Nine months into its two-year mandate, the Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls is making little progress. Was the Inquiry doomed from the start by its limited terms of reference?

The Canadian Labour Congress convention wrapped up on May 12, but the CLC remains hampered by lack of unity around a fightback strategy.

Ten years ago this spring, one of the top US Marxist economists - and the now defunct World Weekly News (!) - both forecast a new economic depression. A decade later, that crisis still lingers on.

Angela Davis speaks at CLC Human Rights Forum: page 5
It looks like those who advo- cated for a meaningful national inquiry into murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls will be waiting a little while longer. Despite the promise from Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that the national inquiry would be his first order of business, it has been 19 months since his election and we are still held a single day of hearings. Although the commissioners held two soft launches in September 2016 and February 2017 promising to launch the hearings soon, the inquiry has not started, nor will they hear from the families until fall 2017.

Given that the commissioners were given exceptionally limited time to conduct the inquiry, the fact that they have already used up nine of the 26 months allocated to them is a major concern. At this point, the commissioners have very little to show for either the time used or the money spent to date — more than 10 per cent of its $55 million budget.

Given the lack of communication from the commissioners to date, we are all left wondering what is going on. Equally concerning are reports that the federal government has been behind some of the delays by refusing to share its lists of potential witnesses with the commissioners or advance adequate funding to allow much-needed staffing to occur.

The long list of Indigenous families, leaders and advocates raising public concerns has been met with extended periods of silence. Recent cancellations of scheduled meetings of the inquiry with the same Indigenous families and advocates who originally pushed so hard for the inquiry are even calls for the inquiry to be “reset” both in terms of the panel of commissioners and the inquiry format itself.

But, as problematic as all this administrative holdup is — and it could very well unravel the inquiry — it is relatively minor in comparison to the fact that the inquiry, legally speaking, is fatally flawed.

Even if the federal government had ensured the inquiry started earlier in Trudeau’s term, and even if the commissioners had been able to quickly launch hearings, neither of these conditions could save the inquiry from its flawed Terms of Reference.

The Terms of Reference lack the two areas of inquiry that are most important to Indigenous families, leaders and advocates:

1. A review of all the known police case files of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls and;
2. A comprehensive review and investigation of police behaviour, specifically racism, abuse and sexualized violence of Indigenous women and girls in Quebec; or the rampant sexualized violence and discrimination within the RCMP as evidenced by the class action by its female members — none of this will be open for examination.

Yet, these two things are specifically exempted or protected from review in the terms, forcing witnesses who want to give evidence about these issues, to go back to the very same police forces that committed the flawed investigations of their missing or murdered loved ones, or the same police forces that failed to act on abuses by their officers.

There is no way to save the inquiry from such fatal flaws. The provinces and territories all passed the terms on to allow the inquiry to proceed in their jurisdictions based on the terms as drafted — in other words, based on these two exemptions. Yet this flies in the face of what Indigenous women, leaders and advocates have long requested and the minister heard in the national engagement sessions leading up to the drafting of the terms.

Despite the Human Rights Watch report about police officers sexually abusing Indigenous women and girls in British Columbia with impunity; or the police officers in Val D’or, most of whom will not face charges for allegations of ongoing sexualized abuse of women and girls in Quebec; or the rampant sexualized violence and discrimination within the RCMP — it is relatively minor in comparison to the fact that they have already used up nine of the 26 months allocated to the inquiry on the “vulnerabilities” of Indigenous women and girls — the inquiry risks missing the whole point. The fatal flaws of the Terms of Reference are reason enough for a reset of the inquiry.

There is no shame in learning from the mistakes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s reset and making sure that the thousands of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, and their families and communities get the inquiry they asked for and the justice they deserve.

By Pamela Palmater
As expected, the May 9 B.C. provincial election was a close race, resulting in what appears to be a minority government scenario, although the balance of forces in the Legislature could still change when up to 176,104 absentee ballots are counted starting May 22.

The Communist Party of BC views the initial results as a sharp rebuke for Premier Christy Clark and the BC Liberals, who lost their majority status, taking 43 seats (down from 49 in 2013), and dropping over three percent from their previous share of the popular vote, down to 40.8%. The NDP kept its share of the vote (39.8%), but increased from 2013's 37.5% by 16.7% to winning three seats, up from one.

If these results hold, for the first time in Canadian history the Greens will hold the balance of power in a legislature. Already there are conflicting interpretations of this tentative victory. The campaign revealed widespread support for the policies of the corrupt, arrogant and anti-people BC Liberals, who lost significant support in every riding. The NDP platform was stronger in some respects than in 2013 campaign, for example by supporting the demands for a $15 minimum wage and a $100/month child care program. But the NDP policies overall failed to arouse enough enthusiasm among working people to gain large numbers of new and undecided voters to commit themselves to reverse the damage to the BC labour code, a legacy from the Gordon Campbell years, which have tapped into the hundreds of thousands who did not bother to vote in 2013. The Greens, on the other hand, riding on their somewhat exaggerated image as environmentalists and “outsiders”, managed to win three or five percent to elect MLAs. Being totally dependent on corporate money to drown out any serious public debate, the Liberals at first glance appear unlikely to agree to the Green party conditions, but if both the parties engage in serious negotiations, it would not be surprising if the Liberals offered “baby steps” towards such reforms, in order to hold on to office. That scenario raises the ugly threat of a Liberal-Green coalition based on limited measures to improve electoral democracy, without changing the fundamental anti-people and anti-environmental policies of Clark and former premier Gordon Campbell.

