

## Revolt spreads in eastern Ukraine

By MICHAEL SCHREIBER

The conflict in Ukraine has greatly escalated in recent days, as open revolt against the right-wing government in Kiev sweeps through the eastern and southern sections of the country. Protesters state that they are trying to protect the Russian-speaking population from discrimination and fascist attacks. Many call for autonomy for their region, while others say they are seeking to secede from Ukraine and to join Russia—as Crimea did following its March 16 referendum.

Unemployment and falling living standards are also fueling the revolt, just as it did for many of the people who joined the demonstrations in Kiev's Independence ("Maidan") Square at the beginning of the year under the illusion that prosperity would arrive with an orientation toward the European Union.

The U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund warns that the Ukraine economy faces a 5 percent contraction in 2014—even though the IMF has granted a \$17 billion loan to the country over two years. Most of the funds from the IMF will go to paying back the Ukraine's creditors—including \$5 billion already owed to the IMF. In return for their loans, the Western imperialists are demanding drastic austerity measures aimed at the country's working class. The current Ukrainian regime has already raised natural gas prices by 50 percent.

The ruling group in Kiev came to power in February in a coup that was closely supported by Washington. The new government was ushered into office after fascist and ultra-right forces effectively took the leadership of the Maidan protest. State Department Undersecretary Victoria Nuland admitted last December that the U.S. had poured some \$5 billion into the country in attempts to destabilize and overthrow the previous regime; U.S. officials later handpicked the new prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk. The ruling group hopes to consolidate and legitimize its power through presidential elections, which are scheduled for May 25.

In recent weeks, at least 600 battle-ready U.S. troops have been airlifted into neighboring Poland and into the Baltic States, and U.S. warships have been sent to the Black Sea. These moves signal the possibility of armed intervention, as leaders of the coup government in Kiev steadily beat the drums for war with Russia.

Although Russia has threatened to militarily intervene if the Russian-speaking population of the Ukraine is in danger, it would be hard pressed to counter a full-scale offensive by the U.S. and its NATO allies. No doubt with this in mind, Russian officials have in-



(Above) People hold back an armored vehicle during Ukrainian army advance on Slovansk.

dicated a preference for international talks leading toward establishment of a federal republic in Ukraine, with greater autonomy for the eastern region and guaranteed protections for Russian speakers. And in a conciliatory move, on May 8 Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that he was pulling troops back from the Ukrainian border, and that he backed the call for elections on May 25.

As we go to press, battles are raging in several cities. In Slovansk, a city of 120,000 in the Donbas industrial belt, Ukrainian army troops, reportedly augmented by neo-Nazi Right Sector forces, have been trying to dislodge protesters who had seized government buildings and constructed defensive barricades in the streets. At the same time, the Kiev regime has sent a unit from its newly created National Guard—which incorporates Right Sector and other "Maidan" paramilitary units—to attempt to establish control of the country's major port city, Odessa.

Vasyl Krutov, who serves as "anti-terrorism" minister for the ruling group in Kiev, has declared that the current military push "is not a short-term action. This is essentially a war." The stakes are high since it would be catastrophic for the Kiev regime to give up its Black

Sea port facilities and its industrial heartland in the east. The International Monetary Fund has threatened to cancel and renegotiate its loans to Kiev if the pro-Western regime loses control of those areas.

So far, the Kiev government's "war" has met strong resistance, and the advance of its army has been slow.

(continued on page 11)

### May Day rallies

See page 2





# Workers, immigrants march on May Day

May 1 in New York City: Tony Savino / Socialist Action



By LISA LUINENBURG

Dozens of protesters were injured in Istanbul, Turkey, this year on May 1 as they tried to reach Taksim Square. A week earlier, the Turkish Prime Minister had announced a ban on demonstrations in Taksim Square on the internationally recognized workers' holiday. Police in Istanbul used tear gas and water cannons against thousands of protesters who attempted to defy the ban.

The Turkish government's willingness to use violence to break up the demonstration is just another sign of the times—as workers around the world continue to protest against unending austerity and war, the capitalist class is more willing to use violence to keep them in their place.

In the United States, May Day demonstrations of a more peaceful nature took place around the country. One of the largest was in Seattle, where over 7000 people marched in support of immigrants' and workers' rights. Recently elected Socialist Alternative city council member Kshama Sawant spoke at the rally, addressing the need for a living wage for workers. Other speakers addressed the ongoing campaign for better conditions in the Northwest Detention Center, where a hunger strike took place in February to protest the

deplorable conditions for immigrants who are held there.

May 1 demonstrations in other parts of the country also focused on workers' rights and justice for immigrants. Rallies of about 2000 people took place in New York City's Union Square, in Salem, Ore., and in Minneapolis. Workers in those states rallied for immigration reform, an end to deportations, and driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. In Portland, Ore., and Madison, Wis., protesters rallied for a \$15 minimum wage, and people in Madison also supported ongoing fights against mining and tar sands pipelines in the state.

Demonstrators in the United States have many good reasons to rally around the cause for immigrants' rights on May 1. While politicians in Congress debate immigration reform and argue over how many fines to charge people seeking green cards and how many Border Patrol agents to send to the border, hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants are being deported by the Obama administration every year. At the same time, undocumented immigrants are being criminalized for working, as E-verify and I-9 audits have replaced Bush's military-style raids as the weapon of choice.

A good example of these circumstances can be seen

in several fights currently taking place in Philadelphia. In April of this year, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter signed an executive order stating that city police will no longer hold undocumented immigrants under ICE detainers unless they have been convicted of a felony and ICE issues a warrant.

Usually, police forces cooperate with ICE by holding immigrants who are arrested until ICE can pick them up, even if they have been accused of no crime. This has led to cases such as that of Ernesto Galarza, a U.S.-born citizen of Puerto Rican descent, who was arrested and illegally held for three days in 2010 under ICE's mistaken belief that he was an undocumented immigrant from the Dominican Republic. According to the ACLU, cases like Ernesto's, along with the fact that ICE's detainer policy promotes a high rate of deportations of people who are innocent of any crime, has had a big impact on many city officials around the country.

Philadelphia has joined the ranks of a growing list of municipalities, including Washington, D.C., New Orleans, and New York City, which have stopped complying with ICE holds.

In another recent case, nearly 100 workers from the La Brea Bakery in Swedesboro, N.J., outside Philadelphia, were recently fired after the company conducted an I-9 audit and the workers were unable to produce documents proving their immigration status. Many of these workers had put in over 10 years on the job, but were offered no advance notice or severance pay.

Under the Obama administration, the use of I-9 audits has largely replaced the military-style immigration raids of the Bush era. With this tactic, undocumented workers are quietly fired from their jobs, essentially criminalizing their right to work and provide for their families, while avoiding much of the public outcry that accompanied large-scale raids in the past.

CATA, El Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (the Farmworkers Support Committee), has taken on the case of the workers fired from La Brea. On March 17, the workers delivered a letter to the company, seeking dialogue and asking for their jobs back, or at least for compensation. The company has yet to respond.

On May 1, a small delegation of CATA workers joined the May Day march in Philadelphia, stopping for a short rally outside of Starbucks, which sells La Brea goods. The workers delivered a petition and letter to the manager. You can support the La Brea workers by signing the petition at the following link: <https://www.change.org/petitions/john-yamin-call-on-la-brea-bakery-to-treat-workers-with-justice>.

The recent struggles around immigration in Philadelphia are just one example of a myriad of injustices that take place against immigrants and workers every day, not just in the United States, but around the world. Despite the low level of social struggle currently taking place on a global level, thousands of workers in many countries marched in the streets on May 1, showing that the struggle of the working class is far from dormant. It is this struggle that we must help to grow in the coming years, as the austerity and attacks against the working class continue. ■

**SOCIALIST ACTION** Closing news date: May 8, 2014  
Editor: Michael Schreiber Canada Editor: Barry Weisleder

Socialist Action (ISSN 0747-4237) is published monthly by Socialist Action Publishing Association, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Socialist Action, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. RATES: For one year (12 issues, 1st-class mail): U.S., Canada, Mexico — \$20. All other countries — \$30. Money orders and checks should be in U.S. dollars.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of Socialist Action. These are expressed in editorials. Socialist Action is edited, designed, and laid out entirely by volunteer labor.

**SOCIALIST  
ACTION**

For info about Socialist Action and how to join: Socialist Action National Office, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610, (510) 268-9429, [socialistaction@lmi.net](mailto:socialistaction@lmi.net)

Socialist Action newspaper editorial offices: [socialistactionnews@yahoo.com](mailto:socialistactionnews@yahoo.com)  
Website: [www.socialistaction.org](http://www.socialistaction.org)

## Subscribe to Socialist Action

**SPECIAL FOR NEW READERS!** — \$12 for 12 months — \$5 for 5 months

**RENEWALS:** — \$10 for six months — \$20 for 12 months — \$37 for two years

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

— I want to join the Socialist Action Newspaper Supporters Club.  
I enclose an extra contribution of: — \$100 — \$200 — Other

Clip and mail to: Socialist Action newspaper, P.O. Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610.

## WHERE TO FIND SOCIALIST ACTION

- ASHLAND, Ore.: [damonjure@earthlink.net](mailto:damonjure@earthlink.net)
- CHICAGO: P.O. Box 578428 Chicago, IL 60657, [chisocialistaction@yahoo.com](mailto:chisocialistaction@yahoo.com)
- CONNECTICUT: (860) 478-5300
- DULUTH, MINN.: [adamritscher@yahoo.com](mailto:adamritscher@yahoo.com). [www.thenorthernworker.blogspot.com](http://www.thenorthernworker.blogspot.com)
- KANSAS CITY: [kcsa@workernet.org](mailto:kcsa@workernet.org) (816) 221-3638
- LOUISVILLE, KY: [redlotus51@yahoo.com](mailto:redlotus51@yahoo.com), (502) 451-2193
- MADISON, Wis.: [Northlandiguana@gmail.com](mailto:Northlandiguana@gmail.com)
- MINNEAPOLIS/St. PAUL: (612) 802-1482, [socialistaction@visi.com](mailto:socialistaction@visi.com)
- NEW YORK CITY: (212) 781-5157
- PHILADELPHIA: [philly.socialistaction@gmail.com](mailto:philly.socialistaction@gmail.com)

- PORTLAND, ORE.: (503) 233-1629 [gary1917@aol.com](mailto:gary1917@aol.com)
- PROVIDENCE: [ADGAGNERI@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ADGAGNERI@GMAIL.COM) (401) 592-5385
- SALEM, ORE.: [ANNMONTAGUE@COMCAST.NET](mailto:ANNMONTAGUE@COMCAST.NET)
- SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA: P.O. Box 10328, OAKLAND, CA 94610 (510) 268-9429, [sfsocialistaction@gmail.com](mailto:sfsocialistaction@gmail.com)
- WASHINGTON, DC: [christopher.towne@gmail.com](mailto:christopher.towne@gmail.com), (202) 286-5493

## SOCIALIST ACTION CANADA

NATIONAL OFFICE  
526 Roxton Road, Toronto,  
Ont. M6G 3R4, (416) 535-8779  
<http://socialistaction.ca/>



# Supreme Ct. upholds Michigan ballot initiative banning affirmative action

By JEFF MACKLER

The U.S. Supreme Court, in all its majesty, upheld a 2006 Michigan ballot initiative that amended the state's constitution to ban affirmative action in higher education.

