



# Canadian Perspectives

**150 years of the Canadian State:  
Capitalism, Colonialism, Corruption  
and Resistance, & *Looking Ahead***

# What We Stand For

## Jobs, Services and a Living Wage for All

- End poverty pay. A \$15 minimum wage with no exemptions.
- A 35 hour working week without loss of pay, with sickness and vacation rights for all from day one of employment.
- A living income for seniors and others unable to work.
- Living-wage union jobs for the unemployed through a massive public works program.
- No cuts or privatization of public services. Return to public ownership and control all privatized public utilities and services.
- Fully-funded, high quality, free public education from early childhood to university. A living grant for all students.
- Fully-funded public health services including dental, optical and pharmacare drugs, with no user fees. Stop the privatization of health.
- Homes for all. A mass building program of decent, safe and affordable public housing. Renovate existing homes. Rent controls and security of tenure.
- Tax the rich and corporations.
- For fighting, democratic unions run by and for the membership. Organize the unorganized particularly youth and minority groups.
- Elect all union officials, subject to recall and on the same wages as the members. Solidarity between unions and workers in struggle.
- Repeal all anti-union laws. Full trade union rights and the right to strike for all from day one at work. Enforce health and safety laws.

## Equal Rights for All

- End all discrimination. Equal pay for all.
- End police harassment and institutional racism in the criminal justice system.
- Full reproductive rights. Paid parental leave and high-quality, affordable childcare.
- End sexual harassment and violence against women. Quality services for people experiencing domestic violence.
- Full labour, human, and citizenship rights for all immigrants and refugees.

## Environmental Sustainability

- Stop global warming. Massive public investment in clean renewable energy, building insulation and energy saving for a rapid transition to a clean energy society.

- Public ownership of big energy companies to protect jobs and convert to clean energy. Phase out the tar sands and nuclear power.
- Invest in public transport to provide free, rapid and accessible transit. High quality freight and rapid inter-city rail.
- Expand green jobs. Guaranteed paid re-training and new good-paying jobs for all workers in phased-out industries.
- Democratic public ownership of natural resources, water and fisheries.

## Democratic Rights

- Public services and industries to be democratically run and controlled by workers, service users and society.
- Defend the right of Québec sovereignty and for a socialist Québec to be part of a voluntary socialist association of Canada.
- The right to self-determination and self-government for all Indigenous peoples. Abide by treaties and land and resource rights.
- Abolish the monarchy and its powers in Canada. For full social and economic democracy

## Internationalism and Socialism

- No Canadian foreign military interventions. Canada out of NATO. Slash military spending.
- International solidarity with workers in struggle.
- For a fighting democratic mass workers' party.
- Capitalism produces poverty, inequality, environmental destruction and war. Public democratic ownership of key sectors of the economy such as finance, utilities, energy, manufacturing and resources.
- A socialist transformation of society to allow for the democratic planning of the economy based on the interests and needs of the overwhelming majority of people and the planet.



# Canadian Perspectives

150 years of the Canadian State: Capitalism,  
Colonialism, Corruption and Resistance

Canada Today and Looking Ahead

\$5

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# Preface

This pamphlet, written by the National Committee of Socialist Alternative Canada, is the product of intense democratic discussions. There were discussions to prepare the draft for our National Conference in April, when the broad analysis was agreed unanimously. The National Committee then updated points and made revisions based on the Conference discussions.

The purpose of perspectives is to analyze the key economic, social, and political trends in society and develop an estimation of how these trends will unfold in the short and medium term. This is to assist Socialist Alternative in its activities. Perspectives are a guide to action. They help us to decide our priorities and how to use our limited resources to the best effect.

While it is not possible to cover all aspects and nuances of society, we have sought to encompass the key developments and trends today as well as over the past 150 years since the establishment of the Canadian state. Key features of Canada's past and present are colonialism, capitalism and corruption, countered by continual resistance from the working class, Indigenous peoples and broader society. These forces, alongside international events, will shape the future of the peoples that live under the Canadian state.

The Indigenous people suffered from French and English colonialism and, after the conquest of New France in 1759, the French-speaking people also suffered from colonialism. The Canadian state includes many nations – First Nations, Québec and Anglo-Canada. Socialists recognize the rights of these many nations, while knowing that international solidarity and unity of the working class are vital to defeat the rule of big business.

This pamphlet has an extended section on Québec. Québec has a distinct history, culture and dominant language in contrast to the rest of Canada, as anyone who has been to Québec will know. It currently has the most militant society and working class. As an example, in 2014 over 20,000 people marched to defend Radio-Canada (CBC in Québec). It is hard to image a demonstration one-tenth that size in Toronto or Vancouver. Québec is a separate nation within the Canadian state. We have a sister organization in Québec, Alternative Socialiste, with whom we worked in preparing the material on Québec. Not surprisingly, the Canadian media almost totally ignore the workers' and social movements in Québec so it is important for people in the rest of Canada to have knowledge of Québec's history and current situation.

Capitalism is creating an ecological catastrophe. Driven by the thirst for profit, it is incapable of providing a secure and good quality of life for all humanity. Instead, it lives off the exploitation of people and the planet, producing huge inequality and mass poverty. In Canada, two families have as much wealth as the poorest 30% of the population, some 11 million people. The capitalist class will use everything at its disposal to cling to power. It will require a mass, democratic movement to remove this tiny minority from their grip on society, politics and the economy.

Socialist Alternative works to build political awareness and solidarity that will contribute, in the future, to that mass movement. If you find the pamphlet interesting and broadly agree with our analysis, we invite you to contact Socialist Alternative to find out more and hopefully join us.

# Introduction

This is Socialist Alternative Canada's first perspectives document. It outlines how we see the political and economic situation developing in Canada over the next few years and how we, as an organization, can effectively intervene as events unfold. Getting to this historic place, able to produce such a document, has taken years of work by a handful of early members. This pamphlet includes material on Canadian history – to understand the present and have an outline for the future it is important to know where we came from.

This year is 150 years of the Canadian state and 100 years since the Russian Revolution. Ever since class society arose, for millennia, the majority of the oppressed have struggled for justice. Revolutions keep happening. Now it is technically possible to eradicate want and scarcity. But equally, technology used for capitalist profit has the potential to make the world uninhabitable for humanity. The struggle we face is socialism or barbarism, or worse, extinction.

Revolutions have happened throughout history, but most have ended in defeat – crushed, hijacked or distorted. Only once in the history of class society has the majority taken power, in October 1917 in Russia. Whatever monstrosities Stalinism inflicted later, the working class and poor of Russia took power and demonstrated liberation, even in unfavourable circumstances. Crucial to that victory was the Bolshevik party, a revolutionary Marxist party.

In humility and modesty, we, the handful of people gathered around Socialist Alternative Canada, dedicate ourselves to building a Canadian party based on the democratic and resolute traditions and methods of the Bolsheviks.

## Role of Perspectives

Marxist perspectives are based on an analysis of the underlying economic, social, and political trends in society. Flowing from this, we develop a perspective, or an estimation of how those trends will play out in the short and medium term based on the dynamic interplay of the various forces at work.

Perspectives are not precise predictions; rather they are a series of working hypotheses. Developing perspectives is a process of making successive approximations of the complex reality around us, which must be checked against reality at each stage, making adjustments based on the actual course of events or wholesale revision if the line of developments proceeds along a different path. As the organization gains more support in the working class, society and the various regions of Canada, our knowledge, roots and experience will increase, all of which will deepen and expand our perspectives and our understanding of the processes and moods in society. As materialists, our starting and ending point must be the objective reality of actual events and not a schema!

Trotsky wrote in *In Defense of Marxism*: "Every historical prognosis is always conditional, and the more concrete the prognosis, the more conditional it is. A prognosis is not a promissory note which can be cashed on a given date. Prognosis outlines only the definite trends of the development. But along with these trends a different order of forces and tendencies operate, which at a certain moment begin to predominate. All those who seek exact predictions of concrete events should consult the astrologists. Marxist prognosis aids only in orientation."

The Marxist method is fundamentally different from the narrow and empirical approach which only sees “facts” in their isolation, which is the dominant outlook of society. We seek to draw out the dialectical interconnection between different phenomena, the subterranean processes that are the driving engine behind what is visible on the surface, and to locate concrete events within a larger context and processes.

Perspectives are a guide to action. They help us to decide our priorities and how best to mobilize our limited resources to the best effect. Of course, alongside perspectives we need firm determination to make the most of a given situation.

As an example, most on the left saw Trump’s election only as a disaster and an indication that US society had moved to the right. Of course, we recognize the reactionary nature of Trump and the threat he poses to many in the US and around the world. However, we also pointed to the deeper mood in US society of anger against, and alienation from, the corporate elite. Without this understanding, Socialist Alternative in the US would not have called the crucial demonstrations immediately on the day after Trump was elected. These rallies opened the door to the much wider protests we are now seeing.

Similarly, in Canada many saw Harper as a triumph of the right. We pointed out that the Tories had not fundamentally changed the consciousness of Canadians. In fact, in the 2015 election, most Canadians were looking not only to defeat Harper but for change. Unfortunately, the Liberals were better able to capture that mood than the NDP.

The election of Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant to Seattle City Council, with all the benefits that has produced, started with perspectives. Following the end of the Occupy

movement, we understood that the underlying radical mood and angry anti-corporate sentiment still existed. We thought there was a big space to the left of the Democrats for independent candidates to give voice to the Occupy mood in the electoral arena in 2012. On this basis, we decided to run Sawant first for the State election winning 29% of the vote and paving the way to her election to Seattle City Council in 2013. Other left groups had different perspectives, so none ran serious candidates and campaigns.

For Marxists, perspectives are not an abstract contemplation, but a tool to actively intervene to shape events. The development of our perspectives through discussion and reviewing our previous estimations helps us to best understand the conditions we are working in, the stage we are passing through, and how this affects the consciousness of different layers. This assists our ability to identify opportunities, understand the mood of those we are trying to recruit, intervene in movements, establish roots in the working class, and build our organization most effectively.

## **150 years of the Capitalist Canadian State**

Indigenous peoples have lived in what is now Canada for millennia, developing a diverse range of technologies and cultures, in societies that did not include the private ownership of land.

While feudalism was imposed on New France and continued after the British conquest, the dominant class relations in Canada were from the beginning capitalist. Initially there was a large independent farming class, in Marxist terms petit bourgeois, as they owned their means of production but employed very few people.

After the defeat of the radical nationalists in 1837 in both Lower Canada (Québec) and Upper Canada (Ontario), the capitalist class dominated Canada, so they were the class that decided confederation. The Canadian state was thus founded as a capitalist state from the beginning. Canada's history is the interplay of capitalism, colonialism, corruption, and class antagonism and resistance.

A crucial feature of Canada is its large landmass with relatively few people. 36 million people live in an area of nearly 10 million square kilometres (twice the population of the Netherlands in 240 times the land area).

