

## U.S., European authorities clamp down on refugees



Laszlo Balogh / Reuters

By LISA LUINENBURG

A huge number of refugees have been flowing across European borders in the last year, and this great migration crisis has had reverberations in the United States as well, where over 100,000 migrants fleeing violence in Central America arrived in 2015.

As of Dec. 21, more than a million refugees have crossed into Europe; three to four times the number who arrived in Europe during 2014. They come via Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, Malta, and Cyprus, the vast majority making their desperate journey over sea in rubber dinghies or other flimsy boats.

Conditions along the journey are extremely dangerous. In April, a boat carrying over 800 migrants capsized in the sea off of Libya. In late December, Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian child, drowned in Turkey, sparking a global outcry. In all, over 3695 people have died this year while trying to cross into Europe.

So where is this flood of desperate humanity coming from? What would cause them to leave their families and their lives behind to risk everything on such a dangerous journey?

The top 10 countries of origin for the refugees arriving in Europe today are: Syria, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iraq, Albania, Pakistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Serbia, and Ukraine. They are fleeing war, poverty, and political strife in their countries of origin—conflicts in large part fueled by the greedy reach of capitalism and imperialism.

The number of Syrian refugees fleeing their war-torn country has surged in 2015, fueling the largest wave of refugees to hit Europe since World War II. "I have no choice. Its either here or the hell of there," said Mohammed, a resident of a refugee camp in a recent interview with the London *Independent*. "I couldn't stay in Syria."

So, where are the refugees going once they arrive in Europe? So far, Germany has received the highest amount of asylum applications—315,000 by October 2015—but their records show that over 1 million people have arrived so far. Hungary is in second place for asylum applications, and Sweden has taken in more refugees per capita than any other European nation. But this is meeting just a small portion of the growing need. So far, only 184,665 asylum applica-

(Above) Macedonian cops try to stop migrants from entering the country from Greece.

tions out of a total of 570,000 have been approved in Europe.

Moreover, all this is starting to change. As the flood of migrants shows no sign of slowing down, European leaders are beginning to crack down on refugees (especially those they deem "illegal"), putting yearly caps in place and increasing border security. EU ministers voted in September 2015 to relocate 120,000 refugees EU wide, which applies for now to 66,000 refugees in Italy and Greece.

Sweden is now deploying more border patrols and slashing benefits for refugees. Dozens of migrants are bedding down in a tent camp in frigid temperatures, while many others are being turned back at the train station as they arrive. Hungary has lined its borders with razor wire, while Macedonia has implemented strict controls to keep out migrants from countries other than Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria—a measure

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# Boston climate march built solidarity in the movement



By CHRISTINE MARIE

A Dec. 12 rally and march for Jobs, Justice, Climate in Boston constituted the first coordinated effort by New England 350.org chapters to build concrete relationships with economic justice and social justice organizations.

New England 350 developed a partnership with several key Boston-based unions and immigrant rights organizations, gathered the endorsements of more than 140 organizations, and put more than 2000 people in the street to say “no” to the COPS 21 agreement.

In this effort, the activists were inspired by the Sept. 26 televised “launch” of the 350.org strategic framework called the “Road Through Paris,” in which Naomi Klein and others motivated seeing the climate crisis as the opportunity to join with everyone to build a new sustainable economy that was also equitable and just.

The union endorsements included those of the Mas-

sachusetts Nurses Association, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Service Employees Union Locals 508 and 1199, and the Vermont AFL-CIO, along with other important multi-union economic justice coalitions.

While the mobilization size was relatively modest in light of the significant endorsements, it was the largest climate demonstration that the network has organized so far. Perhaps more importantly, the speeches were dramatic in what they suggested about the kind of movement and alliances that can and must be built.

The first of two rallies opened with a talk by Derek Pelotte, a young 350 activist and teacher from the working-class and highly immigrant town of Lowell, Mass. Pelotte moved the crowd by explaining that to win on the climate, we must “build the future across movement lines. We will do this together, or not at all.”

Alluding to Cornell West, who said that movement building is really “loving publicly,” Pelotte listed the political tasks facing those who want to create inclu-

sive and powerful coalitions to save the planet.

“Loving publicly,” he said, “means acting as witnesses in testimony against police brutality, of which poor and minority communities are disproportionately subject...”

“Loving publicly means standing with our disgracefully underpaid service workers, adjunct professors, construction workers, home-care workers, machinists, truck drivers, delivery personnel, and airport and dock workers, and walking arm in arm to fight for their right to \$15 an hour and the right to unionize. Loving publicly looks like standing with our DREAMer allies and declaring that there are no illegal people; there is only racist exploitation of the most vulnerable among us.

Solidarity, Pelotte concluded, is a revolution in its own right.

The material basis of this solidarity was brought dramatically home by Black Lives Matter activist Jean Charle, who spoke when the march reached the State Street bank: “It’s not a secret that State Street financially supports pipeline projects. It’s not a secret that State Street supports private prisons.”

This theme of solidarity as the key to victory was brought home over and over again as the crowd responded throughout the day to the presentations of Karen Higgins, the national co-president of National Nurses United; John Robbins, executive director of the Massachusetts Chapter of the Council of American Islamic Relations; Sherri Mitchell of the Penobscot Nation; Adrian Ventura, director of a New Bedford, Mass., workers’ center: John Harry of the Connecticut State Council of Machinists; and many others.

Harry concluded the day by explaining why climate change is a labor issue. “Workers are on the front lines of the consequences of climate change—not just here but around the world,” he said. “We are also on the front of the solutions—ready to manufacture new technologies, build energy efficient infrastructure, and maintain a decentralized power grid.”

We must take the road, Harry said, to a new world that is “cleaner, more democratic, and economically equitable.” ■

## Socialist Action: Where we stand

Socialist Action is a national organization of activists committed to the emancipation of workers and the oppressed. We strive to revitalize the antiwar, environmental, labor, anti-racist, feminist, student, and other social movements with a mass-action perspective. In the process we hope to bring activists together from different backgrounds into a revolutionary workers’ party that can successfully challenge the wealthy elite—whose profit-driven system is driving down living standards and threatens all life on this planet.

Our ultimate goal is a truly democratic, environmentally sustainable, and egalitarian society organized to satisfy human needs rather than corporate greed. We invite you to join us in the struggle to make the world a better place!

We are active partisans of the working class and believe in the need for independent working-class politics—not alliances with the bosses’ parties. That is why we call for workers in the U.S. to break from the Democratic and Republican parties to build a Labor Party based on the trade unions.

We support the struggles of those who are specially oppressed under capitalism—women,

queers, national minorities, etc. We support the right of self-determination for oppressed nationalities, including Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans. We are internationalists, and hold that workers of one country have more in common with workers of another than with their own nation’s capitalist class. We seek to link struggles across national boundaries, and to build an international revolutionary movement that will facilitate the sharing of experiences and political lessons. That is why we maintain fraternal relations with the Fourth International

Recognizing the divisions that exist on the left and within the workers’ movement, we seek to form united front type organizations around specific issues where various groups have agreement. In this way we seek to maximize our impact and demonstrate the power and effectiveness of mass action.

Socialist Action believes that the capitalist state and its institutions are instruments of the ruling class, and that therefore they cannot be used as tools of the working class but have to be smashed. That is why we fight for revolution, instead of seeking to merely reform or work within the system. When we fight for specific reforms, we do so with the understanding that in the final analysis real social change can only come about with the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of a workers’ government, and the fight for socialism.

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# Indonesia's 1965 massacre provides lessons for Venezuela today

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The 50th anniversary of one of the biggest political massacres of the 20th century passed in the West almost without notice. In 1965, a military coup in Indonesia, backed by the United States, unleashed a slaughter that consumed over one million lives. The aim of the insurgent generals was annihilation of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI).

Two articles\* in the December 2015 edition of the New York-based *Monthly Review* magazine remind us of that gargantuan tragedy. The PKI was then the largest CP in the world. Like its sister Stalinist parties globally, it rejected revolution.

The PKI adhered strictly, one could say dogmatically, to the parliamentary path to socialism. It embraced Joseph Stalin's infamous two-stage theory. Bourgeois democracy and sovereignty, the so-called first stage, became its entire agenda. That meant slavish support for liberal nationalist Sukarno, whose soaring political rhetoric appealed to a radical working-class base.

Sukarno was a firebrand left nationalist. He was the architect of the anti-colonial Non-Aligned Movement founded in Bandung in 1956. But he was no Marxist. Transnational corporations and imperialist governments had no reason to fear fundamental system change at the hands of Sukarno, or the PKI. Nonetheless, big business wanted them gone—if only to reduce organized resistance to the exploitation of rural and urban workers in the ports, and on the rubber and tin estates.

For 50 years American politicians and conservative academics denied Washington's complicity with the massacre of masses of communist militants, their families and innocent bystanders.

By endorsing the manufactured threat of a left-wing military coup (i.e., the inept Sept. 30 Movement), and covertly supplying arms to rightist General Nasution, U.S. Ambassador Marshall Green and Secretary of State Dean Rusk fueled the annihilation of the peaceful PKI. The American Embassy, in an effort to make sure the bloody job was completed, turned over lists identifying thousands of PKI leaders and activists to Indonesian army intermediaries. *Time* magazine in 1966 called it "the West's best news for years in Asia."

The sadistic political scheme was much like what Washington and Henry Kissinger did for General Augusto Pinochet in 1973 in Chile. Kissinger was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1973, ostensibly for his part in winding down the lost U.S. war in Vietnam.

Those were heinous acts, high crimes against humanity, a political holocaust. But the tragedy is that a huge and powerful workers' party in Indonesia put its faith in a patently false strategy for power—reli-



(Above) Caracas protest against recent removal of portraits of Hugo Chavez and Simon Bolivar from the National Assembly building.

ance on the capitalist state. The PKI presumed that Capital would abide by democratic constitutionality and the due process of law. Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government made the same presumption.

Is this tragedy being repeated now in Venezuela? Of course, no two political situations are the same. Jakarta and Caracas are separated by a great big ocean and a half-century of class struggle. Still, comparisons can be instructive. In fact, they are a vital way to learn from history.

Venezuela, for nearly 18 years, has been at the forefront of a wave of left populism across Latin America. It led in re-distributing wealth and raising living standards of the poor and working people. Oil revenues funded free health care, free university education, and cheap groceries sold at government supermarkets.

