Stop Selling “Light Armoured Vehicles” to Saudi dictators

RCMP arrests violate Indigenous rights

See coverage on pages 7 & 10

BC politics in flux?
In the wake of a crushing defeat in last fall’s electoral reform referendum, BC’s NDP-Green alliance in the Legislature faces more uncertainty going into a crucial byelection in Nanaimo.

Resistance in Ontario
The Conservative government of Ontario is barrelrolling ahead with an agenda to make the province even more profitable for big corporations. What kind of fightback can stop Doug Ford?

Yellow Vests
The last weeks of 2018 saw the “Yellow Vest” movement in France challenge a range of neoliberal policies; in Canada, the name has been hijacked by far right forces with a very different agenda.

Solidarity with Posties
All through December and into 2019, solidarity actions took place across the country as postal workers continued to defend collective bargaining rights against Liberal government attacks.
BC’s NDP-Green government faces big challenge

Ontario: Making 2019 a Year of Resistance

PV Vancouver Bureau

As 2019 begins, the NDP-Green coalition holds office in British Columbia, and it was bad news for Premier Horgan’s government. While the turnout was lower than respectable 41%, most observers were shocked that only 30% of voters made it to the polls to switch to a proportional representation system. PR was supported by both the NDP and the Greens, who took office in July 2017 after winning a combined 57% of votes in the provincial election which saw the Liberals lose their majority.

Initial opinion polls had indicated strong support (about 57%) for a “yes” vote on electoral reform. That figure dwindled as the referendum began, but the final result dismayed Fair Vote Canada (who tirelessly lobbied to get out the vote). After defeats in similar votes in other provinces in recent years, it appears that an approximately undemocratic result in a future “first past the post” election could lead many parties to campaign for a new referendum on PR.

There are many factors in this outcome, starting with the tactics used by the corporate sector and their favoured party, the BC Liberals (who have a formal relationship with Justin Trudeau’s federal Liberals). For months, business leaders and the corporate media warned that PR would help elect “dangerous forces...” of the global bourgeoisie to the executive branch (and the provincial one).

Unfortunately, the complex mixture of forces pitting the right-wing forces plenteous of ammunition to work with. “Yes” campaigners (including the Communist Party of BC) found in conversations with voters that many were confused to the point of indecision by the second part of the mail-in ballot, which asked voters to choose between four different versions of proportional representation. This allowed the NO campaign to exploit a morass of complex discussions over the details of these three options.

On the other hand, a referendum on only the first part of the ballot – a simple “yes” for PR or “no” for first past the post – would have been attacked viciously. It was strategically important to allow voters to compare the two elections as the government was caught in a tactical dilemma, which perhaps could have been avoided by putting forward only the most popular and easily understood reform – a mixed-member proportional system. Instead, it appears that the NDP (which essentially drew up the ballot) and the Liberals took PR as a non-issue.

Meanwhile, other dramatic developments have taken centre stage. Back in October, the government’s razor-thin majority in the Legislature was weakened by the election of NDP MLA Leonard Krog as mayor of Nanaimo. Krog’s subsequent resignation at MLA forced a January 30th by-election for his Nanaimo seat, which has been held by the NDP (or its CCF predecessor) for most of the past sixty years.

While the NDP should have a big advantage in the riding, nothing is certain. Governments in British Columbia rarely win by-elections, but this one could be an exception, since voters Nanaimo Days of Apathy unlikely to want the Liberals back in office. However, this case is bizarre for another reason – the by-election is being contested by two government candidates (Nanaimo federal MP Sheila Malcolmson, and Michele Ney for the Greens). This means that the Liberals’ long-term Harris could win with as low as 34-40% of the votes.

Even that might not topple Harris, since such a result would give Darryl Plecas, the Speaker of the Legislature, the power to break tie votes. However, Plecas, who was enticed to become Speaker after being elected as a Liberal, is currently embroiled in a murky situation at the Legislature. Acting on his advice, prosecutors and the RCMP are investigating the Clerk and the Sergeant-at-Arms of the Legislature, who are both suspended with pay. If Plecas is ultimately seen to have uncovered corruption at the Legislature, he could be hailed for his courageous action. But if his accusations are found to be groundless, it’s hard to see how he could remain in office. That could trigger another by-election in his riding, which would be an easy win for the Liberals.

If this was all just a political soap opera, it might be a popular TV series. But it’s not. As the Communist Party of BC pointed out after the 2017 election, the defeat of the big business Liberals and the subsequent “supply and confidence agreement” which let the NDP and Greens take office was a limited but important victory for the working class of British Columbia. Those events opened the door for a chance (now lost) at real electoral reforms, but also for a turn away from the right-wing neoliberal policies of the Liberals. The defeat of the Horgan government under these circumstances could give the Liberals an opportunity to roll back any gains achieved over the past 18 months, such as steps towards a provincial child care plan, and a limited minimum wage increase.

Speaking to People’s Voice on January 7, Communist Party of BC leader George Giordano said, “We remain sharply critical of the Horgan government’s shortcomings, such as its approval of the Site C dam, or its refusal to roll back Gordon Campbell’s huge tax cuts for the rich and the corporations. But this by-election must not set in motion the corporate media warned that this spontaneity was a key factor in bringing building class unity, and one of the structures that organized the single-day general strikes and protests of the Ontario Days of Apathy lead to resistance against current attacks.

Clearly, 2019 needs to be a Year of Resistance in Ontario. The question is, how do we get there? Ontario Communist Party leader Dave McKee notes that well before the Ford government, there was ample evidence of a fighting mood among Ontario workers. We saw the OPSEU college faculty strike, CUPE’s fights at public libraries and the Alberta and ASAs across the province, USW’s ongoing campaign to reverse the privatization of Canada’s steel industry, UNITE-HERE’s strikes for a $15 minimum wage at campus food services, and Unifor’s strike at CAMI to protect jobs and wages in the face of NAFTA. We saw strikes at Carlton and York Universities, the latter being the longest university strike in their history. Then there were the teachers’ union who refused to stop teaching a progressive sex education curriculum, the long-term care workers who blocked the Goderich salt mine against scabs during their 11-week strike at Compass Minerals, and the community members who reinforced that blockade when the company got an injunction against the union.”

