CIVIC ELECTIONS

Municipal elections are coming this fall, including Oct. 20 in B.C. and Oct. 22 in Ontario. One candidate to support is Toronto community activist Helen Kennedy, on the ballot for school trustee in Ward 4.

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FASCISM IN ACTION

Contrary to the myth of poor little democratic Ukraine, fascist and ultra-right gangs backing the Poroshenko government are waging a war of terror against leftists and minorities, such as the Roma people.

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AFTER THE TRUMP-PUTIN SUMMIT

Washington is in chaos after a tumultuous NATO Summit and the campaign to make Russia-hating the new national pastime.

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35 YEARS LATER: SOLIDARITY B.C.

A recent article in The Tyee looked back on the 35th anniversary of Operation Solidarity, and RCMP spying on the “Communist threat.”

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US Supreme Court opens door to “right to work for less”

Will the war on workers hit Canada next?

See page 2

CANADA OUT OF NATO!

NO to military interventions and wars in Iraq, Latvia, Ukraine, and Mali

Withdraw from NATO, dissolve the military alliance

Cut the military budget by 75%, create good jobs across Canada

Demand a foreign policy based on peace, disarmament and national sovereignty

YES TO PEACE!

Read more on page 6

NO TO NATO!
US “open shop” ruling a challenge to workers in Canada

By Dave McKee

At the end of June, the US Supreme Court issued its long awaited ruling in the case of Janus v. AFSCME, in which Mark Janus challenged the constitutionality of public sector workers having to “fair share fees” (or “agency fees”) if they decline to join a union and therefore do not pay dues, but who are still covered by the contract and defended by the union. Janus’ case was based on the argument that his opposition to the union’s political positions meant that mandatory fees violated his constitutional right to free speech. In reality, the fees are used to cover the costs of the union’s legal obligation to represent and defend all workers in its bargaining unit, including those who opt not to pay dues.

This case is a major attack on labour rights and the tradition of collective bargaining. It makes the public sector across the entire United States an “open shop” and directly diminishes union membership and strength. It is expected that public sector unions will lose between 10–30% of their membership – between 500,000 and 1.5 million unionized workers.

Wages, benefits and working conditions will also be negatively affected. The Illinois Economic Policy Institute estimates that this decision could lower public sector wages by an average of 4%, or overall loss of up to $33.4 billion. The overwhelming bulk of these lost wages will not go directly into the coffers of corporations and the very rich, through reductions in state taxes.

Workers from oppressed groups will feel the brunt of these losses. Women comprise 42% of the public sector workforce but are paid an average of 10% less than men in the same sector. Studies of the fallout from the 2008 financial meltdown show that Black workers, who account for about 20% of public sector workers in the US, faced job losses in that sector at a far steeper rate than other demographic groups.

As unions in the US brace for this onslaught, the labour movement in Canada is considering the challenges Janus presents to workers here. CUPE, NUPGE, FSAC, and CBU-Canada all released statements of solidarity with US workers and warned that they expect to face similar struggles.

In the first place, the decision puts wind into the sails of those who promote Right to Work (RtW) legislation in Canada. Many of the same huge corporations that have pushed anti-union legislation in the US are agitating for the same here. This is particularly acute in Ontario, which stands with Ohio as the only two non-RtW jurisdictions in the heavy manufacturing region known as the “I-75 corridor.” Ohio is expected to vote on this issue in two years, and Doug Ford’s Conservative government is just waiting for the chance to enthusiastically swing this axe at Ontario’s working class. The expected wage losses in the US will also affect public sector workers in Canada. Even though there is generally not direct competition between jurisdictions in this sector, lower wages in US states will translate into downward pressure on wages generally. Anyone familiar with collective bargaining knows that the bosses’ unwillingness to pay their workplace’s higher wages is only equalled by their insistence upon matching lower ones.

As US public sector unions are weakened, their workplaces will be more susceptible to privatization. This will, undoubtedly, lead to rapidly increased accumulation and concentration among the private corporations who take over these assets and institutions. And their greed will definitely spill across the border, where Justin Trudeau has already greased the rails of privatization with his multi-billion dollar Canada Infrastructure Bank.

It’s a tremendous challenge and it all sounds very bleak, but the good news is that some in the labour movement are already in motion to fight back.

Prior to the Janus decision, in West Virginia – already a RtW state – education workers defied restrictions and held an illegal strike. They won wage increases and their struggle inspired similar strikes (many of them similarly illegal) in Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina and Tennessee. The unions involved have reported increases in membership in response to these walkouts, including a 13% jump in Oklahoma.

The fight by the teachers and education workers really does show the way forward. But to be effective, they must be fought in the face of powerful foes, unions will need to be engaging and responsive for their membership. The United Electrical Workers (UE) in Indiana and Wisconsin successfully united and mobilized and unionized their members in these RtW states and were able to maintain high membership levels. As the union notes, “The key is UE’s brand of rank-and-file, member-driven, democratic unionism.”

This formula is equally necessary in Canada. If the CLC can be proactive and successfully meet the threat that Janus poses, they need to be pushed away from business unionism and forced to pursue a determined policy of building unity, democracy, militancy, and independence.

The Coalition of Black Unions Canada Chapter put it best: “The CBU-Canada call on all of Canada’s Unions, both the affiliated and non-affiliated, to form a united front against Right to Work legislation as we stand on the side of working fibre. Whether a unionized or non-unionized, it is left behind through our collective response.”

Community activist Helen Kennedy runs for TDSB Ward 4 trustee

With Toronto’s municipal election less than three months away (October 22), a popular labour and community activist has thrown her hat into the ring as a candidate for School Trustee in Ward 4.

Announcing her campaign, Helen Kennedy said, “I have lived in Ward 4 for over 50 years. I am a graduate of Oakdale Jr High, and Westview and North York Fights Back! Parent Council, Jane-Finch Community activist Helen Kennedy’s campaign is based on the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.” On the view that “strong schools mean healthy communities.”

Currently she is a Labour Education Usher at CUPE, and co-chairs Toronto’s Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts. She is the former President of CUPE Toronto; co-chaired the CUPE National Women’s Committee; and was Secretary of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council.

Check out the campaign online, at https://www.facebook.com/helen.kennedy.3517563.

Community activist Helen Kennedy runs for TDSB Ward 4 trustee

Here’s my contribution to the PV Fund Drive!

Enclosed please find my donation of $ to the People’s Voice Press Fund Drive.

