The Fight for $15 in New Brunswick... and the struggle against income inequality

NAFTA talks enter crucial stage:
Will Trudeau's Liberals give away the store?
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After ten years in office at City Hall, Vision Vancouver seems to be on the decline, opening the door for a new alignment of forces in this fall's municipal campaign. But who's running, and for what?

7 Where is the left?
Huge challenges face the working class in nearly every country across Europe and North America. A stronger revolutionary left is needed more than ever.

10 Passing the torch
Joan Baez still has a great voice and a powerful commitment to social justice, writes PV music columnist Wally Brooker. But she has decided that her current 8-month tour will be her last time performing on the road.

INSIDE
With the October 2018 round of B.C. municipal elections just over six months away, many mayors and councillors across the province are already in full on election mode. This includes at least half of the 21 mayors in the Metro Vancouver region - a higher proportion than usual, perhaps reflecting a normal clamping of the guard among this particular cohort of elected officials, some of whom have served relatively long periods in office.

Others see a foreboding storm on the way, including Vancouver mayor Gregor Robertson, who has led a Vision majority at City Hall since 2008. Robertson has held the mayoral chair longer than 37 of his 38 predecessors, thanks to a voter base built on a loose coalition of NDP supporters, federal Liberals, Greens, labour movement and other opponents of the right-wing NPA which had elected ten mayors since its formation in the late 1930s. But Vision has been increasingly condemned for its close links with profit-hungry developers, who have made the city unaffordable for thousands of renters and working class families.

When Vision’s term finished in May 2011, Vision’s first in last fall’s by-election for a vacant council seat, the writing was on the wall. Robertson’s slate including four of the six Vision councillors elected in 2014 have now dropped out of the race, leaving just two incumbents (Raymond Louie and Heather Deal) as potential candidates in October.

It would be a mistake to read too much into a vote with just an 11 percent turnout, but that by-election showed other significant trends. The NPA elected its candidate, regaining its historic status as the party with the best shot at winning a majority. But with a vote share of just 26 percent, the NPA also seemed vulnerable to a united slate of centre and left forces on the ballot, especially if a strong independent candidate for mayor could be found.

Over the past two months, speculation over scenarios for such a unity slate has been rampant. Several current council candidates, many local politicians (Libby Davies, Spencer Herbert, Don Davies) have had their arms twisted by eager supporters, but none have agreed to run for mayor. That leaves several less prominent candidates still up for consideration. Another option might be Vancouver city councilor Adriane Carr, who would not run as a unity-building independent candidate against whoever runs for the NPA.

In this situation, the Vancouver and District Labour Council is attempting to help put together a broad electoral agreement. The VDLC was the key force behind the formation of the Committee (later Coalition) of Progressive Employees in 1968, and has always been prominent in backing unity of centre and progressive groups to block the NPA.

This time around, the VDLC faces a complicated set of variables and contradictions. It has been consulting with parties and groups which could take part in a unity campaign, including COPE. One back-channel has been exploring the possibility of a Vision by-election campaign, and the Greens, all of which have strong sentiments of the Vision legacy developer-driven policies at City Hall. A large March 1 meeting convened by COPE and speakers from the other groups, creating the impression of support for a suitable joint campaign.

But from the perspective of the labour movement, the decision of Robertson and his party ended an era of constant NPA attacks against municipal employees represented by COPE and other unions. More to the point, leaving Vision out of the equation, even in its current weakened state, might encourage the party to nominate its own mayoral candidate, and council, potentially creating a vote split which only benefits the NPA.
Environmentalists warn LNG breaks ignore carbon footprint

PV Vancouver Bureau

The David Suzuki Foundation says that the B.C. government’s proposed tax breaks for liquefied natural gas projects, like the LNG Canada project in Kitimat, would not be compatible with any meaningful climate action. "The province’s future to the shrinking resources on unceded traditional territories of the indigenous peoples. The offer of massive tax breaks for the true carbon footprint of this industry. The provincial government’s commitments and have a thriving modern global economy that is shifting to renewable energy, B.C. "

"What Canada’s NAFTA negotiators give away the store?"

By Liz Rowley

News that the US has withdrawn its demand 50% of auto content made in the US, and 80% produced in North America – a demand that would have eliminated automobile assembly and parts plants and jobs in Canada has left US negotiators in Ottawa light-headed. They think they’ve just cleverly avoided a nightmare scenario on the table, starting with "contrary to the Daily Gleaner administration that opened NAFTA renegotiations by putting a whole number of "over the cliff" options on the table, starting with stripping Canada of auto and manufacturing jobs and industries, and continuing with eliminating Canada’s supply-management system in dairy (bankrupting farmers and damaging Canada’s food security), procurement policies that would quickly privatize public services and universal social programs; unfettered access to Canada’s softwood lumber, oil and gas, and other rich natural resources.

"We’re defending our supply management system for dairy and poultry, our “ridiculous” $20 threshold for applying duties on goods purchased outside Canada, including on-line purchases; and our farm, food, and forest policies, among other things not specified.

This would be folly for workers and farmers, and for Canada. This has had direct economic consequences for workers and people for the interests of the country, instead of the greedy trans-national corporations that finance them.

Instead, we need a multi-lateral and mutually beneficial fair trade with the world, and a government willing to implement policies that put people before profits.

"LNG tax breaks must be rejected"

Statement by the Communist Party of BC, March 26, 2018

"Less than a year after the BC Liberals were defeated in part because of their close ties to the big energy monopolies, the new government of British Columbia is already beginning to move in a similar direction. Despite their campaign promises to shake up the oil and gas industry in Alberta is vastly underreporting methane emissions. "Our research shows fossil fuel extraction in B.C.’s Montney formation alone is intentionally releasing approximately 111,800 tonnes of methane into the air annually," said John Werring, a co-author of the study. "This is the climate pollution equivalent of burning more than 4.5 million tonnes of coal, or putting more than two million cars on the road. Fuel companies are betting that LNG is a ‘clean’ or useful ‘transition’ fuel."