But when Capital went on strike, hoarded food, and other vital commodities, and spurred hyper-inflation and corruption, the governing socialists led by Hugo Chavez, who died on March 5, 2013, and his successor Nicolas Maduro, did not mobilize the working class to seize the banks, big industry, and giant land estates in order to inaugurate a planned economy under workers' control.

The Chavistas did not follow the path blazed by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in the Cuban Revolution over 50 years ago. The Venezuelan government played by the rules of the system. But its bourgeois opposition wrecked havoc in the economy and poi-

soned public confidence.

Now, as a result of the legislative election on Dec. 6, right-wing parties control the national assembly, and wage war on the executive branch. Impeachment proceedings and constitutional referenda are around the corner, while life for the majority continues to deteriorate.

To paraphrase Che, this is not a revolution, but a caricature of one. If the revolutionary potential of the working class has not yet been squandered in Venezuela, it must now be unleashed. If the right wing is allowed to consolidate its victory, and reverse the fragile gains of Chavismo, even if it does not lead to a bloodbath on the scale of Indonesia, the return to brutal neoliberal policy will nonetheless be the fruit of deadly illusions in the parliamentary path to socialism.

From Jakarta to Caracas, the only solution is socialist revolution. ■

\*"No Reconciliation without Truth: An Interview with Tan Swie Ling on the 1965 Mass Killings in Indonesia," by Intan Suwandi, and "The United States and the 1965-1966 Mass Murders in Indonesia" by Bradley Simpson. Both articles are in the December 2015 edition of *Monthly Review*, Vol. 67, No. 7.

By BILL ONASCH

- 2000 UAW Kohler plumbing fixture workers in Sheboygan County, Wis., returned to work the week before Christmas after a 32-day strike. It was marked by strong solidarity among unions and in the community (see photo at right).

Although less than 20 percent of the membership would have benefited, the biggest issue was the union's push to eliminate a divisive two-tier wage structure that had been reluctantly agreed to five years ago when new construction had bottomed out. The union failed to win that objective but did substantially narrow the gap.

Tier B gets a hefty \$4.70 an hour in raises over four years. Most Tier A workers will get \$2 raises. There were improvements in pensions and relatively little "cost sharing" for health benefits. At a hastily called meeting, 1847 workers ratified the agreement with a 91 percent "yes" vote. Though Wisconsin is an open-shop "right-to-work" state, only 22 scabs crossed the line.

- Also shortly before the holidays, the United Steelworkers announced a tentative agreement for 18,000 workers at US Steel—though no details have been revealed at our deadline. Some 13,000 USW members at Arcelor Mittal contin-

## LABOR BRIEFING

ue to work under conditions of a contract that expired in June while negotiating for a new agreement.

In the other major national steel negotiations, Allegheny Technologies Inc. has locked out 2200 workers in six states as they go for draconian takebacks. These include pension cutbacks for present workers and freezing new hires out of the pension plan.

Health insurance would go from zero out of pocket expense to a \$215 a month premium and a \$400 annual deductible. And ATI demanded the right to fill vacancies through attrition with outside contractors that would be excluded from the bargaining unit.

The company has brought in professional strikebreakers to partially run their specialty metals production, along with management employees. On Dec. 18, the Pittsburgh regional office of the National Labor Relations Board upheld union Unfair Labor Practice charges of



bad faith bargaining. Unless overturned on appeal, this means scabs could not permanently replace locked-out workers. It also entitles workers to eligibility for unemployment benefits in all six states.

- After going 10 years without a raise, adjunct faculty at Hamline University in St. Paul voted in June 2014 to be represented by Service Employees International Union Local 284. Nearly 18 months later, they have a tentative agreement for a first contract. Highlights reported on

the *Workday Minnesota* website include raises for all, with the majority getting a bump of 15 percent for the spring semester. Base pay will increase 20 percent in the 2017-18 fiscal year. There's additional compensation for longevity and curriculum development.

- Also from *Workday Minnesota*, dated Dec. 21: "Hundreds of janitors and security officers who clean and protect buildings throughout the Twin Cities and their supporters marched through Minneapolis skyways Monday to ramp up their campaign for a fair contract that begins to close racial and economic disparities." The workers are represented by SEIU Local 26.

- At our deadline, AFSCME clerical workers at the University of Minnesota were voting on a tentative agreement retroactive to June 2015 that would provide two annual general wage increases of 1.5 percent, no changes in health insurance, six weeks of paid leave for birth mothers, and a \$15 minimum wage.

- Registration is now open for the biennial Labor Notes Conference being held in Chicago, April 1-3. The last conference in 2014 attracted over 2000 labor activists from around the country—and the world. Information is available at labor-notes.org/conference. ■



## The Black Radical Tradition

(Left) Activist and scholar Angela Davis appears before a photo of Mumia Abu-Jamal as she listens to a phone message from Mumia to the Philadelphia conference on THE BLACK RADICAL TRADITION.

The Jan. 7-10 event, held at Temple University, drew over 1500 people, according to Tony Monteiro, one of the key organizers. The conference's Call to Action decried a government that represses immigrants and Muslims while unleashing "a reign of racist police terror against people of color."

The goals of the conference were broad, said Monteiro: "One, to discuss the moment that we're living through ... in terms of the integrity and the safety of Black lives. And to go beyond, to the whole question of social and economic justice for poor people and for working people."

The Thursday, Jan. 7, session, with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, was entitled "The Black Prophetic Voice in a Morally Broken World." Friday evening's panel discussed "The Moral Bankruptcy of Capitalism: The Black Radical Tradition as Socialist Alternative." Cornell West was the featured speaker.

Saturday began with a panel on "War, Peace, and Global Justice: Resistance to the U.S. Empire," with Glen Ford, Vijay Prashad, Johanna Fernandez, and Steven Salaita. Speakers at the Jan. 9 evening panel on prisons and political prisoners included Angela Davis, Charlene Carruthers, and Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Mumia reviewed the history of U.S. disruption efforts against the Black liberation movement. "Today," he said, it's perfectly acceptable to large segments of the American populace to beat someone to death ... particularly if that person is Black." In these times, he observed, police are equipped with weapons of war, stemming especially from fake wars on terrorism; murder has been legalized.

Mumia said we should be encouraged by the formation of Black Lives Matter. Speaking to the younger generation, he enthused: "It's movement time again! We welcome you—right on time!"

In riveting testimony, Mumia's doctor, Dr. Joseph Harris, fully described how over the past two years these new antiviral drugs (marketed as Salvadi and Harvoni) have "revolutionized" the treatment of Hepatitis-C (HCV) with a 90-95 percent cure rate. Immediate treatment for all those with active Hepatitis-C is now the recommended standard of care by the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD) and the Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA) and is endorsed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

The World Health Organization added these new medications to its essential medicines list. In curing HCV, the "extra-hepatic" secondary symptoms including fatigue, itchy rashes, arthritis and muscle pain will

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## Mumia's fight for medical treatment

By RACHEL WOLKENSTEIN

Below are excerpts from a report by attorney Rachel Wolkenstein on the fight of Mumia Abu-Jamal to obtain necessary medical treatment. Mumia, a noted political commentator and innocent political prisoner, was convicted in 1982 of killing a Philadelphia police officer. He received the death penalty, a sentence that was later reduced to life imprisonment without parole.

A remarkable and legally historic evidentiary hearing in *Mumia Abu-Jamal v. Kerestes* took place over three days in late December 2015 in the U.S. federal district court in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

The amended lawsuit filed Aug. 3, 2015, by attorneys Bret Grote of the Abolitionist Law Project and Robert Boyle is an action for damages, injunctive relief and a declaration of the unconstitutional denial of medical treatment to Mumia Abu-Jamal.

The immediate question is whether Judge Robert Mariani will grant Mumia a preliminary injunction and rule

that the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) has been deliberately indifferent to Mumia Abu-Jamal's medical condition in violation of the Eighth Amendment's proscription against cruel and unusual punishment and order the DOC to immediately treat Mumia's active Hepatitis-C with the new antiviral medications.

The legal brief filed Aug. 17, 2015, in support of the Motion for Preliminary Injunction succinctly summarizes Mumia's case: "Mumia Abu-Jamal is suffering severe and chronic symptoms from untreated, active Hepatitis-C. In the past several months he has experienced diabetic shock, a painful and pruritic [extremely itchy] rash affecting his entire body, edema, skin lesions, anemia, and likely fibrosis of the liver.

"Scientific advances in the treatment of Hepatitis-C have established a new standard of care that could cure Abu-Jamal of his Hepatitis-C and alleviate the painful symptoms within 8-12 weeks without significant side effects through daily administration of a single pill. DOC defendants, however, are refusing to provide Abu-Jamal with this medically necessary, life-saving treatment."

## ...Refugees

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that has left thousands stranded in Greece.

Although Germany and Sweden have the most generous policies, they are currently granting refugees no more than a temporary stay of one to three years, while implementing ID checks on trains and tighter regulations for bringing family members. Authorities say the new regulations are necessary for security and to stem a flow of arrivals that was "unsustainable." Sound familiar? Similar proposals and policies have been either proposed or put in place to "stem the flow" of illegal immigration from Mexico and Central America to the United States in recent decades.

In the meantime, conditions in refugee camps are often appalling. In Grande-Synthe, a refugee camp that is home to over 2500 occupants, there are only two drinking water stations and one chemical toilet per 100 occupants. This has led to a sanitation crisis that has caused dozens of small children to become ill. Occupants live in thin tents surrounded by mud, in areas that regularly flood.

"Is there any hope the UK will take us? I just want to tell my children there is hope for them," said Gona Ahmed, a Kurdish woman from Iraq who is living

alone in the Grande-Synthe camp with her four children, in a recent interview with the *Independent*. Her husband was wounded fighting when ISIS invaded their village.

And racism is well and alive in the receiving countries as well. In recent French regional elections, the far-right, anti-immigrant Front National got 43% of the vote in Grande-Synthe.

### U.S. to deport immigrants

At the same time, the immigration crisis continues in the United States as well, where authorities have outlined plans to deport numbers of recently arrived Central American families starting this month. According to the *Washington Post*, the raids began on New Year's weekend, when ICE apprehended 121 adults and children in a series of raids that took place in Georgia, Texas, and North Carolina. This mass deportation could affect over 100,000 families who fled violence in their home countries but were denied asylum in the U.S.

