Residents of Newfoundland & Labrador were dismayed this summer to hear that their electricity rates may be jacked up to protect private profits. Maybe it’s time for some serious talk about public ownership of hydro power.

Page 2

As this issue goes to press, over 215 people have been sentenced for protests against the TransMountain Pipeline expansion. One of the “sinister seniors” is Sue Lambert, a former president of the BC Teachers’ Federation.

Page 7

In the course of a summer marked by fire and smoke across much of the planet, the terrible loss of life in Greece has been one of the worst tragedies.

Page 9

Across the country, tent cities are springing up as a response by homeless people and allies to the housing crisis. In Nanaimo, BC, a sharp struggle is underway over “DisContent City.”

Page 12

An urgent call to unite the global labour movement against austerity, fascism and war

- see page 6 -
Alberta Communists focus on energy sector and environment

By Naomi Rankin, Edmonton

The Communist Party – Alberta, an affiliate of the newly constituted Young Communist League, is both growing in Alberta, chiefly in Edmonton and Calgary, but also in other areas.

The main focus of discussion and debate at the convention was the energy sector. It is crucial in Alberta, where the energy sector dominates the economy and the main-stream political arena, to have a clear program for change and development. It is vital.

We have come out of the convention with a confirmed overall strategy and several specific policy decisions about managing the downsizing of traditional energy and diversifying the economy with full employment, in line with the inescapable need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions locally and globally.

We had the benefit of the comradeship of several friends and allies in the environmental and other mass movements in the discussion at the convention. Inevitably, we had to address the issue of what should be our attitude towards the NDP government of Alberta. Although we can and do criticize them when they fail to keep their promises and sell-out the environment, they are in some ways a good government.

We must not lose sight of the far greater threats posed by the United Conservative Party (UCP), led by the far-right Jason Kenney, which would be catastrophic for human rights and workers' rights, and worse still for the environment and the economy.

The next Alberta election will take place in 2019, and Communists will be on the ballot in Edmonton and Calgary.

Another main focus of the convention was preparation work and the potential for greater involvement in both Edmonton and Calgary in developing connections with other activists. Building and revitalizing the peace movement is vital at a time when the US is demanding that Canada and other NATO countries raise military spending to four percent of GDP.

Donations towards our annual appeal totalled about $1620 over the last few weeks, bringing us to $39,659, or 79.4% as of August 18. Newfoundland & Labrador, Nova Scotia & New Brunswick have topped their targets, and other provinces are making progress. Ontario is now up to 91.4%, and Alberta is close behind at 90.6%. Thanks go out to the organizers and volunteers.

Casino strikers challenge company irregularities

Members of the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) on strike at Gateway Casinos’ four Thompson-Okanagan casinos rallied on Aug. 20 at BC Lottery Corp.'s (BCLC) head office in Kamloops, to urge the regulatory body to investigate whether the casinos are operating fairly.

‘We’ve got questions about how Gateway Casinos have been operating their Thompson-Okanagan casinos,’ said BCGEU President, Stephanie Smith. ‘Based on what our members have witnessed and reports we’ve heard, it sounds like Gateway hasn’t been living up to their obligations under BCLC and provincial gaming laws and regulations during this strike.’

The union is asking BCLC to investigate potential irregularities in the casinos’ operations witnessed by strikers. The alleged incidents range from failing to comply with regulations around IDing patrons to a failure to identify suspicious behaviour possibly related to money-laundering.

Specific concerns include whether the casinos are maintaining the security of assets, properly safeguarding against corruption and money-laundering, complying with BC’s liquor policies, and adequately ensuring the safety of staff and patrons.

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By Sean Burton, Aug. 14, 2018

As Nalcor’s hydro-electric project at Muskrat Falls in Labrador is completed, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are bracing for a substantial rise in electricity costs, perhaps as much as double the current rates. In a period when many call for prudent government spending, the federal government is pursuing austerity measures to cut the deficit, such an increase in costs could make a difficult situation for working people even worse. One could start by looking at a family shipping goods to Brazil or the U.S. right now would fare if rates doubled, especially during the coldest times of the year.

Rate hikes are already being implemented over this summer, prompting a number of residents to protest in small groups in front of the Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro (Nalcor) board (PUB) office in St. John’s. The government has insisted that it will not reconsider its plan to “mitigate” the all-but-inevitable increases when Muskrat Falls comes online, but it hasn’t yet come up with anything more newsworthy than the fact that it is more bad news for a province that can barely keep young people and immigrants from leaving and an increasingly aging population.

The gap between the wealthiest 87 families in Canada and the rest of us has increased dramatically over the last 17 years. A mere 7 families in Canada have on average increased their net worth nearly 7 times more wealth than the average Canadian family. They own the same amount of wealth as Canada’s 12 million lowest earners combined. These are the astounding numbers from the new report garnering global media attention, published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), entitled Born to Win - Wealth Concentration in Canada since 1999.

According to the report, the average net worth (the value of assets minus debts) of the wealthiest 87 families is almost $3.9 billion each, or the equivalent of the median net worth (the middle point) for Canadian families was $290,000 in 2012.

In the last 17 years the net worth of the very wealthy has increased at a rate 8 times faster than the net worth of all Canadian families. In 1999, the average net worth of the wealthiest 87 families was $3.9 billion each, or the equivalent of the median net worth (the middle point) for Canadian families was $290,000 in 1999.

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Darkness descending - capitalisms kill us

For the second consecutive summer, much of western Canada and other parts of North America are covered in a smoky haze. It’s a familiar sight seen in other countries as well. The knee-jerk tendency is to blame “global warming” as if nothing can be done. But the tragic losses of life from fires (in Greece, for example), are often directly connected to austerity cuts/outbacks, in other words, to the drive by big capital to put private profits ahead of human life and the environment.

Of course, there is a bigger picture as well. The fires in British Columbia follow earlier decades of global warming meant that mountain pine beetles weren’t killed off by frigid winter temperatures. By the 1990s, vast stands of forests had been turned into tinder for lightning-sparkled wildfires. Other aspects of 160 years of colonial capitalist exploitation of west coast forests also led to the fires. Without fir trees and other conifers, the fireline is spreading relentlessly across the western half of the continent.

Humanity and other species are starting to pay the price for carbon emissions in the form of climate change, with the burning of fossil fuels having the most significant long-term impact. Arms manufacturers make a killing, as governments spend a trillion dollars a year on armies and weapons. Meanwhile, the US, the biggest military spender on the planet, is sabotaging attempts to shift towards renewable energy.

There is still time to avert catastrophe, with a global “green jobs” strategy to slash carbon emissions and put people ahead of profits. To succeed, we need to scrap the private profit system which has been the driver of ecological collapse. Capitalism - a system that puts ownership and control in the hands of the working class. The only alternative is a dark capitalist future, in which summer is the perpetual season of fire and smoke.

Symbolism or progress?