In the late 1990s, the speed of the Mike Harris government’s attacks led to the formation of new structures. This spontaneity was a key factor in bringing building class unity, and one of the structures that organized the single-day general strikes and protests of the Ontario Days of Apathy lead to resistance against current attacks.

In some instances, these grassroots efforts pulled the provincial leadership into action, which McKee says demonstrates the capacity of class struggle positions to win over the majority.

“So, building local community–labour solidarity is really critical. If we can forge dynamic, engaging fightback committees at the local level, we can push our provincial projects, it militancy, audacity and tactical creativity to the point of making the entire labour movement in a militant and dynamic struggle. The important lesson from the Harris years is that spontaneous resistance and opposition needs to become organized if it is to be sustained and developed. That’s the way we can make a difference in 2019.”
Heavy fog and clouds blanketed Saint John harbour in New Brunswick, and rain fell continually, but a ray of love and proletarian internationalism as warm as the South Arabian sun beaming over the west-side docks on Dec. 22, all the way to the starving and battered highland people of northern Yemen.

That morning, activists from groups such as PEACE-NB, the Council of Canadians, and the Communist Party of Canada picked the King Street entrance to the docks, hindering the progress of LAV 6.0 armoured cars to the Middle East from the London, Ontario plant where they are manufactured.

The armoured cars are used by the Western-backed coalition of Arab states which has been blocking and bombing the overwhelmingly Zaidi Shi’a population of northern Yemen since 2015.

Dockworkers at Saint John belonging to the International Longshoremen's Association respected the picket, refusing to cross when they arrived for work just after 7:00 am. They had been scheduled to load armoured cars onto a Saudi Arabian freighter, the Bari Yanbu, that morning.

Canada is currently in a 14 year, $14.8 billion contract to provide 14 LAV 6.5s to Saudi Arabia, which is spearheading the military intervention in Yemen, while withholding weapons and tactical support, and countries such as Canada and Britain provide additional weapons.

Over the last five years, Saudi Arabia has imported more weapons than any country except India, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

The United Nations has labelled the war in Yemen as the worst current humanitarian crisis. Amnesty International and other rights groups have warned of the bombing of civilians, hospitals and schools. An estimated 55,000 people have been killed since 2015 because of the coalition’s air and naval blockade.

Saudi Arabia is one of the least democratic countries in the world, with no national elections and harsh punishments for political or religious dissent. Yet it is worth remembering that what Saudi Arabia wants, it has not been done by before by others.

In 1839, Britain, which desired control of the port of Aden in southeastern Yemen, bombarded the local rulers until they agreed to a “British protectorate”. In the early 20th century, the British suppressed insurrections in Yemen by bombarding cities, destroying the food supply, and torture. This was repeated in the early 1960s during Operation Nachtrieb and the policing action in Raifain. The usual method of collective punishment involved as to declare area “proscribed”, leaflet it to warn all inhabitants to leave, then destroy the buildings by bombing. The leafletting saved most civilian lives in the short term, but the operation also involved the destruction of food crops in the field during planting season, so that, according to a British military source: “a large number of the population reported that the former rebels were starving.”

A new wave of civilian killing in Yemen by a foreign power is the ongoing U.S. drone campaign. According to data from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracy, in cooperation with Human Rights Watch, the U.S. reported that about six people are killed on average per strike. The proportion of innocent people to intended or “legitimate” targets killed is even harder to gauge. But it appears, as a rough estimate, that something like half the people killed are victims of targeting errors, or simply happen to be nearby when an intended subject is blown up.

These executions can be terrifying and horrific, often coming with practically no warning and resulting in the virtual liquidation of people’s bodies or the scattering of body parts over a wide area.

While the pressure of competition has “chased the bourgeoisie over the whole world”, as Stalin said, it gives the phenomenon we know as capitalist globalisation, the task of mitigating the uglier aspects of globalisation has fallen mainly to the ordinary working people of the world and their organisations.

It was a combination of Nasserite Arab socialism and the militancy of the ILO Trade Union Congress which finally forced Britain to remove its imperial class from Yemen in 1967. And the campaign against murder by drone is being waged, not by global capitalist enterprise, but by its employees.

The 3100 employees who signed a letter of protest in 2018 against their employer, Google, and itsucer's dependency on ethical action of international proletarian solidarity.

By 9am it was learned that the port authorities would not bring the Bahri Yanbu in from its anchorage to take on LAVs that day – the reason being given as “bad weather”. The protesters gave up the picketing, free leaving they went up to the ILA dockworkers, thanking them for their work and acknowledging their contribution.

On the picket line: a chilly morning in Saint John.

By Harinder Hundal

When you have an extremely high-wage governing class in power, you cannot counter it by compromises. Rather, you need to build a fighting front to defeat the attacks it imposes on our public health care.

That was the message delivered on Dec. 16 by Natalie Mehra, Executive Director of the Ontario Health Coalition, speaking to a public meeting organised by the GTA West Club of the Communist Party of Canada. Mehra called the threat posed to health care by Doug Ford’s government the most dire and serious she has seen in her lifetime.

Referring to the OHC, she said, “We have to build mass actions to stop this government whenever it introduces any cut to our health care, and we will not stop until we stop them. We held a major rally outside the provincial legislature to start with, and we mobilized to organize the people to defend our health care, with more than five thousand people (the police estimated 8,000 attendees) attending. More bigger actions are planned for the spring.”

Mehra encouraged more people to join the coalition, urging listeners to reactivate the Brampton Health Coalition to build a fightback against civic health care cuts. She said that over the years, the OHC has often fought and defeated major changes when it took on the Project Maven contract to provide drone guidance to military intervention in Yemen from 2009 through 2018. The rate is increasing. She said that 125 of the attacks were in 2017. Anecdotally evidence from the Yemeni government, an English language publication, suggests that the FDD figures are probably too low, perhaps by several times.