The capitalists' wealth initially, and even today, is based on resource expropriation, exploitation and extraction. First of all, the land itself is stolen land. As Arthur Manuel points out only 0.02% of the land is First Nations' reserves, the rest has been appropriated by Canada. In what are now the six eastern provinces of Canada the stolen land was not shared among the new arrivals. Most of the land suitable for agriculture was given to the church, landlords (often absentee, such as almost all of PEI) and Seigneurs in Québec, politicians and their friends in a series of scandalous land grants. Very little was available to poor immigrants. This was in part to ensure the existence of "a class of persons willing to work for wages."

The Hudson Bay Company (HBC) was created by the King of England granting to a few English friends all the land that drained into Hudson Bay, more than one third of the present area of Canada. This area was then sold to the Canadian government in 1869 for \$1.5 million (about \$25 million today). The people who lived there, Indigenous and Métis, had no say in this exchange. The handing over of Manitoba to Canada with no consideration of the resident Métis provoked the first rebellion against the newly formed Canadian state in 1869.

Canada's first prime minister, John A MacDonal, deliberately starved the plains First Nations to force them to move to lands north of the route of the Canadian Pacific Railway, even boasting of keeping them "on the verge of actual starvation." The CPR was only one of many railways given large blocks of land. It, owned by seven men, was given 100,000 square kilometres (nearly twice the area of Nova Scotia) of some of the best land in Canada.

The wealth was extracted by exploitation first of the fur of animals, driving the beaver and sea otter almost to extinction. The timber was recklessly logged. Animals, such as the cod of the Grand Banks and the buffalo of the prairies were driven nearly to extinction. The capitalists gave no thought to tomorrow – simply extract the wealth as fast as possible. In 1824 Simpson, governor of HBC, described the Snake River country as "a rich preserve of Beaver ... which ... we should endeavour to destroy as soon as possible," before the region was granted to the US in 1846.

Only with the drive to settle the prairies, partly to stop the US claiming the area, was land distributed for free. The Dominion Lands Act of 1872 offered free ownership of 160 acres of land on the condition the person lived on and improved it. Improvement meant making the land suitable for agriculture – usually backbreaking work.

Most Canadians lived in rural areas until 1931. However, even in 1851, a significant portion of the population was wage-dependent. The Census of that year showed that in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Upper Canada (Ontario), while the majority were agricultural workers there was one industrial worker for every two agricultural workers, highest in NS at nearly three to four. In Lower Canada (Québec) there was one industrial worker to every three in agriculture. Most industrial workers were

employed in construction, sawmills and gristmills, so although most worked in rural areas and small workplaces, a working class was forming.

Today much of the wealth of Canada's rulers still comes from resource extractions of timber, minerals, oil and gas. Land speculation continues to be a major source of wealth.

The wealth from the land and its resources continue to shape the Canadian economy and the rulers. Canadian capitalism is dominated by the resource industries, finance, construction and the services necessary for their wealth accumulation such as utilities and services, both public such as health and education, and private such as communications and transportation.

A key feature of the shaping of Canada is the existence of Québec with its separate language, culture and history.

# International Overview

Canada is connected to the world in many ways. Both imports and exports are crucial parts of the Canadian economy. The large number of immigrants means there are many threads to most countries in the world. Canada is near to three of the major world powers: sharing a border with the US, sharing the Arctic with Russia and across the Pacific Ocean is the rising giant of China. The environment is a global system with flows of air and ocean currents circulating energy and materials.

The collapse of Stalinism in 1989 and the following triumphalism of capitalism that strengthened neoliberalism had a dramatic and ongoing impact on the workers' movement. Francis Fukayama, a capitalist historian, claimed that with the collapse of Stalinism the world was "witnessing not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." He, and many others including leaders of the workers' movement, believed that capitalism had finally triumphed.

Many former workers' parties have disappeared or have been transformed into open supporters of capitalism, yet they still have some electoral support. The unions are weaker and there is less of a socialist consciousness. This changed situation fuelled the domination of politics and economics by neo-liberal ideas and policies.

The ravages of neoliberalism led to the global Great Recession of 2008, from which the world has never recovered. The capitalist class of the major economies pumped some \$7.2 trillion into circulation but as there were few areas for profitable investment in production most of this

flowed into new speculative bubbles, property development and so-called emerging economies. Bubbles inevitably burst. This flow of money is an important driver of the property bubbles in Vancouver and Toronto.

There is a growing realization that the best that the capitalist world economy can offer is permanent sluggish growth with falling or stagnant living standards for the majority, continuing attacks on public services and a general fraying of society. As Claudio Borio of the Bank for International Settlements said in 2016, "the global economy seems unable to return to sustainable and balanced growth." Rooted in the world economy is the likelihood of another Great Recession with little room for the capitalist class to manoeuvre as interest rates are already at or near zero and there have been huge cash injections.

Canada's population, due to immigration and birth rate, is growing faster than most older economies in Europe, US and Japan. Canada will therefore have a younger population than these countries. The sluggish world economy means young people face a grim future, added to by the cuts in post-secondary education funding, the gig economy and in many cities unaffordable housing. In Canada and many other countries, young people are leaving their parents' homes later in life than they did 40 years ago.

Growing inequality and stagnant living standards have fuelled a mounting rage against the political establishment and a growing polarization to the populist right on the one hand and a leftward search for an alternative to capitalism on the other. Many of the traditional parties, whether of the conservative mainstream

or rooted in a social democratic past, are in crisis or discredited.

There is a complex process, moving at different speeds in different countries, of a re-alignment of political parties. There are new parties and formations on both the left and the right.

The populist right has made gains in several countries, in particular in the US, although the more traditional right is still the dominant trend on the right. The rise of right-wing populism should not blind us to the regressive nature of the traditional right. The British Tory government under Cameron and May cut local government spending by 37% and real median wages are only now returning to pre-2008 levels.

There has been growth in more nationalist and racist language and policies from both traditional parties and new parties. However, the new European right parties are not a common block, as there are many deep divisions between them. So far, their best election results leave them as opposition parties unable to form a government or win a majority. The recent failure of Wilders in the Netherlands is a case in point. Outside of the electoral field, there is a small but shrill reactionary wing of prejudice and hate. The nationalist right is clearly a threat to the working class, immigrants, minorities and democratic rights.

The dominant trend in society, especially among young people, is to the left with increasing concern for social justice, hostility to inequality and poverty, rejecting discrimination and growing awareness of the deep ecological crisis. All these concerns are seen as connected, in however a confused way, with neoliberalism if not capitalism.

The liberal bourgeois see instability and growing polarization as deeply worrying and often link both new left and right forces as a

common problem – comparing Podemos in Spain or Mélenchon in France to Marine Le Pen.

While the rise of the new right has dominated the bourgeois media, the reality is that the left has also made important strides. There is a rising counter trend to the right, with a growing search and support for left and socialist ideas as shown by the enthusiastic support for Corbyn and Sanders. Even on the electoral field, the left has made gains when it puts forward a radical program. The campaigns of Sanders, Corbyn and Mélenchon were all marked by a radical departure from neoliberalism, clearly putting forward genuine and significant reforms, and a bold campaign enthusing large numbers of people who in turn mobilize others to vote. The impressive results of Sanders, Corbyn, Mélenchon, Podemos and Syriza all demonstrate the opportunities for the left. Significantly all have gained their best support from young people. Mélenchon came first among young voters (18 to 24 years) at 30% and Corbyn secured 62% of the youth (18 to 24 years) votes.

The main thing that has prevented further gains by the left is the role of so-called progressives such as the capitalist Democratic Party machine, the French Socialist Party or the Blairite Labour MPs. If these forces had supported Sanders, Corbyn or Mélenchon they could have won. In general, the right appears strong when the left is weak.

Both the new right and left parties are often unstable. UKIP in Britain is a case in point, now looking for its 11<sup>th</sup> leader in its 26 years of existence. In 2017 its 145 councillors were defeated and its votes collapsed from nearly 4 million in 2015 to less than 600,000 in 2017. Of course, the ruling class and its fringe will keep funding new right parties. The new left parties often suffer from a confused program, a willingness to enter into coalitions with

capitalist parties and are liable to retreat under the pressure of government. An important factor contributing to the instability and trend toward crisis of new left parties is the very limited space for reforms or reformism within capitalism today. An extreme example was the rapid move of Syriza in Greece from promising an end austerity to introducing even more brutal austerity. Revolutionaries, who do not limit struggle to what is acceptable to capitalism, are now the best fighters for reforms.

The ruling class is losing control of the political system as seen with the Brexit vote, Renzi's defeat in Italy and the election of Trump. However, these do not demonstrate a simple reactionary mood in society as some bourgeois commentators claim. While there was a reactionary tinge to a section of Brexit voters, it was mainly a rejection of the establishment, to which Corbyn could have given a left voice. Renzi's proposed changes to the Italian constitution were anti-democratic. Sanders could have defeated Trump. We will see more instability and political and economic shocks.

While these trends are not as pronounced in Canada as in other countries, Canada is not immune. These developments will come to Canada. One of the worst mistakes we can make is to assume that things will continue as they are and that Canada is exceptional.

Howard Zinn in his *Peoples' History of the US* titles the chapter on the 1960s "Does it Explode?" Today around the world, we are seeing signs of coming explosions. While at this stage Canada lags behind the US, Greece, Britain and others, the same processes are at work. However, the organized workers' movement, in terms of union density, willingness to struggle and understanding of how to win, is weaker today than in the 1960s. Political representation and broad socialist awareness are also lower.

In the short-term, the beneficiaries of the first convulsions can be the right-wing. However, this is not inevitable. There was a powerful leftward shift in Latin America in the 2000s and the left grew first in Greece and Spain. Even if the right makes the initial gains, the weight of the working class is far greater and the social base of reaction much weaker than ever in history. The institutions of capitalist rule, the church, politicians, police, the media, etc. have been greatly undermined and discredited.

## **2016: Trump Wins – Ruling Class Losing Grip**

The ruling classes are reeling from 2016, where in several countries they were rebuffed by voters. Above all, the election of Donald Trump has the elite around the world in disarray. It is true that Trump is bad news for the working class, but he is not good news for the ruling class. His election follows Brexit, again where voters rejected the urging of almost all of the elite.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ruling class and their ideological supporters among the so-called liberals believed that things were going well, ignoring the growing anger in society. Now they are wrong-footed, trying to understand what has happened.

Our sister organization in the US, Socialist Alternative, stated in March 2017 that "Trump is the living embodiment of decaying, predatory capitalism. His victory, far from inevitable, reflected the polarization in society, the effect of right-wing populism in the absence of a real left alternative and the loss of control by the ruling class over their own political system".

There is a growing struggle between economic nationalists, embodied by Trump and his cancellation of the TPP and attacks on NAFTA, and those in favour of continued globalization. Prime Minister Trudeau is a champion of

globalization, cleverly and hypocritically, claiming trade deals break down national barriers and allow a freer movement of people, rather the reality of destroying jobs and weakening labour and environmental regulations. Trudeau's role explains his international popularity with the liberal bourgeois and media.