Proposals for symbolic actions can often have a double-sided character. As part of the struggle for the shorter working day, the labour movement has often organized to win more paid days off. Labour Day is a statutory paid holiday in North America, giving millions of workers time to relax with families and friends. But on another level, Labour Day was also a strategy by the employers and some right-wing union leaders to derail celebrations of May First, the International Workers Day.

Now, the federal Liberals have proposed a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, to honour the survivors of Indian Residential schools, perhaps on the current National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21, which is not a statutory holiday) or “Orange Shirt Day” (Sept. 30). One of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations (number 80) was to declare such a day.

Unfortunately, PM Trudeau’s shining rhetoric does not match the content of his government’s actions. For one thing, such a date (at least at this point) would only cover employees under federal jurisdiction. For the large majority under provincial jurisdiction, it would be a holiday of no more than a true statutory holiday. Perhaps more important, we have to ask: why take action on this particular anniversary? Why not another National Day for those who are killed in the line of duty? Why not a National Day for veterans?

A summary of the note points to a number of significant findings:

“Early statements by the US and French governments that a nerve agent had been used in the alleged chemical attack in Douma on 7 April 2018 were rebutted by the OPCW (Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) Fact-Finding Mission, which reported that neither environmental samples nor blood samples from purported victims contained any trace of nerve agent. Furthermore, the US and French governments were poorly informed at the time of the US missile attack on Syria on 14 April.

“The Prime Minister misled the House of Commons by stating on 16 April that the OPCW team had been prevented from visiting the Douma attack site by the Syrian authorities and the Russian military, and may also have misled the House by stating that the US-led missile attack was ‘specifically targeted at three sites’ alleged to be linked with chemical weapons (rather than targeted on Syrian military infrastructure as reported elsewhere).

“The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission did not reach any conclusion as to whether a chemical attack had taken place. The detection of chlorinated organic compounds in environmental samples is consistent with release of chlorine from a gas cylinder at the two alleged attack sites, but this does not distinguish between a chemical attack and a staged incident.

“Experts agreed that the images showing bodies of victims lying close together in an apartment building were not compatible with exposure only to chlorine, from which the victims would have been able to escape by moving to the windows or leaving the building. This is supported by experience of industrial accidents, the chlorine in which those exposed are usually able to escape.”

“Another nerve agent degradation products were detected and the positions of the victims’ bodies were not compatible with death from chlorine exposure on the spot, the only remnant of explanation is that the victims were killed by other means.”

Other observations favour a managed massacre rather than a chemical attack as the explanation for the Douma incident. The positioning of the gas cylinders is more consistent with staging than with an air-dropped munition at the site where most victims were shown, a fire was lit in the room underneath the gas cylinder. For chlorine to be useful as a weapon it would have to be released on an area of high population density rather than as a single cylinder or barrel dropped from the air.

Assessments by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission that chlorine had been used as a weapon in Syria between 2013 and 2017 were based on secondary sources without on-site inspections. This violates a precept that OPCW had set for itself in 2013.

“The conclusions of the Fact-Finding Mission that use of chlorine in alleged attacks in Syria between 2014 and 2018 was ‘likely’ or supported ‘with a high degree of confidence’ relied on witnesses and samples provided by non-governmental organizations with access to opposition-held areas of Syria.”

As the briefing note explains, these organizations included a “CIRBN Task Force” set up by an agent of the intelligence service of a state committed to one side in the conflict between the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) — reliant on information obtained by proxies, a Brussels-based organization whose operations are not transparent; and the White Helmets who were not consulted if these incidents were staged.

“In relation to one of the incidents from which the CIRBN-Task Force collected materials — the alleged chlorine barrel bomb attack in Talmenes on 21 April 2014 — the UN/OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism found clear evidence of staging at one of the two alleged attack sites.”

“In a widely-publicized incident in Sarmin on 16 March 2015, the deaths of a family of six were allegedly caused by a chlorine barrel bomb. For this incident the alleged mode of delivery is improbable, and the images of the ‘attack site’ are clearly inconsistent with drug overdose rather than chlorine exposure as the cause of death. Despite evidence that the incident had been staged, the Leadership Panel of the UN/OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism — Gamba, Mariotti and Schanze — relied on information obtained from unspecified ‘looter sources’ to conclude that a Syrian air force helicopter had dropped a chemical weapon.”

The Working Group (Paul McKeigue, Jake Maun, David Miller, Piers Robinson) was established to research the “areas of organised persuasive communication” (including propaganda and information operations) and media coverage, with respect to the conflict in Syria and related to Syria-since-2014.

But it remains dubious whether their briefing note will be reported by Western media outlets. The group is open to academics and independent researchers, and is “not aligned to any state or non-state actor. In line with ethical expectations, the research group is committed to the upholding of international law and human rights norms.”

The group’s aim is “to facilitate research, the development of research papers and research grants bids and to provide a source of reliable, informed and timely analysis for journalists, researchers and policymakers. This will be accomplished through a commitment to the production of rigorous and independent research. The aim is to examine carefully the various accounts of the conflict in Syria to build an empirically grounded account both of the conflict itself and of the apparatus, practice and content of organized persuasive communication (including propaganda) in relation to the conflict.”

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Canada’s hypocrisy on display in Middle East

Canada’s hypocrisy on display in Middle East

Elections in Brazil: unwanted help from a U.S. friend?

Nino Pagliccia, August 17, 2018

When you think that “they have enough damage, or seen the light, or maybe they have been repeated and disregarded”, the wealth they have amassed thanks to an insane capitalist system, they surely don’t need to fear that a cancerous surgery or radiation has been able to remove. I’m reacting to news reports by Telesur (1) and MiniPress News (2), saying that Steve Bannon was advising the far-right presidential candidate in Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro in the upcoming presidential election. What could someone with racist views contribute positively to a country like Brazil where 51% of the population is black or mixed? This is the same Steve Bannon who helped “Trump ascend to the U.S. presidency” and served in his administration for one year until being dumped. Bannon is also the former executive chair of the far-right syndicated Breitbart News Network. Any association with Breitbart News, even a “former” association, does not reflect well on Mr. Bannon. The network is widely considered to be ideologically driven, with a rightwing and xenophobic tone.

Stemming from the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Canada, Aug. 16, 2018

The ongoing diplomatic dispute between Canada and Saudi Arabia is a tragic reflection of the Israeli-Saudi conflict. In a country where the concept of human rights in our world today - but not in the way presented by Canadian foreign policy - is a corporate media. The Communist Party of Canada says that this situation reveals the hypocrisy of both sides, neither of which has any claim to moral superiority.

The current dispute arose after Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland issued a Twitter statement on August 2 expressing “Canada’s concern” over Saudi human rights activists Samar Badawi, who was recently arrested, Rauf Badawi, who is in prison. Other Canadian diplomats and the Canadian ambassador in Riyadh released similar statements, calling for the release of all other peaceful human rights activists in the country.