There is no accurate casualty count, but information from Human Rights Watch in Yemen suggests that about six people are killed on average per strike. The proportion of innocent people to intended or “legitimate” targets killed is even harder to gauge. But it appears, as a rough estimate, that something like half the people killed are victims of targeting errors, or simply happen to be nearby when an intended subject is blown up.

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The 3100 employees who signed a letter of protest in 2018 against their employer, Google, and itsucer's dependency on ethical action of international proletarian solidarity.

By Norm Knight

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The OHC’s Natalie Mehra
EDITORIALS

Broad coalition needed to defeat patriarchy

The third annual Women’s Marches across North America take place on January 19, and millions are expected to take part. Attacks against trade unions, Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, women, and immigrants have sharpened under Donald Trump’s regime, and similar trends are growing in other parts of the world. In nearly every case, misogynist hatred of women is a key element of the so-called “populist” assault.

To some extent, this trend has been under-estimated by mainstream media and politicians. The tendency is to focus on the revolting sexist comments and actions of powerful men, rather than the underlying patriarchal ideology driving much of the fear. The Women’s March protests can play a vital role in building popular resistance, but a focus on one-day annual protests against sexism is inadequate, to say the least. The top-down character of the organizations behind the March limits the scope of the emerging grassroots resistance against the entire right-wing agenda.

In Canada, there was (not surprisingly) a tendency after 2015 to heave a sigh of relief after the blatantly anti-equality Harper Conservatives were defeated, by a Liberal PM who calls himself a feminist. But as a federal election looms next October, very little has changed for the better for women. Despite Justin Trudeau’s rhetoric, the gender wage gap has barely budged, the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls has disappointed expectations, and progress on an affordable national child care program is painfully slow. The revolting sexist comments and actions of powerful men, and the fascist agenda. The Women’s March protests can play a vital role in building popular resistance against the movement.

Growing inequality is not a side issue; it is crucial to the entire strategy of mobilizing for social justice. In this situation, an annual day of marches is no substitute for a broad, inclusive and powerful coalition of women’s equality-seeking groups. The sooner such a coalition becomes a priority, the better.

Global inequality still growing

21st century capitalism is a system with the biggest income and wealth gaps in human history. The relevant facts and figures are mainstreamed. In March 2018, ForBourgeois magazine identified 2,208 global billionaires, with a collective worth of $9.1 trillion, up 18 percent since the preceding year. Currently, the world’s richest 10 per cent take up to 40 per cent of total global income, while the poorest 40 per cent earn 7 per cent. Nearly half of the increase in global income between 1988 and 2008 was captured by the top 5 per cent of the world’s population.

Here at home, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reports that the country’s 100 highest paid CEOs netted an average of $9.5 million in 2017, or 197 times more than the average worker’s annual earnings of $50,759. This disparity continues despite what the capitalist media describes as a “tight labour market”. While bourgeois economic theory predicts this should boost wages, none extra dollars haven’t trickled down. As the CCPA says, “immense wealth continues to circulate through the “vest” battles in France are just the early signals of impending class struggles on a huge scale.

Sudan: Communists have rejected calls for negotiations with President Omar al-Bashir’s government, warning against US attempts to divide the opposition as large protests continue to demand his resignation. The Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) has played a leading role in the popular uprising against the government, insisting that Bashir must step down and pave the way for democratic change.

They denounced the representative of the US administration for attempting to derail the revolution after he met with opposition groups. Warned that they were planning a “soft-landing scheme” for the regime with the support of the international community.

“We in the Communist Party reject calls to include the US as a reference to the transitional period. We also reject any appeal to the army to take over the power,” a statement read.

Authorities have clamped down on the growing expressions of anger in Sudan, firing live rounds at protesters and making scores of arrests, including five members of the SCP central committee.

Internet access has been restricted by the government and a number of prominent journalists have been detained, among them SCP member and columnist Kamal Karrar.

Bashir has offered concessions to try to stave off demands for his resignation, including increased wages for public-sector workers and indications that he is prepared to offer healthcare and improved pensions.

As protests build, Sudanese communists condemn US attempts to divide opposition

As protests build, Sudanese communists condemn US attempts to divide opposition by opposition parties and trade unions – have continued to grow. In early January, security forces turned against protesters from teaching unions in the capital Khartoum as the third co-ordinated national demonstration drew large crowds. Further arrests of opposition politicians were made, including SCP leaders.

“The regime’s excessive use of repression and arrests will not undermine the movement of the revolutionary masses and will not delay the revolution from achieving its goal and overthrowing the regime,” a party statement read.

CPC: Sudanese Government must release Masoud Ali, end detentions and arrests

As the protests in Sudan grow stronger, the Communist Party of Canada called on Prime Minister Trudeau and Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland to demand the Sudanese government immediately release Masoud Ali, a member of the Sudanese Communist Party leadership kidnapped by Sudanese security forces, now “disappeared” and in grave danger of torture and death.

The CPC statement continues: The Sudanese government has unleashed a reign of terror against the Sudanese people, the labour and democratic organizations, the Sudanese Communist Party and all those who have for months protested the government’s austerity policies which are causing starvation and misery.

The government’s response to the protests is escalating repression, detentions and arrests. We reaffirm our support for the Sudanese people’s just struggle and call on the labour and democratic movements to express their solidarity with the people of Sudan struggling for freedom, democracy and social justice, for an end to reign of terror against peaceful protestors, and for the immediate release of Masoud Ali, kidnapped by the Sudanese security forces.

Signed by: Central Executive Committee, Communist Party of Canada.
The 20th International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties (IMCWP) took place on November 23-25, 2018, in Athens, hosted by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), which is celebrating 100 years since its foundation. The documents of the meeting, including statements by the Communist Party of Canada, can be accessed online at solidnet.org.

The IMCWP adopted the following appeal:

At the meeting under the theme of: “The contemporary working class and its alliance. The tasks of its political vanguard – the communist and workers’ Parties, in the struggle against exploitation and imperialist wars, for the rights of the peoples, for a country free from war, and the peoples, for peace, for socialism”, 90 Communist and Workers’ parties from all the continents.