Trump is destabilizing world relations, threatening trade wars and provoking huge anger at home. He will intensify the already growing inter-imperialist rivalries. All this will impact Canada. The economic impacts of Trump's policies are not yet clear but there will be greater uncertainty between the US and Canada. Trump has already attacked Canada's softwood lumber exports, by imposing tariffs, and has made threatening noises about dairy and energy exports. Probably of greater impact will be the collateral damage to Canada's economy from Trump's hostility to Mexico and China.

Trump's election will have a variety of impacts on Canadian politics. Prime Minister Trudeau will use it as an excuse for his rightward shift, claiming he is being realistic. Trump's victory has boosted the right-wing's confidence. But he has also pushed people into action in the US, Canada, Québec and elsewhere as shown by the huge rallies and demonstrations the day after his inauguration. The resistance has continued, demonstrating the weakness of Trump and his ilk.

# Canadian Economy

The economy plays a decisive role in most people's lives; work is how people provide for their necessities and fend for their families. However, the economy means two very divergent things in our society. To workers it is about good paying jobs and quality public services. To the elite it means their profits. This difference, unexplained by the mainstream left, explains much political confusion. Historically, it was the unions and lefts who talked about jobs, pay and services and that these should be the priorities of economic policy. Now the left is on the defensive on the economy and does not challenge the right-wing's talk of jobs and economy. In fact, the union leaders merely echo the Liberals' platitudes about the need to create "good middle-class jobs." Economic well-being remains the dominant issue in the political outlook of working people.

Canada came out of World War II in a much-strengthened position, with a large manufacturing sector; only the US, the Soviet Union and Britain had a greater manufacturing output. During the war, Canada produced 16,000 aircraft, over 815,000 military vehicles and 9,000 ships. A quarter million women and men worked in shipyards and aircraft manufacture. Canada had the fourth largest merchant fleet in the world.

Since then Canada's role as a major manufacturer has declined, as the ravaged economies of Europe and Japan recovered and, more recently, manufacturing expanded in Asia and elsewhere. Decisions by the Canadian ruling class also resulted in a declining role for manufacturing. In 1944, manufacturing accounted for 29% of GDP, by 2014 it had declined to 10.6% of GDP. Canada has lost some 600,000 jobs in manufacturing, in part due to out-sourcing, since 2000, when there were

nearly 2.3 million workers. By 2010, manufacturing employment had fallen to just 1.7 million workers and has not improved since then.

In the post war period, Canadian workers, in the main, gained relatively high living standards both in direct wages and indirect wages through social benefits (health, pensions, welfare, etc.). Real wages doubled between 1945 and the late 1970s.

These improvements came to an end and have been partially reversed as Canada was hit by the worldwide shift to neoliberal policies over the last 40 years. While this has not been as brutal or as severe as in some other countries, Canada now has widespread homelessness, begging and food banks – all non-existent or rarities 50 years ago.

Union density peaked in 1982 at 37% of the workforce. The key battles trying to stop the shift to austerity and neoliberalism happened in the 1980s. And like the defeat of PATCO (Air traffic controllers' union) in the US and miners in Britain, the leaders of the wider union movement played a baleful role.

Brian Mulroney's Conservatives, elected in 1983, started the attacks federally and the Liberals continued these attacks in the 1990s. The struggle in British Columbia in 1983 was important in shaping the balance of forces in Canada's shift to neoliberalism. In that year, the provincial government launched neoliberal attacks on public sector services and unions and community organizations. The response was a mass movement of unionized workers and community organizations with over 40,000 workers on strike and many more about to join, mass protests with 50,000 in Vancouver and a growing movement for a general strike. Then

Jack Munro, a leader of the BC unions, cut a verbal deal with the BC Premier and called the whole thing off. The sell-out led to divisions and disillusionment.

The grip of right-wing policies increased with Liberals under Chrétien and Martin (1993-2006) and the Conservative Harper government (2006-2015). The 1995 federal budget announced \$25 billion in cuts over three years. The Chrétien government abolished the Canada Assistance Plan in 1996, cutting provincial funds for welfare and social housing. Most provinces then cut welfare payments and ceased building social housing.

In contrast to the three decades of steadily rising living standards until the 1980s, since then real wages have largely stagnated, with some small gains in the early 2000s. Living standards, which include more than wages, have stagnated or declined for most Canadians in the last 30 years. Most jobs are more stressful, with even white-collar professionals such as teachers, nurses, university teachers, civil servants, etc. facing more insecurity or increased bureaucratic pressures. In some parts of Canada, there is persistent high unemployment while in places with jobs, such as Vancouver or Toronto, housing is unaffordable as wages have not kept up with the cost of living.

Young people are worse off than their parents. The full cost of a four-year university degree is now around \$80,000, and no longer guarantees a good job. Young people are worse off than their parents, an important historic shift that will have profound impact on consciousness both for young people and their parents.

Canada is now marked by widespread poverty and growing inequality. Most people living in poverty, 70%, are employed (2015). In the mid-1990s, one in 40 workers made minimum wage, now that figure is around one in eight. Most Canadian workers live from pay cheque to pay

cheque. More than half of Canadians are living within \$200 per month of not being able to pay all their bills or meet their debt obligations, according to a recent Ipsos survey. Total hours worked have increased and in most households with two adults, both work. Between 1976 and 2008 total hours worked by couples increased from 57.6 hours to 64.8 hours. Fewer Canadians have savings and most are saving less. The ratio of net savings compared to disposable income was 18.8% in 1982. It fell to below 2% by 2003 and is still below 5%. Alongside declining savings is soaring personal debt. The family debt to income ratio in 1993 was 90%. At the start of 2017, it had soared to over 174%. In 2016, total household debt was \$1.973 trillion, including \$586 billion in consumer credit and \$1.293 trillion in mortgage debt.

The gig economy of precarious jobs, short-term contracts and zero-hour contracts, unpaid internships or residencies and temporary work has grown rapidly in Canada, as in many other countries. Nearly one in five workers (19.3%) are part-time compared to only 12.5% in 1976. Contrary to myths, most part-time workers are adults and many would prefer to work full-time. Canada has no laws requiring minimum hours – a lack that employers take advantage of. Canada's non-standard workers are some of the worst treated in the advanced capitalist world. The OECD found that the pay gap between "standard" workers – those in full-time open-ended contracts – and non-standard workers – workers in temporary work, part-time work or self-employment – in Canada is the worst in the OECD. While a non-standard worker in the OECD earns on average 75% of the hourly wage of a standard worker, they earn only 57% of a standard wage in Canada.

Governments undermined the post-war social safety net. Until 1979 unemployment benefits paid 75% of a person's previous income, now it

is only 55% of earnings, having been cut by both Liberal and Conservative governments. Not content with cutting the payment rate, eligibility has been sharply reduced. In the 1970s around 75% of people who became unemployed received unemployment benefits; by 2012 it was below 40%. Welfare rates for people unable to access unemployment benefits were cut in almost every province (Québec being the main exception) in the 1990s and most have stagnated or declined in real terms since then (Newfoundland raised single person welfare in the early 2000s).

Stressful and insecure work, poverty and inequality have a detrimental impact on people's health and well-being. There is a difference of 21 years in life expectancy between two Hamilton neighbourhoods, due to poverty. Homelessness, a growing blight across all of Canada, causes starkly early deaths. Megaphone magazine reported that in BC the average age at death of a homeless person is between 40 and 49 years old compared to the average BC life expectancy of 82 years.

The cuts to social programs were partly to pay for generous tax cuts to the rich and corporations but also to deter workers, as the alternative to a bad job was even worse welfare.

Alongside cuts to public services, federal and provincial governments have given handouts in tax cuts to the rich. The combined corporate tax rate in 1981 was 51%, now it is 26%. In the post-war period, the marginal income tax rate was over 70%, now it ranges between 39% and 50% in different provinces, with most of the cuts since 2000. If the provincial and federal governments collected the same percentage of taxes as in 2000, there would be an additional \$78.5 billion annually for public services. The tax cuts along with stagnant wages have driven the rapidly growing inequality in Canada.

Publicly owned industries in Canada have been privatized raising some \$12 billion for the federal government and \$10 billion for provincial governments. The main areas of privatization have been resource extraction, transportation and telephones. Some of the larger privatizations are: Air Canada, Petro-Canada, Canadian National Railways, Potash Corp (SK), BC Rail (BC), Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Corporation (SK), Alberta Government Telephones (AB), Nova Scotia Power (NS), Manitoba Telephone Systems (MB), BC Hydro's natural gas section (BC) and Cameco (SK).

For several decades now, Canada has seen relatively low rates of investment in machinery and equipment compared to most competitors and low investment in research and development partly as a result of the large branch plant sector (Canadian manufacturing units that are subordinated to the interests of their foreign-owned corporations). This trend undermines future employment.

## **2008 and After**

The Canadian economy was not ravaged as badly by the 2008 recession as the economies of many countries. The Canadian banking system was rocked by the crisis. Canada's five largest banks (RBC, TD Bank, Scotiabank, BMO and CIBC) were bailed out. The banks' borrowing from the US Federal Reserve peaked at \$33 billion, while loans from the Bank of Canada peaked at \$41 billion in December 2008. In addition to this, in an unusual move, the Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation bought \$69 billion of bank held mortgages from the banks – in other words a \$69 billion injection of cash. At the peak, the banks received \$114 billion. A CCPA report of 2012 pointed out that this money would have "made up 7% of the Canadian economy in 2009 and was worth \$3,400 for every man, woman and child in Canada." In early 2009 CIBC, BMO and

Scotiabank were bankrupt, only staying afloat with government support which was equal to or greater than the value of the companies. Nevertheless, while being bailed out, the five biggest Canadian banks reported over \$13 billion in profits in 2009. In 2016, they had profits of \$35.6 billion.

Unlike in other countries, the banks did not collapse. This meant that there were not the cascading crises seen in other countries of widespread bankruptcy and household foreclosures alongside massive government handouts to the financial sector with collapsing government income and further rounds of austerity, all of which deepened the Great Recession in those countries.

The 2008-9 Great Recession hit Canadian employment, exports and production. Between October 2008 and October 2009 employment dropped with a loss of 400,000 jobs and official unemployment increased from 6.3% to 8.6%. Canadian exports fell, particularly to the US, with the value of exports falling 24.6% between 2008 and 2009.

Alongside the banks' survival, the high price of oil helped the Canadian economy to bounce back relatively quickly. Oil prices did drop sharply in the second half of 2008 but recovered in 2009. The manufacturing sector, especially in Ontario and Québec, saw a continuation of the trend of job losses, while Alberta's relative weight in the Canadian economy increased.

While the Canadian economy recovered sooner than in many other economies, growth since has been sluggish. The collapse of oil prices since the summer of 2014, from \$US108 a barrel in June to below \$US50 by January 2015, and the decline in prices of some raw materials, has hit the Canadian economy. Alberta and the tar sands, once the province and sector with the strongest performance, have been hit hard.