Saudi Arabia responded by suspending imports, new investment projects, and investments in companies. The Canadian government is certainly improving the situation.

Saudi Arabia reported that it has sold $15 billion worth of military vehicles to the Saudi regime, and remains a staunch ally and partner of Israel, and its chief supporter of US imperialism. Cosmetic gestures such as a new law to arrest Saudi activists, or the occasional Feeble criticism of Israeli violations of human rights and international law, do not change the fundamental reality: Canada is deeply implicated in the oppression of the peoples of the Middle East by US imperialism, Zionist Israel, and Saudi Arabia and the other reactionary Gulf regimes.

The Communist Party also stresses that despite Canada’s image as a land of democracy and freedom, human rights activists are frequently subjected to harassment, arrest, and imprisonment in this country. Minister Freeland herself is an outspoken supporter of the far-right Ukrainian regime, which is responsible for massive violations of human rights in that country. As long as Freeland remains Foreign Affairs Minister, her tweets and pronouncements ring hollow, to say the least.

The Communist Party of Canada demands that the Liberal government cancel all arms sales to the Saudi Arabian regime which is responsible for brutal aggression against other countries and denies equality for women and minority groups. We further demand that the federal government should immediately expel Israeli diplomats, impose boycotts, divestment and sanctions on Israel, and pressure Israel and the US to adhere to the internationally recognized framework for a peaceful political solution based on dismantling the apartheid wall and ending the sanctions against Gaza. The Conservative government should be more than willing to cooperate with these proposals.

PV Vancouver Bureau

The bomb dropped on a school bus in Yemen on August 9 by a Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthi movement in the US, according to analysis of the debris. The UK Guardian reports that the attack killed 40 boys aged 6 to 11 who were being taken on a school trip. Eleven adults also died. Local authorities stated that 79 people were wounded, 56 of them children. CNN reported that the weapon used was a 22.7kg laser-guided bomb made by Lockheed Martin, one of many thousands sold to Saudi Arabia as US, and billions of dollars of weapons exports.

Saudi Arabia is the biggest single customer for both the US and UK arms industries. The US also supports the coalition with refuelling and intelligence. The investigative journalism site Bellfingcat identified bomb fragments, on photographs and videos taken soon after the bombing, as coming from a guided version of a Mk-82 bomb called a GBU-12 Paveway II. Bellfingcat traced the bomb to a shipment approved by the US state department in 2015, during the Obama administration.

A spokesperson for Lockheed Martin refuted questions about the bombing to the Pentagon. The defense department has said it does not make tactical targeting decisions for the Saudi-led coalition but does provide support to improve targeting.

After the bombing of a funeral hall in October 2016 that killed 155 people, Barack Obama hailed the sale of guided munition technology to Saudi Arabia, on the grounds that it was “precisely the kind of thing that can save civilian lives if the Saudi-led coalition were not targeting innocent non-military targets. The sales were reinstated by the Trump administration, the first secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, in March 2017.

According to a recent report by the UN high commission for human rights, there has not been 17,002 civilian casualties in the Yemen war since 2015, 6,592 dead and 10,470 injured. The majority of these casualties – 10, 471 – were as a result of airstrikes carried out by the Saudi-led coalition.
On Labour Day 2018, the working class faces many crucial challenges: the growing chasm between rich and poor, the ongoing austerity assault against working people, a gender pay gap which never gets narrower, the twin threats of imperialist wars and deadly climate change, and the looming possibility of a new and serious global capitalist economic crisis.

Here in Canada, despite “economic growth”, millions of working people and their families are forced to survive on precarious and part-time jobs. Living standards decline and debt loads rise as the costs of housing, food and other essentials escalate rapidly.

Meanwhile, the NAFTA renegotiations are nearing conclusion, but workers will not benefit from the outcome. Corporate interests based in Canada, the US and Mexico, want to rewrite NAFTA rules in their own interests, aiming to boost profits at the expense of any meaningful gains for labour and environmental standards. The cuts to US corporate tax rates and Trump’s “tariff war” will have a huge negative impact on working people in Canada.

The federal Liberals are poised to accept NAFTA terms that will allow transnational capital to feast on energy and natural resources, including on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The US wants to scrap Chapter 11, which settles trade disputes among the NAFTA partners, while expanding Chapter 11, which gives corporations the power to sue governments over future legislation. Corporations want the right to bid on Canada’s public healthcare and education services and delivery. The Trump administration would decimate the auto industry in Canada, by repatriating the Big Three auto parts and assembly operations to the US, using rules of origin to send auto and manufacturing jobs south, where wages are lower. Trump wants to abolish the agriculture supply management system, which guarantees quotas and incomes to farmers, and to flood the Canadian market with US milk (laced with BGH), eggs, and poultry products.

Working people, Indigenous peoples, youth, women, the unemployed, will all be hit by the final terms of any new deal on this Labour Day, unity of the trade union movement is vital. We call for mass action by labour to build up the struggles to defend jobs, services and people’s rights, and to move towards a wider offensive strategy, shoulder to shoulder with its social and political allies. United we stand, divided we fall! An injury to one is an injury to all!

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Workers across the country are fighting for higher minimum wages (in Alberta they have just $15 and a fairness campaign), to organize into trade unions, and to demand better collective agreements. Other important examples include recent strikes by casino workers in British Columbia, and teaching assistants on campuses in Ontario. Faced with a majority Doug Ford Tory government in Ontario, the OFL should take the lead in coordinating a militant response to attacks on labour and democratic gains made over the past decades.

Contrary to predictions by ruling class pundits about the “end of the class struggle”, the working class internationally continues to grow in size, now totalling almost three billion strong, including the “informal sector” which is a huge part of the global economy. Even more important, the working class remains the key social force with the potential power to challenge the capitalist agenda, and to open the door to fundamental social change and a socialist future, in which working people own and control the economy.

Unity of the labour movement with other democratic and progressive forces is particularly crucial as attacks on civil, social, labour, and democratic rights escalate in the wake of the election of Donald Trump. The recent US Supreme Court ruling in the Janus case allows public sector workers to decline paying union dues, opening the door wider to more anti-labour legislation. But the overwhelming rejection of “right to work” by voters in Missouri proves that this attack on workers can be stopped.

The new Conservative government of Ontario is gearing up to attack local democracy, and important social and trade union rights, and in Quebec, the right-wing CAQ (which leads in the polls for a fall election) and the incumbent Liberals are also both extremely anti-labour. The presence of far right and anti-semitic factions and bigots in the leadership of the Conservative Party of Canada, and at all levels of provincial and federal government, is another clear warning that in the 2019 federal election, the far right will attempt to promote and legitimize hatred against Indigenous peoples, immigrants, racialized groups, Muslims, the LGBTQ+ community, feminists, trade unions, and others. Mass protests held across the country send a strong message that fascist, racist and white supremacist movements must be blocked.