For our part, the Communist Party of BC calls upon the NDP and the Greens to take a different approach, by respecting the powerful public sentiment for change emerging in this campaign. We urge these parties to take the first possible opportunity to defeat the Liberals in the Legislature and to form a coalition government committed to reversing Gordon Campbell’s huge tax cuts for the rich, the rich in business, demonizing democracy, taking action for a sustainable environment and green jobs, and tackling the housing, poverty crises impacting millions of British Columbians. Addressing the needs of working people and reversing the damage done to labour relations in BC by successive Liberal governments should be high on their list of priorities in our opinion. This would mark an important step towards real change in British Columbia.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank the voters who supported the Communist Party in the six ridings where Communists were on the ballot. Despite ongoing efforts to limit electoral debates to the so-called “major parties,” the Communist Party of BC was able to reach out to a record number of voters, on the streets, at forums, and through a greatly increased social media presence. We are pleased to field candidates for the first time in many years in Kamloops, an important working-class centre in BC.

The warm response to our platform indicates that working people in British Columbia are increasingly receptive to our call to put people’s needs ahead of corporate greed, and to end the Liberal government’s attacks against social programs, the environment, and democratic rights. Our candidates urged voters to support a coalition government to vote for fundamental change, and we are pleased to note that the level of support for the Greens in the ballot box was the highest in any BC election in over thirty years. This suggests that whatever party takes office in Victoria, there are growing numbers of powerful and united province-wide people’s fightback to reverse the damage inflicted by the Liberals over the past sixteen years, and to win a much more favourable balance of political forces in the Legislature in the next election.

A closer look at Ontario’s health funding “increase”

By Doug Allan

In the lead up to Ontario’s 2017 Budget, the government crowed that they had heard the public and would improve funding for hospitals. However, based on government announcements, they actually plan to lower the hospital funding increase this year.

They state they will increase hospital funding $518 million, a 3% increase. But, on closer inspection, the funding increase announced for last year was significantly higher.

In the 2016 Budget, Ontario announced that it would increase hospital funding $345 million - about 2.4% increase. Subsequently, the government announced the $140.3 million for hospital funding in the Fall Economic Statement - bringing the total increase to $485 million. That is, of course, already quite close to the much ballyhooed hospital funding increase of $518 million for 2017/18.

But it looks very much like the actual hospital funding increase in 2016/17 was higher than $485 million – higher in fact than the $518 million increase announced for 2017/18.

A little after announcing the $140.3 million hospital funding increase, the province, in its 3rd quarter report, announced another investment of $95.4 million to support additional capacity for surgical and cancer care. So now the total hospital dollars for 2017/18 is $518 million. This is, of course, the full increase for hospitals.

But it looks very much like the actual hospital funding increase in 2016/17 was higher than $485 million – higher in fact than the $518 million increase announced for 2017/18.

A closer look at Ontario’s health funding “increase”
B.C. voted for change!

Two weeks after the May 9 election in British Columbia, there is a working majority: the incumbent Liberals reduced to 43 seats, the NDP now at 40.7%, with the Greens at 16.7%, and others at 2.5%. This outcome represents a large majority vote for change. Despite the huge advantages of a $12 million war chest donated mainly by fossil fuel industry and real estate profiteers, and a corporate media which slavishly promotes Premier Christy Clark, the Liberals failed to win a new majority. The opposition parties have compatible views on some important issues and disagree on others, and a combined majority of seats and a far larger level of popular support.

As the Communist Party of BC stated, these parties should take the first opportunity to defeat the Clark government, reverse the huge Liberal tax cuts for the rich and the corporations, expand democracy, take action for a sustainable environment and green jobs, and tackle the housing and poverty crises impacting millions of British Columbians. This approach is shared by a coalition of civil society groups which is calling on the Greens and NDP to work together, including Leadnow, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, the Health Coalition, Stand on Earth, Force Nature of Nature One Cowichan, and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC.

We agree; it’s time for change. End the Liberal era in Victoria, and put an end to the rot of what people and the environment ahead of unchecked corporate greed!

Defend the Bolivarian Revolution

Desperate to overthrow democracy and reverse the gains of the Bolivarian Revolution, Venezuela’s opposition groups are increasing resorting to open violence. An estimated sixty people have died during demonstrations and protests since early April. Although only a handful were killed by state security forces who face constant attacks, the international media has relentlessly portrayed a false picture of a “brutal” government targeting innocent protesters - the opposite of the truth. In one of the latest developments, opposition protesters torched the house in Barinas where Hugo Chavez spent his teenage years, destroyed five statues of the late President, and blocked the highway.

As international participants at a recent one-day conference in Caracas were told, the Bolivarian Revolution faces a serious crisis, the result of factors such as economic difficulties related to low energy prices and the historic under-development of other sectors, a widespread black market system, and constant political and diplomatic pressures from US imperialism and its Venezuelan allies. The Maduro government’s response includes the proposal to convene a broad-based Constituent Assembly to discuss the country’s future. But perhaps not surprisingly, this offer of an open and genuine dialogue has already been rejected by the opposition business sector, the MUD opposition coalition, and the reactionary hierarchy of the powerful Catholic Church, an organization of American States - headed by puppets of the White House - is also completely opposed to any peaceful resolution of the crisis in Venezuela.

Latin America is at a crucial crossroads, as reactionary forces strive to reverse all the democratic and social gains of the past two decades. At this crucial moment, all friends of the Bolivarian Revolution should stand in solidarity, by exposing the lies of the corporate media and defending Venezuela’s sovereign right to determine its own destiny, free from interference by Yankee imperialism.

The struggle to protect trans people in Canada from discrimination was in the headlines again during May, as the Senate’s Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee conducted hearings into Bill C-16, legislation to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. The Bill also amends the Criminal Code to extend legal protections against hate propaganda to any section of the public that is distinguished by gender identity or expression.

The precursor to this legislation, Private Member’s Bill C-179, eventually failed last year due to the complicated Parliamentary amendment process. Bill C-16 is a critical step in recognizing that trans rights are human rights, and has passed second reading in the Commons. Senators are currently hearing from trans people (including trans and gender creative kids and their families) who support the passing of the Bill.