In a recent interview with National Public Radio, Gillian Christensen, press secretary to Immigration Control and Enforcement, said that ICE has prioritized deportations to people who "pose a threat to national security, public safety and border security." U.S. Customs and Border Protection apprehended more than 134,000 migrants from Central America in FY 2015, as the demograph-

ics of the migrants arriving are changing.

And yet these policies are nothing new. Following World War II, the United States deported over a million Mexican migrants who were no longer needed as field hands in the Bracero Program when farming techniques became more mechanized.

This illustrates the way that the U.S. government has continued to use fear of imprisonment and mass deportation as a way to control the most oppressed section of the working class (undocumented immigrants) and prevent them from rising up to defend their rights as workers and as human beings. As long as the immigrant population is kept afraid and at odds with the majority of the working class, it is easy to force them to work under the table for substandard wages and in terrible working conditions.

And it seems as if Europe is following suit in the face of the ongoing refugee crisis. Capitalism creates a paradox by encouraging the free flow of money and goods across international borders, while at the same time heavily restricting the flow of people. As borders become increasingly closed, it will only force more people to cross illegally and at more dangerous locations. This same phenomena occurred in the United States, when a longer wall and an increasing Border Patrol presence along

the U.S.-Mexico border forced more migrants to cross through the desert, leading to more deaths.

But who will take responsibility for these people as the flood of refugees continues? Who will take them in? As countries close their borders and migrants are pushed from one place to the next, it is important to note that the refugee crisis, whether in Europe or in the Americas, is not about to go away. More people, not less, will continue to flee their countries as the climate crisis creates increasing environmental disasters around the world and the long reach of imperialism and capitalism continue to create unending poverty, war, and political unrest around the globe.

It is here that we must recognize the potential of mass movements to demand change. The immigrant rights movement in the United States has successfully risen up against threats of deportations and abuses of workers in the past, and such a movement has the potential to do so in other parts of the globe as well.

We would all do well to become involved in these grassroots movements and to stand in solidarity with our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters as they struggle for their basic needs, against racism and exploitation, and for human dignity and respect. Any victory for the immigrant rights movement is a victory against capitalism! ■

# U.S. imperialism's Syria strategy & the right of oppressed nations to self-determination

By JEFF MACKLER

U.S. Major General Michael Nagata was unceremoniously removed some two months ago after his \$500 million Syrian assignment to train by the end of the year a projected 5400 Syrian infantrymen to supposedly fight ISIS (Islamic State of Syria and Iraq) “languished in complications,” according to *U.S. News and World Report*. This project “ultimately yielded a force of fewer than 60, most of whom were immediately captured or voluntarily surrendered their U.S.-provided military equipment to extremist groups.”

Nagata's program, aimed at training 15,000 such fighters over the next three years, was similarly abandoned.

The Oct. 9 *New York Times* article entitled, “Obama Administration Ends Effort to Train Syrians to Combat ISIS,” states, “Obama's reversal of policy underscored a harsh reality: tens of billions of dollars spent in recent years to train security forces across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia have rarely succeeded in transforming local fighters into effective, long-term armies.”

Today, after four and half years of U.S. “training of security forces,” supposedly to defeat ISIS, some two-thirds of Syria, mostly thinly-populated areas, is under the control of one or another jihadist group—either the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front, the Islamic State (ISIS) itself, or other Islamist groups. Virtually all are directly, indirectly or covertly armed and financed by U.S. imperialism, its NATO allies, the Saudi government (and “private” Saudi billionaires), Qatar, the United Arab Emirates or other Gulf State monarchies.

In place of this failed program the Obama administration recently announced a “new program” where, “for the first time the Pentagon is providing lethal aid directly to Syrian rebels, though the C.I.A. has for some time been covertly training and arming groups fighting Mr. Assad” [emphasis added].

## Disappearance of “moderate rebels”

U.S. officials have also been compelled to admit, according to the British-based *Independent* journalist Robert Fisk, that Syria's so-called “moderate” anti-Assad forces do not exist. “American officials,” Fisk writes, “... claim that the Syrian Army does not fight ISIS. If true, who on earth killed the 56,000 Syrian [Army] soldiers—the statistic an official secret, but nonetheless true—who have so far died in the Syrian war? The preposterous Free Syrian Army (FSA)?”

Fisk continues: “This rubbish has reached its crescendo in the on-again off-again saga of the Syrian ‘moderates’ who were originally military defectors to the FSA, which America and European countries regarded as a possible pro-Western force to be used against the Syrian government army. But the FSA fell to pieces, corrupted, and the ‘moderates’ defected all over again, this time to the Islamist Nusra Front or to ISIS, selling their American-supplied weapons to the highest bidder or merely retiring quietly.”

Fisk, cites a recent public meeting where “[General] David Petraeus, former No 2 in Baghdad—announced recently that the [Syrian] ‘moderates’ had collapsed long ago.”

“But within hours of Russia's air assaults,” says Fisk, “... the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *CNN*, the poor old *BBC* and just about every



newspaper in the Western world resurrected these ghosts and told us that the Russkies were bombing the brave ‘moderates’ fighting Assad's army in Syria—the very ‘moderates’ who, according to the same storyline from the very same sources a few weeks earlier, no longer existed.”

## Background to the Syrian war

Four and half years ago, in 2011, during the various uprisings that constituted the Arab Spring, which began with mass popular rebellions that toppled the U.S.-backed Tunisian dictatorship of President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali and then the U.S.-backed 30-year Egyptian dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak, the U.S. government embarked on its own “regime change” efforts in Libya and Syria.

We have carefully documented in the pages of this newspaper the horrors attendant to these U.S. imperialist interventions in the Middle East and beyond, beginning with the still ongoing U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the latter now the longest war in U.S. history. Without exception, all have been the product of a U.S. imperialist system in its deepest crisis in the modern era with no resolution in sight other than at the expense of the world's oppressed peoples and nations and the working class masses in the U.S. itself.

It is in the above context of virtually endless U.S. wars and interventions that have taken the lives of literally millions in the Middle East that any serious assessment of the present situation in Syria can best be understood.

With U.S. imperialism's assisted rollback of the Arab Spring revolutionary tide in Egypt and with the Gadhafi “regime change” in Libya via a U.S./NATO “humanitarian war” that slaughtered thousands under its belt, the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad was placed dead center in the U.S. imperial gun sights.

When Assad ordered his army to fire on a series of peaceful mass mobilizations in 2011 aimed at challenging his government's imposition of severe neoliberal austerity measures that especially offended Syria's poor peasantry and layers of the middle class as well as leading bourgeois opposition figures, a dynamic was set in motion for yet another U.S. intervention—the sixth such

war initiated, supported, or continued under the auspices of the Obama administration.

As in Libya, the U.S. moved to establish a Syrian government-in-exile while arming and financing the short-lived and largely exile-based “Free Syrian Army” headed by a handful of defecting Syrian Army officers. In conjunction with the deep popular outrage at Assad's repression and austerity measures, top U.S. planners expected a quick rout of Assad's armed forces and the establishment of a new regime to the liking of both U.S. imperialism and its anticipated bourgeois allies inside Syria. The ever-present threat of yet another U.S. intervention to back such a “regime change” scenario was also an important factor in imperialist expectations that Assad would be forced to exit post-haste.

The absence of any significant organized socialist forces on the ground to pose a coherent working class-based strategy for the Syrian masses to defend and advance their own interests as opposed to Assad's or those of a would-be U.S.-sponsored and imposed capitalist order weighed heavily against any positive outcome for the Syria's working masses. Given the historic failure of past bourgeois nationalist and Stalinist parties to effectively challenge imperialist prerogatives in Syria and far beyond, history has exacted a terrible toll on Syria's initially hopeful and promising Arab Spring.

But in the absence of anything resembling a revolutionary leadership, the democratic and popular thrust of the anti-Assad mobilizations rapidly dissipated. This tragic void was inevitably filled by an assortment of reactionary, mostly religious-fundamentalist, forces backed by U.S. imperialism and/or its reactionary regional allies, especially in Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

## ISIS's main pillars of support in Syria

The U.S.-allied Saudis and the Turks today account for the lion's share of ISIS's finances and weapons—undoubtedly with the full knowledge of the U.S. government. The reactionary Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a U.S. NATO ally, still controls important portions of its southern border with Syria and utilizes these as central cor-

ridors for the entrance of thousands of international ISIS fighters to Syria to depose the Assad government. In the same manner over 1000 trucks from ISIS-controlled oil fields in northern Syria serve as the main conduit for ISIS-smuggled oil into Turkey. In those Turkish-Syrian border areas under the control of the oppressed Kurdish people the flow of ISIS fighters has been significantly thwarted.

An Oct. 10 *New York Times* editorial provides a glimpse of how ISIS operates. In the article, entitled, “Why Is Money Still Flowing to ISIS?,” *The Times* estimates ISIS revenues from the sale of oil at \$40 million monthly. “The Islamic State is also looting banks; demanding ransom from kidnap victims; engaging in human trafficking; selling off plundered antiquities; and leaning on private donors, mainly in Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia” (emphasis added). That these “private donors” include Saudi billionaires and members of the ruling Saudi government is not a fact that *Times* reporters bother to mention, although *The Times* does estimate ISIS annual revenues at \$1 billion.

While the United Nations formally maintains lists of scores of people and organizations designated as financial supporters of terrorist groups, including the Islamic State, U.S. officials have noted that “enforcement has been inconsistent in some cases.” More to the point, the Dec. 4 *New York Times* notes, “There is already extensive evidence of transfers from wealthy donors in the Persian Gulf in particular, but few concrete penalties.”

In the same article, David Andrew Weinberg, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a Washington advocacy group, states, “There is still so much reticence to actually engage in that naming and shaming [of groups that fund terrorists] that this [new UN resolution] has limited impact.”

Similarly, a UN resolution that bans any nation from assisting in the smuggling of ISIS-controlled oil is ignored with impunity. Thus, the evidence that key U.S. allies are active accomplices in funding or otherwise supporting ISIS and/or organizing troops to directly

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# Grassroots environmental struggles in China



By RENE LAU

Just in the last month there have been two cases of environmental protests occurring in China. Around one thousand people protested on the streets of Yangjiang city, in Guangdong province, against the construction of an incinerator. And ten thousand people protested against a chemical factory in Shangrao city, Jianxi province. The protesters in both cases battled with the police. As a result, many people were injured or arrested.