Until now, only a few states have approved such bans, including California, whose 1996 so-called Civil Rights Initiative, Proposition 209, prohibited public institutions from considering race, sex, or ethnicity in admissions policies. Proponents of affirmative action, which is today largely gutted by reactionary court decisions, fear that the Court's April 22 ruling will lead to yet another onslaught of state initiatives modeled after Michigan's.

The Court's decision follows a broad range of assaults on affirmative action based on the racist notion that in the U.S. today racial discrimination has been largely eliminated, and that any program that grants preferences to oppressed nationalities is now a form of "racism in reverse" and/or discrimination against whites!

Virtually every statistic that measures racial inequality with regard to income, wages, academic achievement, percentage of oppressed nationalities in prison and institutions of higher education, health care, life expectancy, etc. marks the fact that in racist America today, the gap has dramatically widened between whites, on the one hand, and Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans on the other. Indeed, the modest gains of the civil rights era of the 1960s and '70s have been largely obliterated. In the case of higher education, affirmative action has been limited to modest efforts to solicit increased numbers of applicants from oppressed groups—that is, to slightly broaden the admission pool.

But in the context of the worldwide economic crisis, the trend toward "lily white" has been exacerbated. In higher education at the University of Michigan, as well as at the University of California campuses at Berkeley, Los Angeles, and elsewhere, the already miniscule percentage of Black and Latino enrollment has largely halved from some 5 percent in 1996 to 2-3 percent today.

The Court's decision, as in the past, did not formally ban "affirmative action." It held that the extremely limited considerations regarding race, constricted by previous decisions to the point of being largely ineffectual, could remain but could be legally eliminated by voters and legislators.

The six-to-two decision concluded that it was not up to judges to overturn the decision of Michigan voters to bar consideration of race when deciding who gets into the state's universities. The majority decision, written by Chief Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, held that "this case is not about how the debate about racial preferences should be resolved. It is about who may resolve it. There is no authority in the Constitution of the United States or in this court's precedents for the judiciary to set aside Michigan laws that commit this policy determination to the voters."

In short, the "people" and "their state government" have the right to discriminate as they see fit so long as they cloak their discrimination in the form of "equality." That is to say, no white may be denied equal rights with regard to Blacks—as if the problem in racist America today is discrimination against whites!

In the 1960s and '70's, in the face of the massive civil



rights movement that shook the United States and reverberated around the world, mass protests forced racist institutions across the country to not only employ affirmative action in the abstract, but imposed strict and required quotas to achieve it. Quotas were applied to public and private institutions alike. Few, if any, denied that the institutional racism and discrimination that permeated every pore of U.S. society could or would be eliminated by the voluntary action of the discriminating racist institutions or employers themselves. A steel plant in a largely Black community that hired only white workers, for example, was assumed to be discriminating, whatever might be the claims by employers that they were hiring based on "merit" only.

Similarly, in liberal San Francisco, the city government was compelled to accept a "consent decree," wherein the city's firefighters, previously close to 100 percent white and male, were compelled to hire and preference the hiring of Blacks and Latinos until their numbers reached the percentage of this population in the city and surrounding area.

On the heels of a massive movement rejecting racism in all its forms, the historic arguments that had become embedded in U.S. society for centuries to justify racist exclusion and segregation were swept aside, and affirmative action programs, with teeth, were adopted across the country—only to be slowly eroded in the decades that followed as the movement declined.

The Court's decision conjures up the infamous 1857 Supreme Court Dred Scott decision, in which Chief Justice Roger B. Taney held that the framers of the Constitution had believed that Blacks "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect..." This decision declared that the federal government could not ban slavery in U.S. territories.

Now the Supreme Court has ruled that the federal government cannot strike down discriminatory initiatives

that ban any form of equal rights for Blacks!

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, one of the two dissenters, along with Ruth Bader Ginsburg, read her 58-page opinion aloud, warning that the Court could not "wish away" evidence of the nation's racial inequality: "For members of historically marginalized groups, which rely on the federal courts to protect their constitutional rights, the decision can hardly bolster hope for a vision of democracy that preserves for all the right to participate meaningfully and equally in self-government." "Democratic" America, as is evident with Sotomayor's dissent, still allows for criticism that reflects reality, provided only that it have little or no real effect.

Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas agreed with the outcome of Kennedy's decision but not with its rationale. Their separate opinion was more blatant, rejecting "racial preferences" in any form, including the most moderate that remain on the books today. The Court's decision reversed a federal appeals court's ruling that had struck down the Michigan ballot initiative.

The Court majority essentially agreed that requiring the admissions process to be "colorblind" could not possibly violate the Constitution's equal protection clause! For these racist justices and their "rationale," we live in a colorblind society, a truly Orwellian proposition that flies in the face of the cruel reality.

The law books of capitalist America are replete with "rationales" upholding slavery, racist discrimination ("separate but equal"), the prohibition of trade unions to organize, and the McCarthy-era destruction of fundamental civil liberties. All were swept away as a result of defiant mass social movements that refused to accept the language and practices of a society ruled by the rich and powerful. The same will be the case in the years ahead, when working people of every race join forces to challenge capitalist prerogatives and bring forth a new world order representing the interests of the vast majority. ■

## NY mayor & teachers union cut rotten deal

By MARTY GOODMAN

This May Day, a day of celebration of the workers' struggle, many unions were rallying at New York's City Hall, but the news from inside was not good for workers. While the unions backed "progressive" Mayor Bill de Blasio (Democrat), he and Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers announced a tentative contract agreement between the city and the 100,000-member UFT.

De Blasio, who assumed office in January, has been hailed by labor "leaders" as a "friend of labor." Labor waited for a change of faces in City Hall instead of fighting for a decent contract. Since the election campaign, de Blasio has demanded union givebacks to pay for all public union raises, as did his predecessor, the billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

The extraordinarily long nine-year tentative UFT contract contains a mere 18% in raises.

The first two years, teachers receive retroactive or back pay of 4% and 4% to cover the city "pattern" in 2009 and 2010, years in which Bloomberg refused to negotiate with the UFT. But the "retro" will be paid out through 2020 in depreciated dollars. Worse, the contract contains zero raises in 2011 and 2012, the zeroes camouflaged by a "lump sum" payout (nicknamed "chump sum" by many New York transit workers), which is not added to the base pay rate, a standard bosses' trick.

The UFT deal averages about 2% in raises, below current inflation rates and projected increases. A New York *Daily News* editorial headlined "Good for the Budget" called it, "responsible increases that are sure to fall below inflation. This should set

the pattern for other unions."

The tentative pact also contains an ominous \$1.3 billion in as yet unspecified health care "savings." If the union and the city cannot agree, an arbitrator may be called in to impose the health-care "savings." The contract also contains increases for bonus or 'merit pay,' an ill-defined rewards system that teachers see as a divide-and-conquer tactic. One provision will streamline the discipline process.

Lastly, there is a dangerous provision to suspend city and union rules in 200 schools—about 10%. *The New York Times* said it was to "encourage innovation" in a system under attack by the for-profit "Charter Schools" movement—ostensibly opposed by de Blasio."

Since the deal was announced, a rank-and-file caucus within the UFT called MORE (Movement of Rank and File Educators)

has called for a "vote no" on the outrageous proposed contract ([morecaucusnyc.org](http://morecaucusnyc.org)).

Since the tentative teacher's contract was announced, the Transport Workers Union Local 100 leadership has used the appalling UFT terms to sell its own rotten contract, which creates a second-class membership for new employees (see the article on page 11).

All public and private, city and state unions need to unite to fight concessions unleashed by a capitalist class in crisis. Despite the many obstacles, a giant "vote no" movement needs to be built and mass union meetings organized to discuss a fightback.

Stop relying on the Democratic Party to save us! Organize instead for mass pickets, marches, and strikes.

New York is the richest city in the world; the needs of all working and unemployed people could easily be satisfied. But the twin parties of the rich will never get us there. We need our own workers' party to fight for it! ■



# Boston activists demand JOBS, NOT JAILS!

By MARILYN LAVIN

BOSTON—Long overdue, the unfinished civil rights movement of the last century is being reborn. Unlike the earlier focus on voting and Southern segregation, the nascent movement is taking to the streets to protest the “new” Jim Crow of mass incarceration and police misconduct expressed in the “Stop and Frisk” laws and the “War on Drugs.”

As we witness the dismantling of many of the gains of the old civil rights movement—like affirmative action, voting protections, desegregation of schools, and social safety nets—Michelle Alexander’s book, “The New Jim Crow,” has been a galvanizing factor in exposing the mass incarceration of Black and Latino youth as a systemic racist phenomenon of the past 40 years, and not due to individual failure.

Well over 1000 people from all over Massachusetts rallied on a rainy and cold day on Boston Common on Saturday, April 26, calling for “Jobs Not Jails.” The rally was organized by the new grassroots Coalition for Jobs Not Jails of over 100 organizations, including prison reform groups, unions, youth organizations, faith groups, and peace and justice groups. The coalition was initiated by EPOCA (Ex-Prisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement), along with Families for Justice as Healing and the Boston Workers Alliance.

The trends and demographics in Massachusetts are in keeping with nationwide statistics. The prison population has risen three-fold since the 1980s. While almost 84% of the population is white, whites make up only 44% of prisoners. The state’s



prisons are well over capacity, primarily because of strict mandatory sentencing laws for nonviolent drug offenders. Once out of prison, which offers very little in treatment and rehabilitation programs, it is almost impossible to find decent paying jobs. Their criminal

records negatively impact and follow ex-prisoners for life, contributing to a high recidivism rate of 70%.

Massachusetts spent 1.28 billion on prisons, probation, and parole in fiscal year 2013 (greater than the amount spent on higher education). With plans for 10,000 new prison units by 2023, at the cost of \$2 billion, reform and justice organizations decided that only joint actions by all would give them the power needed to turn this around.

Under tents and umbrellas, rally attendees listened to moving stories from ex-prisoners and recovering substance abusers and their families describing their hardships and a system that “is set up for failure.” “It’s all about money,” said a member of Friends and Relations of Prisoners, as she listed the many things that victims of the “criminal justice” system are forced to pay for that keep them in poverty. Known as “collateral sanctions,” there are expensive charges for phone calls from prison, and fees for probation, parole, and court costs.

Former City Councilor and ex-prisoner Chuck Turner spoke of the growth of the criminal prison-industrial complex as an immensely profitable product of capitalism. “If we want peace, justice, and equity,” he said, “we have to stand up and take action.”

The coalition is urging an end to prison expansion and instead using the billions saved to create jobs that pay living wages and programs to educate, treat, and rehabilitate offenders, 80% of whom are nonviolent substance abusers and/or mentally ill. They also advocate for repeal of punitive and unjust treatment of current and ex-prisoners, and a raise in the minimum wage for all.

When the state budget and bills related to criminal justice are debated, on April 30, Jobs Not Jails supporters are urged to converge on the Massachusetts Statehouse to wrap it with banners filled with over 30,000 petition signatures to demonstrate community support for real justice, not business as usual. The organizers assured people that this action was only the beginning of a movement for change.

Pastor Paul Robeson Ford from the Union Baptist Church in Cambridge, said, “This is the defining moral issue of our time.” He questioned why criminals exist when people are not born that way and concluded that “a broken society makes broken people.” He summarized the sentiments of the crowd with a fitting chant, “Lift them up; don’t lock them up!”

