

"We are realists... we dream the impossible" - Che



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THE NEW ERA OF WAR AND OCCUPATION



U.S. YANKEE HANDS OFF SYRIA!

Why Poor and Working People Must Defend the Syrian Government

By Nita Palmer

Human Cost of the War in Syria

Over the past five years, war has devastated Syria. Over 400,000 have lost their lives in direct violence. Unknown thousands more have died from lack of medical attention and disease. Much of the country's beautiful architecture - from ancient to modern - lies in ruin. Diseases such as polio which were once eradicated have returned to the country. Access to water and basic sanitation is severely limited, with UNICEF reporting in 2013 that "the availability of water per person has decreased to one third of pre-crisis levels, from 75 litres to 25 litres per person per day". Millions have been forced to flee their cities or the country altogether, leaving behind their homes, their families, and all they have known for a desperate gamble at some form of safety.

Syrian children in particular have had their lives turned upside down by the war. One third of Syrian kids - every child under the age of five - have grown up knowing nothing but war, destruction and violence. They will never know the once-peaceful country of their parents' generation. The schools they would have attended have been bombed

to fragments or are closed due to lack of security. The streets and parks in which they would have played have been turned into battlefields. In any case, many Syrian children have no time to play or attend school, as they must work or beg to help feed their families in a country where employment is now scarce. For an entire generation, life has been essentially put on hold. The war is destroying not only buildings, cities, and neighbourhoods, but the very future of Syria as well.

What is Really Going On?

Western media has by and large billed the crisis as two separate clashes: a 'civil war' between opposition groups and the Syrian government led by President Bashar al-Assad, and a war of the US and their allies against Daesh (the Islamic State, or ISIS). However, the reality of the situation is far more complex.

According to media accounts, the war began in 2011 when the Syrian government began a ruthless crackdown on peaceful protesters demanding regime change. While there have indeed been internal conflicts and disagreements in Syria, the so-called 'civil war' did not begin with a peaceful uprising of people against the government but with a small group of heavily armed fighters in

a town near the Turkish border. Labelling these men as 'freedom fighters', the US and their allies in the region (including Turkey and Saudi Arabia) began funding, arming and supporting the group which became known as the 'Free Syrian Army' to fight the Syrian government and President Assad.

Currently, the so-called 'opposition' in Syria is divided into dozens of different armed groups, many of which are armed, trained, or otherwise supported by the US and their allies. However, for all its talk of fighting a 'war on terror' and bringing peace and democratic rule to Syria, the US government has not been too discerning in which groups they are supporting. Many of the 'opposition' groups are a sort of 'Daesh-lite' - radical Sunni Muslim groups which follow an ultraconservative Salafist ideology. Indeed, a 2015 US intelligence report revealed that "the Salafist, the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI [al-Qaeda in Iraq] are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria". Intelligence reports also note that "AQI supported the Syrian opposition from the beginning, both ideologically and through media. AQI declared its opposition of Assad's government because it considered it a sectarian regime targeting Sunnis". These groups do not want peace and democracy in Syria - they want to replace the secular government with a

conservative Islamist state. Given the types of characters the US is supporting in Syria, is it any wonder that a group such as Daesh has taken hold in the country? Many of the 'rebels' which the US supports have more in common with Daesh than any kind of secular government in Syria.

Whether or not you believe that the US played a direct hand in the creation of Daesh, it must at the very least be acknowledged that the US support for ultraconservative anti-government elements in Syria destabilized the country and created the conditions for the Daesh terrorists to take hold in the country. The US now justifies their presence in Syria with the pretence of fighting the very monster which they helped to create.

The war in Syria is not just a civil war created by the US, however. The conflict has now drawn in players from all over the globe: US regional allies, such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which support the so-called 'opposition'; NATO and European allies including Canada and France, which have conducted airstrikes in the country; and regional and international players such as Russia, China, and Iran, which support the Syrian government both in their fight against Daesh and against US meddling in the country. The New York Times recently described the conflict in Syria as a "proto-world war". Indeed, the outcome of the war in Syria will have far-reaching implications for people around the world.

What is the US Endgame in Syria?

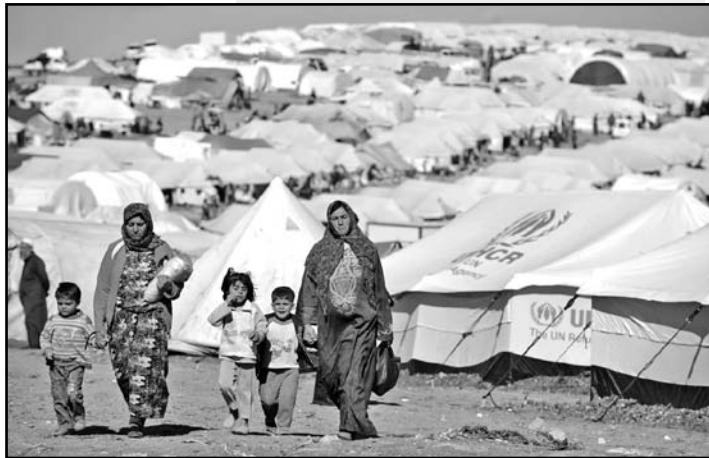
The idea that the US has intervened in Syria to improve the lives of Syrians or even to stop terrorism defies rational belief. US meddling in the internal affairs of Syria has cost nearly half a million lives and created the greatest international refugee crisis since the Second World War.

What, then, is the US endgame in Syria?

As with the US wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, the ultimate goal for the US government and capitalist class is to re-establish US hegemony in the Middle East and North Africa. There are two aspects to this goal. They intend to overthrow any independent governments which refuse to allow the US to dictate their internal and external policies. They also intend to establish

their control over the region in order to keep out rising global competitors such as China and Russia.

This may sound like something of a conspiracy, but consider this: in May 2016, the Center for a New American Security released a report titled "Extending American Power: Strategies to Expand US Engagement in a Competitive World Order". The report by the bipartisan think-tank outlines what they believe the US approach should be in light of "the competitive and increasingly unstable order a new administration coming into office in January 2017 is likely to face". The report states that "The best way to ensure the longevity of a rules-based international system favorable to US interests... is to extend American power and US leadership in Asia,



Above: Internally displaced families walk in the Atme camp in Syria.

Below: Syrian Refugees try to prepare food in a camp in Lebanon.



Europe, and the Greater Middle East – regions where the threats to the international order are the greatest". The report goes on to call for a significant increase in national security and defense spending in order to "take advantage of the substantial military, economic, and diplomatic power Washington has available but has been reluctant to deploy in recent years".

The Center for a New American Security has effectively summarized what many in the US government and capitalist class – Republicans and Democrats alike – have been pushing for since the end of the Cold War: to establish and maintain the US as the dominant global power, by military force if necessary. Syria is one of the final battlegrounds for US control in the Middle East. Therefore, the US sees as its primary objective not the defeat of Daesh but of President Bashar al-Assad, the leader of one of the last remaining independent governments in the region.

Indeed, if defeating Daesh and putting an end to global terrorism really is the goal, the US should join together with the Syrian government and its international allies to put a stop to Daesh. After all, the Syrian army is the force best equipped to defeat Daesh, not a hodge-podge of assorted rebel groups – many of which share a similar ideology to Daesh itself.

The US does not want peace or an end to terrorism in Syria; they want the departure of President Assad and an establishment of a government friendly to US interests, no matter what the cost. If this cannot be achieved through their current program of support for rebel groups, they will not hesitate to use direct military intervention. There are already 300 US soldiers stationed in Syria. US think-tanks such as the Brookings Institution are calling for a 'peacemaking' force of the UN or NATO to be sent to Syria. It goes without saying that a UN or NATO 'peacemaking' force would be acting on US interests – namely, the removal of President Assad.

The Battle For Syria

As one of the last remaining independent states in the region, Syria is critical to the balance of forces between imperialists and oppressed people worldwide. If Syria falls to the imperialist powers, it would put the US in a much better position, politically and militarily, to invade or attack Iran. The US has had their sights set on the overthrow of the independent and anti-imperialist Iranian government since the Iranian revolution of 1979 ousted the US-backed president of that country. Since then, Iran has managed to raise the standard of living for its citizens, surpassing many of its US-supported neighbours both in terms of social gains and technological advances. The US views the Iranian example of success

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Canadian Democracy In Action: Smoke and Mirrors

6 Reasons Why the Liberals' New National Security "Oversight" Committee Does Nothing to Repair the Damage Done by Bill C-51

By Thomas Davies

Almost exactly one year after the Liberals and Conservatives voted to pass the infamous "Police State Act" Bill C-51 into law, the now governing Liberals have introduced new legislation to create the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP). They have championed this "oversight" committee as a big step in their promise to address the massive public outcry against Bill C-51 and the vast powers it granted government agencies, police and secret police to violate our democratic and human rights. As the saying goes, "The fine print is far

more important than the selling price." In this case, we don't even need to look that closely to see that NSICOP will not, as claimed, repair any damage done by Bill C-51.

Here's 6 reasons why:

1. The Committee is not independent, democratic or inclusive.

The plan now is that the Committee would consist of nine members – two from the Senate and seven from the House of Commons. Members are not elected, but "would be appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Prime Minister" The Committee chair will be appointed by the Prime Minister, not elected by Committee members as

promised by Liberals during the federal election.

2. The committee is severely limited in the information it has access to

Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale recently promised the committee would have, "the ability to look at any issue, any activity, any operation, any document." However, under the proposal, the prime minister and his cabinet would be allowed to withhold any information or shut down any Committee investigation they claim to be "injurious to national security." This makes it super convenient for them to censor or cover up important information they find politically damaging. There is no appeal process.

3. In the most important cases, it is not an oversight committee but a review committee

The Committee is not given access to information "respecting ongoing defence intelligence activities supporting military operations" or "relating directly to an ongoing investigation carried out by a law enforcement agency that may lead to a prosecution." This means it cannot stop abuse as it unfolds, only assess the damage and offer recommendations after the fact. There is a massive difference – and there will certainly be cases when government agencies or the police agencies it's more convenient "to apologize rather than ask for permission" when it comes to human rights violations.

4. The committee is deliberately muzzled in what it can report

The Committee does not report to



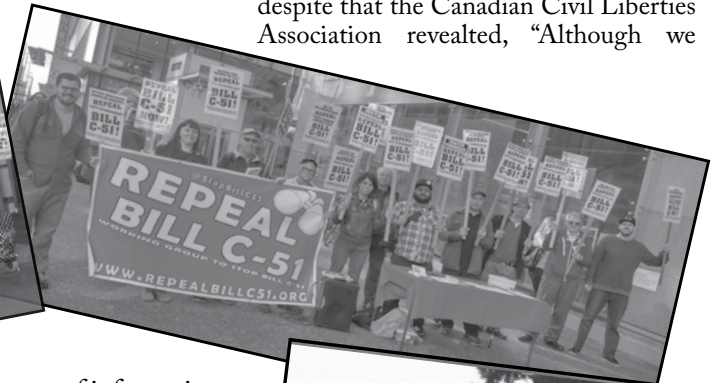
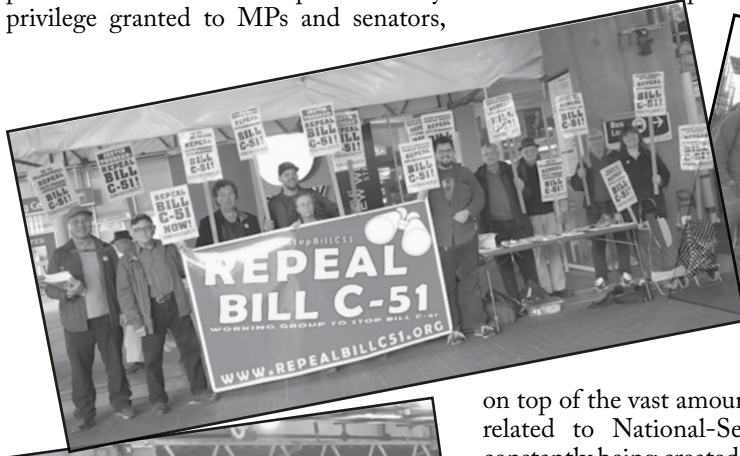
Parliament, but to the prime minister and his caucus. The caucus are then able to censor any information before it goes public, and can also manipulate the timing of its release. It would be also illegal for committee members to publicly discuss anything without authorization by the prime minister. The normal parliamentary privilege granted to MPs and senators,

or even input from individuals or organizations who either have specific expertise in the areas of National Security, or to those who are directly affected the decisions being made. This completely narrows the voices represented. Also, it is impossible for 9 MPs and an appointed "secretariat" of one person to actually stay

vague language regarding what the new criminal offence of "promoting and advocating terror" remains, as do the new low thresholds of preventative arrest.

Repeal Bill C-51

All of these drastic new measures to supposedly protect us from terrorism, despite that the Canadian Civil Liberties Association revealed, "Although we



on top of the vast amount of information related to National-Security which is constantly being created by a government such as Canada's which is continually engaged in wars, occupations and spying in the name of "national security".

6. Bill C-51 is Still Completely Unchanged!

Most damning of all is the fact that one of the most hated laws in Canadian history remains completely unchanged. Privacy rights are still violated by sharing between government agencies without safeguards of accountability. CSIS can still seek secret judicial pre-authorization to violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or break existing laws. The

which allows them to speak without fear of prosecution, would not apply.

5. The committee will not be empowered to hear complaints from the public

There is no mechanism for membership



asked the government repeatedly, not once did we receive specifics on how any part of C-51 could have prevented the attacks of 2014, or on why pre-existing legislation was insufficient to protect us."

There are more problems with this proposed new Committee, just as there are many more problems with Bill C-51. However, it is clear that so long as Bill C-51 exists, our rights continue to be violated and undermined. We are not more "secure" when we have less rights. For these reasons it is important that we continue to educate, organize and mobilize to demand, "Repeal Bill C-51 Now!"

Follow Thomas Davies on Twitter:
@thomasdavies59



**A Big Victory for All Indigenous People in Canada!
A Step Forward for Working Class Struggle!**

MÉTIS AND NON-STATUS INDIANS WIN AT THE SUPREME COURT!

By Aaron Mercredi

On April 14th, Métis and non-status Indians won a significant legal battle against the government of Canada. In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the federal government, not the provinces or any other body, is responsible for the protection of Métis and non-status Indian rights.

The decision came out of a court case launched in 1999 by Harry Daniels, a Métis who also negotiated for the inclusion of the rights of Métis people in section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982, along with Dwight Dorey, national chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP). They sought three declarations in the case: (1) that Métis and non-status Indians are “Indians” under s.91(24) of the Constitution Act of 1867; (2) that the federal Crown owes a fiduciary duty to Métis and non-status Indians; and (3) that Métis and non-status Indians have the right to be consulted with. The court ruled in favour of the first declaration, stating that the Constitution Act of 1867 does not just refer to First Nations with registered Indian status and Inuit peoples, but to all Aboriginal peoples in Canada, including Métis and non-status Indians. However, the second and third were found to be redundant. Previous high-profile legal battles have already established the other declarations. The judge noted that the result of the Delmaguukw and Manitoba Métis Federation cases had established the fiduciary relationship between the federal government and Métis and non-status Indians based on Indigenous pre-existence, while the Haida, Tsilquotin and Powley decisions already recognized the Crown

duty to negotiate with Métis and non-status Indian communities when Aboriginal rights are engaged. The first declaration, however, changes the dynamic playing field and settles what Judge Abella described as a “live controversy between parties”.

Behind the ‘live controversy’

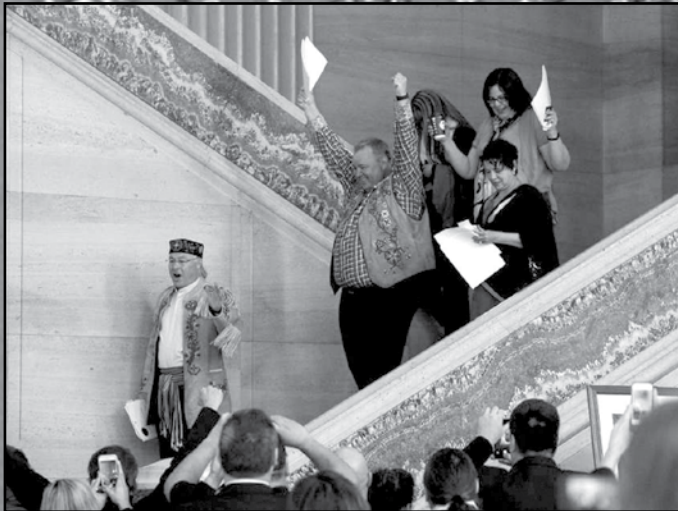
To better understand the impact of this legal victory, it is important to take a look at the Métis and non-status Indians in Canada. Métis roots are traced back to the very beginning of the fur trade. They were the mixed-blood children of fur traders from the North West Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company and Cree, Ojibway or Saukteaux women. As people of mixed ancestry increased in number and married amongst themselves, they developed a distinct culture, neither European nor Indian, but a fusion of the two and a new identity as Métis. Because of their position in the fur trade, having the knowledge of European and Indigenous languages, the Métis were used as a cheap labour force, from the direct gathering of the raw materials to the intermediary positions, and the HBC was able to use its power over them to exploit their labour more than the European immigrants. When the HBC was negotiating the transfer of Rupert’s Land in a deal with Canada, the Métis of the Red River Valley formed a provisional government under the leadership of Louis Riel in 1869. While the new Canadian government tried to undermine the Métis, Riel negotiated the establishment of Manitoba as a new Canadian province with the rights granted to the Métis. In the aftermath of the events of the Red River, Riel fled the country as the government sought his arrest for treason. Many Métis were also forced to flee the Red River Valley to what is now the

province of Saskatchewan. It was there, in 1885, where Riel, returned from the United States, alongside Gabriel Dumont, led a popular movement including Métis, English settlers and the Cree to pursue their rights in Canada’s continued expansion westward. They made a historic stand, but this pursuit ultimately resulted in the military defeat at the Battle of Batoche, where the Métis were outgunned by the newly-formed Canadian military. Riel was hanged, Dumont fled to the United States and the rest of the Métis that were involved in the resistance were persecuted or fled.

