

## U.S. Congress schemes to make workers pay for economic crisis

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



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**S.F. City  
College**

See page 12.

By JEFF MACKLER

In today's era of U.S. and worldwide capitalist austerity, not a day or month passes when the corporate media do not inform us that the nation faces yet another economic crisis.

From the deficit crisis, in which the U.S. budget falls short \$1 trillion yearly; to the "fiscal cliff" crisis, wherein "across-the-board" cuts in hundreds of social programs and the military are now set to begin; to the upcoming budget crisis, wherein draconian social cuts are in the bipartisan congressional hopper; to the multi-trillion dollar bank and corporate bailout that "saved the nation from economic catastrophe," the end result is the same—working people pay, and the rich get richer.

The daily orchestrated maneuvers and shifting the blame by the Democrats and Republicans reflect the hype generated by their corporate masters, and parroted in the media, to convince a wary public that serious differences are at stake.

In late February, the week before the sky was set to fall with regard to the latest crisis, President Obama toured the nation, Chicken Little style, to chas-

tise his Republican partners in corporate crime for the mandated \$83 billion "across-the-board" cuts in social and military spending.

And the sky did fall. The cuts are in progress. The best that President Obama could say was that the cuts were "stupid"—such a gentle word in this context in which millions of workers are to be laid off or furloughed—yet he and his party signed onto them months before. To be sure, plans are in progress to mitigate or eliminate the scheduled cuts to the military, the sector of the economy that generates the greatest profits for the super-rich.

In the next 10 years the total set for the chopping block, supposedly to reduce the government's budget deficit, is \$1.3 trillion. No one mentions that last month's "deal" increased the deficit by \$3 trillion! But that's just in the beginning chapters in the ever-unfolding story of capitalist intentions.

January's 11<sup>th</sup>-hour financial "compromise" increased payroll taxes on working people an average of \$1000 each, while the richest one percent were charged a pittance, undoubtedly to be offset by present or future loopholes that none but the elite corporate

accountants, who write the tax codes, will ever see. Meanwhile, the ruling-class parties were sure to include a broad range of "tax extenders" that would once again gift billions to the few who own the most.

The March 5 *New York Times* reported that state and local governments issued federal tax-exempt bonds worth \$65 billion over the past decade to the richest few. The largest recipient was the Chevron Corporation, which, according to *The Times*, reported profits of \$26 billion last year alone. *The Times* headline properly read, "A Stealthy Subsidy Aiding Big Business Is Growing." But the billions so reported pale

before the over \$20 trillion dollars granted by Congress to the largest corporations and banks under the twisted logic that they were "too big to fail."

Similarly, a March 4 lead sentence from the British press agency *Reuters* stated, "President Barack Obama raised anew the issue of cutting entitlements such as Medicare and Social Security as a way out of damaging budget cuts, a White House official said on Sunday, as both sides in Washington tried to limit a fiscal crisis that may soon hit millions of Americans."

The *Reuters* article continued, "Signaling he might be ready to explore a  
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# 1.5 million protest austerity in Portugal

By LUIS BRANCO

The demonstration “Screw the Troika! Power to the People!” gathered 1.5 million people in dozens of Portuguese cities on March 2. The main demand was the resignation of the government and the immediate halt of the austerity measures that drove Portugal into a deep recession.

Few people would think that the huge demonstrations on Sept. 15, called by the citizens’ group Screw the Troika, could be surpassed in number. One million people then filled the streets and led to the government’s withdrawal of the Sole Social Tax amendment, which would increase the workers’ contributions to Social Security while decreasing the bosses’ contributions. This time, the government acted differently and decided to postpone the announcement of the welfare cuts—the initial intention is to cut more than 4000-million euros—to next week, thinking it would keep many people out of the protest.

But their plans failed completely. On March 2 even more people came onto the streets and made the biggest mass demonstrations ever in the country. For most of them, it was the first time they actually came into the streets to demonstrate and protest, mostly asking for the government to resign.

The demonstrations ended with the people singing, “Grandola Vila Morena,” the Portuguese Revolution anthem that has resurged in the last weeks, with groups of people singing it to interrupt public speeches of members of government all over the country. Even the prime minister got “grandolated” (a new expression for future Portuguese language dictionaries) during his speech in the parliament last month.

Unlike the September demonstration, now there was an organized sectorial presence, inspired by the



Spanish “waves”—the “health wave” gathered nurses and doctors, the “education wave” with teachers and students, and the “retired wave” with retired workers and pensioners, one of the social groups most affected by the tax increase on their pensions.

This huge protest took place at the middle of the 7th evaluation of the troika memorandum, with the IMF, ECB, and EU staff in Lisbon preparing the most savage cuts in education, health, and on the welfare state as a whole. The unemployment rate remains out of control (almost half of all young people have no jobs), and the emigration numbers can only be compared with the late 1960s, when people fled the war, misery, and dictatorship.

The indignation of the Portuguese people is an example to all European countries that are suffering from the consequences of the troika’s brutal neoliberal programme and the new dictatorship of the debt.

Of course, the protests will go on after the announcement of the new cuts, but the power of this mobilization also brings the urge for an international agenda of protests against the common enemies that are destroying the peripheral economies of the eurozone.

*From International Viewpoint.*

# The Last Day

By MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

One day, one day relatively quite soon, the administration under President Barack Hussein Obama will come to an end, and enter the realm of history. Eight years will have passed, true. But it will pass with a swiftness that is difficult to articulate.

Barack Obama, son of a Kenyan goatherd and unsuccessful civil servant, this most unlikely of candidates, will yield his place to another. And while history will have certainly been made, the stuff of books, museums and presidential trivia, another kind of history, a quieter kind, will also have been made.

The history of Black America, written more in song than on paper, will record not the best of times but, far too often, the worst of times. Unemployment, dropout rates, foreclosures, mass incarceration levels—each and all of these will show significant gains, and paradoxically, the worsening state of the national Black community.

Eight years will have passed, and by every measure, Black life will have become more unsteady, more challenging, more raucous—and more brutal. Some will say that the concerns of Black America shouldn’t be his, for he is President of all America. But, before all others, Black Americans have been his most loyal constituency—of all constituencies, why should those who are the most supportive get the least of everything else?

What kind of political logic is that? Moreover, what other constituency would accept it? “I’m voting for you, man—but I don’t want nothing! No better schools! I want more police terrorism! I want judges to spit on me more! I don’t want no jobs for nobody in the ‘hood!”

Africans in America have had a long and tortured history of loyalty to institutions that do not return those loyalties. Colonial governments. Political parties. The Army. State governments. And yes, presidents—even Black ones.

Symbols are powerful things (and the essence of politics is symbol); but when they are empty of substance, they become hollow.

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## A WORKERS’ ACTION PROGRAM TO FIGHT THE CRISIS

We propose an EMERGENCY CONGRESS OF LABOR to discuss and take steps to implement the following demands —

- 1) Bail out the people, not the bankers! Open the account books of the banks to full public inspection. Nationalize the banks to be supervised by workers’ committees.
- 2) No foreclosures! No forced evictions! Cancel usurious debt payments, and reduce mortgage payments in proportion to their capitalist-caused decline in value.
- 3) Full employment at union wages! An emergency public works program to employ all jobless workers and youth! Employ people to build what we need — low-cost quality housing, efficient mass transportation, cheap and renewable sources of power, schools, clinics — and to conserve our water, forests, farmland, and open space.
- 4) Immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops and mercenaries from Iraq & Afghanistan! No war on Iran! Close all U.S. bases abroad! No money for the military — use funds instead for public works! Convert the war industries to making products for people’s needs and to combat global warming.

5) Reduce the workweek to 30 hours with no cut in pay, and cut the retirement age to 55. Provide unemployment and retirement payments at the level of union wages and benefits.

6) To combat inflation: A sliding scale of wages and pensions that matches the rises in consumer prices. To combat high medical costs: A free, universal, public health-care system.

7) Immediate citizenship for all undocumented workers. No job discrimination; equal pay for equal work — regardless of gender, sexual orientation, skin color, or national origin.

8) Nationalize manufacturing, big agribusiness, energy, and transportation corporations and place them under the control of elected committees of workers.

9) To mobilize support for the demands it adopts, the EMERGENCY CONGRESS should organize ACTION COMMITTEES in every workplace and neighborhood threatened by the crisis. These committees can draw up more concrete demands than the ones outlined above.

10) To put all these measures into effect, we need a LABOR PARTY — based on a fighting union movement and all people who are oppressed and exploited. For a workers’ government!

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# Tens of thousands join Washington march against climate change

By JAMES THOMAS

On Sunday, Feb. 17, as many as 50,000 people rallied and marched in winds and near freezing temperatures in Washington, D.C., to protest Transcanada's proposed Keystone XL Pipeline. The demonstration, dubbed Forward On Climate Change, is believed to have been the largest climate change action in U.S. history.

The Sierra Club, 350.org, and Hip Hop Caucus were the primary organizers of the event, and numerous other environmental groups helped to build it. The crowd was quite diverse, with people from all over the country and with a wide range of political views who were concerned about the catastrophic impact that the XL pipeline would have on our planet if the Obama administration approves it.

Speakers ranged from 350.org founder Bill McKibben to Crystal Lameman of the Beaver Lake Cree First Nation in Alberta, Canada. An eco-socialist contingent gathered at the Smithsonian metro stop and marched to the main rally to send the message that "a different world can only be built in fields, factories, and streets, not by politicians walking the corridors of power in Washington." Smaller but similar demonstrations also took place in Austin, Seattle, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco.

The Keystone XL pipeline, with a \$7 billion price tag, would stretch 2000 miles from the tar sands of Alberta to oil refineries in the Gulf of Mexico. Outside of Russia and China it would be the world's largest oil pipeline and would move over one million barrels of crude oil every day. The pipeline's owner, Canadian company Transcanada, has been buying up property throughout the American Midwest and pushing states to inflict eminent domain upon resistant locals.

In certain areas of the country construction has already gotten under way. In fact, 485 miles of the pipeline that run from Oklahoma to Texas are already complete, making the entire project halfway finished. This segment of the pipeline, according to *The Texas Tribune*, costs \$2.3 billion and will transport crude oil between a storage facility in Cushing, Okla., and refineries located in the Nederland area of Southeast Texas.

Of course, Transcanada is doing all of this while assuring people that it will create jobs and provide the U.S. with oil from an ally. But the dirty Alberta tar sands oil represents a major threat to the climate. According to Oil Change International, emissions from tar sands extraction are between 3.2 and 4.5 higher than equivalent emissions from conventional oil drilling in North America. Moreover, petcoke, a byproduct of tar sands mining that is used as fuel in power plants, yields an average of 53.6 percent more carbon dioxide than an equivalent amount of coal. The only method to avoid the worst effects of the catastrophe caused by climate change is to put into effect a rapid and thorough transition off of fossil fuels, regardless of where they come from.



Melanie Blanding / switchboard.nrdc.org

Transcanada's promise of jobs is illusory. Most of the work supplied by the pipeline will be on temporary construction jobs. Corey Goulet, vice president of Keystone Pipeline projects for Transcanada, estimates that all said and done only 20 to 30 permanent jobs will be created in Texas. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader and others have pointed out in addition that most of the oil will be exported once it is refined in the Gulf of Mexico.