But other interventions are also being made by Senators and some transphobic witnesses who are whipping up fear of “the other,” and raising arguments that C-16 would threaten safety, and gender diversity people are not subjected to gendered violence. Trans women are not real women and that trans people are not subjected to gendered violence. Trans women are women, and trans, two-spirit and gender diverse people are, in fact, at heightened risk for sexual violence.

Barriers such as harassment in schools, discrimination in employment and housing, as well as familial and peer rejection, create the economic and institutional conditions for homelessness, gender-based discrimination and risk of violence. In Ontario alone, 20 percent of trans people experience physical or sexual assault due to their identity, and 34 percent are subjected to verbal threats or harassment.

As individuals and organizations committed to ending gender-based violence in Canada, we wish to see a concerted effort to support all survivors - including trans, two-spirit and gender diverse people. Contrary to the suggestion that this bill will threaten “female born” women only spaces, such as rape crisis centres or shelters, we assert that C-16 will enable a necessary shift in service provision, removing some of the barriers trans, two-spirit and gender diverse people face when accessing supports. In Ontario, there are sexual assault centres and shelters beginning this work by developing trans-inclusion policies and providing training for staff to ensure trans and gender diverse survivors have necessary access to their services.

Bill C-16 will bolster efforts to ensure sexual violence support services are available to all survivors of violence across Canada. This bill affirms the importance of creating safer spaces for trans, two-spirit and gender diverse people, sending a clear message that they will be defended and supported. We call on the Senate to take leadership on this issue by supporting C-16 to demonstrate your commitment to equity for all Canadians.

Urgent call for Senate to support Bill C-16

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PEOPLE’S VOICE

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Angela Davis ignites CLC Human Rights Forum

With files from convention.canadianlabour.ca

Delegates were inspired by fearless human rights and child welfare advocate, Dr. Cindy Blackstock, who took the CLC convention stage on May 9. CLC President Hassan Yussuff presented Dr. Blackstock with the CLC’s Award for Outstanding Service to Humanity.

“We would like to give you this award for your courage, for your conviction, for your tireless effort to ensure all children have a fair future in this country, especially First Nations children,” said Yussuff.

“This award is dedicated to the real heroes – the 165,000 First Nations children – that continue to experience racial discrimination by the Canadian government,” said Blackstock.

Holding a stuffed rabbit that she brought to recognize May 10, Bear Witness Day in honour of Jordan River Anderson, Blackstock told delegates that in 150th year, Canada is at a crossroads.

“There are two legacies we can face: one is that we live in a country that has a history of colonialism and the other is that we are now at a crossroads in the world,” she said.

Blackstock highlighted the ongoing funding shortfall for education for First Nations children. Each day this funding shortfall continues, she said, First Nations children are growing up without the education they need. She urged the labour movement to join the campaign to get First Nations children what they need to succeed in life.

Unions are necessary: Candy Palmater

Comedian and broadcaster Candy Palmater addressed CLC delegates on May 9, speaking about the importance of solidarity and the continued need for unions in our society.

“As long as my sisters aren’t making as much as my brothers...unions are necessary,” she pronounced. She spoke about joining her first union at sixteen years old and helping to unionize her first workplace at Tim Hortons. She learned about solidarity as a shop steward with the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU) and is now a proud member of Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA).

Palmater stated that, “If you want to be true to the world of solidarity, you need to roll up your sleeves, and be prepared to be told that you have done something offensive.”

She reflected on the barriers she encountered as an Aboriginal person in school when she was told, “you people don’t do well in university.”

When she graduated as valedictorian of her class, she stated that they “had no idea what I am capable of.”

Palmater concluded: “Sisters and Brothers, you need to love yourself, to forgive yourself and get up in the morning and look in the mirror and say that you serve a purpose...and that you are enough.”

— convention.canadianlabour.ca

“Canada at crossroads,” Blackstock tells delegates

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Angela Davis, speaking at the CLC Human Rights Forum, May 7 (photos from CLC website)
Divided Labour Movement Leaves CLC Convention Still Divided

The convention looked at unconventional methods of community organizing such as the Workers' Acton Centre, the Chicago Teachers Strike, and the efforts of the Toronto Labour Council to organize within ethnic enclaves. There were some positive developments arising from Convention decisions that can provide opportunities for militant action within the labour movement. There will be four labour council representatives on the Canadian Council for different regions of the country – Ontario, Prairies, British Columbia and the Atlantic. An emergency resolution started by rank-and-file delegates supporting the Palestinian Prisoners' Dignity Strike for their civil and political strike made the floor and was supported overwhelmingly by the delegates. But political and structural issues within the Convention structure and the labour movement remain obstacles in developing a united militant democratic movement to challenge the threat of the neo-fascist agenda of the Trump Administration and the neo-liberal policies of the Trudeau Liberal government and provinces across the country. The major union divide behind the scenes at the convention was the rancor over the dispute between Unifor and the Amalgamated Transit Union, concerning the attempt by former ATU Local 113 President Bob Kinnear to appeal to the Canadian Labour Congress to have the local representing Toronto Transit Commission workers to become a direct affiliate to the CLC while it sought a new home. Once it became known that Kinnear had approached Unifor for legal advice, Unifor National President Jerry Dias went public in supporting the right of the local to become part of a Canadian union.

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Unifor sought to have the constitution of the International ATU declared in violation of the Constitution of the CLC. While apparently fireworks occurred at the Canadian Council meetings held during the convention, the issue was decided at that level and never hit the floor. The only reference was a statement by ATU Canada Director Paul Thorp thanking the Canadian Council for its resolution of the dispute on Wednesday morning. He emphasized that the ATU’s constitution was no one’s business but those of its members, and that ATU remained loyal to the CLC. Lawsuits were dropped and a committee was established to review Article 4 of the CLC Constitution which deals with disputes. One concern may be that it will be made more difficult for a local of an international union, or a Canadian delegation of an international union which genuinely wants to become part of a Canadian union, to be able to do so.