Status and Treaties

While Canada attempted to extinguish Aboriginal title through treaties for First Nations, they introduced the land scrip for the Métis. Instead of a collective extinguishment of title, Canada dealt with the Métis on an individual basis. The premise of the scrip was to extinguish the Aboriginal title of the Métis by awarding a certificate redeemable for land or money. This policy is how many Métis became known as ‘road-allowance people’, living in makeshift communities and settlements. Government policy is also why Métis join the rest of the Indigenous population at the top of the statistics for health and housing problems, incarceration rates, unemployment and discrimination. Métis children were forced alongside First Nation and Inuit children to attend residential schools. According to the 2011 Canada census, there were 451,785 Métis people counted in Canada.

The 2011 Canada census also counted 213,900 non-status Indians in the country. A ‘non-status Indian’ is a legal term for a First Nations person who is either not registered with the federal government, for



Bruce Dumont, president of the BC Metis Nation, Audrey Poitras, president of the Alberta Metis Nation and Gerald Morin, vice president of the Saskatchewan Metis Nation celebrate Supreme Court decision in Ottawa. Thursday, April 14, 2016.



whatever reason, or not registered to a band which signed a treaty with the Crown. Not being registered with the federal government could be the result of many of the circumstances of colonization. For example, if a member of a First Nation was away hunting or trapping during the original registry, they were not registered as a 'status' Indian. Up until 1955, serving in the armed forces, obtaining a university degree or becoming a professional such as a doctor or a lawyer meant automatically losing one's status. For many years, a brutal section of the Indian Act also stripped First Nations' women of their status if they married men who were not status Indians themselves. Losing status, also known as becoming 'enfranchised', meant that person was not compensated or supported, that their band membership is removed and they lose access to their community. The Indian rights that person held were lost. Their children would not have status either, meaning their ties to their ancestry and identity were broken.

What the Ruling means

While Métis and Non-Status Indians have been dealing with the effects of colonization and fighting for decades for rights that they have been stripped of, they have always been caught in a tug-of-war battle between the federal government and the provinces. As neither fall under the category of the Indian Act, the federal government has consistently denied its responsibility towards them. The Supreme Court described it as a 'jurisdictional wasteland', but the final ruling clearly says that "it is the federal government to whom they can turn."

In no way is this article trying to paint a rosy picture of the current state of Canada's relationship to First Nations, or that now because of this ruling Canada will treat Métis and non-status Indians the same as First Nations, fixing everything. The continued neglect, trampling of rights, and ongoing theft of Native land are part of this country's history and present. Canadian colonialism is alive and well and the reason for the deplorable conditions among First Nations communities. What is important, with this recent victory, is that, although it will be a long tough road ahead, that it is a step forward for Metis and non-status Indians in the fight for Indigenous rights by squarely pointing at the federal government for responsibility. This, in turn, is a step forward for all Indigenous people in Canada.

"I am more convinced everyday that without a single exception I did right. And I have always believed that, as I have acted honestly, the time will come when the people of Canada will see and acknowledge it."



Louis Riel



The New Era of War and Occupation IMPERIALIST WAR, OCCUPATION AND THE REFUGEE CRISIS Vancouver Events Highlight the Importance of Building the Antiwar Movement

By Janine Solanki

Since 2001 we have seen imperialist invasions, wars, occupations, sanctions and every flavor of foreign military intervention plague people throughout the Middle East and Africa. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks were used by the US government as the catalyst to set their new era of war and occupation into motion. This new era started with the war on Afghanistan, continued with the invasion of Iraq, and has since hit Somalia, Libya, Mali, Syria, Yemen and done a full circle to create another war on Iraq. Drone wars have targeted innocent people in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia and beyond. Sanctions are crippling the economies of Iran and Venezuela. US meddling and covert operations have led to the US-backed coup that has created a complete crisis in Ukraine, and is working to destabilize countries and back coups in Latin America, especially in Venezuela.

The largest refugee crisis the world has ever seen is now on Europe's shores, with over 65 million people seeking asylum because their homelands are uninhabitable war zones. While the governments of imperialist countries side-step the important question of why there are so many refugees, one only has to look at the countries they are fleeing from. Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia account for some of the highest numbers of refugees – countries that have been under some of the worst attacks by the US-led war drive.

This new era of war and occupation shows no sign of slowing, and is instead opening new and more ambitious fronts. Currently the US and their allies in NATO, including Canada, are building up their military presence in Eastern Europe. They make no secret that they are doing so with the intention of flexing their muscles against Russia.

While operating this Cold War 2, the US is also ramping up its strategic "Pivot to East Asia" plan which the Obama administration first outlined in 2012. The US politicians are claiming China has to answer to the US for its presence in the South China Sea. This hypocrisy was pointed out in a comment by Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying who said "The U.S. has talked about militarization in the South China Sea. But can it explain whether its own increased military deployment in the region is equivalent to militarization?"

While the mainstream media and political rhetoric is spouting misinformation, fear mongering and double standards, the role of the antiwar movement is to fight back. The worst enemy of people in the US, Canada and other imperialist countries isn't Muslims, isn't China and isn't Russia, as news headlines might lead you to believe. Our worst enemy is imperialist governments that are spending trillions of dollars on brutal war and devastation, instead of funding the very real and dire needs of housing, healthcare, education and poverty at home.

Actions and Events

On June 18, 2016 Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) hit the streets to speak this truth, with MAWO's monthly antiwar rally and petition campaign outside the Vancouver Art Gallery in Downtown Vancouver. Passerby's stopped to get information and to sign petitions demanding that Canada stop its \$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia. In contrast to the pro-war messages bombarding us on the news everyday, anyone who walked by couldn't miss the signs and banners demanding an end to the war on Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and for self-determination of all oppressed nations.

MAWO continued from action to discussion, with the June 28 public forum titled "Imperialist War, Occupation and the Refugee Crisis" at Joe's Cafe in Vancouver. News and video clips started off the forum, showing the destruction that this new era of war and occupation has brought throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and the human face of its result – the refugee crisis. Azza Rojbi, a Tunisian social justice activist and MAWO executive committee member and Alison Bodine, MAWO chairperson, were the forum's speakers. They discussed the real roots of the refugee crisis, which is coming now after 14 years of the new era of war and occupation, and how Canada, as an active player in this war drive, has the moral responsibility and capability to open the doors to many more refugees.

I encourage you to join MAWO in our next monthly rally and petition drive on July 9th at 2pm in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery in Downtown Vancouver. This action will be joining protests world-wide, as part of International Days of Action to Stop NATO, during the NATO summit in Warsaw, Poland. As the US and its imperialist allies are further spreading the reach of this new era of war and occupation, they are doing so utilizing the same NATO body which bombed and destroyed Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya. Canada is very much a part of this renewed NATO war drive military spending and proclaiming that "NATO needs more Canada." In . US President Obama spoke in Canadian Parliament on June 29th, 2016, encouraging more Canadian response we say Canada and the world needs an end to NATO! Join us to demand NO to NATO, NO to war and occupation, and YES to self-determination for all oppressed nations!

Follow Janine on Twitter: @janinesolanki

THE NEW ERA OF WAR AND OCCUPATION



TO BUILD THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT WE NEED TO CONTINUE FIGHTING

Below is a talk given by Joe Lombardo at the Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO) public forum "Building the Antiwar Movement in Canada," marking 13 years since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Joe spoke through videoconference at the forum, held on March 18, 2016 in Vancouver, Canada.

Joe Lombardo is the Co-chair of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), an antiwar and social justice coalition in the United States that organizes against imperialist war and occupation, and against the war on oppressed people at home.

www.unacpeace.org

By Joe Lombardo

You all look great! Thank you for having me, it is late here, actually its approaching midnight I guess and it was a long day, but I am really glad that you invited me to speak to you tonight, and I am glad that you are recognizing the 13th anniversary of the horrendous invasion and occupation of Iraq. We have been doing the same thing in the United States. I believe today one of the UNAC groups in Minneapolis is doing an action, we had an action last Sunday in New York City and there have been a number of others that are happening and will be happening around the country.

Alison asked me to give a little perspective about UNAC, what we are and what we do, some of our analysis, why we are

doing what we are doing. So I am going to try and talk a little bit about how we got started and why we got started and what we are doing now.

UNAC, which is the United National Antiwar Coalition is a coalition of antiwar and social justice groups. We have national, regional and local groups in UNAC. We have about 150 groups throughout the country, which sounds like a big number; however as is probably true in Canada too, the antiwar movement has shrunk in the United States since time of the beginning of the Iraq War. The sentiment among people in the United States against war has grown but the movement has shrunk. When the Iraq War started, in the United States a majority supported it, however, that changed very quickly as there were more and more casualties and people started understanding and seeing what this war was all about. It quickly became a war that was only supported by a minority and it has stayed that way ever since. The antiwar sentiment in this country, by all polls, is somewhere above 70%. Yet, we don't see that reflected in large antiwar demonstrations as we saw in the early days of the war. One of the reasons for this is because there have been serious attacks on the American population at home, very much related to the wars abroad and these have taken priority in the minds of many. We recognized

that at our founding conference and we started using that slogan "End the Wars at Home and Abroad!" People are fighting battles against police brutality, attacks on unions, austerity, attacks on civil liberties, deportations, Climate change and much more and many of these seem more immediate to people than the wars abroad. Additionally, because of the high antiwar sentiment in the U.S., the government has been reluctant to put boots on the ground and has used more drones, bombing and proxies to fight the wars.

UNAC was founded in July of 2010 at a conference in Albany, NY of 800 people. One of the reasons that we initiated this conference was because with the election of Obama, there was a lot of confusion in the United States. Many people thought "we won," they thought the wars were going to end and many of the antiwar groups were closing up shop. But many of us knew that as long as there were U.S. troops on foreign soil that we needed to have an antiwar movement in this country. So, we pulled together this conference, and out of that came UNAC, the United National Antiwar Coalition.

There were a couple of things that we did that were different than in past antiwar coalitions, when we founded UNAC. One thing is that we took a very strong position in support of Palestinian rights.

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CAPITALISM & DEMOCRACY

By Manuel Yepe*

The capitalist socio-economic order is synonymous with freedom ... provided you agree that the first of the freedoms is enjoyed by capital and that money can be free to buy everything.

When the ability of money is restricted to acquiring the goods that sustain life in society, or these are prevented from becoming a commodity that can be bought and sold, capitalism is constrained.

That is why it is so important for capitalism to manipulate popular awareness to instill the idea that capitalism is equal to democracy, and that any attack on the freedom of money to buy any of the earthly and moral goods of human beings is an attack on democracy.

Unfortunately, the social system the world lives under today is capitalism; and in very few countries have their peoples have achieved—or are still fighting to do so—a situation in which the moneyed classes do not hold political power. These few countries have undertaken, with enormous difficulties, routes other than the capitalist economic, political and social order.

For that reason, all—or almost all—the rules governing international relations on the planet—in the form of laws, social practices and traditions—have a foundation convenient to the bourgeois order.

There are times when the global capitalist dictatorship is exercised with more violence than at others; but there is always a struggle between the empowered rich and the poor who suffer the consequences of such alien power.

When conditions dictate, oligarchs are bound to make concessions to their “subjects” in order to prevent them from being encouraged to use their numerical advantage and get organized for a confrontation that would somehow disturb the established order.

But with equal or greater speed the wealthy classes react when their hegemony is in danger.

They then support each other in defense of their spurious exploitative interests.

The privileged wonder: how would a country be where doctors, educators, courts of law, governments, the information, production and services media, the cultural expressions, and even the conditions to make love were to serve all equally in a society in which money could not determine differences in the quality and quantity of the benefits?

They consider that something like this would distort the current precarious and asymmetric balance of power in nearly all national societies. Capitalism requires that such ideas continue beyond the citizens’ aspirations.

Why accept that in case of illness, a person

Why should candidates for government positions in their election campaigns have to do without donations from the richest, more influential and responsible members of society so that, in their future roles as leaders, they feel obliged as a priority to protect the security of corporate capital and the most important and powerful segment of the nation?

For international capitalism, the press is only considered democratic in a country where private capital is allowed to buy radio and television stations, newspapers, magazines, news agencies and other media so they can see to it that what is published serves its interests. These interests are the determining factors in the whole society.

The bourgeois order also sees restricting the enjoyment of the best of national and international art and culture to the educated elite of society as legitimate. They are able to pay, through advertising, the price of their expensive productions, or to pay obscenely expensive admission tickets to the shows.

Is it not considered natural and logical that everything in society is structured so that the main attraction for gender relations is money and economic level, and that competition and the struggle for profit is the engine of progress at any level?

History records the existence of a supposed democracy with slaves in Greece, and today the capitalists have tried to appropriate the term as if it were unique to their socio-economic system. This is despite the fact that the word “capitalism” is almost the opposite of “democracy”, a term etymologically claimable only by “socialism”.

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with economic resources is doomed to the same quality of care, equal treatment conditions and possibilities of healing as a person who lacks such resources?

Is it logical that the offspring of wealthy people should share the same classrooms and quality of education with the sons and daughters of poor families?

Is it rational that, when they commit crimes, the rich and poor are judged by the same standards, or that cultured corrupt millionaires share prison food with rough and hungry common criminals?

Por Manuel Yepe*

El orden socioeconómico capitalista es sinónimo de libertad... siempre que usted acepte que la primera de las libertades la disfrute el capital, y que el dinero pueda ser libre para comprarlo todo. Cuando se restringe la capacidad del dinero para adquirir los bienes que sustentan la vida en sociedad o se impide que éstos se comporten a la manera de una mercancía más, susceptible de ser comprados y vendidos, se restringe al capitalismo.

Por eso es tan importante para el capitalismo que la conciencia ciudadana sea manipulada para fijar la idea de que capitalismo es igual a democracia y que cualquier atentado contra la libertad del dinero para adquirir cualquiera de los bienes terrenales y morales del hombre es una agresión contra la democracia.

Lamentablemente, la organización social en que vive el mundo es el capitalismo y son pocos los países cuyos pueblos han logrado- o luchan aun por hacerlo- que no sean las clases adineradas las que detentan el poder político y hayan emprendido, con dificultades enormes, rutas distintas a ese orden económico, político y social.

Por ese motivo, las reglas de juego que rigen las relaciones internacionales en el planeta en forma de leyes, prácticas sociales y tradiciones, tienen todas -o casi todas- una fundamentación conveniente al orden burgués.

Hay veces que la dictadura global capitalista se ejerce con mayor violencia que otras, pero siempre subyace una lucha entre los ricos empoderados y los pobres que sufren las consecuencias de tal prerrogativa ajena.

Cuando las condiciones lo permiten, las oligarquías se obligan a hacer concesiones a sus "sometidos" en aras de evitar que éstos se vean estimulados a recurrir a su ventaja numérica y se organicen para un enfrentamiento que perturbe de alguna manera su orden.

Pero, con igual o mayor prontitud, suelen reaccionar las clases adineradas cuando su

hegemonía se encuentra en peligro y acuden al recurso de apoyarse recíprocamente en defensa de sus espurios intereses explotadores.

Los privilegiados se preguntan cómo sería un país donde los médicos, los educadores, los tribunales, los gobiernos, los medios de producción y de servicios, los medios de información, las expresiones culturales y hasta las condiciones para hacer el amor estuvieran al servicio de todos por igual en una sociedad

¿Por qué candidatos a cargos de gobierno, en sus campañas electorales, han de prescindir de las donaciones que les hagan las personas más ricas, influyentes y responsables de la sociedad, a fin de que, en su futuro desempeño como dirigentes, se consideren obligados a proteger prioritariamente la seguridad de los capitales de las corporaciones y los del segmento más importante y poderoso de la nación?



Para el capitalismo internacional, la prensa sólo se considera democrática en un país donde esté permitido al capital privado comprar emisoras de radio y de televisión, periódicos, revistas, agencias de noticias o cualquier otro medio para así cuidar que lo que se publique sirva a sus intereses, que son los determinantes en el conjunto de la sociedad.

El orden burgués valora también como lícito que el disfrute de lo mejor del arte y la cultura nacional e internacional esté limitado a la élite culta de la sociedad que es capaz de sufragar, mediante la publicidad, el precio de sus costosas realizaciones,

o de pagar onerosos billetes de entrada a los espectáculos.

¿Acaso no considera natural y lógico que todo en la sociedad esté estructurado de modo que el atractivo principal para la relación de géneros sea el dinero y la posición económica, y que la competitividad y la lucha por la ganancia sean los motores del progreso en cualquier nivel?

La historia registra la existencia de una supuesta democracia esclavista en Grecia y los capitalistas han pretendido apropiarse del término cual si fuera privativo de su ordenamiento socioeconómico, pese a ser el vocablo "capitalismo" casi antónimo de "democracia", un término sólo reclamable etimológicamente por el "socialismo".

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en la que el dinero no pueda determinar diferencias en la calidad y urgencia de las prestaciones.

Algo así, consideran, distorsionaría el precario y asimétrico equilibrio actual de casi todas las sociedades nacionales; el capitalismo precisa que tales ideas continúen al margen de las aspiraciones ciudadanas.

¿Por qué aceptar que, en caso de enfermedad, una persona con recursos económicos se vea condenada a la misma calidad de atención e iguales condiciones de tratamiento y posibilidades de curación que los que carecen de ellos?

¿Es lógico que los descendientes de personas adineradas deban compartir las mismas aulas y calidad de educación con los hijos e hijas de las familias pobres?

¿Es racional que pobres y ricos sean juzgados, si delinquen, con el mismo rasero, o que compartan galeras en prisión cultos millonarios corruptos con rústicos y hambrientos delincuentes comunes?