Canadian corporations, after all the tax cuts, are sitting on large piles of cash, what the former head of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney called "dead money." In the 1990s, corporations in Canada held around \$100 billion in cash, by 2015 this had soared to \$680 billion, as companies see few profitable places to invest.

Most of domestic demand is driven by consumers, given the low levels of corporate investment. Much of the consumer spending is based on credit, debt and the high property values for those who own property. Housing in Vancouver and Toronto (home to nearly one in three Canadians) are vastly overpriced, but many other cities in Canada are showing worrying trends according to Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This bubble fuels, especially in the wider Toronto and Vancouver regions, property speculation and construction. Stats Canada reported that in 2016 two-thirds of all of Canada's GDP is based on housing spending and residential investment.

The soaring house prices in Toronto and Vancouver cascade to all sections of the housing market, whether purchase or rental, and contribute to homelessness (note that housing is a commodity rather than the provision of homes). Demographia in 2017 rated Vancouver's housing market as the third least affordable in the world, with median home prices 1.8 times higher than median household income. Toronto is also rapidly getting unaffordable. Rents in Vancouver are the highest in Canada with the average for a one-bedroom unit at \$1,900 a month with Toronto rapidly catching up at \$1,780 a month (April 2017). Finding affordable homes in these two city regions is almost impossible. Homelessness in Metro Vancouver is increasing by five people every week and there are around 70 tent cities in the region. The continual growth in

homelessness across Canada is enough to condemn the ruling class.

The Canadian economy is vulnerable to shocks. It is almost certain that at least one of the following will happen: a property boom collapse in either or both of Vancouver and Toronto, the world financial bubble bursts or a trade war erupts. Canada's housing bubble is showing increasing signs of risk: Moody's has downgraded the main Canadian banks over concerns about personal debt and the housing bubble while Home Capital, one of Canada's largest non-bank mortgage providers, nearly collapsed in spring of 2017.

Most Canadians have few savings, high personal debt and are only a couple of pay cheques away from poverty so if/when something goes wrong they would rapidly be caught in a negative spiral of job loss, house loss, crippling debts and even worse.

Canada does have an advantage of large, still unexploited, reserves of raw materials, but while extracting resources produces high profit it provides few jobs.

Behind all these facts and figures are real people and their struggles. Workers are alienated and exploited at work; they are constantly under pressure to make ends meet, pay the rent or mortgage and worry about future insecurity for themselves and their families. Canada may not be as bad as other countries but it is no paradise for the working class.

There are fundamental contradictions within capitalism. The working class cannot buy back all that they produce, as a significant portion goes to the ruling class in profits, rent and interest. In order for the system to keep going, the capitalist class must re-invest their profits into production, but they will only do this if they see opportunities for future profits.

Neoliberalism boosted profits for the ruling class by reducing the share of wealth that goes to the working class. For a time, as has happened in Canada over the last two decades, workers can keep spending by using debt, spending savings and credit cards. However, there are limits. Now the capitalist class in Canada and worldwide is less willing to invest in production, which will add to the contradictions within the system and society.

# Environment and Climate Change

Canada is an ecological disaster. Among the advanced capitalist countries only the US and Australia have larger releases of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita. In addition, Canada is a major exporter of oil, gas and coal, and Trudeau has agreed massive increases in oil and gas exports. Canada is a major contributor to global warming.

However, climate change is not the only problem. The Canadian capitalist class views the large area of the country as license to pollute. Their approach is once a lake is poisoned by mine tailings, a fishing grounds wiped out, or a forest clear-cut, just move on to the next place. There are still First Nation reserves without clean water. In 2016, 150,000 people living on reserves did not have access to safe drinking water. Major cities regularly release raw sewage into rivers or the sea. The Great Lakes remain highly polluted. The tar sands are both a global warming disaster and a local ecological disaster.

Environment Canada has pointed to high levels of air pollution. The Canadian Medical Association estimates that Canada's air pollution is responsible for 21,000 premature deaths and that the economic cost of air pollution-related illness and death in Canada tops \$8 billion a year. Most Canadians would be shocked to know that Canadian companies produced 73% more air pollution per facility than companies in the United States, according to a study in *Enviromation* in 2006.

Global warming is the most wide-reaching and urgent of ecological issues and Canada is woefully failing to take action. Some people think that a warmer planet would be beneficial, given the cold winters of most of Canada. But global warming does not result in slightly warmer winters. It results in more energy in the world's global weather patterns. More storms,

hotter summers and higher wind speeds are all features of a changing climate.

Already the arctic is melting at record rates. In November 2016 temperatures in the Arctic were 20°C above the historic norm and sea ice was the lowest extent ever recorded for that time of year. Ice is a good reflector of sunlight while open water absorbs light. More open water means more heat absorption. The warming arctic risks releasing large quantities of frozen methane, a far more powerful greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>.

Already Canada has seen increasingly unstable weather patterns, more frequent and stronger storms, and hotter summers. All this spells more summer forest fires, more winter snow and ice damage, melting ice roads and permafrost in the north, and greater risks of floods and droughts.

It is impossible to be certain that the Fort McMurray fire, the floods in the Calgary, Montreal and Gatineau areas, south western BC's real winter, more frequent floods in Winnipeg or the severe storms in Atlantic Canada are all due to climate change. However, more extreme weather events are the inevitable results of climate change. The increase in severe weather events will require more investment in firefighting equipment, flood controls, landslide and avalanche protection, and Vancouver might need snow removal equipment and winter tires for buses. These, and other costs of global warming, will be paid by the working class in higher taxes and insurance, as well as the suffering due to power cuts or even fleeing their homes. The ruling class will ensure that they do not pay the costs and will even seek to make profits. They show no sign of changing policies to stop global warming. Global warming is real and will hit Canadians hard.

# Canada: An Imperialist State

Canada is an imperialist state. For the first part of its history, the main drive was to take and control the vast land that is now included within Canada's borders. The Canadian state fought the Métis and First Nations. In recent times, it asserted its claim to the high Arctic with the forced relocation of Inuit peoples in the 1950s. Canada's claims to the water and continental shelf in the Arctic is disputed by other countries. The land controlled by the Canadian state has expanded over ten-fold from that founded in 1867 along the St Lawrence River and parts of the Atlantic coast.

While Canada is not a military superpower, the Canadian state has a powerful military, which it uses. Recently Canadian armed forces were active in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014, participated in the 2004 coup against democratically-elected Haitian president Aristide and bombed Libya. Hardly the peacekeeping that the government likes to talk about.

Canadian companies have a major international role, particularly in banking and mining. These companies receive support from Canada's Foreign Affairs Ministries and bodies like Canadian International Development Agency (merged with Foreign Affairs to become Global Affairs Canada in 2013). This organization helps mining companies work with dictators such as in Honduras, or weaken laws that may reduce mining profits such as in Ecuador.

Latin America and the Caribbean now account for over half of Canadian mining assets abroad, worth \$72.4 billion in 2014. In 2012 there were 80 Canadian owned mines operating in the region, with 48 more in stages of advanced development.

Canadian-based mining companies have a terrible environmental and human rights record internationally. Seven people were shot, although not killed, while protesting Tahoe's mining plans in Guatemala. In 2017, in Papua New Guinea 150 houses were burnt to the ground inside Barrick Gold's mine compound. According to an Osgoode Hall Law School report, between 2000 to 2015 Canadian companies in Latin America were involved in at least 30 targeted killings. Tanzanian police have killed 65 people and injured 270 during years of sporadic clashes with villagers at Barrick Gold's North Mara gold mine.

Canadian banks dominate the English-speaking Caribbean and have a major role throughout Latin America, having established themselves in the region at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the mid-1970s Canadian banks controlled at least 60% of banking in the Commonwealth Caribbean. In 2008 Canadian banks controlled the English-speaking Caribbean's three largest banks, with assets four times larger than those held by its forty-odd remaining locally-owned banks. As a result, regional banking policy is mostly determined in Canada, profits are repatriated to Canada and banks are cautious in providing funds to local producers, heightening the region's dependency on foreign imports.

Canada is a major arms manufacturer.

Trudeau's government completed the \$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia, the largest single sale in Canada's history, started by the Harper government. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute calculates that Canada is in the top 15 arms exporters. However, it is almost certainly higher as official counts only take into account complete weapon systems and are unable to track the free trade in military goods

between Canada and the US, Canada's biggest military trading partner.

Canadian arms sales to the US increased during the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, despite Canadian government claims that it opposed these conflicts. During the Vietnam War, Canadian companies enriched themselves selling chemical weapons like Agent Orange, while Canada officially stayed out of the war. Canada's military exports go to 10 countries hosting internal armed conflict, and 20 countries whose governments were cited for serious human rights violations. Canada's long history as an arms exporter shows that its reputation as a peacekeeper and defender of human rights is ill-deserved.

Such sales not only fuel conflicts, but also make well-paying Canadian military industry jobs dependent on ongoing conflicts. All the skills of Canadian arms workers could be converted to socially-useful production such as public transit equipment, dealing with global warming and alternative energy production. However, this would require that the economy be no longer run for profits, but instead for humanity's benefit.

# Regions of Canada

Canada is a very large country, 5,187 kilometres from east to west (a similar distance as Lisbon to Tehran) and 4,627 kilometres from north to south (a similar distance as from the north of Norway to Cairo), with enormous diversity. The various climates and landforms as well as the different economic and social histories and conditions produce strong regional features. It helps to have awareness of some of the differences within Canada.

## Atlantic

There is a general feeling that Atlantic Canada (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island) is becoming less important to Canada. At confederation, roughly 20% of Canada's population lived in the two Atlantic provinces of NS and NB. Now only 7% of Canada's population, 2.3 million, lives in Atlantic Canada. For years, people have moved from these provinces to the west. The 2016 census showed that New Brunswick's population has declined and the other three provinces have only very modest growth (PEI 1.9%, NL 1% and NS 0.2%), while Canada's overall population grew by 5%.

In a similar way, the economic centre of Canada has moved west. The forest industry of the region is in decline. The fish of the Grand Banks are fished out. The coal mines of Cape Breton are shut.

	Unemployment rate (%)	Employment rate (%)
NL	13.8	51.5
PEI	9.8	59.3
NS	7.7	57.3
NB	8.9	56.4
<b>Canada</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>61.4</b>

January, 2017

Unemployment, or the more accurate Employment Rate, is the worst in Canada, apart from Nunavut

For a brief period, with the discovery of oil, Newfoundland and Labrador moved to being a "have" province. In 2008, just as Ontario was hit by the recession, NL started paying into provincial equalization for the first time. Also with oil the province took decisive action to tackle poverty. Now with the sharp drop in oil prices the province is back to austerity. NL has the highest union density along with Québec. There was a wave of major protests in 2016 against the cuts imposed by the recently elected Liberal government.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) briefly held power in Nova Scotia, winning government for the first time ever in 2009. Four years later the NDP suffered a massive defeat, going from the largest party to third and dropping from 31 to seven seats. The NDP's share of the votes fell to 26.9% – its lowest in 20 years! It was the first time in 130 years that a NS government did not win a second term. Their pro big business policies such as eliminating the large corporation capital tax, giving subsidies to Irving shipyards (\$260 million forgivable loan) and \$114 million given to the Point Tupper pulp and paper mill, while increasing HST and cutting education by \$65 million, paved the way to defeat.