Obama ostensibly rejected Transcanada's bid to start building the northern section in early 2012, but it appears that the Canadian corporation is expecting to be given permission to proceed, considering all the money it has invested in construction thus far. The progression of the project has not gone uncontested, however. Forward on Climate Change was only the most recent demonstration against the pipeline. In August 2011, 350.org organized a large demonstration outside of the White House to pressure Obama to deny Transcanada a permit; over 1000 people were arrested over the course of the month in acts of civil disobedience.

More recently, a Texas-based organization called Tar Sands Blockade was denied the right to protest alongside the pipeline's route after Transcanada had obtained an injunction prohibiting such activity. The group has since switched its focus to working with communities who live near the Gulf, where the oil will be refined. Texas Rice Land Partners of Jefferson County, Texas, are struggling against eminent domain that Transcanada is trying to exercise over their land.

Whether or not the rest of the pipeline gets approved could have a lot to do with the destructive logic of

neoliberal economic policy. The North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other similar free trade agreements include unprecedented protection for corporate investors—most often at the expense of working people. Through these measures, foreign countries can gain control to each other's natural resources, businesses, and all forms of public or private property to exploit them for maximum profit without regard for safety, health, or community.

Generally, the United States has used these treaty provisions to force concessions for its corporations in Latin America and elsewhere. However, Transcanada could potentially turn the tables, by threatening to invoke Chapter 11 of NAFTA and sue the United States government if it denies the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline. The Obama administration might then cite this "threat" as an excuse to approve the pipeline. The Obama administration is actually considering putting provisions similar to NAFTA's Chapter 11 into its upcoming Trans-Pacific Free Trade Agreement. Our laws are written for the corporations that are destroying our planet.

This shows that it is impractical to believe that Obama will take a principled stance against the Keystone XL pipeline; only sustained mass action by concerned Americans will give him cause to deny the pipeline construction. Similarly, if serious measures are to be taken against climate change, it will require building a giant movement for mass action, independent of the Democratic and Republican parties. The Forward On Climate Change rally was a step toward the construction of such a movement. ■

By DANIEL ADAM

The struggle against climate change is registering real signs of progress. The rise of indigenous struggles in Canada, including the "Idle No More" movement, and the two national mobilizations against the Keystone XL pipeline in the U.S. are particularly significant. Bipartisan backing for the acceleration of the most vile extraction methods in the face of persistently growing extreme weather is birthing new activists in the climate movement.

As these new forces take their first collective step onto the stage of history, their motion will bring the contradictions of this social system—and the limitations of their own movement's prevailing orientation—into bolder relief.

In an interview at the Feb. 17 march in Washington against the Keystone XL pipeline, Stan Heller (of thestruggle.org) asked 350.org founder Bill McKibben what he thought about public seizure of fossil fuel companies in the name of a global emergency. McKibben responded, "I don't see any particular appetite in Congress at the moment for taking over and nationalizing companies." He added graciously, "But I could be wrong. You

never know."

McKibben's own opinions on nationalization appear to be irrelevant to him. The bounds of politics in Congress are what matter in his eyes.

Indeed, major organizers of the Feb. 17 march were unmistakably attempting to organize an appeal to Obama to do the right thing. Yet stopping the flow of greenhouse gas from the earth to the atmosphere will require going against the most powerful interests in world capitalism and even the motive force of their social order—the relentless drive for private profits. Attempting to forge a coalition with one capitalist party or another against the fossil fuel industry will fatally hamstring the movement.

McKibben has pointed to one key aspect of the problem, which alone places solutions to climate change beyond the abilities of capital and its servants. He has pointed out that proven fossil fuel reserves currently under the ground, if burned, would produce five times the

amount of CO2 necessary to wreak disaster beyond which all international agreement considers tenable. Although these proven reserves are still underground, they nevertheless make up an estimated \$27 trillion in the assets held by their respective owners. Any solution that successfully keeps four-fifths of this fuel underground would eliminate \$20 trillion in corporate assets. To this should be added some portion of the \$10 trillion in fossil fuel infrastructure.

The fossil fuel industry is tied to numerous banks, states, corporations, and other powerful bodies through stocks, insurance, loans, agreements, and many of the other relationships and financial devices that have proven their relevance in this age of economic crisis. A write-off of some \$30 trillion of value in the energy sector would take with it many other sectors of the economy, and would be opposed by nearly every major economic power on earth.

What's more, the creation of an ecologi-

cally sound society would simultaneously require enormous projects that promise either little or no profit, and would curtail future investment opportunities. Reorganizing urban life to accommodate walking, public transit, and bicycling would mean radically reducing the market for automobiles and all related industries.

Transitioning from industrial agriculture to eco-agriculture would eliminate many markets for steel, petroleum, plastics, petroleum, seeds, and numerous chemical compounds.

Furthermore, eco-agriculture (like similarly sustainable approaches to production) requires a more highly skilled workforce whose members must constantly adapt to changes in the ecosystem, and thus must have a detailed familiarity with their plots of land, and must continuously learn about their field. Such a workforce is much harder to replace and thus far harder to maintain on starvation wages.

Big business cannot lose so much value

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## Climate movement must tackle system that subordinates environment to private profit

# ... U.S. Congress makes workers pay for crisis

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compromise to end automatic spending cuts that began late Friday [March 1, 2013], Obama mentioned reforming these entitlement programs in calls with lawmakers from both parties on Saturday afternoon.

Reuters reported, "He's reaching out to Democrats who understand we have to make serious progress on long-term entitlement reform and Republicans who realize that if we had that type of entitlement reform, they'd be willing to have tax reform that raises revenues to lower the deficit." White House senior economic official Gene Sperling said on Sunday on the CNN program "State of the Union."

The grotesque logic of this now open Obama administration focus on slashing Social Security and Medicare in order to supposedly reduce the already approved mandatory cuts on a variety of other social problems is proof positive that capitalism's only solution to its crisis is to implement never-ending attacks on every gain that working people have made over a period of multiple decades.

And they are not embarrassed. A March 4 *New York Times* front-page headline read, "Recovery in U.S. Lifting Profits, Not Aiding Jobs." *The Times* article began, "With the Dow Jones Industrial average flirting with a nominal record high, the split between American workers and the companies that employ them is widening and could worsen in the next few months as federal budget cuts take hold."

The article continued, "With millions still out of work, companies face little pressure to raise salaries, while productivity gains allow them to increase sales without adding workers." *The Times* referred to a "golden age for corporate profits," especially for "multinational" corporations that have shifted production to low-wage nations like China, India, Vietnam and Bangladesh.

This situation is expected to continue, noted *The Times*, until there is a "full recovery in the labor market." "Full recovery," in today's economic terminology, means the time when U.S. wages are equivalent to those of the poorest nations.

In truth, the present worldwide economic crisis has no prospect of resolution unless the world's working classes are reduced to near Third World standards, or until a massive challenge is mounted that shakes the foundations of the system. No nation has escaped the economic terror unleashed by the corporate state powers, as austerity is today the universal standard imposed



by never-ending wars, destruction of workers' organizations, massive encroachments on civil and democratic rights, and the impoverishment of workers everywhere, especially women and oppressed nationalities.

Part of the U.S. crisis can be explained by massive and unprecedented waste, including \$1 trillion each year on the military. But the source of the world crisis goes much deeper, to the core of the system itself.

Faced with ever-increasing competition among ever-consolidating and merging corporate entities around the world, and with the ceaseless replacement of workers by robots and other technological advances, capitalism, appearances aside, faces a crisis in the rate of profit—a critical factor that lies hidden but is at the core of the financial crisis that hit with hurricane force in late 2007.

With overall profit rates constantly

on the decline, as with the bankruptcy of the once most powerful world corporation, General Motors, the ruling rich much prefer to invest their ever-declining profits in speculative financial instruments of myriad types. These range from home mortgages to privately owned and unregulated investment houses, to all the devices that essentially collapsed like a house of cards when it became obvious that the accrued "profits" and "assets," like mortgages and other paper instruments, proved to be ethereal—not in any manner based on the production of commodities for sale on world markets.

Indeed, in the first two years of the crisis, capitalism disappeared some \$50 trillion, as its paper profits evaporated almost overnight.

The lesser banks went under or were absorbed, factories lay idle, mortgages were deemed near worthless, and

property values plummeted.

Corporate greed and corruption, accounting fraud, a two-party capitalist system that aimed at defending the interests of the one percent against all others, increasing racism and imprisonment of the oppressed, endless wars over raw materials, the re-colonization of Africa and indeed all poor nations, while important, were merely symptoms of the inherent contradictions of the system itself—a social system where the endless compulsion or need to advance the accumulation of profits of the corporate elite overrules all rational decisions.

Competition for oil and other fossil fuels increases unchecked even at the expense of humanity's future. Wars that murder tens of millions and the starvation of billions continue because these are requirements of a system based on the accumulation and profitable reinvestment of capital at the expense of everything.

Capitalism's fundamental law, "grow or die," today takes its toll across the globe; the system's trillionaire practitioners have no alternative but to solve its burning contradictions at workers' expense.

It is left to capitalism's ideologues to justify or rationalize the horror. Today it is to "defend against terrorism" everywhere, or to defend the "national security interests" of the nation, or to demonize the Black and Brown masses to justify their increasing imprisonment, exploitation, and/or capitalism's need for cheap labor—even slave labor—or to "fight crime" or pursue the "war on drugs." The system requires scapegoats to justify its existence and perpetuate its rule.

The working class and its allies among all the oppressed, women, and youth, on the other hand, have no need to kill, maim, plunder, and exploit in order to live full and productive lives. They have only to unite in a common challenge to a social system that must be replaced by an egalitarian society in which, for the first time in human history, the vast majority will rule society in their own name, through their own institutions, and to satisfy human needs—not corporate profit.

The name of that system is socialism—not the twisted distortion that existed in the now defunct former USSR—but the real socialism, a society free from all the horrors of subordinating human needs to the corporate elite, a society that can reverse the monstrous damage already done to the earth and its people and provide a rich, full, and rewarding life for all. ■

## ... Climate

(continued from page 3)

and in the same stroke make such transformative investments with so little promise of financial return. The difficulty has nothing to do with physical limitations. Humanity could make these shifts in a matter of years, if not months.

The limitations exist only in the social relations organized by private property, wage labor, the market, and the profit motive.

The alternatives to fossil fuel have existed far longer than most modes of fossil fuel consumption. The first photovoltaic cell was invented in 1839 by a 19-year-old messing around in his dad's laboratory. This was decades before Edison's lightbulb, and even before much railroad track had been laid anywhere. Whale blubber was still the big deal in energy at the time. Water electrolysis (one viable method for storing energy created by solar and wind power) had been discov-

ered in 1800.

Capital's failure to promote less hazardous (and more renewable) sources of energy is not due to any serious technical difficulties; the technical feats in fossil fuel extraction and nuclear power outdo wind turbines and solar power any day of the week. The centrality of fossil fuel to the world capitalist economy clearly says something about the nature of capitalism itself.

Part of the answer lies in the relative prospects for profit in the development of one resource over another. Scarcer resources are more easily monopolized. The control over production and sale allowed by a monopoly allows the owner to acquire super-profits, which attract higher than average investment.

To any sensible working person, the fact that a resource cannot be replenished within any meaningful amount of time means it should be used sparingly, if at all. Generally, it's best not to base anything important upon such an element if it can be helped.