BREXIT IMPERIALISM

By David Yaffe

Below is an excerpt of an excellent article originally titled "EU referendum – The position of communists" published in the U.K based "Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism" newspaper. It was originally written before the Brexit referendum took place, but has also been updated to include "post-Brexit vote" analysis. For space reasons we could not print the entire article. We encourage you to read the article in its entirety at: <http://www.revolutionarycommunist.org/capitalist-crisis/4349-eu-referendum>

The 2016 referendum

The background to the current referendum is the ongoing eurozone crisis and the deep splits in the Conservative Party over Europe, splits exacerbated by the challenge of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), its anti-EU stance and racist immigration policy. The overall exposure of UK banks to debt in the so-called 'peripheral' countries in Europe, the weight of banks and financial services in the British economy and the importance of the financial derivatives market for the City of London make Britain very vulnerable to a run on eurozone banks. That is why the British ruling class is so concerned that Europe should address the deepening debt crisis throughout the eurozone. On the other hand it is determined to protect the parasitic and speculative activities of the City of London from European oversight and control. So the British government continually demands safeguards for the City of London as the price for accepting European measures, such as a eurozone banking union, to address the crisis in the eurozone.

On 23 January 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron announced, in his Bloomberg speech, that he would renegotiate the terms of Britain's membership of the EU and follow this with an in/out referendum on Britain's membership by the end of 2017. He did this in a futile attempt to appease the eurosceptics in his party, outflank UKIP, and strike a populist pose to improve his party's prospects in the next general election. It was a spectacular gamble which has created quite serious problems for the British ruling class.

On winning the 2015 General Election,

Cameron set about renegotiating terms of Britain's membership of the EU in the interests of stabilising his party. Key changes will mean:

A seven-year term for the emergency brake to restrict EU migrants in the UK claiming in-work benefits. It will cover individuals for no more than four years.

Child benefit payments indexed to the cost of living for children living outside the UK for all new arrivals to the UK, extending to all workers from 1 January 2020.

Any single non-eurozone country able to force a debate among EU leaders about 'problem' eurozone laws – though they will not have a veto.

An unequivocal opt-out stating that EU treaty 'references to ever-closer union do not apply to the United Kingdom'.

Having achieved these changes he felt confident enough to bring forward the date of the EU referendum to 23 June 2016.

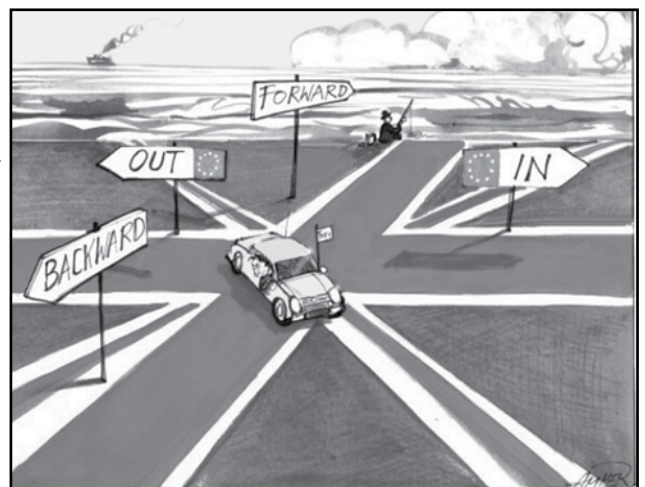
These measures did not appease the eurosceptics in his party. They do not, in fact, represent a significant change on the existing relationship between the EU and Britain. The outcome of the referendum is uncertain, all the more so since the disarray in the Conservative Party resulting from the 2016 Budget and the recent 'Panama Papers' revelations about Cameron's wealth and his dead father's investments in tax havens.

The ruling class is fundamentally split on the question of the EU referendum. The dominant sections of the ruling class are pulling out all the stops to ensure British people vote to remain in the EU. The Bank of England, the IMF, the OECD, large corporations and international banks, the CBI, and Blackrock – the world's largest asset manager – and leading European politicians have waded in pointing out the economic risks of Britain leaving the EU. The former MI5 boss, Eliza

Manningham-Buller warned of the risks to our security and safety. US President Obama joined this chorus during his visit to London in May when he made it clear that it was in US interests that Britain remained in the EU saying that: 'The United States sees how your powerful voice in Europe ensures that Europe takes a strong stance in the world, and keeps the EU open, outward looking, and closely linked to its allies on the other side of the Atlantic. So the US and the world need your outsized influence to continue – including within Europe' (*The Guardian* 22 May 2016).

US companies have \$558bn invested in the UK, with around 7,500 companies employing 1.2 million people. London's status as a financial market capital is built on 'passporting rights' that allow companies based in Britain to conduct business across the EU. This is why London has become the favoured headquarters of many US and international firms. In addition EU companies have accumulated investments of £741bn in the UK, some 60% of the total Foreign Direct Investment in 2014 (*Financial Times* 22 April and 16 May 2016). Britain's exit from the EU (Brexit), the Remain advocates argue, would threaten these investments and undermine the flow of inward investment.

The government's use of two Treasury papers on the impact of Brexit has raised the decibels to unprecedented levels. The first warned that the economy would be 6.2% smaller than current projections by 2030, costing every household the equivalent of



£4,300 a year. The second reported that, following convulsions in financial markets, the economy would be tipped into recession with the loss of between 520,000 and 820,000 jobs. Wages would fall between 2.8% and 4.0%, the pound would go down between 12% and 15%, public borrowing would rise between £24bn and £39bn, house prices would be lower by between 10% and 18% and much more in this doomsday scenario.

Faced with this onslaught, the Brexit campaign, led by former London mayor Boris Johnson and Justice Minister Michael Gove, dismissed all these warnings and reports as exaggerated spin. They argue that an independent imperialist Britain can go it alone and negotiate new advantageous trade deals with the rest of the world. They have talked up the increased costs of remaining in the EU, but have essentially fallen back on ex-

exploiting xenophobic fears of increased immigration putting ever greater strain on public services and employment. Finally, stepping into the gutter, they have claimed that Turkey's future membership of the EU will allow millions more to enter the UK within eight years, endangering UK security because of the 'high level of Turkish criminality'.

and looting and super-exploitation of the oppressed nations.

What attitude should communists take to the EU referendum?

It is important to say something about the character of a United States of Europe under imperialism. Lenin, in an article 'On the slogan for a United States of Europe', written in August 1915, makes what are still indispensable points today. He wrote that under the economic conditions of imperialism, that is, the export of capital and the division of the world by the 'advanced' and 'civilised' colonial powers: 'A United States of Europe under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary'. And later he says of course 'temporary agreements are possible between capitalists and between states'. In this sense 'A United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the European capitalists...but to what end?

Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty against Japan and America...'

In FRFI over many issues we have pointed out the process by which the European powers are taking steps to create a European imperialist bloc. We have spelt out the devastating impact it is having on the working class of the peripheral EU countries in the eurozone. There will be no let-up in the desperate conditions facing millions of ordinary Europeans as the dominant European countries push forward their programme step by step to create a federal European imperialist state. It would suppress progressive developments in the member states while confronting the economic challenge of the US and other imperialist powers and compete with them to divide up the spoils from the plunder

confronting the British ruling class with choices it does not wish to make.

Sections of the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress are calling for Britain to remain in the EU, under the guise of protecting workers' rights supposedly guaranteed by the EU, against the austerity drive of the Conservative government. This opportunist support for European imperialism is only a cover for their own abject failure to fight against austerity at home in Britain.

Left and right social democrats, including the Communist Party of Britain, the SWP, and Counterfire, have joined together with the rail union RMT and other organisations to promote Lexit – the Left Leave Campaign. The Socialist Party and TUSC have taken up a similar position. They claim to be promoting a 'working class, left-wing, internationalist case' for voting to leave the EU. These opportu-

nists say they are against austerity and fighting capitalism. A vote to leave the EU, they say, will lead to a 'hopelessly fragile' Conservative government and a 'crisis of our rulers', opening

up 'greater space for the left'. In reality they will be voting alongside UKIP for an independent imperialist Britain which will continue to plunder and loot oppressed nations throughout the world.

We reject totally taking sides in what is essentially a dispute between sections of the ruling class over what would be for Britain necessarily totally reactionary outcomes – part of a European imperialist bloc or becoming an offshore centre for usury capital under the umbrella of US imperialism. The only principled communist position is to call for a boycott of the referendum while exposing the reactionary intentions of those on either side. This is the way forward in building an anti-imperialist movement in this country, and it opens the path for communists to link-up with those other forces in Europe fighting against European imperialism.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! #251 June/July 2016



Two right-wing leaders of the Brexit debate - MP Boris Johnson, leave campaign & PM David Cameron, remain campaign

FREE OSCAR LÓPEZ RIVERA!

¡Ya Basta! Free U.S. Political Prisoner Oscar López Rivera!

By Alison Bodine

"It is much easier not to struggle, to give up and take the path of the living dead. But if we want to live, we must struggle." Oscar López Rivera, 1991

On May 29, 1981 Oscar López Rivera, a Puerto Rican independence fighter and community organizer and leader, was arrested during a traffic stop outside of Chicago. As of 2016, Oscar has now spent 35 years held unjustly in United States prison for his support and organizing for the independence and self-determination of Puerto Rico, a country that continues its struggle against U.S. colonization to this day.

Who is Oscar López Rivera?

Oscar López Rivera was born in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, but moved to the United States with his family when he was a young man. When he was 18, Oscar was drafted to the U.S. military and sent to the Vietnam War. According to a recent book about his life, "Between torture and Resistance" the Vietnam War was also when Oscar began to become a radical and question the United States government, and also to "see the fragility of life."

When Oscar returned to Chicago he saw the poverty and oppression in his own community and began to get involved in the struggle for the Latin American and Puerto Rican community, organizing for basic rights like education, housing and healthcare. He also joined an organization fighting for Puerto Rican independence called the Armed Forces of National Liberation (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional - FALN).

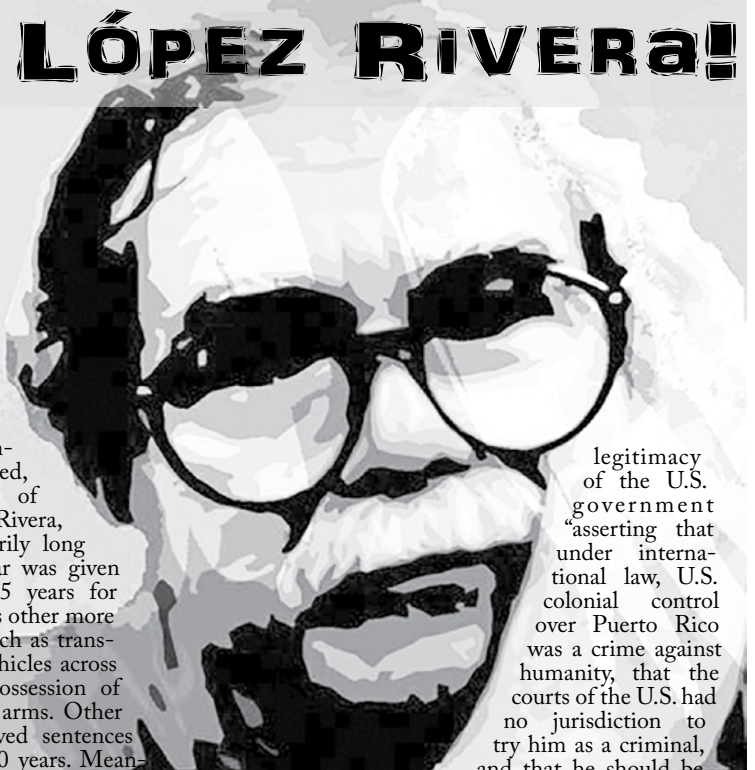
What are the Charges Against Oscar López Rivera?

Oscar López Rivera was arrested in 1981, following the arrest and imprisonment of 11 other members of the FALN. They were all charged with and convicted of "seditious conspiracy to oppose the legitimate authority of the United States government in Puerto Rico by force," essentially with conspiracy to overthrow the colonial government of the United States in Puerto Rico. Although at that point the FALN had taken public responsibility for around 100 bombings of military, government and economic targets in the United States, none of the independence fighters that were

arrested were charged with hurting or killing anyone.

All of the sentences imposed, including that of Oscar López Rivera, were extraordinarily long and unjust. Oscar was given a sentence of 55 years for sedition as well as other more minor charges such as transporting stolen vehicles across state lines, or possession of unregistered fire arms. Other defendants received sentences from 35 up to 90 years. Meanwhile, at the time the average sentence for murder was 10.3 years (People's Law Office).

As Oscar López Rivera explained on the news program Democracy Now in 2013, they were not the first Puerto Rican independence fighters charged with sedition, "I think the fact that I was charged with seditious conspiracy to overthrow the government of the United



legitimacy of the U.S. government asserting that under international law, U.S. colonial control over Puerto Rico was a crime against humanity, that the courts of the U.S. had no jurisdiction to try him as a criminal, and that he should be

remanded to an impartial international tribunal to have his status judged." (Peoples Law Office) This stand meant that Oscar López Rivera, and the other Puerto Rican independence fighters refused to participate in the trial and did not provide a defense or appeal their sentences.

Further Injustice Against Oscar López Rivera

The harassment and political targeting of Oscar López Rivera has continued through the over three decades he has been imprisoned in the United States. This includes the 12 years that he has been forced into solitary confinement, where he was denied not only contact with other humans, but also tortured with sensory and sleep deprivation, spending 22.5 hours a day in a prison cell 6' wide and 9' long.

In 1986 Oscar López Rivera was also charged with conspiracy to escape from prison, following a FBI and police sting operation. He was convicted of this charge

in 1988, given an additional 15 year-long prison sentence and then transferred from solitary confinement in the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Chicago to the Maximum Security Prison in Marion, Illinois and the Super Maximum Security Prison in Florence, Colorado. His 15 year sentence for "conspiracy" to escape prison was eight times longer than the average sentence for actually escaping prison (Jan Susler, People's Law Office in Chicago)



May 29 2016: Protest in San Juan, Puerto Rico demanding the immediate release of Oscar López Rivera

States speaks for itself. But the charge in reference to Puerto Ricans has always been used for political purposes. It goes back to 1936. The first time that a group of Puerto Ricans was put in prison was by using the seditious conspiracy charge. And this has always been a strictly political charge used against Puerto Ricans."

When sentenced, the Puerto Rican independence fighters also continued to stand by their convictions and refused to recognize the

Since 1995 Oscar López Rivera has been imprisoned in Terre Haute, Illinois where he continues to face further harassment as a political prisoner, including a special condition that requires him to report to prison guards every two hours. As of 2012 this special condition had been in place for 14 years. Both in the prison in Terre Haute and before, Oscar López Rivera has also faced denial of medical treatment, denial of family visits, confiscation of his art and art supplies and he was refused the right to attend his mother's funeral, among other further injustices.

Where is the Case of Oscar López Rivera Today?

Oscar López Rivera is the last of the Puerto Rican independence fighters to remain behind U.S. prison bars. In 1998, U.S. President Bill Clinton offered clemency to Oscar, as well as 13 other Puerto Rican political prisoners. Oscar López Rivera refused to accept the offer, stating that he did not want to leave other Puerto Rican political prisoners that had not been offered clemency behind. Since then the remaining political prisoners have been released, the most recent being Carlos Alberto Torres, who was released on parole in 2010 and Norberto Gonzalez Claudio, who was released in 2015.

After being denied parole in 2011, it is the certain intention of the U.S. government and prison system that Oscar López Rivera will remain in prison until at least 2023, when he will be 80 years old.

International Support for Freedom of the Oscar López Rivera

Ever since the arrest of Oscar López Rivera and the Puerto Rican independence fighters, they have received international support for their case for freedom. This includes the support of international organizations such as the Non-Aligned Movement and CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization, Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Máiread Corrigan Maguire, Rigoberta Menchú, José Ramon Orta, Jody Williams and Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, and also the recently released Cuban 5 political prisoners.

Calls for the freedom of Oscar López Rivera have also come from people and organizations around the world, including in Puerto Rico and the United States. As one example of this support, during the 2011 campaign for his parole, the National Boricua Human Rights Network sent over 10,000 letters of support from people in the United States to the parole board. City governments, and state and federal congress people have also called on U.S. President Barack Obama to grant clemency to Oscar López Rivera. As well, there are frequent mobilizations demanding that Oscar López Rivera be released, including a protest of thousands of people in streets of San Juan, Puerto Rico on the 35 anniversary of his arrest, May 29, 2016.

"The Crime is Colonialism"

In a 1998 interview with the Los Angeles Times, Oscar López Rivera stated "I have no regrets for what I've done in the Puerto Rico

independence movement," ... "The onus is not on us. The crime is colonialism."

For over 500 years the people of the island of Puerto Rico have been fighting for their independence, beginning with Spanish colonization and the landing of Christopher Columbus in 1493, through French, British, and Dutch attempts to control the island, and ending with their status as a United States territory.

The United States invaded Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War in 1898, and since then Puerto Rico has been a colony. In 1917, the government of the United States allowed Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and then immediately drafted 20,000 Puerto Ricans into World War I. However, to this day, Puerto Ricans have no right to vote in Federal elections and have only a single, non-voting representative in the U.S. Congress.



Cuban 5 Heroes, former political prisoners, stand in solidarity to free Oscar López Rivera Left to right: René González, Gerardo Hernández and Antonio Guerrero

The people of Puerto Rico also face many more devastating effects of colonization including a 45% poverty rate (U.S. Census Bureau) and an 11.8% unemployment rate (more than double that in the United States). Despite years of implementing tight austerity measures against the people of Puerto Rico, today, Puerto Rico is facing a debt crisis that is furthering poverty and desperate living conditions in Puerto Rico, including big cuts to healthcare and education. These horrible conditions are no surprise given that Puerto Rico as a popular tax haven for many foreign and U.S. corporations, especially manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies, who profit tremendously from the huge tax incentives.

