under the control of those who must work for a liv-

ing. The method by which this can be carried out goes through the self-organization of our class in the workplace and in the neighborhoods, and by an extended general strike.

For this reason, the fact that the working class would stand at the head of the democratic right to decide of the Catalan people acquires a fundamental character. A scenario like this would open the way to allow us to recognize our own right to decide, as a social class, about how we should live. Their crisis need not be our crisis, just as the crisis of their political system is not a problem but an *opportunity* to end their antisocial policies.

For this our response must be coordinated and powerful, presenting a common front before the two bourgeoisies, weakening the pillars of those responsible for labor reforms, cuts in pensions, and evictions, as are the monarchy or the unity of Spain. And the best way to do

that is with a general strike in Catalonia that extends to the rest of the [Spanish] state and that unifies solidarity for Catalan independence with [demands for] the non-payment of the debt, repeal of all labor reforms, prohibition of dismissals, retirement at age 60, and the rest of our claims.

Faced with the divisions that they try to generate among the working class, we have to respond together. In Catalonia, [this requires] encouraging spaces for self-organization that can organize this method of struggle; and in the rest of the Spanish state, generating ties of solidarity in the work centers and educational campuses.

The struggle of the workers there is that of the entire working class and youth, and we must organize it with the same intensity from within but also from outside Catalonia. ■

... Puerto Rico

(continued from page 1)

has fallen squarely on the poorest and most vulnerable: the fiscal control board has cut public health spending by a third, lowered the minimum wage for workers below the age of 24 to \$4.25 an hour, raised utility bills, cut the public pension system, and closed public schools.

The hurricanes, however, have enabled the intensification of this ruling-class offensive. Demands for the cancellation of Puerto Rico’s debt by the U.S. Congress have been bluntly rejected. In fact, the majority of the disaster relief allocated to Puerto Rico by the House is in additional loans of more than \$5 billion, rather than grants, as is typical for disaster relief to U.S. states. In the same bill, the House cancelled \$16 billion in loans for the National Flood Insurance Program—but not a dollar of Puerto Rico’s debt. Such “disaster aid” will only indebt Puerto Rico further and expand the austerity demands from the fiscal control board.

The U.S. government and the disaster capitalists will not concede anything without a fight. We are not helpless in the face of this offensive, however. By building a mass movement of workers and students, we can

win. We’ve already seen a small taste of that when the Trump administration was forced by public pressure to issue a temporary waiver for the Jones Act to aid disaster relief.

Without a mass movement that can educate people about these struggles and keep the pressure up, however, such victories will be transient. Ten days after issuing the temporary waiver, the Trump administration declared that it would not renew it.

There are millions of Puerto Ricans living in the continental United States—more than live on Puerto Rico. This diaspora can form the core of a movement and build connections to the labor movement and other oppressed peoples; it has done so in the past. The struggles to close the U.S. Naval base at Vieques and to free Oscar López Rivera could not have been won without mass movements centered on the diaspora. The mass strikes of Puerto Rican students against austerity can also serve as a template for building resistance to austerity and disaster capitalism.

As Puerto Rico struggles to recover from the devastation wrought by the hurricanes, it is imperative that the disaster capitalist offensive following in their wake, and the austerity and privatization campaign it forms a key element of, are met and defeated. Puerto Rico’s electricity infrastructure must be rebuilt, on the basis of solar, wind, and other renewable sources, and

maintained under public ownership.

Puerto Rico must be freed from the undemocratic fiscal control board installed by the U.S. government. And the onerous debt burden, imposed on Puerto Rico in no small part through U.S. colonialism and corporate handouts, must be cancelled. The austerity drive that is devastating workers, students, and vulnerable people across Puerto Rico must end.

The capitalist class hopes to use the hurricanes as a cover to expand their profits at the expense of Puerto Ricans, and should they succeed, the model created will undoubtedly be adapted elsewhere at the expense of working people across the U.S. and around the world. We must show them that we will not accept disaster capitalism—in Puerto Rico or anywhere else.

We must also remember that, while all of these immediate goals are necessary, they are not sufficient. The debt crisis in Puerto Rico and the general impoverishment of Puerto Rican workers are not accidents that can be resolved merely by clearing away some of their accumulated damage. They are constructions of the twin systems that bind Puerto Rico—capitalism and colonialism. Left alone, they will continue to reproduce poverty, fiscal dependency, and vulnerability.

The only way out is to shatter the twin shackles and build a socialist Puerto Rico run by and for workers rather than Wall Street. ■

How capitalism uses gender oppression to rule

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Following is the text of a talk delivered by the author on Nov. 4 at the “The Solution is Socialism” educational conference in Connecticut. The conference was hosted by the Youth for Socialist Action chapter at Central Connecticut State University, where the sessions were held.

Usually, when I begin a talk about Marxism and feminism, I pick one of the latest outrages to the dignity of women and gender non-conforming people to stand in for all that capitalism has meant in the past and has in store for us in the future. This time, I had a *lot* of trouble choosing. In the last several weeks, we watched a strong 17-year-old without papers, sequestered in a refugee center, forced to stand up to the entire arsenal of the state of the most powerful capitalist nation on earth in order to be allowed to buy an abortion for herself.

Her story was punctuated by Trump’s racist and sexist denunciation of “welfare queens” stealing from the public, just as he was driving forward on a tax bill designed to utterly demolish any survival of the social pact made by the capitalist class in the wake of the rebellious Thirties. Within days, his administration threatened transgender soldiers with the kind of discharges that could condemn them to a life of joblessness, ostracism, and poverty.

And each morning as we click onto our news feed, we read the names and stories of the victims of sexual harassment that occupy the loftiest positions in the realm of the arts, the corporate world, and the U.S. Congress.

Faced with this overwhelming demonstration of the social subordination of women and those who are gender non-conforming, one would expect an uprising. Instead, the only leadership actually visible on the public stage called a National Women’s Convention whose mission was to prepare women to take up positions *within* this system and run for office, acting as if the two-party shell game that got us to this place was really a vehicle for change.

Why did this happen? Why is this the default response to the offensive against our ability to survive with dignity? In part it is because, despite a century and a half of betrayal on reproductive justice, child care, education, and elder care, many feminist activists retain deep illusions in the system, imagining that capitalism, with a bit more reasoning, with a few more mobilizations, with a few more liberal legislators, can actually be shaped into something that can emancipate us.

Socialists disagree. We believe that gender subordination is shown historically to be so integral to the functioning of the capitalist economy and the ability of big business to make profits, that lasting and fundamental changes will be only be made once we can break apart the most basic components of this system and create something entirely new.