The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions and the Pembina Institute estimate that annual carbon dioxide emissions from the LNG Canada project alone would exceed 9.6 megatonnes by 2050 or 80 per cent of B.C.’s total emissions target of 12 megatonnes annually by that date.

"It’s not possible to expand fracking and LNG export and meet BC’s climate targets. It’s time for this government to recognize that building new fossil fuel projects is incompatible with any meaningful climate action."

CUPE-NB leader corrects the media

CUPE-New Brunswick Division President Daniel Légère has called out the Freemen Daily Gleaner for publishing an editorial "misrepresenting the position of the Communist Party of New Brunswick". The央企 government promised to apply the carbon tax to methane emissions from the oil and gas industry, the province’s largest polluter.

"B.C. can achieve climate commitments and have a thriving economy," Bruce said. "In a modern global economy that is shifting to renewable energy, B.C. should seize the opportunity to modernize its economy with clean, profitable, renewable energy projects instead of tying the province’s future to the shrinking global market for fossil fuels."

Meanwhile, the Sierra Club B.C. warns that the $40-billion Kitimat project proposed by LNG Canada (backed by Shell Canada and other investors) will “spell disaster” for the climate. Jens Wieting, the group’s senior forest and climate campaigner, calls the March 22 announcement “a new form of climate denial: the idea that we can build new fossil fuel projects that will cause millions of tonnes of additional emissions while reducing our climate targets. It’s time to stop sweetening the pot for fracked gas exports, the government is laying out a red carpet for companies to help destroy our climate.

"We are hugely disappointed to see the B.C. government jump into an industry that so clearly spells disaster for our climate. LNG development is a win for the wildflls that have devastated BC in recent years. Forests are being cleared, and the glacial ice and watersheds are melting, but somehow our government believes they can have their cake and eat it too. “It’s not possible to expand fracking and LNG export and meet BC’s climate targets. It’s time for this government to recognize that building new fossil fuel projects is incompatible with any meaningful climate action.”
The news that Donald Trump has appointed right-wing war monger John Bolton as his national security adviser is an ominous signal that the world could become an even more dangerous place. Bolton replaces General H.R. McMaster, a career officer seen as “too moderate,” according to former Trump supporters of the President.

Until now, Bolton was most infamous as George W. Bush’s ambassador to the United Nations in 2005-2006, and for his previous role as the State Department’s envoy to enforce arms controls, during the period when lies about Iraq’s non-existent weapons programs were invented to justify the US-British invasion of 2003. The Bolton appointment poses an immediate threat to preparations for direct talks between the US and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Until now, there were cautious hopes that a historic face-to-face meeting between Trump and DPRK leader Kim Jong-un might bring progress towards a formal peace agreement to end the US war of aggression against Korea, withdraw US troops, provide all-war security guarantees, and ultimately to reunify the peninsula. But Bolton claimed in the Wall Street Journal last month that an unprovoked nuclear attack by the US on North Korea would “defend against the threatened use of nuclear weapons and protect the United States and our allies.”

But wait, there’s more. As a bitter critic of the US-Iran nuclear agreement, Bolton has repeatedly urged war against Iran, which could spark catastrophic global consequences. He supported imperialism’s 2011 assault on Libya and regime-change efforts in Syria, both of which have created widespread chaos and death in the North Africa-Middle East region. With John Bolton back in the White House, the planet is a big step closer to nuclear disaster.

The child prisoners of Israel

Incorrectly called the “only democracy in the Middle East,” Israel is the only country in the world which automatically prosecutes children in military courts that lack basic fair trial guarantees. Since 1967, two separate legal systems operate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), so that Israeli settlers living in the West Bank are subject to the Israeli civilian and criminal legal system. But military law is applied to the whole Palestinian population. Since 2000, at least 8,000 Palestinian children – an average of 500-7000 each year – have been arrested, detailed and prosecuted in the Israeli military detention system. The majority are charged with throwing stones, and their experience is one of physical violence during arrest, transfer or interrogation. No Israeli child ever comes into contact with the military court system.

These children are taken from their homes at night by heavily armed Israeli soldiers. Hours later, they arrive at a detention center, sleep deprived and often bruised and scared. Interrogations regularly include verbal abuse, threats and physical violence that ultimately result in a confession. They are not accompanied by a parent and are generally interrogated without legal advice. Military court judges rarely exclude evidence obtained under torture, in violation of the law. Military court judges rarely exclude evidence obtained under torture, in violation of the law.

Abed Tamimi is one such child, arrested for slapping an Israeli soldier after years of attacks against her family and village. On March 21, an Israeli military court condemned Abed and her mother to eight months in prison and fines of 1,500 each. Their choice? Plead guilty and be jailed for a few months, or plead innocent and face prison for up to 10 years. Abed, 13, is a child of simplicity with apartheid Israel is the response of the government of Canada. Shame on every MP who refuses to speak out against this abomination!

Delegation of Communists visits Bolivarian Venezuela

President who was deposed after the 2009 coup d’état, and editor of Le Monde Diplomatique Ignacio Ramonet, participated in the encounter. Anti-imperialist international federations like the World Peace Council, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the World Federation of Trade Unions and the Women’s International Democratic Federation were also represented.

This was the second such ambitious meeting, after the success of September’s similar solidarity gathering. Since then, the situation has only worsened for Venezuela. Imperialist attacks against the Bolivarian process have culminated with former Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, reiterating the US Administration’s support for a military intervention. Such actions – including some prompted by Canada - have literally held the Venezuelan people hostage, facing housing and shortages of necessary goods and commodities as part of an economic war against their country. Politically, attempts to isolate the Caracas government and to give weight to the most reactionary trends in the opposition have continued. The Lima group, in which Canada is playing a leading role, is now consolidated to the point that it excludes Nicolas Maduro from representing Venezuela at the next summit of the Americas, as part of its campaign of attacks against the Bolivarian government.