Gary Bills / Socialist Action



(Left) Part of the crowd at the \$15 Now conference.

conference, “\$15 Plus Tips.” The charter amendment calls for: (a) Large Corporations to immediately pay a \$15 minimum wage on Jan. 1, 2015. (b) No tip credit, no total compensation, no teenage or training wages. (c) A three-year phase-in for small business and non-profits, which would start paying a minimum wage of \$11 on Jan. 1, 2015, and scale up to \$15 by Jan. 1, 2018—at which point all workers would receive \$15 plus a COLA. (d) The minimum wage would include a yearly cost of living adjustment (COLA). (e) Hotel and Conference Center workers could agree to opt out through their collective bargaining process if their health-care plan of at least \$700 per month, adjusted for inflation, is guaranteed for full-time and part-time workers.

The conference approved a strategic and organizational plan for 15 Now. They will start collecting signatures for the ballot measure, and in June there will be another conference to decide whether or not to turn in the signatures to trigger a November vote. The plan is to gather 50,000 signatures, as protection from legal challenges.

There are currently 15 Now Action Groups throughout Seattle—based in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces—and they work independently based on the general guidelines of the organization. In addition, Organizing Councils can be formed citywide or regionally to help coordinate the work of the action groups. It was proposed that a 15 Now Steering Committee be formed of elected representatives of the Organizing Councils, and they will coordinate overall actions and policies. The National Conference will decide the size and proportion of the Steering Committee based on the number of active groups around the country.

There were also 11 workshops dealing with issues such as race and income inequality (featuring Glen Ford of Black Agenda Report), May Day activities, collective bargaining, tipped workers, and the basics of signature gathering.

The conference ended on an upbeat note with a rally featuring Glen Ford and socialist Seattle city-council member Kshama Sawant. While much of the emphasis was on Seattle, activists from around the country attended who are just starting to organize. They hope the momentum from Seattle will help them address low-income jobs in their local areas. The effectiveness of the struggle in Seattle will be demonstrated in how it helps these towns and cities to catch fire in a nationwide campaign for \$15 Now.

## \$15 Now activists meet in Seattle

By ANN MONTAGUE

SEATTLE—On April 26, over 500 activists met here for the first \$15 Now national conference. Fifteen states were represented, but the majority of activists were from the Seattle area. Everyone saw Seattle as ground zero for the movement to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. A victory in Seattle would create waves of momentum for activists in the rest of the country.

The conference was taking place as corporate interests are gearing up to derail the \$15 Now movement by exerting political pressure through the formation of “One Seattle,” which calls for a 21-year phase-in, training wages, and tip and health-care credit.

Democratic Party Mayor Ed Murray has appointed a Minimum Wage Advisory Committee, which clearly reflects the pressure being exerted by One Seattle. Mayor Murray chose the international workers’ holiday, May 1, to announce his proposals, which he said had gained the support of 21 of the Advisory Committee’s 24 members. There would be a three-year phase-in for many workers at large businesses (over 500 employees), but

workers who receive health benefits would have to wait four years to receive \$15/hour. Small businesses would have seven years to bring their workers up to \$15, and during the first five years, tips and health benefits would be factored into the compensation package.

Advisory Committee Co-chair and SEIU 775 President David Rolf was upbeat about the mayor’s proposal. But Kshama Sawant, the Socialist Alternative member who sits on Seattle’s city council, criticized it strongly, stating, “There is no reason to make workers live in poverty for a single day more.”

Mayor Murray has made it clear he is hoping that his proposal will forestall the movement to place a measure on the ballot for \$15 an hour. The centerpiece of the \$15 Now conference was the ballot measure, which is actually called a charter amendment since it would change Seattle’s constitution. Copies of the ballot measure were readily available, and any attendee could discuss, propose amendments, and vote. However, no changes were made.

The basic demand of the ballot measure could be glimpsed in the huge sign that greeted attendees to the



# Lynne Stewart, Pam & Ramona Africa join Bay Area celebration for Mumia

By BEN FORTEN

More than 700 San Francisco Bay Area activists celebrated the freedom of Lynne Stewart and rededicated their efforts to win freedom for the world-renowned political prisoner and government frame-up victim, Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Stewart, who was granted compassionate release from FMC Carswell prison in Fort Worth, Texas, on New Year's Eve after a national and international campaign that had gathered the support of 70,000 supporters, addressed largely standing-room-only crowds in San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Marin, Sacramento, and Berkeley. She was joined in three cities by Pam Africa, coordinator of the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, and Ramona Africa, leader of the Move Organization, formed to free the long incarcerated Move 9, who similarly are frame-up victims of the notorious Philadelphia police department.

The events were sponsored by the Northern California-based Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, the Lynne Stewart Defense Committee, and Pacifica radio station KPFA. Lynne and Pam appeared on six KPFA programs during the course of the seven-day tour. Forty-five Bay Area organizations joined to endorse and build the events in an impressive demonstration of unity and solidarity that broke new ground among area radicals, socialists, and supporters of civil and democratic rights.

Highlights of the tour were three taped greetings to Lynne and supporters from Mumia Abu-Jamal and a statement entitled, "From Cuba With Love," signed by the Cuban Five, three of whom remain in U.S. prisons on frame-up charges of conspiracy to commit terrorism. Their message read in part: "They [Lynne and Mumia] have endured the cruelest experience, but from the depth of their incarceration they have shined and given us all a lesson on greatness that speaks volumes of the worth of the human spirit.

"That's why we have to welcome the return of Lynne Stewart to the society whose representatives put her in prison. That's why we have to keep fighting to see Mumia Abu Jamal return to that society. They not only deserve such a basic human justice; the society which they belong to *needs* people like them, to remind us that only by defending the highest values will humankind conquer the realization of the finest dreams, which will make us one day an intelligent species.

"In the name of the Cuban 5 and the proud Cuban people, to Lynne and to Mumia, our greatest admiration and respect."

Lynne Stewart, as well as Pam and Ramona, were received in meeting after meeting with multiple standing ovations as they reviewed the plight of political prisoners, many of whom Lynne represented during



her 30 years as a people's attorney.

Entitled "A Celebration of Life and Struggle," the Bay Area tour brought new energy to the numerous social movements that have won few victories in recent years in the face of increasing government repression and seemingly endless wars. The Bay Area tour meetings were chaired by Jeff Mackler, who has led the Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal for the past 20 years and the Lynne Stewart Defense Committee for the past 12. Stewart and Mackler serve as members of the Coordinating Committee of the United National Antiwar Coalition, a position that Stewart retained during her five years of incarceration.

Lynne Stewart remains filled with energy and political passion for every social struggle for justice and equality, although she is battling stage-four breast cancer. She is undergoing state-of-the-art treatment at the Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, as well as other promising alternative medical options, and remains optimistic that the prison prognosis of 9-12 months of life can be significantly extended. "No doubt," she repeatedly stated, "the love and solidarity

(From left) Ralph Poynter, released prisoner Lynne Stewart, and Pam Africa join the applause at Berkeley celebration of Mumia's 60th birthday.

that I received upon my return home to my family and friends and my ability to continue the fight for all the oppressed and exploited has provided me with the greatest possible incentive to live forever."

An overjoyed Stewart, upon learning of her winning compassionate release, jokingly stated, "I want to be welcomed at La Guardia with a brass band!" Her wish was granted in San Francisco, when the 10-person Brass Liberation Band of city activists greeted her in a magnificent street rally. Lynne and her life-long companion and leader of her defense, Ralph Poynter, danced on the sidewalk to the cheers of supporters.

"Welcome Home Lynne Stewart: We Cherish Your Freedom" read the banner placed front and center at all Bay Area meetings. "Happy 60th Birthday Mumia Abu-Jamal: We Will Not Rest Until You Are Free" read another. It was a joyous welcome and re-dedication to Mumia's freedom! ■

## Earth Day protests demand ecological justice

By CARL SACK

Protests in more than 20 cities around the U.S. marked Earth Day on April 22. Many were organized as part of a series of "Earth Day to May Day" events sponsored by a coalition of left groups dubbed the Global Climate Convergence. The nationwide effort sought to link the fightback against attacks on working people and immigrants to the struggle to save the Earth's climate and ecosystems from the ravages of capitalism.

In Chicago, about 300 people marched past the headquarters of military contractor Boeing, oil (spill) giant BP, and Chase Bank, highlighting the roles played by multiple industries in the destruction of human lives and the environment. Some rally speakers urged the crowd to boycott SodaStream, which greenwashes its products by claiming they cut down on soda bottles but runs a factory in an Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank.

Another speaker demanded the city stop shutting down its already inadequate public mental health clinics—services badly needed in poor communities that suffer the triple-health-whammy of high unemployment, racial segregation, and pollution from dirty industries.

In New York's Zucotti Park, about 200 rallied against Wall Street's funding of polluters. Some protesters disrupted the city's official Earth Day event, which was sponsored by United Airlines, Toyota, and other

fossil fuel promoters. The protesters especially targeted TD Bank, which claims on its website to be "carbon neutral" but has invested \$1.6 billion in the Keystone XL pipeline. That pipeline would carry tar sands bitumen—a heavy form of crude oil—from northern Alberta, Canada to refineries in the Gulf of Mexico.

Tar sands have been called the "dirtiest of fuels" by NASA scientist James Hansen, who says they contain "twice the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by global oil use in our entire history" and has warned that the pipeline's completion would mean "game over for the climate."

Perhaps the most unique and inspiring action of the day was in Washington, D.C., where members of the Cowboy Indian Alliance, a coalition of farmers, ranchers, and Native Americans from areas along the proposed pipeline route, rode onto the National Mall on horseback. The Alliance set up a five-day tipi camp and held a number of protest actions throughout the week, including a round dance that blocked a downtown intersection and a march of several thousand on April 26.

This year's weekday actions were a far cry from the thousands who took to the streets to demand an end to pollution during the first Earth Day in 1970. But they showed the leading edge of a growing ecological justice movement, one that rejects the slick feel-good marketing campaigns and fake solutions that are all capitalism can offer to address the accelerating planetary crisis.

Over 100,000 people have pledged online to commit acts of civil disobedience if the U.S. State Department indicates the Keystone pipeline might get approval to cross the U.S. border. Thousands have already been arrested at blockades and protests that have forced the Obama administration to delay a decision on the pipeline until after the November election. Countless others are engaged in fights against other oil pipeline expansions, explosion-prone oil trains, plans to ship crude oil across the Great Lakes, natural gas fracking, and devastating new copper, iron, and uranium mining projects impacting Native American communities.

Instead of promoting more dirty energy and environmental destruction, the U.S. government could take up the suggestion of the political prankster group The Yes Men, who presented at a conference of Homeland Security contractors a plan to convert the country to 100% renewable energy sources by 2030. We should push for such a commitment and beyond, one that includes free and convenient mass transit and government-sponsored climate jobs employing the unemployed in efforts to reduce our carbon footprint.

Ultimately, though, capitalism can't solve the crisis it created because it requires an endlessly expanding economy using ever-increasing inputs of energy and natural resources—the antithesis of sustainability. When we replace capitalism with a socialist system—in which decisions about production are made democratically by workers and farmers, not by corporations—protecting the planet for future generations will be more than just a pipe dream! ■





(Left) Assad is guilty of many atrocities, as this photo taken after an airstrike on the town of Maarat al-Noaman shows. But did his regime use sarin gas?