The issue also played a major role in the votes for Secretary-Treasurer and Executive Vice-Presidents. Marie Clarke-Walker was challenged for the position by former Saskatchewan Government Employees Union member Barb Byers in retreating. That meant that Donald Lafleur from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers was potentially going to be knocked off the top four positions that he had been elected in 2014, by Larry Rousseau from the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

As it turned out, the faction led by Unifor brought in more busses of delegates, and those elected on the eve of the election. Rousseau had 2900 votes, while Lafleur got 1700 votes to Sikdmore’s 1400. Once the vote results were announced, the bussed-in Steelworkers delegates got off the convention floor, and no doubt the Unifor delegates did the same. The result left a real chance for rank-and-file delegates to participate. Policy papers on a green economy, organizing new jobs, and equity had good preambles, but the action items were watered down. 25 resolutions were amalgamated into 17 composite resolutions. Controversial resolutions, such as one to support the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel, or another to argue for a general strike against the Trump Administration, were referred to the Canadian Council rather than being debated on the floor.

The agenda was full of videos and guest speakers, and panels of experts on different issues, leaving usually only 1-2 hours per day to debate the resolutions. Delegates known as “mike murfflin” were designated to hold place for the leaders of affiliates to speak on the issues of the day. A frustrated union member demanded that a resolution opposing Islamophobia be brought to the floor for debate, but was told that the convention had to attend to the order of business and to outgoing Secretary-Treasurer Barb Byers. Once that was completed, the Convention adjourned and no further deliberative business occurred.

Where they have left the labour movement as its faces the upcoming challenges? While the two progressive candidates were elected, what chances do they have to bring rival unions together on a fightback campaign? Donald Trump has just given 90 days-notice to the U.S. Congress...
CIA memo
for a blueprint for Syria
By Brad Hoffman, Third World Resurgence

A newly declassified US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) document explored multiple scenarios of Syrian regime collapse at a time when then-President Hafez al-Assad was embroiled in a covert “dirty war” with Israel and the West, and in the midst of a failed insurgency, which had marked an unprecedented level of isolation for Syria.

The formerly classified 24-page memo entitled “Syria: Scenarios of Dramatic Political Change” was prepared in 1986 by high-level distribution within the Ronald Reagan’s administration and to agency directors, including presidential advisers, the National Security Council, and the US ambassador to Syria. The memo appears in the CIA’s latest CREST release (CIA Records Search Tool) of over 900,000 recently declassified documents.

The memo’s central point, drafted by the CIA’s Director of Global Issues (the report itself was prepared by the division’s Foreign Subversion and Instability Centre), introduces the purpose of preparing “possible” or “probable” scenarios that could lead to the ouster of President Assad or other dramatic changes in Syria.

It further curiously warns, “Because the analysis out of context is susceptible to misunderstanding, external distribution has been severely restricted.” The report’s restricted distribution list (sent to specific named national security heads, not everyone) indicates that it was considered at the highest levels of the Reagan administration.

Sectarian war

The intelligence report’s contents contain some striking passages which seem remarkably contemporary and unfolding decades later at the start of the Syrian war in 2011. These passages anticipate the cues that fear of reprisals and organisational problems make a second Sunni challenge unlikely, an excessive give: the miscalculation that the upsurges of Sunni militancy might trigger large-scale unrest.

In most instances the regime would have the resources to crush any Sunni opposition movement, but we believe widespread violence among the populace could stimulate large numbers of Sunni officers and conscripts to desert or mutiny, setting the stage for civil war.

The “second Sunni challenge” is a reference to the Syrian government’s prior long-running war against a Muslim Brotherhood insurgency which culminated in the 1978 Iskenderun massacre, debilitating the nationalist and pluralistic composition of the ruling Ba’ath Party, the report envisaged a renewal and exploitation of sectarian faultlines fitting Syria, as a Sunni-populated country against its Alawite leadership:

“Sunnis make up 60% of the Syria population and are concentrated in junior officer ranks; enlistees are predominantly Sunni.”

It notes that the report warned: “We believe that a renewal of communal violence between the mid-1980s, it considered one of the worst-case scenario drivers of regime change (the other scenarios include “succession power struggle” and “military reverses spark a coup”.

The potential for revival of the Muslim Brotherhood’s “most fanatical faction” is introduced in the following: “Although the Muslim Brotherhood’s suppression drastically reduced armed defiance, we judge a significant potential still exists for another Sunni opposition movement. In part the Brotherhood’s role was to exploit and orchestrate opposition activism by other organised groups. These groups still exist and under proper leadership they could coalesce into a large movement. Should a new Sunni challenge to the regime develop, several sectors of the Sunni populace are especially likely to play a large role. They include...”

The report’s scenario was for a “sizable record of crimes in Syria” as escalating the potential for Western aid and investment to build Syria’s “private economy, thus opening the way for strong future opposition.”

Ironically, the Syrian government would be beleaguered by the US and allies of covert subversion within Syria after a renewal of Sunni opposition. It is noted that the CIA had already made threats to launch violent attacks on a broad spectrum of Sunni community leaders as well as on those engaged in protests. Regime efforts to restore order through violence will increase the likelihood of government violence against protesters inspired broad-based campaigning for regime change, it warned. (p. 12)

Muslim Brotherhood

The possibility of the Muslim Brotherhood spearheading another second Sunni challenge or regime change is given extensive focus. While the document’s tone supplanting as long as a full-fledged future scenario (especially considering the Brotherhood suffered over the next three years and was completely underground in Syria by 1986), it analysis notes that the group could lead to the ouster of President Assad or other dramatic changes in Syria.