Capitalism is a system in which all production is organized to make profits. Profits come from what value is produced by workers in the factory above and beyond what the boss gives in wages so that the worker can sustain himself or herself, and those who are dependent, and those who cannot yet work or can no longer work.

The boss, who is competing with other capitalists, needs to constantly increase profits, and after all other measures have been taken, in the end, can only do it by trying to lower wages. That is, capitalism is a system that works well only by impoverishing those who create its wealth.

To retain privately as much of the surplus society produces as possible, the capitalist class tries to put all the financial responsibility for the care and maintenance and reproduction of the working class onto the individual, usually using the vehicle of the nuclear family.

Women’s, and less frequently men’s, unpaid care and nurturing labor in the home and community have been an essential way for the capitalist class to keep the system humming. Having some section of



the female working class carry out unpaid labor in the home, in turn, by the logic of the system, makes women’s waged labor cheap.

When it is useful to pull these women into the waged work force to make profits, this sectoral, service, or care work is privatized. It becomes feminized low-wage labor, and the fact of its existence is used to try to lower the wages of the working class as a whole.

Unpaid, precarious, temporary, part-time, low-wage women workers who leave and return episodically to the full-time labor pool at the capitalists’ whim play an essential role in making the profit system work for the bosses.

There *are* mechanisms other than gender that help the capitalists keep a pool of surplus labor around. National oppression and immigration are just two others. Regimes to replace workers based something other than gender—slavery and work camps—are sometimes temporarily deployed to handle social reproduction. But it is gender that is the backbone of the system of surplus labor *and* social reproduction as a whole in the capitalist mode of production.

These two poles—a privatized realm of social production based on unpaid work that keeps part of the working-class family educated, healthy, and sane enough to keep punching the clock *and* big pools of warehoused surplus workers that keep wages down—are integral to the production for profit system.

There are variations in implementation. And there are divisions among capitalists about how, practically speaking, to organize social reproduction at any specific time. But these contingencies do not challenge the general workings of the system.

The current debate over taxation, for example, is really about just how far the bosses want to go in terms of cutting the social wage. Just how far can they go in terms of placing the burden for the maintenance of daily life on the individual workers and their families before there is a revolt?

In truth, all the talk of deficits and taxation, all the efforts of big business to lower its tax rate, are really about their increasing unwillingness, in the face of

(Both pages) Posters from the Russian Revolution: The socialist revolution of 1917 initiated far reaching measures and debate aimed at the liberation of women and gender non-conforming people.

new global competition and a declining rate of profit, to continue social spending on education, health care, housing, child care, elder care, safe water, safe food, and so on.

When Congress battles over taxation rates and budgets, a great deal of what they are fighting over really does have to do with how much they can avoid paying the cost of providing these necessities to the working class as a whole without provoking a really threatening response. The wing of the capitalist class driving through the current tax reform is pretty confident, given our level of fightback, that they can go lower and still stay in power.

Capitalists steadily reduce the social wage

The amount of the social wage is determined by the class struggle. For the last 40 years, unfortunately, this has been an almost one-sided war, with capitalists in a global crisis consistently and successfully chipping away at the social wage and conditions of working-class life until, today, they feel that they should not have to pay to insure clean water in Flint or an inspector in a meat-packing plant.

It is this relationship between social reproduction and production for profit, alongside the ruling class’s constant calculation regarding how much the working class will resist, that keeps us in the loop of progress and retreat on issues such as reproductive justice, the disciplining of sexuality and gender expression, and the use of sexual violence and harassment.

None of this is determined in a completely predictable way by the conjunctural circumstances of production and profit. But the connections are demonstrable over time and space, and we ignore this fundamental relationship at our own peril. I have seen the waxing and waning in my own time, coming

(continued on page 7)



... Gender oppression

(continued from page 6)

of age in the post-World War II boom amidst the tremendous gains of second-wave feminism and living through the historic defeats of the gendered neoliberal offensive of the last decades.

The ferocity of today's attacks on women and gender non-conforming people cannot be fully understood outside of the context of the current, even more intense global capitalist crisis. These connections show us that no victory is permanent or secure as long as this mode of production is in place.

Let us remind ourselves of how neoliberal capitalism has been functioning on a global scale for the last 40 years. The off-shoring of a lot of low-wage industry was carried out only with a sophisticated gendering of global labor and the use of hoary patriarchal setups to keep those women vulnerable and unorganized.

Peter Custers, in his studies of women's labor in Asian economies, has documented how the development of the garment industry in Bangladesh and Pakistan was accompanied by the *recreation*, the *resuscitation* and *reshaping*, by urban elites of traditional rural conditions that kept women coming to the city for jobs but tied to peasant family structures that disciplined them.

Lourdes Arizepe described the same process in Mexican strawberry agribusiness. Manipulating the circumstances of social reproduction to assure profitable production is a generalized phenomenon. Within the sweatshops—whether in South Asia, Africa, or the borderlands here—sexual harassment is used systematically to keep workforces quiescent.

A range of studies from the last several decades confirms this. A study of women in the export processing zones of the Dominican Republic found that 40% were sexually harassed by their bosses. Another study in Kenya found that 90% of women in the export zone were sexually harassed. And in each of these countries, imperialist-mandated austerity programs cut water, education, and health, and so dramatically increased the unpaid labor load of women.

So, the neoliberal period has seen gender used brutally in both production and social reproduction. The sheer number of women that began work during this period for subsistence or less than subsistence wages was cited by *The Economist* as the largest source of economic growth in the world by 2006. The cuts in the social safety net lowered corporate and elite taxes everywhere. Since the 2008 crash, we can only imagine that this whole process has deepened.

These stories can be told about gendered labor in the United States as well. In fast food operations in the U.S., a 2016 study reported, the percentage of sexual harassment of women was 40%. And in 2014, the Restaurant Opportunities Center found sexual harassment among restaurant workers (women and men) registering at 90%. Had the kitchen workers been employed further back on the food chain, they would have suffered systematic sexual violence in the fields, as documented in a NPR special in 2014.

'Social revolution, though never a guarantee, is a prerequisite for female and sexual liberation.'

My father-in-law's cousin organized female Jewish jewelry workers in New York City in the 1930s—and guess what? The union won the shop because it promised to put an end to the morning lineup, in which the male foremen would greet their employees by walking along the line and feeling up each of them, just to let them know who was the boss.

"Jane Doe," as an immigrant coming to work in the U.S. without papers, likely to be subject to persistent wage theft and extreme exploitation, all the while still sending funds home to help privately raise the next generation of such workers, could be the embodiment of this global and gendered process. The efforts to control her reproduction could be taken from the annals of any colonial operation from history, as they all used gender subordination as one tool of conquest.