# Seymour Hersh, false flags, sarin gas

BY JEFF MACKLER

When Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Seymour Hersh published a report last year indicating that Syrian “rebels,” rather than the military forces of dictator Bashar Assad, fired deadly sarin gas missiles on Aug. 21, 2013, into the “rebel”-held town of Ghouta, a Damascus suburb, few took notice. Others responded with denunciations or efforts at refutation that lacked credibility.

The initial line up at the level of world governments was U.S. imperialism and its imperial associates on the one side—calling for blood—and a few nations that have learned to sometimes question U.S. “facts” on the other. The latter included the governments of Germany and the England, traditional U.S. allies, who refused to endorse the new “coalition of the willing” that the U.S. sought to assemble to punish Syria in the manner that all of the above did in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

Hersh’s most recent defense of his position, entitled, “The Red Line and the Rat Line: Erdoğan and the Syrian rebels,” appears in the April 17, 2014, issue of the *London Review of Books*. Based on an impressive array of sources, including U.S. intelligence representatives he interviewed, United Nations documents, and classified U.S. government reports that came into his possession (documents that the Obama administration claim do not exist but that Hersh read from in a public radio interview), he presents a powerful refutation of the U.S. government’s still official position that the Assad government, and not the “rebels,” used sarin gas. Below, we quote liberally from Hersh’s text to provide readers with the essence of his arguments.

The deadly sarin gas attack, said at the time to have killed some 1429 innocent civilians, including 300 “rebel” fighters, was front-page headlines the world over. Assad had crossed President Obama’s often repeated “red line,” the corporate media near unanimously blared, and would soon pay the price. Syria was slated to be yet another “humanitarian” U.S. venture, wherein evil would be punished and justice, American style, would be meted out—once again, according to Hersh’s report, in the form of massive bombings—this time of Syria’s critical military installations and basic infrastructure.

Hersh asserted that the covert “rebel” action was a “false flag” or an orchestrated “rebel” pretext aimed at bringing on a massive U.S. retaliation. Readers will note my quotation marks around the word “rebel.” Today, and without exception, the Syrian rebels, whether of the jihadist/al-Qaida variety or the secular Free Syrian Army, are armed, financed, and most often organized by American imperialism and/or its allied governments in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar.

The original popular forces that peacefully mobi-

lized against Assad’s neoliberal policies, and who were severely repressed in 2011, have long ago left the stage as social actors. Lacking any progressive leadership deeply implanted in Syrian society, they have no organized voice, not to mention having no military expression. The war in Syria rather rapidly devolved into a U.S.-backed military onslaught, with a reactionary agenda that differs little from that of the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

President Obama, and every U.S. government official who was allowed to speak on the sarin gas atrocity, closed ranks, insisting that the evidence pointing to Assad was irrefutable. Indeed, *The New York Times* headlined “Forensic Details in U.N. Report Point to Assad’s Use of Gas.” *The Times* included front-page U.S.-government-provided maps indicating the trajectory of the missiles from Assad’s military installations to Ghouta.

A subsequent report by two American weapons specialists—Richard Lloyd, a former United Nations weapons inspector who is now associated with Tesla Laboratories, and Theodore A. Postol, professor of science, technology, and national security policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—entitled “Possible Implications of Faulty US Technical Intelligence in the Damascus Nerve Agent Attack,” nevertheless insisted that the government’s assertions were scientifically impossible because the range of the key rocket carrying sarin gas was less than a third of what the U.S. government was claiming. The maximum range of these rockets, pieces of which were found on the scene, was 2.5 to 3 kilometers, whereas the nearest Syrian military base was located at least 9.5 kilometers away.

The Obama administration asserted that it would soon release declassified evidence to prove its case, including telephone intercepts from Syrian government officials. But no such evidence was ever provided. “We know where the rockets were launched from and at what time,” Secretary of State John Kerry insisted. “We know where they landed and when. We know rockets came only from regime-controlled areas and went only to opposition-controlled or contested neighborhoods.”

Journalist Robert Parry noted at the time, “Kerry also hyped the emotional case for war by presenting claims about casualty totals that now appear to have been wildly exaggerated and based on more dubious intelligence.” Parry continued by quoting Kerry: “‘The United States government now knows that at least 1429 Syrians were killed in this attack, including at least 426 children,’ Kerry said, citing a number that the *Wall Street Journal* later reported was derived from applying facial recognition software to videos of bodies posted on YouTube by the Syrian opposition and then subtracting bodies in bloody shrouds. This

bizarre methodology produced the number 1429, which was about four times higher than numbers provided by doctors on the scene.”

In an action reminiscent of the Bush administration’s taking its case for war against Iraq to the United Nations based on Iraq’s “proven” “weapons of mass destruction,” a claim that was soon unanimously repudiated by UN inspectors and later disclaimed by the Bush administration itself, Obama told the General Assembly on Sept. 24, 2013, “The evidence is overwhelming that the Assad regime used such weapons on Aug. 21. These rockets were fired from a regime-controlled neighborhood, and landed in opposition neighborhoods. It’s an insult to human reason—and to the legitimacy of this institution—to suggest that anyone other than the regime carried out this attack.”

In the end, no one in the Obama administration ever admitted that their version of “human reason” was a lie. Hyperbole aside, and perhaps being aware that the truth would inevitably be told, Obama backed off, supposedly in the face of a Russian-U.S.-Syrian government agreement that Syria’s stock of sarin gas would be removed under international supervision.

Seymour Hersh is a regular contributor on military and security matters to *The New Yorker* magazine. He has won two National Magazine Awards and is a “five-time Polk winner and recipient of the 2004 George Orwell Award.” Here’s a sample of the evidence he employed in the *London Review of Books* to make his case:

- “British intelligence had obtained a sample of the sarin used in the 21 August attack and analysis demonstrated that the gas used didn’t match the batches known to exist in the Syrian army’s chemical weapons arsenal. The message that the case against Syria wouldn’t hold up was quickly relayed to the US joint chiefs of staff.”
- “Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan was known to be supporting the al-Nusra Front, a jihadist faction among the rebel opposition, as well as other Islamist rebel groups. ‘We knew there were some in the Turkish government,’ a former senior US intelligence official, who has access to current intelligence, told me, ‘who believed they could get Assad’s nuts in a vice by dabbling with a sarin attack inside Syria—and forcing Obama to make good on his red line threat.’”
- “The American and British intelligence communities had been aware since the spring of 2013 that some rebel units in Syria were developing chemical weapons. On 20 June analysts for the US Defense Intelligence Agency issued a highly classified five-page ‘talking points’ briefing for the DIA’s deputy director, David Shedd, which stated that al-Nusra maintained a sarin production cell: its programme, the paper said, was ‘the most advanced sarin plot since al-Qaida’s pre-9/11 effort.’”
- “Last May, more than ten members of the al-Nusra Front were arrested in southern Turkey with what local police told the press were two kilograms of sarin. In a 130-page indictment the group was accused of attempting to purchase fuses, piping for the construction of mortars, and chemical precursors for sarin.”
- “A series of chemical weapon attacks in March and April 2013 was investigated over the next few months by a special UN mission to Syria. A person with close knowledge of the UN’s activity in Syria told me that there was evidence linking the Syrian opposition to the first gas attack, on 19 March in Khan Al-Assal, a village near Aleppo. In its final report in December, the [UN] mission said that at least 19 civilians and one Syrian soldier were among the fatalities, along with scores of injured. It had no mandate to assign responsibility for the attack, but the person with knowledge of the UN’s activities said: ‘Investigators interviewed the people who were there, including the doctors who treated the victims. It was clear that the rebels used the gas. It did not come out in public because no one wanted to know.’”
- “In the months before the attacks began, a former senior Defense Department official told me, the DIA was circulating a daily classified report known as SYRUP on all intelligence related to the Syrian conflict, including material on chemical weapons. But in the spring, distribution of the part of the report concerning chemical weapons was severely curtailed on the orders of Denis McDonough, the White House

(continued on page 7)



(continued from page 6)

chief of staff.”

- “In the aftermath of the 21 August attack Obama ordered the Pentagon to draw up targets for bombing. Early in the process, the former intelligence official said, ‘the White House rejected 35 target sets provided by the joint chiefs of staff as being insufficiently “painful” to the Assad regime.’ The original targets included only military sites and nothing by way of civilian infrastructure. Under White House pressure, the US attack plan evolved into ‘a monster strike’: two wings of B-52 bombers were shifted to airbases close to Syria, and navy submarines and ships equipped with Tomahawk missiles were deployed.”

- “The full extent of US co-operation with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in assisting the rebel opposition in Syria has yet to come to light. The Obama administration has never publicly admitted to its role in creating what the CIA calls a ‘rat line’, a back channel highway into Syria. The rat line, authorised in early 2012, was used to funnel weapons and ammunition from Libya via southern Turkey and across the Syrian border to the opposition. Many of those in Syria who ultimately received the weapons were jihadists, some of them affiliated with al-Qaida.

- “By the end of 2012, it was believed throughout the American intelligence community that the rebels were losing the war. ‘Erdoğan was pissed,’ the former intelligence official said, ‘and felt he was left hanging on the vine. It was his money and the cut-off was seen as a betrayal.’ In spring 2013 US intelligence learned that the Turkish government—through elements of the MIT, its national intelligence agency, and the Gendarmerie, a militarised law-enforcement organization—was working directly with al-Nusra and its allies to develop a chemical warfare capability.

[A former intelligence official said]: ‘Stepping up Turkey’s role in spring 2013 was seen as the key to its problems there. Erdoğan knew that if he stopped his support of the jihadists it would be all over. The Saudis could not support the war because of logistics—the distances involved and the difficulty of moving weapons and supplies. Erdoğan’s hope was to instigate an event that would force the US to cross the red line.

- “A US intelligence consultant told me that a few weeks before 21 August he saw a highly classified briefing prepared for Dempsey and the defense secretary, Chuck Hagel, which described ‘the acute anxiety’ of the Erdoğan administration about the rebels’ dwindling prospects. The analysis warned that the Turkish leadership had expressed ‘the need to do something that would precipitate a US military response.’ ... In the autumn, the former intelligence official went on, the US intelligence analysts who kept working on the events of 21 August ‘sensed that Syria had not done the gas attack. But the 500 pound gorilla was, how did it happen? The immediate suspect was the Turks, because they had all the pieces to make it happen.’

- “As intercepts and other data related to the 21 August attacks were gathered, the intelligence community saw evidence to support its suspicions. ‘We now know it was a covert action planned by Erdoğan’s people to push Obama over the red line,’ the former intelligence official said. ‘They had to escalate to a gas attack in or near Damascus when the UN inspectors’—who arrived in Damascus on 18 August to investigate the earlier use of gas—‘were there. The deal was to do something spectacular. Our senior military officers have been told by the DIA and other intelligence assets that the sarin was supplied through Turkey—that it could only have gotten there with Turkish support.’

- “The post-attack intelligence on Turkey did not make its way to the White House. ‘Nobody wants to talk about all this,’ the former intelligence official told me. ‘There is great reluctance to contradict the president, although no all-source intelligence community analysis supported his leap to convict. There has not been one single piece of additional evidence of Syrian involvement in the sarin attack produced by the White House since the bombing raid was called off. My government can’t say anything because we have acted so irresponsibly. And since we blamed Assad, we can’t go back and blame Erdoğan.’”