Through these three days of discussion, conference and visits, Communists from Canada are not alone in providing solidarity with the Venezuelan people’s struggle for emancipation and against imperialism, and condemned Canada’s proactive role in attacking Venezuela. They had the opportunity to visit the state of ‘Vargas, to attend a celebration to honour the legacy of Hugo Chávez, and to become familiar with the activities of the Ciudaddes Deportes. But perhaps the most important achievement is the rebuilding of effort, with an emphasis on infrastructure and housing. For example, on land that was owned by four speculators, over 2000 free social housing units were built as part of the mission Hogares de la Patria, through which 2 million free social housing units were built in the last four years, with 2 million more expected by 2020.

They also had the opportunity to attend discussion panels on the youth, labour movement, women and arts and culture, to name a few. Participating in the two main conferences were key people such as Delcy Rodríguez, the leader of the National Constituent Assembly and, for the closing ceremony, President Nicolás Maduro.

Coming out of this conference, it is clear that strengthening solidarity with Venezuela is one of the most pressing tasks of progressive, democratic and peace-loving people. Considering the prominent role played by Canada’s diplomats who are leading the war on Venezuela, our action is even more crucial.

On May 20th, the Venezuelan people will cast ballots in the Presidential elections. Despite all the difficulties and propaganda, the majority of the people clearly understand what is at stake: to defend anti-imperialist unity and continue on the path of popular emancipation, and to return to a time where policies were not taken in Miraflores Palace, but dictated by Washington and Wall Street bankers. Changes are that, with Maduro being once again the candidate supported by all progressive forces gathered in the Gran Polo Patriótico Simón Bolívar, including the Communist Party of Venezuela, and with the opposition divided, the former bus driver will go for a second term but it remains clear that the corporate media and imperialist forces will seize this opportunity to further attack the Bolivarian process. This will be a crucial time where our solidarity will be of utmost importance.

(For more coverage of this important solidarity conference, see reports on page 9.)
It appears that this military presence is mainly intended to protect imperialist interests. Fighting Tuareg fighters objectively and the US contribution of “non-peacekeepers” to the west African country of Mali is an ominous signal that under Justin Trudeau’s government, a weak central government which has nothing to do with non-humans will sooner or later be involved in combat operations causing civilian casualties. If the US does not do anything, the outcome can only be more chaos and destruction. The Communist Party of Canada condemns this mission, which has nothing to do with fighting Tuaregs and business costs of a growing military mission in Mali will inevitably rise, and Canadian troops will sooner or later be involved in combat operations causing civilian casualties. If the US is not doing anything, the outcome can only be more chaos and destruction.
Bolton’s appointment is bad news for the Iranian people

By Jane Green

During the administration of George W Bush, the under secretary of state for arms control, one John Bolton, was an enthusiastic supporter of the invasion of Iraq.

Inspite of the catastrophe which followed in human, political and military terms, Bolton remains an enthusiastic supporter of recent titles such as To Stop Iran’s Bomb, Bombs Iran under his belt, it does not take much of a deal of digging to find that Bolton’s position has not fundamentally changed in the intervening 15 years.

If anything, Bolton’s position has hardened as he has openly argued for regime change in Iran in recent years.

Bolton’s appointment follows hard on the heels of the shocking appointment of Secretary of state Rex Tillerson in favour of CIA director Mike Pompeo — another confirmed hardliner and outspoken opponent of the Iran 5+1 nuclear deal.

Taken together, these appointments shift the balance in the White House towards a sharper approach to negotiations with Iran, one that is negotiated at great length with European partners, as well as Russia and China, under former US president Barack Obama.

The new balance signals the growing likelihood of a military option being considered in relation to Iran.

The US position will have been further reinforced by the visit last week of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who flew from his state visit to Britain — from which he emerged bristling with threats — to visit the US where he will be looking to add to the $54 billion spent by the Saudis with US arms suppliers in the past nine months.

As President Donald Trump made clear: “Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy nation, and they’re going to give the United States some of that wealth, hopefully, in the form of jobs, in the form of the purchase of the finest military equipment anywhere in the world.”

The Crown Prince added that last year’s Saudi pledge of $200bn in investments will rise to approximately $100bn over a 10-year window to implement the deal had already begun. The Saudis also have a longer-term agenda, however, in their engagement with the United States, which is to fulfil their aspirations to become a nuclear power.

In spite of their massive oil reserves, the Saudis have been in negotiations for some years with the US over diversification of their energy base and are keen to negotiate access to technology which would allow them to build a nuclear reactor.

The Iran nuclear deal was predicated upon the unfounded assertion that, in developing a civil nuclear programme, the Iranian regime would inevitably move towards the creation of nuclear weapons.

The inspection regime imposed by the agreement, however, prevents the Iranians from enriching uranium and reprocessing plutonium to weapons-grade levels. In exchange, the 5+1 deal oblige Iran to curtail some of the sanctions imposed upon Iran and allows for greater capacity for Iran to trade in international markets.

In spite of these restrictions, and the crippling impact which sanctions has had upon the Iranian economy, the Saudis cannot countenance a Middle East in which Iran has even a limited civilian nuclear capability if they have none.

Saudi ambitions to develop nuclear energy are, on the one hand, about keeping pace with Iran and asserting dominance as the regional Islamic superpower.

In an interview with CBS News, Mohammad bin Salman openly stated that “Saudi Arabia does not want to acquire any nuclear bomb, but without a doubt if Iran develops its nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible.”

Not only has he referred to the Iranian nuclear deal as a “flawed agreement,” he has made clear that any deal relating to the development of nuclear energy in Saudi Arabia will not be subject to the inspection regime imposed to upgrade uranium and plutonium to weapons-grade levels.

The warnings to Iran were made clear: “Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy nation, and they’re going to give the United States in the form of jobs, in the form of the purchase of the finest military equipment anywhere in the world.”

For the people of Iran there is limited good news from this appointment. The US will be allowing the Saudis to trade in international markets.

While the Syrian nuclear reactor was promptly shutdown following a US air strike, only now admitted due to the declassification of previously secret Israeli intelligence material.

Further instability in the region is fuelled by the recent revelations that a thousand Pakistani troops are stationed in Saudi Arabia, as part of a long-standing bilateral agreement between the two countries, on a so-called “train and advise” mission.