Russian Revolution: steps to liberate women

When you think about it this way, you realize that gender subordination is not an accident or something to be held over that could be cleared up if we get some more enlightened people into the Congress. For the vast majority of working-class women and gender non-conforming people, the pain and fear associated with it is omnipresent. This is because it is undeniably part of the way that the system functions.

It can seem overwhelming. It is so normalized. But history shows us that it does not have to be this way. One hundred years ago, in 1917, a women's demonstration for bread in Petrograd, Russia, turned into the first mobilization of a revolution that upended the entire social system organized production for profit. This revolution had a leadership determined to break women free from the drudgery of the compulsory and repressive family mandated by the Orthodox Church, and immediately made simple divorce available to all.

Children born outside of a religious marriage could no longer be considered "illegitimate." Abortion became free and legal. "Sodomy" was decriminalized for only the second time in modern history. Community kitchens and nurseries and laundries that could replace the unpaid labor in the family were built despite tremendous economic stress.

In those years, for a brief time, the most far-reaching experimentation and debate on the way to organize society to free women was on the agenda. There is at least one same-sex marriage on the court dockets from this period. Radical thinking about sexuality was generalized and exhilarating. Russia's advances were discussed in international conferences in the Berlin of Magnus Hirschfeld, a pioneer advocate for LGBTQI rights.

This amazing working-class effort to emancipate working women, according to LGBTQI researchers

into the period like Jason Yanowitz, would very likely have led in time to even more far-reaching conceptions of gender variability and rights. Sadly, it was cut short by imperialist intervention in the Soviet Union, civil war, a period of scarcity, and a bureaucratic counterrevolution. But it happened, and shows us what is possible if we manage to take the reins of power and organize society on the basis of fulfilling human needs, collective responsibility for social reproduction, and individual dignity. Social revolution, though never a guarantee, is a prerequisite for female and sexual liberation.

The tasks for today

Clearly we are not now on the verge of a revolutionary upsurge. But revolutions are not spontaneous. The ideas that they implemented in 1917 and 1918 had been debated in the factories and working-class women's organizations for decades. The women who led this transformation had worked for decades to create a working-class political party that was clear on these issues and capable of leading in the decisive moments.

This one brilliant moment when all of everyday life could be reorganized was prepared, in truth, by generations of work. This is the broad task before us today: Building our organizations. Struggling to achieve clarity on the most advanced questions around sexuality and gender and, with others, theorizing emancipatory solutions. Creating spaces where regular people can learn of their potential power.

Socialists need to join up with forces like those who initiated the International Women's Day strike solidarity action on March 8 and to begin to create nodes of a women's movement for the 99%, a movement that privileges the struggles of working-class women, including trans women, and that recognizes the leadership of African American and immigrant women. We need a movement that is independent of the Democratic Party and full of spaces in which working women can find their radical political voices. A movement where working women can learn, debate, and build their confidence as leaders.

Such a movement, by the way, is also essential if we are to successfully counter the right-wing ideological offensive that managed to draw in working women alienated from "lean-in" feminism and the Hillary Clintons of this world. Twentieth-century European history tells us in no uncertain terms that failure on this score can lead to actions and events that are unthinkable.

This movement has to exist on a community and campus level. But its cadres must also be part of building a left wing in the unions that can mobilize the most combative sections of our class in support of the unorganized, in support of child care, elder care, health care, housing—all the social services we need to free women and other care givers for leadership.

And we must look for the moments when we can carry out exemplary struggles that make a movement independent of the Democrats look viable to the unorganized. Has such a movement existed? Yes, of course, it has in many historical contexts. In fact, women's movements with these characteristics are in formation, and one of them in Argentina, Pan y Rosas, is the topic of our next speaker, Tatiana Cozzarelli of *Left Voice*. ■

Construction site murder was avoidable



By a WORKING CARPENTER

On Oct. 5, a recently fired carpenter, Samuel Perry, 42, arrived at a Midtown Manhattan job site to pick up his last paycheck. He shot his foreman, 37-year-old Christopher Sayers twice, killing him. He then turned the gun on himself. Both men were members of Carpenters' Local 212, a concrete construction local that aims to reclaim concrete construction in the city, where 70% of concrete work has gone non-union.

Sayers was praised by co-workers as a "good guy" and a good foreman, while some newspaper reports said that Perry was a "hothead." Newspaper accounts were quick to highlight Perry's past criminal record, but this is a distraction. It would be easy to vilify Perry and turn the discussion towards a discussion of the toxic effects of masculinity and gun culture, but there's more at stake here.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports an increase in workplace homicides of "2 percent, to 417 cases in 2015, with shootings increasing by 15 percent." We have to ask, how do construction unions and workers deal with the question of workplace violence?

The atmosphere in commercial construction is filled with stress and the pressure to perform. Deadlines loom and the urgency of meeting them is intense. This means that subcontractors, especially in concrete and interior systems, who often operate on a slim profit margin, engage in speed-up, cut cor-

ners on safety, and generally mistreat their workers. Foremen are under pressure to meet production goals and will push workers to perform. This creates a situation that one of my co-workers calls "rowing the boat for Pharaoh." Solidarity between workers is undermined at every turn in the construction trades.

The threat of firing or layoff is always present. The uncertainty associated with construction work takes a heavy toll on the mental health of workers. Alcoholism and other problems run rampant. The unions, more often than not, are complicit.

There is rarely any sort of grievance procedure, the union regularly refers to contractors as our "partners" in the business, and union representatives have been known to threaten to blacklist "unproductive" workers.

Standing up to the foreman over an abusive workplace situation or a safety concern is your ticket to the unemployment line. If you have a problem with a supervisor, your recourse is to quit, get laid off, or start looking for another job. In the feast-or-famine world of construction, economic downturns mean that workers who are not "steady" company people are cast out. Older workers, people of color, and women are often the last hired and the first fired. Workers who haven't been able to find "steady" employment with contractors are sometimes referred to as "hall trash."

The Carpenters union (UBC) itself is an increasingly top-down and bureaucratic institution. Locals and

district councils have been consolidated into larger and larger units. For example, the Philadelphia Metropolitan Council of Carpenters was forcibly "consolidated" with the New Jersey based Northeast Regional Council, creating a council that covers New York (excluding New York City), New Jersey, southeastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. In the process, local unions were dissolved and unified into large mega locals. None of this change in the structure of the Philadelphia carpenters was done in consultation with the members.

The right to vote on union policies or the leadership "teams" is virtually non-existent. The UBC was never a shining example of union democracy, but the ascension of Doug McCarron to the post of General President of the International Union marked a sea change in the internal life of the union. Under the McCarron regime, the union has pursued a more openly class-collaborationist policy, stripped democratic rights of members, and consolidated councils and locals throughout the union. Most members feel alienated from the union.