Name

Address

City/town

Prov. / Postal Code

Send your contribution to: People’s Voice, 700 Clark Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 1J1
On July 12, Toronto Mayor John Tory and Police Chief Mark Saunders announced a $1 million plan to address recent gun violence by placing 200 more officers on the streets of the city the evening of the announcement. They also pledged to come up with an additional $12 million to expand existing community programs serving at-risk youth by pooling federal and municipal resources. The new proposal was introduced as a reaction to the tragic loss of a 13-year-old boy shot to death on July 10-11. As the situation worsens, the government is increasing the pressure on the police to intensify the ongoing gun violence crackdown. However, the police are increasingly asking for more resources to be able to address the pressing community problems.

The Tory/Saunders violence prevention plan will no doubt face many challenges, especially among those concerned with addressing the issues of at-risk youth, front-line officers, the union and community leaders. The better approach is the one proposed by the Toronto Youth Development Centre: "a better approach is the one proposed by the Toronto Youth Development Centre. The young people are asking for more programs with a focus on social skills, civics and social justice instead of adding more policing and the police officers who are committed to the roots of youth crime problems and effects of gun violence. One of the programs that the Toronto Youth Development Centre has put in place is an investment in after-school, evening and weekend leadership development for at-risk youth in the 17-19 years old age group. Youth leadership programs with a focus on social skills, civic action, etc. have proven benefits for keeping this age group, pre-teens especially, engaged in recreation activities. Left to themselves, most 10-12-year-olds would rather hang out at the mall than be made to go to a children’s after-school program. Engaged at the Community Centre, they improve their job skills and are more likely to end up with part-time or full-time work.

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Ford attacks sex ed - students and teachers fight back

During the provincial election, Doug Ford declared repeatedly that he would scrap Ontario’s updated curriculum. On July 12, he announced in his Throne Speech that this curriculum would be replaced with one from 1998. The response from educators, students and allies has been fast and furious. Within four days of the Throne Speech, Education Minister Lisa Thompson began to flip flop, stating that some elements of the updated curriculum – including gender identity and consent – would remain. It remains completely unclear what students will be taught when school resumes in September. We know that it is Ford, however, that is supporters of the inclusive curriculum are in motion.

On July 21, over 1000 people converged on Queen’s Park as part of the March for Education. The rally was organized by high school students, supported by education unions, LGBTQ organizations, parents, social service workers, and health care workers. Joyce Lachica, President of Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Toronto representing 11,000 teachers, warned that educators are prepared to do “everything necessary to fight this government to teach what needs to be taught.” We will teach healthy relationships! We will teach anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying! We will foster safe and caring classrooms and school communities for all forever. Will we be moved? No, we will not be moved!

March organizer Rayne Fisher-Quann, a grade 11 student, delivered a stirring “Open Letter to Doug Ford”:

“Your planning to go back to a curriculum that doesn’t talk about gender identity, same-sex marriage, online safety, or consent, AND you’re planning to scrap the few steps our province has made towards Truth and Reconciliation with our Indigenous Peoples. As a young woman growing up in the province that you don’t seem to care about, let me explain to you why that’s a bad idea…

“My sister needed that curriculum when kids spent two years bullying her for her sexuality. They grew up thinking that being gay was wrong, and our school board never taught them otherwise.

“I can’t even count the number of non-binary and trans friends who needed that curriculum so they wouldn’t feel alone and confused and scared for so many years of their lives…

“I can name 2 more people who needed that curriculum. That’s the number of grade 7 girls I’ve seen walk into middle school pregnant. Grade 7? Can you even imagine what that must have been like? Grade 7. Mr. Ford, you want me to walk back to a curriculum that barely teaches grade 7 girls what their vaginas is called. Can you imagine what an education in consent might have done for those girls? Even a single lesson on the reproductive system? That’s what we need to teach, and they need it early, and you’re taking it away…

“So sure, Doug Ford, scrap our curriculum. Go back to an education plan created before gay marriage was even legal. But just know that if you do, you can throw any pretense you still have of being “for the people” out the window. You can look at your sister, your younger self, my friends, my family, 275,000 bullied children, and those 11 year old girls in the eye and tell them that you don’t care about them.

“Your policies aren’t for me. They aren’t for our indigenous population. They aren’t for the LGBTQ2 community, and they aren’t for anybody here.

“So sure, Doug Ford, scrap our education. We are the people, and we deserve it.”

Good article but fell short

I was glad to see the article “Women’s pay: capitalism knows a good thing when it sees it”, in the July 1-31 2018 issue. I thought the author, Laura Duggan made important links between patriarchy and capitalism. However, I ultimately found the article disappointing as Duggan failed to see women’s lives as intersecting and complex. By failing to analyze unique circumstances of women’s power, privilege and identity such as ability, race, class, immigration status and sexual orientation, Duggan oversimplified her analysis. Duggan’s failure to use any intersectional lens ultimately led to a weakened perspective.

Duggan failed to provide any understanding of how multiple forces work together and interact to reinforce conditions of inequality and social exclusion for women. While she speaks about capitalism, her failure to examine how the aforementioned identities combine with capitalism to reflect inequalities is problematic.

I am unable to use any Irish example [Laura Duggan’s article is from the Irish Socialist Voice - Ed.], but I want to press my point by making some references to the Canadian context. Here are some of my examples:

- The Canadian Labour Congress reported in 2018 women overall make 32 percent less per year. Racialized women make 40 percent less. Indigenous women make 45 percent less. Immigrant women make 55 percent less. Women with a disability make 56 percent less.

- In hospitals, a significant number of women work in dietary and housekeeping services and this includes a large number of racialized and immigrant women.

These jobs are often precarious and low paid.

- According to the Canadian Women’s Foundation poverty is not the same among all women: Women of colour are far higher for First Nations women (living off reserve) –36% - Women with disabilities – 33%, Immigrant women – 20%, and Single senior women – 16%

This information says to me that if we are going to discuss the situation of women, we more importantly need a national plan for solutions we need to apply an intersectional lens. Without that both our analysis and our solutions are inadequate.

I am urging the editors of People’s Voice to apply an intersectional analysis to their socialist framework.

Marion Pollack, Vancouver BC

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ford attacks sex ed - students and teachers fight back

People's Voice to apply an intersectional analysis to their socialist framework.