While it is claimed that the troops will not be used in the Saudi conflict with Yemen, the deployment coincides with the culmination of a week-long joint exercise between the Saudi and Pakistani navies in the Arabian Sea.

Retired Pakistani army chief Raheel Sharif was appointed last year as the first commander of the Counter Terrorism (Imaf) which is being described as the “Muslim NATO,” and which will oversee the training of Islamic states led by Saudi Arabia. Unsurprisingly, Shi’ite Muslim Iran is not a member.

Given the international outrage the Saudi role in Yemen has raised, the appointment of the current troop deployment puts Pakistan in danger of being drawn into a wider Middle East conflict, with the Houthis rebels in Yemen being backed by Iran.

One observer has described Pakistan’s position as “a balancing act that increasingly resembles a tightrope as conflicts and disputes in the Gulf mushroom.”

For the people of Iran there is little good news following the alignment of forces in the Middle East and in the White House. Widening US-Saudi rifts are expressing disillusionment with the regime’s economic policy, political corruption and human rights record have met with arrests and violent suppression.

The limited lifting of sanctions which the 5+1 agreement was meant to facilitate has not been enough to overcome the high levels of unemployment and rampant inflation in the Iranian economy.

Inflation in the Iranian economy. Those in work are poorly paid and often on short-term contracts. Those out of work are sinking into poverty. While protests have rocked the government, it has not seen bad news, p. 11.

Spain’s persecution of Catalan leaders continues

A Spanish Supreme Court judge has charged 13 Catalan separatist politicians, including fugitive former regional president Carles Puigdemont, with rebellion for their attempt to declare independence from Spain. Judge Pablo Llarena’s indictment on March 23 wrapped up the investigation into the events that six months ago plunged Spain into its deepest political crisis in decades. Rebellion charges are punishable with up to 30 years in prison.

Llarena said that 25 Catalan separatists in total will be tried for rebellion, embezzlement or disobeying the state. They are all already in pre-trial detention; seven other members of the ousted Catalan parliament are also charged.

Others charged with rebellion were former Catalan vice-president and current Catalan parliament curator Carme Forcadell; jailed separatist activits Roger Torrent and Jordi Cuixart and the leader of the left-wing separatist ERC party, Marta Roig.

In a letter to party supporters, Ms Roig said that she was being held illegally and it’s been more saddening to lead a silenced life.”

Puigdemont and four other Catalan politicians fled to Brussels following the failed secession referendum attempt in late October. Jordi Sánchez, a former MP for the left-wing separatist CUP party, fled to Switzerland earlier this year.

Spain’s post-Franco constitution insists the country is “indivisible” and courts have blocked Catalonia’s independence efforts at every turn. Seccession is illegal without a constitutional amendment.

Twelve of the former regional ministers are also charged with misuse of public funds, and seven other MPs are charged with misuse of public funds.

The judge also required the 14 ex-members of the Catalan cabinet to pay 2.1 million (€1.85m) as a collective deposit before the trial establishes whether they need to pay back misused public funds.

That includes 1.6m that, according to the judicial investigation, were used to pay for the October 1 referendum that set the turbulent events in motion, and which Madrid insists was illegal.

Llarena described the case as “an attack on the constitutional state that, through the desire to impose a change in the form of government for Catalonia and the rest of the country, is of unusual gravity and persistence.”

His ruling also warned that the strategy to secede Catalonia was “criminal and awaiting resumption” once separatists regained control of the Catalan government.

Two days later, protesters clashed with riot police in Barcelona and other Catalan towns following the detention Carles Puigdemont in Germany.

A German court was set to rule on whether he should remain in custody while other courts decide whether he should be extradited to Spain.

Puigdemont was being held in prison in Neumünster after he fled March 22 and was convicted of rebellion and misuse of public funds.

German court’s consider whether the Spanish crime of rebellion is equivalent to the German crime of terrorism in order to determine whether it constitutes grounds for extradition.

“With files from the Morning Star.”
The collapse of the centre, where is the left?

By Zoltan Godels

With both the Italian elections and the German effort at a social market economy, the recent news, much attention has turned to political developments in Europe. For those of us in the US, interest comes not only from the effect of European politics on our own, but also from the fact that US and European trends have often travelled on parallel tracks.

For example, in much of the post-war period, governance in Europe revolved around two centrist political poles that could be roughly characterised as Christian democracy and social democracy. Insofar as both poles defended capitalism and opposed communism, support capitalist institutions, and are content to peacefully alternate rule, they remained in place without the stricter institutional backstops that preserve the clearest definition in both the US Republican and Democratic Party in the US.

Certainly, the western European polity was more multiparty after the war, but the dynamics of those systems steered political developments toward the centre. The fair right was appropriately countered by the discrediting of Nazism and fascism as a consequence of World War II. The revolutionary left, the communists, were overly and counterfactually thwarted by the cold war, the Nato consensus. Where the communists enjoyed formal legality, the centrist parties, the US and the Nato allies, were hand-in-glove to deny participation in government.

While both European Christian democracy and social democracy were firmly committed to the capitalist course, social democracy withered as a consequence of the economic disasters of the 1970s and 1980s. It has since, defying expectations, been revived in most of the post-communist countries in Europe and Russia, and more recently in Northern Europe.

As an insurance policy against the return of the revolutionary allies of the communist parties, Christian democracy tempered the right’s contribution to the creation of minimalist government, unfettered markets and austerity budgets, gradually allowing social spending and a more humane social contract.

Frustrated by the de facto barrier against communist parliamentary success, many European communist parties began a process of concessions, of shedding revolutionary principles and prospects, creating a left-social democracy dubbed Eurocommunism. A few parties resisted this option.

The demise of the Soviet Union and the European socialist states put a period on European politics and particularly the left. The Eurocommunist left, which had so often been derided as “d’etre — communism without communism — collapsed, leaving a void to the left of Christian democracy.