Union health plans offer little in the way of mental health support, and the general atmosphere of macho behavior puts pressure on workers to "suck it up" or "man up." Workers can be cold about the personal situations of other workers because the threat of layoff always looms. "Better them than me" is a common thought.

Avoiding future tragedies will require fundamental change in the building trades unions themselves. Democratic unions controlled by the members and based on solidarity and struggle for the rights and living standards of the members is crucial. This requires rebuilding the unions in a way that includes oppressed nationalities and women as equals. Class-collaborationist policies that see the bosses as "partners" have to go. Union benefit plans should increase the support given to members who suffer mental health crises. Cutting the workweek without loss in pay and making sure that the work is shared during slowdowns is necessary.

Union action to stop speed-up, production quotas, and abusive workplace practices is essential. Workers and foremen should be trained to recognize the signs of mental illness.

Ultimately, the problems of construction unions and members flow from the profit-driven nature of the business. Members build luxury condos while struggling to keep a roof over their own heads. Millions of people remain in substandard housing and pay exorbitant rents, while construction booms in gentrifying areas. This speaks volumes about the perverse nature of an economic system based on greed rather than production for human needs. ■

50 stories above New York City — Interview with an apprentice union carpenter

By ERNIE GOTTA

Last August, a 22-year-old apprentice fell to his death on a construction site. Fatalities and injuries are increasing each year in the building trades. Young class-conscious workers like Mari Lamarca are trying to figure out how to take on the bosses while building strong unions that are in tune with the needs of rank-and-file members. Lamarca, a union carpenter apprentice, discusses the day-to-day pressures from 50 stories above New York City.

Ernie Gotta: Can you briefly describe what it's like to be an apprentice carpenter? What is it like working in the building trades?

Mari Lamarca: Being an apprentice in the unionized building trades has numerous sides to it. I have been a member of the Carpenters for two years now, but before I joined the union I did floor covering and landscaping. The biggest difference is pay and benefits. Before, I had to work hard for \$12-\$15 an hour. As a first-year apprentice in the union, I started at \$21 an hour. I also have a pension,

which I can keep track of on-line, health care, dental care, and a vacation check which I get every three months.

Economically, the benefits are clear. The other major advantages are job training, free certification classes, and my personal favorite—the out-of-work list. It's much easier to find a job and it's reduced significant amounts of anxiety for me.

The bad side is that the construction unions have subscribed to a business unionism ideology for a long time now. On the job that has various manifestations. Because technology has yet to have a significant impact on construction, the companies have to resort to management and psychological techniques to extract more from us.

For example, we are condescended to frequently—especially the apprentices. On arrival, we're treated as idiots until we prove otherwise. This makes us feel as if any day we could be laid off, which of course causes us to be more complacent. There are also other unwritten rules, but which everyone follows. If you have to use the restroom, it is considered a waste of time and another reason to be laid off.

Instead of 30 minutes for lunch, we have between 12-12:30, which on a 50-story building with two hoist elevators and several trades going up or down, is simply not going to happen.

Then, of course, there are the explicitly illegal actions. It's not hard to imagine what we go through. The boss prioritizes profit and will do anything to increase that. I've been on jobs where they wouldn't provide dust masks, requiring that I buy them from my wages. Or they give us inadequate dust masks, which are not intended for the specific work we are doing. Although New York state law mandates employers to provide water, in my entire time working in New York City I have only had one employer provide water.

To be honest, I attribute a lot of this to business unionism and male chauvinism. The two go hand-in-hand. We are expected to be tough, so things that wouldn't be allowed to pass in any other context are allowed to happen to us. Have you ever heard of an office worker not being provided water for free? But in construction this is "normal."

EG: On site, what is the most pressing issue facing your coworkers?

ML: There are numerous things. If you ask the average worker, they would probably say pay and benefits. Due to the rise of non-union construction most unions have taken a hit. But there are safety issues such as inadequate safety equipment, being forced to work in unsafe conditions (there is an unwritten rule to never say no), or simply being pushed too hard. A friend of mine suffered heat stroke this summer, and it was absolutely preventable. We don't have as many deaths as non-union, but plenty of things are allowed to happen that shouldn't.

EG: We know thousands of workers are injured or die each year due to unsafe working conditions. In August a 22-year-old construction apprentice fell to his death at a worksite. Can these injuries and deaths be avoided? How?

ML: Before I moved to New York I worked as a carpenter in Boston. The company and the foreman will not look out for us, so it's pointless to say that we just need to demand safer jobs. The key to the question of safety is representation and enforcement. The major difference is that in Boston—although far from perfect—the stewards fought for us on the job. There is too much room for corruption in the structure of our union

(continued on page 11)

British Labour Party seeks 'democratization'

By ANN MONTAGUE

The annual British Labour Party Conference was held in Brighton on Sept. 24-27. It is the party's main decision-making body. Going into the conference, infused with young Labour Party members and a visible union presence, the word on many members' lips was "democratization" of the party.

Former Prime Minister Tony Blair's so-called "New Labour Party" had been characterized by a fear of the party members. This dominant attitude was vividly described before this year's conference by Owen Jones in *The Guardian*. He said that the party members "were seen as a delusional rabble, a hotbed of dangerously unelectable ideas. They had to be neutralized, penned in, institutionally ostracized, reduced to an army of leaflet deliverers and voter ID collectors. Labour's annual conference was stripped of many of its powers and functions. Parliamentary selections were stitched up: the role of unions choosing candidates was stripped back, favored special advisors were parachuted into safe seats, and dangerous lefties ... were forbidden from standing as MPs."

When Tony Blair spoke at Margaret Thatcher's funeral, he said, "I always thought my job was to build on some of the things she had done rather than to reverse them." In 2004 the BBC stated, "Tony Blair did not change the Labour Party—he created a totally new party."

In the last two years, Labour has not only been winning elections; previously non-functioning local parties have been infused by young workers as they see the possibility of transformative change within their grasp. The Labour Party more than doubled its membership of 200,000 from 2015 until the general election of June 2017. The membership surged again during the election campaign.

In the last election the Tories, the BBC, and most newspapers refused to cover the Jeremy Corbyn campaign, and when they did, they reviled the new young members. They claimed that the new recruits would never be bothered to come out to vote in the election. Those opinions proved incorrect.

The rise of Momentum

Momentum, a pro-Corbyn movement of Labor Party members, was organized in October 2015, a month after Jeremy Corbyn had won the leadership race. It is credited with mobilizing support for Corbyn and his Manifesto both on-line and in the streets during the election campaign this year. It has more than 31,000 members, 15 full-time staff, and 170 local groups across the country.