Such reactionary views arise in the context of the crisis of capitalism in its endless quest to meet the needs of working people. As they impose unpopular austerity policies, they aim to stifle opposition and maintain the status quo. Racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism are tools to split and divide working people and weaken their resistance.

Similarly, the media campaign about the so-called “Russiagate” threats is intended to intimidate progressive voices. Today, Canada is even more closely aligned with US imperialism, sending troops to Latvia, Ukraine, and Iraq, and providing support to the US militarist agenda. The labour and people’s movements cannot sit on the sidelines as the US, Canada, and their NATO allies wage or panic against Russia and China, and push to overthrow governments such as Venezuela, Cuba and the DPRK, which resist their domination of the planet.

The Communist Party calls for a People’s Coalition of all forces fighting against austerity, war and new fascism, and for a human face on capitalism, or to defend their interests in the turbulent times ahead. This Coalition must beblock such reactionary views to defend their interests in the turbulent times ahead. This Coalition must be block such reactionary views.

On this Labour Day, unity of the trade union movement is vital. We call for mass action by labour to build up the struggles to defend jobs, services and people’s rights, and to move towards a wider offensive strategy, shoulder to shoulder with its social and political allies. United we stand, divided we fall! An injury to one is an injury to all! 

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countries", where it stands at continues to widen in emerging below the rate of men. That women were in the global labour gender gap. in a slight narrowing of the slower than that of men, resulting women's participation has been the labour force. The decline in past decade, to 61.8% in 2018. have dropped by 1.4% over the face a wide range of barriers published by the International Trends for Women 2018, Employment Social Outlook: PV Vancouver Bureau I respect the rule of law and know throughout history, laws have been used to bolster the rights of I believe that every citizen has been given to us to face the consequences of our experience. It is my conviction, and I suspect everyone’s in this courtroom, that the scientists and our First Nations people are right. Emissions from the use of fossil fuels are harming our planet to be heard. I know that each and every one of us in this courtroom is thinking of the contribution we are making today. As Margaret Mead said: “Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Women still face labour market barriers

PV Vancouver Bureau

According to World Employment Social Outlook: Trends and Policies 2019, published by the International Labor Organization, women still face labour market barriers holding them back from gender equality in the workforce. On a global level, labour force participation rates for both men and women aged 15 and over have dropped by 1.4% over the past decade, to 61.8% in 2018. That drop is one factor behind the global increase in poverty and inequality, as many women who can’t find work drop out of the labour force. The decline in women’s participation has been slower than that of men, resulting in a sharp narrowing of the gender gap. But on average, women are much less likely to participate in the labour market. Just 48.5% of women were in the global labour force in 2018, compared to 62.5%, below the rate of men. That gap has shrank by a mere 2 percentage points in the past 20 years. The gap in participation rates continues to widen in “emerging countries” and stands at 30.5% in 2018, up by 0.5% since 2009. One positive reason is that a growing number of young women in these countries are enrolled in formal education, which delays their entry into the labour market. But gender gaps in labour market participation are especially wide in the Arab world, Southern Africa and Southern Asia, possibly reflecting restrictive gender and cultural norms facing women in these countries. Public policies also play an important role. Family support policies, which aim to improve work-life balance, rights to paid leave and return to equivalent work, as well as affordable childcare services for working parents, have made a substantial contribution to lifting the participation rates of women, and especially those of mothers, in some countries. As of 2018, the global unemployment rate of women, at 6%, is 0.8 percentage points higher than that of men (5.2%). This ratio is expected to increase over the next several years in both developing and emerging countries, which are known for higher rates of “informal employment”, and limited access to social protection systems, both of which pressure women and men to take up any employment opportunities, regardless of the working conditions. Recent reports by the ILO show that, despite women’s expressed preferences for paid jobs, socio-economic factors and prevailing social norms continue to obstruct their participation in paid employment. Such constraints are often directly linked to the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and household responsibilities that women have to assume in order to improve their educational and employment opportunities and their ability to participate in the labour market.

Women in developed countries are somewhat closer to gender parity in terms of unemployment rates. But this success is partly due to the long-lasting negative effects of the 2008 financial crisis, which has impacted some male-dominated sectors, such as construction, more strongly than the rest of the economy. Globally, 42% of workers are either “own-account or contributing family workers”. Over 1.4 billion workers are in these “vulnerable employment” categories, more likely to be in informal employment and living in poverty, and with limited access to social protection systems. Women are over-represented in informal employment in developing countries, in part because a higher proportion of women are “contributing family workers”. According to the ILO, the share of women in informal employment in developing March 2018: an estimated 10,000 people march from Lake City Way Skytrain station to the Burnaby Mountain operations operation of Kinder Morgan. (PV photo: K. Cario)
Iranian teacher activist gets 10 year sentence

Mohammad Habibi, a member of the board of directors of the Iranian Teachers’ Trade Association of Tehran (ITTATehran) was attacked by security forces and undercover agents. Fourteen participants, including Habibi, were arrested. At the time, Habibi was on bail from a previous arrest. All were freed one day later, except Habibi, who was transferred to a solitary confinement cell in Tehran’s largest prison.

According to family members, Habibi, suffering from severe pains in his chest and sides, due to severe kicks and blows to his body. He also has a large visible bruise on his back, the result of undercover agents dragging him. He needs an immediate scan of the injured areas, but public authorities have not allowed him to hospital from prison.

Education International (EI), the umbrella group of global teacher unions, in calling on all progressive organisations to condemn the attack and demand his immediate and unconditional release.

Migrants in Italy strike after road crashes

African migrant labourers have gone on strike in Italy in protest at their poor working conditions, after 16 workers died in road crashes. Three-quarters (74%) of workers say bosses should be held responsible for such accidents, but that is often not the case. They also want compensation of €3 million for each bereaved family for the Balda factory fire tragedy.

Puerto Rico teachers hit the streets

The Puerto Rico Federation of Teachers marched Aug. 15 through the streets of Old San Juan to protest bullying in the public school system. At the fall school semester began amid budget cuts imposed by a federally appointed fiscal control board. Teachers are demanding a reconsideration to the closure of 250 public schools, an increase in salaries, and no more privatizations of public schools. One protestor told the media: “They eliminate a budget, but nonetheless in the executive and administrative positions millions and thousands of dollars are wasted in salaries. But in the classroom, nothing is invested like it should. So we have the contradiction of closing job placements but hiring in other executive positions and distributing money in places that take almost every other day, they also demand.”

Migrant workers say that the best health and safety laws are implemented across the country. They also want compensation of €2.5 million for each bereaved family for the Balda factory fire tragedy.