Social democracy, in turn, cast off its troubled private-private partnership under the direction of monopolar capitalism: massive welfare policies were to provide for the masses. And, without the threat of
capitalism, the right returned to its fundamental characteristic, aggressively pressuring unrestrained class politics: anti-trade unionism, anti-regulation, privatisation and chauvinism. Without the fear of communism, capitalism had no need for an accommodation with the working class.

In the 1990s, continental Europe followed the path blazed in Britain and the US over a decade earlier by the Thatcher-Reagan axis.

Faced with shifting alignments and the 1970s failure of Old Left/New Deal policies (specifically, the Keynesian economic framework underlying both approaches), a new consensus began to emerge in both countries. From the mid-1980s into the next decade, the new consensus spread to nearly all major political parties and around the globe.

In its essence, it was a return to Whiggism, the political, social and economic ideology of the bourgeoisie: parliamentarism, negative rights and the economic liberalism of minimal regulation, preference for private over public initiatives and, markets as decisive

Of course, the structural changes cited are, to a great extent, the result of the failure of worker unions and parties to defend the interests of workers against predatory capitalist practices.

Moreover, the difficulties that these changes bring forth are obstacles to union organising, less so to political parties. And history teaches that establishing militant political parties in the interests of organising militant trade unionism.

No task before the trade union movement today presents greater impediments than waste task of building industrial unions in the US in the 1930s. The challenge of establishing the US Congress of Industrial Organisations was only met, was only possible, because of the leadership and effort of communist and socialist workers.

These lessons challenge the notion of the failure of all matters and in the last instance.

Pundits are fond of labelling this development “neoliberalism,” or “neoliberal governance.” While the superficiality of that term obscures the fact that the turn is more than a policy change, that it leads to the failings of the previous consensus and it constitutes the capitalist norm when the spectre of communism does not loom large over the future.

Social democrats in the US and Europe promoted the notion of a “third way” to mask their capitulation to classical liberalism and its totalising influence over all aspects of society, over every global nosh and cranny.

In fact, after the demise of the Soviet Union and its socialist neighbours, there was the one way in the US and EU.

With capitalism marching triumphant, most of the US and European left conceded that capitalism was impermanent. The triumph of the moral of a kinder, gentler capitalism might be the best that could be imagined. But the triumphant project ran aground, crushing on the rocks of economic nationalism. The inevitable accommodation process imploded in 2000 and again, even more severely, in 2007-8.

Recovery required absorption, but left millions of broken, desperate people in its wake. Inequality, unemployment, poverty, insecurity and alienation afflicted

Mesmerised by rising equity values and restored profitability, and impressed with the growing wealth and wellbeing of the bourgeoisie and the visible and invisible, genuine, working elites labour under the illusion that all is going well.

In reality, in the US, the never-changing meal of capitalism: worship, sports, anti-social media, and other distractions. The failure of growth to return has led many in the capitalist class to call for a change in direction:

Protectionism. The emergence of support for nationalisation and protectionism has energised the Eurosceptics, the extreme right and Trump.

Of course, the other side of this political coin is the failure of the left, organisational left that is, a failure that is uncontainted by the strain of ineffetive social democracy. For the most part, the non-Establishment left has failed to deliver a militant, persuasive message to the working people in Europe and the US.

And where there is a still a credible militant communist left, the waters have been maddened by false prophets — for example, Syria in Greece.

In many countries, the retreat from Marxism became a rout after the fall of the Soviet Union. In its place, ideologies like anarchism, utopian socialism and cooperatism — ideologies that had long been discredited by Marx himself — are revived.

The peculiarly North American marginalising of the procedural democracy — the view that justice will flow spontaneously like a natural spring from procedures. The acceptance of Robert’s Rules of Order has returned to prominence as shown by the now-occupied Occupy

The desperate attempt to preserve a coalition of the centre left and the shocking success of the Five Star Movement and Donald Trump in Europe and in the US only truly underscore the distance between the masses and the political parties carefully crafted by the bourgeoisie to contain the aspirations of those masses. Besides these political developments lies a stagnant, sputtering global economy. It is this trend in employment has followed the path blazed in Britain and the US over a decade earlier by the Thatcher-Reagan axis.

For example, in much of the US, interest comes not only from the effect of European politics on our own, but also from the fact that US and European trends have often travelled on parallel tracks.

While both European Christian democracy and social democracy were firmly committed to the capitalist course, social democracy withered as a consequence of the attraction of a workers’ state by advanced capitalism. With the advent of Whiggism, the political, social and economic ideology of the bourgeoisie: parliamentarism, negative rights and the economic liberalism of minimal regulation, preference for private over public initiatives and, markets as decisive

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Amazon workers strike in Spain

A 48-hour strike in the Amazon warehouse in San Fernando de Henares, near Madrid, succeeded in bringing the company’s biggest logistics center to a temporary standstill. The strike was called by the CCOO (Confederación Sindicarial de Obreros Camioneros) of the UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores), two of Spain’s major union federations, and the CGT (Confederación General del Trabajo), a split from the anarcho-syndicalist CNT. An estimated 98% of the staff walked out, paralysing the warehouse for two consecutive days.

The logistics centre was the company’s first one to open in the country and the biggest, with approximately 1,100 permanent workers and 900 employed by temp agencies. The strike, the first of its kind in Amazon Spain, was voted for by 75% of the permanent workers and 80% of the under-90s workers in March, as a result of the failure to renew the collective agreement that expired on December 31, 2017, and was then extended by law a further year.

numerous two-day walkouts followed a proposal from Amazon to impose changes that workers considered damaging. Under the offer, the mid and low-category salaries would be frozen, employees would lose their health insurance if they worked in countries outside Spain would also lose pay for night-shifts.

During the strike, Amazon released a statement which dictated that all employees of the San Fernando warehouse would receive a salary rise of between 1.6% and 5.6%, depending on their category, starting April 1. The workers are demanding to reestablish the old collective agreement, to maintain current working conditions, and to boost salaries by an average of 1.5% over the average rate of inflation.

Amazon turned a $3 billion profit in 2017, a 20% increase over 2016, but is paying some of its drivers wages all over Europe.