The United States has also continued their military occupation of Puerto Rico, through various military on the island. This included the military base on the island of Vieques. Beyond just a military base, although 10,000 Puerto Ricans call Vieques home, the U.S. military used the island as a weapons testing ground and toxic waste dump. According to a U.S. navy brief from 2002, for two decades, the U.S. military dropped nearly 1500 tons of bombs and explosives each year. Even the U.S. government's Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA) has documented "Almost 2 million pounds of military and industrial waste—oil, solvents, lubricants, lead paint, acid, and other refuse—were disposed of in different sites in mangrove swamps and sensitive wetland areas."

Following a campaign and protests, the U.S. military was forced to leave Vieques in 2003, although they still maintain a military presence on other parts of Puerto Rico, as well as operate a U.S. Coast Guard and National Guard.

Free Oscar López Rivera NOW!

As the case of the freed Puerto Rican political prisoners, and the case of the Cuban 5 political prisoners released in 2014, has shown, oppressed people around the world can and will win when we organize a consistent, creative and unified campaign for

justice!

For over three decades, political prisoner Oscar López Rivera has been locked unjustly behind U.S. prison walls for fighting for the independence and self-determination of Puerto Rico. As people who believe in human rights and justice, we must organize for his freedom!

Ya Basta! Enough is Enough! As Oscar López Rivera said, "Agitation, organization, resistance, struggle and love are the ingredients that will guarantee us victory!"

To write Oscar López Rivera: Federal Bureau of Prisons

Oscar López Rivera
#87651-024
PO Box 474701
Des Moines, IA, 50947-0001

On the 29th of each month the ProLibertad Freedom Campaign also organizes a Twitter campaign for the freedom of Oscar López Rivera. To participate tweet: "@BarackObama I add my voice to the thousands demanding: Free Oscar Lopez Rivera NOW! #FreeOscarLopez"

THE NEW ERA OF WAR & OCCUPATION

IMPERIALIST WARS, OCCUPATIONS & THE REFUGEE CRISIS

THE TRAGEDY OF DISPLACED PEOPLE



SYRIA

By Alison Bodine

There are now more displaced people in the world than any other time in history. As of the end of 2015, 65.3 million people, or one out of every 113 people on the planet, has been forced to flee wars, occupations and devastation in their homes in search of somewhere to be safe.

It is no coincidence that this horrible record has been reached after nearly 15 years of imperialist wars, occupations, sanctions and all forms of foreign intervention in the Middle East and Africa. Since the U.S. invaded in Afghanistan in 2001, this new era of war and occupation has brought unbelievable death and destruction to people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. People across the Middle East and Africa have been left with no other option then to abandon everything that they have ever known for the possibility of a future and some sense of security, in another city, country or continent.

The Origin of the Refugee Crisis

The utter devastation of imperialist intervention can be seen clearly in a report "Global Trends 2015," released by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). According to this report, Syria and Iraq have the world's 2nd and 3rd largest numbers of internally displaced people (the country with the most displaced people is Colombia). This comes as no surprise given that since August of 2014 alone, over 46,000 bombs have been dropped on the people of Iraq and Syria in the U.S.-

led bombing campaign (Airwars.org) all under the pretext of fighting against the terrorist organization Daesh (ISIS/ISIL).

The report from the UNHCR also shows how imperialist intervention in the Middle East has expanded in the last year. One-half of all people newly internally displaced during the year 2015 were in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, all countries that have faced increased foreign military intervention. In fact, 10% of the population of Yemen was displaced in only 12 months of a U.S.-backed Saudi Arabian bombing campaign and war on their country that continues today. In Canada, this level of displacement would be as if the entire population of Alberta was forced to flee their homes.

For some people, fleeing their homes or cities is not enough to ensure safety and they are forced to escape their country all-together and become a refugee. The UNHCR report for refugees in 2015 also illustrates the devastation of U.S.-led attacks in the Middle East and Africa. More than one-half of all refugees came from countries destroyed and destabilized by U.S. intervention, Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. The world's largest refugee population continues to be from Palestine, with over 5.2 million refugees registered with the UN.

Officially, the United Nations recognizes over 21.3 million refugees world-wide. The vast majority of refugees (around 90%) stay in the countries that surround their homeland, packed into over-crowded refugee camps,

and their children forced to work in order to survive. For refugees that stay close to home either have no other option, or carry with them the hope of returning one day.

When this hope is gone and no end to the war and devastation is in sight, that is when someone is forced to make the difficult decision to risk their lives fleeing for Europe. This is why one refugee, when interviewed by Doctors Without Borders, said "[the word refugee] means being defeated by war."

Over 1 million people fled the Middle East and Africa for Europe in 2015, packed on all sorts of dangerous boats, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea for a chance at life and safety. 80% of them were from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. In the last year and a half, over 4,600 people have gone missing or have died while crossing what has become known as the "Sea of Death."

European Refugee Policy Has Deepened the Crisis

For those that are lucky enough to survive the journey, their struggle for basic rights and dignity has only just begun. Once in Europe they face inhuman conditions in processing and detention centres, barbed-wire fences, increasingly closed borders and complete uncertainty about their futures. Tragically, this devastating crisis situation continues to be the status quo despite over a year of meetings, summits and negotiations in Europe. As one Palestinian refugee who fled Syria remarked to Doctors Without Borders "Coming to



At the same time that refugee policy in Europe is making life for refugees more dangerous and difficult, the United States, and their allies, including Canada and many European countries, are also increasing their overt and covert attacks against people in the Middle East and Africa, creating more and more refugees.

The refugee crisis in Europe is a direct result of these continued bloody attacks, a list of which continues to grow each day. Whether it is the increasing imperialist bombing attacks and special forces deployments to Syria and Iraq, the continued occupation of Afghanistan under the auspices of a NATO training mission made up of 13,000 foreign troops (a force to which the United States and Germany are the largest contributors) or the more covert and less reported on U.S./U.K. and French operations in Libya and other parts of Africa, or the continued U.S.-backed mobbing of Yemen, the new era of war and occupation is showing no signs of slowing down.

Why Does the Refugee Crisis Continue?

When over 1 million refugees, largely from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq arrived on the shores of Europe last year, the people and governments of Europe could no longer turn a blind-eye to the death and destruction of imperialist wars and occupations in the Middle East and Africa. Refugee camps in the Middle East and Africa had spilled over, and people who longer had any hope of returning to a home without war had arrived at their doorstep.

Some governments, like Germany, saw the opportunity in the determined faces of refugees. They took a good look at their aging population and need for workers in low-paid jobs and decided that accepting refugees made good economic sense. Other countries shut their borders almost immediately. All governments have been interested in one thing, preserving the status-quo.

At this time, keeping business-as-

usual in European countries, also means maintaining an agenda of government cut-backs and austerity measures. This is more easily accomplished when poor, working and oppressed people are divided, a task that can be accomplished through Xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Imperialist countries around the world are also working to maintain and expand wars and occupations in the Middle East and Africa. For people living in the Middle East and Africa this means getting used to living under perpetual war. The U.S. government and their allies do not want tens of millions of refugees to flee the Middle East and Africa, they want to be able to control their movement, lives and futures in a way that benefits their capitalist interests the most.

What About Refugees in Canada?

Canada is not immune to the refugee crisis. In fact, Canada, is one of the imperialist countries responsible for its creation and therefore should gladly open its doors to refugees.

According to the government of Canada's website about Syrian Refugees – called #WelcomeRefugees – a total of 28,640 Syrian refugees have been re-settled in Canada between November, 2015 and March, 2016. Although Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised to re-settle 25,000 government sponsored refugees in the same time period, only 15,385 Syrians have been brought to Canada as government sponsored refugees.

In reality, this is a shameful response from a rich and spacious country like Canada. Even the conservative newspaper National Post exposed the government of Canada's weak humanitarian response to the refugee crisis. An article from December of 2015 states "Based on its population and the size of its economy, Canada would have to accept about 670,000 refugees to match the compassion Sweden has

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Europe I thought that I would never again see humans treating other humans in such an inhuman way, but I was wrong," describing the treatment that her and her children faced when being forced from Macedonia back to Greece.

In September of 2015 a deal was finally reached that allowed for the relocation of 160,000 refugees from countries like Greece and Italy to other European Union member-states. Although this number represents just about 10% of all refugees that have arrived on the shores of Europe, even such a low commitment has proven impossible to achieve. According to the most recent data available from the European Commission, by May of 2016 only 1,441 refugees had been relocated. This means that tens of thousands of people are stuck living in limbo in Greece, Italy or Hungary. For example, the Greek government reported in June that there were over 57,000 refugees living in the country.

For some, like Ali Al-Zobady, a refugee from Iraq, life in Europe was so difficult and humiliating that he chose to return back to Iraq. As he told USA-today, "We left my country because of the war...We just want peace. We dream of a new life. The European governments did not save my life."

Another deal between the European Union and Turkey was struck in March that was supposed to help control the refugee crisis. Instead, it has actually increased the number of refugees dying in their journey to Europe. The deal taken most simply, allows for the deportation of refugees back to Turkey in exchange for the re-settlement of a refugee directly from Turkey to Europe (a practice which has been declared "reckless and illegal" by Amnesty International). This has indeed slowed the flow of refugees from Turkey into Greece, but as a consequence more and more refugees are instead fleeing to Europe through Libya. Crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Libya to Italy is a more dangerous route. As a result, more than 2,800 refugees have drowned this year as compared to 1,850 deaths at this time in 2015.

Increasing War and Occupation



BAHRAIN: MASS STRUGGLE AGAINST TYRANNICAL REGIME

By *Azza Rojbi*

On February 14, 2011 thousands of Bahraini took to the streets, on what was called the day of rage, to protest for human and democratic rights. As much as 55 peaceful marches took place in 25 locations throughout Bahrain. The Bahraini security forces responded violently to protesters by firing tear gas, rubber bullets, stun grenades and birdshot. Despite the government's attempts to crush the protest movement, the Bahraini people have continued their struggle against the U.S. puppet Al Khalifa dynasty.

No surprise that the U.S. and their imperialist allies have turned a blind eye on the ongoing crackdown of the Bahraini government on its own people. We still remember their hypocritical stances in defense of the so called democracy and human rights in Libya and Syria.

According to a publication titled "U.S. Bilateral Relations Fact Sheets" by the State Department "Bahrain plays a key role in regional security architecture and is a vital U.S. partner in defense initiatives. Bahrain hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet and participates in U.S.-led military coalitions... U.S. assistance enables Bahrain to continue to obtain the equipment and training it needs to provide for its own defense and to operate alongside U.S. air and naval forces."

It becomes clear that the United States and its allies like Saudi Arabia, are providing military and political support to the repressive Bahraini regime. On March 14, 2011, Saudi Arabia sent 1200 troops, along with 800 troops from United Arab Emirates, to crush the protest movement.

Video footage surfaced showing Saudi light armored vehicle being used against Bahraini protesters. Those light-armored vehicles looked quite similar to those sold by Canada to Saudi Arabia throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The Globe and Mail reported, "Asked if it believes the Saudis used made-in-Canada LAVs when they went into Bahrain, the Canadian government doesn't deny this happened."

Not only the Canadian government is trying to downplay its support and involvement

in the quelling of pro-democracy protesters in Bahrain in 2011 but now it is desperately trying to justify its \$15-billion deal to sell more military vehicles to Saudi Arabia. On a French language TV show Justin Trudeau described the vehicles as merely "jeeps". The reality is that this "jeeps" are light-armored vehicles, or LAVs, and will be equipped with machine guns and other weaponry. Basically these light-armored vehicles are a newer and more sophisticated version than the ones Saudi Arabia previously used against the people of Bahrain.

Oppression continues so does resistance

The Bahraini government continues to escalate its crackdown on human rights and pro-democracy activist. According to the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights BCHR, at least 261 Bahrainis were stripped of their citizenship since 2012. This include Sheikh Isa Qassim, a prominent Muslim cleric and spiritual leader for the Bahraini Shiites who constitute 75% of the population of the Kingdom.

Nabeel Rajab, the President of BCHR and prominent human rights activist, was arrested and detained on 13 June 2016 on charges of "spreading false rumours in times of war" and "insulting public authorities" after tweets he published in 2015. Nabeel has been in solitary confinement since his arrest and is detained in extremely poor and unsanitary conditions. His health deteriorated and on June 28 he was transferred to the Bahrain Defense Hospital's Coronary Care Unit after he suffered irregular heartbeats. A day later he was transported back to detention center event though his family reported that his health was not stable.

Another prominent opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman had his prison sentence extended to 9 years on charges of inciting violence. Sheikh Salman was also the Secretary-General of Al-Wefaq, the largest political society and opposition party, which the Bahraini government closed on June 14, 2016.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, condemned the sentencing of Sheikh Ali al-Salman "The sentencing of Sheikh Ali al-Salman seems to confirm a worrying trend of

political repression further shrinking the space for any form of dissent in Bahrain today."

According to Amnesty International's annual report on Bahrain "The authorities severely curtailed the rights to freedom of expression and association, and arrested and prosecuted political and religious activists who criticized the government through social media or at public gatherings. Others were prosecuted and convicted for criticizing the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-led air strikes in Yemen"

The brave people of Bahrain continue their struggle for freedom, democracy and respect of human rights while the U.S. government and its allies continue its hypocritical support of the al-Khalifa regime. In its 2016 fiscal year the United States allocated \$3.5 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) to Bahrain for "programs and activities to promote reconciliation, democratic reform, and adherence to international human rights and labor rights standards in Bahrain."

The hypocritical position of the U.S. government towards the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain is a clear prove that the U.S. has never had any genuine interest in promoting human rights or democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. The U.S. has no right to impose and defend their puppet repressive regimes against the will of the Bahraini people. We must demand the right of all oppressed nations to self-determination.

As Bahraini human rights activist Zainab al-Khawaja said "We Bahrainis have chosen the path of resistance to dictators and suffered willingly because we want real change."

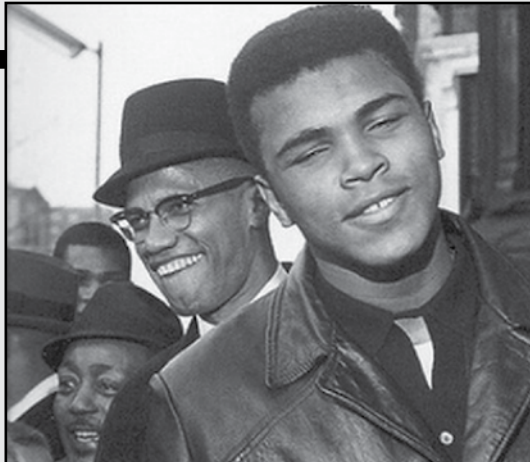
Follow Azza on Twitter: @Azza_R14



MUHAMMAD

ALI *Muhammad Ali*

January 17, 1942 – June 3, 2016



"But I have said it once and I will say it again. The real enemy of my people is here."

"I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for their own justice, freedom and equality."

The Venezuelan government published an official statement Monday June 6, paying tribute to boxing icon Muhammad Ali who died June 3, aged 74, after being admitted to hospital for respiratory issues.

In the statement, the socialist government outlines Ali's role in the sport of boxing as well as his important work as an advocate for social change and social justice.

Read the full statement below:

"The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expresses their condolences to the U.S. Afro-American people, the global sporting community and the family of Mohammed Ali for the sad passing of this sporting glory and symbol of the struggle for civil rights, peace and religious diversity in the world.

History will remember Muhammad Ali not

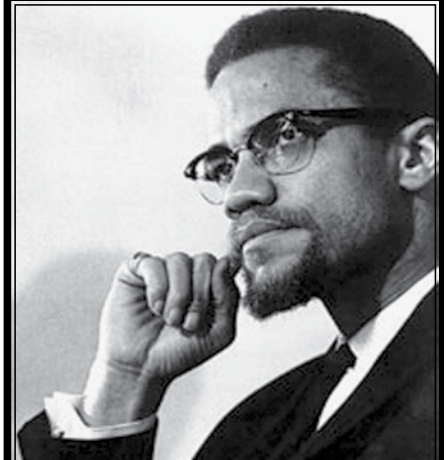


only as the most important and most elegant boxer of all time but also as a man who from a young age rebelled against the ruling system of racial discrimination in his country and utilizes his sporting success to condemn before the world inequality and violations of the rights of the Afro-American people.

The world will remember his famous speech before a jury which sought to force him to take part in the genocide of the Vietnamese people: "I'm not going 10,000 miles from home to help murder and burn another poor nation simply to continue the domination of white slave masters of the darker people the world over."

Mohammed Ali lives on in the heart of all those who love sport and support the peaceful coexistence of people, cultures and religions."

"By Any Means Necessary..."



MALCOLM X SPEAKS

Malcolm X interview with Pierre Berton
January 19, 1965

We're trying to be human beings, and we want to be recognized and accepted as human beings. But we don't think humanity will recognize us or accept us as such until humanity knows that we will do everything to protect our human ranks, as others will do for theirs...

I believe in recognizing every human being as a human being, neither white, black, brown nor red. When you are dealing with humanity as one family, there's no question of integration or intermarriage. It's just one human being marrying another human being, or one human being living around and with another human being. I may say, though, that I don't think the burden to defend any such position should ever be put upon the black man. Because it is the white man collectively who has shown that he is hostile towards integration and towards intermarriage and towards these other strides towards oneness. So, as a black man, and especially as a black American, I don't think that I would have to defend any stand that I formerly took. Because it's still a reaction of the society and it's a reaction that was produced by the white society. And I think that it is the society that produced this that should be attacked, not the reaction that develops among the people who are the victims of that negative society... I believe in a society in which people can live like human beings on the basis of equality.

LGBTQ+
HERO!

A portrait of Chelsea Manning, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a white collared shirt. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a vibrant, multi-colored sunburst pattern with rays in shades of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple, all with a distressed, splattered texture.

**CHELSEA
MANNING**
SOLDIER OF HUMANITY
WIKILEAKS WHISTLE-BLOWER



We must not let the Orlando nightclub terror further strangle our civil liberties...

and trans people as well as human rights campaigners, environmentalists and anti-corporate protestors as “threats and criminals.”