Marion Pollack, Vancouver BC
By Nino Pagliccia

A recent opinion piece by Michael Harris in iPolitics titled “Harper’s willingness to appease Trump should scare all Canadians” comments on the fact that former Conservative PM Stephen Harper “is back representing Canada on the world stage.” In fact he is making a full-fledged public appearance with a new book coming out soon and a big splash in the news speculating about his visit to Washington on July 2. [1] No one seems to know the reason for the visit, which is private. He is not really repatriating after all. Harris has ever really represented the popular will of most Canadians. Doidain is the most descriptive characteristic that can be associated with his behaviour. It was simply a matter of time before Harper would surface again. And surely, as Harris suggests, Harper should be concerned since he is still capable of causing some political damage. But who would have thought Harper could be concerned if Harper was not in the news? Harper will continue being a private citizen with no public life. No surprises there. It’s old news. But the fact that we can report on Harper’s being Trump, that should scare the hell out of most Canadians.

Trump, the unheralded Harper’s reported view that “the world would just have to get used to the new president” is to be taken very seriously. Trump is trying to impose on everyone, as an excuse to really justify an attack on Harper, uses several paragraphs to highlight all the bad policies that the Trump administration will impose on the world. We certainly do not disagree with Harris, especially when he refers to “Trump’s fascist impulses.” However, Trump will continue being Trump. That is again old news. The question now is that should be concerned about that and should act on it if they care. In Canada, as in the rest of the world willing to resist the US imperial dominance, we should be more scared at this time than ever. Harper himself is attempting to create a US-avis “Trump’s fascist impulses”.

Harris asks the valid question “Will anything survive Trump’s presidency?” What is at stake in this question? I would like to ask a pro-active one: What is Canada doing to offset the dismal implication of the question? My short answer is, not much. On the contrary, the Liberal government continues to have a foreign policy fully aligned with US war and military bickering on trade. There is nothing Harper can do to make it worse.

Canadian foreign policy has experienced a striking shift toward the political right in the last thirty years with both Liberal and Conservative governments. There is a new political and social movement that the world stage is an outright recognized wars and uprisings reporter, and end out of all this. It is a riddle very closely with the Trump administration. The most evident Canadian edition into international relations have occurred during Christy Clark tenure as Minister of International Trade of Canada (2015-2017) and as Canada’s Minister of Foreign Relations since January 2017.

The Hill Times recently reported an increase of 44% in Canadian military exports in 2017 with almost half of the exports being to Saudi Arabia, a US ally. The aggressive military involvement of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, not to mention the human rights abuses domestically, does not bode well for the often-apeled “Human Rights” Harper. This is a typical example of trade priorities over more humane considerations.

Closer to home, Chrystia Freeland has tacitly and actively supported regime changes in Latin America. In the case of Venezuela she has taken an infamous leadership role together with the US and EU governments - to subvert the constitutional order. She has done so by promoting and supporting a violent opposition and calling the military to a rebellion. Freeland leads the so-called Lima Group - a splinter group of a dozen nations outside the so-called Organization of American States pushing the Nicolas Maduro government to a crisis, and sanctioning Venezuelan high-ranking officials. This extremely aggressive interference can only be explained as a defense of Canada’s corporate mining interests in Venezuela and other Latin American countries.

There are more examples that Chrystia Freeland is imposing a personal ideology on Canada’s foreign policy. “Canada supports the most extreme form of sectarianism” in Syria, reports Global Research. [3] She chooses to ignore the neo-Nazi surge in Ukraine, and even more “Ms. Freeland’s” clients, the Gulf States. This is the foreign minister of Canada and more the foreign minister of Ukraine.” [4] She has also manifested an old Cold War attitude towards Russia.

Stephen Harper is likely quite proud of the current foreign minister and Canada’s foreign policy. Michael Harris warns Canadians about citizen Harper but he does not warn about the Trudeau government as represented internationally by Freeland. Considering Freeland’s recent speech in Washington, Harper should consider a follow-up article titled “Freeland’s willingness to appease Trump should scare all Canadians.” [5]

Canada should detach itself from the grip of an old and powerful US-centered world and accept a shared multipolar world. It should stop imposing its own ideological authoritarianism blaming the victims when they exercise their sovereign rights. We need to gain the trust of other nations by sincerely seeking peace and mediating for peace, especially in the Americas. We would benefit from welcoming the genuine trade connectivity expansion coming from China. We should support the war-deterrent balancing role that Russia is exerting in the Middle East.

By moving forward with these strategies Ms Freeland would help gain respect for Canada (and herself) from Canadians and the rest of the world, and contribute to world peace. ●

By Nino Pagliccia

Workers of all lands…

US labour still a key asset to imperialist foreign policy

By Dave McKee

On June 27, 1979, faced with stiff fighting in Managua, thousands of Nicaragua’s Sandinista militants began a tactical retreat to the nearby city of Masaya which they controlled. There were able to regroup, rearm, and train new militia. Less than a month later, on July 19, the Sandinistas entered Managua and began the revolutionary overthrow of Anastasio Somoza, “the last Manipulador” who was installed by US military to a rebellion. Freeland heads the so-called Lima Group - a splinter group of a dozen nations outside the so-called Organization of American States pushing the Nicolas Maduro government to a crisis, and sanctioning Venezuelan high-ranking officials. This extremely aggressive interference can only be explained as a defense of Canada’s corporate mining interests in Venezuela and other Latin American countries.

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Canada's troop withdrawal from Iraq and NATO brings it closer to the US.
**People's Voice Commentary**

The world is watching the latest round of the Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki. Washington with a mixture of fascination and dread. This is not surprising, since every twist and turn of the melodrama around the current occupant of the White House promises implications for other countries. But personalizing politics does not do justice to the huge challenges faced by humanity - the widening gap between billions of impoverished people and a handful of super-billionaires, upending imperialist wars and militarism, the militarization of crisis of climate change, the assault by powerful transnational corporations on the unity of working class rights, ongoing attempts by bigots and fundamentalists to roll back human equality gains. These issues emerged long before the 2016 US election, and they will remain after Trump leaves office, whenever that happens.

However, the working class and its allies cannot ignore immediate developments such as the recent NATO summit, or the subsequent Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki. Every day, even every hour, new headlines pop up. But instead of being drawn into the intricate details of each new revelation, we need to zoom out for a wider overall picture. This commentary is not meant to address every angle of this ever-changing situation, but it does aim to provide a broader perspective.

**“Meddling” accusations: an exercise in hypocrisy**

On one level, the campaign around “Russian meddling” in US elections is not the right way to frame this. Everyone knows that the US has influenced or rigged hundreds of foreign elections since the Cold War era. Its interference in the sovereignty of other countries is sometimes covert, but often is financed openly through budget appropriations for organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy. The bipartisan consensus around this decades-long strategy uses the term “democracy building” to cloak its real aim - to block working people from electing governments which put their own interests ahead of the demands of imperialism.