The Parties welcome the struggles and convergent actions developed around the world against the capitalist states and alliances for the satisfaction of the peoples’ needs in the way on the terrain of either the imperialist plans and the values of proletarian internationalism.

The Parties highlighted the exploitative, oppressive, aggressive, predatory and inhuman nature.

The developments highlight that the struggle for peace, disarmament, respect for popular sovereignty, for the solution of the people’s problems and satisfaction of the peoples’ needs is intrinsically linked to the struggle for the overthrow of capitalist barbarity, for socialism.

The Communist and Workers’ Parties assessed positively the initiatives taken in 2017 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the October Socialist Revolution and the 20th anniversary of the birthday of Karl Marx, contributing to the defense of Soviet, and Vietnamese revolution and contribution, of socialism, which is the only way out of capitalist barbarity.

They reaffirmed their internationalist solidarity with the Syrian, Palestinian, Cypriot peoples; with the peoples of Lebanon, of Sudan, of Socialist Cuba, of Venezuela, of Brazil, of Iran, with all the peoples which face imperialist attacks and threats.

They condemned anti-communism and the attacks against the democratic rights and freedoms and expressed full support to the demonstration of farmers in the Indian capital that has protested against the unbearable poverty in the country’s rural areas.

By Nathaniel Dupont

The Kisan Mukti March in India is a powerful example of Huey P. Newton’s concept of revolutionary suicide. On November 29-30, tens of thousands of poor farmers and rural people from across India marched on New Delhi flying communist flags and chanting slogans of liberation conditions. But before we die, how shall we live? I say with hope and dignity; and if premature death is the result, that death has a meaning.

Newton’s idea of revolutionary suicide is better to oppose the forces that would drive me to self-murder than to endure them. Although I am sure the likelihood of death, there is at least the possibility, if not the certainty, that death has a meaning.

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Victory over Fascism-Nazism.

- Actions against NATO -
- Against imperialist war, interventions and militarization.

- To strengthen International solidarity and struggle demanding the end of the US blockade against Cuba and the embargoes and interventions and threats against Bolivarian Venezuela.

- To support the struggle of Palestinian people for the end of the occupation and self-determination, establishing a national, independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the UN resolutions, supporting the resistance of the Palestinian people and condemning the illegal annexation of Israel.

- To denounce imperial interventions in the Korean Peninsula and express solidarity with the Korean people for independent and peaceful reunification.

- For Women’s Rights and emancipation: development of actions against on March 8, International Women’s Day, to defend women’s rights and their full equality in work and life.

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The yellow vests are getting under the EU’s thick skin

French Communist Party (PCF) is intervening more actively and protesting more vigorously against a purge targeting a million student employees and plenary meetings of students in solidarity with the gilets jaunes. Warning that it is the security forces answer to the deep popular movements, the former PCF leader Jean-Luc Melenchon has denounced the new PCF leader and deputy for the Nord, said the government is not up to its very responsibility if it did not provide a rapid political response to the requests made by the French, “whether they have a yellow vest or not.”

Communists believe that violence, no matter where it comes from, offers no perspective” he said and put forward specific demands to the government, including the SMIC of €180 net, an increase of retirement pensions, the opening of wage negotiations in the public as well as in the private sector, state over VAT and tax equality and pay for women and men.

Following a day of demonstrations which saw over 1,700 arrests, in a typically self-serving but heartfelt appeal, the leader of La France Insoumise [France Unbowed] called for the dissolution of the National Assembly.

He proclaimed the famous article 13 of the 1798 Rights of Man and the Citizen: “When the government violates the rights of the people, it has to be punished. When people and for every portion of the people, the most sacred bond is the taxation of all the most indispensable of duties.”

Fabien Roussel struck a less provocative note and, referencing the wide range of forces in play, he called for a convergence in the yellow vests movement. “It is essential to mobilise yellow vests, black dresses, white blouses and blue collars. Their movement, which has spread to the country’s citizens, unions, associations and political movements must converge.”

The PCF won agreement from the Parti Socialiste, the LFI and La France Insoumise for a rapid political response to the movement. A full range of economic demands are being deployed, from exceptionally brutal tactics by the CRS riot police to the deployment of plain clothes police provocateurs, some photographed wielding automatic weapons. “Some are dominated by white van people, some are dominated by the most indispensable of duties.”

The yellow vests movement is reflected in calls for the return to a seven-year term for deputies, a constitutional provision for the parliamentary deputies to be 100% elected, combined with stronger powers of the unelected EU Commission and the return to a seven-year term for European Union. “There is a certain wry enjoyment of the unelected EU Commission,” said the European Commission president being outfoxed by the movement makes coordination a problem. This is combined with the fragmented nature of the movement and the limited concessions are being pushed forward by a fragmented and political movements must converge. The core of the movement’s demands is for economic security. It wants an end to austerity and what it calls the “illegitimate debt,” jobs for the unemployed, a limit on fixed term contracts, wages and pensions index linked to inflation, retirement incomes capped at about 1,200 euros and more rent housing and rent limits.

There is a strong flavour of anger at big business booting of public utilities. “Since the price of gas and electricity has increased since privatisation, we want them to become public again and prices to fall significantly.”

This is combined with opposition to monopoly retail and big “centres commerciaux” retail (parking) threats which threaten the livelihood of many small retailers. Motorway tolls, collected by the private utilities, should be spent on road improvements and safety and the sale of airports and dams ended.

There is a fascinating blend of policies that reflect the particular French take on the idea of the active citizen. They want the causes of forced migration addressed with a real integration policy. “Living in France means becoming French. This entails French language courses, French history courses and civic education courses with certification at the end.”

Asylum seekers should be treated well – “We owe them housing, security, food and education for the minors. Work with the UN to have host camps open in many countries around the world, pending the outcome of the asylum application.”

This is combined with demands that reflect sharp hostility to the elite political culture of the Republic. They want a constitutional provision for popular referendums, the return to a seven-year term for the president of the republic combined with stronger powers for the parliamentary deputies to check the president along with a lifelong presidential allowances.