People hate incinerators, Paraxylene (PX) plants (PX is a chemical used in manufacturing plastic bottles and polyester clothing), nuclear power plants and chemical plants. Their hatred is so strong that they are not afraid to fight the police. Unlike labour strikes in China, environmental protests always call people out to demonstrate in the streets. In China, freedom of assembly is not assured and being arrested is very common for protesters. So why are so many people still willing to take the risk and participate in these demonstrations?

## Environmental damage behind economic growth

Since former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping proposed the “reform and opening up” policy in 1978, the Chinese economy has experienced rapid growth. Until 2014, the average annual GDP growth was 9.7%. This means that the Chinese economy doubled every seven years. This growth is even greater than Deng’s plan, which aimed for doubling in 20 years (about 7.2% per year). Under the rapid economic development, the traditional image of China, with a beautiful natural environment of rivers and mountains, has been badly altered by pollution. The environment of China has been sacrificed for the sake of growth.

## Beijing’s toxic haze

Carbon dioxide emissions increase when industrial output increases. In 2007 China overtook the United States as the world’s largest carbon emitter. At the same time, air pollution is serious. In 2006, 37.6% of China’s 559 major cities failed to meet national air quality standards. In February this year, Chai Jing, formerly a reporter for China Central Television (CCTV), the main state broadcaster, released a self-financed documentary called “Under the Dome”. It focuses on the toxic haze in Beijing. This documentary sparked widespread concerns. Chai represents the new generation of the middle-class who care about their lives and health. However, this documentary was quickly “harmonized” by the Chinese government (“harmoni-

## In capitalist China, the traditional image of rivers and mountains has been sacrificed for the sake of growth.

nized” is a word created by Chinese “netizens” to describe being censored by the government).

## Water is unusable

In addition to air pollution, water pollution is another serious problem. In China, at least 320 million people cannot access clean water. According to the 2014 China Environmental Bulletin, nearly two-thirds of the ground water and one-third of the surface water is not suitable for humans to come into contact with. Water from nearly 40% of lakes and rivers is not suitable for drinking, aquaculture or swimming. Tap water in the cities is not safe either. There were at least seven leakages of chemicals or heavy metals into tap water in Chinese cities between 2010 to 2014. They affected more than 300 million people.

## Millions die from polluted air

Health problems caused by pollution are also getting serious and concern everybody who lives in China. Recent research from physicists at the University of California, Berkeley, calculated that about 1.6 million people in China die every year from heart, lung and stroke problems because of incredibly polluted air, especially small particles of haze.

People in rural areas also suffer from severe health problems. There are more than 247 “cancer villages” in 27 different regions of China. Most villagers living in these “cancer villages” are too poor to move. We know that there are many petitions and complaints from these cancer villages, but the media never reports them. These villagers are the most vulnerable people who suffer from pollution, but their voices are so weak.

## Food is not safe

Water, air, and even food safety cannot be guaranteed. Over the past decade, there have been a number of food safety scandals. In 2008, a number of Chinese baby formula companies were discovered add-

ing melamine to their products. In 2010, the media revealed the “gutter oil” production chain in China (this is used oil which comes from restaurants, sewer drains, and slaughterhouse waste and is illegally recycled).

Other scandals include the abuse of plasticizer (an additive that increases plasticity), and the use of banned pesticides on vegetables and fruits. “Black-hearted food” (food manufactured dishonestly from contaminated products) is everywhere. This is also the reason why new middle-class people are buying baby formula and groceries overseas.

## Environmental protest growing

Beyond a certain point of pollution, a country’s food, water, and air safety cannot be guaranteed. Undoubtedly, this situation is a hotbed for unrest. According to the state news agency, Xinhua, environmental protests in China have been growing by 29% per year since 1996, and a much more rapid increase of 120% occurred in 2012. The Chinese people have already reached a consensus that the causes of the ongoing pollution problems are the corruption of government officials and the lack of monitoring of polluting companies. So the only effective reaction is to march in the streets to fight against any sources of pollution that may be built nearby.

## Not just about “Not in my back yard” (Nimby)

Nimby syndrome has often been mentioned in relation to China’s environmental protests. These include the protests against PX plants in Dalian, Xiamen and Kunming, as well as the anti-incinerator demonstrations in Beijing, Yangjiang, and Huizhou. All these protests put out the message “do not build in my back-yard.” In these cases, opposition declined when the targets were relocated to remote areas.

However, there was an exceptional example in the Panyu district of the southern city of Guangzhou. Panyu residents not only objected to the building of incinerators in Panyu. They also called for the banning of all incinerators in China and demanded more environment-friendly waste recycling methods.

With the support of local media, the residents succeeded in prevailing on the government to stop the plan. This case was successful and exceptional because media and environmental activists in Guangzhou have more freedom than in other cities.

If the Chinese government cannot deal with these serious pollution problems, people’s discontent will continue to rise. In recent years, the Chinese gov-

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# ... Climate

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dumped enough rain on the Upper Midwest to cause the worst floods on the Mississippi since at least 1993. Record rains also caused flooding in South America and Europe. The North Pole saw temperatures rise above freezing in what should have been deep winter.

Why, in the face of oncoming catastrophe, don't capitalist leaders do more than make high-minded pronouncements while the planet burns? As Institute for Social Ecology director Brian Tokar notes in his analysis of the Paris climate talks, "The world the diplomats inhabit couldn't be farther removed from the places where the impacts of continuing climate chaos are felt the most." It is the frontline communities facing droughts, wildfires, unprecedented storms, and inundation by rising seas—not the global capitalist class—that can bring about the system change necessary to avert the worst devastation.

The fact that the Paris agreement pays lip service to the goals of the global climate justice movement is a testament to the growing power of that movement and the ability of mass action to shift the conversation. In the lead-up to the conference, 785,000 people took to the streets at over 2300 events in 175 countries.

Protests around the Paris summit were large and colorful despite the French government's attempts to squelch them. The administration of François Hollande used the Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris as a pretext to outlaw all street protests during the climate summit. The government even placed 24 environmental activists under preemptive house arrest before the talks.

International protest organizers bowed to the ban and officially canceled a march scheduled for Nov. 29. But up to 10,000 protesters took to the streets of central Paris anyway. They were met by riot cops firing tear gas and stun grenades. Media images of heavily armed cops trampling a memorial to victims of the Nov. 13 attacks in order to arrest 200 peaceful protesters were broadcast worldwide.

The New Anti-capitalist Party, which includes Socialist Action's co-thinkers in France, participated in the protest and pointed out: "EDF (the formerly state-owned electricity company), BNP Paribas (one of the country's biggest banks), Air France (the formerly state-owned airline), GDF Suez (the formerly state-owned gas company), all of them sponsors of the COP 21, are among the biggest polluters worldwide. Dictators from around the globe are welcomed with honors by Foreign Affairs Minister Laurent Fabius and President François Hollande, but the people who want to protest for a better world are being repressed."

Left-wing Canadian journalist Naomi Klein, who is renowned for her writing on capitalism's failure to address climate change, also called for activists to defy the protest ban. On the last day of the Paris talks, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets, carrying banners representing "red lines" that climate negotiators crossed in their final agreement. The French government permitted the protest at the last minute, perhaps fearing a repeat of the Nov. 29 debacle.

The crackdown on civil liberties itself hints at the effectiveness of mass protest. If world powers had nothing to fear from mass mobilization, why would they insist on a "state of emergency" to curtail it while football matches and public markets go on as usual? Indeed, the only way to challenge capitalism's march toward the abyss is by mobilizing for system change. The modern capitalist economy simply cannot exist without climate-changing fossil fuels, and global leaders are willing to go to any lengths to continue extracting them—even if it means planetary destruction.

An investigation by *InsideClimate News* revealed that virtually every fossil-fuel company has known that burning fossil fuels causes climate change since the 1970s. The American Petroleum Institute ran a task force on CO<sub>2</sub> between 1979 and 1983, but then campaigned against the Kyoto Protocol and spread lies about the uncertainty of climate change.

That revelation followed an exposé of documents showing that oil company Exxon conducted top-notch research into global warming starting in 1977. The company went so far as to outfit its largest supertanker with instruments to measure the ocean's absorption of carbon dioxide and developed its own in-house climate models that accurately predicted future atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels and warned of global temperature changes. But by 1989, the company had switched to funding climate-change deniers and lobbying to block any political action to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

These investigations merely confirm what was al-



(Above) Poster on the wall of a Paris Metro station reads: "The future of the planet is now being set in motion: World March for the Climate."

ready known: fossil fuel companies are criminally liable for the deaths of millions from climate change-related disasters. So why do \$775 billion in direct government subsidies still flow to fossil-fuel corporations, rather than to transitioning to clean, renewable energy sources?

It's not that such a transition is technically impossible. In fact, a recent study conducted by a group of engineers at Stanford University not only confirms that it would be possible to convert all 50 U.S. states to 100% wind, solar, and mostly existing hydroelectric power by 2050 using current technology, but details exactly how each state could do so. The study considers not just the electric grid, but transportation, heating and cooling, and industry as well. The researchers have published their peer-reviewed findings in an interactive website, [www.thesolutionsproject.org](http://www.thesolutionsproject.org).

But such a transition requires immediate, massive, sustained investment in new renewable energy sources; so far, only a few U.S. states have taken some half-measures toward meeting these goals. Further, it would only work if all of the new energy from renewables were to *replace* existing fossil fuel sources, rather than just increasing the energy supply. Currently, this is not the case. Fossil fuels are more in demand than ever.

Capitalism requires constant expansion and replacement of human labor with machinery (what Marx termed "constant capital"). Machinery—including not just factory belts and motors, but labor-saving devices like computers and farm tractors—requires energy to run. As an energy source, fossil fuels are extremely energy-dense and relatively easy to extract, store, transport, and sell. They can be used wherever and whenever a capitalist needs them, in any quantity the capitalist can afford.

By contrast, wind and solar energy are less concentrated, requiring more capital investment and a slower return on that investment. Fossil fuels are a form of solar energy, but ones that have been concentrated by the work of nature over millions of years; collecting energy directly from the sun requires an investment of human labor to replace this use value of nature. The availability of both wind and sun are also impacted by local weather conditions. From an ecological perspective, it makes sense to reorganize the economy around clean, renewable energy sources, producing goods when energy is available and relaxing when it isn't. From a capitalist perspective, it only makes sense to consider the bottom line: fossil fuels enable unlimited mechanization and profit.