But to an investor, "unreplenishable" is

the Promised Land. Investors who own land can prevent others from growing crops, or building things, or capturing energy on that land. But they can't prevent them from doing it elsewhere. They might grow coffee. But if everyone else grows coffee the market can be easily flooded. They might invent the best solar panel ever, but tomorrow, someone might invent a better one or the market might again be flooded with cheap knock-offs.

Land with oil is a different story. There is oil elsewhere, but only so much. The competition is inherently more limited than for other products. And expensive extraction and refining technology only further limits the field of competitors. When a small group obtains access to all of this technology, and virtually all the access to oil (as happens under market competition), they can band together and extort everyone else.

Even a corporate giant like Wal-Mart can't beat the profit rate of Big Oil. Wal-Mart's revenue of \$421.8 billion compares favorably to Exxon-Mobile's Revenue of \$354.7 billion. Yet Exxon-Mobile's

annual profit comes in \$14 billion higher, at \$30.46 billion, compared with Wal-Mart's annual profit of \$16.39 billion.

Such a higher margin of profit allows an industry to shape the rest of the economy so that other industries and consumers become more dependent upon their resource, which expand the demand for their product. Thus automobile and oil companies buy up trolley-car lines and replace them with less efficient buses in order to expand the market for cars, and petroleum becomes more important to food production than soil. These resources have become central to our society in part because they are limited and non-renewable.

Steering away from climate disaster will require such "despotic inroads on the rights of property" as seizing some \$30 trillion in corporate assets. Big business and its parties will never develop the appetite for such a move. That appetite will only grow among the masses of working and oppressed people, who are not the owners of that \$30 trillion, but its slaves. And its victims. ■

By CHRISTINE MARIE

Kristin Bumiller, *"In An Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Violence"* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

On Feb. 14, the streaming videos of the flashmobs of young women determined to claim a violence-free life set my feminist heart to humming. But the hum quieted a bit for me on Feb. 27, a date just two weeks after the One Billion Rising global day of action against violence against women, when the New York City Council passed a resolution demanding that the city settle a decade-old lawsuit for damages filed by those Black and Latino youth unjustly convicted and sent to prison for the gang rape of a Central Park jogger in 1989.

The city council resolution was a too sharp reminder of the way that U.S. elites have for centuries used the hot-button issue of sexual violence to divide and conquer and as a tool to deepen the systematic repression of the Black community.

The sentences of these youth were vacated in 2002, but by that time some of them had served over a decade in prison. The Central Park Jogger rape trial was the occasion for one of the most hysterical and deliberately racist prosecutorial media campaigns since the victories of the Civil Rights Movement. It was fairly compared to the campaign to convict the nine Scottsboro Boys of raping two white women in 1931 in Alabama.

The prosecution painted a deliberately terrifying picture of the urban youth of New York as a pack of animals who roamed the city "wilding" and enacting senseless sexual brutality upon the civilized of the metropolis. Kristin Bumiller, author of *"An Abusive State,"* calls this prosecutorial gambit "expressive justice," a tool often used by the coercive state to legitimate an expansion of policing.

The five young Central Park Jogger defendants, all 14 to 16 years of age, were found guilty, even though there was no forensic evidence linking them to the crime, by means of confessions coerced during 14-30 hours of interrogation. The seriously injured female victim was in a coma for much of the trial—an absence that could be filled as needed by the prosecution to further sensationalize its case. Because she was a white, petite investment banker, the state and the compliant media were able to use her identity to create a racialized fear campaign, the type of campaign known as a "sex panic."

The vast majority of rapes are not committed by strangers in public places, but the Central Park Jogger trial resulted in the public acquiescing to the NYPD's move to use all the tools at its disposal to further criminalize youth of color and their communities as a whole. It was a classic reenactment of the traditional way in which race, class, and gender divides are used to strengthen the powers that be.

The coming together of the news of the Central Park lawsuit and One Billion Rising's celebration of the March 5 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), should be the occasion for all activists to think deeply about the most effective strategy to end sexual violence. The exhilaration felt by feminists when for a few weeks violence against women was mainstream news around the world must be complemented by a very sober analysis of the challenges before us.

Is the VAWA, a bill developed in line with other crime bills, the best tool for defending ourselves against sexual violence? Or does the mass incarceration strategy on which it relies lead us away from what is really needed?

The struggle to renew the Violence Against Women Act was posed by most liberal feminist groups, including One Billion Rising, as a victory against the retrograde politicians of the Republican Party and just plain common sense. To watch the media coverage, one would not know that professional counselors have had grave misgivings regarding VAWA for many years. In 2007, more than a dozen domestic violence experts submitted a white paper on the impact of the VAWA and documented the fact that between 1994 and 2007, there was little evidence that domestic violence, as a percentage of all violence, had decreased at all. Others charged that it was a mere "granting" bill.

There was an even more important subterranean dissatisfaction being expressed by radicalizing women activists and survivors of domestic violence. Kristin Bumiller interviewed many of them as part of her research for *"In An Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Violence."*

The difficulty of finding the feminist critique of VAWA is a product, according to Bumiller, of the way that the shelter system, and all the other ancillary elements of the package of services now available to vic-

## Issues confronting the movement to end violence against women

Tony Savino / Socialist Action



tims of battering, have been bound with a thousand funding strings to the criminal justice system in all its forms. Those who *have* found the space to speak out tell a painful story.

During the height of the Second Wave of feminism in the late 1960s, activists initiated groundbreaking campaigns to draw attention to the hidden and often ignored range of violence against women. They connected these campaigns to self-help initiatives designed to create safe and empowering spaces for women.

According to Bumiller, these shelters were movement-building affairs organized democratically and non-hierarchically. In these spaces, women functioning collectively could heal and prepare for the future by coming to see the violence they had endured as part of a larger system oppressing women. Services were linked to building a political fightback.

As the mass movement dissipated and funding became difficult, the services provided by these groups remained in great demand. In time, most shelters and rape crisis centers in need of grants found themselves moving "to the terrain of the state," as Bumiller describes it. Many groups were able to maintain a feminist identity, but in order to secure stable funding they became enmeshed with the courts, cops, and government social service agencies in ways that are problematic at best.

At the same time, the criminal justice system was growing by leaps and bounds, and the state took advantage of the new consensus about the importance of meeting the needs of domestic violence and rape victims to create their own projects.

Government regulation, Bumiller argues, now required women leaving violent situations to apply for state benefits to demonstrate their commitment to "self-sufficiency." Entering into the welfare system, however, entwines women with probate court actions concerning child custody, paternity hearings, child protective services, and state involvement with school officials. An ever-increasing set of government agencies, who often view indigent victims of battering with suspicion or even malice, suddenly became involved in the lives of every battered woman who sought shelter.

The VAWA led to, first, mandatory arrest, and later, "pro-arrest" policies for police called to sites of domestic violence. If the aggressor could not be determined, police arrested and charged both men and women, leading to a growing incarceration rate for both genders. Women who were found defending themselves against abusers were charged as well. In short, violence against women became a facet of crime control in a period of economic slowdown when the state felt the need to initiate the dramatic new level of social control that has become known as mass incarceration.

And while a lack of "self-sufficiency" can result in a battered woman being humiliated and punitively regulated by a multi-faceted social welfare system, there has been no equal Congressional attention to

the problem of women's segregation into low wage jobs in a nation with less childcare than ever before. A jobs program that provided employment and a child-care system that allowed women to go to work would naturally allow them to leave abusers without becoming subject to what Bumiller calls "the alternative patriarchy of the state."

Objectively speaking, Bumiller demonstrates, legislative advances in response to violence against women have been, at best, a dubious proposition for the most vulnerable segment of the female population. Liberal feminism, she suggests, mistakenly chose to treat sexual violence, not as an outcome of the overall need of the system to keep women vulnerable as a reserve army of labor and dependent on an individual man for her survival and that of her children, but as the result of gender-based discrimination by the cops and the courts.

This "discrimination" approach was a winner in Congress, an institution that has rarely seen a crime control bill that it did not like, but is starting to seem like a loser to more and more women in the know. While Bumiller offers no blueprint for the mass women's movement we must develop, she provides a cautionary tale for those committed to building one. ■

### Vancouver Longshore Lock-out

*"You can either stand with us now in Longview or we will be on the line together one year from now in Portland and Vancouver." — Anonymous ILWU member, 13 months ago*

As we go to press, the United Grain Corporation has locked out 44 ILWU dockworkers at the Port of Vancouver (Washington state) and are bringing in replacements. The lock-out stems from UGC's claim that a union member sabotaged company equipment, though the union has denied it.

This all happened in the midst of contentious bargaining. International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 4 charged that the Feb. 27 lockout of its workers constitutes an unfair labor practice, and the company should have dealt with the union at the bargaining table.

ILWU announced that picketing would last "indefinitely." The first day of the lockout left the port with no workers to unload 1800 Subaru vehicles, and prevented the loading of wheat onto another ship for export. The next day, the Port of Vancouver announced that "replacement workers" were loading grain. Railroad union crews honored the picket lines and halted engines outside the terminal. Train company managers had to drive them into the plant.

The United Grain Terminal is one of nine Northwest elevators that handle a quarter of all grain exports and half the nation's wheat exports.

— ANN MONTAGUE

# A new Arab revolt?

## Mass movement is rekindled

Hassene Dridi / AP



(Left) Feb. 6 demonstration in Tunis protesting the murder of leftist attorney Chokri Belaid.

By ANDREW POLLACK

In recent weeks the masses of Egypt and Tunisia have re-entered the streets and taken workplace action in significant numbers. In response, the parties in power in each country—bourgeois populist parties with an Islamist veneer—have stepped up repression, while at the same time engaging in maneuvers with parties representing either old regime or bourgeois secular forces, or sometimes coalitions blending elements of each.

A similar upsurge and a corresponding array of class forces are visible in Palestine as well, even if the vastly different circumstances make the parallels seem obscure at first.

In Tunisia and Egypt the leading forces in the state include degenerated remnants of the bonapartist bourgeoisie that ruled for most of the period after formal independence was achieved. Once their dictator was overthrown, elections were held; the Islamist bourgeois populists won but rapidly lost mass support as their policies were seen to mirror those of the previous regime.

The majority of figures and organizations in the bourgeois opposition in both countries are from the secular liberal camp, who have done little better in differentiating themselves from the old regime's approach.

In Palestine the array of leading political forces appears fundamentally different, yet in essence rests on the same class basis. The key difference is that there is no post-independence regime over which a bourgeois party could rule. Instead, we see a puppet pseudo-government, the Palestinian Authority, pretending to rule over discontinuous fragments of land still controlled by the colonial power, Israel.

And instead of old regime, Islamist, or liberal bourgeois parties battling for control of all the spoils and succeeding each other in power, in Palestine the division plays out geographically, with Fateh dominant in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza—but all representing parallel class fractions to those in Egypt and Tunisia.

### Tunisia

Tunisian politics have long been distinguished regionally by the presence of a large union federation, the UGTT (Tunisian General Labor Union), which, while dominated until recently by a relatively bureaucratic leadership, was never formally subordinate to the regime, as was the case with unions in Egypt until Mubarak's departure and the formation of indepen-

**As the masses of Tunisia & Egypt re-enter the streets and take workplace action, the bourgeois parties in power have stepped up repression.**

dent unions. What's more, left parties with a base in the UGTT and other mass organizations have been influential in leading mass actions.