In response to leaks and mass attacks on military bases, the FBI also sought to stifle potential whistleblowers. This Insider Threat program used my gender identity, psychological profile and history as a basis for their targeting. “Safety and security” has even been used as a justification to place a two-inch limit on the length of

my hair.



We are not safe and secure when the government uses us as pawns to perpetrate violence against others. Our safety and security will come when we organize, love and resist together.

We should remember that we are alive. We are real flesh and blood. Apart from the fact that we are increasingly disconnected from the world by technology and politics, we are still surviving as a community.

And even though we have come a long way, events like these remind us we still have a long way to go. Thoughts and prayers alone won't protect our community. We need to continue to build and support queer and trans communities and end the profiling and criminalization that so many face.

We find solace and sanctuary in the club because we are so often expelled from other public spaces – from bathrooms, from street corners, from jobs, from history. Our survival is our resistance. And our solidarity and support for the Muslim community in these coming days and months – some of whom are queer and trans – will lift us all up in the face of anyone seeking to further marginalize another.

**Private Chelsea Manning is a US soldier sentenced to 35 years in prison for leaking classified US diplomatic cables, videos and documents. Published on the whistleblower site Wikileaks, they exposed US war crimes around the world including mass killings, torture, corruption, and the government's attempted cover-up of their atrocities. For more info visit: www.chelseamanning.org*

Follow Chelsea Manning on Twitter: @xychelsea

*By Chelsea E Manning**

This morning, I woke up in my cell to an even more shattered and fractured world. We are lost. We are devastated. We are bewildered. We are hurt. And we are angry. I haven't been this angry since losing a soldier in my unit to an RPG attack in southeastern Baghdad during my deployment in Iraq in 2010.

As a young queer kid growing up, I explored my identity through the Chicago and Washington DC club scene. As many have said, the club is our sanctuary – a place where we find ourselves, love ourselves and find community. I can totally relate to the trauma that has afflicted our community in the wake of the shooting in Orlando.

We must grieve and mourn and support each other, but in our grief and outrage we must resist any temptations to let this attack – or any attack – trigger anti-Muslim foreign policy, attacks on our civil liberties or as an excuse to descend into xenophobia and Islamophobia.

However, an attack like this is carefully planned and executed to maximize attention by inflaming the passions

of a helpless public. Because of this, the response can be more dangerous than the attack. The refrains of “safety and security” have,

for many years, been used as a tool by the powerful to justify curtailing civil liberties and emboldening backlash against immigrants, Muslim people and others.

Those who wish to continue campaigns of fear are prepared to cast an entire religion as hateful with no reflection on their own complicity in the many forms of violence the queer community encounters in the United States. We should not let their agendas guide our reaction to this senseless massacre.

We're not sure yet what schemes might be

proposed over the next few days and weeks, but we have seen how politicians have used our fear to compromise our constitution many times in the past, from extraordinary rendition (kidnapping) to enhanced interrogation (torture), from foreign intelligence surveillance courts to encryption backdoors.

Some will claim extreme measures are necessary to protect the queer and trans community. Others will erase the queer and Latin identities of the victims and instead claim that we are at war with Islam. But regardless of how the narrative is told, such policies will undoubtedly have a negative impact on our community at home and abroad.

Current proposals for hate crime laws and terrorism enhancements only take more power away from our community. We consolidate power with law enforcement only to have those

same mechanisms turned against us. For example, more intense scrutiny on verification procedures in government and business have created barriers for trans people seeking

documents that correctly identify their gender, causing us to be subjected to abusive and humiliating searches when traveling. Any increase in surveillance of marginalized communities for the sake of security theater have expanded the cycle of criminalization that queer people – especially queer people of color – are forced to navigate.

Earlier this year, the FBI sought a novel judicial backdoor to a cellphone in response to the San Bernardino attack. Such a backdoor would have potentially allowed the government to more easily target queer

“As we mourn the shooting victims, it's imperative that we remember the response can be more dangerous than the attack”

Capitalism, Discrimination and Fighting for Queer Rights



By Azza Rojbi

The recent mass shooting at the pulse night club in Orlando opened up an interesting aspect in the queer liberation movement. Unlike the manipulation we saw from the capitalist ruling class and mainstream media to try to paint this incident as the product of Islam, we immediately saw queer activists and LGBTQ groups around the U.S., Canada and Europe out on vigils with signs declaring "Queers Against Islamophobia."

Islamophobia and Homophobia Are Sides of the Same Coin

The queer and Muslim community joined together to mourn the death of the 49 Orlando victims and to stand strong against violence and hatred. Suzanne Barakat, sister of one of the victims of the "Chapel Hill" shooting where three young Muslims were gunned down in cold blood, spoke at a Vigil for Orlando, here is some of her powerful words: "We stand here to express our shared humanity, and our everlasting love, and say to those consumed by hatred, you will not define us, you will not



mold us in your image, you will not sow the seeds of discord among us."

As the mainstream media kept spinning the narrative of presenting Islam as being the reason of this criminal act in Orlando, more and more queer and trans* activists came out to speak against islamophobia. In her column for the Guardian newspaper, whistle blower, trans women, antiwar and queer rights activist Chelsea E. Manning said "We are not safe and secure when the government uses us as pawns to perpetrate violence against others. Our safety and security will come when we organize, love and resist together." The full article by Chelsea is published in this issue of Fire This Time Newspaper on page 22.

Also on page 38 of this issue we are printing a moving post that went viral on social media by blogger and Gender queer advocate Jacob Tobia. Jacob's words are an important call for the queer community to not give up to the fear mongering and anti-Islam rhetoric. "Today, it is our obligation as a queer community to remember that islamophobia, homophobia, and transphobia work together.

Today, it is our obligation as queer people to proclaim that the same forces that marginalize queer people in the United States are used to marginalize Muslims."

Stonewall Rebellion

As working and oppressed people we need to unite and reject homophobia, transphobia and Islamophobia. One form of hate can't justify another. We can't let the ruling capitalist class divide us further and use the horrible mass shooting in Orlando as an excuse to further

expand their policies of war and occupations in the middle east and north Africa.

We cannot forget that the Stonewall rebellion and the LGBTQ liberation struggle that ensued has its own roots in the civil rights and anti-war movement. The Stonewall rebellion were a series of protests and demonstrations by members of the gay community against a police raid that took place on June 28, 1969, at the gay bar the Stonewall Inn, located in

the Greenwich Village in New York City.

When the Gay Liberation Front GLF was founded in 1969 in the aftermath of Stonewall, it was just as central to fight for LGBTQ rights as it was to fight against the war in



Participants at Orlando Vigil, London, England, 2016.

Vietnam. An excerpt from the Los Angeles GLF statement of purpose cites: "we oppose the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, and are in total opposition to wars of aggression and imperialism, whoever pursues them. We support the demands of Blacks, Chicanos, [Asians], Women, Youth, Senior Citizens, and others demanding their full rights as human beings. We join in their struggle, and shall actively seek coalition to pursue these goals."

Today the queer and trans* liberation movement is far from being over! While in advanced capitalist countries such as the U.S. and Canada, the LGBTQ community enjoys some degree of right, however fundamentally queer and trans* folks are still denied fundamental human and democratic right.

According to an article on the Miami Herald: "In the six months before the weekend

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INTERVIEW WITH ISEL CALZADILLA ACOSTA

“My first major challenge was to be able to tell my son that I am a lesbian”

LESBIAN ACTIVIST FROM CUBA & COORDINATOR OF “LAS ISABELAS”

Interview by Tamara Hansen

On June 11, 2016 organizers with the Fire This Time Newspaper were invited to a meeting in Seattle, Washington, USA to meet Isel Calzadilla Acosta, a Cuban lesbian activist and coordinator of the group “Las Isabelas” in Santiago de Cuba. The Seattle event was organized by the US-Women and Cuba Collaboration who gave me the honour of acting as Isel’s translator for the event. Over 40 people gathered to hear Isel speak about her experiences as woman and LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans*) activist in Cuba. After a successful and inspiring meeting, I had the chance to sit down with Isel and ask her some more in-depth questions on behalf of Fire This Time Newspaper.

Fire This Time: On behalf of Fire This Time, our newspaper, thanks for talking with us. Please, tell us a little more about your organization, “Las Isabelas” and how it was formed.

Isel Calzadilla: Well my name is Isel Calzadilla, I am the coordinator of the first group of lesbian women in Cuba founded in 2000, but officially in 2003, when we asked for the advice and support of CENESEX, the “National Center for Sex Education” [in Cuba]. Since then we used that date as the foundation of the group.

The name “Las Isabelas” was chosen because of a place in Santiago de Cuba where all of the groups and people in the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans*) community get together. It is a cafeteria featuring traditional *Santiaguera* music, and is a meeting place called “La Isabelica”. So we had a meeting with all the girls and decided on “Las Isabelas” because of this meeting place.

FTT: Great, thank you. So, what kind of work you do with your organization?

IC: Our main work is aimed at lesbian and bisexual women over 18 and up to any age, there is no limit, we have no problem. Also, people who would like to help and give us any type of support are welcome to participate, whether heterosexual, gay or trans. Our work is aimed at improving our

sexual health and to defend our rights in general. We work in the LGBT community and communities with the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC - which is the organization that all of us Cuban women over 12 years old belong to in Cuba) and through this work we give more visibility to our group. We also participate with other groups that exist in Cuba in other provinces where we share our work. All of our groups count on the support of the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), where we are given training in national workshops, where all of us women activists from different groups come together. Generally we select 10 ladies from each group and then they participate in these national workshops, which are taught by the best specialists in health and rights issues, and thus give us the tools to work in activism.

FTT: As a lesbian woman in Cuba, what kind of achievements and challenges have you encountered throughout your life?

IC: The main challenge was myself, because of the prejudices, taboos and upbringing we have in our country, we often keep ourselves completely in the closet. Then you move forward learning and knowing yourself and you come out of the closet. I have a son, now 22, and my first major challenge, the first thing that happened to me, was to be able to tell my son that I am a lesbian woman. As a child, he was raised by my mother, where there was a lot of homophobia and many things, but little by little I was teaching him that the world is very diverse, and gradually was showing him this other side. When he turned 15 he became a health promoter, so he was learning and understanding these issues. So the moment came when one day he asked me and I said, ‘Look, yes, I am a woman who loves another woman,’ and he already had very good relations my partner at that time, and so that was my first challenge.



Isel speaking in Seattle with Cindy Domingo, Moon Vasquez & Tamara Hansen, June 11, 2016.

Annual Pride Parade in Havana, Cuba.



Equally in the workplace, as people begin to imagine, when you know there are lots of parties and things, and you do not go with a *compañero* [a male friend/comrade]. No worries, my behavior has always been the best possible and with a lot of respect to me and to others. I've never had any problems with anyone, I have lived my life based on respect. I think that in this way people have also respected me.

Yes, many women with regards to the family, have many challenges being out of the closet in their family or at work. For many people, once you express your sexual orientation they will no longer treat you equally, because of prejudice and taboos. But we are gradually educating the population to not think this way.

FTT: Good, can you tell us about the achievements of Las Isabelas and CENESEX to change this mindset in society?

IC: Yes of course. When we started the group, Las Isabelas, I'm a nurse by profession, and many of us are professionals in different fields, and everyone has expressed the desire to know more, to learn more, to work and research on our own sexuality. If we do not do the research ourselves about lesbians, there is very little literature on this. So we have learned to do scientific research and to present the work in universities and scientific events. It has been one of our most important achievements, that several women in the group have already written scientific work on the subject of lesbian women.

Besides this, assuring that every person who

is in the group is involved and integrated into society, either through study, work, courses, or workshops of any kind. Once you have become part of the group you learn many interesting and necessary things, such as the laws, which previously nobody knew about. Ignorance is what can allow your rights to be infringed on. This has been one of our most important gains. Our infinite thanks to CENESEX! which has enabled us to learn about these issues, which help us to have a better life.

FTT: Outside the LGBT community in Cuba, do you have support from different organizations and networks?

IC: First, we have the support of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) that supports us specifically as lesbians and bisexual women. We also have a network of lawyers, which has been one of the best networks that CENESEX ever took the initiative to form. We have a series of lawyers, legal minds, who support us and know the laws and can defend us when there are any cases of discrimination or violations of rights, it has been very important.

We also have a network that is supporting us a lot, which is the network of social workers for sexual rights. These people are mainly concerned with LGBT people who are living at home alone or without family, etc. this network is doing a good job with respect to this. The network of for youth rights, which are university students and pre-university students, who have the knowledge or who want to learn about rights and are support us.

Also the different ministries for public health,

who always support us, and psychologists, who are also always with us in our events and all the things we do. We also include people involved in cultural work through the different *peñas* [cultural groups] that exist, other artists that approach us as well. In the end, we are always obtaining more support.

Now we are also doing good work with women educators, because we are all women. Especially kindergartens, where they are showing a lot of interest in having us train them on these issues, because these women are educating boys and girls in children's centers, and we want to convey real knowledge about sexual diversity so that we do not continue handing down from generation to generation all the prejudice and taboos that we have been dragging around with us for a thousand years.

FTT: Do you have a message you want to bring here to the United States or to the readers of our newspaper in Canada and around the world?

IC: I mean, the most important thing is to give my eternal gratitude to the group of American women supporting the Cuban revolution, especially Moon and Cindy, [two leading organizers with US-Women and Cuba Collaboration] who have made my trip to the United States possible.

I should also say, to all who read your newspaper, please support us in putting an end to the U.S. blockade against Cuba, which is so damaging to all of the Cuban people, but especially to women. The blockade is one of the things that continues to damage us every day in our work and our lives.

FTT: What do you see for the future of the LGBT community in Cuba?

IC: In Cuba I see a good future regarding these issues. The work we do as activists to defend our own rights, is moving forward little by little. Sometimes in slow steps, other times with speedy steps, but never stopping. I think in the future we will conquer more, much more space, much more momentum than we have now. Always with the support of the government, which we currently have. Our government supports us in everything we do. Also state institutions such as CENESEX, an agency of the Cuban government, which has opened doors for us, which has given us qualifications, helped us, medically, socially, and in many other ways. I think yes, we can move forward and we will continue with success.

FTT: Thank you Isel, for a very educational and interesting interview.



ENTREVISTA CON ISEL CALZADILLA ACOSTA

“Mi primer desafío importante fue poderle decir a mi niño que soy lesbiana”

ACTIVISTA LESBIANA DE CUBA Y COORDINADORA DE “LAS ISABELAS”

*** EN ESPAÑOL ***

Entrevista por Tamara Hansen
Traducido por Tamara Hansen y
Macarena Cataldo

El día 11 de Junio del presente año, los organizadores del Periódico “Fire This Time” fueron invitados a escuchar en Seattle, Washington, EE.UU. a la Cubana Isel Calzadilla Acosta, quien expuso su experiencia como activista lesbiana y coordinadora del grupo de “Las Isabelas” de Santiago de Cuba. El evento realizado en Seattle fue organizado por la US-Women and Cuba Collaboration quienes me dieron el honor de ser la traductora de Isel en aquel evento. Más de 40 personas asistieron a la charla de Isel, quien nos contó sus experiencias como mujer y activista LGBT (Lesbiana Gay Bisexual y Trans*) en Cuba. Al finalizar la inspiradora presentación tuve la oportunidad de sentarme con Isel y profundizar ciertos puntos en nuestra conversación para el Periódico Fire This Time.

Fire This Time: En nombre de Fire This Time, nuestro periódico, gracias por hablar con nosotras. Queremos saber un poco más sobre tu organización “las Isabelas”, y como se formó.

Isel Calzadilla:

Bueno mi nombre es Isel Calzadilla, soy la coordinadora del primer grupo de mujeres lesbianas que existe en Cuba del año 2000, pero oficialmente del año 2003, en que pedimos asesoría y apoyo de CENESEX, el “Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual”. Desde ese momento tomamos como fecha de fundación del grupo.

El nombre “Las

Isabelas”, esto surgió por un lugar en Santiago de Cuba que ha sido de la comunidad LGBT (Lesbiana Gay Bisexual y Trans*) donde se encuentran todo los grupos, todas las personas. Es una cafetería donde se escucha la música tradicional Santiaguera, y es un sitio de encuentro que se llama “la Isabelica”. Por eso hicimos un encuentro entre todas las muchachas y decidimos ponerle “las Isabelas” por este sitio de encuentro.

FTT: Bueno, gracias. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo hacen con tu organización?

IC: Nuestro trabajo principal está encaminado a las mujeres lesbianas y bisexuales, mayores de 18 años hasta cualquier límite de edad, no tenemos ningún problema. También puedan participar personas que quieran apoyarnos y darnos cualquier tipo de apoyo, ya sean heterosexuales, gay, transexuales. Nuestro trabajo está encaminado a elevar nuestra salud sexual y defender nuestros derechos en sentido general. Trabajamos en la comunidad LGBT y en comunidades con la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC - que es la organización donde pertenecemos todas las mujeres mayores de 12 años en Cuba) y de esta forma darle visibilidad a nuestro grupo. También participamos con los demás grupos que existen en Cuba en las demás provincias donde hacemos intercambios de trabajo. Entre todos nuestros grupos contamos con el

apoyo del centro nacional de educación sexual, donde se nos capacita en talleres nacionales, donde vamos todas las mujeres activistas de los diferentes grupos. Generalmente se seleccionan 10 muchachas por cada grupo y entonces todas participamos en estos talleres nacionales, donde los imparten los mejores especialistas en temas de derechos y salud, y de esa forma tener herramientas para trabajar en el activismo.

FTT: ¿Durante tu vida, como mujer lesbiana en Cuba, que tipo de logros y desafíos has encontrado?