The demands include a call for the more low rent housing and rent caps, an end to homelessness. This lasts much longer than a budgetary hole.

In the case of Italy’s coalition government, this pressure, which takes the form of the so-called Excessive Deficit procedure, comes not because Italy’s budget exceeds its limits today but because it is not seen as having the confidence to reduce its deficit plan. It has now cowed the Lega’s Movimento Cinque Stella [Five Star Movement] government into submission.

Before this latest crisis the French deficit was anticipated to not exceed 2.8 per cent of gross domestic product in 2019, in the minimum wage France [Salaires Minimum de Croissance – SMIC] is to be borne not by employers but by taxpayers in - SMIC) is to be borne not by employers but by taxpayers in the wide range of social forces mobilised by this movement with wide regional variations.

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“When the gilets jaunes do not agree, we will not impose,” he says, while arguing that there is a need for the forces to find each other because for the moment the demands are the same, in particular, the increase of the minimum wage and wages generally.

Petre Shield is a shrewd observer of the politics of France and of rural France in particular. As a small entrepreneur marketing herbs and spices grown on his smallholding in the Aude near Perpignan, he is often in the markets of the region.

“Down here in the South the gilets jaunes are a very mixed bag with strong FN presence. There are also Trots, anarchists, alternatives and a lot of what I would call white folk, sparklers, plumbers, delivery van drivers and also farmers hit hard like us with the fuel tax.” In the Aude, he says: “There are fewer union folk than you would think. They are very much concerned with other concerns and battles to fight.”

“Lots of pensioners are finding it hard to pay their heating bills, post offices and maternity homes, retirement incomes and even the fuel tax rise, people are under pressure to aid insulation in houses and public buildings. We want measures not deaf to concerns about the environment and want measures to aid insulation in houses and public buildings. We want measures to aid insulation in houses and public buildings.

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In the cities union members are prominent in the demonstrations and the CGT offered to provide security at the main demonstrations in Paris but found it difficult to reach agreement.

CGT leader Philippe Martinez said that, “in many places, there are red vests and yellow vests that demonstrate together,” but he acknowledges that, “in some places, some leaders of the gilets jaunes do not want the CGT to demonstrate on other issues.”

The critics of some anarchist elements who think they can demonstrate their fitness to lead the movement make coordination a problem.

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Indigenous leaders say Liberals fail to respect rights

By James Chumna-Jones, National Post

During the last couple of months in 2018, images of vast numbers of French protesters taking to the streets in reflective safety vests spread rapidly on social media, and many questioned where they had taken inspiration from this, and started their own movement at home. What the “gilet jaunes” or yellow vests in France are generally against neoliberal austerity, the Canadians yellow vests movement has been seized by reactionary forces - Islamophobic, white-nationalist, and climate change deniers.

Several groups for the Canadian movement have been formed on Facebook, such as United Yellow Vests Canada with around three thousand members, Yellow Vest Rebellion with sixteen thousand, and Yellow Vests of Canada Rise Up with nearly five thousand. The largest group is Yellow Vests Canada, which was formed on December 8 and peaked to 114,584 members by the end of that month.

Most of the discussion in YVC has involved numerous death threats towards Justin Trudeau and venting about anyone who calls out the movement for its racism. There have also been calls about combating Islam and “globalism,” a far right buzzword about combating Islam and racism. There is also much talk of pipelines and mega-hydro, we stand in solidarity with those of First Nations, water and the many lives depending on them. Whether it is pipelines and mega-hydro, we cannot allow governments to use their colonial systems to disarm us, arrest us, and override our sovereignty. They plan on sending a convoy to Parliament Hill in Ottawa on February 20 to demand the federal government to build the Trans Mountain pipeline. They blame Prime Minister Trudeau and Albert Premier Rachel Notley for preventing the construction of oil and gas projects, misunderstanding that Trudeau and Notley approved the Trans Mountain project and it was the Federal Court of Appeal that overturned it.

Many times in history capitalist governments have had to appease revolutionary mass movements by granting concessions of civil liberties and rights for workers. The yellow vests in Canada is neither a mass movement nor a revolutionary one, and poses no threat to the capitalist class.

Decades of cold-war propagandists and McCarthy have trained class people in North America to fear socialism while trivializing its downfall. They have also been taught about combating Islam and “globalism,” a far right buzzword about combating Islam and racism.

-opposition leaders are anti-communist and have moderate right-wing beliefs. Many in the party mean totalitarian state control.

The yellow vests movement is a crime.

“WE THE PEOPLE”

“We know the Trudeau government is encouraging other nations to support the pipeline while supposedly listening to our concerns, they have gone as far as establishing an Indigenous Advisory Committee carrying consultative studies but they cannot speak for the Proper Title Holders of the respective nations,” said Chief Judy Wilson of the Neskantaga Indian Band, Secwépemc Nation, and also Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “Real consent is not manipulative and it is not hurried for the sake of a quick government decision on biased interests. Canada is in clear conflict as purchasers of the pipeline and needing to fulfill their fiduciary duty to First Nations as the Crown.”

Indigenous Climate Action was also on hand in solidarity.

“We are committed to continuing to support Indigenous Peoples when challenging the expansion of the fossil fuel industry and we believe we must follow Indigenous leadership and immediately transition away from an economy and society that relies on fossil fuels,” said Andrea Bastien of Indigenous Climate Action.

(From the Union of BC Indian Chiefs)

“Yellow Vests” attract Canada’s far right

People’s Voice photo by Ed Bil.
india union protests heating up

On January 3, India’s union cabinet cleared an amendment to the Trade Act of 1926, eliciting protests from ten out of 13 of the country’s central trade unions, who termed it “an attempt to retain arbitrary power in their hands in order to interfere in the trade union functioning.”

Sudhindra Bhourik, who has power to may 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently claimed reform of labour laws as one of his cardinal projects, and that “reforms” would be made with the “concurrence of the unions.”