The activities of the left within the UGTT during and since the uprising against Ben Ali have given it a share in the federation's leadership. When protests of thousands of youth broke out in November of last year in Siliana, the UGTT's threat of a general strike forced the government to stop its violent attacks on the youth and to make some concessions. In retaliation, however, the regime launched attacks against the UGTT, both on its own and through its surrogate armed thugs.

Meanwhile, the left parties, united in the movement against Ben Ali, subsequently suffered a fracturing of that unity, but have since come back together.

Since the spring of 2012, the Tunisian political landscape has been marked by a growing polarization between two major poles. The first consists of the Islamists of Ennahda (the current ruling party), with allies in the Congress for the Republic. The second brings together various forces left over after the break-up of the party of former dictators Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba.

But a third pole, united in the Popular Front, has also arisen. It is made up of Maoists, Trotskyists, Socialists, Nasserite and Baathist Arab nationalists, Greens, anti-debt activists, and independents. One of the leaders of the Front was Chokri Belaid, a lawyer well known for defending labor struggles and an outspoken critic of Ennahda. His assassination on Feb. 6 led to a mass upsurge. A million (some estimates say a million and a half) protested around the country after the murder.

There was a general strike in Siliana on Feb. 8. Headquarters of the Ennahda party were attacked in several places. In Bin Kirdan, tear gas was fired at protesters and some demonstrators broke into Ennahda's headquarters—this in a town that had voted heavily for that party in the last elections.

Belaid had taken part in the protests in Siliana, leading then-Interior Minister Ali Larayedh to accuse him of "stirring up trouble." After Belaid's assassination, this same Larayedh, who has overseen the government's repressive apparatus since the fall of Ben Ali, was appointed prime minister!

The Ligue de la Gauche Ouvrière (Workers' Left League, LGO) issued a press release headlined, "Down with the government of murderers!" The League proclaimed: "Let the blood of comrade Chokri Belaid unite us to overthrow this government in the regions, in the centers of sovereignty, in all the state institutions, in particular the institution of the Ministry of the Interior and the Constituent Assembly!"

"Get rid of the governors and delegates and elect activist local bodies to create a situation of dual power! We call together for civil disobedience and the general strike with the sole perspective of bringing down the regime!"

An LGO leader stated in *International Viewpoint*: "The successive governments since the fall of Ben Ali have followed the same neoliberal economic choices, in liaison with international capital ... there are around 200,000 more people unemployed than at the time of Ben Ali. As for the development of the regions of the interior, we face an almost total absence of state and private sector investment. ... The new partnership agreement with the European Union will deepen the neoliberal policy."

This bold projection comes on the basis of continued working-class mobilizations in recent years. After Ben-Ali's flight, struggles for social rights took place, most notably in the country's mining basin as well as in regions of the interior like Sidi Bouzid or Siliana. "Not a day passed," noted the League, "without a strike or a demonstration, even in small localities, notably around wages."

The struggles also involved precarious workers and unemployed graduates. At the same time mobilizations have continued in defense of civil liberties and women's rights.

In analyzing Ennahda's difficulties, Tunisian leftists note that Ennahda had not expected the old regime to fall, and, not believing it was possible to overthrow it, were ready to negotiate with it. "They have shown the people," said the LGO, "that they practiced the same clientelism as Ben Ali's party." All of this could obviously be said as well of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

### Egypt

In mid-February, protests broke out in the coastal city Port Said against the murder of dozens of people by the regime and its thugs during a mass rally against the regime's frame-up verdicts in the February 2012 football match deaths (which were widely viewed at the time as having been set up by the regime and its paid thugs). The protests soon spread to many other towns in the Suez region—towns which, like those first to ignite in Tunisia, are heavily working-class in composition and which have often been even more militant than the more highly publicized Tahrir Square protests.

Workers at a Port Said shipyard launched a sit-in, while some residents blocked the road to Sharq al-Tafrea port. Workers from the Suez Canal Authority's navigation department expressed solidarity with calls for the resignation and prosecution of Port Said security chief Mohsen Radi and Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim. Workers threatened to strike if their demands were not met.

A coalition in Ismailia, another Suez region city, said it was launching a civil disobedience campaign targeting government institutions. In Kafr al-Sheikh,

(continued on page 7)

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a delta city, members of the National Salvation Front opposition coalition threatened to launch a civil disobedience campaign against what it termed attempts to “Brotherhoodize” the government.

More details on this upsurge among workers outside of Cairo were provided in an *Al-Akhbar* article dated Feb. 26, titled “Egypt: Civil Disobedience Gains Ground Among Workers.” The authors wrote: “There are many reasons behind the rise in worker actions and popular protests. One being a general mood of anger among organized workers and professionals following an attempt by Muslim Brotherhood labor minister to undermine the unions by issuing legislation severely restricting union pluralism. This coincides with demands for higher wages in the midst of a significant decline in living standards and exorbitant prices.

“Hesham Fouad, a leader in the Revolutionary Socialists and a member of its workers committee, explained to *Al-Akhbar* that workers strikes are not only increasing in frequency, but witnessing a qualitative change. There is a noticeable trend of workers taking over and running their factories [in the face of] attempts by defaulting employers to close facilities and escape the country,” he said. “This concerns the state, “since it knows that giving back the companies to the businessmen will become impossible as the workers gain more confidence.”

Fouad cited the example of workers joining the civil disobedience in Port Said: “The workers of the industrial free zone joined the demonstrations, and dock workers are demanding retribution for victims of abuse at the hands of security forces.” In Mansoura the clashes escalated after the police ran over and killed a protester.

Socialists quoted in the article exposed the pretensions of leaders of the main bourgeois opposition formation, the National Salvation Front. Said one: “All the leaders of the Front who claim to be secular opponents of Islamists do not have economic answers that differ from the Muslim Brotherhood. While the deteriorating economic conditions indicate that social upheaval is on the horizon, when it happens, it will not be led by any of the leaders of the Front.”

Meanwhile, the response of some bourgeois liberals to Brotherhood repression has been to call on the military to seize power. Among supporters of a military takeover are former Mubarak Supreme Court appointee Tahani al-Gebali. She declared: “We must protect our national security at home and abroad. ... It shouldn’t respond to pressure from the Brotherhood to open the tunnels to Gaza and let them implement their schemes in Sinai.”

In fact, the Brotherhood has bent over backward to comply with U.S./Israeli insistence that it continue to assist in the blockade of Gaza. But it has not been quick enough for the liking of the pro-Zionist liberals, who filed and won a lawsuit to demand the government flood the tunnels to Gaza.

As in Tunisia, there is a similarity in policy—whether on the economic, repressive, or diplomatic fronts—between the ruling party and its secular bourgeois opponents. They disagree only over who should administer the cuts and accompanying repression, and the means to do so, and which segments of the capitalist class should profit. This coincidence of interests is particularly dangerous given the deepening economic crisis and the swelling volume of insistence that Egypt turn the screws on workers if an IMF loan is to be granted.

Egypt’s latest economic reform plan will cut subsidies for or raise taxes on many basic consumption items. The plan’s announcement came on the eve of a visit by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, the result of which was a promise that the U.S. would provide \$250 million in aid after Egypt promised to reach an agreement with the IMF.

And to improve the regime’s capacity to squash the inevitable anti-austerity protests, the U.S. agreed to send Egypt 140,000 more canisters of tear gas, an order accompanied by an open admission that the emergency shipment was needed because they were running out of supplies given the widespread attacks on protesters. The import permit specified that the manufacturer’s name and the country of origin would be erased from the canisters.

Some liberal opposition groups have called for a boycott of upcoming elections. Others announced their intention to form a “Popular Parliament,” running in parallel with the official one. It’s unlikely that this body will base itself on the committees thrown up in workplaces and neighborhoods at the peak of mass struggles. But perhaps its creation will open a discussion of the need to revive—and to unify nationally—such bodies.

#### Palestine

Meanwhile, the number of Palestinians resisting oppression in the streets has once again swelled. Rallies and tent cities have been set up to support political prisoners on hunger strike, actions that gathered mo-



(Above) Protest camp in front of provincial headquarters of government in Port Said during general strike. Posters show men slain by Egyptian authorities during the struggle.

## The similarities in the class alignments in Egypt, Tunisia, and Palestine raise the possibility of regional solidarity and collaboration.

mentum as Samer Issawi—on hunger strike since last August—appeared close to death.

During this same period, running street battles between Palestinian youth and the occupation army also escalated in size and frequency. All these actions drew fuel from the dramatic increase in number and violence of settler and IDF attacks, mushrooming settlement expansion, and growing anger at a Palestinian Authority leadership that does nothing but beg Israel for talks.

At the same time, public sector strikes are growing as the PA withholds wages and rejects other demands. These strikes follow massive protests in the West Bank last fall against price hikes and tax increases. The actions featured calls for the resignation of the PA’s chief economic policymaker, Salam Fayyad, as well as for an end to the Paris Protocols, the economic section of the Camp Oslo Accords, which codifies PA subservience to the neoliberal policies of the IMF, including reinforcing dependence on the Zionist economy.

Protests grew even bigger and more frequent with the news of Israel’s murder by torture of detainee Arafat Jaradat. News of Jaradat’s death led to mass demonstrations in dozens of locations throughout the West Bank, in Gaza, in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, and in pre-1967 Israel. Israeli officials publicly demanded that the PA put a lid on the upsurge (while, of course, in the meantime shooting protesters on its own).

The fury over Israel’s treatment of prisoners and detainees is intensified by recognition that it has carried out frequent re-jailings in violation of the agreement reached to end mass hunger strikes called in 2012 to protest open-ended “administrative detention.”

Israel’s brazen disregard of agreements signed concerning detainees and prisoners is paralleled by its repeated and murderous violations of the terms of last year’s Gaza ceasefire. Israel has breached that agreement on more than 800 occasions since it was signed last November. In stark contrast, there have been only two allegations of truce violations by Palestinian groups. The latter, of course, are the only ones to get mainstream media coverage. And we can be sure that when Israel decides once again to attack with massive force, the mainstream media will claim it is in retaliation for supposed missile-fire from Gaza.

Israel’s ceasefire violations include repeated deadly attacks on Gaza fishers, despite the fact that they have been sailing well within the agreed-upon off-shore limit set as part of the ceasefire. In response, the fishers carried out a demonstration at sea on March 3 in which fishers from all over the Gaza Strip brought their boats and formed a flotilla at the seaport.

The everyday racism of Israeli society was horrifically captured in a set of photos that went viral at the end of February of a vicious attack by dozens of settlers on a lone Palestinian woman. Soon thereafter, Israel an-

nounced it would begin “Palestinian-only” bus lines. News of this, and comparisons to Jim Crow policies of the U.S. South, also went viral.

In the face of this increased and ever more widely and openly applied racism and repression, the PA and Hamas have done virtually nothing to defend those whom they supposedly represent. And they will certainly continue to try to impose austerity measures, as in Egypt and Tunisia.

This, of course, is not surprising, for as mentioned at the start, despite the dramatically different contexts, the class basis of both the PA and Hamas is the same as that of their counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia—one or another segment of the capitalist class.