The success of this propaganda campaign is evident in the degree to which it is accepted by many in the US and abroad, often regardless of progressive positions on domestic issues. Given this context, whether or not certain elements of the Russian state “meddled” in the 2016 US elections cannot be the main question. Certainly many Russians hoped that Donald Trump would defeat Hillary Clinton, the Democratic candidate well-known for her vicious anti-Russian positions and her support for US-led imperialism abroad. It would hardly be surprising if some tried to influence US voters. Trump’s campaign manager Paul Manafort has close links with Russian capitalists, raising suspicions that he may have been a factor in this process.

But the real enemy of US imperialist goals is international forces. The forces around the Trump regime include those responsible for imposing US military occupation and armed intervention aimed at the US black population and other racialized minorities, including wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US is already the world’s largest arms exporter, the largest provider of military aid, and a member of NATO. These policies contribute to the many shared interests (with Canada playing a leading role) of “democratic” intervention. In 2016, US-led alliances of imperialist states and dependent countries, first to isolate the so-called “Communist threat”, later to fend off the “Axis of Evil”, over the decades has been a recipe for imperialist hegemony at a time when its economic primacy is increasingly challenged.

It would also be too simple to describe the situation in the United States as a clash between democratic and imperialist hegemony at a time when its economic primacy is increasingly challenged.

Lining up behind the Justin Trudeaus and Angela Merkels of the world will not stop the advance of fascism. The only real alternative is build a broad coalition to fight for a true People’s Alternative to neoliberal austerity, climate catastrophe, and war.

**After the Trump-Putin meeting: the real struggle for the planet**

Among their many crimes, Trump and his MAGA crowd are working to eliminate women’s reproductive rights, whip up violence against immigrants and the LGBTQ community, unions and trade unions, and remove electoral rights. However, recent months have also seen a more positive trend across the United States - a series of heroic strikes by teachers and other workers, the huge upsurge in the struggle against the separation of migrant families at the border, massive rallies by women and men, and massive rallies by women and men.

Democratic Party chosen this particular issue to mount a serious challenge. But through Trump’s instigation of mobilizing for the mid-terms around a progressive agenda, these forces and trends to keep a left upsurge within their own party. The top Democrats in Congress appear to be channelling resistance against Trump away from any serious challenge to corporate domination, and demanding restoration of the traditional bi-partisan policy of building international alliances of imperialist and client states to isolate Russia (as previously the USSR), China, Cuba, etc. They advocate a reactionary, pro-war, militarist strategy: new sanctions against the DPRK and Russia, escalation of US support for jihadi groups fighting the secular government of Syria, “regime change” against so-called “rogue” countries such as Iran and Venezuela, ongoing support for the Israeli zionist regime, ratcheting up the military encirclement of Russia and China, further expansion of NATO, etc. These policies raise the danger of nuclear catastrophe, and undermine any genuine attempts to tackle climate change.

**Shifting the terrain to “Trump’s treasury”**

Since his meeting with Russian President Putin in Helsinki, the corporate media, the Democratic Party in Congress, and even some elected Republicans have charged that Trump sold out his country, and should be driven out of office. The end of this vile character’s political career would be a welcome victory (according by People’s Voice), but we also shudder at the prospect of ultra-reactionary Mike Pence in the White House. Here’s our question: why has the right-wing leadership of the US government chosen this particular issue to mount a serious challenge? But through Trump’s instigation of mobilizing for the mid-terms around a progressive agenda, these forces and trends to keep a left upsurge within their own party. The top Democrats in Congress appear to be channelling state power only undermines the growing popular resistance to the right against the far-right agenda.

**Playing into the war agenda**

Objectively, moves to shift the struggle from Trump and his racist and fascist allies, away from the fight for working class interests and those of loyalty gains, plays into the hands of the military-industrial complex.

The US has never not been at war. The US is the biggest element of the global imperialist system. And this trend has accelerated in the Trump era. Trump has proven that his allegiance is first and foremost to big capital, despite his pose as an “outsider”.

**The US domestic conflict sharpen**

In the push to oust Trump from power, we see “progressives” even Trump to their defence of supposedly “democratic” institutions such as the FBI, US intelligence agencies, and the military from White House interference. This scenario is built on the classic Hollywood portrayal of heroic FBI agents and CIA operatives, bravely putting their lives on the line to protect ordinary Americans. In real life, backing these anti-people organs doesn’t help us understand the real struggle for the planet.

The United States (and Canada) have long histories of vigilante anti-Soviet and anti-Russia activism. There are certainly features of Russian society which draw criticism, such as anti-LGBTQ sentiments at both corporate domination, and plays into the hands of the military-industrial complex.

**Don’t fall into the anti-Russia trap**

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"democratic" Americans and an out-of-control Commander in Chief. Trump and his “Make America Great Again” movement are just not a fringe collection of fascists, nationalists, racists, and fundamentalists. They form a strategic Christian Zeitgeist. By delivering on corporate demands for big tax cuts to the wealthy, and his other moves to support corporate interests, Trump has proven that his allegiance is first and foremost to big capital, despite his pose as an “outsider”.

The US domestic conflict sharpenes

Among their many crimes, Trump and his MAGA crowd are working to eliminate women’s reproductive rights, whip up violence against immigrants and the LGBTQ community, unions and trade unions, and remove forces of Congress may shift in the November 2018 mid-terms, undermining the power of the ultra-right. But this scenario also frightens the traditional pro- corporate and pro-imperialist leadership of the Democrats.
Police attack Amazon strikers

Peaceful picketers were met with batons on July 17 during the second day of a three-day strike at Amazon’s suburban Macarthur distribution centre. According to media accounts, Spanish National Police officers in riot gear began arresting striking workers around 2:30 pm. The police alleged that the strikers were engaging in road traffic and that they were blocking exits. The claim was disputed by the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), the majority union for Amazon workers on a national level.

During the assault, one worker was bloodied and lost teeth after being clubbed in the head. Three workers were injured. Two were arrested and released later that afternoon.

“Amazon workers were demonstrating against the repressive practices inside the company’s warehouse, only to be met with police violence outside,” said Christoff Hoffman, General Secretary of UNI Global Union. “This is not the first time after a strike is under way to be an assault on Amazon workers, but on the basic human right of freedom of association and the constitutionally protected right to strike. We call for an investigation into this serious and unfair behaviour and we demand that Amazon stop its campaign of coercion against workers.”