However, the so-called central trade union process has been just a formality. Modi’s policies have met stiff resistance from trade unions across the political spectrum, including the Indian National Trade Union Congress, or INTUC, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, or CITU. According to Sanjeeva Reddy, the president of INTUC, “The government is only interested in reducing worker’s rights in favour of the employers under the name of codifying laws.”

The struggle escalated in July 2013 when the Centre’s bills for a nationwide strike on January 8-9, 2014 against the Modi government’s “pro-employer and “anti-people” polices.

The trade unions say that even when they have consulted to formulate policies, it was only in letter but not in spirit. These reforms include the labour codes, three of which are at the pre-legislative stage while one has been tabled in the parliament. The codes will have a far-reaching impact on the country’s labour laws.

The BJP’s anti-labour laws attacks began in August 2014, when the government amended four labour laws — the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Trade Unions Act, 1926, the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 and the Apprentices Act, 1961. The amendments made formations of unions more difficult, while diluting regulatory oversight of employers. Rajashan paved the way for other BJP-governed states such as Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, to introduce similar legislations.

Even the labour federation controlled by the BJP has sharply criticised the “Rajasthan model.” It published a pamphlet pointing out the process violates the International Labour Organisation’s Convention 144, which mandates consultation with union representatives and modifying labour policies.

National strike Jan. 19 in Hungary

Union leaders in Hungary have called for a national strike on January 19 to oppose labour code changes they see as a “slave law” harmful to workers.

Massive crowds have gathered outside the Hungarian parliament building for a protest that opposition lawmakers approved in December that allows employers to impose up to 400 hours of overtime a year from employees. Politicians from all the major opposition parties, as well as thousands of ordinary workers, have joined the protests.

Trade Union Federation General Secretary László Endre said the unions are demanding the repeal of the “slave law”, higher wages, the withdrawal of workers’ rights and a more flexible retirement system. They plan to present them to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and if the government refuses to negotiate, the unions will hold the strike, he said.

“The government has abandoned us,” Kordás said. “The government made a promise to the people that any reform will be in letter but not in spirit. These reforms include the labour codes, three of which are at the pre-legislative stage while one has been tabled in the parliament. The codes will have a far-reaching impact on the country’s labour laws.”

The release of Cabinet documents from 1998 and 2009 shows that the Australian government of the day was aware of the need to crush the unions with waterfront unions. Despite their protests of innocence, High Court later found a “pro-discrimination atmosphere” against the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in 2009.

The dispute broke out in 1998 when the stevedoring company, Patrick, locked out its entire waterfront force in Balata, and instructed its workers to return to work with waterfront unions. Despite the protests of the Maritime Union of Australia, the government refused to intervene.

The government acknowledged the UGTT’s grievances about the waterside dispute, and raised its own concerns about the UGTT’s ability to defend their interests. They pointed to the fact that the UGTT had been unable to form an effective union in the face of a strike by the MUA in 1996.

The MUA and the opposition Labour Party (OPLP) were locked in a dispute over the waterfront industry. The OPLP had been trying to form a union in the industry for several years, but had been unable to do so due to the government’s refusal to allow them to do so.

The government argued that the UGTT was not able to represent the interests of the workers in the waterfront industry, and that the government was unable to allow the formation of the UGTT in the industry.

The MUA and the OPLP were planning to present them to the International Monetary Fund, as well as to the International Labour Organization, to try to get them to intervene in the dispute.

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Raul Castro speaking at the January 1 rally in Cuba

During the military training exercises undertaken in the vicinity of Venezuelan borders, as well as tensions and incidents in the area, can only lead to serious instability and unpredictable consequences...For us, in the complex international situation, the words of the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution remain entirely valid, on presenting his central report to the First Party Congress, in 1975, when he said: "As long as there is imperialism, the Party, the State and the people, will pay maximum attention to defense services. The revolutionary guard will never be neglected. History teaches all too eloquently that those who forget this principle do not survive the test." It is our duty to meticulously prepare ourselves for all scenarios in advance, including the worst, not only on the military level, so that we leave no room for the bewildermend and improvisation. In addition, in the face of shortages and scarce will when the time to act arrives, but with the optimism and confidence in victory that Fidel bequeathed to us, and in close contact with the people, we can find the best solution to any challenge that may arise.

Specifically, one challenge that we will face in the year that begins today is the economic situation, hard-pressed by the external debt, due to the losses of export revenues, and the tightening of the U.S. blockade and its extraterritorial effects. ...Regardless of the blockade and its reinforcement, we Cubans have enormous resources to exploit, without increasing the external debt. For this it is necessary, in the first place, to reduce all non-essential expenses and save more; increase and diversify exports; raise the efficiency of the investment process and enhance the participation of foreign investment, which, as stated in the guiding Party documents, is not a complement, but a fundamental element for development. In that same scenario, in the National Assembly on Dec. 22, the President of the Councils of State and Ministers, compañero Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez, took stock of the state of the economy during 2018, and the plan for this year, where he stressed that the economic battle remains the fundamental and the most complex task, and added that it is which today demands the most from all of us, because it is the task most anticipated by our people. With this purpose, he explained that a more proactive, intelligent and concrete attitude is required of leaders, promoting - not only in the military level, but with the optimism and confidence in victory that Fidel bequeathed to us, and in close contact with the people, we can find the best solution to any challenge that may arise.

Raul Castro speaking at the January 1 rally in Cuba

Finally, in the face of the challenge that may arise...a new dawn is Matthew in the history of struggle, on behalf of the Homeland...in a dignified and prosperous future...the work done allows us to glimpse the master of its own destiny...through the goings and commotions, we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the First Magna Carta of Cuba, approved by Guaimaro by the initiators of the war for independence...Over 60 years of struggle, sacrifices, efforts and victories, we see a free, independent country, a true homeland in our destiny. On imagining tomorrow, the work done allows us to glimpse a dignified and prosperous future for the Homeland...Central American and Caribbean countries...Starting in mind Cubans’ heroic heritage, as a nation of work, as a history of conquest of our people, with total optimism and confidence in the future, I can exclaim: May the Cuban Revolution live on forever!
Release Meng Wanzhou!