In the short term, we need to continue building mass mobilizations to demand an immediate transition to clean renewables—water, wind, and solar. There are many immediate demands that can be made, such as ending fossil fuel subsidies, banning fracking, tar sands, and mountaintop removal coal mining, stopping new oil and gas pipelines, caps on power plant emissions, new government investment into mass transit systems, and forcing utilities to replace fossil fuel generators with renewables. All of this should be done with an eye toward providing transition jobs for displaced fossil fuel workers at union wages.

But ultimately, the transition that is needed will require workers and the oppressed—including the frontline victims of climate changes—to unite in revolution against the capitalist class. Another world is both possible and necessary for human survival. ■

## L.A. methane leak

A methane leak at a natural gas storage facility in California that began in October continues to spew the toxic, highly potent greenhouse gas into the atmosphere. Experts are calling the leak the worst environmental disaster since the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Aliso Canyon leak has caused health symptoms such as headaches, nausea, and vomiting among residents of the upscale Porter Ranch community in suburban Los Angeles, where the underground storage facility is located. In addition to methane, the leaking gas contains benzene, a carcinogen. Two local schools have closed, and more than 4500 families have left following a voluntary evacuation order.

But the leak has global implications. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is 28 times more powerful at trapping heat than carbon dioxide over a 100-year time span, and 84 times more powerful over a 20-year time span, according to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The leak is releasing about 1200 tons of methane a day, causing an impact roughly equivalent to the daily emissions produced by 2.4 million cars.

The leak was first reported by gas company employees on Oct. 23. But Southern California Gas, the corporation that operates the storage facility, publicly denied that there was a leak for five days. The source of the leak is 470 feet underground in one of 115 aging

wells drilled into a depleted oil reservoir, now used to store natural gas. A safety valve about 8500 feet down the well could have shut the leak down immediately—except that the valve wore out in the 1970s, and the company decided to simply remove it rather than replace it.

Initial attempts to stop the leak by pouring heavy liquids down the well failed because the gas is shooting out at high pressure. While the methane is invisible to the naked eye, infrared video shows the gas spewing out in a dark plume that reaches far up into the atmosphere. The gas company now expects the leak to continue until at least March. That's when they will finish drilling a relief well to intercept the leaking well 8000 feet down.

Most of the natural gas produced in the United States now comes from hydraulic fracturing or fracking, which has poisoned the air and water of thousands. Injection of fracking wastewater into deep wells has caused hundreds of earthquakes in Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and other states.

While the scale of the Aliso Canyon leak is unprecedented, small leaks at storage facilities and other natural gas infrastructure are common. Studies using on-the-ground measurements and satellite imagery have indicated that 9-10% of the methane produced by U.S. natural gas extraction leaks directly into the atmosphere. Computer models indicate that this rate of leakage outweighs the climate benefit of switching power plants from coal to natural gas, which produces less carbon dioxide when burned. — CARL SACK



(Left) A destroyed tank lies in the streets of Aleppo, Syria.

## ... U.S. imperialism & Syria

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overthrow the Assad government is acknowledged by virtually all sources from the UN to the *New York Times* and beyond.

With regard to bombing ISIS's oil refineries, *The Times* delicately notes and with perhaps an ounce of disbelief, "Concerns about leaving local citizens without crucial refining facilities and with the daunting job of rebuilding them later may be *tempering* the American [bombing] approach, some experts say" (emphasis added). The word "tempering" is in fact a euphemism for leaving these oil facilities largely intact in order to support, in a "tempered" manner to be sure, ISIS's anti-Assad objectives.

More recently, top U.S. military officials have announced policy changes with regard to bombing ISIS-controlled oil refineries. Until mid-November the "official" U.S. policy was to limit bombing or degrading of these facilities to inflicting minor damage only—damage that could be easily repaired within a matter of weeks or months. "Until Monday," according to *The New York Times* of Nov. 16, "the United States refrained from striking the fleet used to transport oil, believed to include more than 1000 tanker trucks, because of concerns about causing civilian casualties. As a result, the Islamic State's distribution system for exporting oil had remained largely intact." *Largely intact!*

Today, U.S. policy has purportedly shifted to inflicting a modicum of greater damage on ISIS oil fields—at least this is what U.S. officials state for the record!

Meanwhile, Turkey has been more than content to stand by, if not assist in, the ISIS slaughter of Kurdish fighters in Kobani and elsewhere. The Turkish government prefers the massacre of its oppressed Kurdish population by ISIS to the Kurds' advancing their historic struggle for national liberation and self-determination. But the Kurdish leadership, which mistakenly accepts support from the U.S., nevertheless repeatedly states that their objective is *self-determination for a future Kurdistan and not the removal of the Assad government.*

### Conflicting interests among U.S. allies

There is little doubt that the special regional interests of all U.S.-allied nations, from Turkey to the Gulf State oil monarchies, NATO, as well as Israel, play a role in the present Syrian and related Middle East wars. But these interests are invariably *subordinate* to those of the dominant and only world superpower—U.S. imperialism.

Both the Saudis and Israelis bitterly complained when the Obama administration signed the recent nuclear ac-

ords with Iran. The Saudis were not pleased when the U.S. stood mute when it bombed Yemen to smithereens, although the U.S. secretly supplied the Saudi military with the intelligence to do so. In all these instances, and several others, there are undoubtedly conflicting interests, with the U.S. preferring to resume, for example, its long-interrupted exploitation of Iranian oil while the Saudis see Shiite Iran as a rival for financial and political influence in the region.

Today, as the U.S. purports to increase bombing of ISIS oil facilities, the Saudis do the opposite and cease its essentially minimal or token bombing of ISIS, instead turning Saudi air power to its ongoing slaughter in Yemen. In the same vein, Turkey idly stands by, if not assists, as ISIS slaughters the Kurds, while U.S. military policymakers, for their own imperial reasons to be sure, aim their airpower at ISIS in "support" of Kurds. But again, these realities on the ground are fundamentally *subordinate* to the greater aims and objectives of the U.S. imperial behemoth. No one would deny, for example, that the U.S. has not at any time in history ever supported the historic struggle of the Kurdish people to reunite their long imperialist-divided Kurdish nation.

An insightful Dec. 3 *New York Times* article entitled "Germany Rebukes Its Own Intelligence Agency for Criticizing Saudi Policy" makes this clear. The article begins: "The German government issued an unusual public rebuke to its own foreign intelligence service on Thursday over a blunt memo stating that Saudi Arabia was playing an increasingly destabilizing role in the Middle East."

The secret memo, leaked by sources inside the German agency, the BND, noted: "Saudi rivalry with Iran for supremacy in the Middle East, as well as Saudi dependency on the United States, were the main drivers of Saudi foreign policy." And further, this embarrassing memo, repudiated by the Angela Merkel government, stated: "In Syria, Saudi Arabia's aim was always to oust President Bashar al-Assad, and that has not changed" (emphasis added).

We should add here that the French move to bomb ISIS is not without its limitations. *The New York Times* aptly notes: "While France has been conducting scores of airstrikes against the Islamic State in Iraq, it has been bombing inside Syria only sparingly, wary of inadvertently strengthening the hand of President Bashar al-Assad by killing his enemies."

### Imperialism's major policy shift

The recent Russian intervention in Syria at the request of the Assad gov-

ernment has convinced virtually all that Assad's immediate removal is no longer on the order of the day. Hence, we see all the anti-Assad forces, governments, their patrons and the like scurrying to conferences around the world to patch together diverse and sometimes warring coalitions to eventually meet in negotiations with the Assad government to partake in the determination of Syria's future.

This unfolding worldwide U.S.-orchestrated "negotiations" scene constitutes a grotesque imperialist spectacle that tragically replicates almost all previous U.S. maneuvers to determine the future composition of governments that it has or seeks to remove. Literally hundreds of parties, all favored to one degree or another by U.S. imperialism and its allies, meet in conferences today that are virtually presided over by Secretary of State John Kerry, and/or other top U.S. officials, to determine who will get what in a future Syria.

The latest U.S.-orchestrated gambit unfolded during a two-day conference in Riyadh, the Saudi Arabian capital. Entitled, "Syrian Rebels Form Bloc for New Round of Peace Talks," the Dec. 10 *New York Times* describes it well: "An array of Syrian opposition groups agreed here on Thursday to form a new and more inclusive body to guide the diverse and divided opponents of President Bashar al-Assad in a new round of planned talks aimed at ending the Syrian civil war."

"The formation of such a body has been seen by the United States and the opposition's other international supporters as a prerequisite for new talks, and the new body appeared to fit the bill by pulling together political dissidents who have long distrusted one another as well as rebel groups fighting the Syrian Army. "This is the widest participation for the opposition, inside and outside of Syria, and we have the participation of the armed groups," said Hadi al-Bahra, a member of the exiled Syrian National Coalition who attended the two-day conference that produced the new body."

(We should note here that the Kurds rejected participation at the Riyadh conference and instead organized their own meeting in Kurdish-occupied regions. None of the participants advocated the Assad government's removal. In some of these Kurdish areas the Assad government continues to pay the salaries of Kurdish officials—a *détente* of sorts.)

The Riyadh conference signaled a major shift in the orientation of U.S. imperialism and its allies over the past five years. Previously, all such conferences were premised on the understanding that the Assad government must fall via

the *military actions* of all its opponents, included those armed and financed by the U.S.

Today, this equation has dramatically changed in that the Assad government is expected by all to have a prime seat at the scheduled late January negotiating sessions. That is, assuming the present U.S./UN-brokered agreements hold, the U.S.-led effort to remove Assad by the application of *military force*, will be set aside in favor of a *negotiated* settlement with the Assad government representatives at one side of the "bargaining table" and the combined forces, yet to be specifically determined, of all U.S.-allied forces in all their reactionary manifestations, on the other.

### Right of oppressed nations to self-determination

The right to self-determination of oppressed nations, historically trampled on by imperialist conquerors and colonizers over the past several centuries, applies with full force to Syria today. It applies to all oppressed nations regardless of the qualities or class nature of their leadership.

From the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution led by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, and long before, the defeat of the imperialist, colonial oppressor has always been central to revolutionary internationalist working-class politics even if the oppressed nation was led by feudal monarchs.

U.S. imperialist war and intervention today represents nothing less than the crystallization and ruthless application of the ruling-class power of an American capitalism in crisis—a crisis so deep that the imperialist beast is compelled to send its armies, privatized death squads, drones, and surrogates everywhere on earth to advance its interests.