During the first day of the strike, the CCOO reported that more than 80 percent of the 1,600-person workforce participated. The only workers to cross the picket line, the union said, were temporary employees threatened by local management.

The union was timed to coincide with the company’s “Prime Day” promotions. The strike was called by Unión Sindical Obrera, located in San Fernando de Henares, protested wage cuts, working conditions, and lack of union recognition.

The strike was joined by Amazon workers in Germany and Poland.

Norwegian oil rig workers strike

On July 16, a Norwegian union for workers on offshore oil and gas drilling rigs stepped up a six-day strike that has hit oil output, after employers did not respond to demands for higher wages and better working conditions. The union added 900 workers to the strike, after failing to win concessions before a midnight local time deadline since almost 700 workers on the rigs went on strike on July 10. The picketers plan to begin walking off work on July 22 without any immediate extra impact on oil or gas production beyond the company’s Kraken field, which produces crude equivalent to 23,000 barrels of oil per day.

Both the union and the Norwegian Shipowners’ Association said they had no new contacts or offers to consider. The workers went on strike after rejecting a proposed wage and pension deal, affecting rigs owned by Saipem, Transocean Sonu Offshore, Odfjell Drilling, Archer and COSL, among others.

NZ teachers and nurses walk out

Thousands of nurses, primary school teachers and principals are calling on New Zealand’s government to ensure dignity for educators, and to guarantee the future of quality public education. After months of negotiations, the latest pay offer to nurses was rejected in June, and a nationwide 24-hour strike was held on July 12.

Nurses say they are overworked and underpaid, and hospitals are chronically understaffed. That explains why they went on strike for the first time in a year.

Health Minister David Clark said the nurses’ discontent had been brewing for nine years, and called the previous National government: “Their frustration is understandable – nurses and organ donors are among a class of professional workers who are now, but it takes more than one year to address people’s needs of neglect. We have a fiscal limit, and we’ve put out there the best offer we could put out there.”

New Zealand’s first Labour- governed government in a decade took office in October. Other groups to strike then since include cinema workers, fast-food workers, and bus drivers.

Race to the bottom hits hotel workers

An investigation by IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Association) affiliate UNIA into housekeeping in Marriott hotels in Zurich - one of the world’s most expensive cities - shows the consequences of outsourcing: extreme speed-up and exploitation of a vulnerable workforce. The result is dangerously unsanitary conditions for workers and guests, and multiple violations of the region’s collective agreement for the cleaning sector which sets minimum legal working conditions.

Housekeepers in eight franchised Marriott hotels in Zurich reported having to regularly clean up to six rooms per hour. In one hotel, twelve housekeepers were required to clean 300 rooms with the hotel fully booked. Workers regularly worked 12-13 hours daily to meet their work loads, as well as routinely working weekends.

Cleaning staff were provided with a single full-strength cleaning agent with which to clean toilets, floors and even glasses that were not provided with any protective equipment like gloves. Housekeepers, who are routinely exposed to aggressive and harassment, are given no support from their cleaning bosses, nor are they even in place to deal with the constant threat.

Marriott, says UNIA, cannot evade responsibility for conditions by hiding behind the franchise system and outsourcing responsibility along with operations. Ensuring decent working conditions, and quality rooms for guests, can only be achieved by directly employing the housekeeping and other staff who are the victims of outsourcing’s relentless race to the bottom.

Strikes cancel Ryanair flights

Multiple crew strikes in various countries caused Ryanair to cancel a massive number of flights during peak holiday season and issue refunds or flight changes for passengers. On July 17, Ryanair announced that 25 flights between the United Kingdom and Ireland on July 20 were being cancelled because of an “unnecessary strike” planned by the airline’s Irish pilots, over disputes regarding seniority rights.

Ryanair claims that its pilots enjoy “the best working conditions of perhaps any group of Irish workers.” The cancellations affected 4,000 guests. Summer holiday in the United Kingdom began for most schools on July 20, starting one of the busiest times for year travelling.

Chile may see new copper strike

A union representing 300 out of 1,000 workers at Lumina’s Caserones mine in Chile said on July 19 that contract negotiations with the company had failed, paving the way for a potential strike. The union said it would reject a final proposal that could be submitted by the company up to July 24, and that government mediation would be the only way forward. It has sued the company over the length of shifts, and the number of hours worked.

Casino workers battle for contracts

Unisonized casino workers in Las Vegas are continuing their weekly picketing campaign as they negotiate new contracts. On July 20, Culinary Union Local 226 members protested near the Margaritaville casino-restaurant and the D Casino-hotel with signs and chants. They also picketed outside the Golden Gate casino-hotel.

The contracts of 50,000 unionized workers expire later this year. Workers in May voted to authorize a strike over the lack of cross-section negotiations.

The union and casino operators have since reached agreements covering 40-20 properties. The Golden Nugget in downtown Las Vegas on July 17 became the first property in over a year to face a five-year deal with the union. Those agreements include wage increases to reflect the new event that the properties are sold.

Nepal to rescue stranded workers

The Nepal government has started a mission rescue 38 migrant workers stranded in the Middle East. The workers, who landed in Saudi Arabia more than six months ago are without jobs, money and basic facilities. The Nepalesegovernment approached the government, the Department of Foreign Employment (DoF) summoned recruiting agencies to a meeting on July 22.

Tajpur Employment Services and Empower Human Resources Management, which sent the workers to Saudi Arabia, were given 15 days to rescue the stranded workers. The government will revoke the licenses of the agencies if they do not take the responsibility, including to arrange food and shelter for the workers.

The Nepal Embassy in Saudi Arabia is sheltering 16 of the 38 workers. The Non Resident Nepali Worker (NRW) has been providing food and lodging for others.

Workers were promised jobs in hotels. Their job agreement said they would work in the catering section of hotels and in the Traveling & Advertising Company. Instead, they were forced to work as labourers. Two months later, the company assured them of changing their jobs. They never happened, and when the workers protested, they were promptly terminated.
By Madeline Roache, first published in New Internationalist

Drunk on power, seven masked men rampaged their way through a Roma camp in Liviv, a city in Western Ukraine, with knives and metal rods, tearing through the walls of the makeshift homes. The residents grabbed their children and ran, leaving behind their homes and belongings, fearing for their lives. But no manager ever escaped to care. David Popp, 23, was finally stabbed in the head and chest by the unattainable authorities. The seven residents were wounded, including a 30-year-old woman who was stabbed in the back by a heavy knife. The reason for the 23 attack: blind hatred. The alleged LViv attackers, all under the age of 20, are said to be associated with Sober and Angry Youth, a ultra-nationalist group.