Hersh is no conspiracy theorist. What he reports with regard to U.S. plans and plots to bomb Syria has been repeated for decades, indeed for more than a century, with U.S. false flags or pretexts for war being the rule, not the exception. “Remember the Maine” was among the early pretexts, with regard to Cuba in 1898, when the U.S. insisted that Cuban independence fighters sunk the mothballed ship the Maine. The subsequent U.S. invasion ended with the annexation of Guantanamo, Cuba, where U.S. forces remain today, conducting monstrous torture operations on alleged terrorists with no charges leveled against them and virtually no means to defend themselves.

The U.S. government waged a 10-year war in Vietnam on the pretext that a Vietnamese boat fired on an American destroyer. Four million Vietnamese were



(Above) Syrian government blamed rebels for killing 25 in March 2013 chemical attack in Aleppo.

## Seymour Hersh has contributed to lifting the veil of secrecy that is used to camouflage U.S. foreign policy.

slaughtered following that pretext. The U.S. chief spy agency, the CIA, similarly conducted coups that removed elected governments in Guatemala (1954), Iran (1953) and the Dominican Republic (1965). It supported the 1965 military coup in Indonesia where one million were slaughtered in a matter of days.

Today the list of covert interventions in the name of the “war on terror” are endless—covering most of the African continent, the Middle East and now in Ukraine, where the U.S. and European Union supported a coup carried out by neo-fascist militia forces—the Svoboda and Right Sector parties.

In every instance, the objective was and remains to advance the economic, political and military interest of a U.S. corporate elite, ever in competition with its rivals to secure for itself the world’s wealth and resources.

Seymour Hersh’s contribution to exposing yet another false-flag war effort is a welcome contribution to lifting the veil of secrecy that is consciously employed to camouflage an imperialist foreign policy that knows few, if any, limits. Facing a world economic crisis that is the product of its inherent and irreversible contradictions, we are witness to a world where austerity has become the norm, where workers rights are subordinated to capitalist profit, where the environment is subjected to grievous if not irreparable assault, and where the resort to military means to advance the interests of the few U.S. and other oligarchs the world over who own and control the vast and increasingly larger share of the wealth created by working people.

Hersh’s winning of the George Orwell Award for Distinguished Contribution to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language put him in the company of several noted journalists the world over who told the truth at a time when its revelation advanced the interests of all those who oppose today’s endless U.S. wars, interventions and conquests. That the U.S. government covered up, if not indirectly participated in, the brutal sarin gas murders conducted by its Turkish NATO ally using jihadist and other reactionary forces should serve as a stern warning that nothing that appears in the corporate-controlled media can be taken for granted.

Orwell’s classic, then futuristic, novel of authoritarian government repression, “1984,” uses the term “Newspeak,” “a language” that Wikipedia defines as “closely

based on English but has a greatly reduced and simplified vocabulary and grammar. This suits the totalitarian regime of the Party, [or state power] whose aim is to make any alternative thinking—‘thoughtcrime’, or ‘crimethink’—impossible by removing any words or possible constructs which describe the ideas of freedom or rebellion.”

U.S.-style “Newspeak” proved insufficient to railroad the world into yet another “regime change” war in Syria, wherein the Assad regime would be replaced by another capitalist government more beholden to U.S. interests. The combination of mass U.S. public and international opposition to Obama’s proposed war and the increasing lack of credibility of U.S. lies uttered as “irrefutable facts” at least temporarily thwarted an overt U.S. war on Syria. Obama’s administration, however, continues to intervene in the conflict.

The widely reported U.S. provision of tank-piercing missiles to the “rebels” at the end of April tells us that antiwar activists must continue to mobilize demanding in Syria and everywhere else: “U.S. Out Now! Bring the Troops and War Dollars Home! Money for Jobs and Education Not War!”

## Socialist Action's 30th anniversary fund & sub drives

**We thank you, our readers, for supporting Socialist Action newspaper. Some of you have been regular readers since our first issue came off the presses — in December 1983. Now, we ask for your support once again. And for NEW readers — we have an attractive offer for you too!**

**This spring, Socialist Action newspaper has launched a major SUBSCRIPTION DRIVE. New readers can now subscribe for an entire year at a cut-rate price of \$12, or five months for \$5. Please return the sub blank on page 2.**

**The subscription drive coincides with our campaign to raise \$25,000 for the Socialist Action annual FUND DRIVE. Achieving this goal will enable us to expand our efforts to build the revolutionary socialist party in the United States and worldwide. Please send your contribution to Socialist Action, Box 10328, Oakland, CA 94610. Thank you!**



# Snowden reporters receive Pulitzer journalism prize



(Left) Former *Guardian* reporter Glenn Greenwald.

BY JEFF MACKLER

President Obama and the National Security Agency (NSA) suffered an important blow to their credibility when on April 21 the nation's most prestigious journalism award, the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service, was given to *The Guardian* newspaper (based in England) and *The Washington Post*. The award recognized the work of reporters Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras, Ewan MacAskill, and Bart Gellman for their reports based on the unprecedented revelations of former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, whose exposure of the massive and illegal U.S. government cell phone, internet, and other high-tech surveillance of tens of millions of Americans, as well as governments and heads of state around the world, is still unfolding.

Snowden, who 10 months ago fled the U.S. to China, was subsequently granted asylum in Moscow. He has been charged by U.S. government officials with violation of the 1917 Espionage Act. To date, Russia has refused American requests for his extradition.

Snowden released a brief statement to *The Guardian* applauding the award to his collaborators. He said: "Today's decision is a vindication for everyone who believes that the public has a role in government. We owe it to the efforts of the brave reporters and their colleagues who kept working in the face of extraordinary intimidation, including the forced destruction of journalistic materials, the inappropriate use of terrorism laws, and so many other means of pressure to get them to stop what the world now recognizes was work of vital public importance."

The four journalists had earlier received the prestigious George Polk Award, administered for the past 65 years by Long Island University, for national security reporting. This was yet another indication that the exposure of the government's massive surveillance network is widely seen as consistent with the protection of civil and democratic rights as opposed to the government's assertion that telling the truth about its blatant spy operations is a threat to the "national security" of the U.S. and akin to an act of treason.

Indeed, Greenwald, today living in Brazil, has expressed serious concerns regarding possible U.S. government persecution should he return to the United States. During his visit to receive the awards, Long Island Republican Congressman Peter King, who called the award a "disgrace," called for Greenwald's arrest. Apparently more savvy government officials decided to side step such a move—likely since they were fearful that the price to be paid in taking on the nation's journalist community far outweighed exacting vengeance for Greenwald and his associates' stinging reporting.

Greenwald responded that he considered King's threat, "an enormous badge of honor." He likened Snowden's revelations to *The New York Times* 1971 publication of the "Pentagon Papers," leaked by whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg.

The government's infamous "Pentagon Papers" exposed U.S. lies and atrocities during the Vietnam War. Ellsberg, who defeated in court government charges that could have imprisoned him for over 100 years, has said, "The Snowden documents are the most important leak in the history of the country."

Responding to Congressman's King's threat, Greenwald observed, "That's just part of ... what journalism is. If you want to be adversarial to those who wield power, you have to expect that those who wield power aren't gonna like what you're doing very much." Greenwald added, "And not only doesn't that bother me, I see that as a vindication that what I'm doing is the right thing."

Greenwald saw the Pulitzer and Polk awards as providing "further vindication that what [Snowden] did in coming forward was absolutely the right thing to do and merits gratitude, and not indictments and decades in prison." Laura Poitras added: "None of us would be here ... without the fact that someone decided to sacrifice their life to make this information available. And so this award is really for Edward Snowden."

The Pulitzer, overseen by Columbia University's School of Journalism, is widely considered the greatest honor in journalism, with the public-service award regarded as its grand prize. ■

By ROBBIE MAHOOD

The Quebec election of April 7 delivered a majority Liberal government and a severe rebuke to the Parti Quebecois (PQ). The PQ vote declined to 25 per cent, the lowest since 1970, while the Liberal vote rose to 41 per cent giving them a comfortable majority in the first-past-the-post system. The vote for the right-wing populist Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) declined to 21 per cent despite the revelation of the widespread corruption that characterized the PQ, and especially the Liberals during their years in power. The small left-wing party, Quebec Solidaire (QS), modestly increased its vote from 6 to 7.5 per cent, electing a third member to the National Assembly, from east-end Montreal.

The PQ invested heavily in ethnic nationalism. Its proposed Charter of Quebec values would have banned the wearing of conspicuous "religious" clothing or symbols in the public service, targeting mainly Muslim women wearing the hijab. In cultivating islamophobia, the PQ was trying to undercut the CAQ which in its previous life as the Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ) had demonstrated the potential for anti-immigrant demagoguery in the election of 2008.

The surprise recruitment of multi-millionaire media mogul Pierre Karl Peladeau as a star candidate was intended to cement the PQ's good standing with the Quebec bourgeoisie. Peladeau is notorious for breaking union resistance to concessions in his media empire.

These polarising manoeuvres failed to gain traction. Instead the PQ was placed on the defensive on the perennial question of independence. The Liberals always play on the fear of "separatism," falsely attributing to the PQ a firmness of purpose on this question, which it has entirely lacked since the referendum defeat of 1995. Marois' evasiveness on a future referendum only played into Liberal fear-mongering and disoriented the

## Quebec election: PQ debacle returns Liberals to power



(Above) Parti Quebecois candidate Pierre Karl Peladeau.

sovereignist side of the electorate.

It is tempting to pin the PQ's disastrous showing on an inept campaign. But any mistakes expressed contradictions that have been undermining the party for some time. Nominally for a sovereign Quebec, the PQ has no perspective on how to advance that cause. It is committed to defending the profit-making prerogatives of Quebec and international capital, and the social decay and environmental destruction that follows. Thus, it demoralises its working-class and popular base. But because it is associated with the project of rupture with the Canadian state it cannot win the confidence of the big bourgeoisie.

The PQ did nothing to earn its narrow 2012 election victory, which was the fruit of a mass revolt led by the province's young people in the spring and summer of that year. Once elected, Marois turned her back on the students and their sup-

porters. The government retreated on every front: increasing university tuition, abandoning its promise to rescind the supplementary health tax, raising day-care fees and ordering another round of cuts to welfare, education, and health-care budgets.

In the wake of the Lac Megantic train disaster, the PQ administration declared an interest in exploiting oil and gas reserves in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It pursued with enthusiasm a free-trade agreement with the European Union. In sum, it was a nuanced version of the policies of its Liberal predecessor.

There was rejoicing from the usual quarters whenever the Parti Quebecois goes down to defeat. For the corporate media in English-speaking Canada, as for the federal Conservative and Lib-

eral Parties and unfortunately, the New Democratic Party leadership, there is no greater menace than Quebec "separatism." Normally an obsessive partisan, Tory Prime Minister Stephen Harper pronounced himself satisfied with the Quebec Liberal victory.

Quebec Solidaire was the only party to clearly differentiate itself from the neoliberal discourse of the three right-wing parties. It proposed raising corporate taxes and directing public funds to social housing, the CLSC's (community health centres), and public transport. With this program of limited reforms, QS moved into the territory vacated by the PQ after its first years in office. Especially under current leader, Francoise David, the party avoids class references in favour of "consensual" politics and a "values" discourse.