New Brunswick has seen declines in the fishing, logging and mining sectors. Much of NB, and to some extent NS, is dominated by the Irving Family, the seventh richest family in Canada which owns all of NB's English language newspapers.

PEI depends mainly on farming, particularly potatoes, and tourism, with much of the work being seasonal.

## Ontario

Ontario remains the driving force behind the Canadian economy with 40% of Canada's population, Toronto the headquarters of the major banks and financial institutions and thriving IT centres in the Ottawa and Waterloo regions. The traditional manufacturing of steel and auto have seen much better days. There are about 300,000 fewer people working today in Ontario's manufacturing sector than 14 years ago which can be explained by a combination of factors: automation, globalization, exchange rates, low productivity, low investment, insufficient innovation and investment in education and skilled trade training, and weak union responses to factory closures. Global automakers invested \$7 billion in Mexico in 2014 compared to \$750 million for Canada. Some experts are predicting that Ontario's auto sector will follow the path of decline of Australia and possibly by 2040 end up with no manufacturing at all.

Ontario's real GDP increased by 3% in 2016 and is expected to further increase by 2.4% in 2017. Employment growth has also been strong in Ontario with 25,400 out of 44,000 jobs nationally in October 2016. But, no surprise, most of those jobs were low paying and temporary. As in Vancouver, much of the economic activity in Toronto is generated by the housing boom. Nearly a quarter of new jobs in Toronto created over the past decade have been tied, directly and indirectly, to that boom.

Home sales grew 8.6% during 2016 while the annual prices increased by 21% to an average of about \$730,000 for all properties while detached homes rose to an average of \$1,016,145. That is just one side of the boom. The other side is the

affordability aspect, especially for new wannabe homeowners. The average age of a first-time homebuyer in the Toronto region hit a new high of 37 in 2016. And for existing mortgage holders, the picture is no less gloomy – one fifth of Toronto-area homeowners could be struggling to afford their mortgage payments if interest rates rise just two percentage points, according to a recent report from TD Bank.

For the last 14 years, the Liberals, first under McGuinty, then under Wynne, have been in government. Both premiers have generally been neoliberal fiscal conservatives while mildly socially progressive. The provincial government was on board for the bailout of the subsidiaries of the US auto manufacturers in 2008, contributing a significant chunk of the \$3.3 billion total. At the same time, the Liberals' focus on deficit reduction (this was before their Federal cousins' more relaxed policy on deficits) led them to attack public sector workers, particularly in education, through legislation controlling their bargaining rights and introduction of pay freezes. More recently, the Wynne government has proceeded with an incremental privatization of the public utility, Ontario Hydro.

Prior to the recent Liberal domination in Ontario, the 1990s were marked by governments of different stripes. First, the NDP had its one and only shot at power at the beginning of the decade, coinciding with a major downturn in the North American economy. NDP leader Rae, initially elected on a left platform, bowed to business pressures and introduced austerity legislation, ironically named "Social Contract," to reopen collective bargaining agreements with the province's public-sector unions. At the same time, the government abandoned one of its popular election planks – the promise of public auto insurance. These policies led to division within the labour movement and

disillusion/cynicism among traditional NDP voters.

It was no surprise that the 1995 election saw a strengthening of the neoliberal assault with the arrival of the right-wing and confrontational Progressive Conservative (PC) government of Mike Harris – marked by major cuts to welfare programs and attacks on the public sector. It was also marked by spirited resistance from labour and community groups – the “Days of Action” in 1995-97 and the two-week province-wide political strike of teachers in 1997.

Although mobilizing many, these protests ultimately failed to push back the neoliberal assault. After all, this was a period when labour was on the defensive worldwide.

With increasing unpopularity of the Liberals under Kathleen Wynne, it looks more likely that the PCs, rather than the NDP, will be the beneficiaries, particularly on the issue of high Hydro prices. Conscious of their low standing in the polls, with an election less than a year away the Liberals have moved to undo some of their most unpopular policies, notably introducing significant rebates for Hydro customers.

They have moved left, sensing that is where public opinion lies. After opposing a \$15 minimum wage for years they have suddenly announced that Ontario will have \$15 by January 1, 2019. This dramatic shift will boost the wages of one-quarter of the workforce, 1.6 million people, who earn less than \$15 an hour. In addition, the proposal partially tackles the disparity in wages between permanent and temporary workers, provides guaranteed emergency leave to the low paid, makes union organizing easier and contract flipping more difficult.

After years of cuts and with a boost in revenue, the Liberals now have a budget surplus. They are planning significant new investments in hospitals and major transit developments

including a possible high-speed rail link between Windsor and Toronto. They are talking of returning to building social housing after an absence of 20 years. In addition, they are contemplating the expansion of rent controls, an unthinkable move a year ago. On education, they are capping class sizes in Grades 4 to 8 at 25 students per class. Finally, the Liberals have announced that from next January anyone who is 24 or younger will get free prescriptions. It remains to be seen whether these measures will be enough to dispel the mistrust and cynicism that the Liberals have engendered over their last 15 years in government.

Like their Federal counterparts, the Ontario NDP moved to the right in recent years and paid the price electorally. In the last year or so, they have made tentative moves back to the left such as calling for returning Ontario Hydro to public ownership and supporting the \$15 minimum wage well before the Liberals discovered the value of that issue. More recently, the NDP came out in favour of a limited free prescription drug program which had the potential to be a vote winner except that the Liberals stole their thunder by announcing their own plan. Unfortunately, the NDP restricts itself to policy proclamations; it doesn't go out and campaign on them.

For the last ten years, the unions have been divided on which parties to support electorally. Some continue with traditional support for the NDP while others, including the CAW (now part of Unifor) and many public-sector unions, argue for strategic voting in order to keep out the PCs – in effect, this means voting Liberal in many cases. It will be interesting to see if this strategy stays in place for the next election in 2018.

## **Prairies**

The Prairie Provinces were dominated by agriculture, the circumstances of which fostered a strong cooperative movement both for marketing produce and for purchasing goods. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF, forerunner of the NDP) came out of this cooperative spirit.

As well as agriculture, transportation played a crucial role in Manitoba's history from the days of the fur trade to Winnipeg's role as a major rail hub. As well as agriculture and a service sector, Manitoba's economy includes some manufacturing, resource extraction (mining and oil) and a financial sector.

From 1969 to 2016, the NDP formed the Manitoba government for 32 years. It was heavily defeated in the 2016 election by the Progressive Conservatives, losing nearly half its share of votes (from 46% to 26%) and over half its seats (from 35 to 14).

Saskatchewan elected the first CCF government in 1944 and was the first province to introduce public health in 1961. The CCF/NDP dominated provincial politics from 1944 to 2007 (in power 1944-64, 1971-82 and 1991-2007). Now it has the most right-wing provincial government, the Saskatchewan Party led by Brad Wall, which won the 2007 election. This was rooted in disappointment with the NDP and the shifts in society and economy. Recently however, the NDP is recovering as Wall's government becomes more unpopular, with a budget that increased sales taxes, hitting working people, and cuts to services.

The agricultural producer cooperatives have been privatized. Although agriculture is still important, its character has changed. There are now fewer but larger farms; in just five years from 2006 to 2011 the average farm size increased by 15% in Saskatchewan and 13% in

Manitoba. Prairie farmers increasingly invest millions of dollars in machinery, such as combine harvester that costs around \$500,000. Agriculture no longer totally dominates the economy, as potash, uranium, oil and gas are now major sectors.

## **Alberta**

While Alberta shares a strong agricultural tradition with Saskatchewan and Manitoba, other factors have helped shape its different character. The southern part of the province is not suitable to farming, unless irrigated. This area is more suitable for cattle and many of the settlers came north from the US. This US influence was increased with the development of the oil industry.

Alberta has a long history of fossil fuel extraction. Coal mining started with the arrival of the railways. Fossil fuels now dominate the economy – bitumen, oil, gas and coal, which has shaped Alberta's character. In 2013, its GDP per person was \$84,390, much higher than the national average of \$53,870. It also had the lowest unemployment in Canada. The pay and jobs drew people from the rest of Canada (and the world) so its population has grown more rapidly than the rest of Canada.

The drop of over 50% in oil prices since 2014 has hit Alberta hard. Unemployment had been below 5% until the price drop; now it is around 9%. The price of other fossil fuels has also fallen, also hitting Alberta's economy.

The Progressive Conservatives (PC) ruled Alberta for 44 years, aided by oil revenues. The NDP won the 2015 election, running on a platform that was to the left compared to the party's norm. The victory was also due to deep distrust of the PC under Prentice, reaction to the PC's austerity budget and a split in the right-wing's vote between the PC and Wildrose. The

NDP promised to raise the minimum wage to \$15 by 2018, and is on course to reach this target.

The PC had an acrimonious leadership contest which Jason Kenney won. He now proposes to merge the PC and Wildrose into one “free enterprise” party, the United Conservative Party. It is likely that this will be agreed by the joint membership. However, the leadership contest for the newly unified party may open up tensions. Wildrose’s base is largely in rural Alberta while the PC are mostly urban-based, and a section of the former PC members will object to some of the more reactionary views of Wildrose members. The new party’s platform will include widespread cuts and the reversal of many of the NDP reforms. Alberta will see future political and social struggles.

## **British Columbia**

Historically BC’s economy was based on fishing, logging, mining and farming. There was a spike in manufacturing during World War II, but this declined sharply after the end of the war. Primary industries have declined in BC and now the province is dominated by construction and the service sector.

Last year the BC government claimed the best jobs growth of any region of Canada. This growth has been concentrated in the Wider Vancouver region while in most of resource-based BC jobs are disappearing. The job growth is based on the property bubble. Most of the jobs are in construction or low paid often part-time service and hospitality work. Vancouver has a median household income lower than most Canadian cities.

Demographia found that Vancouver has the third most expensive house prices in the world, with only Hong Kong and Sydney being worse. Vancouver’s median home prices are 11.8 times higher than median household income, while

housing is considered affordable at three times median income.

The ripple of soaring house prices has spread from Vancouver all the way up the Fraser valley and across to Vancouver Island. The entire region is home to 3 million people, two-thirds of BC’s population. The growth in jobs is paid for by unaffordable housing.

In Metro Vancouver in 2016, over 66,000 units of housing were empty or underutilized; this is 6.5% of the region’s housing stock. At the same time only 0.7% of purpose-built rental housing is vacant, a very low level.