Wages drop in EU countries

A study assessing wage growth among European workers has found that salaries have tumbled by as much as 20 per cent between 2010 and 2017. Out of nine countries that saw an overall fall in pay over the last seven years, workers in six of them – Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey and Finland – also earned less in 2017 than they did in 2016.

The paper, called Benchmark Marking Europe Working 2018, was published by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). It examines workers’ “real” wages – the value cost of living, adjusted for differences among EU member states and Norway over the last decade. As of 2017, Greek employees suffered the most from the fiscal crisis, as their wages decreased by 19% from 2010 to 2016. In Finland, workers’ wages decreased by 1% in seven years. Meanwhile, wages have risen in some Eastern Europe countries – by 55% in Bulgaria and 20% in Latvia between 2010 and 2017.

Explaining the wage drop, the study points to poor investment, labor market deregulation, and fiscal austerity in the wake of the global financial crisis from 2007 to 2008. So-called “labor reforms” market in 2013, drivers were promised monthly incomes of about $1,500 per year. In 2016, according to the company’s own data, it was saying that some salaried workers quit their jobs to drive. Cypriot workers of all kinds of透过 should have been more than a little concerned, on the basis of their own data that the family-wage companies did not have to compete with drivers. At the beginning, drivers said, companies took a percentage commission from each ride. Now, they are forced to give back up to 30 percent.

Childcare workers seek pay equity

A nationwide childcare strike planned for March 27 is expected to throw millions of workers demand better pay. The strike has been called by the Careworkers union United Voice as “Keep Your Children at Home Day”. While the negotiations so far have not materialized. The huge influx of willing drivers meant ride-hailing companies to work the same “flexible hours” but the federal government isn’t to blame for the action.

Port strike in New Zealand

Two hundred members of New Zealand’s Rail and Maritime Transport Union were on strike for seven days in late March, demanding safer conditions and the same pay rates as members of another union working at the Lyttleton port in Christchurch. The port says it will not offer equal pay, unless RMTU members agree to work the same “flexible hours” the rival union has agreed to. The RMTU has received no indication of interest in the talks. The union says the strike is against their wish, and the Government has not made any proposals to prevent it.

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“We Are All Venezuela”

The second ‘Todos Somos Venezualia’ (We Are All Venezuela) event held in early March was even larger than its predecessor in September 2017, with over 300 international delegates, including 116 from Latin America, 33 from the Caribbean, 48 from North America, 19 from Africa, and 34 from Europe. The event also had the blessing of Hugo Chavez’s representatives of Venezuelan social movements, political parties, and organised community groupings. The encounter was held as the US government increased its threatening rhetoric. On March 2, President Trump renewed an executive order declaring Venezuela to be an “extraordinary threat” to US national security. The US is also pressing regional governments to not recognise the results of the country’s May 20 presidential elections.

By Adrien Welsh

At the end of the National Conference of the Communist Party of Venezuela (known by its Red Rooster symbol) activists gathered on Feb. 26 to announce the Communists’ strategy for the May 20 presidential elections. After negotiations and sometimes heated internal discussions with the United Socialist Party of Venezuela in power, the Communists have chosen to support the candidacy of incumbent President Nicolas Maduro, on the basis of a common framework agreement read by two members of the national leadership of the PSUV, two members of the Political Bureau of the PCV as well as by Nicolas Maduro himself.

This unitary framework agreement represents a first in the history of the relationship between the two partisan entities of the Bolivarian process. For the first time, the two progressive forces agree to respect a common road map for a minimum program in office.

Maduro is the Communists’ Candidate in Venezuela

By Adrien Welsh

The text also commits the two parties to defend the rights of workers by strengthening class unionism and the obvious expressions of the revolutionary workers’ movement, which includes trade unions, but also the Socialist People’s Councils. The strengthening of the Organic Labor Law is also on the agenda.

As for the economic aspect, the VCP and the PSUV agree to put an end to the dismantling of public enterprises, to promote the nationalization of trusts and monopolies and to experiment with a system of democratic and multiple control of national enterprises.

The agreement also stipulates that for all matters relating to culture, sports, education and youth rights, youth organizations from both parties (JCV and JPSUV) will have to be consulted.

This declaration of unity was signed on the eve of the announcement of Maduro’s candidacy for the presidential elections, the PCV conditioning its support for Nicolas Maduro on the adoption of a frankly anti-imperialist joint agreement, contrary to the views of the PSUV in its opposition to maintain and strengthen the unity of anti-imperialist forces. The agreement pledged to respect the most reactionary forces to fill the imperialist’s road map to secure its hold on the country, and to advance the process of social transformation initiated since Chavez came to power in 1998.

Thus, after several days of discussions, the agreement on the adoption of a frankly anti-imperialist joint agreement, contrary to the views of the PSUV in its opposition to maintain and strengthen the unity of anti-imperialist forces. The agreement pledged to respect the most reactionary forces to fill the imperialist’s road map to secure its hold on the country, and to advance the process of social transformation initiated since Chavez came to power in 1998.

Chavez’s constitution of 1999 that replaced the “morbund” Caracas charter is all about people and their relevance in society by granting them not only a participatory role in the revolutionary process but also more fundamentally a protagonist identity and commitment.

For the communists, this development is of particular importance. According to Oscar Figuera, General Secretary of the PCV, this is a historical development that marks a qualitative change in the relationship between the two main parties of the popular anti-imperialist alliance. For the first time in 19 years, the PSUV and the PCV agree on a programmatic basis to deepen the socialist transformation undertaken by Chavez in 1999, which strengthens the secular state and the social welfare programs, and the new popular victory on May 20.

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Whether BBC photoshopped Corbyns hat is not the point

By Ben Cowles, Morning Star (UK)

In the background to a BBC Newswipe episode on March 15 was a graphic of Jeremy Corbyn superimposed in front of the Kremlin wearing what appeared to be a Russian hat, known as an ushanka. It seemed to many that the BBC had deliberately photoshopped his hat to make him look more Lenin-esque.