Today, U.S. imperialism is focused on the Middle East, where its multiple wars against the oppressed people and nations have wrought untold death and destruction. Yet, U.S. policy in that oil-rich region remains in an advanced state of disarray. Having conquered Iraq with military force virtually unequalled in the modern era, the establishment of a stable regime that can guarantee U.S. control of that nation's vast fossil fuel resources remains in question. The latest tyrant that the U.S. installed, Haider al-Abadi, fears that Iraq's military and political association with the U.S. can only outrage vast portions of its population, which have experienced first hand the horrors unleashed by the U.S. military machine. Indeed, it is widely accepted that past U.S. policies in Iraq laid the foundations for the emergence of ISIS.

In the wake of virtually all U.S. Middle East wars over the past decade and longer, "failed states" have been the inevitable outcome. In Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan, death and destruction and endless internecine wars waged by competing tribal-based reactionary groups are accompanied by almost unbelievable human suffering—poverty, disease and starvation—U.S. imperialism's trademark and legacy for whom-ever it conquers.

Again, unconditional support to the right of self-determination of all oppressed nations, free from all imperialist intervention in all its manifestations, is a central and strategic component of revolutionary socialist politics.

Having affirmed this fundamental working-class principle, support to self-determination is not at all synonymous with political support to the governments or regimes of these oppressed nations—in the case of Syria, the Bashar al-Assad government. Socialists have no illusions that the Assad

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regime represents any form of revolutionary nationalist or otherwise progressive break with capitalism.

Neither do we hold that the Assad government strives to achieve an egalitarian society that advances the interests of the working class and peasant majority as against Syria's capitalist elite.

Nevertheless, the removal of Assad's oppressive capitalist Syrian regime is the sole responsibility of the Syrian people, not U.S. imperialism and its reactionary allied forces.

Socialist Action's unanimously adopted 2014 national convention Political Resolution makes this absolutely clear: "Today's war in Syria is a war between U.S. imperialism's direct and indirect capitalist-fundamentalist and reactionary forces on the one hand and the capitalist Assad government on the other. The Syria masses have no independently organized political, military or economic presence. Under these circumstances, Socialist Action stands full square against U.S. imperialism and those allied with it in Syria and elsewhere. In accord with our support to the right of self-determination of all oppressed nations, even those under capitalist rule, we are for the defeat of the U.S.-backed imperialist intervention in all its forms.

"We oppose its direct aid to the FSA or its indirect support or acquiescence to ISIS, through U.S. surrogates in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar or anywhere else. In the U.S. this translates into our full support of the key demand and the actions called by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) to "End All U.S. Intervention In Syria!"

Socialists include in this strategic orientation the absolute necessity of Syrian workers and peasants, however difficult and distant under the present circumstances, to struggle to form their own independent fighting revolutionary socialist parties aimed not only at opposing all imperialist wars, including in Syria, but at establishing socialist societies where capitalist exploitation and oppression are forever ended.

### Syria's right to seek allies against imperialist intervention

Syria's right to self-determination necessarily includes the right of the Syrian government to seek and accept the support of the militia fighters that are today defending Syria against imperialist intervention in several of its

manifestations. These include fighters from Lebanon and Iran, that is, the forces of Hezbollah, who defeated the last Israeli invasion of their country, and the Shiite militias from Iran, who, in the past, joined with Shiite fighters in Iraq to challenge the U.S. invasion and war against that nation.

In a similar vein, the agreements recently signed by Syria with Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia to share intelligence information in fighting ISIS, al-Qaeda and all other groups aimed at removing the Assad government, including the 13-nation U.S. imperialist-led "coalition," fall squarely within Syria's right to self-determination. This includes Syria's agreement to accept Russian air, naval, and related military support to accomplish the same end.

President Obama has repeatedly asserted that U.S. war aims in Syria are "strategically" opposed to those of the Russians. U.S. imperialism has been organized for almost five years to overthrow the Assad regime. Whatever its motives, the Russians are in Syria at the behest of the Syrian government, not to overthrow it.

Undoubtedly, the Russian capitalist government of Vladimir Putin has its own reasons for accepting Syria's invitation to intervene, including NATO's increasing encroachment on its borders and the U.S. and European Union economic sanctions. Revolutionary socialists suffer no illusions that capitalist Russia can serve as Syria's strategic ally in the present war. Indeed, the Putin government has consistently and cynically offered itself as a mediator in the Syrian war, repeatedly proposing a "negotiated solution" wherein all parties, including U.S. imperialism and its NATO allies, as well as the Saudis and others, will collectively decide Syria's fate.

Following Putin's private talks with John Kerry, Putin remarked, "We have an understanding how we should proceed if we talk about a political settlement. We need to work on a new [Syrian] constitution, new elections and the *control over their outcome*" (emphasis added). Thus, Putin's cynical mindset, as with his U.S. negotiating counterparts, includes his thesis that Syria's fate is to be determined not by the Syrian people but by the deals brokered by others, indeed, by deals whose "outcome" is "controlled" in advance.

At least for the moment, however, Russia on the one hand and U.S. imperi-



(Above) Wounded civilians arrive at hospital in Aleppo in 2012.

alism on the other are on opposite sides of a U.S. imperialist-led war against the poor and oppressed Syrian nation.

Russia is no newcomer to "deals" in the Middle East. It gave its assent to the U.S./NATO "humanitarian war" against Libya that essentially destroyed that country. Revolutionary socialists should indeed expect Russia to include at the "negotiating" table the advancement of its own interests even if these are at odds with those of the Syrian people.

Yet Russia's actions in driving ISIS and related pro-U.S. forces farther from the government-held Damascus capital and surrounding regions has undoubtedly altered the calculus of imperialism's previous equation, that is, the military conquest of Syria and the imposition of a new regime directly beholden to U.S. imperialist interests. Perhaps now, given the reality on the ground that the Assad government has not been obliterated, as originally planned, the outcome will be perhaps somewhat less onerous with regard to Syria. Socialists cannot be neutral in such matters.

Similarly, with the Russian air force entry into Syria, the various "no-fly zones" previously contemplated by the Obama administration and formally proposed by leading Democrats (Hillary Clinton) and Republicans are today excluded. Clinton herself stated bluntly that with the Russian entry this overt U.S.-imposed "no-fly zone" option was no longer a viable option.

### The tragedy of Syria today

We are nevertheless compelled to recognize that any "negotiated settlement" to the imperialist-led war against Syrian cannot be expected to represent a

lasting gain for the Syrian people. Absent a powerful revolutionary force on the field of action to effectively challenge both the imperialist intervention and pose a working-class alternative to the Assad regime, the likely outcome will be some variant of an imperialist-imposed "regime change"—as opposed to an outright imperialist-led conquest and occupation of Syria, the latter being the original and now apparently thwarted, for the time being at least, intention of the U.S. warmakers.

The Russian intervention may well have prevented the overt marching of reactionary jihadist/religious fundamentalist groups or other imperialist-allied forces into Damascus with a resulting Libyan-type chaos, anarchy, and bloodbath to follow. Historic tragedy has a habit of unfolding in a myriad of forms—some less devastating than others. Here we have a distinction, perhaps with a significant difference, in that the opportunities for future Syrian anti-capitalist struggles may become somewhat improved.

Antiwar and social justice fighters can best help to tilt the scale in favor of Syria's people and future class-struggle fighters by building the most powerful U.S. movement possible demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of U.S. military aid and forces in all their manifestations from Syria. Removing the imperialist boot from Syria and the Middle East more generally best opens the door for the oppressed masses to resume their struggle.

U.S. out now! Self-determination for Syria! ■

## ... Mumia's fight for medical treatment

(continued from page 4)

also be cured. But the cost in the United States is \$1000 per pill, making a course of treatment approximately \$90,000....

At the close of the intensive evidentiary hearing on Dec. 23 after the testimony of Dr. Harris, two DOC expert specialists, the DOC's chief medical officer and the SCI Mahanoy chief medical officer, the following was not in dispute:

- Mumia Abu-Jamal has active chronic Hepatitis-C, stage-two fibrosis with a 63 percent probability of cirrhosis of the liver.
- Mumia has "anemia of chronic disease."
- Mumia's severe itchy skin rash is not resolved despite months of intensive treatment.
- Severely itchy skin is often a secondary symptom of HCV.
- There is no medical reason for Mumia not to be treated with the new antivirals for Hepatitis-C.

The dispute is clearly not a medical or scientific one. It is social, one of cost and, in regard to prisoners, one of peneological purpose. This was the proverbial "elephant in the room" that the DOC witnesses would not directly address....

The DOC maintains that this is simply a case of doctors with differing opinions of treatment. That argu-

ment was exploded by the DOC expert witness on Hepatitis-C treatment, Dr. Jay Cowan, who responded to attorney Robert Boyle's question, that "yes, he would recommend the new antivirals to anyone who had Hepatitis-C who could pay the \$90,000 cost."

The DOC's new "Interim Hepatitis-C Protocol," secretly issued on Nov. 12, 2015, does not take any account of the new drugs' potential to cure Hepatitis-C and stop its deadly progression and alleviate painful and debilitating symptoms suffered by a significant portion of the prison population. Rather this is a protocol to deny this new treatment to Pennsylvania prisoners. According to the testimony of the head of DOC medical services, Dr. Peter Noel, only five out of some 6000 prisoners with active HCV are getting treatment.

The DOC protocol does not allow treatment to be considered until the prisoner is close to death, with severe complications from cirrhosis of the liver....

The DOC lawyers and doctors, from the medical specialist "experts" to the head of its medical services, laid bare the reality of medicine for profit in capitalist America and the function of prisons as repressive punitive institutions without a modicum of care for the medical well-being of prisoners.

The court evidentiary hearing unfolded with rare public display of the DOC's mendacity and utter con-

tempt for its own laws and rules: the suppression and then attempt to keep its Hepatitis-C Treatment Protocol "confidential;" submission to court of a false declaration from its chief of DOC health services; and its expert witnesses' testimony that withheld information from Mumia's medical records that contradicted their opinions. In cross-examination Mumia's lawyers successfully discredited the DOC's presentation of false or misleading evidence.

At the close of the evidentiary hearing, Judge Mariani set Jan. 13, 2016, as the date that all parties would get transcripts of the hearing, and that written briefs were due by both Mumia and the DOC by Feb. 3, 2016. The judge said he would decide as quickly as possible, making this case his priority....