Co-founder Adam Klug claims, "Over the last two years Momentum has become one of the most significant organizations in British politics. Our members have breathed life into the Labour Party by getting involved at a local level, running educational events, getting out into the community and supporting workers' struggles across the country."

Critics cry that Momentum has "taken over" constituency Labour Parties and agitated against sitting MPs who are critical of Jeremy Corbyn. Momentum members are expected to run for the three new rank-and-file positions on the National Executive Committee (NEC).

Changing the rules

Before the September conference started, the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) agreed to changes to the way that Labour elects its leader. Previously, for a candidate to get on the leadership ballot it was necessary for 15% of the Labour Members of Parliament (MPs) to support the nominee. The proposal to change this to 10% was overwhelmingly approved by the conference as a whole.

There were also changes to the ruling executive committee. They added three members from the grassroots (to be elected by the rank-and-file members of the local Constituency Labour Parties), and a new place was opened for one of Britain's largest trade unions, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW). Also, Jennie Formby of UNITE was elected Vice Chair instead of the centrist MP Margaret Beckett. Two more positions also went to UNITE. The annual conference voted to ratify these changes. Jeremy Corbyn supported the action of the NEC as an "expansion of democracy and participation in the party." But the "New Labour" pressure group Progress criticized the changes as "undermining the role of the MPs."

Jon Lansman, founder of Momentum, told the *Independent*, "In the NEC of thirty five members, half a million members have just six representatives. It's absurd." After the new members are elected there



(Above) Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn at the Brighton conference.

will be a wider review of party structures, including, "strengthening the links between the party and its trade-union affiliates locally" and "gender representation throughout the party and the role of the Labour Party's Women's Conference"

The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) is preparing to return to the Labour Party. They were expelled under Tony Blair when some of their branches endorsed the Scottish Socialist Party. Their ruling national executive committee backed a Labour vote in the last election on June 8. When Corbyn addressed the RMT national executive meeting, one delegate said that he received a "hero's welcome and the General Secretary told the assembly that he has been the union's 'long-term friend and comrade.' He said they will make a decision after they have 'consulted fully and democratically with our members.'"

Inside the Labour Party Conference

Every local party elects delegates to attend and vote on policy. There were 1300 delegates, many for the first time, making the conference the largest that anyone could remember. The number of speakers' slots for senior politicians was cut in order to allow more speaking time for the rank-and-file members who attended this year. Estimates, based on the voting, were that over 3/4 of the delegates were from constituency parties that supported Corbyn's leadership.

Left candidates on the ballot for the two seats on the National Constitutional Committee won by a 71% vote of the delegates. The atmosphere and the ascendancy of the broad left in the party, including members of the social-democratic Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, was best expressed by the spontaneous standing ovations for the outspoken leftists who had long been maligned by Tony Blair and his New Labour.

Diane Abbott, who in 1987 became the first elected MP who is Black, received an ovation with just a mention of her name in the middle of Corbyn's speech. Len McCluskey, general secretary of the union UNITE, received a raucous reception just for taking the stage. Delegates demanded that Dennis Skinner, a long-time member of the Socialist Campaign Group, be chosen to speak from the floor. John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, also of the Socialist Campaign Group, received three standing ovations during his speech.

The left's dominance in Brighton can be attributed to organization. The Campaign for Labour Democracy played its traditional role in assisting local parties and new delegates with the process, but this year it had a powerful ally in the very effective Momentum. They encouraged new delegates, and gave them confidence and technical assistance if they had questions while on the floor.

Alex Nunns commented that the new delegates became more assertive during the conference. They were not interested in just passing policies and positions as they came from the National Executive Committee (NEC). She noted that British journalist Nick Cohen was really off base when he referred to these delegates as "Corbyn cultists," only interested in pleasing the leader, "children who cannot handle the robust debates of a free society."

They opposed structural proposals from the NEC

and wanted them to be more democratic. Many addressed problems they saw within the schools, social care services, or the railroads. They succeeded in getting changes to the National Health Service (NHS) policy. One of the most popular policies was to reinstate the NHS fully and abolish the internal and external market forces "based on the American model."

Calls were made to restore a universal, comprehensive and fully publicly funded health system, which would restore the NHS to its former vision. This proposal was brought to the floor and strengthened further by changing it from saying that the NHS is the preferred provider to saying it was to be the only provider.

The day before the conference started, Labour Party Chair Ian Lavery announced that Labour membership was now up to 569,500. Jeremy Corbyn told the press that he would restart his tour of marginal constituencies and that Labour is ready for a new election.

Challenges facing a Labour government

The conference was not all about standing ovations, voting to reaffirm the party's Manifesto and looking toward preparations for another general election, which could mean the fall of the Tories.

Hilary Wainwright, the editor of *Red Pepper* magazine, wrote extensively about the packed meetings, discussing the challenges that a more radical Labour government would be up against. The conference heard from John McDonnell, who would become the chief financial officer of a Labour government. McDonnell related the hard facts of the possibility of sabotage by the capitalists, from a possible a run on the pound to capital flight and other forms of non-cooperation. These events were not political rallies but intense discussions about the future.

McDonnell called on everyone to organize, mobilize, educate, and build a popular movement that could build a counter-power to the pressures from Big Business, and to counter a hostile press that will try to divide and demoralize Labour supporters.

This call to resist after the election reminded the delegates that when they cheered those committed to taking back the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts into the public sector, it was a vindication for all those who fought to try to stop those PFI deals when they happened. Now with a determined working-class movement ready to fight austerity, there is a window of opportunity not seen in a very long time.

Red baiting returns

Although red baiting had no apparent effect on the most recent election, it is once again being tried by the major newspapers in Britain.

Dame Stella Rimington, an author of spy novels and former director of MI5, Britain's spy agency, revealed that she was in charge of investigating members of "communist and Trotskyist organizations" in the 1980s, and that some of them, who are now members of Momentum and "advising" Jeremy Corbyn, were on her list. This statement created a flood of newspaper articles speculating about which of Corbyn's advi-

(continued on page 11)

Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

Victory to Ontario College teachers!

More than 12,000 community college faculty, members of the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, have been making headlines since the start of their province-wide strike, Oct. 16.

The union is fighting to improve education quality for students and to

stop the shameful trend towards more precarious jobs on campus. An inspiring feature of the strike is the unity of full-time faculty with their part-time teaching co-workers.

OPSEU is calling for:

- More full-time faculty to teach stu-

dents: In the last decade, the number of students has gone up much faster than the number of full-time faculty.

- Democracy at school: For faculty and student input into academic decision-making—for the creation of an “academic senate” that includes both student and faculty representatives.

- Ensure that there are enough counselors for students; put an end to outsourcing of mental health services so that colleges can adequately meet the mental health needs of students.