Just a few days later, on July 1, a Roma woman was found with her throat cut, in the city of Berestechok, 800 kilometres west of Kiev. Life for Roma people in Ukraine has become increasingly unsafe. Six far-right attacks on Roma settlements have been reported in the past two months. In April, members of the C14, a far-right nationalist group, burnt down a Roma camp near Chernivtsi, 500 kilometres west of Kiev. A prominent C14 activist, Serhiy Mazur, posted photos of the camp of around 15 make-shift homes engulfed in flames and wrote on Facebook that the group used “legal means” to drive the Roma from the land.

Zolja Kondur from the Chiriki Roma Foundation, an NGO which supports the Roma community in Ukraine, told New Internationalist that Roma have been moving for seven years from Transcarpathia — the mountainous far western corner of the country — to Kiev, Odessa and Lviv in search of employment and a better quality of life. Over the past three years, the Roma have experienced similar attacks from far-right. One attack is attacking the most vulnerable groups and it’s bringing them popularity,” she added.

Police have arrested seven suspects in the Lviv attack and opened a criminal case into the murder, which carries a sentence of up to 15 years. But the rest of cases remain unsolved. “In five out of the six cases, we have not seen a proper investigation,” the law enforcement official on these cases “hoeliganism”, not “hate crimes”, said Kondur. “We’re very much concerned by this situation.”

Not only is the government turning a blind eye to the violence, it is also providing financial support to groups that many rights activists consider neo-Nazi. The government has given C14 a Youth and Sports Ministry grant of $16,800 for their “national-patriotic education projects”, according to a June 13 report by Hromadske Radio.

The Maidan’s legacy

During the Maidan protests the police fired at protesters, killing around 100 people. The new post-Maidan government overhauled the old patrol force — one of the most corrupt in the post-Soviet bloc – with the aim of eradicating a police culture which normalised brute-taking and extortion. But reports of the law enforcement’s inaction toward crimes by Ukrainians’ far-right political groups has led many to question the success of the reforms.

Denys Kobrin, Director of the Kharkiv Institute of Social Research, fears the new police reform is “decoration” – a façade of reform that merely masks the habits of the old. When pressed for an interview about the attack, Andriy Kryshchekalo, the Head of the Kiev Police, went so far as to quote earlier police claims that they had not received any complaints of violence toward the Roma.

He insisted in an interview with the 112 TV channel that only trash on the camp had been burned. Halya Cnyoush, a member of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection group (KHPG) told New Internationalist that C14’s patriotic rhetoric is deployed to help avoid police and the public at large from viewing the group’s actions critically. “I think C14’s real agenda is unpopular, but the patriotic rhetoric, the kind of hands-on ‘justice’ and other populist features have proven too successful, especially as the country is at war.”

But Cnyoush wrote shortly afterwards that the police “must have been aware that it was happening”. According to Liakhachev, the head of the National Minority Rights Monitoring Group, which records Roma-related attacks, the first time police have investigated an attack since the Maidan. Strong and clear demands from civil society groups have played a big role.

Liakhachev considers C14 a far-right extremist group, but believes some of its members are neo-Nazi.

Statement by the United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers Union of America (Area 14), June 7, 2018, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The right-wing, anti-worker majorities on the Supreme Court issued a ruling today against public-sector workers and their union. In Janus v. AFSCME, five of the Supreme Court justices agreed with the billionaire- and corporate-funded National Right to Work Committee that public-sector unions should not be allowed to collect “fair representation” fees from the workers they represent.

This ruling is intended to financially weaken unions so that employers can cut wages, slash benefits, and impose worse working conditions. The Illinois Economic Policy Institute has estimated that this decision could lower public-sector wages by an average of 4%, resulting in an overall loss of between $11.7 billion and $13.3 billion in low-wage economic activity as public-sector workers have less money to spend. Janus is a blatantly ideological decision to weaken public workers’ organizations, and buttress the financial and electoral fortunes of the anti-worker Republican Party as the American people increasingly turn against their extreme right-wing agenda. A recent working paper from the Economic Policy Institute finds that right-to-work laws are just one reason for the declining class to depress voter turnout.

Trump appointee Justice Neil Gorsuch is only on the Supreme Court due to Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s refusal to hold confirmation hearings in 2018 for President Obama’s nominee for Supreme Court, Merrick Garland. McConnell has been explicit that “we’re putting a priority on changing the courts,” because he knows that the Republican agenda is simply not popular with the American people.

The anti-union legal arguments in Janus rest on whether the fair-share clause requiring workers to financially contribute to the union that negotiates their union contract is a violation of their First Amendment right to free speech. However, we know that the biggest threat to workers’ free speech is not their union but their boss. UE Local 255’s contract at Hunger Mountain Co-op in Montpelier VT provides an example of true free speech rights for workers, guaranteeing that “Employees have the right to express political, religious, and other beliefs through activities related to the workplace — without fear of reprisal or discipline,” including speaking up at public union meetings, or interfere with performing their duties. UE’s own constitution declares that no worker or union member should face discrimination because of their political beliefs. UE works to ensure that UE members and leaders of the right-wing assaults on unions do not get away with it.

We encourage all UE locals, and the broader labor movement, to challenge any laws that infringe on the constitutional rights of any workers, including public-sector workers, to protect their conditions by speaking out, picketing, striking, or engaging in boycotts. Public workers will continue to organize and defend our rights to decent living and work standards defined by our own workplaces, not by forbidding “fair share” fees. Vocal and militant actions by UE speakers and partners around the “right to work” South show the possibilities available to public workers to continue to defend and improve their working lives. UE locals in Indiana and Wisconsin, faced with the impact of new right-to-work laws in recent years, have mobilized and utilized the power of the union in some of their best contracts in decades, and have maintained high levels of membership. The return to the right to bargain and democratic rights in the US workforce has given UE’s brand of rank-and-file, member-driven, democratic unionism.

Meeting local UE leaders and members invites UE to its 75th Convention declared that “In order to restore what rights have been lost, and to bring them to states where they were never won, worker power must be a credible threat to the elite. We must return to a period of widespread workplace agitation.”

The overwhelming majority of school teachers and other school workers in West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, and other states to strike in defiance of the law shows the way forward.

Peter Knowlton, General President; Andrew Dinkelsbuhl, Secretary-Treasurer; Gene Elk, Secretary of Organization.