IC: El principal desafío fue conmigo misma, pues los prejuicios, los tabúes y las crianzas que tenemos en nuestro país, se ponen en el closet totalmente y luego te bombas aprendiendo y conociendo a ti misma pues, sales del closet. Tengo un hijo, actualmente de 22 años, y mi primer desafío importante, lo primero que me paso, fue poderle decir a mi niño que soy una mujer lesbiana. Él era un niño criado por mi madre, donde había mucha homofobia, muchas cosas, pero poco a poco yo fui enseñándole que el mundo es muy diverso, y poco a poco fui mostrándole esta otra parte. Cuando cumplió 15 años él se hizo promotor de salud, entonces fue entendiendo estos temas, y bueno llego el momento en que un día me preguntó y le dije: *Mira, sí, soy una mujer que ama a otra*

Isel hablando en Seattle, Washington. 11 de junio de 2016.



mujer', y él ya tenía muy buenas relaciones con la que era mi pareja, y bueno fue mi primer desafío.

En el centro de trabajo, igualmente, ya las personas como que empiezan a imaginar cuando tú ves que hay fiestas y cosas, y tú no vas con un *compañero*. Entonces nada, mi comportamiento siempre ha sido lo mejor posible con mucho respeto a mi persona y a lo demás. Nunca he tenido ningún tipo de problema con nadie, he basado toda mi vida en el respeto. Pienso que de esa forma las personas me han respetado también.

Sí, tenemos muchos desafíos, muchas mujeres, referente a la familia, a poder salir del closet en su familia o en el trabajo. Porque muchas personas, una vez que tú dices tu orientación sexual ya no te tratan igual, por los prejuicios y los tabúes. Pero poco a poco vamos educando a esa población para que no piensan así.

FT: Bueno ¿Puedes contarnos sobre los logros en la sociedad de las Isabelas y de CENESEX para cambiar esta mentalidad?

IC: *Sí* como no, las Isabelas, muchas de las muchachas, cuando empezamos el grupo, yo soy de profesión enfermera, muchas de las muchachas son profesionales en diferentes campos, y todo el mundo ha experimentado el deseo de conocer más, de saber más, de trabajar y de investigar sobre nuestra propia sexualidad. Si no hacemos nosotras mismas los trabajos de investigación sobre las lesbianas, hay muy poca bibliografía de esto, entonces hemos ido aprendiendo a hacer trabajo investigativo y científico para ponerlo en las universidades o en los eventos científicos. Ha sido uno de los logros más importante, el que varias muchachas del grupo han escrito ya trabajo científico referente al tema de la mujer lesbiana.

Además lograr que cada muchacha que está en el grupo se incorpora en la sociedad, ya sea estudio, trabajo, un curso, talleres, de cualquier índole. Y que una vez que han entrado en el grupo han aprendido muchas cosas interesantes y necesarias como las leyes, que anteriormente nadie conocía, y el desconocimiento a lo que te conlleva es a que te vulneren en tus derechos. Esto ha sido uno de los logros más importantes. ¡Gracias infinitas al CENESEX! que nos ha capacitado en poder conocer estos temas, que nos ayudan por una mejor vida.

FTT: ¿Fuera de la comunidad LGBT en Cuba, tienes apoyo de diferentes organizaciones y redes?

IC: Tenemos en primer lugar, el apoyo de la federación de mujeres cubanas (FMC) que nos apoya nosotras en específico, a las mujeres lesbianas y bisexuales. Tenemos la red de juristas, que ha sido una de las mejores redes que se le ocurrió al CENESEX formar. Contamos con una serie de abogados, de juristas, que nos apoyan en cuanto a conocer los derechos a defendernos cuando hay alguna discriminación o alguna de vulneración de derechos, ha sido muy importante.

También tenemos una red, que nos está apoyando mucho, que es la red de trabajadores sociales por los derechos sexuales donde estas personas se han interesado mucho en las personas LGBT que se encuentran solo en su casa, que no tienen familia, etc. Entonces esta red está haciendo un buen trabajo con respeto a esto. La red de los jóvenes por los derechos, que también son los jóvenes universitarios y pre-universitarios, que tienen estos conocimientos o que quieren tener el conocimiento de los derechos, y apoyarnos.

También los diferentes ministerios de salud pública, que siempre nos apoyan, y psicólogos,

que también están siempre con nosotros en los eventos y todas las cosas que hacemos. Asimismo las personas de la cultura, a través de las diferentes peñas que hay, culturales, nos acercan también. Al fin, siempre vamos obteniendo más apoyo.

Ahora tenemos buen trabajo con mujeres, porque somos mujeres todas, educadoras de los círculos infantiles, donde ellas están mostrando mucho interés para que las capacitemos en estos temas, porque estas mujeres son las que educan a los niños y a las niñas en los centros infantiles, y queremos transmitirles conocimientos verdaderos sobre la diversidad sexual para que no se siga transmitido de generación a generación todos los prejuicios y tabúes que venimos arrastrando de mil años atrás.

FTT: ¿Tienes una mensaje que quieres traer aquí a los Estados Unidos o a los que lean nuestro periódico en Canadá y en otras partes del mundo?

IC: Lo más importante que quiero decir donde quiera, es darle mi gratitud eterna al grupo de mujeres estadounidenses de apoyo a la revolución cubana, en especial a Moon y a Cindy, [Dos organizadores principales de la US-Women and Cuba Collaboration] que han hecho posible que yo me encuentre en este momento en los Estados Unidos.

Poderle decir a todos los que leen la revista, que nos apoyen a eliminar el bloqueo hacia Cuba que tanto daño nos hace a todo el pueblo cubano, pero específicamente a las mujeres. El bloqueo es una de las cosas que nos sigue dañando día a día en nuestro trabajo, y en nuestras vidas.

FTT: ¿Qué ves para el futuro de la comunidad LGBT en Cuba?

IC: En Cuba yo veo un buen futuro referente a estos temas. Al trabajo que hacemos los activistas en defender nuestros propios derechos, se va viendo poco a poco, a pasos lentos y a veces apuraditos pero sin ceder. Pienso que en el futuro vamos a conquistar mucho más, mucho más espacio, mucho más momento de lo que tenemos ahora. Siempre con el apoyo del gobierno, que *sí* lo tenemos. Nuestro gobierno nos apoya en todo lo que hacemos. También instituciones del estado como CENESEX, un organismo del estado cubano, que nos ha abierto las puertas, que nos ha calificado, nos ha ayudado, medicamente, socialmente, de todas formas. Pienso que *sí*, que podemos seguir avanzando y que vamos a continuar bien.

FTT: Muchas gracias Isel, por una entrevista muy educativa e interesante.

Jornada Cubana contra la Homofobia





CHEVRON IN ECUADOR

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATIONS & EXPLOITATIONS MADE IN THE U.S.A

By Thomas Davies

On September 12, 2016, 30,000 Ecuadorian plaintiffs – bolstered by a previous unanimous decision in their favour by the Supreme Court of Canada – will begin their 5 day class-action hearing to seize oil giant Chevron's Canadian assets to cover its US \$11 billion debt to the communities affected by Chevron's massive pollution in Ecuador during its drilling operations in the country.

Why Canada? Because Chevron stripped its assets in Ecuador in 2007 anticipating it would lose the court case against it there. The company, which as an example made almost 27 billion dollars in 2011, has spent roughly 2 billion over the past 2 decades trying to fight not to pay what it owes. In Canada, Chevron has hired four separate law firms to defend itself. It has used at least 60 law firms and more than 2,000 lawyers in the case since the beginning in 1993.

As the world's seventh largest oil and gas company, Chevron has been found repeatedly guilty in Ecuadorian courts of massive environmental contamination stemming from its oil drilling operations in the Amazon rainforest (under the Texaco brand) in Ecuador from 1964 to 1992. It has been proven time and time again that Texaco, which merged with Chevron in 2001, knowingly operated without concern for the environment or wellbeing of local residents. Their most drastic crimes include:

- Dumping 18 billion gallons of waste water into rivers and streams.
- The construction of more than 900 open-air, unlined toxic waste pits that leach toxins into soil and groundwater.
- Release of contaminants through spills, spreading oil on roads, gas flaring, and burning of crude.
- The creation of a pipeline and road system that opened pristine rainforest to uncontrolled and widespread clearing, resulting in more than a million acres of deforestation.

Due to Chevron's toxic contamination of their soil, rivers and streams, and groundwater, local indigenous communities continue to suffer an epidemic of cancer, birth defects, miscarriages, and other ailments. Ecuadorian courts have found Chevron liable for 11 billion dollars in clean up fees and damages, and today today, more than 30,000 Ecuadorians who were directly affected by Chevron's pollution are fighting for justice through a class-action lawsuit.

Ecuador's previous governments turned a

blind eye as Chevron deliberately cut corners on safety and environmental protection to save money. Industry field manuals at the time required that waste pits be lined and used only for temporary storage. Chevron used unlined pits for permanent storage. Their own documents show the company considered spending money to address environmental problems from use of the pits, but they decided it was too expensive. In the end, by handling its toxic waste in Ecuador in ways that were illegal in the United States, Chevron saved an estimated \$3 per barrel of oil produced.

For savings of \$3 per barrel over 1400 Ecuadorian people have already died unnecessarily from cancer, childhood leukaemia, miscarriages and birth defects. For \$3 a barrel they permanently and massively damaged one of the most diverse and sensitive habitats in the world.

Chevron was recently forced to surrender extensive internal company information related to its Canadian operations, which are estimated to have a value of at least \$15 billion. Given previous experience it is very suspicious that Chevron has now decided to put \$5 billion in assets on the market by offering its Burnaby refinery for sale. Could it be that they are anticipating needing to dodge another loss?

The United States government and huge corporations have a history of working hand in hand to exploit everything they could from Ecuador. In the early 1960's the CIA helped Ecuador's military overthrow two Presidents, Jose Maria Velasco Ibarra and his later successor, Vice President Carlos Julio Arosemena Monroy, who were not compliant with US government demands, especially that they break diplomatic ties with the Cuban government.

The CIA infiltrated hundreds of its agents into diplomatic offices, political parties and military forces in Ecuador during the 1960's and created their own front left wing and right wing political organizations to create divisions and disruption. Later documents also suggest their connection to the suspicious plane crash death of Ecuadorean president, Jaime Roldo's, who was strongly against US intervention in Latin-American on "Plan Condor" during the 1970's.

Since taking office in 2007, Ecuador's current government led by President Rafael Correa has prioritized social programs for the poorest sectors of society, rather than appeasing United States interests. This has meant that U.S. companies like Chevron are no longer free to exploit the country with impunity any longer, just as the U.S. military was forced to leave the



Oil contaminates much of the Amazon in Ecuador, poisoning water supplies and destroying the environment.



People in New York City protest and show solidarity with the people of Ecuador in their struggle against Chevron. 2015

Manta military base in 2009 after enjoying a decade of a rent-free lease signed by a previous administration.

Forced to take a less open approach to intervention, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) are used by the U.S. government to advance their political, economic and social interests. They often use the same dirty tactics of funding and creating so-called "opposition" organizations within Ecuador – especially leading up to and during a failed rightwing coup attempt in 2010 which was overcome by popular support for Correa and his governments.

The massive exploitation of the natural and human resources of Latin-America has always meant huge profits for U.S. companies at the expensive of the lives and environment of Latin-Americans. Ecuadoreans' are standing up to defend their dignity and self-determination, and Chevron is doing everything possible to avoid having to pay back even a fraction of what it has already profited in the country. We must support them in their struggle to hold Chevron accountable, and in taking control of their country back from U.S. domination.

Chevron – Pay Your Debts!
US Hands Off Latin-America!

Follow Thomas on Twitter: @thomasdavies59

In the last few months, the case of toxic water in Flint, Michigan, U.S. has been displayed in different media and has caught the attention of people around the world. The problem with this toxic tap water is now a trending topic and appears on TV, radio, newspapers and in our daily conversations. However, the Flint tragedy does not represent an isolated incident. There are countless toxic drinking water disasters like Flint around the world. The majority of them are not as fully reported to the public.

In general, the toxic water problem can be due to different causes such as: (i) negligent government administrations, (ii) contamination of the water source and (iii) sanctions against countries in order to sabotage their water systems. Here, we will examine some of the most emblematic cases of toxic drinking water around the world.

St. Joseph, Louisiana, U.S. (2016)

In this city, similar to Flint, the majority of the population is Afro-American, representing 60% of the whole population. At least 40% of the town lives under the poverty line. In this case, the tap water has had high levels of iron for more than 10 years. The quality of the water is not optimal and its brown colour makes it disgusting and not healthy to drink. According to authorities, this water does not represent any risk for people to drink, but the city administrators themselves "would not drink it".

The people of St. Joseph feel very frustrated when they see the negligence of their government and they believe that officials would have acted quicker if the majority of the city's population were white and/or wealthy. Flint, St. Joseph and Afro-American communities around the U.S. are suffering from "environmental racism", where the right to have clean (not toxic) water is denied to poor, working and oppressed people.

Walkerton, Ontario, Canada (2000)

The toxic Walkerton water was one of the most serious cases of water contamination in Canadian history. It happened 16 years ago in the rural heartland of Bruce County, Ontario. The community of Walkerton, with a population of less than 5,000 at the time, saw 2,300 people fall ill, and seven die.

The tragedy started in May 2000 when a dangerous strain of E. coli contaminated the water source of Walkerton due to farm runoff. The public inquiry in 2002 showed improper practices and systemic fraud by public utility operators. The privatization of municipal water testing; the absence of criteria governing the quality of testing; and the lack of provisions made for results to be published to multiple authorities; all contributed to the crisis. In addition, the inquiry report showed that if the Walkerton Public Utilities Commission had admitted to contaminated water sooner, the people who died directly from drinking the

TOXIC WATER

E. coli-contaminated water might have been saved.

The case of toxic water in Walkerton cannot be viewed as an isolated tragedy. It is a result of privatization and neo-liberal policies, a lack of regulation and the dismantling of public services.

The U.S. intentionally destroyed Iraq's water supply (1996)

This merciless water attack started when the U.S. deliberately bombed Iraq's water system during the First Gulf War. However, after the war, successive attacks against Iraqi people were carried out. The U.S. promoted sanctions against Iraq, which were adopted by the United Nations Security Council. As a result of these economic sanctions, Iraq suffered from a lack of purification chemicals, chlorinators, chemical dosing pumps, water tankers, and other equipment necessary for water purification. This impeded the Iraqi government from guaranteeing safe drinking water and this continues to affect the water system in Iraq today.

The United States knew the cost that Iraqi civilians, who were mostly children, would pay, and it went ahead anyway. Different documents have been declassified and these include information that confirms that the U.S. deliberately destroyed Iraq's water system, fully aware of the cost to civilians. One of the documents, dated January 22, 1991 is called, "Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities". The document predicts what was going to happen when the Iraqi government would no longer have all of the necessary equipment to purify the water.

Other documents discuss how the outbreaks could affect the life of children in Iraq and the development of a counter-propaganda strategy that would blame Saddam Hussein for the lack of safe water in Iraq.

This constituted a direct violation of the Geneva Convention, which states "It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population."

Arica, Chile

In Arica City in the north of Chile, high levels of mercury, lead and arsenic have been found in rivers, lakes and groundwater, which are used as drinking water sources.

The problem started 30 year ago, under the dictatorship of Pinochet, when 20,000 tons of toxic smelting waste was imported to Arica from Sweden. The Swedish mining company, Boliden had made an arrangement with the Chilean company Promel to recycle these wastes, however the project was never carried out. The waste was left unprotected on nearby



abandoned lands until 1998.

From the 1990s, the Arica community has suffered from serious diseases, including cancer, miscarriages, skin conditions and respiratory problems. Medical tests have shown excessive levels of arsenic in the residents' blood.

In September 2013, Arica victims filed a claim against Boliden Mineral, the Swedish mining company. The plaintiffs allege that Boliden acted negligently. Boliden denied the claim in its entirety. Boliden argued that the Chilean health authority and Promel were responsible for the health issues Arica citizens are facing. The Chilean Supreme Court held that the state had to compensate 365 residents from Arica.

Take action

These toxic water cases are a good indication of how the capitalist system does not care about the people's well-being and their health, and even worse, that they destroy the lives of millions of poor and working people in order to maximize their profit.

For them, profit comes before human interest. Their criminal neglect generates misery for the world's population and is causing the destruction of our planet.

The toxic water problem is happening in different places around the world all the time. For this reason, we, the working class, poor and oppressed people must build a revolutionary movement to fight for our interests and our fundamental rights. We need a mass majority movement to end environmental degradation and the toxin producing capitalist system.

Follow Macarena on Twitter: @makufy

TOXIC
CAPITALISM!

The following is an excerpt from the key address given by Raul Castro Ruz, President of Cuba to the Opening Session of the 7th Summit of the Association of Caribbean States. Havana, Cuba, June 4, 2016. To read the full article:

www.minrex.gob.cu/en/speech-president-cuba-raul-castro-opening-session-7th-acs-summit

Distinguished Heads of State and/or Government,

Distinguished delegates and guests,

For the seventh time, we are meeting as Heads of States and/or Government, alongside other high representatives of the States and territories of the Association of Caribbean States, ACS. On this occasion we have gathered for a deep exchange on the theme "Together to confront the challenges of sustainable development, climate change and peace in the Caribbean".

We hope one day to be able to count with the adherence of all of the Caribbean territories, including the sister island of Puerto Rico, as an independent and sovereign nation.

Another issue demanding priority attention concerns sovereignty over our natural resources, which constitute a guarantee for the future and a source of wealth for our peoples. Allowing their unrestricted exploitation by foreign interests, with negligible profits for our nations, is tantamount to compromising development and adding to existing dependence.

We cannot remain indifferent to disturbances in Latin America and the Caribbean resulting from the imperialist and oligarchic counteroffensive unleashed against popular and progressive governments, which emerged after the failure of the neoliberal wave. This constitutes a threat to peace, stability, unity and indispensable regional integration.

The situation demands the reinforcement of consultation and coordination mechanisms in conformity with the precepts contained in Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed by the Heads of States and/or Government attending the 2nd Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (CELAC), held in Havana in January 2014. We should also urge others to respect those principles in their relations with our countries.