But just as Mumia wouldn't have gotten into court on this case without international publicity, medical treatment to keep Mumia alive and for those other thousands suffering from Hepatitis-C won't be won relying on the courthouse or the state legislatures. While fighting hard in the courts, there can be no illusion in obtaining justice there.

The state, its cops, its prisons are intent on silencing Mumia, and what we are dealing with now is state execution by medical mistreatment. The state won't stop; the only way Mumia will survive is if he is freed. It will take a broad international campaign that calls for agitation, publicity, and demonstrations building the broadest possible support demanding Mumia's freedom.... ■

## When 'withdrawal' means escalation

By BARRY WEISLEDER

As if in a dance of the seven veils, the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau is sequentially exposing its false election promises, revealing an agenda that increasingly resembles that of the widely despised Conservative predecessor regime.

For starters, an immediate and meaningful increase to the Canada Pension is now off the table. Re-settlement of Syrian refugees is well short of the early target figure, and even the revised one. Promised amendments to the repressive Anti-Terrorism Act—at least to hold police accountable for spying, arrest without trial, and disruption of legal organizations—were not even mentioned in the government's Throne Speech.

And the latest example of a major breach of faith is on the war front. Trudeau campaigned to withdraw its

six CF18 fighter jets and pledged that Canadian Forces would play no combat role in Iraq and Syria. Instead, the jets are bombing the Middle Eastern countryside with sudden and accelerating intensity. While Liberal cabinet ministers insist they will stick to their jet exit plan, there is no date set for it.

More importantly, the Trudeau government pledges to increase troops on the ground, to operate under the rubric of "trainers." It appears that the pre-election 69 "trainers" will soon number in the hundreds. Given their location very near the front lines of the fight with ISIS, a combat role will (continue to) be in effect.

The Conservative Party and major media outlets applaud the bombing and argue that the planes should stay. They want them combined with a dramatic increase in "trainers" inside the combat zone. A telling point the war hawks make is that the Liberal government has given no concrete reason why it

plans to remove the fighter jets.

Sadly, they're right. Instead of saying, honestly, that Western military intervention has outraged the peoples of the region and promoted the rise of ISIS, instead of admitting that Ottawa and its imperialist

allies have no legitimate reason to intervene in Iraq, Syria, or for that matter in Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, or elsewhere, Trudeau espouses a contradictory policy. It is based on a shallow and muddled sentiment—which paves the way for a betrayal of the public opinion that forced the Liberal withdrawal pledge in the first place.

The policy of the labour-based New Democratic Party, now reduced to third-party status in Parliament, is only somewhat better than Trudeau's. It advocates removal of all troops and weapons. Unfortunately, the NDP leadership has failed to assert clearly the principle of self-determination for the indigenous peoples—that the future of Syria is for the Syrian people to decide.

Moreover, it neglects to express sharp opposition to the corporate agenda of resource plunder. That agenda is behind the actions of the U.S., Canada, and allies that sought regime change, and the installation of more compliant governments across the oil-rich Middle East.

The resulting destabilization—and due to the absence of a major progressive working-class military force—

opened the door to ISIS, al-Nusrah, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and other offshoots of al-Qaeda.

Jihadi terrorism could be quickly stopped. The imperialist powers need only insist that client regimes, like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, stop funding the recruitment and arming of Salafist-inspired fighters, and stop buying ISIS-controlled oil. Instead of demonizing, arresting, or excluding Muslims and Arabs, domestic and foreign, the Western powers could target poverty, racism, and youth alienation at home.

Meanwhile, every bomb dropped by Canadian, U.S., and French jets on Iraq and Syria recruits a village to ISIS. Each assault on the East attracts dozens of discontented young Westerners to the Islamic terrorist brand.

Joining a reactionary sect is a horribly misguided response to growing inequality and injustice. Indeed, it bolsters the state terrorism of the West. It diverts attention from the misdeeds of the imperialists, which dwarf the crimes of ISIS. The biggest crime going is resource plunder for profit. Western rulers pursue their aims with a variety of tactics. They exercise a division of labour.

Justin Trudeau's unctuous "sunny ways" rhetoric, his posturing as a peace-loving humanitarian is camouflage for a widening war of intervention in the East. It must be confronted with principled opposition to the war. United front mass demonstrations against Ottawa's plan to increase its involvement are urgently needed. ■

## Biggest strikes in Quebec since 1972

By ROBBIE MAHOOD

MONTREAL—Leaders of Quebec's Common Front of public sector unions and the provincial Liberal government of Premier Philippe Couillard announced a tentative agreement on Dec. 17. The deal covers wages and pensions. Working conditions are negotiated separately by sector. Grouped in the Common Front are the unions representing government employees affiliated with the major union centrals, notably, the CSN (Confédération des syndicats nationaux) and the FTQ (Fédération des travailleurs du Québec), as well as several non-affiliated unions.

The agreement came on the heels of a one-day general strike involving over 400,000 workers of the Common Front and affecting schools, health-care facilities and government services across the province. While picket lines were set up at work sites, 40,000 marched in downtown Montreal and another 20,000 in Quebec City.

The Dec. 9 strike was the biggest since 1972. That's when the original Common Front launched a work stoppage of 200,000 government employees, which in some communities saw strike committees commandeer radio stations and take charge of government services, and ended only after union leaders were imprisoned.

Preceding the December strike was an autumn punctuated by big mobilizations. A mass union demonstration in Montreal on Oct. 3 opposed the austerity agenda of the Liberal regime. The Common Front launched a series of rotating strikes. Community organizations, students, the feminist movement, and climate justice activists also took to the streets. Teachers camped outside the Minister of Education's office, picketed schools, and marched in their thousands, supported by a parents' group dedicated to defending "our public schools."

As negotiations wore on, public opinion shifted perceptibly against the government. The workers' demands are seen by many as protecting the integrity of Quebec's public health care and educational institutions. There is sympathy as well for the underpaid and largely female workforce who keep government services running. Average pay for government employees in Quebec lags 8% behind their private-sector counterparts.

Support for the Liberal austerity drive has also been undermined by the government's obvious class bias and hypocrisy. A \$1.2 billion bailout of Bombardier, Quebec's flagship in the global corporate world, and a 34% pay increase awarded to the province's doctors were announced during negotiations with the Common Front!

Both the union leaders and the government, for separate but convergent reasons, wished to avoid a prolonged stand-off and the risk of an escalating confrontation. A repetition on a grander scale of Quebec's epic student strike of 2012 is something both parties would prefer to avoid.



The agreement in principle was widely hailed in the media. It was billed as an 11<sup>th</sup>-hour "miracle" that, thanks to compromise on both sides, would meet the government's austerity targets while at the same time "avoiding [sic] the impoverishment" of its employees, to

### No Reconciliation without Justice

What will come of the massive report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which investigated the cultural genocide inflicted by the Canadian federal government on indigenous peoples? Will its 94 specific recommendations bear any fruit?

The TRC deserves praise for raising awareness of the horrendous suffering of the 150,000 indigenous children who were torn from their communities between 1883 and 1996 and placed in residential schools. As many as 6,000 of them died of malnutrition, tuberculosis, influenza and other diseases.

Thousands were buried, forgotten, in unmarked graves. The survivors had to live with the painful memories of physical, emotional and sexual abuse that was rampant in the federally-funded, church-run schools.

In 2008 then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the "great harm" caused by Ottawa's racist campaign "to take the Indian out of the child," suppressing native languages, culture and identity.

The TRC justly demands much more than an of-

quote the FTQ's chief negotiator.

A closer assessment indicates that compromise came overwhelmingly from the union side. Salary increases will be limited to under 2% annually for the next five years, and this after years of retrenchment.

The agreement reached after a 13-hour secret session in the office of Martin Coiteux, Quebec's President du Conseil du trésor (effectively the Finance Ministry), was not exactly a charade. But it has the character of shadow-boxing between two "frères ennemis" (brother enemies), as some in Quebec term the relationship between the union tops and the employers.

It remains to be seen how easy it will be to sell this package to the ranks. Already there are signs of discontent. Delegates to the council of the FSSS (Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux, Federation of health and social service workers), representing about a quarter of the Common Front members, have recommended rejection. Likewise opposed to the agreement, even though outside the Common Front, are leaders of the FAE (Fédération autonome de l'enseignement, Autonomous Federation of Teachers) representing 34,000 Montreal-area teachers.

Voting by members of the unions will take place early in the New Year. Rejection of their leaders' advice will take courage and would pose the question of how to take the struggle forward. In particular, it would raise the perspective of a general or social strike, since nothing less will be required to defeat the Liberal government. ■

cial apology. Its call for "mutual respect" is embodied in the idea of a nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and 1.4 million indigenous peoples. That means honouring native land rights, and providing funding for health, housing and education.

Fulfilment of those goals, not as an act of charity, but on a foundation of indigenous self-government, faces sharp resistance from the Canadian establishment. Not only from pipeline companies, energy resource industries and mining firms, staunch resistance will come from the ruling rich as a class, and from the state that guards their interests.

Mass protest actions of the kind initiated by Idle No More put the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women onto the political agenda. Many more such actions, in partnership with labour unions, social justice and environmental movements, will be required.

In fact, the re-distribution of wealth and power necessary to end the present colonial arrangement entails nothing less than a revolution to abolish monopoly business control of the economy. — B.W.

## Films

By JOHN WILSON

*"The Danish Girl,"* directed by Tom Hooper.

"The Danish Girl" is a mesmerizing, moving account of how transgender pioneer Lili Elbe (originally Einar Wegener) came to be one of the first persons known to have gender reassignment surgery.

Adapted from David Ebershoff's 2000 fictionalized novel, it features Eddie Redmayne's amazing performance as Einar. He discovers who he really is, and transitions into Lili. Alicia Vikander, as Einar/Lili's wife, is brilliant in her almost equally demanding role, at times becoming the central focus.

The film is mainly situated in a lush, middle-class Copenhagen in the 1920s, where Einar is a celebrated landscape artist. Wife Gerda is also an artist. She fights for recognition—until she starts painting the emerging Lili as a femme fatale, which started with a whimsical, half-joking sitting by Einar for her as a female model. But for him this is the



start of his self-realization as Lili.