Ukraine’s resurgent far-right commit hate crimes with “full impunity”

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The Pentagon benefits from Hollywood to make money, and, in turn, Hollywood churns out propaganda for the brutal American war machine. The US has the largest military budget in the world, spending over $611 billion – far larger than any other nation on Earth. The US military also has at its disposal the most successful propaganda apparatus the world has ever known...

Hollywood is a slick, two-hour recruiting tool to change the American consciousness. There’s some brilliant stuff out there being sung and spoken word. "There’s so much bad..." Captain Russel Coons, director of the New York Office of Information West, told Al Jazeera what the military expects for their combatants’ media education. "We are going to support a program that disengages a uniform or presents us in a compromising way."

Phil Strub, the DoD chief Hollywood liaison, says the DoD has no leverage to quash dissenting films. "The DoD doesn’t have a program that disgraces..." The DoD has no budget to support a program that disgraces, incriminates against, or pro-American in any way. It deems insufficiently pro-military films like Braveheart a turning point. "This indoctrinated adoration of..." Hollywood liaison, says the DoD, "is to encourage songwriters and spoken word performers to write..." The Bread and Roses Songwriting and Spoken Word Competition seeks to encourage those communities to engage with more storytelling... and spoken word. "It’s open to all, regardless of trade union membership..." The winners: Bloque Capitals (“That..." The 352 choirs were evaluated by a panel of choral experts from 28 nations. On the other hand, the choir Olympics, brings together amateur choirs from around the world in a peaceful competition. The 10th World Choir Games will be held July 4-14 in Tahwane City, South Africa, where 352 choirs from 62 countries competed for gold, silver, and bronze medals in 29 categories. The competition was preceded by a joyous parade of 6,000 choristers through the centre of Tahwane. The World Choir Games were founded by Interkultur, a German musical society that organizes annual choral competitions and festivals. The idea to create an event modelled on the Olympic ideals, which aim to peacefully unify people and nations connected by song in a fair competition..." The top medal winning countries in Tahwane were South Africa (76), China (25), Russia (17), and USA (15). It shouldn’t be surprising that the top medal winning..." The DoD used the CIA to portray themselves as heroic and..." The CIA collaborated with the makers of Argo in order to prevent the historical record and elevate their image. The DoD’s efforts in the propaganda department’s bid for the DoD’s money, it is an uphill battle for directors to maintain their artistic integrity in the face of constant pressure from Hollywood studios. The top medal winning choirs were from South Africa. On the other hand, the country is justly celebrated for its world famous choirs traditions. The 11th World Choir Games will be held in 2019 in a current public approval for the American Military Image in Film..." The US military also has at its disposal the most successful propaganda apparatus the world has ever known...

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Why Marx said raising the minimum wage won’t just boost prices

By Saleh Weizuddin

A major objection I ran into about protecting minimum wage increases was when I was canvassing as an NDP candidate in the Ontario election that it’s just going to raise prices. It simply won’t be better off. Marx ran into these points even from labour leaders, and here is an interesting economic parameter in live debate with them, printed as Value, Price, and Profit.

For a start, Marx points out that though increasing the minimum wage increases the demand for things workers buy, these are only a small part of what the economy produces, since a lot more is produced for the rich and their businesses.

What an immense amount of the necessities themselves must be wasted upon stuffed horses, cats, and so forth of the rich compared to the basic needs of workers (and their cats!). While at first the goods and services we buy might see price increases, pretty soon wages would go back to where they were. The main difference would be workers having a bigger share in the profits from their labour.

This is backed up by study after study showing quick rises in the minimum wage don’t lead to net price increases or job losses. In 2006 five Nobel Prize-winning economists publicly said so in an open letter.

Prices aren’t based on wages anyway. Wages are just another price, for labour power (hiring someone to work), which is based on the prices of commodities needed to live. Elsewhere, in Wage, Labour, and Production, Marx explains that wages are the cost to keep workers going to work another day, but wages are general, not for any particular worker. Marx said “...the general level of wages is not the result of a calculation on the part of workers that they receive not enough to be able to exist and propagate themselves, but wages for workers as a class fluctuate based on the minimum.

Saying prices depend on wages, which depend on prices, doesn’t tell us anything because it’s circular logic.

It’s also perverse to say since wages, like a commodity, should take a cut based on the bad times, but they shouldn’t be raised during the good times. You can’t treat a wage like a commodity when it suits the rich but not when it costs the rich. This would make a worker worse than a slave because they “would share in all the miseries of the slave, without the security of the slave.” Slaves in Marx’s time were forced to work by “calibrated torture” as Edward Baptist says in his book How Has Never Been Told, but Marx was writing about the economic position of ancient slaves vs. modern workers who are “free” (and forced) to sell their labour power just to survive.

Marx points out in most cases campaigns for raising the minimum wage come only after big gains to the capitalists from increases in productivity, technology, demand and supply, and inflation, and so it’s wrong to look at raising the minimum wage without looking at what this demand “follows only in the track” of the changes in the commodities market.

Marx was writing about the minimum wage only the working class’s response to changes by the capitalists themselves, to ignore this is to “proceed from a false premise to a false conclusion.” As Marx said in his conclusion “the general tendency of capitalism is not to raise but to sink the standard average wages”.

If we look at statistics on poverty in Canada, provincial minimum wages have fallen far behind prices while corporate profits have skyrocketed. The low-income cut (LICO) for a family of four in a city of 100,000 is still below the increased minimum wages, which is why we need wages that are not just minimum but liveable.

Marx pointed out ultimately the labour movement provides good “centres for resistance” against capitalism, but will fail to overthrow capitalism if they only fight against capitalism, but will fall short if it sticks only to “guerrilla warfare” against the employers and “sabotage war against the effects”, instead of simultaneously using its power to build the movement as a weapon to overthrow capitalism and its wage system forever.

The Poroshenko administration's"
Looking back on Operation Solidarity - a Communist perspective

By George Gidora and Kimball Curison

This summer marks the 35th anniversary of the Solidarity struggle in BC - the first major response in Canada against the emerging neoliberal austerity agenda of far-right sections of the ruling class. Promoted by economist Milton Friedman and the so-called “Chicago boys”, this agenda was first imposed on Chile under the Pinochet military dictatorship. From there it spread to Thatcher’s Britain and to the west coast of Canada, where the Fraser Institute had become a key think tank for austerity policies.