BC is the centre of several major environmental battles: Kinder Morgan’s pipeline, fracking and liquefied natural gas exports, and the Site C dam.

Right-wing parties under various names – Social Credit, Conservative and Liberals, have dominated BC politics. Since 1933, the NDP/CCF has gained between 28% and 46% of the votes, apart from the 2001 disaster, when the NDP fell to 22% support and it only won two seats. This paved the way to 16 years of Liberal rule. When the right-wing parties are split, the NDP wins. The present Liberal government, so-called to gain support from a wider base than a conservative party, is one of the most conservative in Canada. BC has the second worst poverty, the worst inequality and is at the low end of the minimum wage.

The 2017 election has produced an unstable situation. The Liberals were reduced to 43 seats, one less than a majority. The NDP, as in past elections ran a cautious campaign. Their vote remained at 40%, but due to shifts in the distribution of votes won 41 seats. The NDP, with the Greens’ three seats, will form a weak government. In the election aftermath, the Liberals, desperate to keep power, suddenly proposed social policies that they opposed for

years, reflecting the left-wing pressures of society. This has revealed the utterly cynical approach they have to politics, only interested in power and lacking any principles or ideals.

The improved result for the NDP is mainly due to the hard work of unions, environmentalists and social justice activists. These movements will have to step-up pressure on the new government to deliver reforms or, like so many progressive governments, it will succumb to the pressures from big business. If the NDP had run a bold campaign, such as Corbyn or Sanders, it would now have a majority government.

BC politics is much more unstable and there will probably be another election within a year or two.

## Northern Canada

The northern territories of Yukon, Northwest Territories (NWT) and Nunavut suffer discrimination by not having full provincial status within the federal state. Territories have no sovereignty under the constitution, they only have such powers that the federal government grants to them.

This region is marked by a huge area and a small population; 114,000 people, less than 1% of Canada's population, live in an area of 3,593,589 square kilometres, 40% of Canada's total.

The main economic activity is resource extraction and the services, both public and private, to support it. Although the north produces a great deal of mineral wealth, most leaves the region. People also supplement their diet and income with subsistence hunting.

Average wages are higher than the Canadian average but the cost of food, commodities and construction materials are high in the north, especially in Nunavut which has no road connection to the rest of Canada. Yukon's

unemployment rate is 4.6%, one of the lowest in Canada, while the NWT rate of 6.8 % is near the Canadian average. In both territories, the wages and employment are dependent on resource extraction – always a precarious economic foundation. Nunavut has high unemployment at 14%.

There is widespread poverty and food insecurity in the north, especially in Nunavut with 60% of children living in food insecure households, while it is 29% in the NWT. A major factor of poverty and other social issues is a difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous population. In Yukon, a minority of the population are Indigenous (23%), NWT is nearly 50/50, while Nunavut is overwhelming Indigenous (85%).

In recent years, there have been virtually no strikes. Politically the Liberals have the three federal seats; in 2011, the NDP had one and the Tories two. The NWT and Nunavut assemblies nominally have no political parties. The Liberals are the present government in Yukon. It might appear that there is less class conflict in the north but the increasing impacts of resource extraction, growing inequality and widespread poverty will find a political voice.

When Nunavut was established in 1999, there were high hopes. The reality has been different with the Canadian government failing to deliver on promises, widespread poverty and social issues. One example is suicide – the Canadian average is 11.3 suicide deaths per 100,000 people. The north has the three highest rates, in the NWT the rate is 18.3, Yukon 19.4 and Nunavut 69.1 (2012 figures).

The impact of climate change is dramatic in Canada's north. The arctic ice is melting. The opening of the north will mean more resource extraction and marine traffic through the North-West passage. On the basis of capitalism, this will mean more pollution, damage to

ecosystems, social disruption and few economic benefits for local people.

Many of these features also apply to the area of the Canadian Shield in the northern parts of the Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec and Labrador.

# Québec

Québec is unique. Québec is a separate nation, yet part of the federal state of Canada. With an intertwined history, Québec and Canada have and continue to have a vital role in shaping particular features of each other's society.

The English, after the conquest in 1759, were too weak to force the assimilation of the Québec population and did not want them to be influenced by the ideas of the American Revolution, and so made an agreement with the Catholic Church to control the population. In return, the British allowed the use of French civil law, the Church to collect tithes, and Catholics to be part of the state administration.

The Patriot Party, founded at the end of the 18th century, defended secular and republican ideas, in conflict with the English occupiers and the Church. The Patriots' armed uprising in 1837-38 (at the same time as the rising in Upper Canada) was violently suppressed, allowing the Church complete domination of social and intellectual life, while the English controlled economic and political life.

The founding of the Canadian state in 1867 locked the Québec French-speaking population into an English dominated, minority position. Up to the 1960s, French-speaking Québec workers were told by their English-speaking bosses "to speak white," meaning English. The Francophone population, oppressed by the English-speaking elite and historically by the Catholic Church, is an oppressed national minority within Canada.

Québec has a long history of strong anti-imperialist sentiment, notably at the hanging of francophone Louis Riel in Saskatchewan in 1885, the Canadian involvement in the far-off Boer War and the riots during the 1917 conscription crisis. The Anglophone ruling class of Canada

used these events to create division in the Canadian working class by stoking anti-French-Canadian sentiment amongst the non-Francophone population.

After World War II, growing union militancy, demonstrated by the bitter 1949 Asbestos strike, merged with rising national consciousness, wanting increased civil rights and an end to the repression of francophone national rights. The struggle for better living conditions linked to the struggle against national oppression.

Until the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, Québec was the most right-wing province with the Catholic Church wielding enormous power. The Quiet Revolution, part of a worldwide period of upheaval, transformed Québec and had a major impact across Canada. The Quiet Revolution included an explosion of unionization, especially in the public sector. The Common Front movements were the most developed militant class battles in North America at the time, as the entire public sector united for better wages and fought for reforms to benefit the general population such as a significant hike in the minimum wage, paid maternity leave and universal daycare. Since the 1970s Québec has had the highest union density (along with NL), the most militant struggles and the best social services in Canada.

The Quiet Revolution resulted in the separation of Church and State, an end to paternalistic work relations and major social reforms. Québec became a modern nation and a real Francophone bourgeoisie emerged in Québec. Yet, Québec did not emerge from this era as an independent state. As a result, Québec became a nation whose self-determination is blocked by the Canadian state, but a nation with a bourgeoisie strong enough to exploit its own

people. The Quiet Revolution forged a strong nationalist movement, and produced several political organizations with differing approaches to the national question.

In the early 1960s the NDP tried to expand into Québec, supported by a section of the labour movement. However, as the NDP refused to understand and support the right to self-determination, this failed and prevented the emergence of a mass workers' party in Québec for a time. The idea of a mass workers' party re-emerged in 1969 when the major trade union federations (FTQ, CSN, CEQ) created le Front d'action politique (FRAP).

Some adventurist sovereigntists advocated violence to achieve Québec independence. The Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) bombed symbols of Anglo-Canadian colonialism and capitalism. The use of terrorist methods did not have widespread support and ultimately hampered the emergence of a sovereigntist workers' party. In 1970 the October Crisis ignited when the FLQ kidnapped and murdered a Québec cabinet member and Prime Minister Trudeau imposed the War Measures Act, suspending all rights and freedoms. The government rounded up hundreds of people claiming it was to apprehend the FLQ. In fact, it was an opportunity to suppress left-wing organisations nationwide, including FRAP, which faced sharp oppression.

The Parti Québécois (PQ), founded in 1968 as a left-wing nationalist bourgeois party, championed the cause of language rights. It was first elected to government in 1976, breaking the glass-ceiling for Francophones in Québec with the Charter of the French Language in 1977. Riding the nationalist movement, it initiated the 1980 independence referendum, which was defeated, with only 40% support. After their 1982 austerity budget, they were ousted from office.

During the 1970s, the idea of a creating a sovereigntist workers' party endured in the labour movement, but union leaders increasingly influenced by the PQ, consciously sabotaged all rank-and-file initiatives to do so.

The PQ returned to office in 1994 and called a second referendum in 1995, which was narrowly defeated with 49.42% support. The sovereignty vote won in Francophone rural and urban areas, significantly in East and suburban Montreal, the heart of the Francophone working class. It was defeated in regions with higher Anglophone populations, both urban and rural, or greater numbers of federal employees. Due to the PQ's ill-defined alternative to a federal Canada, and the federal government's anti-sovereigntist fear-mongering the federalists won a narrow victory. The result reflected linguistic polarization, with non-Francophones consistently voting against sovereignty, but also class divisions. Large corporations and banks supported federalism as did wealthier Quebecers irrespective of linguistic identity.

From the 1980s, the PQ has shifted to a party that serves the interests of the economic elite. It has put a brake on the union movement, attacked the public sector and supported free trade.

With neoliberal ideas increasingly dominant in the PQ, Québec solidaire (QS), a left sovereigntist party was founded in 2006. It describes itself as a party of the streets and the ballot box. It currently has three deputies, all elected in Montreal.

As the PQ's shifted right, the Québec Liberals' confidence in taking on workers grew. In 2012 the Liberals announced an increase in university tuition fees, provoking a massive movement that lasted several months, went beyond students, and mobilized 500,000 people on the streets of Montreal in the face of violent police repression. The Maple Spring, Printemps érable,

was partly inspired by the Arab Spring, Printemps arabe. It influenced the political development of many young Quebecers. The student movement triggered a provincial election and, despite the movement's refusal to take an official position on the election, the Liberals lost to the PQ.

While in power from 2012 to 2014, the PQ passed budgets as austere as those of the recent and current Liberal governments. In 2013 the PQ proposed a Québec Charter of Values, which was a thinly veiled attack on non-Christians and aimed to exploit and increase hostility to Muslims and recent immigrants. It was PQ's attempt to pull voters away from the right-wing nationalist party Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) founded in 2011. However, the proposed Charter was very controversial and contributed to the PQ's defeat in the 2014 elections.

After the 2014 defeat, the PQ elected as leader billionaire, anti-union Pierre-Karl Péladeau. Following his unexpected resignation, Jean-François Lisée, who has made strong anti-Muslim statements, was elected leader in October 2016. If the PQ again resorts to xenophobia during the election campaign, it is possible that the Liberals will win the 2018 elections. While continuing its rightward and chauvinist policies, the PQ has adopted a veneer of "progressive" policies.

On returning to power in spring 2014, the Liberals launched deep austerity, cutting over \$4 billion from social services, seeking to catch up with the neoliberal attacks in the rest of Canada. These brutal cuts, together with Liberal attacks on public and para-public sector workers, led to the biggest struggles since the Maple Spring both quantitatively and qualitatively. The unions' strong defence of quality public services and the solidarity networks rallied the majority of Quebecers behind the workers; 51% of the population

supported the workers, while only 21% supported the government. Following several protests of 50,000 to 150,000 demanding an end to cuts, the cross-union Common Front coalition of five national union federations organized a national general strike of its 500,000 members on December 9, 2015!