Pakistan miners “pushed into death traps”

Pakistan’s mine working conditions are a cause of concern for employers and have failed to introduce workplace health and safety standards, said labour leaders at a press conference on August 16. The miners said that after a particularly bad blast at a coal mine at Sanjии in Balochistan, 13 miners and two rescue workers died. Last May, 27 miners died due to suffocation after a blast in the mine where they were working. Over the past four months, more than 70 workers have died in mining and industry accidents. Migrant union leaders warned that “the responsibility of these deaths rests upon the shoulders of the government, owners, related departments and agencies and corrupt officials of Inspectorate of Mines, who issue licences to all workers after taking heavy bribes and there is nobody to hold them accountable.”

ANC may face political ultimatum

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has issued the ruling ANC with an ultimatum ahead of elections in May, saying the party will “pay the price” if it fails to balance the demands of “capital” with those of labour.

In a strongly worded statement on August 14, the federation said it would back workers in their need to continue supporting the ANC if it does not respect their interests. The COSATU executive committee met a day earlier to discuss how to respond as a country, the effect of the VAT increase on the poor and alleged evidence that government is making workers pay for its mismanagement.

The committee resolved to request an urgent meeting with the ANC top leadership to communicate “a clear message that workers will not vote against their interests in the upcoming elections.”

COSATU’s first deputy president, Tsiyoto James, said workers’ support for the ANC does not come without conditions. “Workers in this country voted [for] the ANC to protect their rights. Hence the reason if the ANC will betray the interest of workers, they will have to rethink their support of the ANC. Our vote for the ANC is not free, it is for the ANC to continue to protect their interests.”

COSATU has long complained of the ANC’s failure to implement its own policies in government, blaming the treasury for the failing economy and its effect on workers. The ruling party’s federation’s national congress in September will debate the triennial review of which the ANC, COSATU, and the South African Communist Party (SACP) have been in discussions about how the alliance can be reconfigured to ensure it is effective, and that resolutions from partner groups are debated openly in the ANC.

Japanese temp workers face layoffs

In Japan, many temporary workers dispatched by staffing agencies expect to see their contracts end without renewal after Sept. 30, the third anniversary of a revised staffing law that introduced the use of such temporary (“haken”) workers at the same workplace for more than three years.

The law is aimed at preventing staffing services from becoming an alternative to permanent hiring, and at helping every worker develop their career, according to the labour ministry. But despite improved business conditions, demand remains weak for dispatch workers, since it is easier for companies to let their contracts expire than to dismiss regular employees.

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, many companies terminated or refused to renew contracts for dispatched workers. The revised law allows dispatch workers to work at the same workplace beyond the three-year limit if staffing agencies conclude permanent contracts for them. But many agencies are reluctant to take this step.

Haken Union, a group supporting haken workers, says it is consulted by workers every 40 days before terminating their contracts. Under the revised law, companies are allowed to use dispatch workers indefensibly by replacing them with new workers every three years at the latest after hearing opinions from labor unions. “It wasn’t a good amendment,” said Haken Union head secretary Shuichiro Sekine.

There are moves to permanently employ dispatched workers in industries facing severe labor shortages, particularly the retail and logistics sectors. Tokyo-based iDA, which dispatches sales personnel to department stores, says it will convert some 320 dispatched workers reaching the three-year limit into permanent employees if they wish. But such moves seem unlikely for certain jobs, such as clerical work, for which the ratio of job openings to seekers is low.

UK workers fear employer spying

Six in ten working people in Britain fear that greater workplace surveillance through technology will fuel distrust and discrimination, according to research for I’ll Be Watching You, a new Trades Union Congress (TUC) report published on August 17.

The study reveals that most UK workers (56%) believe they are currently monitored by their boss at work. This can take a variety of forms such as: monitoring where and when they work and through webcams; location tracking by handheld or wearable devices; recording time away from work tasks (for example using toilet break times); use of facial recognition software to assess workers’ moods.

Workers worry that this surveillance will be used by bosses to set unfair targets, micromanage them and take jobs away from others. Three-quarters (74%) of workers say bosses should be held responsible for such surveillance. But a third (33%) think that their activity on social media accounts is being snooped on when they are not at work.

Most workers (70%) think workplace monitoring will become more common in the future. But only a minority (38%) say they feel able to challenge forms of surveillance that they think are unfair. The vast majority of workers (79%) say employers should be legally required to consult their workforce and reach agreement before using surveillance.

The TUC says new safeguards are needed to ensure that employers respect workers’ rights to privacy and prevent employers using excessive or intrusive surveillance.

JOIN THE FIGHT BUILD THE STRUGGLE!

The Communist Party of Canada, formed in 1921, has a proud history of fighting for jobs, equality, peace, freedom and justice. Join the CPC and help us to build a socialist society in Canada! Get involved in your local CPC committee and help to organize for social and economic justice. Contact your nearest CPC office!

This month in labour history

Sep. 29, 1931 - Three coal miners were killed by RCMP during their historic strike against pay cuts in Estevan, Saskatchewan.
Greece fires “no natural disaster”

By Kevin Ovenden, Morning Star

“Words are nice … but I want him to tell me and the people who perished that it was not human fault it is, if not ‘this’,” has been the complaint of a 79-year-old woman of the devastating fire that ripped through the Rafina area north-east of Athens in July. She was giving testimony to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’s belated acceptance of “political responsibility”.

“How does he redeem this responsibility?” the petitioner complained, “… does political responsibility mean? These and other questions were already ricocheting across Greece last week as grief and anger came together in the wake of the worst death toll from wildfire – 87 people and rising – ever in Europe.

When Defence minister and junior coalition partner ANEL leader Panos Kammenos visited the devastated Mati-Rafina resort, where most of the victims died, he was roundly heckled.

“You let the people burn, Mr. Kammenos!” shouted one woman. (The word “kammenos” in Greek means “burnt.”)

One reason for the anger is that the government tried to suppress questioning under a shroud of three days of national searching questions under a government-imposed “state of plunder” – is not down to a lack of capitalist development. It is the product of the actually existing capitalist maldevelopment of the cold war and neoliberal epochs.

It was an alliance between a Kleptocratic oligarchy and a fire service that was never committed to open itself up to independent government scrutiny to the German company Fraport.

The Greek fire service has been cut to pieces by Schaeuble’s privatisations.

Responding to the constant threat of new sanctions and military aggression pose an enormous threat to the Middle East, and in fact to the world.

The government remains committed to eye-watering 3.5 percent primary budget surpluses that can only mean more austerity even though Greece is to exit the formal memorandum program on August 21. Yet, if national celebrations that occur on international days are consumed in debate and redress the lack of infrastructure. A forensic expert pointed out to the BBC that the state’s development has itself also failed. The new road built at the time of the Greek Olympic bid could have been designed to act as a firebreak. But highly flammable native trees were planted either side of it, not those that were proven in Spain to be resistant to the flames.

And when the local police chief signalled regional headquarters to sound an evacuation, he discovered that there was no regional evacuation plan for an area that is packed with local tourists in summer.