A general campaign of Alawite violence against Sunnis might push even moderate Sunnis to join the opposition. Remnants of the Muslim Brotherhood — some returning from exile in Iraq — could provide a core of leadership for the movement. Although the regime has the resources to crush such a venture, we believe petty attacks on Sunni civilians might prompt large numbers of Sunni officers and conscripts to desert or stage mutinies in support of dissidents, and Iraq might supply them with sufficient weapons to launch a civil war.” (p. 20-21)

Serving Western interests

While the document is primarily a heavily redacted projection of key scenarios of Syrian regime weakening and collapse (its purpose is analysis and not necessarily policy), the authors admit of its“purposefully provocative” nature and the document closes with a list of potential outcomes.

One provocative outcome describes a “Sunni regime” serving US economic interests.

“In our view, US interests would be best served by a Sunni regime controlled by business-oriented moderates. Business moderates would need to work closely with Western aid and investment to build Syria’s “private economy, thus opening the way for strong future opposition.”

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A sizable record of crimes in Syria

The United States has already amassed a sizable record of crimes in Syria, and an even more sizeable record in the larger Arab world. This is not just the crimes that citing Syria and including the Islamic Republic of Iran, an act of war itself. As a military colossus, the US is at liberty to violate international law with impunity, since there exists no international authority to challenge or hold it accountable for a force greater than that which the Pentagon itself wields. Expecting the US to heed international law in any situation is like asking for a discussion of whether this or that act of the United States violates international law is a discussion of no consequence. The White House is able to violate US law without punishment by eliciting at least the passive acceptance of the US public and its representatives for the US military campaign of aggression; accordingly, with the Congress and the US public on side, there is noone to hold the White House accountable under the US constitution.... (Excerpts from a commentary by Stephen Gowans, author of “Washington’s Long War on Syria,” http://gowans.wordpress.com.)
Fast food fight in Germany

Since last October, German fast-food workers have been in a conflict with employers over fair pay and a living wage. In collective bargaining with the German food workers union NCG, the companies have offered a wage which is considerably below what the German government calculates as the minimum needed to build a good life for workers.

Since the start of this year, more than 1000 workers and supporters have been on strike, with the warning shots at McDonald’s, Burger King, Starbucks, Pizza Hut and Autogrill. The employers have shown no serious willingness to negotiate a living wage.

Colombian teachers’ HQ bombed

The Colombian Educators Federation (FECODE), which began a week-long strike on May 10, was targeted on May 18 by an explosion at the federation’s headquarters located in Bogota, the country’s capital. According to reports, the attack took place after the federation declared a national strike, which is considerably below what the German government calculates as the minimum needed to build a good life for workers.

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Colombian teachers and their leaders, and bring the perpetrators of the terrorist act to justice. FECODE reaffirmed that despite this attack, its representatives would return to the negotiating table with the Ministry of Education, in order to find a way out of the strike, which has kept 3 million students out of school.

Free Esmail Abdil

Education International (EI), the umbrella group of teachers’ unions, has renewed the global solidarity call for the immediate and unconditional release of Esmail Abdil, a leader of the Tearham Teachers Association, who was sentenced to six years in jail on false charges by Branch 36 of the Appeals Court of Tehran last October.

On April 30, Abdil started a hunger strike which is taking a toll on his health, and may put his life at risk. He has lost weight and is suffering from hypertension and dizziness. Reports also show that Abdil is in harsh detention conditions in the notorious Evin prison. He was recently transferred to a new prison ward where he was denied communication with his family and lawyer. His wife has not been given any information about her husband’s circumstances and health since March 1.

Abdi has been targeted for his union activism and campaign for free and accessible public education for all. He initiated his hunger strike to protest against unfair, illegal treatment of civil activists, and the ‘lack of independence and sentencing of teachers’ union and labour activists, because of their civic activities’. In a recent interview on April 22, he denounced the ‘unjust and illegal reports against the teachers’

Cleansers protest at Canary Wharf

The tranquility of London’s Canary Wharf was shattered on May 26 when a group of cleaners with a siren protesting HSBC’s tower over planned redundancies joined a protest by the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWWU) held a loud demonstration in the Canary Wharf complex.

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The CPC does much more than run candidates in elections. We think the fight against big business and its policies is a year-round job, so our members are active across the country, to build our party and to help strengthen people’s movements on a wide range of issues. All our policies and leadership are set democratically by our members. To find out more about Canada’s party of socialism, contact the nearest CPC office:

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By Richard Irons, Morning Star

You remember one thing about Venezuela in the coming months, it will soon be clear: the west is at war in the region. With a date in the media is the Donald Trump administration crank up international sanctions at regime change. To give a clear example, a recent press leak revealed that US state department officials are lobbying the Senate to bill calling on the government to add more sanctions on Venezuela and to recognize opposition leaders internationally.

According to a report on Venezuela analysis.com, the senators representing Florida, home to those accused of "undermining democracy" or "corruption" as well as calling for a report from US intelligence services into the "involvement of senior officials of the government... the National Electoral Council, the judicial system, and security forces, in acts of corruption." This report, they said, should also detail how those officials represent a threat to US national security.

US hostility since Trump’s election represents a continuation of intervention aimed at "regime change," but also a ramping up of hostility. As the Venezuelan government leaders were sanctioned in December 2014 and February 2015, the US in March 2015, issued an executive order labelling Venezuela an "unasual and extraordinary threat to national security." This year more sanctions were imposed on Vice-President Tareck El Aisami, who was accused of being a Russian backed official to be harassed. The Bill would also commit the US government to invoke the Organisation of American States (OAS) Ibero-American Democratic Charter against Venezuela thereby expelling it from the OAS, the body that represents a threat to US national security.

The US bill is an attempt to strengthen the “energy security initiative” (CESI) of the Obama administration and to undermine Venezuela’s support in the region and opening up new markets for US firms.