- Job security and better working conditions for contract faculty: Contract faculty need to reapply to teach every semester, never knowing whether they will have a job next semester.

- “Equal pay for equal work” for contract faculty: Contract faculty are not paid to prepare courses, correct assignments, or offer out-of-class sup-

port to students. Most of them have to work several part-time jobs to make ends meet.

Congratulations to the striking college teachers for showing the way forward to the entire workers' movement.

For standing up to management on issues of quality education and student services, good jobs, equity, and against the bosses' austerity agenda, the teachers deserve full support.

Mass rallies, demonstrations, solidarity picketing and sympathy strikes are the order of the day.

Help to turn the tide against the capitalist state and its servile institutions. Get involved. Make a difference. Build solidarity. Take action. Victory to the strikers! ■

The text above is based on a leaflet Socialist Action has been distributing widely.

Contact SA at: www.socialistaction.ca, socialistactioncanada@gmail.com.

Telephone: 647-986-1917.

'Conflict of interest' is a rich man's game

By BARRY WEISLEDER

Questions:

1) How do you know when a bourgeois politician is lying?

2) When is a bourgeois politician in a conflict of interest?

In the era of decaying liberal democracy, the corporate mass media occasionally identifies rich people in high office who appear to benefit economically from the laws and budgets they craft. Donald Trump, for one, defies his critics, and just flatly refuses even to post his tax returns.

Canada's federal Finance Minister, Bill Morneau, takes a different tack. After he was caught reaping benefits that resulted from changes he proposes to federal pension plans, Morneau moved to sell off his shares in the over \$1 billion family firm Morneau Shepell. It is a leading Bay Street pension administration and human resources company, with 20,000 clients across North America.

Morneau pledges to donate to charity the profits he made since coming into office in October 2015, estimated at \$10 million. Of course, for a multi-millionaire, that is a drop in the bucket. It's much less than he will be paid annually when he “returns to the private sector.”

Four other government ministers, following intense pressure, reported that they do not hold any publicly



traded assets. A further 14 cabinet members issued a uniform statement that they are in compliance with recommendations of the Parliamentary Ethics Commissioner, who said they do not have to put their corporate wealth in a “blind trust.”

Finally, 10 additional ministers simply refused to re-

(Left) Finance Minister Bill Morneau.

ply to media questions on the subject.

For its part, the Conservative Party Official Opposition claims to be clean; but in opposition, since they don't regulate anything, a true test of financial conflict seems beyond reach.

Somehow, though, doesn't this miss the point? Doesn't it ignore the elephant in the room? By serving and preserving the capitalist system, bourgeois politicians reap the rewards of the private profit system, sooner or later—regardless of whether they administer, legislate, regulate, or just stand back and watch their assets grow under the current regime, of which they are shamelessly a part.

The historic conflict of interest that really matters is the one between capital and labour. That's a conflict that cannot be regulated out of existence. It can be resolved only by social revolution. In the meantime, arguments in the media and in parliament about the alleged conflicts of interest of office-holding politicians represents a relatively minor issue: they reflect the disputes between different factions of the capitalist class.

They also serve to remind working people that operating and benefiting from the capitalist system is mainly a rich man's game. ■

Answers to Questions:

1) When their lips are moving.

2) Once they take office.

Census reveals wide inequality; Minorities becoming the majority

By BARRY WEISLEDER

As the population of Canada becomes more diverse, the income gap between those who identify as visible minorities, Indigenous or recent immigrants, and the rest of Canadians remains huge. According to census data released on Oct. 25, total income was 26 per cent lower for visible minorities than non-visible minorities, and 25 per cent lower for Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people.

Recent immigrants—many of whom are also visible minorities—have total incomes 37 per cent below total incomes for Canadian born, the data shows.

The face of Canada is changing rapidly. More than 22 per cent of Canadians—including 51.5 per cent of Torontonians—reported being from a visible minority community in 2016, up from 16.3 per cent nationally in 2006.

Some 7.5 million people, out of a population of 35 million, reported being foreign-born individuals who

immigrated to Canada. Asia, including the Middle East, is the largest source of recent immigrants at 61.8 per cent, followed by Africa at 13.4 per cent. Europe, once dominant at 61.6 per cent in 1971, now ranks third at 11.6 per cent. The census counted 1.67 million Indigenous people in Canada in 2016, about 4.9 per cent of the total—a growth rate of 42.5 per cent over the last 10 years, four times the rate of the non-Indigenous population.

The reality is that racialized people continue to face discrimination, which is aided and abetted by corporate management practices in hiring and pay, and also thanks to policies like the Temporary Foreign Worker Programme. Combating racist exploitation, alongside the fight against precarious work, have become the “do or die” imperatives for the labour movement. Will it be working-class unity against inequality, or will it be hateful division along racial and ethnic lines to be exploited by the alt-right? The fate of society hangs in the balance. ■

Will Indigenous languages survive?

Cultural genocide is an explosive term—but not too strong when applied to the fate of many languages of Indigenous people across North America, Turtle Island. According to 2016 Canadian census data, the mother tongue of over 213,000 people was an Indigenous language. In Ontario, it was over 25,000.

In September, parents of Indigenous children enrolled at the Toronto District School Board petitioned trustees to expand the Indigenous language programme. Board officials acknowledged the need for more. Seven schools have provided Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe) classes for over a decade. But of the 53 languages taught to 30,000 students during the International Language Elementary Programme last year, none were Indigenous.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action highlights the need to preserve and strengthen Indigenous language and culture. Clearly, there is far to go.

Gisele Gordon, one of the TDSB-petitioning parents, told the *Toronto Star*, “My mother-in-law is a fluent Cree speaker. My husband, like most of his generation, is not. This is a direct result of residential schools.”

On Oct. 5, the Canadian federal government agreed to pay \$800 million to survi-

vivors of the “60s Scoop” for the harm suffered by an estimated 20,000 Indigenous children who were robbed of their cultural identities when seized by the state and placed with non-native families between 1965 and 1984. There is no “settlement” on the table for the victims of the infamous Residential Schools programme, which placed more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children in church-run schools from the 1870s to 1996. Many of those children were beaten, sexually abused, and starved for speaking their mother tongues.

Meanwhile, in the secret talks to re-write the North America Free Trade Agreement, the Canadian government's promise to “modernize” the NAFTA by demanding it include a new chapter on Indigenous peoples, seems to be empty. It is reminiscent of the Jay Treaty of 1794, signed by Britain and the USA, which pledged free cross-border movement of Indigenous people and the goods traded by them, along with protection for Indigenous cultural properties and traditional knowledge.