When the Guardian’s Owen Jones challenged Newswipe presenter Evan Davis over the image on the show the following night, Davis denied it was altered. Soon after, Skwawkbox shared a gif (a short animated photo) of the original Corbyn photograph the Beeb used next to the one which aired on the show. It quite convincingly showed the height of the Labour leader’s hat had increased.

Later, however, Newswipe acting editor Jess Brammar took to Twitter denying it had been digitally altered. She said: “Our (excellent, hardworking) graphics team explained the image has had the contrast increased and been colour treated, usual treatment for screen graphics. … If you look you can see it’sUART in silhouette.”

Whether the image was deliberately altered or not isn’t really the point, but the fact that the BBC contributed to the narrative set by most of the corporate press depicting Corbyn as some sort of traitor is.

It was another example of the media acting as the attack dog of the Establishment as found in the 2016 LSE study into the journalistic role of Newswipe. As an article written on Corbyn in the British press:

“Corbyn was thoroughly denounced as a ‘traitor to the country’ or, from the moment he became a prominent candidate, the study says, “an even more so after he was elected as party leader with a strong mandate. This process of de-legitimization occurred in several ways: 1) through lack of or distortion of voice, 2) through ridicule, scorn and personal attacks; and 3) through association, mainly with terrorism.”

The image also fits into the corporate media’s deliberate collaboration with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s kleptocratic government with the country’s communications ministry thereby because Corbyn is a socialist. The Sun’s front page last Thursday read: “Outrage at Red Jezza! Putin’s Puppet.” The Daily Mail smeared it front page: “Corbyn the Kremlin Stooge.”

“Now clearly, BBC Newswipe editors, as well as the editors of The Sun and Daily Mail, are educated enough to know that Russia hasn’t been anything like a Hussein warned the government to examine closely for hate speech. O’Connor’s attacks on the BBC about such thing as impartiality. The very idea is ludicrous. We’re all inculcated from birth by our education system and public institutions to accept the values and beliefs of the powerful and the BBC is one of those institutions, of course.

In a famous interview between August 1973 when asked how he felt about the BBC’s impartiality, Chomsky replies: “I’m not saying you’re wrong. I’m sure you believe everything you’re saying. What I’m saying is if you believed something different, you wouldn’t be sitting where you’re sitting.”

A ask: about BBC impartiality, Tom Mills, the author of BBC: The Myth of a Public Service, said: “The BBC has always been formally accountable to ministers for its operations. Governments set the terms under which it operates, they appoint its most senior figures who in future will be directly involved in day-to-day managerial decision making and they set the level of the licence fee, which is the BBC’s major source of income. So that’s the context within which the BBC operates and hardly amounts to independence in any substantive sense.”

Perhaps US journalist Chris Hedges was right in saying: “The corporate state is unnerved by the media outlets that give a voice to the critics of corporate capitalism, the security and surveillance state and imperialism … These discontents, if we had a functioning public broadcast system or a commercial press free of public control, could be multiplied many times.”

So that’s the context within which the BBC operates and hardly amounts to independence in any substantive sense.

The Morning Star exists in a perpetual state of financial crisis. Appearing on the BBC’s newspapers page round-ups would be a great boon. Each edition of this paper is a miracle and is totally in the hands of your patronage and donations. Yes, it will occasionally include a mockup shop-up of Tories in silly hats, but at least it is honest about its publication. You’ll find the words for “peace and socialism” on the front page. The mainstream British media are state corporations and states/corporations are not impartial.

We are in a capitalist/socialist revolution, it is very doubtful we’ll ever see the Morning Star included on BBC newspapers page round-ups.

Typical red-baiting anti-Corbyn front page from the Daily Mail

Joan Baez: passing the torch?

Joan Baez has announced that her latest album, Whistle Down the Wind, would be her final recording, and that her current eight-month tour of Europe and North America is part of farewell to the “torch”. But while the three-octave soprano voice of her early days is now a burnished alto, it’s hard to imagine that this artist and teacher, who has been everywhere - from the March on Washington in 1963, to Standing Rock in 2017 - is actually going to retire. Her voice is still a supple and expressive instrument, and she remains a storyteller with important things to say. Whistle Down the Wind, produced by singer-songwriter Joe Henry, is a reflective, ultimately hopeful work that places the focus, not on the Baez persona, but on the songs themselves.

The title piece by Tom Waits - a song about the 2013 Charleston church shooting. Last year, at her induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Baez described the relationship between her singing and the philosophy of non-violent political action that has guided her throughout her career: “What has given my life deep meaning and enduring pleasure has been to use my voice in the battle against injustice. It has brought me in touch with my own purpose.”

Celebrating jazz pianist Geri Allen

On January 15, New York City’s Winter Jazzfest hosted a Martin Luther King Day tribute to the pianist and educator Geri Allen, whose death from cancer last June 27 at age 60 came as a shock to the jazz world. The Detroit native was an inspiration to the generation of jazz players that followed in her wake after her debut as a major artist in the early 1990s. An obituary in the New York Times aptly described her as a musician who “reconciled far-flung elements of the jazz tradition”. The Winter Jazzfest homage was one of several in recent months, at which eminent musicians who had worked with Allen gathered to honor her creative vision, her humanity, and the role she played in establishing the shape of contemporary jazz. Musical director for the tribute was Allen’s friend Liam O’Flynn: 1945-2018

Virtuoso Irish uilleann piper Liam O’Flynn was laid to rest on March 16 at St. Brigid’s church, in the village of Kill, County Kildare. Among the mourners were Christy Moore and Andy Irvine, both former members of Planxty, the lead vocalist in the traditional band O’Flynn co-founded, with them, in 1972. Irish President Michael D. Higgins was in attendance, along with many prominent figures in Irish traditional music. The service began with a trio of uillean pipers, vocalists Dee Dee Bridgewater and Lizz Wright, and drummer Jack DeJohnette. “Geri Allen’s music will always remind us that we do not need to sacrifice our cultural identity in order to engage in courageous explorations,” said emcee Angela Davis. “Her brilliance will inspire generations to come.” To learn more about this giant of contemporary jazz visit http://geralden.com. Liam O’Flynn: 1945-2018

Typical red-baiting anti-Corbyn front page from the Daily Mail

Typical red-baiting anti-Corbyn front page from the Daily Mail
Bad news for the people of Iran... continued from page 6

been dislodged.
The threat of military attack on Iran would be used by the ruling
theocracy to justify repression of dissent and as a means to demand
total loyalty.