Contrary to Tsipras’s attempt to decouple the history of unregulated or illegal building, but it is not, as many commentators and the corporate media are suggesting, is a systemic failure of capitalism. That means it is the responsibility of the 1 percent of capitalists and those who have shed all social protection to serve them.

Peterson (a member of Britain’s Respect party and a Palestine solidarity activist.)

The Vancouver Peace Council, with which Vancouver Friends of Iran, Irvine is committed to peace-loving people and organizations to speak out against the threats against Iran. The group calls on the Canadian government to “stop backing U.S. imperialist adventures and instead to reject the escalation of tensions and the threat to launch a new and deadly war of aggression.”

On Sept. 14-15, the Vancouver Peace Council and the Fraser Valley Peace Council, member groups of the Canadian Peace Congress, will co-sponsor a speaking tour by U.S. human rights lawyer and anti-war activist Daniel Kovalik, the author of “The Plot To Attack Iran.”

Kovalik is a member of Britain’s Respect party and a Palestine solidarity activist. He was long associated with the VPC statement, “Trump yet again threatened to bomb Iran out of existence, and then announced that the latest round of sanctions are not a success. It is this that the people as a whole are being threatened by. Iran already has a “state of plunder” – is not down to a lack of capitalist development. It is the product of the actually existing capitalist maldevelopment of the cold war and neoliberal epochs.

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US sanctions against Iran step up threat of war

By Jane Green, CODIR (UK Committee for Defence of the People’s Voice) SEPTEMBER 1-15, 2018

The step next in the unended war on Iran has been taken by the Trump administration with the first wave of sanctions imposed last week, following the unilateral withdrawal by the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The JCPOA, widely known as the Iran nuclear deal, was agreed in 2015 by the United States, the United Nations Security Council, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the European Union to halt the domestic uranium enrichment programme in Iran and to allow international inspection of its nuclear program for the relaxation of previously imposed sanctions. The deal was being monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and, up until the most recent inspection earlier in 2018, Iran was deemed to be following the terms of the agreement.

Under President Obama, as part of his so-called ‘pivot to Asia’, the economic sanctions on Iran were lifted. For Trump, relaxing sanctions on Iran simply allows the regime in Tehran to enrich its nuclear program and to use those resources which it can then use to fund its aggressive foreign policies around the world. These policies, such as the brutal suppression of student protests. The regime in Tehran also has been described by activists in that region as being in its vicious response to internal criticism by the United States’ key allies in the region, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

However, the sanctions imposed by the United States, which will be further intensified on November 5, are not about actively trying to weaken the Republic and help the oppressed Iranian people and freeing them from an oppressive regime. The US is solely interested in maintaining its power in the Middle East, with the US seeking to impose full control and unilateral control of the region’s resources.

Ironically, the path being pursued by Trump was initiated by President Obama, as part of the United States’ New Middle East Plan, to reassure influence and bolster resource control in the region. Obama’s version of the New Middle East Plan was the JCPOA and a more nuanced approach to containing the perceived threat of Iran’s nuclear program and regional influence.

Not surprisingly, for Trump there are no such niceties. To all intents and purposes, the gloves are off and the New Middle East Plan Mark 2 is simply to bring Iran to its knees in whatever it takes to recover the cost to the prospects for peace in the region or to the plight of the people.

That cost, which the protests which have engulfed the streets of Iran over the past few months, which the annual household income of the year have shown, is already high and is only going to get higher. In December 2017, protests against unemployment, poor pay, poor conditions and government corruption, erupted across 80 cities in Iran and were met with a brutal response by the Iranian regime, in the form of arrests and scores of deaths.

The protests, which have arisen from the economic difficulties facing the country and the mismanagement of the economy, are likely to be exacerbated by further sanctions. They continue to be an expression of the frustration of large sections of the working class youth with the regime.

In the months since that initial wave of protest in the Iran has worsened, with a drop in the value of Iranian currency to less than 30% of its April exchange value against the US dollar. This has meant the value of basic goods has quadrupled while wages remain stagnant, precipitating a sharp drop in the living standards of ordinary people, all the time amidst spiralling mass unemployment.

Water shortages, resulting from environmental degradation exacerbated by the ill-judged policies of the regime, have hit significant swathes of central and southern Iran. Power cuts are a regular occurrence, in the midsummer, high degree temperatures in these regions, drive people to despair.

Opposition sources inside Iran claim that it is not an exaggeration to suggest that 80% of the population now clamour for political change. They are held at bay by the regime’s use of repression and force, but reports and footage widely emerging from the streets in Iran show a regime clearly wary of the mood prevailing amongst the people, with a significant deployment of its repressive machinery around central squares, main thoroughfares and transport hubs.

Farang (foreigner) is a term that has come in vogue in Iran and to move in any sign of dissent. Against this context the latest round of US sanctions has resulted in those European companies which had begun to deepen economic relations with Iran, now halting plans on hold. German car and truck manufacturer, Daimler, said it had scrapped plans to open a new automobile plant in Iran. French companies, Peugeot and Renault, have also suspended plans as a result of the US sanctions and have said they will comply with the US sanctions.

France’s environmental minister, Nicolas Hulot, has said that it will say it will quit the multibillion-dollar South Pars gas project if it cannot secure a waiver from the US sanctions – a request French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said last month had been rejected along with others by French corporations.

Total signed a contract in 2017 to develop Phase II of the South Pars field with an initial output of 400,000 barrels of gas per day. Total did not yet say what it will do with its 30 percent stake should it pull out. It has until November 4 to wind down its Iran operations, barring any surprise exemption.

The widespread withdrawal and suspension of economic activity by European companies is remarkable because the US sanctions have no international force and no United Nations backing. The US strategy is essentially that of the playground bully. Companies are free to deal with Iran if they choose but they may find it difficult to do business in markets with the US. For most companies the choice between sticking with Iranian business or losing access to the US market is no choice at all. The United States knows this and the international community appears powerless to prevent it.

The latest round of sanctions will cripple even further already crumbling Iranian economy. The confrontational position taken by the US is encouraging this process, as the regime, feels emboldened. Former president Ahmadinejad has recently called for a non-cooperation campaign to resist those who have always opposed the JCPOA are now following the word of the US as value-less and are seeking to turn the current turmoil to their advantage.

Meanwhile the people of Iran, their suppressed trade unions and political activists, continue to orchestrate regular strike action, street protests and actions in opposition to the endemic corruption at the heart of the Islamic Republic.

Inside Iran it is the view of the left, progressive and pro peace forces, including socialists and communists, that President Rouhani has come to help strengthen the influence of the people’s protest movement, through the taking of concrete and practical steps towards closer and more effective cooperation, most importantly towards the establishment of a united front against the regime. The anti-people credentials of the US are, therefore, an argument to turn the current turmoil to their advantage.