Given this setting, the massive Solidarity movement was a test case for labour and popular resistance. Many of the strategies and tactics used by various forces in 1983 are still hotly debated, as seen by comments on the July 6 article by Stanley Tromp on the Tyee website (“The RCMP Thought Solidarity Was a Communist Plot”).

This article discusses “revolutionary” strategy by spying on the Communist Party, which played a significant role in the Solidarity movement. The documents obtained by Freedom of Information channels might suggest some are not aware of the long record of RCMP surveillance against a wide range of radicals, trade unionists, indigenous activists, and others who challenge the norms of capitalist power in this country.

Even before the Communist Party was formed in 1921, the RCMP was already attempting to undermine the party which has always been organized for socialist change since that time. From this perspective, the fact that the RCMP knew that a member of the BC executive worked for the CPC and was a member of the BC Teachers’ Federation leadership, on a certain date in a sandwich shop, merely confirms that the state police force has always been tasked with keeping tabs on the party. During renovations of the CPC’s offices in Toronto a few years before Operation Solidarity, listening devices were discovered in the walls and ceilings. When Party leaders held a news conference to reveal this illegal operation, the RCMP sent a representative to demand the return of its property.

The real question arising from this particular episode is rarely discussed. The issue is not whether the RCMP brass seriously believed that the Communist Party was capable of seizing power in the near future. Of course, during the Cold War, some right-wing politicians and police made this argument, but usually for their own red-baiting career purposes. (Brighter lights among the Mounties probably do understand that the Communists are the only revolutionary force which has ever toppled capitalism and embarked on the construction of socialism, and that even a small Communist party has the potential to lead a revolutionary struggle.)

A better question is whether these forces believed that the Communists were capable of helping to challenge the dominance of bourgeois politics in Canada. And the answer to that different question is a definite yes. Why? Because the Communists have always been in the vanguard of movement in our small numbers, on any number of issues - from the struggle for Medicare, to the movement to build industrial unions, to the call for peace and disarmament - the Communists have worked in the vanguard of the leadership of many organizations, patiently winning public opinion to our programs and demands. Sometimes we were the first to raise these ideas, but often we supported causes initiated by other forces which rallied broad popular opposition to the agenda of big capital and capitalists.

This track record is the main reason that the post-war Liberal government launched PROFUNC, the RCMP operation to collect highly detailed personal information about “occult and secret functionalities” of the Communist Party. PROFUNC eventually tracked 50,000 potential “subversives” such as prominent CCF/NPD leader Tommy Douglas. The PROFUNC list was one basis for the roundup of some 500 left activists in Quebec during the so-called “October Crisis” of 1970 - most of whom had no connections with the separation FLQ.

In the case of British Columbia in 1983, the Communist Party was active in trade unions and other people’s movements, not just in a few unions in the province, but across the province. When the Socreds moved to smash the trade unions and community groups, the Communists encouraged people to organize cross-picketing at workplaces, keeping tabs on the party. During the political legitimacy of the government. When it was crucial to organize, cross-picketing at schools to help teachers join the strike movement, the Communist Party did not shirk the responsibility. We put numbers and supporters to help make it happen. This was no secret. The PROFUNC list was circulated in leaflets and news releases, and printed every week in the Pacific Tribune newspaper. The party’s representatives were well known.

For some, however, the CPC supposedly “failed” to block the Solidarists agenda. As subsequent events proved, this episode was just an early part of an ongoing massive global strategy to wipe out every remaining vestige of the defeat of Hitler fascism, despite strong resistance in many countries, but not in Canada. It was having failed to defeat the first wave of this capitalist agenda; the only shame would have been to surrender when existing socialism was destroyed a few years later in the USSR and its allies in central and eastern Europe.

A different criticism is that the CP hoped to seize control of Operation Solidarity, turning the fightback into a movement “for a socialist revolution. This argument twists the classic statements of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, that the Communists disdain to conceal their aims. Yes, our goal is the revolutionary replacement of capitalism by a socialist society. But our aims also include the defense and expansion of a wide range of immediate social and economic reforms. In 1983 this meant blocking legislation which undermined the entire framework of labour and social rights, going back to the pre-WW1 miners’ strikes on Vancouver Island. As a working class party, the BC Communists were acutely aware that the Socreds wanted to do just the opposite - making the people more difficult. Our view is that in the course of fighting for their rights, CPC class people strengthen their ability to defend their interests, and gain a better understanding of the need for socialism. Absolutely. There is no contradiction here, nothing concealed up our sleeves.

Our role in 1983 was to use our influence in the trade unions and community groups to come together and build a bigger fight against the policies of the BC Fed on board, which kept the private sector unions marginally supportive. Right wing social democrats were terrified that they were not in control of this movement, and when it came time for the private sector unions to step up to the table, they caved. This brings us to one final general question: are the Communists surveilled by the state police because we threaten democracy? This question is often put another way, by those who argue that it’s acceptable to monitor the Communists, but wrong to target other activists.

The truth is that the Communists are not targeted because we espouse democracy, but precisely because we are engaged in the strengthening and expansion of democracy. In every crucial social confrontation in the past century, Communists have stood up on a few occasions almost alone in defence of civil and democratic rights. Yes, we urge the trade unions and other social movements to take full advantage of all the democratic rights won by past struggles, including the right to refuse to work, to protest and speak freely without the fear of police attacks or having to pay “demonstration insurance”.

Communists have often taken part in civil disobedience actions, defending the democratic right to defy unjust laws and to argue for the freedom to organize and act for progressive policies and leadership of many organizations, at the grassroots level and in the workplace. CPC has been fined or jailed, not for opposing democracy, but for choosing to stand up for working people, not corporations.

In 1983, instead of meekly accepting that an elected government had the unfettered right to rip up collective agreements, the Communists encouraged working people to exercise all their democratic rights. When the Campbell Liberals pulled a similar move in 2001, Communists in BC joined in the movement to fight back, up to and including support for wide strike actions.

The question that comes up in such defensive battles are sufficient? Of course not. We believe that as long as our society is dominated by big capital, every gain, every movement forward, is under constant threat. We argue for going forward, by placing political and economic power in the hands of the vast working class majority of this society. We are proud to say that socialism is inherently far more democratic than capitalism.

We took that position in 1983, and today, more and more working class people, especially young, agree with us. The capitalist state may have more surveillance and spying tools than ever, but it’s impossible to prevent people from sharing our conclusion that socialism is the only alternative to capitalist destruction of the planet. (George Gidora is the leader of the Communist Party of BC, and Kimball Curison is the editor of People’s Voice.)