At the end of 2016, Venezuela’s state oil company PDVSA used its US subsidiary GTOG to lock the US as collateral to secure a substantial Russia-backed loan. Now, the proposed Bill would also introduce a cap on the stop Russian state oil company Rosneft from taking over CTTGO Senate at a time when the State Department is releasing hundreds of millions of dollars in the last decade via NGOs linked to USAid and the so-called National Endowment for Democracy. The proposed Bill would allocate funds for the Department of State and USAid to provide “humanitarian assistance” – code for funding right-wing activities. If this Bill is approved, the Caribbean region would also come under renewed US pressure. The US government to strengthen its “energy security initiative” (CESI) by working with US Congress to undermine Venezuela’s support in the region and opening up new markets for US firms.

In justifying the intervention the US and its allies is much of the West media are seeking to give the impression that Venezuela is a unique case, and that the Bill doesn’t represent a broader policy of reclaiming their enacted, destabilize Nicaragua. As the British Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign points out, “Almost 40 years after a war that cost 30,000 lives, the US is once again threatening Nicaragua. The US sees Nicaragua as this time an economic one, which would severely undermine the economic, social and political forces of the Nicaraguan government in reducing high levels of poverty.” Known as the NICCA Act (Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act), the legislation would mean that US which effectively has veto powers within the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank could block all loans to Nicaragua.

Currently running at £194m annually, these loans are being invested in education, social programs, electricity, roads and water supplies.

The Bill calls for the US to oppose loans unless Nicaragua also promises to respect the rule of law and freedom of expression to the satisfaction of the US Department.

In 2007, Nicaragua has undergone a remarkable transformation under the leadership of Sandinista government. Health and education has been doubled and maternal deaths has been halved. Poverty and extreme poverty have been halved and the country has been praised by the UN for achieving the millennium development goal of halving malnutrition.

The US has declared illiteracy-free by UNESCO and currently enjoys growth rates which are among the highest in Latin America. It has peace and stability and has become a recognized national power in Central America by the United Nations Development Program. Regime change in Venezuela has become US government policy under G.W. Bush, Barack Obama and now Donald Trump – worrying it is becoming a policy with regards to Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador.

Progressives everywhere have to be increasingly vigilant. We must not let those under threat and stand up to Trump’s interventionist policies.

By Nino Pagliccia

Every time the Venezuelan “opposition” decides to make the government look bad, with but some exceptions that the Maduro government has quickly rectified, [1] the international community has followed. Chavistas will never break what the international community considers important legacies. They will respect it to the end. There will be room for improvement but the essence will remain.

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Why corporate capital subverts radical culture’s intent

By Mike Quille

How do the ruling classes manipulate art and culture to secure political consent for oppression and exploitation? Two exhibitions on the 1917 revolution in Russia offer some ways towards providing an answer.

Most historians accept that the February and October revolutions in that year were both clear improvements on the tsarist autocracy that preceded them. And most cultural historians also recognize the explosion of creativity and widespread democratization of culture which followed the October revolution. Art and cultural activities suddenly became exciting, accessible and relevant to ordinary Russians.

But these are uncomfortable facts for our current rulers, who must crush any hopes for political or cultural progress if they are to stay on top.

There are two ways they can do this. One is to construct a biased and misleading narrative which ignores historical evidence and downplays artists’ support for the revolution. That was on view in the recent exhibition at the Royal Academy, an openly one-sided and distorted presentation of its politics and art.

The second is to create a monumental fudge which obscures the real historical and cultural achievements of 1917, through a tactic of caustic eclecticism.

This is exactly what was achieved by the British Library in its current exhibition (“Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths”), emboldened in the mistaken and banal commentary offered by one of its curators in the Morning Star.

“Today, people are not so much concerned about the faults of capitalist society but are trying to find their way through the new challenges of the global world,” she asserted.

How on earth can anyone write this in the middle of an election campaign in which the Labour Party is quite clearly trying to address the faults of a capitalist society, but is at the same time working to undermine all beyond belief.

She provides an individualist focus on the “personal stories” of those involved and the “individual interpretations” of visitors to the exhibition, rather than promoting a broader, historically based understanding of Russian history.

This is a cop-out because curatorial practice, including the type of contextual and supporting material supplied, is bound to influence visitors’ perceptions. It is also disingenuous, because the curators do have a message. They believe that the exhibition “can convey a simple idea that violence can only create more violence in response.” This is sloppy thinking.

History is full of instances where individuals and classes have violently seized control of commonly held resources and have been unwilling to give them up peacefully. Oppressive rulers have had to be challenged, defeated and restrained by force as well as by peaceful argument, in order that most people can have a fair share of the Earth’s resources.

Of course, peaceful persuasion is there to force if that doesn’t work to end exploitation! Would slaves, peasants and serfs have ever been freed without their violent, illegal rebellions?

The “violence breeds violence” message conceals a defacto political agenda. When the law itself is nothing more than a codification of unjust and oppressive social and economic relationships, it has to be challenged and changed by every means at our disposal.

Coincidentally—or perhaps not—both exhibitions have been sponsored by the Blavatnik Foundation, the beneficiary of Britain’s second richest man Leonard Blavatnik.

He made a huge fortune after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the accompanying legalized robbery by private individuals and corporations of the wealth built up by the Russian people since 1917.

So money stolen from the Russian people is used to fund cultural exhibitions which distort the truth about Russian history. That is how dominant classes manipulate art and culture to secure consent for exploitation and oppression.

There have been ever more obvious examples of the increasing corruption of our cultural institutions by corporate capital, masquerading as philanthropic or charitable foundations.

A key demand of any progressive arts and culture policy must now be the complete abolition of private sponsorship of our common culture and heritage.

This historic poster was used by the British Library as an image for its exhibition, “Russian Revolution: Hope, Tragedy, Myths”.