It was the biggest strike in Québec in terms of numbers, but not in terms of radicalism. The strike ended with the Liberals dropping most of the attacks, showing that struggle is worthwhile. Yet, the Common Front did not press its historic potential power to halt the attacks on public services or win a pay rise for public and para-public sector workers. Rather than stepping up militant actions to win, the leadership of the Common Front instead sought to avoid back-to-work legislation and triumphantly announced its tepid deal.

Confronted with this wasted opportunity, dozens of unions initially refused to ratify the main salary agreement. The FSSS (Health and Social Services Federation) decided to go it alone, winning some additional gains. This episode radicalized many union members. Issues such as civil disobedience and independent political action by unions are once again being discussed.

In 2017, the government announced a surplus of \$2.7 billion, 93% of which will go towards paying back Québec's debt. Looking to the 2018 election, the Liberals have promised some small tax cuts and meagre investments in health, education and transportation.

Employment has increased since 2011, with official unemployment at 6.2%, the lowest since 1976. But the job growth, as in many countries, is based on the shift from union jobs to precarious McJobs. Future growth depends on government spending (both Québec and Canada) and the US economy. The Québec Liberals are lifting the ban on fracking in place

since 2006, claiming it will “help” the economy. This will provide few jobs while damaging the environment.

Alternative Socialiste (AS) initiated the campaign for a \$15 minimum wage, 15plus.org, in 2015. Since then the demand has won support from QS, union federations (FTQ and CSN) have started their own campaigns, some SQUEES (Québec Service Employees Union) Locals have won \$15 an hour and a petition has over 22,000 signatures, mostly gathered by Old Port of Montreal strikers. The government has announced that the minimum wage will increase to \$12.45 by 2020. Unions and social justice movements rightly denounced this insufficient increase and are continuing the campaign.

The PQ’s Charter of Values has helped fuel xenophobia and lent legitimacy to far-right views, in particular against people considered to be “Arabs” or “Muslims.” This and trashy right-wing radio stations contributed to the mindset of the lone far-right terrorist, who killed six people and injured 19 others in a mosque on January 29, 2017. Thousands of people mobilized to denounce the attack. The issue of racism and immigration has gained attention with the arrival of refugees from Syria and the US. The far-right, such as *La Meute* and the Soldiers of Odin, have used this to assert themselves, gaining a public face that is generally unchallenged by the media, something which has not been the case in decades.

Corruption scandals have caught politicians and the Charbonneau Inquiry revealed its widespread tentacles. Bombardier’s decision to give senior management huge pay increases, after the company laid off thousands of workers and took \$1.7 billion in public money, unleashed a tidal wave of anger, with 90% of people opposed to the increases.

However, most of the labour movement, as in the rest of Canada, has not mobilized mass union-led resistance to racist attacks, the far-right and corruption. Only Montreal City’s blue-collar union is campaigning against corruption, including opposing out-sourcing or privatization.

The 2012 Maple Spring, the 2015 public sector general strike and weeklong strike of 175,000 construction workers in May 2017 all demonstrate Québec’s continuing militancy. However, the mass movements have not stopped the government’s neoliberal program. Nor have labour and social movements provided leadership in elections. The leaders of the 2012 student movement refused to take a position on the 2012 election. The leadership of the union federations gloss over their failure to decisively fight back, instead recommending their members to “vote strategically” in order to elect the “lesser evil” in provincial and federal elections. This failure has emboldened the government to attack working people.

The Québec movement, with its militancy, needs to address how to win and bring together the many different struggles. A democratic organization that campaigns year-round, is a forum for democratic debate and challenges pro-capitalist parties at the polls would dramatically increase the strength of Québec’s movements. However, a lack of clarity from the leadership of the unions and QS is a significant obstacle to building such a formation.

Strategic voting against the Liberals is now the cornerstone of the Parti Québécois’s plan. They are seeking to ally with Québec solidaire and Option Nationale, a small 2013 sovereigntist center-left split from the PQ, as a stepping-stone to power. If QS rejects this strategy, the PQ will accuse QS of splitting the sovereigntist vote and causing the PQ’s electoral failures.

QS congresses have thrice rejected any kind of pact with the PQ. The QS's congress in May 2017 voted by over 60% against a pact with the PQ, while supporting unifying with Option Nationale. Yet many in QS's leadership continue their interest in an electoral alliance, rather than examine why they have only three elected deputies and are seen as mainly a party of Montreal's students and poor. Its low level of involvement in everyday struggles remains a weakness.

Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois (GND), 27 years old, joined QS in 2017, bringing charisma, media profile, radical discourse and fame as the student spokesperson during the 2012 student strike. GND has since been elected to the National Assembly and one of QS spokespersons. In the weeks after he joined, around 7,000 people joined QS taking the membership to nearly 16,000. However, it has not yet broken out of its white-collar, intellectual base.

GND relies mainly on the mass media, rather than building grassroots community engagement. Although he speaks of a clean break with establishment capitalist parties, he argued at the QS congress to remain open to an electoral pact with the PQ – a party that stokes xenophobia and attacks workers. A “convergence of sovereigntist forces” based on nationalist and capitalist policies, would not win major support for QS. At present support for sovereignty has declined to around 30% amongst Francophones in Québec. What is needed are clear class policies or QS risks becoming the tail of the PQ dog.

Québec's militant traditions and its strong sovereigntist wing has, in part, restrained the Canadian capitalists' neoliberal onslaught. The Canadian ruling class's narrow victory in the 1995 referendum has left it fearful that if they push too far, too fast on austerity, that support

for sovereignty could reignite in Québec and Quebecers could decide to leave Canada. Without Québec, Canada would not even be a secondary world power, if it even continued to exist.

Today, left-wing nationalism is the dominant political trend amongst the working class. Most union leaders, like most around the world, are unwilling to lead militant struggles. This results in them continuing to support the PQ, watering down demands and holding back the labour movement. Yet the PQ looks after the interests of big banks and corporations. If Québec won independence under the pro-business PQ, corporate interests would dominate.

For Québec workers, the struggle for independence is not to be dominated by “homegrown” bosses, but to introduce socialist policies and end the rule of bosses wherever they live. To do this the working class needs its own class-based party. Left-wing non-class nationalism of the 1970s is the principal obstacle to building a political movement that fights for the working class, as it leads to class collaboration in the name of national liberation. The fight against class oppression should not be sidelined in the interest of forming a larger coalition against national oppression.

The PQ's rightward shift has opened a huge space for Québec solidaire, potentially winning significant support from workers that previously backed the PQ. QS should grasp this opportunity rather than join in alliance with the PQ. This requires stepping up campaigns between elections and rallying workers, feminists and youth into a unified left-wing party. QS needs to learn from Corbyn and Mélenchon and launch a radical class-based campaign.

Breaking the working class from the PQ and whether QS can become the main party of workers are crucial issues for the future.

Alternative Socialiste will be part of these struggles and work to build a socialist alternative to the constant crises created by capitalism.

# Areas of Struggle

There are many areas of potential struggle in Canada. Our perspectives seek to identify which are the most powerful and significant. Given the importance of the working class to social change and the continued relative strength of the unions – this is a key area for Marxists.

Although at present the most combative and organized sections are the struggles on the environment and of Indigenous peoples.

This document deals with areas of struggle separately. The reality is that there are increasing connections, a trend we welcome and will seek to strengthen, pointing to the central role of capitalism.

## Labour

The Canadian working class is broadly undefeated, not suffering major setbacks as has happened in the US or Britain. However, unions have been weakened in several ways. Unions have fewer activists, rely more on staff, in part due to adopting a servicing rather than an organizing model. A series of changes to Labour Codes and Standards have shifted power towards the employers in the ongoing workplace class struggle. Union membership has dropped from a high point of 37% in 1982 to 31.8% in 2015.

Most of the decline in density has been in the private sector, while the public sector has maintained around 75% unionization. This is big shift from 50 years ago when most union members were in the private sector. The change is partly due to the changing nature of the private sector with a sharp decline in jobs in manufacturing and growth in service, but also the failure of unions to organize these growing sectors.

The weakening of the unions is shown clearly in the level of strikes. In the 1970s there were on average around 900 strikes or lockouts each year. By the year 2000, the figure was around 300 annually and in recent years around 150 strikes and lockouts a year, a level not seen since the 1940s.

The majority of union leaders in Canada share the same outlook as their colleagues in the US and most European countries. They have no concept of militant struggle; instead, they accept that this is “the age of falling expectations,” of negotiated retreat and concessions. Two-tier contracts are increasing, with the more recently hired workers having poorer wages and conditions – a recipe for divisions in the workforce. The 2016 acceptance of two-tier pensions for autoworkers by Unifor is a stark example. Some unions, notably the Teachers in BC and Ontario, have relied on the courts. The recent court victory by the BC Teachers’ Federation over class size and composition should not blind the movement to the dangers and weaknesses of this strategy.

In spite of the weaknesses, the unions still have immense power in society with over 4.8 million members. They represent a crucial step in forming class consciousness with workers coming together as workers with common interests.

The picture in Québec is somewhat different with higher levels of activism; there were 500,000 people on strike on December 9, 2015. However, most union leaders are largely cut from the same cloth as in the rest of Canada.

A significant change, with far-reaching implications, is that women workers, reflecting their increased participation in the workforce,

are now 52% of union members, compared to around 10% in the late 1970s.

There are signs that sections of workers are more determined than the union leaders. The Nova Scotia teachers, over a six-month dispute, rejected the union leadership's recommendation three times to accept the provincial government's offer. They conducted a work to rule, voted 96% in favour of striking with almost all teachers voting, and held the first strike in 122 years for one day in February this year. The government imposed the contract by legislation a few days after.

Unifor members were reluctant to accept the recently negotiated contract with only 64.7% at GM and 58% at Ford voting to accept.

There are signs of increased militancy among the "precariat" such as food service workers, university teaching assistants, etc. The recent victories at York and Simon Fraser universities are significant. At SFU, the catering contract was flipped to Sodexo who initially made no guarantees that the new contracts would have the same standards as the old. Workers in UNITE HERE organized, lobbied and won a strike ballot. The University and Sodexo backed down. Left Alternative and Socialist Alternative actively helped to raise awareness among students and win solidarity.

The various campaigns for a \$15 minimum wage have made a real difference. They gained widespread public support and have forced politicians to move. The Ontario Liberals announced that the minimum wage will go from the present \$11.40 to \$14 on January 1, 2018, and \$15 by January 1, 2019. The likely new coalition government in BC of NDP and Greens have also committed to raise the minimum wage to \$15, albeit over several years. These come along with the Alberta NDP government's plan to have a \$15 minimum wage by October 2018.

Winning \$15 in the three provinces, which have 63% of Canada's population, will increase the pressure for the other provinces to raise the minimum wage. This is an important victory for working class people. Although the increase was not won through mass strikes, it does indicate the mood in society for action to tackle poverty and inequality.