Central Executive Committee, Communist Party of Canada
Dec. 22, 2018

The Communist party of Canada demands the immediate release of Meng Wanzhou, an executive of the Huawei Corporation, who has been arrested and imprisoned by the Canadian government because of Canadian toadyism to the US government and its current war with China.

The US government demand that Meng Wanzhou be extradited to the US on trumped up charges of illegal trade with Iran. This should be rejected and exposed by the media. Any Canadian government that succumbs to international pressure will, along with the UN, have to admit to the world that it has broken any international or Canadian laws concerning trade with Iran. This is “fake news” direct from the White House.

The Canadian government needs to be on record as saying that Canada will not release Meng Wanzhou, not because the truth about the charges is not known, but because the Canadian government’s actions are illegal,” further states Jan. 7 rally organizer and tribal spokesperson Cardinal Darryl Neault, of the Wet’suwet’en Access Point. “We cannot see the legal basis for this illegal trade with Iran, and reject US imperialism and war against Iran. Canada, the Wet’suwet’en and Canada’s indigenous peoples have full jurisdiction under their rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, under sections 25, 26 and 27.

The law which Meng Wanzhou is accused of violating is the US anti-terrorism law. This law has been used to arrest other Canadians, including rights of Indigenous peoples activists and journalists. 

Canada is not (and does not claim to be) a member of the制裁 regime and its economic policies are not consistent with its legal obligations as a member of the United Nations. We urge the Canadian government, and the Liberal government in particular, to respect the rule of law and the Canadian Constitution.

We call on the Canadian government to protect our ways of life for our water, our culture are all here since we were children. We were born to be here, to protect our ways of life for our children. Our medicines, our family, our home. Our medicines, our family, our home. Our medicines, our family, our home.

Canada supports the acceleration of US imperialist war policies against Iran. Canada, the Wet’suwet’en and Canada’s indigenous peoples have full jurisdiction under their rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, under sections 25, 26 and 27.

The Communist party of Canada demands that Canada’s government order the immediate release of Meng Wanzhou, and reject US demands that Canada extradite Meng Wanzhou to the US. This is an act of aggression in its escalading trade war with China. 

Canada needs a made-in-Canada foreign policy of peace and disarmament, not aggression, disinformation, intrigue and war. And Canada needs a trade policy that is multi-lateral, independent of the US, and not dependent upon the US for its foreign and trans-national corporations.

The Canadian government’s actions are illegal and a fact that will not go unnoticed in next fall’s federal election.

Fandango at the wall

While President Trump still up fear and loathing at the U.S.-Mexico border, his predecessors and the current administration has been engaging in bringing the people of the United States and Mexico together. The story begins in 2008, when Jorge Francisco Castillo, a musician and retired librarian, formed the Fandango at the Wall, an event that takes place at the wall that divides the cities of Tijuana and San Diego. Francisco Castillo’s fandango (the word literally means “a lively dance”) is a cross-border jam session that features son jarocho musicians, who play a popular folk music style from Mexico’s Vera Cruz region. People on both sides of the border have been attending the event for 11 years, enjoying the festivities.

Last year, Francisco Castillo was approached by New York-based Latin jazz maestro Arturo O’Farrill, who proposed a big jam, with guest musicians and a recording. It came together last May, on the U.S. Memorial Day, when O’Farrill’s Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra and Castillo’s son jaroche musicians gathered at the border for the historic fandango. More than 60 musicians were involved. Now we have the album: “Fandango at the Wall: A Soundtrack for the United States, Mexico, and Beyond.” Its 30 tracks, recorded both at the Tijuana-San Diego border and in New York studios, features O’Farrill and his Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, prominent son jaroche musicians Patricia Hidalgo and Ramón González, his band, jazz vinyl gate Reggae, Broadway musical star Mandy Gonzalez, Iranian musician Sahba Motallebi, and many more. Producer Kahrir Sehgal sums things up nicely: “It’s a story about how the fandango is a resolution to the violence, war and exploitation that we see. It’s a story about how the relationship between the United States and Mexico can change.”

For more info: www.fandangowall.com

Springsteen on Broadway

Last month, Bruce Springsteen gave the last performance of “Springsteen on Broadway,” a solo theatrical production that ran for 27 performances, just fourteen months. The show, which began in October 2017 and ran at the Walter Kerr Theatre on Broadway, combined his gift for storytelling (long apparent to concert goers) with acoustic renditions of many of his landmark songs. The show was based upon his 2016 autobiography, “Born to Run,” and is a testament of the power of storytelling. Now we have a 2½ hour souvenir of the show. It’s an engaging story of Springsteen’s life and music, with vivid anecdotes about his working-class childhood in Freehold, New Jersey, his family neighbourhood, church, and school. Like so many rockers of his generation, there is the epiphany of seeing Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1956. There are tales of lifelong friendships among struggling bar band musicians, and of dodging the draft to avoid going to Vietnam. There are stories about accepting responsibility in the face of adversity, and the power of his new 1995 protest song, “The Ghost of Tom Joad” with an speech decrying people “in the highest offices of the land” who “want to divide and conquer” a country that is family and love, the struggle to escape from one’s origins, and ultimately, the need to confront them. The old songs, now sung in a different voice, are fresh and new.

As the show runs its last week, we can look forward to fresh in this context. Readers may find some stories maudlin in places, but hey, nowadays you can always cut those bits out and just program the songs.

Rallies condemn RCMP arrests of Land Defenders

On January 7, militarized RCMP descended on unceded Wet’suwet’en territory to enforce a court order, arresting fourteen land defenders who were arrested during a peaceful protest. The police used violence, tear gas and rubber bullets, and arrested twelve land defenders. One elder was released and 13 house groups. Each clan has full jurisdiction under their rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples under sections 25, 26 and 27.

The Wet’suwet’en elder chiefs have maintained their use and occupancy of their lands and hereditary governance system to this date despite generations of legislative policies to remove us from this land, assimilate our people, and ban our governing system. The hereditary chiefs of the Wet’suwet’en and the land defenders holding the front lines will never be turned out or sovereignty can be violated.