Packingtown scores at Mayworks

Toronto’s 32nd Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts concluded on an artistic high note on May 7th with a performance of the video ballad Packingtown, a multi-media people’s history of the February and October revolutions in that year. The performance by Ground Zero Productions videographer Don Bouzek and historian-Catherine Cole. Packingtown refers to the site where in 1847, a major riot by North America’s second-largest stockyard, and the home of meatpacking giants Canada Packers, Burns, and Swift (re-branded as Gainers in 1980) by Toronto financial mogul Peter Pocklington.

The video ballad format is brilliantly realized by the collaborating artists. The video images, interviews, and live performances are perfectly synchronized, as the narrative moves back and forth between everyday life and collective struggle with humour, pathos, and anger. Kudos to Maria Dunn - an accomplished songwriter and performer - and to her supporting musicians, violinist Shannon Johnson and saxophonist and low-whistle player Jeremiah McDade.


Canadians protest TSO Israel Tour

The Toronto Symphony Orchestra launched its first-ever tour of Israel with a May 3rd “Arabian Nights Pre-Tour Concert” at Toronto’s Roy Thompson Hall. The send-off for the tour, which included several concerts in Europe, followed a winter fund-raising campaign that ignored the protests and petitions of Palestinian solidarity organizations like the Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA) and the Canadian BDS Coalition. The TSO’s tour included concerts in Jerusalem on May 11 and Tel Aviv on May 13. In its statement, the CAIA charged the TSO with “lending its prestige and reputation to legitimize a state which is responsible for ongoing human rights abuses.” Those abuses include holding two million people under siege in Gaza for the past ten years, flouting both international law and official Canadian policy by moving half a million Israeli citizens into illegal settlements in the occupied territories, and systematic destruction of Palestinian homes and olive groves. The unprecedented TSO tour will be reciprocated with a performance by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in Toronto on October 28, 2017. Read the full CAIA statement at http://www.caiaweb.org.

Nunca Más Mujer

Last November, twelve Chilean women songwriters and musicians, gathered at a retreat centre near the capital city of Santiago for a workshop to harness the power of song as a tool in the struggle to overcome against the 1973 military coup. The workshop was set up by the Popular Education for Health Foundation (EPES), an organization that was founded during the era of the military dictatorship (1973-90) to help working-class women organize for better living conditions. Leading the workshop was Holly Near, the American singer, feminist, and peace activist. Near’s 1978 song “How In a Man’s Hand” is still widely regarded as a classic. The workshop was sponsored by the Blavatnik Foundation, the beneficiary of Britain’s second richest man Leonard Blavatnik.

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The leaders of the affiliates who control the CLC Canadian Council to adopt a political agenda which puts the workers and the people ahead of the profits of the big corporations.

The task for progressive trade unionists is enormous but necessary. The time is ripe to undertake this task. The time is now.

By Peter Marcus

The May 16 Vancouver and District Labour Council meeting was preceded by a Pizza Educational talk by Derrick O'Keefe of Stop War, on the current situation in the Middle East, particularly in Syria. He also mentioned the very serious situation in Korea. In both cases the main protagonist is U.S. imperialism, its warmachine and its desire for regime change to serve U.S. imperial interests. The educational came out of a resolution unanimously passed at the previous Labour Council meeting: "That this Council requests the National Council of the CLC to develop an educational program concentrating on organizing the numerous workers stuck in precarious employment. It should stereotypes and prejudices that curb the well-being of men and women. The essayist and ethnologist alluded to different periods in Cuba for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities. In Cuba, sex, gender and sexuality were recognized with the following observation: "Unfortunately those obsolete and retrograde minds got the way."

The ceremony took place at the headquarters of the National Association of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC by its Spanish acronym) and was attended by its president, Miguel Barnet; Maritza Castro, director of the National Center for Sexual Education (CENESEX) and Rolando Nuñez, president of UNEAC Association of Performing Arts. When referring to the stamp, with the image of Vilma Espín, esteemed activist of the Federation of Cuban Women, Raúl Lorenzo, president of the Cuban Philatelic Federation, said that this action "enhances the country's history and its efforts for full development of all people." On awareness of respect for other races on the Web.

Evelyn Suprun, a lifelong supporter of the working class press, died on April 29 at the age of 92. Born in Vancouver on June 1, 1924, Evelyn was one of five children of Alice Shaw and Arthur Beaumont. Her early years were spent on West Broadway in Vancouver, swimming in False Creek, skiing on Hollyburn Mountain and riding her bike all over the city. She attended Model School, King Ed High, and worked at her Grandma Shaw’s pie stand at the Lansdowne Rock Beach and they married in 1945, raising five children and becoming deeply involved in numerous clubs and other athletic programs. Evelyn was a stalwart activist in the peace movement and other progressive organizations, and was a dedicated supporter of the Pacific Tribune, one of the forerunners of People’s Voice. The walk-a-Thon for PV was launched some 15 years ago by the Lower Fraser Club/CPC, Evelyn was among those who helped to secure the location at Bear Creek Park and to contribute to the biggest drawcard for the PV Fund Drive. Evelyn always stood up for the less fortunate and did not hesitate to speak her mind. She was a powerful force and entertained her friends and colleagues with her razor sharp wit, which remained with her to the end. Evelyn is predeceased by her husband Walter, and siblings Arthur, David, Alan, and Rosemary. The Editorial Advisory Board of People’s Voice sends its deepest condolences to Evelyn’s children Cherie (Peter), Brenda (Erik), Avarie, Gregor, Leslie and Owen, and four grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren. A celebration of Evelyn’s life will be held on Sunday, June 11, starting around noon, at 16260 10th Ave., Surrey, BC.