The commitments of States in the region to not interfere, directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of any other State, and to abide by the principles of national sovereignty, equality of rights and the free determination of the peoples; to promote friendly and cooperative relations between them, and

with other nations; to exercise tolerance and live in peace; and, to fully respect every State's inalienable right to choose its political, economic, social and cultural system are unavoidable conditions to peace, harmony, development and the integration of our countries.

I reaffirm our strongest and unconditional solidarity with the fraternal people of Venezuela, with the legitimate government of President Nicolas Maduro, and with the Bolivarian Revolution initiated by Commander Hugo Chavez Frias. They are firmly resisting the destabilizing thrust, and the economic and media warfare undertaken by those who intend to sweep away the political, economic and social conquests that have brought benefits to millions of people who for centuries lived in conditions of poverty, injustice and inequality.

It is a source of deep concern, the unacceptable attempt by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States [OAS] to apply the so-called Inter American Democratic Charter to interfere with the internal affairs of Venezuela. The statement published by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs explains Cuba's position and releases me of offering details.

I would only reiterate our view that the OAS, from its inception was, as it is and will continue to be, an instrument of imperialist domination, and no reform whatsoever can change its nature or its history. That is why Cuba will never return to the OAS.

We also extend our solidarity to the Brazilian people and their Constitutional President Dilma Rousseff, who is bravely confronting the parliamentary coup d'état promoted by the rightwing and neoliberal oligarchy, intent on reversing the social achievements scored during the governments headed by the Workers Party.

I reaffirm our satisfaction with the progress attained in the Colombian peace process, and

reiterate that we shall keep up the effort to contribute to achieve the completion of an agreement that can definitely put an end to the armed conflict in that sister nation.

Likewise, we are fully committed to support the reconstruction and development of the fraternal Republic of Haiti, the birthplace of the first revolution for independence and slave emancipation in Our America.

We shall never forget that when the ACS was established, in July 1994, our Caribbean brothers and sisters defended our membership in the bosom of this united family. At the time, Cuba was undergoing an extremely challenging situation, since our economy had fallen by 35%, due to the sudden loss of its major markets, in the aftermath of the demise of the European socialist camp and mounting imperialist pressures to corner and destroy the Revolution.

We shall neither forget the unrelenting support that every government represented here has provided to our just demand for the removal of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States; a blockade that remains in force, despite the fact that it has been rejected 24 times at the United Nations General Assembly, and other important, like the Summit of the Americas held in Panama last year; and despite positive but insufficient measures adopted by the current U.S. Administration.

We also appreciate the support displayed at the 4th CELAC Summit with respect to our demand for the return of the Cuban territory unlawfully occupied by a U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo, against the will of our people and government.

Now, without further delay I pronounce the 7th Summit of the Association of Caribbean States open.

Thank you.

"We cannot remain indifferent to disturbances resulting from the imperialist counter-offensive."

Speech by the **President of Cuba Raul Castro** in the Opening Session of 7th Association of Caribbean States Summit



IN DEFENSE OF CUBA

Cuba solidarity activists in Vancouver, Canada and Seattle, USA demand “Lift the US Blockade on Cuba!”



By Janine Solanki

On December 17, 2014, US President Obama made a historic announcement, that “the United States of America is changing its relationship with the people of Cuba.” A year and a half later, are Cuba solidarity groups done protesting the blockade? Not at all! While there are more exceptions and an easing of some restrictions, the US trade and travel blockade on Cuba is still in place. The US is still occupying the Cuban territory of Guantanamo Bay, and the US government still funds and directs covert regime change programs in Cuba.

For over 50 years Cuba and supporters around the world have been demanding an end to the blockade. Finally, we are seeing



Public forum in Seattle with Cuban guest Isel Calzadilla Acosta on June 11 2016. From left to right: Tamara Hansen, Isel Calzadilla Acosta, Moon Vazquez & Cindy Domingo

progress! In July 2015 Cuba and the US opened embassies once again in each others countries. In March 2016 Obama and a large US delegation visited Cuba. Now that positive moves are happening, public pressure is necessary to keep this progress moving forward. Increasing that pressure on is exactly what Cuba solidarity activists in Seattle, US and Vancouver, Canada are working together to do.

Seattle Stands with Cuba!

On June 11th, 2016 the US Women and Cuba Collaboration organized a public event in Seattle, Washington with special Cuban guest Isel Calzadilla Acosta. Isel is a Cuban activist and founder of “Las Isabelas” in association with Cuba’s National Center for the Education of Sex (CENESEX). This event was a great chance for both people in the US and Cuba solidarity activists who drove down from Vancouver, Canada to join in hearing first-hand about the great gains Cuba is making for LGBT+ (Lesbian,

Gay Bisexual, Trans) rights. There were many questions from the audience and a very fruitful exchange between participants and Isel. (Read the FTT interview with Isel on page 24).

It is definitely important to pressure the US government to lift the blockade from here in Canada. But Canada’s Cuba solidarity must extend across the border to the US, which is the front lines of the Cuba solidarity movement. Exchange and cooperation between US and Canadian Cuba solidarity organizations is how we can unite forces for a stronger show of support for Cuba. That strength of solidarity was felt at the Seattle event with activists from Vancouver and Seattle sharing aspirations to end the blockade and a deep love for Cuba!

Vancouver Pickets for Cuba!

On June 17, 2016 the Friends of Cuba Against the US Blockade – Vancouver (FCAB-Van) held their monthly picket action in front of the US Consulate in Vancouver, demanding that the US lift the blockade on Cuba and return Guantanamo Bay to Cuba. The pickets happen on the 17th of every month, marking the day of Obama’s historic announcement and will continue until the blockade is fully lifted! Local activists spoke between rounds of picketing



Vancouver monthly picket against the U.S. blockade. June 17, 2016



and chanting, as well as a phone message of solidarity was shared from Ottawa Cuba Connections, who hold coordinated pickets at the US embassy in Ottawa.

Cuba’s Legacy Lives On

Following the June 17th picket against the US blockade, that evening Cuba supporters gathered for an event celebrating Che Guevara’s 88th birthday. The event, organized by Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC), honored the life and legacy of this revolutionary hero. Participants sang along to live music from MX Katracho, watched a film about Che Guevara, and even got to play a game of trivia to test their knowledge of Che Guevara’s life!

Out On the Streets

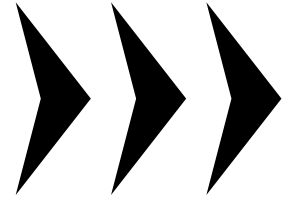
On June 19th Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba and Friends of Cuba Against the US Blockade – Vancouver spent the day at the Car Free Festival, on Vancouver’s Commercial Drive and Main Street. Activists at the Cuba solidarity information tables welcomed people who were especially curious to know more about the current state of US-Cuba relations. When passerby’s found out that the US blockade on Cuba is in fact still in effect, they were eager to sign the petition demanding that the US end its blockade on Cuba.

Join in the Cuba Solidarity Movement!

There are many events and actions like these which you can join in to learn more about Cuba and protest the US blockade! Check out www.vancubasolidarity.com and www.vancubavsblockade.org, find us on facebook, or on twitter @VanCuba_VCSC and @NoBloqueoVan

VIVA Venezuela Continues to Stand AGAINST U.S. INTERVENTION!

VENEZUELA!



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro greets a rally. Caracas, Venezuela. June 2, 2016.

By Alison Bodine

On June 21, 2016 Afro-Venezuelans from all of Venezuela's 14 states took to the streets in Caracas to show their support for the government of Venezuela against an economic war and foreign intervention. Two days later, people across Venezuela gathered in the public squares of major cities also against foreign intervention and to defend the sovereignty of Venezuela. On the International Day of Refugees, Colombians living in Venezuela marched in Caracas in support of the Bolivarian Revolution and the government of Venezuela.

These mass demonstrations are only a few examples of the way that the people of Venezuela are demonstrating their support of the Bolivarian Revolution. The people of Venezuela, led by the government of President Nicolas Maduro are mobilizing every day, in streets, classrooms and workplaces of Venezuela to defend the gains of the Bolivarian Revolution against a violent counter-revolutionary opposition that works hand-in-hand with the U.S. government.

However, you would know none of this if you were reading the mainstream news. Instead, you would see the headlines "Venezuela food shortage pushes country to breaking point", "Rolling blackouts and riots in drought-stricken Venezuela", "Venezuelans ransack

stores, riot in streets as widespread hunger grips South American nation" or "Venezuela is grinding to a halt amid chaos;" all headlines that have been used in the last month for articles in the New York Times, the Washington Post and even Canadian press such as the CBC.

This mainstream media campaign against Venezuela is using lies, deceptions and manipulations to turn Venezuela into a "failed state," with a people in desperate need of foreign aid and intervention. This is a false and exaggerated narrative that compliments the current policy of the U.S. government and their allies against the sovereignty and self-determination of the people of Venezuela.

U.S. Intervention in Venezuela Continues

Since the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution with the election of Comandante Hugo Chavez in 1998, the U.S. government has led a constant attack against the people of Venezuela and their right to choose their own government and the future of their country. This has included financial and political support for a violent and counter-revolutionary opposition in Venezuela, including support for a 2002 coup against President Chavez. Most recently, President Obama and the U.S. government have declared Venezuela as a "threat to U.S. national security" and upheld existing sanctions.

Calls for foreign intervention, including support for a motion against Venezuela in the Organization of American States (OAS) have been echoed by all major political parties in Canada, including the NDP. In a recent statement NDP Foreign Affairs Critic Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie) said "Canada should be working through the Organization of American States (OAS) to support multilateral diplomatic initiatives. The

OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro has invoked the Inter-American Democratic Charter regarding Venezuela, and Canada, as a member of the OAS, should support his efforts. Multilateral action is the best way to find a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis in Venezuela."

So, What About the OAS?

The United States and their allies have also continued to try and impose their will on the people of Venezuela through the apparatus of the Organization of American States (OAS). In May, the OAS member-states (which include the United States and Canada) refused to accept the call of the General Secretary of the OAS to invoke the "Inter-American Democratic Charter" against Venezuela, which could lead to the removal Venezuela from the regional body. Then, in June there was another meeting of the OAS where the General Secretary, Luis Almagro proceeded to read his full report on Venezuela and the reasons they should be banned from the OAS.

The government of Venezuela has denied the legitimacy of the General Secretary to invoke the charter, especially in the light of Almagro's direct meetings with the opposition in Venezuela as if they were somehow representatives of Venezuela at the OAS. As Delcy Rodriguez, the Foreign Minister of Venezuela has said "Every day we have evidence of the secretary general's bias in favor of sectors of the opposition who are seeking a coup in Venezuela," she said. "I see now this is ordered by Washington. I know they are on Washington's payroll to meddle in the domestic affairs of Venezuela."

Member-states at the OAS meeting expressed their support for dialogue between the government of Venezuela and the opposition as facilitated by UNASUR. As opposed to the OAS, which is based in Washington DC and receives 59% of its funding from the United States, UNASUR is a regional cooperation bloc for and in South America. If the United States and their allies are truly concerned with peace



**Rally in support of the Bolivarian Revolution
Barrias, Venezuela. June 5, 2016.**

and democracy in Venezuela, they should support the efforts of Venezuela's neighbors to promote dialogue.

What Are the Media Lies and Deceptions About Venezuela?

At a time when the U.S. government has chosen to mask its intervention in Venezuela under demands for "democracy" and an end to "humanitarian crisis," mainstream media has also launched a campaign against Venezuela in order to pave the way for further intervention. This campaign is working through all major capitalist media outlets to prove that the people of Venezuela are facing a humanitarian crisis that the government of Venezuela is doing nothing to remedy.

This manipulative campaign has focused especially on food shortages and the long lines of people waiting to buy basic goods in Venezuela. First of all, it must be said, what right does the U.S. government and media have to tell Venezuela about ensuring access to proper nutrition? Within the United States, the richest country in the world, over 15 million children live in households without consistent access to "nutritious food necessary for a healthy life", according to the US Department of Agriculture.

Despite the obvious hypocrisy, the mainstream media and U.S. government officials continue to offer their criticisms, placing the entire fault for lines and shortages on the shoulders of the Venezuelan government. There are, however, many other factors that contribute to the great challenges that the Venezuelan economy is facing, not the least of which has been the dramatic fall in the price of oil, Venezuela's main export. These factors, with very real consequences to Venezuela's economy are brushed off in major media in order to make room for more photos of empty grocery store shelves.

The continued practice of the smuggling and re-selling of basic goods in Venezuela for a massive profit is another factor causing shortages. In a rare article about the problem of smuggling in Venezuela, Time Magazine

interviewed two sisters in Colombia. As Time reports, "... they meet a local who has purchased about 60 kilos of beef at the Mercal, the state subsidized supermarket, for the equivalent of just \$54. By the end of the day that same quantity of meat will be on a market shelf in Cucuta, where it will sell for over \$200." Despite the closure of much of the Venezuela/Colombia border by President Maduro in August of 2015 to crackdown on smuggling, the criminal practice continues to funnel food and basic goods out of government subsidized stores and out the country.

To further demonstrate that the mainstream media has no interest in the truth about Venezuela, take for example a photo that has been re-printed dozens of

"I will say this now and always, Venezuela does not obey orders from the United States."

Nicolas Maduro

times in mainstream media over the past few years. In this photo, a woman with a grocery cart is seen walking in front of a row of empty shelves, a supposed example of a severe crisis in Venezuela. Although this photo was reported as being taken in Venezuela, it was later proven to be a photo taken in New York in 2011 prior to Hurricane Sandy.

It has also become common practice in the mainstream media to report that the inflation rate in Venezuela has reached 700%, which is a direct lie. This number is only a prediction by the IMF about where the inflation rate is headed in Venezuela in the next year. Instead, Venezuela's Central Bank has reported that the inflation rate 141.5 percent.

"Each aggression of the opposition must be responded to with more revolution"

Diosdado Cabello, Venezuelan Parliamentarian and former President of Venezuela's National Assembly

In Venezuela today, the majority of food production and distribution is still controlled by private companies, a factor that mainstream media chooses to leave out when they discuss shortages. These companies, including the largest, known as Empresa Polar, have been found hoarding food as well as raising prices for basic goods. In order to combat this, the government of Venezuela has implemented emergency economic measures that enable them to introduce more control and regulation in the industry. With the emergency decree in place, there are advances being made to

diversify Venezuela's economy as well as boost production in factories left to waste by private industry in Venezuela.

They have also formed a community-based food distribution system, known as CLAP – Local Committees of Supply and Production. As reported by Telesur at the beginning of June, "the CLAP committees have facilitated the distribution of 33,000 tons of food to some 6.4 million of Venezuelans." As well, the government is working to establish growth of food production in Venezuela, with new projects such as community gardens and urban farms. In another sector, Venezuela actively working to increase food imports outside of the private sector. This includes a recent trade deal with Trinidad and Tobago for food, bath and laundry soaps and toilet paper.

When the right-wing opposition was elected to a majority in the National Assembly in December of 2015, the first laws that they attempted to pass immediately showed their intentions to roll back the great gains made by the people of Venezuela in the Bolivarian Revolution. Despite these attempts, the people of Venezuela continue to receive the important services delivered by the social programs, known as "Missions" in Venezuela. This includes those for housing, health and dental care, subsidized food and education.

"I will say this now and always, Venezuela does not obey orders from the United States." – Nicolas Maduro

In the face of a difficult economic and political situation in Venezuela, the Bolivarian Revolution has continued to advance, in dramatic contrast to the chaos and desperation described by mainstream media. As the mainstream media mounts a campaign of lies and deceptions to paint Venezuela as a failed-state, the government of Venezuela is working to combat a very-real economic crisis, a violent counter-revolutionary opposition and constant threats of foreign intervention.

Almost 17 years ago the people of Venezuela choose to pursue a different path than that set out by the U.S. government and their allies in Latin America. With the election of the late President Comandante Hugo Chavez, the people of Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution began to build a more equal and just society. Since then, great gains have been made in the fight against poverty, illiteracy and lack of adequate housing, education and healthcare in Venezuela.

Ever since that day, the government of Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution has been under constant threat. As people in Canada and the United States we must echo the demands of the people of Venezuela against foreign intervention and expose the hypocrisy of the U.S. government in their claim to be fighting for "democracy" and "human rights" in Venezuela.

Vancouver Stands Firmly With Bolivarian Revolution Activists Exposing U.S. Meddling in Venezuela

By Janine Solanki

The last 17 years of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela has been marked with huge advancements for their people. Venezuelans have seen the rate of poverty and unemployment decrease dramatically and infant mortality improve by almost 50%. The Bolivarian revolution has carried out dozens of Missions to improve literacy and provide housing, healthcare, and education to its citizens. The rights of Indigenous people in Venezuela are now not only recognized but are enshrined in Venezuela's constitution.

Today this extraordinary country is under a vicious US-backed right-wing and attack. The counter-revolutionary opposition in Venezuela, hand-in-hand with the U.S. government, is making every attempt to overthrow the government of Venezuela and reverse the great gains made by poor and working people. Alongside economic warfare and US sanctions, Venezuela is also being subjected to a mainstream media campaign that aims to demonize the government of Venezuela and President Nicolas Maduro.

On June 9th, 2016 the Hugo Chavez

People's Defence Front - Southwest Canada Chapter organized a discussion event on the topic of "Bolivarian Foreign Relations and Solidarity - The Achievements of the Peace Diplomacy". The speaker for the evening was Wilfredo Perez Bianco, the First Consul General and Head of the Mission for the Consulate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in Vancouver, Canada. Wilfredo Perez Bianco outlined the important role of new initiatives for social, political and economic cooperation between Latin American and Caribbean countries, such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). He also spoke about the increased US and right-wing attacks on Venezuela.

The next day, June 10th, Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice organized a monthly picket action at the US Consulate, with the demand "US Hands Off Venezuela!" Protestors carried picket signs and chanted, and throughout the picket heard speeches from social justice activists and organizers. This was the 7th consecutive monthly picket action, and protestors are committed to continuing these actions in defense of



Vancouver, Canada, June 10, 2016.