The real question facing Palestine, then, is not so much whether a Third Intifada has broken out or whether it will soon, a subject of widespread media speculation. It is instead whether grassroots committees gathering in the masses of workers and peasants akin to those of the first Intifada can be strengthened and broadened where they exist, created where they don’t, and linked up across Palestine.

Such base-building is needed regardless of whether the pace and intensity of the ever-present Palestinian grassroots resistance quickens, or whether we are instead in a period of preparation for the next uprising. Such a period would also be useful for strengthening ties being re-forged with the campaigns for return of the millions of refugees in exile, and of Palestinians within pre-1967 Israel.

A related question is whether a revolutionary leadership—that is, a working-class-based party—can be built in time to gather the most militant elements of such committees, providing a framework for developing a program and a strategy to implement it, as well as to forge ties with similar movements and parties throughout the region.

#### Regional coordination?

The similarities in the class alignments in each of the countries described above raise the question not just of the need for firmer organization of working-class-based movements and parties within each country, but also of the necessity and possibility of regional solidarity and collaboration.

Fear of just that on the part of the region’s rulers and their masters was seen in a recent attack on a gathering in Algeria. Police raided the first North African Forum to Fight Unemployment and Precarious Work, arresting and deporting unionists from Morocco, Tunisia, and Mauritania. The forum was prepared by meetings of unemployed graduates and young precarious workers in the region. Its meeting in Algeria was designed to prepare for the upcoming World Social Forum (WSF) in Tunisia.

Tunisia’s LGO said the WSF “should be an effective time to express loudly the rejection of neoliberalism as well as the diktats of the EU and the USA. We expect a significant presence from all the movements opposed to neoliberalism and fighting for the emancipation of oppressed peoples.”

In this regard, the WSF can be a forum for discussing the tasks facing the region’s labor and socialist movements. And we should add, in so doing it can provide, as the region has done so often in recent years, continued inspiration for those now engaged in general strikes and monster rallies throughout crisis-ridden Europe and elsewhere. ■

# The legacy of Malcolm X

This is Part II of Socialist Action's 1992 resolution, "Black Self-Determination and Socialist Revolution." The first part appeared in our newspaper last month.

Malcolm X's evolution was a precursor of the coming generalized working-class radicalization. He was clearly influenced by the revolutionary events on a world scale that involved genuine revolutionaries of all colors in a united working-class struggle for emancipation from wage slavery. Symptomatically, in his last year, Malcolm X relentlessly attacked the two capitalist parties—both the "Democratic foxes and the Republican wolves." And in his last months, he more explicitly focused his attack, explaining that capitalism is the fountainhead from which springs racism, super-exploitation, and national oppression.

Malcolm X showed in his most mature writings and speeches that he had begun to see the outlines of the coming combined revolution. He showed in his polemics against the capitalist "vulture" that he had begun to sense that the national liberation of his people might only be won in the course of the coming workers' socialist revolution. If for no other reason, this marked him as a candidate for assassination by U.S. capitalism.

## The Nation of Islam

Black nationalism remains a powerful current in Black America. The Nation of Islam continues to be the largest Black nationalist force in this country. It remains capable, despite contradictory cross-currents, of making a major contribution to the struggle for Black liberation and to the coming American revolution.

The Nation of Islam, in the pages of their newspaper, *The Final Call*, sharply opposed the U.S. attack on Iraq [in 1991]. And since then they have continued to defend those GIs who are still being victimized for their refusal to take part in the criminal military enterprise. But with a few notable exceptions, they took little part in mobilizing Blacks for mass action against the war—mostly limiting themselves to propaganda against the U.S. imperialist assault on Iraq.

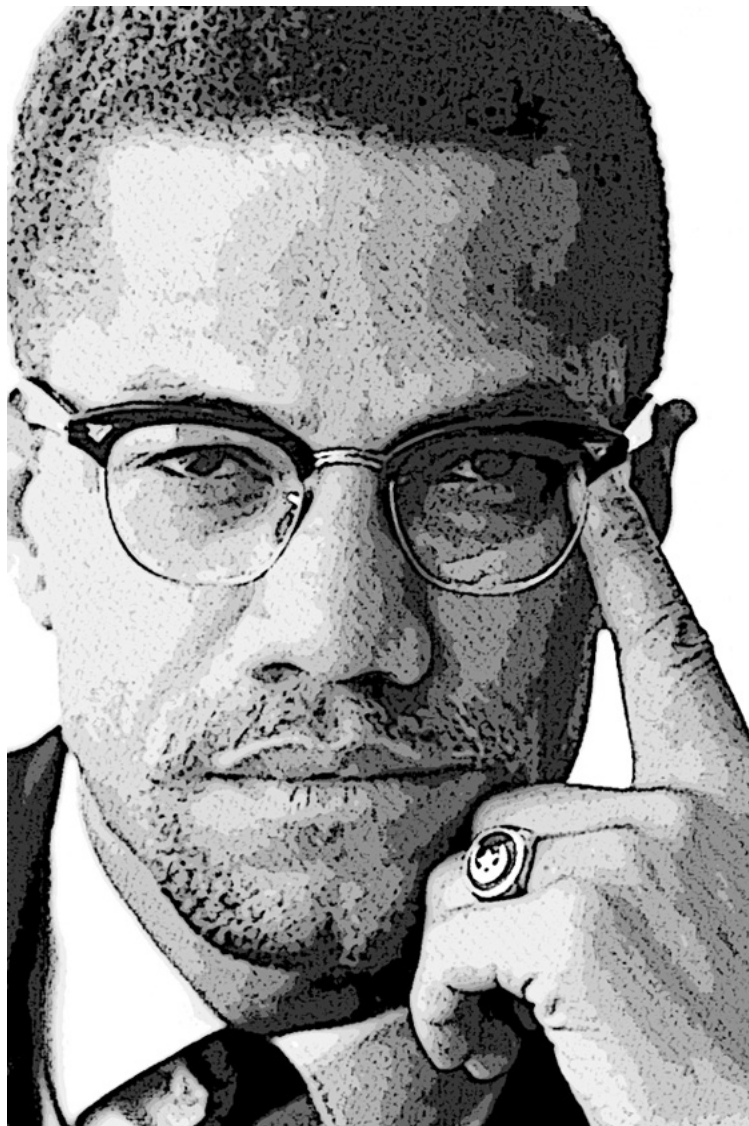
The Nation's policy today on many important political questions is not qualitatively different from what it was before Malcolm X was suspended for making his "chickens coming home to roost" comment to reporters in the immediate aftermath of the Kennedy assassination. But much water has flowed under the bridge since. Malcolm X began to revise the Nation's backward positions—especially its abstentionist stance toward the integrationist-oriented civil right movement. It is important to note that his evolution began long before his break with Elijah Muhammad.

While he was one of the chief spokespersons of the Nation, well before he was suspended from his position as a major Nation spokesman, Malcolm sought to identify the Muslims with the actual struggle of the Black masses in the South. He began to treat his organization's differences with Martin Luther King and other leaders of the civil rights movement as subordinate to their common struggle against racism in the United States. This was entirely positive and constituted a major political contribution toward establishing a united Black front against the racist ruling class, which was cut short by his and King's assassinations.

Most importantly, both before and after the split with Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm didn't stand still. He continued to evolve toward a higher conception of the struggle for Black liberation; not the least of which was his ongoing polemic against both capitalist parties and ultimately against capitalism itself. But it would be wrong to say that he ever abandoned his progressive Black nationalist views, or that he was moving in that direction. Malcolm's thinking in his last year confirmed our view that there is no contradiction between Black nationalism and proletarian internationalism.

Even to this day most of the Black "leaders" who have embraced him—not in life, but only after his death—pretend not to have heard his repeated characterizations of the Republicans as undisguised "wolves" and Democrats as sly "foxes," both in the business of raiding the chicken house. Nor do these Johnnie-come-latelies acknowledge his ultimate evolution in the direction of class and socialist consciousness.

This is not to say that the Nation has stood still on the positions they held before Malcolm made his major contributions transforming it from an essentially isolated religious sect into a significant political force. But their evolution has been quite mixed. In contradiction to progressive stands like the one they took



in the Gulf War, they also oppose abortion as Black genocide, they have taken strong positions in favor of such things as the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, and they display a collateral male chauvinism and opposition to affirmative action. The Nation's opposition to women's rights is sharply counterposed to Black unity.

Similarly, the Nation's continued reactionary anti-Semitic message is sharply counterposed to true internationalism. While they solidarize in the pages of *The Final Call* with the struggle of Palestinians, the reactionary smell of anti-Semitism is mixed in with their anti-Zionism. And while they denounce white Democrats and Republicans, they are more than a little supportive of both liberal and conservative Black Democrats and Black Republicans.

However, we cannot rule out decisively progressive evolution by this current under the impact of the developing crisis of American and world capitalism. The overwhelming majority of African Americans are working class, and most important, there is no Black component of the American capitalist class. There are no Black Rockefellers, Morgans, or Fords. There are no Black corporate raiders or Chief Executive Officers of major corporations.

Furthermore, the Black nationality in the United States is unique among oppressed nationalities throughout the world—they have no indigenous capitalist class or separate Black territory or separate economy to power the tendency of a privileged elite to hold back its revolutionary anti-capitalist dynamic.

The Black section of the American working class has been the last to benefit from the long period of relative prosperity, and are now the first to feel the economic lash of the recession. The simple facts of life for Black Americans guarantee that they will be among the first wave of radicalizing class-struggle fighters in the USA.

We can expect that the logic of capitalist economic life will put the Nation of Islam to a severe test. This formation will not be immune to the impact of the economic crisis on its constituency. That means that despite the current conservative drift of the Nation of Islam we need to position ourselves for reaching out with a friendly response to any move by it, or by a current within it, in the direction of a consistent struggle for Black liberation.

Only coming events can answer the question of the future role of the Nation of Islam. In the meantime, we are optimistic and remain ready to reach out in friendship and solidarity to this important component of the Black movement for freedom, justice, and equality.

## "Integrationist" wing of Black movement

The "integrationist" sector of the movement of African Americans for social, economic, and political justice has been in decline since the victory over Jim

Crow. The assassination of Martin Luther King removed from the scene the most dynamic exponent of that current. Significantly, he was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., where he had gone to help striking Black sanitation workers win their battle. The dynamic of the Black struggle in the North had led him to embrace the cause of wage slaves in an objective struggle against capitalist exploitation.

Although his pacifist convictions limited King's effectiveness, he had become a confirmed advocate of mass civil disobedience, which unlike individual acts of civil disobedience alters the basic relations of forces bringing the masses into direct action in the streets. Furthermore, such mass actions pose the question of effective self-defense; they set in motion a logic that must ultimately lead to organized self-defense.

It could be expected, too, that had Martin Luther King lived, he also would have continued his own evolution toward a higher level of political consciousness. But even King's pacifism was two-sided. Unlike many of history's avowed pacifists who have hypocritically condemned with impartial vigor both the violence of slave master and slave, he took a bold stand in opposition to the Vietnam War policy of American imperialism.

Leaders like King and Malcolm X don't arise every day. Both these men came out of the struggle against the system of legally segregated and second-class citizenship prevailing in the Southern states and the de facto segregation in the North. They both led and learned from the struggles of the masses.

The momentum of the victory over Jim Crow in the early 1960s carried the struggle with ineluctable force to the Northern states, where unofficial forms of second-class citizenship for Blacks is the norm to this day. Segregation, albeit not overtly supported by any special laws, prevails and worsens in housing, schools, and jobs. Moreover, separate but (un)equal is also a fact of life in all other spheres of civic life for Blacks.