The worst-case scenario military strike on Iran, something many in the US administration have not taken off the table, would still have the potential to generate chaos and political disintegration even greater than that seen in Iraq following the 2003 invasion. To re-engage with Iran, in putting pressure on the US, or one of its proxies in the region, would but be a huge step forward for the whole of Iran.

Marc Blitzstein’s The Cradle Will Rock

The release in July of a 2-CD recording of Open Syracuse’s 2017 production of The Cradle Will Rock is an important event in American musical theatre. Composer-librettist Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964) had always imagined a fully-orchestrated and staged version of his “proletarian opera”. Blitzstein was a member of the League of Composers, a left-wing group that included well-known figures like Aaron Copland, Charles Seeger, Ruth Crawford, and Earl Robinson. He’d studied in Europe with composers Arnold Schoenberg and Nadia Boulanger. The influence of the revolutionary German musical theatre of Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weil, and Hanns Eisler. The premiere of “The Cradle Will Rock” was deemed to be following the election campaign rhetoric. For Obama his version of the US deems to be its policy in the Middle East through the JCPOA, widely known as the Iran nuclear deal, was agreed in 2015 by the United States, Russia and the European Union to halt the domestic uranium enrichment programme in Iran, in exchange for the lifting of sanctions. The deal was being monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and, up until the most recent inspection earlier in 2018, Iran was deemed to be following the terms of the agreement.

Two weeks, following the unilateral withdrawal by the US from the JCPOA, the worst-case scenario military strike on Iran, another event that has been widely debated amongst the people, with a significant deployment of its repressive machinery around central squares, main thoroughfares and transport hubs, that has been described in its vicious response to internal criticism by the United States’ key allies in the region, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

“Rage Against the Machine (RATM), the militant left-wing American rock band known for its criticism of US foreign policy, systemic racism and oppression, has taken legal action against Nigel Farage, leader of Britain’s far-right U.K. Independence Party (UKIP). The Grammy-winning band, whose albums have sold in the millions, is demanding that the UK government release the name of its podcast, "Rage Against the Machine". RATM charges that the podcast "brazenly and unlawfully" exploits its name and logo, and implies that the band endorses Farage’s reactionary political views. When it launched the podcast last March, the band tweeted “this piss weasel IS the machine, the peddler of spite, of blame, hateful bullshit and lies”. Farage has refused to cancel the podcast. His July 10 cease and desist letter uses strongly-worded, albeit less-colourful, language: “the implication of any endorsement by Rage Against the Machine of your viewpoint.” While the court case is ongoing, the Fairness Rocks Alliance, led by Fairness岩石摇滚联盟”
Women workers...

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countries was 4.6% higher than that of men, when including agricultural workers. This gender gap stands at over 20% in some sub-Saharan African countries.

Being in paid employment is often insufficient to escape poverty. In emerging and developing countries, as many as one in four working men and women live below the moderate poverty threshold, a cap of 70% of household income less than US$3.10 per day. Across a sample of middle-income countries and developing countries, women are found to earn, on average, 20% less than men.

Much of this gap results from the over-representation of women in low-paying jobs, where pay is more common. In addition, weak or absent collective bargaining and minimum wage rates are also partly responsible for persistent gender wage inequality.

We need diverse books

By Lorri Nandrea, People’s World

Good children’s fiction cultivates empathy, imagination, social justice, and hard-earned awareness. Some of the best children’s novels written during the early 20th century also raise class consciousness — Natalie Savage Carlson’s The Family Umbrella Bridge, for example, socialist E. Nesbit’s Railway Children, Eleanor Estes’s The Hundred Dresses, and the original Mary Poppins books, which are wonderfully critical of capitalism and white supremacy. Today it’s possible to have a nanny and her working-class friends.

While the politics of these older books hold up well, it’s hard to miss how very white the characters are. Fortunately, a new wave of multicultural, politically attuned children’s fiction is now hitting the shelves. Thanks in part to a movement called “We Need Diverse Books,” many new novels for middle graders and young adults include more people of colour, gay and lesbian characters, ethnic and religious minorities, and the differently abled.

The six novels discussed here offer nuanced portrayals of diverse characters confronting war, poverty, racism, sexism, inequality, and emigration. They all avoid the near-nilism of recent best-sellers like The Hunger Games, which bring attention to inequality and then suggest no solution. At the same time, these books are so well written and engaging that even reluctant readers won’t want to put them down.

Escape from Aleppo (2018), by NH Senzai, is a thrilling story of a young girl’s escape from the besieged city after becoming separated from her family. Already suffering from PTSD due to earlier bomb attacks, Nadia is evacuated to a home to overcome her paralyzing anxiety. As she navigates the dangerous streets alone, she finds friends, rebels as government organizations.

This novel, set in the 1930s, is swallowed up by a sinkhole (poor environmental planning), he faces new challenges. He and his friends are bussed to a school in a lower-income neighborhood populated by Latinx families who work in the citrus groves. Paul makes the soccer team at this school, and his teammates gradually come to accept and trust him. In turn, Paul comes to respect their work and their knowledge of the plants and the weather. But Paul’s older brother, a near-sociopath whose behavior has been covered up by their parents, almost ruins everything.

Blow does an excellent job of tracing several possible outcomes when families from different classes and ethnic backgrounds interact. The first person narrator, Paul, is refreshingly genuine. The reader may help readers understand their own feelings in similar situations. This novel provides a window into the lives of others and teaches empathy, respect, openness, acceptance, and equality — the very values that capitalism later works to negate. Why is taking turns good on the playground but not in business?

While these novels stand out for what we might call their socialist tendencies, most children’s literature promotes values on helping, sharing, caring for one another and forming a community. It is a near-sociopath whose criminal behavior has been covered up by their parents, almost ruins everything.

CUPE cleared to represent WestJet attendants

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) has been issued an interim certification by the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to represent 3,000 mainline flight attendants at WestJet. With the majority of attendants having signed union cards, CUPE filed an application for certification on July 9.

On behalf of all 665,000 CUPE members across Canada, it’s an honour to welcome WestJet flight attendants into our CUPE family,” said CUPE National President Charlie Fleury. “WESTJET is on par with the ground running in support of WestJetters as they push for a formal contract to make their work lives better.”

CUPE has been working with WestJetters for the past year to deliver strong union representation for WestJet flight attendants and is now officially recognized as their bargaining agent. CUPE notes represents roughly 15,000 flight attendants nationwide, increasing the union’s ability to address industry-wide issues.

CUPE President Charlie Fleury, union president at WestJet, said the expertise to get WestJetters the fair treatment and improved working conditions that they deserve, “said CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury. The union is working to achieve the first ever collective agreement at the airline, and hopes to unionize flight attendants at WestJet’s regional carrier, Encore, and low-cost carrier, Swag.
By James Chuma-Jones

On Sunday, August 5 a confrontation took place in Nanaimo outside the homeless camp known as DisconTent City between protesters wanting to dismantle the camp and counter-protesters.