QS remains attentive to the mass movement even if takes no initiatives to organize protests, especially in an election campaign. For example, there was a modest QS contingent in the anti-austerity march of April 3, convened by the left-wing student union ASSÉ. It mobilized over 10,000 in the streets of Montreal. In theory, the party recognizes the politics of the ballot box and the politics of the street in equal measure. In practice, electoral considerations dominate. Party leaders were hoping for a minority government, in which an enhanced QS delegation could play the role of power broker. The party's performance, though a modest improvement, was from this perspective, disappointing.

Quebec has a tradition of extra-parliamentary politics, periodically erupting into mass protests. Absent a politically re-armed and militant working class expressed through its unions, the impact of these often impressive mobilisations is bound to be limited. Quebec's union leaders have allowed the movement's radical and combative traditions to wither, immersed as they are in a framework

(continued on page 9)



By BARRY WEISLEDER

Working-class and progressive voters should back the labour-based New Democratic Party in a pivotal provincial election set for June 12. It is the only mass workers' party in the race. Thus it is subject to demands from its progressive class base, unlike the Liberal, Conservative, and Green parties, which represent different factions of business elite, and only different versions of the austerity agenda of capital.

By pulling the plug on Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal minority government at Queen's Park, Ontario New Democratic Party Leader Andrea Horwath gambled big time, and left her supporters puzzled. The gamble is that voters disgusted with the scandal-plagued Liberal Party regime will turn to the third-place NDP, as opposed to the openly labour-hating Conservatives under Tim Hudak, who lead in opinion polls.

The puzzle is whether Horwath will campaign to the left, or to the right of the Liberals. In rejecting the provincial Liberal Budget on May 2, the NDP leader made the issue one of "trust," and hinted that the Liberals were engaged in a desperate spending spree to win votes. This seems in line with Horwath's refusal to support the \$14/hour minimum wage campaign backed by the union movement, and

## Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada  
website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

### Vote NDP in June 12 Ontario election

her populist anti-tax agenda focussed on the "middle class."

While the labour leadership is divided over the aborted Liberal Budget, which offered a pay raise for home-care workers, a new retirement income scheme, and some investment in public transit, now is the time for Labour to demand these things and much more from inside the NDP campaign.

Workers', students', women's, seniors', tenants' and anti-poverty organizations need to come together to stop Hudak, and to replace the Wynne regime with an NDP government committed to socialist policies.

At the policy forefront should be demands for a major shift of the tax burden from workers and the poor, onto the big banks, corporations, and the rich. This is urgently needed to reverse the austerity cuts and to invest in the construction of affordable hous-

ing and mass public transit. A major boost in funding is needed to revive health care, education, social services, recreational facilities, and to repair long-neglected infrastructure, like roads, bridges, railway tracks, water pipes, sewers, and electrical systems.

A massive public works initiative, as outlined above, will generate tens of thousands of jobs, especially for the nearly excluded new generation of young workers, including aboriginal youths. But many more jobs are needed. An NDP government should not hesitate to use public ownership, under workers' and community control, to create useful, meaningful jobs for all, with decent pay and benefits, including good defined-benefit pension plans.

The NDP should give voters something to vote for, not just someone to vote against. The key to progress is the fight for a Workers' Agenda. ■

### Hypocrisy reigns between Canada and Ukraine!

By EVAN ENGERING

It is often said that truth is the first casualty of war. But in the dark days of late capitalism we have learned one more thing. From the tall tales about murdered "incubator babies" and alleged "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, we know that even before a war is declared, the truth comes under withering assault.

As Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper sends fighter jets and troops to NATO bases in Poland, this becomes evident. After over 80 per cent of the people in Crimea voted to rejoin Russia, western media and politicians went on a propaganda rampage, presenting any argument they could imagine to de-legitimize the referendum. While Putin's actions were heavy-handed, Russia was not alone in recognizing the validity of the vote. Many countries in the global South did.

But the Western media played its usual role in trumpeting the claims that the election was held at "gunpoint," ignoring the fact that Russian soldiers were already legally stationed in the region, by treaty, as they had been for decades.

The most brazen display of Western hypocrisy came after the vote in Crimea. Prime Minister Harper flew to Ukraine in March for the purpose of expressing support for the new Ukrainian government and to shake his fist at Russia. Even after flying there and back, Canadian politicians and media were silent on the ultra-nationalist character of the new regime in Kiev.

Taking advantage of folks with a short memory, Harper did a double about-face. Late last year he visited Israel. Even writers at the right-wing *Sun* newspapers and the *National Post* expressed their loathing of the tired old argument that criticism of Israel is anti-Semitism. Of course, the ongoing illegal and expanding

Israeli settlements in the West Bank were not mentioned.

Fast forward to Harper's recent visit to Ukraine. Suddenly his viewpoint is reversed: annexation of another country or region is instantly outrageous, whereas anti-Semitism (this time not from the dark crevices, but from the junior partner in the ruling coalition government in Kiev) is ignored. If Harper were a man of democratic principles, such cognitive dissonance would make him dizzy!

The Ukrainian Jewish community was shamelessly used by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. A distributed leaflet, purportedly from the "pro-Russian" group, the Donetsk People's Republic,

ordered all Jews in the area to surrender their money and register themselves. But the document was a fraud. Despite Kerry's fast and furious condemnation of the document, nobody claimed authorship for this supposedly public edict.

Again, Kerry has no record of speaking out against the actual racism of Svoboda or any other pro-Maidan fascists. He does, however, have a history of speaking out against a foreign adventure that was started and waged under a U.S. leader from the Democratic Party. Kerry served in the Vietnam War under President Lyndon B. Johnson and, upon his return to the U.S., joined the antiwar movement as a member of Vietnam Veterans Against

the War. Now that he is in a position of influence and power, like a butterfly coming out of a cocoon, he has metamorphosed from antiwar activist to imperialist war hawk.

Fortunately for Harper and Kerry, they can hold these positions and contradict them freely, for it is clear as day that their actions are not motivated by principle or respect for international law, but by crude geo-political strivings for power and profit abroad.

Unfortunately for Canada, the media's rabid focus on Putin's wrongdoings have blown the situation out of proportion. While condemnation of his oligarchical regime is justified, it is no reason to take our own government's sabre-rattling rhetoric at face value.

Canadians who are outraged Russia's actions, but were not so opposed to Canada's presence in Afghanistan, or who don't mind Ottawa's role in NATO, should be mindful of the narrative they are being sold by politicians and media.

Canada just happens to be on one side of the geo-political divide. Russia is on the other. Considering that this whole situation started with protests against the refusal of Yanukovich to accept a bad deal from the EU, and that the U.S. (which is no neutral party to any conflict in the world) has picked a side, there is no reason to believe this is anything other than an inter-imperialist conflict.

We should be calling for NATO to pull back; and for the U.S. to stop funding the ultra-nationalist, rightist regime in Kiev. Say no to intervention from Western forces or Russia. Let Ukraine exercise its sovereignty through democratic elections—and allow its regions more autonomy, outright independence, or if they wish, to choose merger with Russia. ■



(Above) John Clarke, provincial organizer of Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, speaking to May Day gathering (April 26) sponsored by Socialist Action in Toronto.

### ... Quebec Liberals to power

(continued from page 8)

of class conciliation. The conservatism of the union bureaucracy needs to be challenged if struggles are to win. This is a task that QS, or at least the socialist contingents, within the party need to take up.

The PQ has faced crises before, and we are far from hearing its death knell. It remains a mass party that profits from its association with partial advances born of past struggles. But its hegemony over the independence movement has been shaken.

It scarcely seems likely that the party can reverse its right-wing trajectory, al-

though some sort of cosmetic "left" turn cannot be ruled out. A new leader will soon be selected. Will the party faithful gamble on the scourge of the unions, Pierre-Karl Peladeau, or perhaps one of the veterans of the recent debacle, such as Jean-Francois Lisée, the "modernizer" who proposes to liquidate the legacy of the "Quiet Revolution," or Bernard Drainville, point man for the Values Charter?

However the crisis of the PQ unfolds, a recomposition of the movement for independence is welcome. Socialists will have greater scope to argue that not only a political break with Ottawa, but

also a full anti-capitalist programme that includes nationalization of the banks and main enterprises under democratic control, radical measures to reverse environmental destruction, and withdrawal from imperialist alliances can bring about genuine national liberation.

Faced with tripartite consensus on the need to deepen the austerity drive, many voters either abstained or turned to the Liberals as the most credible managers of this portfolio.

Although it lacks a specific mandate to do so, the new Liberal government under Philippe Couillard will move aggressively on its austerity and privatisation agenda. The Liberals will lean on their

sacrosanct majority to discredit and repress protest as they did in the student strike of 2012. But opposition there surely will be: to handing over the province's natural wealth to the rapacious mining and fossil fuel industries, to user fees for public services, to public sector lay-offs and contracting out and to further privatization of health care.

Public sector workers negotiate new contracts in 2015. Mobilizations of the labour movement and its allies will be critical in confronting this most determined of opponents. Only mass struggle of the scope seen in 2012, which this time reaches the point of a general or "social" strike, will weaken the resolve of the employer class. ■



# NY bosses & politicians slam transit workers

BY MARTY GOODMAN

"This is a fair and equitable contract for transit workers," declared John Samuelsen, president of Transport Workers Union Local 100, at an April 17 press conference that announced a tentative contract with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), a state-run agency that operates New York City's subway and bus system. At President Samuelsen's side were New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (Democrat) and MTA boss John Prendergast.

TWU Local 100 represents 34,000 city subway and bus workers. They've been without a contract since Jan. 15, 2012.

The five-year tentative agreement includes a 1% and 1% retroactive pay increase for 2012 and 2013, plus 2%, 2%, and 2% raises over the next three years. The union had insisted on raises that matched the cost of living, yet with employee health-care deductions increasing from 1.5% to 2% in the tentative deal, the agreement actually represents a wage cut. Inflation in the New York City region went up 2% in 2012 and 1.7% in 2013, and is anticipated to rise 2.1% in 2014 and 2.9% next year.

Previously, the MTA had been demanding three zero raises in any contract. The MTA declared that any raise without offsetting union concessions would strike a "devastating blow" to the MTA budget. It was all lies. Throughout, Samuelsen consistently rejected zeros at the table.

The proposed contract dangerously divides the workforce by adding two years to reach full pay for new workers, increasing the time period from three years to five years. This is a shocking return to the divisive TWU contracts of the 1990s, which especially punished cleaners—an overwhelmingly Black and Hispanic workforce. This new racist pact with MTA bosses will see cleaners start at a mere 60% of top pay and progress to top pay at an even more gradual rate than all other new employees.

Lastly, the tentative contract does not contain a "no layoff clause," i.e. a job-security agreement. In 2010, 950 transit workers were laid off during the administration of Democratic Gov. David Paterson due to a phony MTA "budget crisis." They were rehired over a period of two years of relative union inaction. No Democratic or Republican politician demanded their immediate rehire (former Governor Paterson now sits on the MTA Board). Ironically, the current TWU leadership was elected for their opposition to membership health-care costs and the absence of a contractual "no layoff clause."

The new agreement does have some gains, however. New will be an unprecedented two-week maternity and paternity leave, added death benefits, and some improvements in medical coverage.

The temporary deal was quickly accepted by Local 100's compliant Executive Board 33-0, with two absten-



tions. The membership will vote and the contract will be counted sometime in late May, Samuelsen has indicated.

Since the expiration of the contract in 2012, there has been little TWU fightback except for a spirited rally of 5000 transit workers last October and a lobbying caravan to the state capital in Albany earlier this year. Clearly, the TWU's strategy was to depend on the twin parties of the 1% rather than on a sustained struggle to win a decent contract—which is always a losing strategy.