Iranian people need peace to be able to build their movement for a
democratic and just future. That is the only viable route to stable
democracy and prosperity.
The US support for hawkish regimes in Saudi Arabia and Israel,
combined with an increasingly right-wing lineup of personnel in the
White House, increases the possibility of external intervention in Iran.

While the West may have had its fingers burnt provoking civil war
and outside intervention in Syria, they may not be enough to stop it taking its chances on another
military adventure.

Both Saudi Arabia and Israel regard Iran as an existential threat.
Their combined military capability would be a force to be reckoned
with.

In military terms, Iran would be no pushover. However, for the people of Iran, any outside intervention would be a step
backwards in terms of the fight for peace, social justice and democracy.

( Jane Green is UK national organiser of CODIR, the Committee for the Defence of
the Iranian People’s Rights.)

Propaganda... continued from page 11

communism - at the time the book was written.

Herman and Chomsky highlight the creation and stategic use of
coverage between those killed by the West and its allies and those killed by
the West’s enemies.

They state that “worthy victims will be featured prominently and
dramatically, that they will be humanised, and that their victimisation will receive the detail
and context in story construction that will generate reader interest
and sympathetic emotion. In
contrast, unworthy victims will merit only slight detail, minimal
humanisation, and little context that will excite and enrage.”

One example they give is that of
Archbishop Oscar Romero, recently confirmed as a saint by
Pope Francis, who was assassinated in a El Salvador
hospital chapel by a US-armed and trained death squad but whose
murder was played down by the
Corporate media’s role as a
propaganda mouthpiece for the
Establishment is the reason why
the war in Yemen, Turkey’s attacks
on the Kurds, and the Western-
backed Al-Qaeda forces in Syria
received such scant coverage. It’s
also the reason why the
blood-soaked sotrage宫f a medieval
state has his face all over our
papers.

And the winner is...

The winner of the annual Bethune Day Dinner door prize - an all-inclusive trip for two
to sunny Cuba - is PV reader Anne-Marie Brun of Kelowna, British Columbia.
Congratulations and enjoy your travels!

People’s Voice deadlines

April 16-30: Thursday, April 5
May 1-15: Thursday, April 19
Send submissions to PV Editorial Office,
706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, V5L 3J1
<pvvoice@telus.net>

People’s Voice 2018 Calendar

People’s Voice 2018 Calendar marking the 200th birthday of Karl Marx, available by
mail $6 (includes postage),
or $4 each for minimum
of 5 calendars.
Call 604-255-2041 for details.

Mother’s Day Brunch

Sunday, May 13
11 a.m.-2 p.m.
1600 block E. 20th Ave. Van.
(3586 BellaVista)
$15 - kids $10
All proceeds to People’s Voice
Ph. 604-255-2041 for information.
The British are well known for their dramatic flair when it comes to politics, often described as having a flair for the theatrical and murder mystery. Think Ian Fleming, John Le Carré and Agatha Christie. But the episode of a former Russian spy being poisoned on a public park bench in a quaint English town has suggested a tad too much drama about it.

It is being speculated that the Russian ex-spy, who had been living in Britain since 2010, may have been poisoned by a deadly nerve agent. William Hague, the 80-year-old Sergei Skripal being rushed to hospital in Salisbury, along with his daughter Yulia, British politicians and media were cracking up the story that the pair had fallen victim to a murder plot implicating the Kremlin.

British Prime Minister Theresa May had held a top national security summit in Downing Street, and her Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said that further sanctions would be imposed on Russia. The incident of Skripal’s apparent poisoning is strongly suggestive of a Kremlin assassination attempt.

As with the Skripal case, Moscow said it had nothing to do with Skripal’s demise. A dubious semi-official British inquiry concluded in January 2016 that there was “strong circumstantial evidence of Russian state responsibility” over Litvinenko’s death. The British inquiry presented no evidence. However, alternatively, there is plausible evidence that Litvinenko was poisoned accidentally as a result of his own shoddy dealings with organised crime and international smuggling of special nuclear materials.

In any case, the real similarity between the case of Sergei Skripal and Alexander Litvinenko is the cynical way that the British authorities are exploiting it for anti-Russian propaganda.

It seems highly significant that Russia’s presidential elections were due to take place later in March. What better way to smear the expected electoral victory of a decade in England be targeted on the eve of Russia’s presidential election? It is by Kremlin avengers?

And while we are in “who done it?” mode, another important possible lead is this: if Venomous Russian propaganda.

The country’s human rights record is atrocious. Amnesty International has long noted: “The authorities severely restricted freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Many human rights defenders and critics were detained and some were sentenced to lengthy prison terms after unfair trials .... Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees are commonplace.”

“Despite limited reforms, women faced systemic discriminations in law and in practice that were inadequately protected against sexual and other violence. The authorities used criminal and civil law to perpetually, externally carrying out scores of executions. The Saudi-led coalition continued to commit serious violations of international law in Yemen.”

Oh yes, Yemen. Since 2015, the Saudi-led war in Yemen has been described as one of the most deadly conflicts in the world, killing at least 10,000 people and regularly carrying out what observers say are war crimes – all profits come before the lives of women and children.

Oxfam reported last year that “the number of people with cholera in Yemen is now the largest ever recorded in any conflict in a single year since records began.” The United Nations lists at least six hospitals that are no longer able to treat cholera patients, with “no one mobile to carry them to hospital.”

The authors describe how every story passes through five filters before making it into print. Articles are influenced – though largely framed in a favourable way to their interpretation.

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By Finian Cunningham,
Information Clearing House

The British public to be receptive towards more elections by Kremlin avengers?
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