Martin Luther King was one of the first, and certainly the most effective of the civil rights leaders who led the struggle into the North. Black super-exploitation and oppression in the Northern cities is openly economic in form and has no juridical framework supporting it other than the framework of the sanctity of capitalist property, and the capitalist law and order upholding it. King didn't hesitate to respond to the obvious by focusing the struggle "up-South" on the economic forms of racial injustice in the "free" states.

At that moment, in the 1960s, the course of the two major Black leaders began to intersect. Black nationalists like Malcolm X had appeared to be indifferent, even scornful of the fight against Jim Crow. But this was primarily a consequence of their polemics against the hypocrisy of white "liberals" who downplayed the hell caught by Blacks in the North. Black nationalist polemical emphasis was focused on the other side of the truth and thereby illuminated more completely the economic foundation of Black oppression.

Black nationalism, at that time, was also in rebellion against those civil rights fighters who, in their zeal to defeat the abomination of Jim Crow, soft-pedaled racial injustice in the North. Black nationalism was not in the least counterposed to the goals of the civil rights struggle. It was its ideological complement; it constituted another vital component of the generalized struggle, North and South, for Black social, economic, and political justice.

It was no accident that when Jim Crow began to show signs of imminent collapse, and the attention of African Americans began to shift to the North, that Malcolm X, sensing this change, also sensed that people in the army of civil rights fighters were potential enlistees in the ongoing war for freedom everywhere in the United States, North as well as South. It was at that historical moment that Malcolm began to reach out to his erstwhile ideological opponents for collaboration in the struggle.

After Malcolm X's assassination, the needs of capitalism also required Martin Luther King's assassination. The two murders removed from the scene the two most capable leaders produced by the historic upsurge that brought down Jim Crow and who had begun to follow an intersecting logic. Their death, along with the Vietnam War-fueled economic boom and President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War Against Poverty"—which succeeded in co-opting, compromising, and corrupting potential Black leadership—contributed to a downturn in the pace of struggle for Black

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By GAETANA CALDWELL-SMITH

*"The Gatekeepers," a film directed by Dror Moreh, who also conducted the interviews.*

"The Gatekeepers" is a riveting documentary film that reveals the behind-the-scenes actions of one of Israel's key tools for maintaining its repressive rule over the Palestinians—the Shin Bet (appellation for Israel Security Agency or ISA, formerly Mossad). The film tells its story through candid interviews with ex-leaders of Shin Bet, and includes archival black and white film clips.

The film opens with footage of Israel's six-day war with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in June 5-10, 1967. One result was that one million additional Palestinians were put under Israeli rule. A former member, Avi Dichter, shown being interviewed, was only 11 years old during the war. He had to ask, "What is war?"

Dror Moreh was inspired by Errol Morris's documentary, "The Fog of War," where Morris interviewed Robert McNamara, U.S. Secretary of Defense during the Vietnam War. Moreh's interviewees either retired or resigned from Shin Bet, supposedly having gained a conscience regarding their actions.

The film contains many memorable yet unsettling images. Some seem right out of a Bond or Bourne film, such as a successful bomb in a cell phone triggered to explode in the user's ear, and the inhumane conditions of prisons where Palestinian suspects are tortured and held without trial.

Acting under Shin Bet orders, Israeli soldiers' actions were not unlike those of the U.S. military in Afghanistan. Taught simple Arabic commands, they went to Palestinian homes to count how many lived in each. Those who didn't comply got their doors kicked down. Soldiers grabbed men, bound and corraled them into trucks, and hauled them off, leaving wailing women and children behind.

Moreh interviews one ex-leader who spoke of the beauty of the Palestinian olive groves. Here, he in-

## Inside the Israeli killing machine



(Left) Palestinian refugees after June 1967 war.

cludes grainy black and white shots of soldiers driving through them. Yet soon the land was confiscated and people were sent to refugee camps. A Shin Bet leader, curious about the camps, paid a visit and was sickened by the conditions.

Illustrated by archival film clips, we see people who once lived freely on their land relegated to rows of one-room concrete blocks. Demeaned, Palestinians protested with rudimentary acts of resistance against Israelis they saw as occupiers. As these acts increased, a curfew was instigated and as many as a hundred people a night were arrested and tortured. One Shin Bet member laughingly brags that some of the methods were such that a victim would confess to killing Jesus.

Shin Bet also relied on human intelligence (HUMINT). We witness films of warehouses filled with rows of file cabinets containing dossiers on hundreds of thousands of alleged suspects. Clerks sat at microfiche machines running countless records from which

suspected "terrorists," killing most. Moreh asks him about it; Shalom cannot remember. When asked if he thinks the attack was illegal, Shalom replies that there was no such thing as an illegal action. Moreh presses on, "Not even shooting people with their hands behind their backs?" He says he ordered killings instead of trials because he didn't want the chance of an armed terrorist in court. (Ironically, this sounds like a sound-bite from today's U.S. administration speaking about the "war on terror," especially how it dealt with Osama bin Laden.)

Impassively and coldly, he answers Moreh's questions: "In a war against terrorists, there is no morality." One of their mottos is, "Victory is to see you suffer." Their matter-of-fact attitude, calmness, and lack of emotion (except for Shalom's giggles), make them appear as pathological killers. Still, they verbalize their remorse. Whether or not they mean it, only they would know. ■

## The con that knows no borders

By BARRY WEISLEDER

*Will Ferguson, "419" (Penguin Canada, Toronto, 2012, 399 pages).*

How are the sins of imperialism visited upon the common people of the "rich" countries? One way is "419." That is the law against fraud in the criminal code of Nigeria. It is also the title of the Giller Prize-winning book by travel writer Will Ferguson, which won best English-language novel published in Canada in 2012.

A retired Calgary teacher, Henry Curtis, is persuaded by an internet con man in Lagos to liquidate and transfer all his assets, supposedly to aid the escape of a death-threatened petroleum heiress, and to gain a mega reward for his efforts. Curtis dies in a suspicious car crash, leaving his wife destitute, and launching his reclusive freelance-editor daughter



Laura onto a quest for the truth, and pursuit of the purloined funds.

This is no morality play about Third World gangsters ripping off innocent, middle-class North Americans. "419" transcends such parochial resentments to provide a critical intercontinental

perspective on exploitation and the desperation it breeds. The author shows what the system is doing to Nigeria and to Africa through an intimate portrayal of his characters' lives. Quite disparate beings, they are linked in a web of dispossession, intrigue, and revenge.

Laura is moved by vengeance to risk her own safety, but succumbs to pity.

Nnamdi is a Niger Delta fisherman's son who tries to survive as a "mechanic" on the fringes of the oil black market. He exemplifies the destruction of Igbo culture in the whirlwind of rapacious "development," and armed resistance, as Nigeria teeters on the brink of civil war.

Amina, "the girl in indigo," is a pregnant refugee on a lonely journey, from the arid Sahel to a southern metropolis teeming with poverty, crime, and despair.

Winston is an educated hustler who fabricates identities, and pitches windfall schemes to foreigners by appealing to sympathy and greed. He sees himself as "Entrepreneur, Nollywood director ... but not as a criminal."

Michael "Irons-Egobia" is a heavy-set, sweaty man who coughs blood into a handkerchief. From behind his large polished wood desk in the bowels of a warren of courtyards and dingy offices, he runs a protection racket, ruthlessly exercising powers of life and death over all who fall into his wretched domain.

From this least appealing of characters comes a frank account of the 419 enterprise, refracted through his worm's-eye view of political economy. "It is not a game. It is a business, and do you know what that business is? Retribution," intones Irons-Egobia.

"Where would England be without Africa? England without Africa is England without Empire.

The crowns of British royalty glitter with blood, with rubies and emeralds wrenched out of Africa."

"If we Nigerians are good at thieving, we learned it from the British. We may plunder bank accounts; they plundered entire continents ... we will take back our share of what was stolen. ... Where does the money from Delta oil fields flow? Into off-shore accounts, into foreign banks, back to the descendants of slave traders."

Nnamdi's people, whose fishery has been despoiled, whose children cough blood from the gas flares and the oil pollution in their midst, point to those responsible. "They were all Shell Men; it didn't matter whether they were oyibos (whites) or Igbo, and it didn't matter what the colour of their coveralls was or which particular tribal markings were sewn onto their chest pockets: Chevron, Texaco, Mobil, Agip, BP, Exxon. Total from France, Eni and Saipem from Italy. Even the NNPC, Nigeria's own National Petroleum Corporation. It was all Shell."

The main characters of "419" converge in a tragedy in which no one triumphs.

While the author usefully dissects the familiar e-mail scam, he doesn't offer much sympathy to North Americans who naively believe that they could win the jackpot promised by 419 scammers and evade prosecution by domestic authorities for money laundering. Perhaps it's the Irish rebel in him that tilts his concern towards the neo-colonial masses trying to survive conditions of growing danger and barbarity, under the thumb of Big Oil.

Will Ferguson does not indict the capitalist system, the biggest con that knows no borders. But he does artfully connect the e-fraud to the legacy of imperialist domination of Africa, and to its ongoing exploits, replete with the prevailing environment-be-damned corporate ethos.

As today's murderous scramble for Africa's energy and mineral resources intensifies, this novel makes the regional context more accessible to a broad Northern readership. The fast pace, at least in the second half, makes this a compelling entertainment, as well as an informative read. ■

### ... Legacy of Malcolm

(continued from page 8)

liberation that has essentially prevailed to this day.

But now, the steadily rising interest in Malcolm X, combined with the developing economic crisis, augurs a new and higher stage in this struggle.

Most importantly, this new stage, which promises to bring the working class into the struggle for fundamental change, will begin where the two previous upsurges left off. The labor radicalization of the 1930s and '40s, and the Black radicalization of the late 1950s and '60s will tend to merge in a new synthesis. A new alliance between the coming generations of labor militants and Black nationalists is objectively necessary and, therefore, is guaranteed to be given an impulse by the force of historical experience.

It cannot now be determined which

strategic road to freedom Blacks will ultimately take: Whether it will be one that begins on the road to a separate nation or on the road to a united, combined struggle for Black liberation and a socialist America.

Revolutionary Marxists remain neutral on this question—until Blacks have made clear which road is their choice. In our view both roads lead to socialist revolution. But Socialist Action's strategic orientation is toward the goal of a united revolutionary party of Black and white workers organized for the purpose of the overthrow of capitalism and for the establishment of a world socialist order. And in the final analysis—whether or not the common struggle of Black and white workers must first pass through a stage of formal separation, Socialist Action is committed to a united revolutionary struggle of the Black liberation movement and the working class for their mutual needs and aspirations. ■

# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

## Does it matter that Ontario's premier is a lesbian?

By JOHN WILSON

The election of Kathleen Wynne as leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, leading to her being sworn in as Canada's first openly lesbian premier, has made a huge splash in the media. But what does it really mean?

It does show that we have come a long, long way in the area of queer rights and acceptance. This accomplishment has nothing to do with Wynne's individual performance. As Gary Kinsman, Laurentian sociology professor, veteran queer activist and socialist says, "That Kathleen Wynne can even be the premier of Ontario is a legacy of our liberation movement." The civil rights gains made by LGBT people are the result of

decades of struggle in the streets and in communities. Interestingly, Wynne herself does not claim in any way to be a spokesperson for queer rights.