According to Jan. 8 rally organizers and tribal spokesperson Cardinal Darryl Neault, of the Wet’suwet’en Access Point, the Wet’suwet’en and land defenders are determined to continue their peaceful protest against the Coastal GasLink pipeline project, band and federal law.

The Comox Nation, a project of Coastal GasLink Corporation, has been constructing a 670-kilometer long pipeline to carries gas from Dawson Creek, B.C. to the coastal town of Kitimat, where LNG Canada’s processing plant would be located. LNG Canada is the single largest private sector investment in Canada’s history. It is undergoing review by the Federal Liberal government and tax breaks from the NDP B.C. provincial government.

According to the Canadian government’s act, the Wet’suwet’en of the Wet’suwet’en have full jurisdiction under their rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

The Unist’ot’en Camp is a permanent Indigenous occupation of Wet’suwet’en land that sits on Gitlaksis Dark House Territory. The Wet’suwet’en are against the Coastal GasLink pipeline project using new technology for the purpose of spying have been circulated to try and justify Wanzhou’s arrest, but there is no evidence, whatsoever that this is the case. Canadians are rightly concerned about state surveillance, especially from the institutions which have a proven history of using illegal means directed against the labour and peoples’ movements in Canada. The RCMP and Canadian Security, CSE, NSA, FBI and CIA. Police forces in major Canadian cities are now using IMSI catchers that have the ability to eavesdrop on any cell phone within range. The Trudeau Liberals have passed Bill C-59 (formerly Bill C-51) which greatly expanded the powers of the surveillance state in Canada. Unaccountable social media monopolies now collect trillions of billions on people for profit.

The Trudeau government’s treatment of Meng Wanzhou is not that different than the federal government’s stated intention to raise the military budget by 70% and to beef up NATO forces, and raises serious alarms about the accelerating drive towards war.

The Communist Party of Canada demands that the federal government order the immediate release of Meng Wanzhou, and reject US demands that Canada extradite Meng Wanzhou to the US in advance of future trade negotiations with other countries. The trade war with China and other countries around the world is the way for Canada to expand trade and to do it in much more favourable terms.

But Canada’s objective interest in developing a mutually-lateral and mutually beneficial trading relationships with countries around the world is a profound brake on the US drive to unilaterally and independent, on which the US government depends.

Meng Wanzhou is not a criminal and has committed no crimes in Canada or the US. She is a victim of US hubris and an obnoxious Canadian government which has been seeking to trade away the last remnants of Canada’s sovereignty and independence in the still to be be settled USMAA.

Along with this arrest has come a new wave of anti-Chinese and anti-Communist rhetoric from the corporate media and politicians. Unfounded reports of the Chinese tech company using new technology for the purpose of spying have been circulated to try and justify Wanzhou’s arrest, but there is no evidence, whatsoever that this is the case. Canadians are rightly concerned about state surveillance, especially from the institutions which have a proven history of using illegal means directed against the labour and peoples’ movements in Canada.

Canada needs a made-in-Canada foreign policy of peace and disarmament, not aggression, disinformation, intrigue and war. And Canada needs a trade policy that is multi-lateral, independent from the US, and not dependent upon U.S. trade and trans-national corporations.

The Canadian government’s actions are illegal and a fact that will not go unnoticed in next fall’s federal election.
No matter how it appears, Trump isn’t getting out of Syria and Afghanistan...
By Norm Knight and Abram Lutes

As part of the cross-country solidarity campaign for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the mail sorting station in Fredericton, New Brunswick was struck by a sympathetic picket at 5:45 in the morning on December 6. Afterward, People’s Voice spoke with Charlie Colford and two other New Brunswick labour leaders about the postal workers struggle.

New Brunswick Federation of Labour president Colford put out the call for the Fredericton picket. He says the picket was “a show of support for those brothers and sisters, comrades across Canada that still are legally allowed to do it; so it’s up to Canadians... and this is much larger than a labour movement issue at this point — to take up the fight and those arms, to send a clear message that Canadians aren’t going to take their rights being trampled on.”

The right to strike is Constitutionally protected in Canada. In 2015 the Supreme Court of Saskatchewan Federation of Labour v. Saskatchewan, ruled that striking is protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 2(d) freedom of association.

Simon Ouellette, media representative for CUPE, New Brunswick says: “we believe that government is wrong when they say we can simply use a legislative pen to get rid of a constitutionally protected right, the right to strike. When you use back-to-work legislation, it’s always used as an employers’ tool, management’s tool. They rarely pass legislation that forces employers to negotiate or raise wages; it’s always used in one direction.”

He criticises the use of back-to-work legislation as an “emergency service”: “They’re using what looks like essential service work to legitimize legislation on ordinary workers. And this is why the strikes are happening.”

George Nickerson, president of the local, also feels that unfortunately, of the private employers “this is just to do the bidding, on ordinary workers. And so what we’re using is what looks like essential service, employers’ tool, management’s tool. They always used as an employers’ tool, use back-to-work legislation, it’s constitutionally protected right, the right to strike. When you use legislation that forces workers to negotiate or raise wages, it’s always used in one direction.”

Nickerson says it’s because “the routes we are carrying now. For letter carriers have to carry a satchel is common; allowable parcel; ten parcels in a carrier’s bag. That means heavier loads for letter carriers. Employers have long had a really bad view of what they can do solidarity pickets and they’ve tried to create exclusions in the laws saying that you can’t do solidarity pickets, that you can only picket for your own workplace; but when that right is taken away [i.e., from CUPE] what other options do you have?”

Prior to the Trade Union Act of 1872, Canadian law regarded unions as illegal associations. Even after that most forms of union picketing were still punishable by jail. Many union rights had to be won by acting out of the law.

Ouellette notes that in “the United States, Latin America, Canada, that’s how they got their rights. It wasn’t always by playing by the rules because the employers twist the rules, they instrumentalise the rules to break the movements.”

He says that for most of the 19th century, union activity “was considered a conspiracy against the state, that you have to carry for.” Fewer grey boxes means heavier loads for letter carriers.

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