Can there be “reconciliation” before there is real, substantial restitution, to the tune of trillions of dollars, from the treasury of the corporations and business elites who have profited from Indigenous genocide and the plunder of natural resources? — B.W.

Connecticut: 'Solution is Socialism'

By KEITH LESLIE

NEW BRITAIN, Conn.—On Nov. 4, Socialist Action Connecticut and the Central Connecticut State University Youth for Socialist Action held their second annual conference, entitled "The Solution is Socialism." More than 100 workers, students, and activists from as far away as Alabama turned out for a day packed with talks, workshops, and educationals from 21 speakers.

Taliba Obuya from the Malcolm X Grassroots Network brought the revolutionary history of the Black nationalist movement and the fight for self-determination among Black Americans to the forefront. Michael Roberts, a leading Marxist economist from Britain, explained key elements of the crises of world capitalism.

Socialist Action member Daniel Adam gave a stirring speech on the prospects for socialism and the potential of a socialist future. A set of workshops organized and led by the YSA covered the struggle for a united Caribbean against imperialism, LGBTQ+ liberation, lessons of the Russian Revolution, immigration and Islamophobia, and feminism and fossil capitalism.

Left Voice's Juan Ferre and Socialist Action's John Leslie covered the task of building a class-struggle left wing in the labor movement. Puerto Rican activist Mikael Rosa raised the topic of the colonial oppression of Puerto Rico in light of its devastation by Hurricanes Irma and Maria as well as the disaster capitalist offensive in their wake. Christine Marie of Socialist Action and Tatiana Cozzarelli of *Left Voice* exposed the central role of gendered oppression under capitalism and the need for a feminist voice in the revolutionary left.

The YSA also made significant contributions, not only helping to organize and advertise the conference, but also constructing the workshop sessions and providing four speakers, including CCSU YSA leader Shelby Williams, who delivered opening remarks and spoke in a workshop on building Caribbean resistance to imperialism.

The conference revealed some of the potential of socialist politics in the current climate. Capitalism's status quo is failing billions of people in extremely apparent ways. The failures of the Democratic Party and disillusionment with the Bernie Sanders campaign, which served mainly as a vehicle to try to lead discontented people back into the party, have opened a space for the genuinely socialist left to share our perspectives. This opening has been recognized even by right wingers—who felt the need to tear down posters advertising the conference at CCSU and elsewhere in an effort to suppress news of it.

The conference drew in many new faces, particularly young people. Socialist Action was able to build new relationships with workers, students, and activists, many of whom are enthusiastic to learn more about socialism and to join the struggle.

Capitalism's crises are clear to anyone who bothers to look. Scientists warn, for example, that capitalism is quickly pushing toward shattering crucial thresholds on global warming and other environmental catastrophes.

The release of the "Paradise Papers" has exposed massive corruption among the ultra-rich members of the capitalist class. The assault on Puerto Rico has shown the class interests of the austerity offensive against working people.

The revelations of Donna Brazile in her new book "Hacks," concerning the inner workings of the Democratic Party, have confirmed once more its role as a bourgeois party owned and operated by capitalist elites and the need for workers to break from it.

These constitute only the tip of the iceberg; new outrages are arising on a daily basis. It is necessary, however, to construct and broadcast a socialist vision for society, and shatter the lie that there is no alternative to capitalism. As the anniversary of Russia's October Revolution turns 100, it is imperative that we ensure that its memory and legacy do not fade away. As the Nov. 4 conference emphasized: the solution is socialism! ■



(Above) Taliba Obuya of the Malcolm X Grassroots Network speaks to the Connecticut conference on the Black struggle for self-determination.

Minneapolis: 'Socialists in Action'

MINNEAPOLIS—Twin Cities Socialist Action, together with the Philosophy Department at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC), hosted a conference entitled: "Socialists in Action: Taking Theory to the Streets," on Nov. 3 and 4 on the MCTC campus.

Over 80 people were in attendance for at least some portion of the conference—many for the entire two-day event. A majority of those in attendance were students—well over 60%—most of whom were being exposed to socialist ideas in real depth for the first time.

The conference opened with a keynote address by Socialist Action's National Secretary, Jeff Mackler, speaking on "The Relevance of the Russian Revolution Today"—in this, its 100th anniversary year.

All day on Saturday, Nov. 4, we explored the core concepts of Revolutionary Socialism. Michael Livingston explained: "What is Socialism Really?" to people who might only

have heard of socialism through the Bernie Sanders campaign. Bruce Lesnick gave an "Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory." Carl Sack spoke on "Eco-Socialism: How Marxists Confront the Climate Crisis," while Karen Schraufnagel, branch organizer for the Twin Cities branch, addressed: "Marxism and Women's Oppression" in her talk.

Rob Wallace spoke on: "How Capitalist Agriculture Misuses Science," in a lecture that transfixed the audience and led to a Q&A session running well into the time for the closing panel, as the deeply engaged crowd asked question after question.

The day ended with a shortened closing panel: "Socialists in Action," featuring Jeff, Carl, and Karen, together with Adam Ritscher. When it was over, several students asked to join Socialist Action immediately, with another 10 or more expressing interest in learning more and potentially joining in the near future. ■

... Interview with a union carpenter

(continued from page 8)

here in New York City.

I've witnessed stewards make deals with foremen right in front of me. And when I've asked them for things, such as safety equipment, they simply ignore it. Usually the steward uses his power to benefit himself, such as by not working at all or doing the easiest tasks. The companies don't like that either, but it's preferable to having a militant steward.

I don't want to knock the union. This problem is also worsened by the rise of non-union construction. We're struggling to keep contractors employing union labor, so that means enforcing these standards will also become more difficult. If we're on the defensive to simply keep our jobs, then it's harder to be aggressive about issues such as safety. But, in my opinion, the solution would be better steward representation. Maybe we should be able to elect/recall stewards; that way they would have obligations to the membership.

EG: What has to be done to win greater concessions from the bosses?

ML: The biggest question is immigration. Some members have bought in to the right-wing message that we have to deport them all, but we know this will never happen. Immigrants are great for capitalism. By keeping workers marginalized it is much easier to exploit them. And that's exactly what is happening in New York.

We can't accept immigrants into the union because the employers use a verification system that would prevent them from finding work, or jeopardize their status here. Even if they joined, they can't get work through the signatory contractors. The non-union companies exploit this and hire immigrants for lesser pay, which creates downward pressure on wages throughout the industry.

This is the biggest question. Even if we organize, our inability to include immigrants will weaken any of our

efforts. Successful union campaigns require shifting the terms in our favor. If there are workers who can do the same work for less, then anything we do will be less effective. The other side is organizing and militancy such as strikes, pickets, recruitment, etc. We have the tools, we just need to use them.