Largely unaddressed is the \$32 billion MTA bond debt to the city's ultra-rich. Tax-free income is paid by riders via the bus fare-box and subway turnstile. The percentage of MTA operations paid by NYC riders is the highest amongst the nation's major urban transit systems, 55%.

In April, the MTA sold \$500 million worth of new MTA bonds to wealthy investors (minimum purchase is \$5000!), without protest from a single union leader or politician. By law, the MTA bondholders must be paid before 60,000 MTA workers. Bond sales pay for ongoing construction, typically running way over budget, and for maintenance repair costs, not salaries.

Socialists demand full funding for mass transit and all public services! Make the greedy rich pay!

Since the MATA/TWU contract was announced, a small "Vote No" movement has begun and is gaining traction amongst rank-and-file workers.

Gov. Cuomo, up for re-election in November, is famous for his full-stop support for the anti-union charter-school movement and tax-breaks for the rich. He secured an appalling three-zero-raise contract with two state unions in 2011 under threat of 10,000 layoffs. Cuomo pressed especially hard for the TWU deal after receiving a public letter, full of undeserved praise, from Samuelsen. Cuomo knows the big TWU sets a contract pattern. A weak contract would exert great downward pressure on all New York City and state unions.

Directly impacted are the workers at the MTA-run Long Island Rail Road (LIRR), whose contract with several unions expired in 2010. The TWU pact, despite Samuelsen's public pledges of "legal" solidarity, was a body blow to LIRR prospects. One anonymous LIRR union official described the TWU deal in *Newsday* newspaper as "terrible."

After MTA stonewalling, a federal "Emergency Board" panel was empowered to study the issues. The MTA rejected its recommendation of a 17% wage hike over six years, combined with a 2% member health-care contribution. A second board has been convened, but is thought likely to repeat the previous findings. If rejected by the MTA, workers may strike in late July, union officials say.

The TWU deal is also disappointing for 152 city unions whose contracts expired under the billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who steadfastly refused to negotiate. The cost of city union back pay is estimated at \$7 billion. Bloomberg, with votes from a majority Democratic city council, left no money in the budget for contracts. Untouched, however, are massive tax breaks for the rich and a mostly untaxed Wall Street stock exchange.

Bloomberg was replaced by Bill De Blasio in January, enthusiastically supported as a "progressive" Democrat by the labor bureaucracy. De Blasio promises to negotiate but, like Bloomberg, openly demands givebacks. The mayor has said that there is no way the city could afford to pay full retroactive pay to all 152 unions. The "progressive" mayor says, "If they want to talk about retroactive pay, that's their right, but they have to show us the cost savings to go with it."

Following the transit pact, the influential *New York Daily News*, in an editorial entitled "Stay on Track, Bill," advised, "His (De Blasio's) obligation now is to deliver contracts that are essentially cost-free," adding, "TWU members are contributing 2%, de Blasio can accept no less from the city workforce."

Now, more than ever, there is a need for a united front of all New York unions—one that will reject all givebacks and separate deals with bosses. It would mobilize the ranks to fight Wall Street and its mouthpieces in the Democratic and Republican parties. We've got the guts, and we definitely have the power to shut it down! ■

## The fight to defend public education

By ERNIE GOTTA

HARTFORD, Conn.—April was full of revolutionary activity for Socialist Action comrades in this city. As the current crisis of capitalism deepens, party members in Connecticut are playing an active role in many different arenas of class struggle.

The corporate takeover of education is sweeping through cities and towns across the U.S. like a plague or zombie apocalypse. Soon students will be stalking the streets looking for brains, as an increasingly privatized school system will devalue their education.

"The Fight for Public Education" addressed this issue during a session of Connecticut Socialist Action's monthly forum series, held on April 19 at the Hartford Public Library. In all, some 40 teachers, students, parents, unionists, and community activists turned out to hear a dynamic panel discussion. Panelists included Hartford Rising members, AFT teachers, and a member of Socialist Action, who not only explained the full meaning of a privatized school system but also how to organize and fight for quality public education.

For years, Hartford public schools have been struggling without access to adequate resources and funding. Corporate privatizers have seized on the weakened public schools to put forward the idea

that if public schools are failing then the answer is to place them under private management funded by public money.

The corporate players have used parents on "turnaround committees" to advocate for privatization. Dan Durant, an AFT organizer and NAACP member, said, "The opposition has invested a lot of money in organizing the community ... they're giving money to community organizations that once had progressive reputations, and they [the community groups] are switching over."

Shonta' Browdy, executive director of Parents Uniting Resources to Promote Outstanding Student Education (P.U.R.P.O.S.E.) and a member of Hartford Rising, spoke about her own transformation from participating in these "turnaround committees" to organizing against the corporate takeover of the Clark school in the North End neighborhood of Hartford.

Retired New York City teacher Laura Sturt, author of "Devonte's Inferno: Ten Years in the Public School Gulag," and Ebony Murphy, a former teacher at Hartford charter school Capitol Prep, spoke about their experiences as teachers in public and private institutions. Ebony explained how Dr. Steve Perry's Capitol Prep is a flawed model that has many around the country fooled into believing he is the savior of education. Perry's desire to franchise his school model, with a

high teacher turnover rate, emphasized his real intention, to make money.

Diane Ravitch, a leading national public education advocate, said, "In his [Jonathan Peltó a well-known Connecticut education blogger] latest blog, Peltó shows that Perry's school has lower test scores for African American students than the much-maligned public schools of Hartford. Yet Perry now seeks to open more schools."

When Perry lost his bid to take over another public elementary school in Hartford, he resorted to violent imagery to intimidate his opponents. He said via Twitter, "The only way to lose a fight is to stop fighting. All this did was piss me off. It's so on. Strap up [get a gun], there will be head injuries."

The only way to roll back money-hungry privatizers like Dr. Steve Perry is to mobilize the community to fight for public education. This was the message of Socialist Action member Tokuji Okamoto and others during the discussion period.

To date, no decisive victories have been won in favor of public education. However, the Chicago teachers' strike and Hartford's Clark Rising, the group that formed during the struggle to keep Clark elementary public, show that real power to make change resides not in the corporate elite or politicians but in the hands of parents, teachers, and students.

....

### Hartford Rising

Out of the experiences of the Clark Rising movement, Hartford Rising was born. Looking to take on multiple issues, leaders in the community decided to write a "bill of rights" that reflected the needs of Hartford residents. A majority of the community is Black and Latino and have been hit especially hard by years of social and economic oppression. Over 2000 doors were knocked and over 400 surveys were administered to get a thorough understanding of what folks throughout Hartford felt would improve their lives.

For a city that is consistently ranked second or first on the top 10 poorest cities in the U.S. list, it is no surprise that working people demanded jobs with a livable wage, pension and benefits, quality healthcare, affordable housing, and a clean and safe city. Hartford's contradiction is clear when one considers that the most profitable insurance companies in the country are surrounded by wealthy suburbs while many of those living in the city are subjected to an all-out assault on their quality of life.

Plugged in to Hartford Rising is a growing movement of low wage fast food workers organizing in Hartford to win minimum wage increases and union representation. This movement has its finger on the pulse of a much larger national "\$15 and a union" movement that has gained prestige thanks in large part to the election of the socialist city councilor in Seattle, Kshama Sawant. ■



# ... Revolt in Ukraine

(continued from page 1)

In April, some units defected to the so-called “rebels,” handing over armored trucks and weapons in the process.

Since then, it appears evident that Kiev has sent in more reliable troops, which include hardened fascists. Yet protesters continue to occupy the cores of about a dozen cities, despite mounting casualties.

Fighting spread to Odessa on May 2, when Right Sector thugs attacked a number of anti-government protesters who had sought refuge inside the building of the local trade-union council. The fascists threw Molotov cocktails into the building, setting it on fire. At least 46 people (and perhaps many more) were reported to have died in the conflagration or in armed clashes in the vicinity. Eight people died from falls after they had hung onto upper-story windowsills in desperate attempts to escape the flames. Gruesome photos taken inside the building show a pregnant woman who was apparently strangled to death, and a man shot twice in the head.

A pro-government newspaper, *Ukrainska Pravda*, indicated that the mob outside the building did nothing to help the victims. “As the building burned, the Ukrainian activists continued to scream mottos about Putin and sing the Ukrainian national anthem.”

“The aim is to completely clear Odessa [of anti-government protesters],” a man identifying himself as a member of the Right Sector later crowed to the press. “They are all paid Russian separatists.” This atrocity followed other attacks by the Right Sector during the last couple of months. These included armed raids on Communist Party offices in Rovno and Sumo on April 15, in which a regional CP official was wounded, and the killing of two protesters when Right Sector members opened fire on an anti-fascist demonstration in Kharkov on March 14. After being apprehended for the killings, the Right Sector assassins argued that they should be free from prosecution since they were enrolled as members of the Kiev government’s National Guard.

In response to the Odessa attack, on May 4, about 2000 men and women attacked a police station in the city—smashing doors and windows and yelling, “fascists!” They demanded the release of anti-government activists who had been jailed inside; many of the prisoners had been arrested as they left the trade-union building, dazed and covered with blood. Police yielded to the protesters and released 67 prisoners held inside their jail. But the Interior Ministry in Kiev said that 42 other anti-government protesters in jail were being transferred to another region to prevent their being liberated.

The Odessa fire has become a cause for rallying the population in other sec-

tions of the country. On May 3 and 4, men and women occupied and looted several government buildings in Donetsk, as hundreds gathered in support, chanting, “Odessa will not be forgiven!” “No to fascism!”

According to AP reporter Matt Robinson, who was in Donetsk on May 3, “a couple of hundred people smashed up the city’s state security building as evening fell, then walked down the street and ransacked the business headquarters of the region’s Kiev-backed governor, steel baron Serhiy Taruta. They carried out chairs, crates of vodka, and icons. Middle-aged women cheered young men in balaclavas, the new power in this city of one million people built on steel and coal.

““This was for yesterday [in Odessa]! They’re monsters, worse than monsters,” said Tatiana Kamniva, who had joined the protest with her daughter. “This is just the beginning,” she said.”

On May 4, as people occupied the Lenin district council building, “masked men in military fatigues and armed with automatic rifles made some attempt to marshal the crowd. ... The building belonged to the people and shouldn’t be burned, a man said through a loud hailer. ‘Don’t worry, we’ll go west and take Kiev,’ he said, trying to placate them.”

The AP reporter noted that “there were similar scenes at the weekend in coastal Mariupol, south of Donetsk, where protesters torched a downtown branch of Privatbank, owned by an oligarch who backs the pro-European political forces in Kiev.”

“In our town, the people are in power,” said a 55-year-old former sailor who gave his name as Mikhail, surveying the damage. His wife, Irina, said the arson was probably the work of more provocateurs trying to discredit the uprising. Nevertheless, Mikhail said, “They did right to burn it.”

The Kiev government and the Obama administration maintain that the unrest in eastern Ukraine has been fomented, directed, and supplied by Russia. They allege, moreover, that Russian military operatives, although masked and in disguise, have taken a major part in the actions. Without hesitation, the U.S. media has relayed the same scenario, simplistically reducing the unrest in eastern Ukraine to something on the order of “Russian separatists against the Ukrainian people.”