Wynne is also, of course, leader of a Bay Street party with "progressive" pretensions that acts against the interests of the great majority, including the vast majority of LGBT people. While currently making cooing noises to Ontario teachers' unions, she has no intention of reversing the "contracts" imposed on teachers by the notorious Bill 115, which trashed collective bargaining rights, including, critically, the right to strike.

She intends to continue the "austerity" agenda of cutting jobs and services in the public sector in the name of



(Left) Premier Kathleen Wynne.

The new premier has promised to re-introduce the moderate sex-education curriculum reform that former premier McGuinty cowardly abandoned as soon as the religious right started becoming hysterical. We'll see how that pans out.

Don't expect any progress from Wynne on the issue of a single public school system. In response to questions on this issue, Wynne declared, "To be distracted by that kind of governance issue—that's something I'm not going to do." So the continued existence of the publicly funded Catholic system, which costs Ontario one to two billion wasted dollars a year, and oppresses queer students, is just a *governance issue*?! Unbelievable. As are the PR attempts to paint the "new" government as somehow more progressive, open, yada, yada, yada, than McGuinty's.

Undoubtedly, part of the objective of this PR frenzy around Wynne's accession is to undermine support for the NDP. Queer activists will recall that the labour-based NDP, despite serious deficiencies, is the only party with anything approaching a consistent record on the issue of queer rights. ■

(Quotes are from Xtra magazine.)

## And then there was one

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The protest by Ontario education workers against clawbacks and anti-labour legislation is collapsing like a house of cards built by feckless bureaucrats.

In spring 2012, a common front of 140,000 teachers and education support workers stood tall together against Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty's two-year wage freeze and his slashing of paid sick leave. Catholic and French school board teachers' leaders were the first to break ranks. They signed concessionary deals in the summer—without conducting a vote of their members. The Legislature passed Bill 115 in ear-

ly September. It set a Dec. 31 deadline. On that date the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement accepted by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association would take effect across the education sector, instantly suspending collective bargaining and the right to strike. Teachers and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE-Ontario) launched a court challenge of Bill 115.

Starting in October, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario urged their members to withdraw from extra-curricular activities (e.g. clubs, sports, field trips, drama and music productions). This tactic

mainly impacted students and parents. Teachers held rallies and picketed Liberal MPP offices. ETFO held rotating regional one-day strikes in December. CUPE caved on Dec. 30. OSSTF promised a province-wide walk out in January, but backed away when the Ontario Labour Relations Board ruled it illegal and threatened heavy fines.

Then, in late February, OSSTF officials decided to "suspend political action." This was a totally one-sided "gesture of good will" toward the new Liberal Leader and Premier Kathleen Wynne. But ETFO, and a large number of OSSTF members continue to boycott extra-curriculars.

The legal challenge, which will take four years, together with the continuing ETFO action, maintain resistance at a low frequency. The initial battle cry is

reduced to a whimper.

From the start, the real options were clear. Either capitulate to the government's austerity agenda, or defy the anti-labour legislation. A variation, which teachers used to win the right to strike in 1973, is to resign en masse. But militant mass action was never in the plans of the top brass. OSSTF members didn't even get to vote on the move to "suspend political action."

As the education common front disintegrated, the emboldened Conservatives under leader Tim Hudak, and a number of media editorialists, began baying for legislation to force teachers to conduct extra-curricular activities.

So you can see it coming. That, plus a permanent ban on strikes in education. And the one way to stop this assault on education workers is just as clear. ■

## Precarious work predominates

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The trend towards insecure jobs with no benefits has grown sharply over the past two decades. A report by McMaster University and the United Way of Toronto (charity) provides fresh evidence. Issued on Feb. 28, the study shows that barely half of working adults in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton, the densely populated arc at the west end of Lake Ontario, have full-time jobs with benefits.

Precarious or insecure work in the region has increased by fifty per cent in 20 years. The phenomenon has implications for economic well-being and job security. Rising tensions at home and at work are often the result.

Precarious work is common in low-income households. Surprising to the researchers is "how much precarious work has crept into middle income households," said McMaster labour and economics professor Wayne Lewchuk.

Low-income workers in unstable jobs are typically employed by temporary agencies that pay minimum wage, with no benefits or security. They can also be found in the fast-food, cleaning, and service sectors, and in manufacturing, where they are often "on call" and uncertain of their work hours or

weekly schedule. Lack of job security often makes these workers reluctant to report or refuse work they consider dangerous, the report notes.

The study surveyed 4000 working adults between the ages of 25 and 65, and conducted in-depth interviews with 100 of them. It is part of a five-year, \$1 million research project on precarious employment in southern Ontario, funded by the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Precarious employment compounds the impact of poverty, Lewchuk said. Non-whites and newcomers who've been in Canada less than 20 years were more likely to be in insecure work, as were those aged 25 to 35 and those over 55. This kind of employment is putting a dignified retirement increasingly out of reach for millions.

Big business took full advantage of the economic boom and bust periods that bracketed the 2008 crash to increase worker insecurity while padding private profits and extending corporate holdings globally. Associated with the term "neo-liberal agenda," this drive has had little to do with competitive necessity, and much more to do with greed and political opportunity. ■

## 'Communists' irked by unions' NDP link

By BARRY WEISLEDER

On the road to merger of the Canadian Auto Workers and the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers that will soon create Canada's largest private sector union, what do you suppose is the chief concern of the Communist Party of Canada (CP)? The threat of a bigger top-down bureaucracy? Less membership control? More concessions bargaining?

Nope. The focus of CP concern appears to be ... wait for it ... *affiliation to the NDP.*

That's the thrust of an article in the CP newspaper *People's Voice* (Nov. 16-30, 2012) titled "NUP: a step forward or just another merger?" Writer Sam Hammond, referring to the vision statement of the New Union Project, warns that "support for the NDP contains within it the relationship to capitalism itself. The historic resistance of the NDP to coalitions and united front movements is one of sectarianism and class propriety."

Sadly, the CP scribe has it upside down. The affiliation of the Canadian Labour Congress and major unions to the NDP expresses working-class antagonism to capitalist rule. The labour link to the NDP was forged in the 1950s and '60s by breaking union subordination to the Liberal Party. The LP, as every communist ought to know, was the main instrument of Canadian big business political rule in the 20th century.

The idea of building "peoples' coalitions" comes from the Stalinist playbook of the 1930s. Long since the CP ceased to be communist or revolutionary, it has zigged and

zagged between ultra-left rhetoric and liberal coalition politics. It sees "democracy," not socialism, on the political agenda. And it sees an independent labour party as a barrier to the CP's twisted ambition to be part of a liberal coalition government—for what?—to protect workers from a "premature" socialist transformation.

To find evidence for this indictment one need not look far. The CP supported the Liberal-NDP-Bloc Quebecois coalition that was thwarted by Harper's proroguing of Parliament in 2009. In addition, while the Stalinists have long opposed the NDP's running a full slate for municipal government, they did endorse the Liberal-NDP regime of Mayor David Miller at Toronto City Hall whose service cuts and tax hikes paved the way for right wing populist Rob Ford.

Finally, in the *PV* editorial in the very same edition, the following words jump right off the page: "The U.S. election shows that the far right can be blocked at the polls, but this is just the first step in the fight for a better world."

In other words, Barack Obama, the American imperial war president who bailed out Wall Street while millions lost their homes and savings, is "the first step in the fight for a better world." Supporting Democrats in the USA, and backing the so-called progressive wing of the Liberal Party in Canada, has long been a specialty of this deformed, ex-Marxist tendency.

So, how *should* workers view the CAW-CEP discussion about political action and the NDP? We should see it as a golden opportunity to extend working-class politics, free of the bosses' parties, while being fiercely critical of the social democratic leadership, and fighting for a socialist agenda. ■

By MARTY GOODMAN

# N.Y. school bus strike ends in defeat

NEW YORK—Some 8800 school bus drivers and helpers (called “matrons”) returned to their jobs on Feb. 16 after losing a bitter month-long strike over the city’s cancellation of job security guarantees, known as Employee Protection Provisions (EPP). The EPP includes seniority-based hiring, training, health care, and benefits.

Now, when private bus companies, many under mafia influence, bid on routes, the jobs and rights of skilled workers will be lost as profit-hungry companies seek to under-bid rivals. The results will be devastating for low-income families.

Some 150,000 pre-kindergarten and grade-school students, one-third of whom were students with special needs, were affected by the strike, which began on Jan. 16. The strikers, organized by the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1181, are mostly non-white and include a number of Hispanic and Haitian immigrants.

On Feb. 15, a face-saving deal, apparently brokered by ATU International President Larry Hanley, was announced in a statement released by five Democratic candidates for the mayoral election in November. Candidates Christine Quinn, Bill Thompson, John Liu, Bill de Blasio, and Sal Albanese asked the ATU to end the strike and pledged to “revisit” the issue if one of them were elected mayor. The pledge avoided embracing the EPP demand by name, while warning the ATU that all decisions will be “fiscally responsible,” that is, maintaining the threat of lowered wages and benefits for workers.

The union vote to end the strike was conducted by phone calls to the Local 1181 Executive Board—a method that avoided any discussion. The membership had voted to strike at a meeting of 1500 members last May. Striking workers had massed at ATU picket lines at nearly 50 locations in the freezing New York winter. The strikers received only \$150 to \$300 a week as strike pay. At press time, at least 100 workers have returned to work only to find that they have been laid off or replaced by scabs.

Evelyn Catalano, 65, a driver for more than a decade, explained to the New York *Daily News* (Jan. 29, 2013) that replacement workers could not do her job. “We take classes and get fingerprinted to do our jobs right. You don’t know who those drivers are. These children are our most precious cargo. I didn’t get this job for the money. The kids love us and we love them and I miss them.”

## Mayor Bloomberg leads the charge

Leading the union-busting assault was billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who summed up the strike’s significance for New York’s rich ruling class: “In the city’s entire history, the special interests [unions] have never had less power than they do today, and the end of the strike reflects the fact that when we say we put children first, we mean it.” Larry Hanley, national ATU president, said, “This is the New York equivalent of [Wisconsin Governor] Scott Walker’s attempts to strip workers in public services of their wages and benefits.”

The strike was provoked in December when Bloomberg—worth \$25 billion and counting—put up for bid about 1/7 of the city’s 7700 bus routes without EPP, a first in 33 years. Bloomberg ignored union appeals to postpone bidding and negotiate. The EPP was originally won in 1979 following a three-month strike.

During the recent ATU strike, 2000 routes were driven by scabs from non-union companies and other companies organized by different ATU locals and Teamsters Local 284. At least two pedestrians were killed by scab drivers during the strike. A mobilized New York labor movement could have stopped scab buses cold and halted the union-busters dead in their tracks. This was a working-class issue that cried out for joint union-parent mobilization, but it was diverted by union bureaucrats tied to the Democratic Party.

From the outset, Bloomberg sought to pit working families against each other—an old bosses’ trick. He accused the ATU of “abandoning” the children, especially special-needs students. The corporate press echoed the lie, but for the most part, it didn’t work. Even conservative Staten Island parents supported striking bus workers over Bloomberg by 55%.