EG: Do you see pockets of class struggle where the building trades can/are linking with other unions and working class for formations?

ML: Unfortunately, no. There have been campaigns and collaboration with other organizations, but they are too superficial to mention. The building trades are on the defensive right now. The leaders don't want to be too aggressive either.

EG: Are your coworkers active in political movements? How have they reacted to the Trump presidency? What is their general feeling about what happened in Charlottesville and the rise of fascism/white supremacy?

ML: I haven't heard much talk about Charlottesville, although most oppose it. Overall, I think workers are opposed to Trump, at least here in New York City. They're aware of his history of employing non-union labor and recognize that his policy proposals overwhelmingly affect working-class people. Many white workers do support him though, largely for his stance on immigrants. So, I would say there is a significant minority of Trump supporters within our unions.

I have noticed workers become more involved as well, especially in DSA [Democratic Socialists of America]. But there is also a contingent of workers who are trying to create pressure from below on the union bureaucracy. Most of us recognize there is a need for militancy, but that has yet to be channeled into real organization and action.

EG: Before we wrap up, I'd like to ask what you would say to any young worker considering entering an ap-

prenticeship in your trade?

ML: If you want good money, join the union. Don't expect it to be easy or perfect, but it's the best option out there. You're guaranteed raises, make a living wage, and have an opportunity to learn a skill that will keep you steadily employed and can be used to help others. Most important of all, be active in your union and don't ever become complacent. We need more honest, class-conscious members. ■

... Labour Party

(continued from page 9)

sors were under suspicion. However, Paul Mason, writing in *The Guardian*, demanded that Rimington stop fueling "paranoid fantasies" about Corbyn.

The main attack is on shadow chancellor John McDonnell. McDonnell was elected Member of Parliament representing Hayes and Huntington in 1997 and has continued to win every election since. He has clearly stated that he is a Marxist and describes the current economic crisis as a classic capitalist crisis. The gutter-press tabloid, *The Daily Mail*, declared that McDonnell has advocated driving the Tories from office by means of a violent "insurrection."

It is doubtful that these attacks will have a negative effect on Corbyn and the Labour Party. It generally illustrates the failure of the Tories, who, since they have nothing new to tell the British people, can only resort to their failed past. After the recent conference, it looks like Labour Party activists are more concerned about being prepared for the next election than worrying about red-baiting in the press. ■

Immigrants targeted in aftermath of Calif. fires



Jeff Chiu / AP

By NICOLAS BRANNON

SANTA ROSA, Calif.—In the past year, Sonoma County has swung from one environmental extreme to another. These extreme weather patterns set the stage for the past month's wildfires, but they are also much more significant than just the most recent disaster. They are the trends that we can expect going forward as the effect of climate change.

One year before the wildfires, Santa Rosa was emerging from five years of record drought into the wettest winter on record, with 60 inches of rain, more than double the average amount. Record rainfall was followed by the hottest summer on record, with the hottest days of all coming at the end, in early September.

The conditions for the spread of wildfire were accumulating. The five years of drought left California with an estimated 100 million dead trees across its parched landscape. After last winter's rain, there was a magnificent wildflower bloom and renewed undergrowth, but the summer heat dried it up and turned it to kindling. In the end, the rain only added to the fire danger. Scientists expect this cycle of extreme drought and extreme rain in California to continue as one of the effects of global warming.

When the wildfires came, nearly half of Santa Rosa was in evacuation zones. Tens of thousands of people fled to shelters or to friends and family in other areas. Across Northern California, nearly 100,000 people were displaced by the fires.

Fear of deportation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), along with rumors of immigration checks at shelters and the unnerving presence of armed, uniformed National Guards, kept many people from going to the emergency shelters in an area that is almost one-third Latino and 17% immigrants of every status. The major local industry—the wine industry—is heavily dependent upon immigrant workers,

who are often undocumented.

Recent news of ICE lying in wait for immigrants at courthouses, hospitals, and outside schools, along with targeting homeless shelters and refugees, weighed heavily on people's minds. The fires also occurred barely two weeks after a highly publicized nationwide series of ICE raids targeting sanctuary cities, in which 498 people were arrested, including 27 in the Bay Area.

Some immigrant evacuees fled to coastal beach areas, far from the fires and also the shelters. Sonoma County is home to an estimated 28,000 undocumented immigrants, and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office has a long history of complicity with ICE, including continuing to work with ICE while claiming otherwise.

ICE itself made an announcement in transparent doubletalk, saying that it would "suspend routine immigration enforcement operations" in the area, "except in the event of a serious criminal presenting a public safety threat."

The hollowness of this lie was shown just days later when the acting director of ICE, Thomas D. Homan, repeated the allegation, first spread by the alt-right *Breitbart News*, that a homeless undocumented immigrant and longtime Santa Rosa resident who had been arrested on a minor charge was also charged with starting the wildfires. The statement was based on nothing but racism and a desire to stoke fear. Nevertheless, ICE sought to have the person transferred from the Sonoma County jail to their jurisdiction. Sheriff Robert Giordano eventually told the media that the charge was "false and misleading."

Evacuating immigrants called a popular local, politically active, bilingual radio station for information, looking for ways to find help without having to go to the shelters or seek help from federal agencies such as FEMA who could turn their information over

to ICE. People who were not evacuated called to offer help, such as serving hot meals at their houses to those who needed them.

Throughout the fires, wineries in Napa and Sonoma kept the grape harvest going, wanting their valuable grapes to be picked and brought in regardless of the cost to workers. The fires came late in the harvest.

Most wine grapes had already been picked. But what remained was mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, a late-ripening grape and the most expensive in the area, used to make the most expensive and prestigious bottles of wine. Fieldworker crews, often without masks, picked grapes at a rate of one ton per hour in the smoke-clogged air as the wildfires burned nearby.

One of the lingering effects of the wildfires will be an increase in Santa Rosa's housing crisis. In total, 2834 houses in the city were destroyed—five percent of Santa Rosa's housing stock. Suddenly, a city where the average rent has been rising at 10% a year, has far fewer houses.

Rents are already spiking as landlords are setting the price of new rentals based on the upper limits of what insurance companies will pay towards the rent of displaced customers. Before the fire, it was estimated that 3000 residents of Sonoma County were homeless. Encampments in Santa Rosa are already spreading and getting more populous.

Capitalism cannot prevent these disasters and offers no help to the working-class people affected by them. Instead, time and again, we see nothing but disaster capitalism, making sure to use the disaster for its own gain. Capitalism is the cause of climate change and the increased and increasingly extreme disasters that come with it.

Only a socialist system in which decisions about energy sources and the use of land, water, and other resources are made in the interest of the people can reverse climate change and save the planet. ■