The group called Action Against DisconTent City organized the protest on its Facebook page, which involved marching past City Hall to the tent city. They were approached by members of the Soldiers of Odin, a right-wing “street safety” patrol, to act as security for the protest, which they welcomed openly. The Alliance Against Displacement and organizers of DisconTent City staged a counter-protest in anticipation to defend the camp.

DisconTent City is located on 1 Port Place Drive and is estimated to have around 175 to 200 homeless residents, some saying it is the largest tent city in Britain Columbia. In March, homeless residents pitched up tents in front of Nanaimo City Hall after city council voted against allocating $7 million of provincial funds towards supportive housing. This protest was urgent when police evicted the homeless occupants off the lawn of City Hall, forcing them to relocate in a public park. On May 17, organizers and homeless residents cut the chains to the entrance of a fenced off empty lot between Esplanade and Front street and moved into the area, naming the new camp DisconTent City.

DisconTent City has been a site of contention in Nanaimo since its founding and local opinion has been polarized. Many housed Nanaimo residents have shown their support by visiting the camp and offering donations such as spare tents, food, and bottled water bought from the neighbouring Thrifty’s store. The sympathetic to the camp include low income workers who are either experienced or are on the verge of homelessness themselves.

Others have expressed their discontent toward the tent city on social media and have harassed homeless residents from the Thrifty’s rooftop parking lot that overlooks the camp. Vigilantes have even thrown rocks and bottles into the camp, injuring one woman.

DisconTent City still manages to stand despite constantly being under attack. Along with the growing number of homeless camps in BC and Canada, it is a symptom of the problem rather than the cause. That cause is low wages, high rents, and unemployment caused by a capitalist system that benefits rich at the expense of the poor.

The public has had to answer the call by camp organizers to rally in its defence on multiple occasions, such as on May 29, when an injunction was filed by the City of Nanaimo ordering campers to be evicted that morning. A citizen lanted in a letter to the local newspaper after the event that “activists ran around holding a Canadian flag upside down” and that a YCL member supporting the camp “warred an old common USRR hammer and sickle flag and paraded around smiling.” Supporters were called to rally in front of DisconTent City again on July 26, when Fire Chief Karen Fry threatened to shut down the tent city due to the tents in the camp being a supposed fire hazard. August 5 had the largest number of supporters show up, since the camp has never before faced a threat as great as the Soldiers of Odin.

Before noon people were already gathered outside the gates to defend DisconTent City. The number of supporters for that day were around 150. Several community members on the opposite side of the street came to witness the commotion, distancing themselves from the counter-rally while the song “Which Side Are You On” played from speakers organizers had set up. Those attending the counter-rally were from the community as well from out of town; some had travelled all the way from Victoria just to show their support.

Coast Salish elder and matriarch Rose Henry also travelled with family to support DisconTent City. She identified herself as a member of the Seminakewunc First Nation and welcomed everyone to the territory, making it clear that the only ones not welcomed were those against the land. Rose Henry also performed a prayer and took part in leading the demonstration, instructing everyone to hold hands and form a circle on the street.

The Soldiers of Odin finally arrived to the protest with a Canadian flag, red maple leaves on their black outfits, and RCMP officers as escorts for their protection, presenting Canada as the white-supremacist colonial state that it is. This was contrasted by the upside down Canadian flag flown within the camp and the Indigenous campers and elders in the counter-demonstration.

Neo-Nazi Mikka Ranta founded the Soldiers of Odin in 2015 in Finland as an anti-immigrant street patrol gang. The president of the Canadian Alliance of Armourers, Conrade Peach, denies that the group is white-supremacist or fascist, saying that “We are based on real allegations; 1 defy anyone to produce evidence of my club doing anything other than Canadian patriots.”

Fascist movements throughout history have always been hyper-nationalist and often used the excuse of patriotism to hate foreigners and greater groups. In March 2017 the SOO tried to disrupt an anti-racism rally in Vancouver, and protested outside a mosque in Surrey.

“Do not engage!” DisconTent City organizer Amber McGrath repeated over the speaker system when the Soldiers arrived, leaving counter-demonstrators not to provoke violence. “Homes not camps, smash the hate, we will not negotiate” Ivan Drury chanted for the crowd to repeat. Several homeless residents such as organizer Kevin Donaghy could be heard replacing the second verse with “smash the state” while standing. Drury has organized tent cities in Maple Ridge as well as Nanaimo, and was listed in Vancouver Magazine as one of the 50 most powerful people from the city.

Many brought picket signs to the counter rally with images of peace symbols and hearts attempting to combat the hate with love. “Everyone deserves to be loved” Amber McGrath shouted, instructing counter-demonstrators to throw up their hands and greet the Soldiers with peace signs. A few homeless residents, including former resident, gave the Soldiers the middle finger instead. Those more serious about fighting bigotry had zero-tolerance for the white-nationalists and brought signs that read “NAZI F*CK OFF” as well as GLP, black power banners, flags, and shirts with anti-fascist imagery.

Despite the small disagreement of tactics and rhetoric, the counter-demonstration remained united and managed to turn away the Soldiers of Odin without any police arrests or violence. The overall atmosphere at the end of the day was positive when the Soldiers eventually departed, which reinvigorated support for the camp.

Anewly formed Nanaimo chapter of Food Not Bombs provided three sandwiches to campers and counter-demonstrators, making sure that they were fed that day. Local YCL members have been helping with the food justice initiative and are also in the process of forming an official YCL club.

Nanaimo itself has not been known in recent years for having any strong left wing movements, the local Communist Party club has remained active, but has not run election candidates. The NDP has a stronger presence in Nanaimo, with Leonard Krog as MP and Sheila Malcolmson as MLA. The NDP’s youth wing, the Young New Democrats, is also quite active at the local Vancouver Island University campus. Pele Goulda, YND leader club at VIU, just posted a video of himself on Facebook days prior urging people to support the camp. In the video he says that “Nanaimo is facing a potentially pivotal moment in [its] political identity.” Goulda was one of the organizers who were “[very] happy to have stood with anarchists, communists, socialists, First Nations people, a Wobbly, and at least one person in a Green Party T-shirt, all standing up to a proto-Nazi attempt at intimidation.”

The presence of the Soldiers of Odin in Nanaimo was a wake up call to locals who previously assumed that white-supremacists were not a real threat at home. It was a call to action for those previously apathetic or passive in their political stance. DisconTent City itself is an example of a local government that ignores the needs of the community and who support it — Marxist- Leninists, anti-capitalists, and progressive left.

For left leaning folks it was an opportunity to openly reveal themselves, and actively fight for their principles out in the open. It revealed just how many people in the community have revolutionary views on capitalism and colonialism and the need to stand solidarity with each other. The confrontation at Discontent City was not just a small victory for working and Indigenous peoples, but also for the left in Nanaimo.