People’s Voice 2017 Fund Drive for $50,000

Contribute online today at peoplesvoice.ca/donate

People’s Voice deadlines

June 16-30 issue: Thursday, June 8
July 1-31 issue: Thursday, June 22

Send submissions to PV Editorial Office, 706 Clark Drive, Vancouver, V5L 3J1
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www.ycl-ljc.ca
rebelyouthmagazine.blogspot.com
http://solidnet.org

Margaret “Betty” Griffin

Long time teacher and social activist Margaret “Betty” Griffin passed away with family and friends by her side May 1, 2017 at the age of 94. A date she would have found fitting - May Day.

Past president of the Burnaby Teachers’ Association and the North Shore chapter of the Council of Canadians, she was tenacious during her 14 years on the negotiating committee for the HCTF for which she was awarded an honours diploma in labour relations.

Betty also dedicated her time for many years as an organizer of the North Shore Club of the CPC. Her lifetime commitment to protecting the rights of others is one of the most legendary in the history of the CPC.

She is predeceased by her loving husband Harold “Hal” Griffin and will be missed by her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, many other relatives and friends from all walks of life, for whom she cared deeply. In lieu of flowers and to honour what she believed in most, please take a moment to sign a petition, speak up for someone, champion a cause, be the voice she no longer has. Her life will be celebrated this summer and we look forward to sharing your stories, with the date to be announced next month and available at www.DignityMemorial.ca or Obituaries.
In stark human terms, the US economy is failing working people. Between January 2016 and January 2017, average hourly earnings slipped 0.1% and the hours of the average workweek dropped 0.3%, indicating that not only the labour-saving equipment, but also real average earnings for those twelve months.

With reduced earnings, more and more workers are drawing on their retirement savings: 20% of 401(k)s have been reduced through 2017. And senior citizens are saddled with growing debt as well. In 1998, 30% of people 65 and older were in debt. In 2012, the percentage of seniors in debt reached 43.3%. Growing debt comes in the wake of the collapse of net worth since 2005, when it topped $300,000. And profits rebounded nicely because the working class had been systematically underemployed, replacing them with robots, corporations are showing little interest in the introduction of new and old technologies. They are spending very little on equipment. While the technology may be there, capitalists have shown little need for it, given low labour costs. 

A business cycle contraction grows more and more likely. The long, tepid expansion following the crash—has fallen for three straight months. Auto dealers are in danger of being replaced by robots, corporations are showing little interest in the introduction of new and old technologies. They are spending very little on equipment. While the technology may be there, capitalists have shown little need for it, given low labour costs. The Trump tax change package, favourable to corporations and the repatriation of profits, is one ruling class response to this anticipated problem. Instead, the post-collapse era of stagnation and deteriorating living standards continues for the working class. 

This harsh truth has been a painful anniversary. The global economy never fully recovered from the crash of 2008. It has stumbled along from one setback to another, with economic activity barely keeping pace with the historically low birthrate and stalling population growth. When both the enormous loss of wealth from the crash and the historically unequal distribution of the wealth recovered since the crash are configured, it is fair to say that the vast majority of the world’s population have seen little or no recovery. In fact, the casualties from the crash continue to pile up. The US economy is healthy now without serious symptoms. Despite the market euphoria that accompanied the Trump election, the Atlanta Federal Reserve has lowered its growth expectations for the first quarter to 0.5% from an earlier forecast of 3%. Other projections have similarly dropped.

For three months in a row, since January, durable goods orders (excluding volatile transportation orders) have dropped. Industrial production fell 0.1% in January and was unchanged in February. Factory output decreased 0.4% in March from February and was only up 0.8% from a year earlier. Bank loan growth has slowed. Retail sales slowed by 0.3% in February and 0.2% in March. Inflation, as a measure of consumer demand, dropped to 0.3% in March. Retail stores are closing in unprecedented numbers and unemployment has risen to 4.8%. 

Sales of new cars—the principal driver of consumption growth since the crash—rose for the first time in three straight months. Auto dealers are now offering buyer incentives that are greater than the labour costs of production (labour costs are less than $2500 per car, on average). Incentives account for 10.5% of average sticker price ($31,435). Yet the average car sits on the dealer lot for 60 days. Used car prices were down 8% in February, another sign of declining demand. And auto loan defaults are on the rise.

The US trade gap—the difference between imports and exports—reached a 5-year high in February. While the dollar is undervalued in the real sense, it is not undervalued in the nominal sense. The US trade deficit is caused by one thing: US capitalists do not have a rentier class to support them. They see no need to do so, when labour power can be used on demand, with no reserve army of the unemployed or underemployed.

That trend is clearly reflected in the most recent period’s historically poor growth in productivity, among the lowest periods of productivity growth since the Second World War. Contrary to the euphoria that accompanied the Trump election, hawking of the idea that most workers are in danger of being replaced by robots, corporations are showing little interest in the introduction of new and old technologies. They are spending very little on equipment. While the technology may be there, capitalists have shown little need for it, given low labour costs. As Shawn Sprague says in a recent BLS paper, since 2009 the growth of aggregate hours-worked has grown much more quickly than the growth of non-farm business output. This fact demonstrates that US capitalists feel little pressure to save labour while restoring profits during the so-called “recovery.” Rather than having existing workers work more hours, they are hiring more workers at low wages and contingently. Profits rebounded nicely because the working class had been systematically underemployed, replacing them with robots, corporations are showing little interest in the introduction of new and old technologies. They are spending very little on equipment. While the technology may be there, capitalists have shown little need for it, given low labour costs. As Shawn Sprague says in a recent BLS paper, since 2009 the growth of aggregate hours-worked has grown much more quickly than the growth of non-farm business output. This fact demonstrates that US capitalists feel little pressure to save labour while restoring profits during the so-called “recovery.” Rather than having existing workers work more hours, they are hiring more workers at low wages and contingently. Profits rebounded nicely because the working class had been systematically underemployed, replacing them with robots, corporations are showing little interest in the introduction of new and old technologies.