Venezuela each month.

Following the picket action, supporters headed through Downtown Vancouver to the Vancouver Art Gallery, to setup information tables with the proud message "Maduro is our President!" Activists had many conversations on what is happening in Venezuela with people and collected petition signatures demanding that the US government stop their interventions, sanctions and threats towards Venezuela.

All of these events and actions serve to cut through the mainstream media lies about Venezuela, to open the discussion on what is really happening in Venezuela, and to defend Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution and government of President Maduro. Come out to join the next picket action for Venezuela, on July 8th, 4pm at the US Consulate.

US Hands Off Venezuela!

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shown over the past year. To be as welcoming as Germany, Canada would have to take in about 450,000 asylum seekers in a little over half a year. Even tiny Finland has put Canada to shame. With about one-seventh the population, Finland has accepted about 30,000 refugees since June. That would be like Canada taking in 210,000 refugees in seven months."

As the above comparison illustrates, the government of Canada is fully capable of welcoming in 200,000 refugees, Syrian and non-Syrian, before the end of this year and it is their moral obligation to do so.

The government of Canada also has the further obligation to grant all refugees immediate human and legal rights in Canada. In this regard, Canada's program for accepting Syrian refugees has utterly failed. Refugees have reported trouble with accessing food banks, sub-standard housing and 16-month long waitlists for federally funded English classes. Take for example, the front-page headline from the Province newspaper in Vancouver which read "Refugees Face New Hurdles: Disabled sisters who fled Syria in their wheelchairs struggle in a Burnaby apartment that is not accessible." Since coming to Canada as refugees, these

women have essentially become trapped in their own home.

From Europe to Canada to the United States (which, shamefully, has only offered to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees in the next year), it is clear that the refugee crisis is not going away. This crisis is a painful and devastating symptom of the crisis for humanity caused by continuing wars and occupations in the Middle East and Africa.

Over the past five years, the number of internally displaced people in the world has grown by two and a half times. As the imperialist war machine accelerates, so does the environmental and human destruction that it creates. Refugees escaping wars, occupations and complete devastation must be given a safe passage to where ever they choose to settle. From here in Canada and North America, we must work not only to welcome all refugees, but also to end imperialist wars and occupations.

No to Wars and Occupations! Yes to Refugees!

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The Newspaper Of
FIRE THIS TIME
MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
www.firethistime.net
Volume 10 Issue 7
July 2016
Published Monthly

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-ISSN-1712-1817-

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This did not happen in the United States in the past. The AIPAC, Zionist lobbies and pro-Zionist sentiment made it very difficult. Although pretty much everyone at the conference said they supported Palestinian rights, some thought that an antiwar coalition couldn't be built with a pro-Palestinian rights position. But this was at the time of the first Gaza Freedom Flotilla that tried to break the blockade of Gaza and some who were on the Freedom Flotilla were at the conference, including Ann Wright. They had witnessed the killing of the Turkish members on the Mavi Marmara, and the conference decided that there was no

not a War against another country but a war against a concept and therefore, could never be won. It was a formula for continuous war. We also understood that the so called "War on Terror" had a domestic component. We were seeing Muslims being victimized in the United States; we were seeing Islamophobia showing its ugly head. The FBI in the United States was sending provocateurs and agents into mosques all across the country and they were inventing schemes, terrorist schemes that they were trying to get people in these mosques to buy into. Sometimes they cajoled them to do it, sometimes they bribed them to do it, and sometimes they threatened them

phones and our internet usage and even people outside the country, even heads of state of other countries, are being spied on. We have always heard that this is the way that dictatorships function, "they spy on their own people." Our government was doing it on a scale that would make any dictator envious, the U.S. are spying on everybody.

We also started seeing the militarization of the police in the United States. MAWO was with UNAC in Chicago when NATO came in 2012. UNAC built a big demonstration there. At that demonstration, antiwar GI's threw their medals back at NATO. But I



UNITED ANTIWAR MOVEMENT VOICING OPPOSITION TO US INTERVENTION IN SYRIA IN 2013

way an antiwar movement in the United States could not take up that issue. We put forward the demand of "No aid to Israel," but it caused a split at the conference, a minority broke from the conference over that issue. As it turned out, some of the largest antiwar demonstrations that have happened in this country in recent years have been demonstrations around the issue of Palestinian rights and against the attacks that have happened on Gaza.

The U.S. Imperialist were calling the wars, a "War on Terror." In that respect, the wars were different than the Vietnam War or WWII. A "War on Terror" is

to do it. Albany, where the founding UNAC conference took place was one of the places which was a target of this kind FBI attacks. At a downtown mosques in Albany the Imam and another member had been arrested on phony charges. At the end of the conference, we held a march to the mosque that had been targeted by the FBI and held a rally there.

But the attacks didn't end with Muslims of course. There was attacks on everybody's Civil Liberties. We saw the Patriot Act and the NSA spying. As Edward Snowden pointed out, every single person in this country is being spied on by our government through our

have never seen the kind of militarized police in such numbers that I saw at that demonstration. We were very peaceful at that demonstration, we marched and we protested and we said very loudly and clearly what we were protesting and why we were protesting NATO, but as we marched down the streets in large numbers there were lines and lines of cops from the whole mid-west of the United States, they all came together in Chicago. They spent millions of dollars on the "security" for Chicago. They told people that we were going to be violent, that people should move out of the downtown area of Chicago, and many did. And at

the end of the rally, when there was no violence on our part at all, I think they felt that they had to do something to justify the expense for the security. So, the demonstration was attacked. At the end of the rally people were directed to go in a back to their buses but the police blocked them and forced people leaving to move between rows of cops. Then, they started pushing with their clubs. People started falling over and soon clubs were being swung, some demonstrators were hospitalized and many people were hurt. But, that militarization of the police that we saw in Chicago rapidly went into every minority community in the United States.

As GI's were coming home from Iraq, many soldiers who only a few months before were kicking in doors of people in Iraq, entered the police forces in the United States. Some police uniforms were now khaki like they wore in the military. They started calling the people in these communities the 'enemy,' they did not see them as

people they were supposed to 'defend and protect.' Vehicles that were coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan were seen in the streets and there was a real militarization of the police that was going on here.

This, along with attacks on unions, immigrants and others was the 'War at Home.' And so, we now speak about "Ending the Wars at Home and Abroad.

We understood that Obama was not going to end the wars. He has not ended the war on Afghanistan or the war on Iraq. We have seen attacks on Libya and seen the results of that war. We have seen the attacks on Syria, and other places around the world. We see the expansion

of NATO. Weaponized drones are being used in Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, and in many other places around the world. It is a militarization and a war that is not just a war against a single country as it was in Vietnam, but it has spread throughout the whole world. The United States today has military forces in over 130 countries they have close to 1000 foreign military bases. That means they have about 20 times the number of foreign military bases as every other country in the world combined. The military budget in the United States is about 57% of our discretionary budget, which is about equal to the military budgets of every country in the world

during Obama's presidency

The anti-war movement needs to continue to fight, it needs to continue to be in the streets and it needs to continue to find links with the other movements that have moved into action in the United States. More and more we have been seeing the need to reach out internationally. Last week we had a demonstration in New York City which was a successful demonstration, but nowhere near as large as they were right before and after the invasion of Iraq. But for this demonstration so many of the international communities from New York City came out. Yemenis, Syrians, Haitians and many others and we were able to raise the issue of the wars that are not being talked about in the election campaigns. While we were having that demonstration we had two of our members—at a social forum that some of the Eastern Europeans organized and the Social Forum sent our demonstration greetings. We have made several



combined.

We in the United States were right to keep the antiwar movement going. It became very clear, and I believe we were right, in opposing both the wars at home and the wars abroad. We are starting to make connections with the youth that came into streets around the Black Lives matter movement and around and the occupy movements throughout the United States. The anger that we see in this election campaign can not be contained by the lesser evil politics in the U.S. No matter who is elected we will see more war and I believe antiwar sentiment will once again be express in massive actions that we did not see

international visits to countries that are under attack in the recent years. It is very clear that this time, an antiwar movement in the United States has to be an international antiwar movement. We have to come together with the victims of these wars, with the refugees that are fleeing wars into Europe and other places around the globe.

UNAC, despite the times that we are in, is growing, it is gaining an important reputation in the US and around the world. We are very proud to have had good relations with MAWO and I look forward to our further collaboration. Together, we will end these wars at home and abroad. Thank you.

OUR HERITAGE



Leslie Feinberg

September 1, 1949 - November 15, 2014

Leslie identified as an anti-racist white, working-class, secular Jewish, transgender, lesbian, female, revolutionary communist. She was a member of the National Committee of Worker's World Party and managing editor of the Worker's World newspaper.

"But divide-and-conquer ideology diverts the working class from realizing that the historic moment has ripened to unite to take power. Understanding that solidarity is in the class interests of all who are exploited and oppressed is the key to revolutionary struggle.

That's why we as communists see the struggle against lesbian, gay, bi and trans oppression as an essential component of the working-class struggle.

Fighting all forms of oppression defends lives. And it also helps build unity in the struggle by revealing to the entire working class the social and economic inequalities that are built into the capitalist system.

Fighting LGBT oppression is an ideological, social and economic battle.

When LGBT workers are denied same-sex benefits for their partners, they are being paid less than their co-workers, which drives down wages and benefits for all workers. The LGBT-led struggle for domestic partner benefits has helped win gains for unmarried heterosexual workers, as well.

LGBT workers have to cobble together an economic support system without the benefits bestowed on heterosexual families. That's why we support the right to same-sex marriage. We are not advocates for or against marriage—we say the state does not have the right to discriminate."

Excerpt from talk, "LGBT liberation: An essential working-class struggle", May 13, 2005

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massacre at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, more than 200 bills had been introduced at the state and local levels to restrict the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people."

The case of institutionalized homophobia and transphobia is not limited to the United States; at different degrees we see similar restrictions on LGBTQ rights in Canada.

Take the example of Steinbach a city located in Manitoba. In May a parent of a 12-year old son who was harassed in school for having two moms, tried to bring change to the school board curriculum that bans teachers from discussing about sexual relationships and gender identity in elementary and middle-school classrooms. Her request was refused by the majority of school trustees with one of the trustees going as far as trying to link the rise of sexual education in schools in Toronto to an increased risk of cancer!!!

Unfortunately, the situation in Steinbach is not an isolated incident, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association LGBTQ youth face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than heterosexual peers.

Revolutionary Cuba Sets Example

This story from the school in Steianbach is a huge contrast to what I saw on my recent trip to Cuba. I had the opportunity to visit schools and cultural centers for youth, in every classroom I visited I noticed a billboard dedicated to sexual education and health and a variety of posters against homophobia and transphobia. With the intervention of Cuba's revolutionary socialist government and the

work of LGBTQ activist and organizations such as the National Center for Sex Education CENESEX, Cuba is opening a new era of rights and freedoms for the queer community. To learn more about Cuba's achievements and continuous work on LGBTQ rights, check page 24 in this issue of Fire This Newspaper for an interview with Cuban LGBTQ activist, Isel Calzadilla Acosta. Isel is the founder of "Las Isabelas", the first lesbian group in Santiago de Cuba. She collaborates and works with CENESEX in different projects to combat against homophobia.

No Freedom Without A Struggle

Although nowadays the queer community in advanced capitalist countries, such as the U.S. and Canada, enjoys different degrees' of rights, we have to remember that the struggle started with the Stonewall rebellion has never been completed or finished. Solidarity and unity among the working and poor people and all other oppressed and marginalized layers of the society is necessary to continue the revolutionary struggle for true liberation.

In the words of Chelsea Manning: "We need to send a powerful message to the world in a unified voice: that we can fight for social justice for everyone, everywhere and change the world, not just get married. We can continue to build our communities and address the root causes of queer and trans poverty and deaths. We can work to get queer and trans people out of the prisons and jails and off the streets, and to improve our access to housing, education, employment and gender-confirming healthcare."

Follow Azza on Twitter: @Azza_R14

Remember The Forces That Marginalize Queers Also Marginalize Muslims

By Jacob Tobia
@JacobTobia

It does not matter if the Orlando shooter was Muslim.

His identity does not justify islamophobia.

Our fear does not justify islamophobia.

Our trauma does not justify islamophobia.

Our sadness does not justify islamophobia.

Our heartbreak does not justify islamophobia.

Today, it is our obligation as a queer community to remember that islamophobia, homophobia, and transphobia work together.

Today, it is our obligation as queer people to proclaim that the same forces that marginalize queer people in the United States are used to marginalize Muslims.

Today, we need to remember that joy, love, and celebration are still possible; that queer and allied Muslims are an integral part of the queer community.

Today, we must stand together against the wave of prejudice, hatred, and violence sweeping our country.



Last night, just three hours before the attack began, I stopped at the bodega in my neighborhood for some ice cream. The Muslim couple who run the bodega were sitting behind the counter: the husband speaks English, and his wife is still learning. After I made my purchase, the husband translated on behalf of his wife:

"What lipstick are you wearing?" he asked.

"It's from Sephora, it's my favorite!" I responded.

His wife said something to him in Arabic, the same language that my grandparents spoke when they immigrated to the United States from Syria in the 1950s, the language that I do not speak but wish I could.

He turned to me: "She says that she likes your lipstick. She thinks that you look beautiful!"

Today, we mourn together.

continued from page 3

as an independent country as a threat to its interests in the region. Should the US attack Iran – and if Syria falls, Iran will be next in their sights – it would without a doubt be the beginning of a catastrophic and bloody war, the likes of which we have not seen yet.

Why We Must Demand an end to Imperialist Intervention in Syria

It is absolutely critical that poor and working people, peace loving people, and anyone who cares about justice and humanity join together to demand an immediate end to intervention in Syria by the US and their allies. The human cost of this war has been immense. We cannot stand idly by while more Syrians die, whether in their own country or in a treacherous attempt to escape to Europe or elsewhere.

As the US and their allies expand their nebulous 'war on terror' around the globe, there has been a corresponding increase in the 'war on terror' at home. Muslims – especially Muslim women – have been facing increasing discrimination, both through government policies (to remove their hijab or niqab, for example) and hate crimes by individuals. However, it is no longer only Muslims who face these sorts of attacks on their human and democratic rights. Increasingly, peace activists, labour activists, anti-racism activists and environmental activists in many countries have been thrown together under the vague definition of 'terrorists' in government legislation or policy which claws back at rights we have taken for granted for generations (in Canada, Bill C-51 is an example of this, as we have covered in previous issues and this current issue of Fire This Time).

Further, the wars abroad have been matched in all imperialist countries with increasing cutbacks and austerity measures at home. Taxpayer dollars are being diverted into the military while basic essential services like health care and education are left woefully underfunded. The 'war on terror', in Syria and around the globe, has not advanced freedoms or quality of life, but destroyed them.

What is the Solution?



LONDON, ENGLAND. 2015



FLORIDA, USA. 2013



VANCOUVER, CANADA. 2016

The primary and most urgent objective in Syria is to support the Syrian government in their efforts to defeat the terrorists of Daesh and other US-supported groups. This can only be done through a military campaign coordinated by the Syrian government. If Daesh is to be defeated, it is the US that must go, not President Assad and the independent government of Syria.

Only once the defeat of Daesh and other terrorists has been achieved will the people of Syria be able to move forward to determine the best future for their country. There are internal problems and divisions within Syria to be sure, but these must be solved by the Syrian people and an independent Syrian government, not a puppet of a foreign power. Indeed, the history of US interventions – in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, for example – shows us that they will only create and further exacerbate problems.

For poor and working people and all supporters of justice and human rights, building an effective movement to oppose imperialist intervention in Syria is our critical task. We must educate, organize, and mobilize ourselves and others to stop this war. The future of the Syrian people – and our own future – depends on it.

Battle of Ideas Press
WAR AND OCCUPATION
IN AFGHANISTAN
WHICH WAY FORWARD?

BY NITA PALMER

Nita Palmer is an author and researcher on the war in Afghanistan. She is a member of the editorial board of Vancouver, Canada-based social justice newspaper Fire This Time.

January 2010, paperback, \$7.00
 155 pages, illustrated,
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PLUS: SPECIAL CELEBRATION
of the 233rd Birthday of
The Liberator of Latin America
SIMON BOLIVAR



BBQ, LIVE MUSIC, GAMES & SALSA LESSON-
SUNDAY JULY 24
6PM - TROUT LAKE CONCESSION
NEAR BEACH & CONCESSION

VACUVER COMMUNITIES IN SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA - VCSC
VANCUBA_VCSC | VANCUBASOLIDARITY@GMAIL.COM
WWW.VANCUBASOLIDARITY.COM

INTERNATIONAL DAYS OF ACTION TO STOP NATO
DURING THE NATO SUMMIT IN WARSAW JULY 8 TO 9 2016



© EPA

2011 NATO bombing of Libya

**CANADA: CANCEL THE ARMS DEAL WITH SAUDI ARABIA!
US/UK/CANADA HANDS OFF LIBYA!**

US/UK/CANADA/France/NATO:

NO TO WAR ON SYRIA, IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN!

SAUDI ARABIA HANDS OFF YEMEN, SYRIA AND IRAQ!

CANADA OUT OF IRAQ! CANADA OUT OF AFGHANISTAN!

TURKEY OUT OF SYRIA AND IRAQ!

NO TO ISLAMOPHOBIA!

ISRAEL HANDS OFF PALESTINE!

END THE OCCUPATION NOW!

END THE BLOCKADE OF CUBA!

LIFT ALL SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN!

NO TO WAR & OCCUPATION!

YES TO SELF-DETERMINATION!

**ANTIWAR RALLY &
PETITION CAMPAIGN**

**SATURDAY JULY 9 2PM
VANCOUVER ART GALLERY**

ROBSON STREET AT HOWE STREET
DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER, BC



**MOBILIZATION AGAINST WAR & OCCUPATION - MAWO
WWW.MAWOVANCOUVER.ORG**