To back their claims, the Kiev authorities released photographs of armed men in Ukraine together with photos of the same individuals that were purportedly taken in earlier Russian army operations in Chechnya and elsewhere. Soon afterward, however, some U.S. news sources, including *The New York Times*, found themselves forced to ad-



(Above) Woman defending Slovansk against army attack.

mit that the blurred photos were not entirely convincing. For example, one of the photos that *The Times* had featured, allegedly showing several Ukrainian rebel fighters in Russia, was actually shot in the Ukrainian city of Slovyansk, according to Maxim Dondyuk, the photographer who took the picture and posted it on his Instagram account.

It is not implausible, of course, that the Russian government has given some aid to the uprising. But interviews conducted on the barricades by Western reporters strongly suggest that the protests and building occupations have been carried out primarily by civilians, and that their weapons have been obtained locally.

*The New York Times* (May 4, 2014), which spoke to men defending the barricades in Slovyansk, noted that they appeared to have local support. “To the guys in Kiev, we are separatists and terrorists,” one man commented. “But to the people here, we are defenders and protectors.” The fighters were reported to have said that their heavy weapons “had either been taken from seized police buildings and a column of captured Ukrainian armored vehicles, or bought from corrupt Ukrainian soldiers.”

Unfortunately, the goals of the protesters are unclear; no political program has been put forward to map out a steady and principled course for the future.

Leaders of the self-styled “Donetsk People’s Republic” are organizing a regional referendum to take place on May 11—although Putin expressed the wish that the vote be delayed. The referendum simply asks, “Do you support the Donetsk People’s Republic?” But what then? Moderate proponents of the referendum have told Western reporters that they view it simply as a form of pressure on the Kiev regime to grant

more regional control. Many others express sentiment for secession from Ukraine and joining Russia. Both roads, however, would prove to be dead ends for working people.

Neither the government of Vladimir Putin, which represents the interests of Russian capitalism, nor the ruling group in Kiev, which slavishly follows the dictates of Western imperialism, is capable of providing any lasting solution for working people in Ukraine. The only way to abolish poverty and unemployment, and to overcome discrimination and fascist attacks, is for working people to surmount the artificial barriers between nationalities, cultures, and language groups, and to join together in an independent mass movement with the goal of bringing the major means of production and the state itself under the control of the working class.

This will require the formation of a mass-based revolutionary socialist party throughout Ukraine—one that is in active solidarity with similar parties in Russia and throughout the world.

In the meantime, however, the danger still remains of a catastrophic war breaking out in Ukraine. It is not ruled out that the U.S. will decide to intervene militarily, which could result in major capitalist powers facing off in a military confrontation for the first time since World War II.

This is the time for antiwar activists in the U.S. and internationally to pour into the streets, demanding “No U.S./NATO intervention in Ukraine!” The United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) is calling for protests and teach-ins to take place from May 8 to May 26 around this demand. For more information, see [www.unacpeace.org](http://www.unacpeace.org). ■

# ... Teamster rebellion

(continued from page 12)

over 1500 police and deputies, and hundreds of strikers and other union members, ready for hand-to-hand combat. The ensuing battle, known as the Battle of Deputies Run, would become legendary. Within an hour of the start, the strikers had managed to drive off all the deputies and police force, and were controlling all traffic in the area. During the course of the battle, many people were seriously wounded on both sides, and two special deputies were killed—one a prominent businessman.

After the battle, Governor Olson met with the Central Labor Union and representatives from Local 574 and the Citizens Alliance to negotiate a truce for the next 24 hours. When the bosses tried to move trucks to break the truce, the union threatened to go back on strike. In response, Olson threatened to call out the National Guard. Although a new truce was negotiated, the play of powers had ended in a stalemate, with Olson caught in the middle.

Recognizing the importance of the strike, the central lead-

ership of the Communist League quickly flew in its national secretary, James P. Cannon, from New York to assist the Minneapolis branch in leading the strike through the ensuing negotiations. The militancy and success of the strike had caught national attention, and had given legitimacy to the still small American Trotskyist movement.

When negotiations began, Local 574 did not demand closed shop contracts, only recognition of the union. When the bosses refused to discuss even that, their bankruptcy was exposed to all the workers. Olson, acting as mediator, was once again caught in the middle, but unable to force the hand of either side. Eventually, a settlement was negotiated, which included a recognition of the union signed by 166 employers in the general trucking industry, all strikers restored to their original jobs, no discrimination against union workers, the establishment of a seniority system, and the recognition of the right of Local 574 to negotiate further contracts with the employers.

Significantly, the agreement also included both drivers and inside workers as part of the union. Although the language was vague, Olson assured the union it was the best they could get, and they voted to accept the agreement on

May 25. Although the workers knew it was a partial victory at best, it established the union as a recognized bargaining unit and gave them a solid base to work from when negotiating further advances in the future. The workers victoriously returned to their jobs the next day, knowing they had won a hard-fought victory and gained the respect of workers nationwide.

Although more than 7000 workers now belonged to Local 574, by June the new contract was already falling apart. Employers began discriminating against union workers, with over 700 disputes soon filed. Despite efforts by Local 574 to negotiate wage increases, the employers always avoided the issue.

Soon, it became clear that Olson’s word was not to be trusted, as the employers insisted that their interpretation of the contract did not cover inside workers—an opinion that was supported by the Labor Board and that excluded thousands of workers who had joined the union.

Despite their recent success, the union was once again under attack, and began to prepare for another strike, the final chapter in the battle to make Minneapolis a union town.

(to be continued)



## Teamster rebellion! May 1934: 'Battle of Deputies Run'



(Above) Trotskyist leaders Carl Skoglund (l.) and James P. Cannon helped give leadership to strike.

(Left) Teamsters battle cops and special deputies.

By LISA LUINENBURG

*This is the second installment of a series of articles marking the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic Minneapolis Teamster strikes of 1934. The first part appeared in our March 2014 issue.*

We return to the story of the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strikes as the workers are celebrating their recent victory, following the February strike they fought out in the coal yards in the dead of the Minnesota winter. After striking for three days, the workers had won recognition of their union, Local 574, wage increases for most workers, and overtime pay. Although a small victory at best, this success gave the rank-and-file a new confidence in the power of the working class.

The Minneapolis branch of the Communist League, the small Trotskyist organization that was the predecessor of the Socialist Workers Party, had been at the forefront of the strike, leading the drive to unionize the coal industry in Minneapolis. Their success in February had shown them that their tactics and strategy had been borne out by an effective mass movement, and that the working class was also learning valuable lessons through their participation in the struggle. Through their experiences in February, workers were quickly shedding any illusions they might have had in the intentions of the police force, and they had also learned that the Labor Board, far from being a “neutral body,” most often acted on the side of the employers.

The Minneapolis Communist League sought to expand on the recent victory by broadening the struggle to a general union drive among all truck drivers in the city (not just those who worked within the coal industry). This was an important step towards the large-scale industrial unionization that would soon sweep many parts of the country. The intentions of the Local 574 organizing committee, made up of rank-and-file strike leaders, were soon ranged against the plans of the executive committee, a group of small-time union bureaucrats who wanted to recruit new workers to the union simply so they could get more dues.

As February drew to a close and the weather began to warm up, the coal industry had other plans for the newly unionized drivers. As the coal season began to close, the bosses began laying off workers from the most combative shops, thinking that if they could hire a new set of workers when the season picked up again in the fall, they could break the union.

With this new threat on the horizon, union organizers like Farrell Dobbs and Carl Skoglund (who both also be-

**The Minneapolis Teamsters' victory gave them a solid base for future advances. Their struggle gained the respect of workers nationwide.**

longed to the Communist League) began recruiting new members to the union, this time from broader sections of the trucking industry. As workers in each industry came up with their own set of demands, a mass meeting was organized at the Schubert Theatre for April 15. “Drivers, Organize!” shouted the flyer advertising the meeting. “Monster Mass Meeting ... will open the big campaign to organize. Governor Floyd B. Olson Will Speak on ‘The Right to Organize.’”

The union had invited Governor Olson, a member of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, hoping to force him to speak in favor of the union. While Olson didn't actually show up, he sent his personal secretary with a letter supporting the union. While membership in Local 574 had numbered around 100 a year earlier, by the end of the mass meeting, over 3000 workers had joined the union, voted to strike if the bosses rejected their demands, and elected a strike committee.

At the same time, the Citizens Alliance, an employers' organization, was building an anti-union campaign in the rest of the city. While they screamed about the “communist threat” that Local 574 presented, the Citizens Alliance recruited the support of the mayor and the police force, and on May 7 they issued a letter rejecting recognition of the union's closed-shop contracts. The bosses were poised to begin the fight to crush the newly formed union.

Local 574 was simultaneously recruiting its own support among various layers of the working class. In 1934, there were 30,000 unemployed workers in Minneapolis, whom Local 574 directly organized as part of the strike, offering in return to defend their right to receive public assistance. The union also organized the Farmer's Holiday Association of Minnesota as part of the strike, and set up a women's auxiliary, led by Marvel Scholl and Clara Dunne, who took over many functions at strike headquarters, including working as cooks, nurses, and secretaries.

The union rented a big garage at 1900 Chicago Avenue, where they set up an efficient strike headquarters that in-

cluded a commissary that fed 4000-5000 workers a day, a hospital, a garage for mechanics, offices, and sleeping quarters. Thus prepared, the workers voted to strike on May 15.

The next day, as the strike began, the headquarters was a beehive of activity. A committee of 75 met regularly to make decisions, picket dispatchers deployed thousands of fixed and moving pickets around the city as needed, and the rank and file met in a general assembly each night. During this time, union membership increased to almost 6000, and hundreds of university students, women, unemployed, union workers from other industries, and unorganized workers showed up daily to volunteer their services. Within a few days, the strike had shut down trucking operations in the entire city.

But the workers were about to learn a hard lesson about the true power of the boss class when they are engaged in class struggle. As newspapers distorted the happenings of the strike, and the bosses recruited scabs to drive trucks, the police force entered in action against the strikers. The Citizens Alliance elected a “Committee of Law and Order” and began to recruit special deputies from among the upper classes to augment the police force.

The police soon provoked a run-in with the strikers in the market, where they attacked the workers with clubs. Later that same night, they laid a trap for the workers, luring three pickets made up of men and women, into an alley—where they were brutally beaten. Once strikers were taken to the hospital, they were often held there until the police could come and arrest them, so the need for a hospital at strike headquarters became doubly important.

Although the police's first few attempts to break the strike had ultimately proved unsuccessful, the workers quickly decided that they had to equip themselves for defense against the brutality of the police. They began to collect baseball bats, 2 by 2 wooden boards, bannisters, hoses filled with lead and sand, and whatever else they could find, and lined their hats with cardboard to make makeshift helmets.

Early Monday morning, May 21, about 600 workers were armed and ready as they waited for the battle in the market to begin, while 900 workers waited in reserve at strike headquarters. At 9 a.m., the police attempted to move a truck, and battle was soon joined. During the course of the battle, most of the special deputies fled the scene, leaving the police to face the strikers alone. After three hours, the workers had met the police blow for blow, and although many were wounded, not a single truck had been moved.

As the battle raged, the women's auxiliary marched in protest to the sheriff's office, demanding that Police Chief Johannes be fired, withdrawal of the police forces, and a halt to all interference with the pickets.

The next day, both sides were reinforced by new members. The market was filled with thousands of spectators,

*(continued on page 11)*