Lili endures horrific experiences consulting with "experts" in the biased and prejudiced medical system who are de-

termined to "cure" her, or banish her to a psychiatric facility. Then she meets Dr. Warnekros (Sebastian Koch), who proposes what he candidly described

as experimental and risky gender reassignment surgery. Of all the doctors, only he seems to have a sympathetic understanding of what she is going through.

(Since Lili, who was raised in a context of relative class privilege, suffered such difficulty, can we imagine how truly impossible would be the situation of a transgender person born to a working-class family?)

Gerda is steadfast in her love and support for Lili—despite being very conflicted and confused by a process she knows will lead to her losing her husband.

In short, this film is well worth seeing. It comes at a time when transgender issues are finally gaining prominence—thanks to decades of LGBTQ activism. Despite ongoing challenges of medical access, the cost of surgery, and persisting prejudice, in Canada and elsewhere, real gains are being made. In revolutionary Cuba, the treatment is free.

We should note, though, that with all the attention that this film is deservedly getting, other pioneering films, such as "Transamerica," are being overlooked. ■

## Books

# Go Set a Watchman

By JOE AUCIELLO

Harper Lee, *"Go Set A Watchman,"* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 288 pp., \$27.99.

Why throw away the Christmas turkey after it's been eaten? It can still be used. Take the carcass, simmer with water, and the bones make a good stock for soup. Take the carcass of a popular novel—its discarded rough draft—place it between hard covers, and these bones can make for a best seller. The difference is that one is honest and thrifty while the other is dishonest and shift.

HarperCollins is a company that knows what to do with leftovers. Given the popularity of Harper Lee's Pulitzer-Prize winning novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird," the publication of "Go Set a Watchman" was inevitable.

"Mockingbird" has sold millions of copies and has never been out of print since its publication in 1960. The film version released in 1962 won three Academy Awards, brought many more readers to the book, and helped lift the story of Jean Louise Finch ("Scout") to a select status of beloved novels. Every graduate of an American high school knows the stories of Huck, Holden, and Scout. Their misadventures make up no small part of the national-curriculum-by-consensus of American education.

But "Go Set a Watchman" is Harper Lee's failed, first attempt at what eventually came to be "To Kill a Mockingbird"—her only authentic novel. Promoted as a sequel or as a companion piece that offers richer insight into "Mockingbird," the new volume found an enthusiastic audience.

Immediately upon publication in 2015, "Go Set a

Watchman" took top spot on the *The New York Times* best-seller category in hard-cover fiction. In its first week alone, the book sold more than 1.1 million copies. It was unwrapped under many a Christmas tree. This January, it remains in the top ten best-seller list.

Publication of "Watchman" was a shrewd commercial decision, but not a critical one. In fact, there is a real question if Ms. Lee, in her advanced old age, was capable of consenting to publication of the draft.

However it came to print, "Go Set a Watchman" is not a successful work of fiction, despite some moments of promise and insightful, ironic observation. Mostly, the plot plods along, tediously slow. Reading the book feels like driving behind a car that's crawling about 15 miles per hour below the speed limit and brakes at every downhill slope and every bend in the road.

Without compiling a list, be assured that all the literary errors of the amateur novelist can be found in "Go Set a Watchman." The most damaging offense may be Scout's utterly implausible discovery—at age 26—that Atticus is not the decent and open-minded man she had believed him to be. Instead, her father is and always has been a sophisticated racist, vilifying the NAACP and the Supreme Court, while asserting that people of the backward "Negro" race are not yet ready to earn their rights as citizens.

To Scout, Atticus is a repellant stranger, like a "pod person" from "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," an alien who appears human but who tellingly lacks a soul. When a Southern novel of manners veers off into science fiction territory, it is a sure sign that something has gone terribly wrong.

Within the structure of a clumsy coming-of-age narrative, Harper Lee intended to write a story that would explore Southern racism. From the conflicting, insider perspectives of white Southerners, she wanted to take a stand against intolerance and bigotry. Her literary challenge was to create a framework and a suitable set of characters to embody those warring beliefs.

"Go Set a Watchman" was a failed effort, but it con-



tained the seeds of a better one. The crucial decision was to shift Atticus, a lawyer in a small, Southern town, into a defender of human rights, a fighter against racial injustice. This is the man of conscience who tells his children: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

With a newly defined Atticus, and with the addition of the mysterious recluse, Boo Radley (entirely absent from

"Watchman"), the plot lines of "To Kill a Mockingbird" resolved themselves into themes of understanding and acceptance, rejection of ignorance and prejudice, especially white racism.

Lee had written a complete first draft, an initial attempt to think out and approximate her vision. An excellent editor encouraged her to set it aside and begin anew. No need to dignify the publisher's scheme by calling this effort a novel. Nor is there a need to keep it locked away.

The draft should certainly have been made available to biographers or academic researchers. Perhaps the publication of a scholarly edition by a university press, like the University of Chicago editions of Dostoyevsky's notebooks, would have been a justifiable addition to American literature. An honest introduction added to the current edition would have been acceptable. But for HarperCollins to pass off a draft as a novel is a particularly specious sort of re-gifting. ■

## ... China environment

(continued from page 6)

ernment has revised the "environmental law" to make it stricter. It has also implemented the so-called "ten-point water plan," which is considered the strictest environmental policy in China's history. However, many Chinese laws cannot be implemented at the local level. Under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, corruption is still common and human rights are restricted. This reduces the effectiveness of government-led reforms.

In the short term, we can only hope the protests of the people will bring some improvements. If not, the situation will continue to deteriorate. ■

Rena Lau has been working at *Globalization Monitor* since 2011. She is the author of the 2012 study "Restructuring of the Honda Auto Parts Union in Guangdong, China: a two-year assessment of the 2010 strike." Reprinted from *International Viewpoint*.

## Gender wage parity — More than a century away

It will take 118 years to close the wage gap between women and men if present trends in pay inequity persist, the World Economic Forum predicts.

The global pay gap between the sexes narrowed by a mere 3 per cent over the past decade, visibly stalling after 2009-10, according to the forum's annual Global Gender Gap report.

The slow progress means women are only now earning what men earned nearly a decade ago: \$11,000 on average, while men's average pay has

nearly doubled to \$21,000 worldwide.

The report, which also looks at women's progress in education, health and political empowerment, found that Canada ranked 30<sup>th</sup>, and the United States was 28<sup>th</sup> out of the 145 countries surveyed. Syria, Pakistan and Yemen occupied the bottom of the list.

Women now outnumber men in universities in 100 of the countries surveyed, yet few of them hold the kind of skilled or leadership roles that come with bigger pay cheques.

Why inequality? Just ask yourself this: where does the money go that corporations save by not paying equal wages to women? — B.W.

## Paris climate talks produce hot air

David Sassoon / Inside Climate News



By CARL SACK

After 10 days of talks at the COP 21 climate conference in Paris, negotiators from 195 countries celebrated the adoption of an agreement that calls for a goal of limiting global warming to 1.5° Centigrade above pre-industrial levels.

On one hand, the agreement goes farther than any previous accord to acknowledge the need for a rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Its preamble includes the “principle of equity” that rich countries must do more than poor countries. It even pays lip service to indigenous rights, gender equality, and a “just transition of the workforce.” It calls for holding the global average temperature “well below 2° C above pre-industrial levels”—the suicidal temperature ceiling advocated by the U.S. and European countries—and aspires to limit the temperature rise to 1.5° C. Many poorer nations pushed for the 1.5° target.

On the other hand, despite the enlightened preamble, the document is utterly empty of any concrete measures to curb planet-destroying carbon emissions. It relies on countries to set their own “intended nationally determined contributions” or INDCs, which are to be updated every five years. The language used is revealing; INDCs are voluntary pledges that are non-binding and therefore have no real impact.

The agreement does not lay out any roadmaps for how individual countries will achieve their pledges. It fails to even mention reducing the consumption of fossil fuels beyond a vague reference to “domestic mitigation measures.” Even if all countries were to follow through on all of the pledges made just prior to

the Paris conference, scientists at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research peg the result as a disastrous 2.7° C warming by the year 2100—just 0.9 degrees below the “business-as-usual” scenario.

Worse, like its predecessors, the Paris agreement endorses counterproductive market-based carbon-trading schemes. Carbon markets introduced under the Kyoto Protocol (called the “Clean Development Mechanism”) have attracted rampant corruption, promoted big development projects like hydropower dams that displaced sustainable communities, and ultimately collapsed due to a lack of demand for carbon offsets. Forest protection credits, sold as carbon offsets under the UN REDD program, have accelerated corporate land grabs in developing countries and hastened the conversion of natural forests into private monoculture tree plantations.

Provisions of the agreement could also be interpreted as promoting speculative carbon-capture technologies and risky geo-engineering schemes.

NASA climate scientist James Hansen called the agreement “a fraud” and “a fake.” “It’s just bullshit for them to say: ‘We’ll have a 2C warming target and then try to do a little better every five years.’ It’s just worthless words. There is no action, just promises,” Hansen said in an interview with *The Guardian*. Hansen supports a carbon tax with public redistribution of the proceeds as a means of curbing fossil fuel use.

Perhaps proving Hansen’s point, the Paris talks do not seem to have spurred any immediate action to curb emissions by the world’s worst polluters. In fact, just before the Paris talks, President Barack Obama signed a transportation bill including a provision that

(Above) Protest for climate justice near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, Dec. 12.

fast-tracks environmental review of new oil and gas pipelines and strictly limits lawsuits aimed at stopping such projects. Just after the talks, he signed a spending bill that ended the 40-year-old oil export ban, allowing U.S. fossil fuel corporations to ship crude oil overseas.

India has said it still plans to double its use of coal-fired electricity. Japan is currently building 43 new coal-fired power plants, and China is adding a new 600-megawatt coal plant every 10 days for the next decade. Both countries are adding renewable energy sources as well, but not enough to offset their growth in energy demand. Much of that growth is due to increased manufacturing of goods exported to the U.S. and Europe.

In 2009, the U.S. pledged to spearhead a \$100 billion per year “Green Climate Fund” to finance renewable energy development in poorer countries. But to date, the fund has only received a fraction of that in actual contributions, and wealthy countries have sought to dedicate the money that has been pledged to promoting “public-private partnerships” resulting in private, for-profit energy infrastructures.

Meanwhile, climate change is causing unprecedented weather conditions globally; 2015 was again the hottest year on record—surpassing 2014, the hottest year before that. In late December, 43 people died from unseasonable megastorms across much of the U.S. The storms spawned tornadoes in 10 states and

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