One parent strike-support group, “People to Improve School Transportation (PIST),” and others organized a car caravan Feb. 2 from downtown to Bloomberg’s house on the Upper East Side and on up to the Bronx to a rally of several hundred. Over 50 Teamster bus workers were there from Boston. They carried with them copies of an EPP-type law signed by the mayor of Boston.

Bloomberg’s professed concern for children and education is a fraud. Since 2002, Bloomberg can



(Above) Workers from other unions expressed solidarity by helping on the picket lines, Feb. 17.

hand pick the School Board and has implemented one-man rule; 1800 teachers’ jobs are slated to be cut in 2013 during Bloomberg’s last year as mayor. Like most city unions, the United Federation of Teachers has been without a contract for years. The privatization of education known as “charter schools,” championed by President Obama, is being implemented under Bloomberg at a furious pace. Bloomberg has closed some 100 public schools.

Bloomberg used a 2011 Appeals Court decision to ram through the decimation of the EPP. The ATU hotly contested Bloomberg’s interpretation of the ruling, but he proceeded with his union busting. Another 20 routes go up for bid June 30.

Removing EPP would “save” the city “tens of millions,” said the mayor, a claim the union also contests. When Bloomberg-appointee School Chancellor Dennis Walcott was asked at a City Council hearing why EPP costs the city so much, he had no answer. The ATU says that workers’ salaries, adjusted for inflation, have actually declined 1% in 30 years. Drivers earn an average of \$35,000 a year and matrons \$28,000, both below the city’s median income and far less than New York City’s public bus drivers. Some school-bus drivers’ families must rely on food stamps.

Once the strike started, Bloomberg refused to negotiate with the ATU, calling the strike “illegal” because contracts had been negotiated with the bus companies. On Feb. 8, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) found that the city and the bus companies were both “primary employers” of the striking workers. The arrogant mayor simply ignored the NLRB, demonstrating again the futility of relying on the courts for justice.

PIST and other groups have maintained that the bus companies and the city are in violation of the law. PIST member Johnnie Stevens said, “The security of our children is interconnected with the security of the workers who provide transportation, which is a special education right as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and also of the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN). The WARN Act requires companies with more than a hundred workers to give 60-day notice before closing a plant or enacting mass layoffs.”

The majority of school buses are owned by the Atlantic Express Transit Group, which is the city’s largest transit company and second largest in the country. Greenwich Street Capital Group, a hedge fund, purchased a controlling share of AETG in 1999. Hedge fund companies are capitalism at its most brutal. Their goal is to realize a maximum profit and move on, no matter what the cost in human terms.

## Democratic Party plays an ugly role

The Democrats *directly* helped Bloomberg’s union busting. Although every previous mayor since 1979 had supported EPP, Bloomberg sent a memo to the governor reversing the city’s position. He urged a veto of legislation *already* passed in Albany that protected EPP. Governor Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, accordingly vetoed the bill in September 2011, enabling the mayor to begin bidding on routes without employee protections.

The objective of the Democrats was clearly to end the strike, while posing as “friends of labor” to the city’s large union membership, a huge voting block. An Feb. 1 statement by the City Council, dominated

by Democrats, called for an end to the strike and a “mediated” cooling-off period. In line with national policy, the Democrats did not want to appear too closely identified with labor—just closely enough to obtain labor’s money, its vote, and its ability to get members to ring doorbells for candidates.

On Feb. 22, at a union-backed event on transportation in New York, the five Democratic candidates were completely silent about the just concluded ATU strike, despite their so-called opposition to Bloomberg’s policies.

In addition, no mention was made by any of the candidates about the expired contract of the Transport Workers Union Local 100, the New York subway and bus workers. Local 100 workers have been without a contract or a raise from the state-run Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for one year. The Feb. 22 panelists were silent about contract issues—even though Local 100 was a key organizer of the event and in the room! The MTA is controlled by a fellow Democrat, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who is attempting to shove zero wage contracts down the throats of the TWU and other state unions.

The poisonous role of the Democrats in this episode is proof once again that workers need their own party, a fighting labor party!

## Which way for labor?

ATU President Hanley’s comparison of the recent strike in New York to labor’s defeat in Wisconsin that was noted above is apt in a way that perhaps he did not intend.

In 2011, public workers and their allies in Madison, Wis., responded to the governor’s union busting by mobilizing in the tens of thousands and, at one point, occupying the state Capitol building. The Democratic Party, as defenders of the 1%, squashed the largest militant mobilization of working people seen in decades. Democratic Party bosses directed their loyal labor lieutenants to get out of the street and into the voting booth. The workers lost; their fightback was derailed and demoralized.

In the case of the school-bus drivers, there was only one solidarity rally. It took place on Feb. 16—one month into the strike! A march started in Brooklyn and marched over the Brooklyn Bridge and emptied into an area next to City Hall on a Sunday afternoon peopled mainly by tourists. Rally estimates were 2000 to 5000 protestors, about 80% ATU members. Speakers were mostly Democratic Party politicians and union officers who are tied hand and foot to the Democrats—who mouthed empty threats aimed at Bloomberg.

The ATU, like the public union leaderships in Wisconsin, relied on Democratic Party politicians to defeat billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg, instead of seeking to mobilize New York’s large organized working class. A serious mass mobilization of labor in support of the ATU could have stopped scab buses cold and shut down the city.

Capitalism—the profit system—is in crisis. The onslaught of the boss class will not slow down until living standards are slashed to the bone for everyone. Building mass independent labor action in the workplaces, the streets, and at the ballot box will point the way for a winning fightback for working people. ■

## City College of San Francisco threatened by privatization

By DON HARMON and KAREN SCHIEVE

City College of San Francisco (CCSF), with 85,000 students on seven campuses, is under attack from powerful and monied forces, such as JP Morgan Chase, Bill Gates, Rupert Murdoch, Goldman Sachs, and Lumina Foundation. These corporate giants are in collusion with the layer of secondary bureaucrats who are doing the footwork to destroy public education. Their endgame is a “new and improved” college that will serve the long-term goals of America’s 1%: “Yes, sir. No, sir. How can we serve the 1%, sir?” Their plan has nothing to do with educating students.

In this time of austerity and severe cuts to education (the CCSF budget has been trimmed by more than \$50 million), when America’s corporations are reaping maximum profits and paying minimum taxes, the privately-run and undemocratic accrediting agency—whose actions and process are veiled in secrecy with little or no input from staff, students, or the public in general—has demanded further unnecessary cuts.

These cuts would forever decimate City College and slide it toward privatization. The end result would be exorbitant tuition fees that would exclude most of the present-day students and also result in low-paid, non-union faculty and staff replacing the current excellent teachers and workers.

The accrediting agency, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), under the guise of “fiscal responsibility,” has given CCSF a “show cause” sanction, meaning that the college must satisfy the demands of the ACCJC or face closure. This “show cause”—the most severe sanction possible—is akin to a death penalty looming over the college. It has come out of the blue, with no prior lesser sanctions.

In its 77-year history, City College has never received any sanction of any kind. In 2007, City College was named by *The New York Times* as one of the top 11 community colleges in the nation. CCSF was among those “frequently named as models” and “successful in preparing students to transfer” to a four-year university, according to a panel of nationally prominent community college researchers.

According to the Save CCSF Coalition, “a study of actions taken between 2003 and 2008 found that the five regions of the U.S. had sanction rates ranging between zero and six percent of community colleges. In contrast, the ACCJC imposed sanctions on 37% of community colleges in California, 41 of California’s 110 community colleges. Remarkably, the ACCJC generated 89% of all sanctions issued nationwide during this period. From June 2011 to June 2012, the ACCJC issued 64% of the 75 sanctions issued nationwide. At present, 25% of California’s community colleges are on sanction.”

CCSF is an institution of working-class students who are overwhelmingly people of color—African American, Latino, Asian. These 85,000 are a microcosm of San Francisco and its working class, from those neighborhoods that the tourists never visit. CCSF is much loved and respected by its students, staff, and the community at large.

CCSF students who go on to four-year universities have a higher graduation rate than those students who enter four-year colleges right out of high school. And these authors have heard many students exclaim the virtues of this institution: “City College turned my life around. This place gave me a second chance.”

The faculty at CCSF is unionized—American Federation of Teachers Local 2121—and very supportive of the democratic procedures that have been hard fought and hard won, such as the decades-long system in which department chairs teach less and earn stipends to run their departments, thus giving the teachers a greater voice in the day-to-day operations.



**SAVE CITY COLLEGE!  
RALLY AT S.F. CITY HALL  
THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 4 PM**

Other colleges use deans who are part of the administration, and therefore non-union. The accrediting agency—no surprise here—recommends that this democracy be dismantled, that more administrators be hired to do the work that union department chairs are presently doing.

To hear the corporate media know-it-alls, one might think that teachers are overpaid and underworked. You be the judge: A beginning full-time instructor makes less than \$50,000 per year, hardly a princely sum in the expensive Bay Area. But the accrediting agency recommends a temporary pay cut of nearly 9% and permanent pay cuts of 5% to be established for the next school year.

Does the community support City College? Last November San Francisco voters approved Prop A with a 73% “yes” vote, allocating \$16 million yearly to help maintain the college, money to be spent in the classroom, on student services, and staff. But the interim chancellor, who is paid the queenly sum of \$1000 per day, has ruled that Prop A funds cannot be used as they were intended, another testament to the premeditated injustice being perpetrated. This is another example of the immoral and illegal operations at play. Also, California voters approved Prop 30, which allocates close to \$400 million for the state’s junior colleges.

A student delegation met with the interim chancellor, Dr. Scott-Skillman, in late February to present their demands:

1) Call on the Board of Trustees to reverse the cuts to classes, services, staff, and faculty. Stop downsizing the mission of CCSF and promote equity.

2) Organize town hall forums at all campuses so that students can have their voices heard.

3) Make a public statement calling for Prop A funds to be used for education as voters intended. Call on City Hall to give CCSF a bridge loan until Prop A and Prop 30 funds become available.

4) Speak out against CCSF being put on “show cause” without prior sanction. Call on the Department of Education to take action to stop the ACCJC’s misuse of the accreditation process.

But the chancellor rejected all of these demands. Mass meetings of up to 350 people have been organized by the Save CCSF Coalition. Not only students, faculty, and staff but also an outpouring of people from the community have been in attendance. In addition, numerous campus rallies have been held since October 2012. On March 14, at 4 p.m., the coalition is planning a mass rally at San Francisco City Hall to insist that the mayor and Board of Supervisors release Prop A funds immediately.

According to Reuters reporter Stephanie Simon, investment in for-profit education has already jumped from \$13 million in 2005 to \$389 million in 2011. Why are corporations spending millions of dollars on education?

The U.S. capitalist class is confronted with dwindling profits due to the crisis of overproduction. They have largely given up on producing goods. Instead, their profits have come from financialization of capital, gambling and risk-taking with the money that belongs to working-class people. According to billionaire media mogul Rupert Murdoch, private investment in a bare-bones, cut-down U.S. education industry is a risk worth taking—a new \$500 billion opportunity for investors.

The effort to save City College of San Francisco will take more than a few demonstrations. We must build a massive and united movement of students, parents, labor, and the community at large—determined to do what it takes to protect our right to quality public education at the junior college level. No cuts! No to privatization! All out to City Hall on March 14! ■



Shane Menez / El Tecolote