Socialist Alternative and the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) played a role in this. The campaign started with the victory in Seattle spearheaded by Socialist Alternative's councillor Kshama Sawant. In BC, SA helped to initiate the campaign led by the BC Federation of Labour, and have been core activists ever since. In Québec, Alternative Socialiste launched 15+ before the unions and has since worked with Québec Solidaire and unions on this.

The campaign has mainly focused on public awareness, petitioning, etc. rather than militant on-the-job action, although there have been a few strikes. The food service workers at York University, organized in UNITE HERE Local 75, took on Aramark including an all-out strike to win \$15 and dental coverage. There are now struggles at other Toronto universities. Less successful was the long strike by the Old Port workers in Montreal. Even with Québec's traditions, the broader union movement did not give them the support needed for victory.

A large section of the union leadership was charmed by Trudeau's pre-election talk about a "fair and balanced approach to organized labour." They hope to win better conditions for their members via the Liberals rather than through struggle. The unions may well regret falling for the smiling sunny words – history shows the Liberals govern for the rich.

The Liberals refuse to introduce a federal \$15 minimum wage that would benefit nearly a million workers and set a benchmark for the provinces. They blocked legislation that exists in

BC and Québec, which would ban the use of replacement workers (scabs) during a dispute.

Trudeau wrote an open letter to public servants contrasting his view to that of Harper's, saying that, "Where he sees an adversary, I see a partner." Yet for over a year of negotiations with the main federal employees' union, PSAC, the Liberals stuck to the Tories' proposals to weaken sick leave. Recently, a deal has been reached which defers the issue to a task force.

The postal workers are discovering the inadequacy of reviews and task forces. The Liberals promised that they would "save home delivery" and review the Harper attacks on Canada Post. They did not remove the Harper appointed CEO, Chopra. They did not support the postal union in the 2016 negotiations. The review panel that Trudeau appointed backed all of Chopra's attacks on Canada Post, including a likely move to two-tier pensions and partial privatization. The Liberal-dominated House of Commons Committee recommended restoration of home delivery to only 350,000 out of the 830,000 households that lost that service since 2014. Both the review panel and parliamentary committee opposed the idea of re-establishing post office banking.

It is a real possibility that the Liberals will launch the attack on postal workers that Harper prepared. The union, CUPW, has a left leadership; this could be an important struggle for Canadian workers.

The action of the young workers, who turned their backs on Trudeau at the CLC conference, at the peak of Trudeau's honeymoon, is also indicative that young worker activists are less intimidated than their older counterparts.

The strike by 1,500 container port truck drivers in Vancouver in 2014 demonstrated the power of the working class. The strike was unusual as the majority of the drivers, about 1,200, are not

in a union, as they are self-employed and own their own rigs. The strikers were threatened with back-to-work legislation, as they were on the verge of closing the entire port, Canada's largest. They stood firm and the government blinked first, reaching an agreement.

There are signs that some unions are rediscovering their role in social movements, with growing debates in the unions about the environment. Sections of the union movement are supporting non-union workers.

It is true that strikes are at a low level and consciousness has been thrown back but the potential remains and reality will drive workers to struggle. If you are told every day by the priest or the media that your belly is full but everyday you are hungry and your belly is empty, eventually you will believe your belly.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

The legacy of colonialism affects every aspect of the lives of Indigenous people in Canada. Colonialism was part of the rise to power of the bourgeoisie in Europe, who sought new sources of raw materials and new markets. Colonizing the Americas was crucial to capitalism's primitive accumulation, gaining wealth through plunder and privatization. The commons of Europe were transformed to private property at the same time as the gold and silver, land and furs of the Americas were robbed. Colonialism in Canada was a deliberate attempt to undermine, starve and defeat a people to steal their land. Thomas King explained capitalism's view that "Land is primarily a commodity, something that has value for what you can take from it or what you can get for it."

The fundamental root of conflict between Indigenous peoples and colonialism was and is the concept of private ownership of resources and land. The Indigenous people had a concept

of shared stewardship. Real reconciliation has to include ending the private ownership of land.

Treaties were signed with some First Nations but governments failed to live up to their obligations under these treaties. At very young ages, children were taken from their families and communities and placed in residential schools, with the aim to “kill the Indian in the child.” They were forbidden to speak their language, suffered neglect, abuse and deprivation as well as sub-standard education. The result was a traumatized people, disconnected from their families, communities and culture. However, they were not defeated, resistance never ceased.

Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples in Canada (consisting of Inuit, Métis and First Nations) are the most oppressed people in Canada. Numbering 1.4 million people, Indigenous people represent 4.3% of the total Canadian population. Aboriginal people in Canada are the poorest of all minority groups. They experience food insecurity, particularly in the northern regions, inadequate and crowded housing conditions, and lack clean drinking water in many communities, with over 100 communities having water advisories in late 2016. Spending on education for on-reserve Indigenous children is around 30% less than for children in the systems run by the provinces. Removing First Nations children from their families and communities continues today. Residential schools may be closed and the Sixties Scoop is over, but 15,000 Indigenous children are in foster care, nearly half of all in foster care. Indigenous people face far higher rates of incarceration than non-Indigenous peoples; although 4.3% of the population they are 25% of male prisoners and over 33% of the women prisoners.

In spite of the constant efforts of the Canadian state at “cultural genocide” or “genocide,”

Indigenous peoples have survived. In recent decades, resistance and confidence have increased. There is a cultural revival as people rediscover their cultural traditions, music and language and create new art forms. Struggles over land, the environment, residential schools, missing and murdered women, and conditions on reserves are all increasing.

The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing and most youthful section of society. Population increased by over 20% between 2006 and 2011 and the median age is 28 years, 13 years younger than the non-Aboriginal population.

One of the key strengths the Indigenous peoples have is, ironically, the land they hold by treaty, legislation or court decisions. Unlike others in society, they have a separate space on which to organize. Lenin pointed to four key features of a nation: a common language, territory, economic life, and culture. Some nations do not have all of these but the First Nations, Métis and Inuit have elements of all. The power of controlling land explains the drive by all Canadian governments to break up the reserves into privately-owned individual plots of land.

The majority of Indigenous people, 56%, live in urban areas. Off-reserve Indigenous peoples constitute the fastest growing segment of Canadian society. The three largest concentrations of urban Indigenous people are in Winnipeg, 78,000, Edmonton, 62,000 and Vancouver, 52,000. While off-reserve Indigenous people have access to clean water, better-funded education and are more likely to have a job, they still face systematic discrimination of low wages, police harassment and racism. Child poverty is lower off-reserve, 41% compared to 60% on-reserve, but this is still far worse than the scandalously high rate of 18% for all Canadian children.

There are divisions within and between Indigenous communities, with some leaders

willing to cut deals with the capitalist state and corporations. Harper notably tried to exploit this, using Senator Brazeau (former leader of Congress of Aboriginal Peoples), Shawn Atleo (former head of Assembly of First Nations) and Leona Aglukkaq (former Tory Cabinet member).

The emergence of Idle No More in late 2012 showed a growing determination to resist the Canadian state. It also has increased the pressures on the more compliant leaders. While it may not be in the news at present, the mole of Indigenous struggle is burrowing away and at some stage will erupt again. Arthur Manuel explained that the key to successful struggles is “mass mobilization of the people rather than on leaders pleading their case in committee rooms or behind closed doors with government officials.” This approach is very much the method of Idle No More.

Indigenous peoples forced the Canadian government to hold The Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, there were many flaws including the truth-telling being one-sided with no process for hearing the truth of what the perpetrators did and the settlement agreement process is described as “a shameful piece of colonialism.” Most of its 94 recommendations have not been enacted. Reconciliation promotes the idea that colonial violence is over and that society can move forward together. This belies the reality of the lives of many Indigenous people and the continuing colonial reality. The state-run child welfare system that continues to put kids in the care of perpetrators of violence is arguably as destructive to Indigenous children as were the residential schools.

The Liberals, superficially, have taken a different approach than Harper and previous Liberal governments including establishing a National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women. However, with good

grounds, there is growing concerns that this Inquiry will not make a fundamental difference to the lives of Indigenous women and girls and will repeat many of the failures of previous Inquiries and Commissions.

The non-Indigenous people of Canada have an important role to fight against the racist treatment of Indigenous peoples. Encouragingly there are growing numbers in these struggles such as demanding the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women inquiry, or to gain recognition of the on-going, deep trauma of Residential Schools. To win significant changes will need the solidarity of both groups of people.

Indigenous people are resisting resource extraction for profit at the expense of all else. Idle No More and other movements are mobilizing young people and elders who are prepared to stand up to colonialism and capitalism.

Colonialism and capitalist exploitation continue unabated with people living on small reserves of land, a fraction of their traditional territories, or in cities facing poverty and racism.

Socialist Alternative will continue to learn more and work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. We point out that capitalism will not willingly relinquish private control of land and resources, which is vital to any true reconciliation and ending colonialism. We recognize the right of all nations within the existing state of Canada to self-determination. At the same time, we support a democratic and voluntary socialist association of all the nations within what is currently the present territory of Canada.

## **Environment**

As the Canadian ruling class continues to treat the environment as disposable and shows no sign of seriously transitioning to clean energy,

there are countless environmental struggles in Canada. Many are local and gain little or no wider publicity or solidarity. There are also headline struggles such as against pipelines and major mining proposals.

Crucially within the environmental struggles the debates are growing about strategy and program. Naomi Klein in *This Changes Everything* rightly points to the failures of Big Green, the dominant NGOs, which continue their strategy of working within capitalism and with the mainstream political parties and even with big business, largely ignoring the social aspects, such as employment, discrimination, etc. of environmental struggles.

Encouragingly, growing sections of environmentalists actively make links between jobs, the treatment of Indigenous peoples and the environment. These activists are less likely to look to big business, consumer choices or mainstream political parties to make the necessary fundamental changes and instead realize that building movements is what matters. However, there is still a lot of naivety and even mystic ideas in the struggles. In many environmental struggles, the courts have been used as an avenue of resistance. While the courts may occasionally give a favourable ruling, they cannot be relied on to defend the environment over the demands of profits. Both the BC Supreme Court and the Federal Appeal Court rejected the case of the Prophet River and West Moberly First Nations against Site C dam. More crucially the courts cannot impose the just transition to a society that puts the needs of workers and the environment before the greed for profit – that takes a mass movement. To quote Arthur Manuel, “It will not be lawyers, Indigenous or otherwise, who will bring the fundamental changes we need. That power ... rests with the people themselves”. There is a

growing awareness in the workers’ moment of the importance of the environment.

The Indigenous peoples at Standing Rock took inspiration from Canadian struggles. In turn, Standing Rock will reinforce struggles in Canada.

Across Canada many struggles on the environment are led by Indigenous peoples. The federal government predicts that more than 600 major resource development projects will get underway across Canada over the next decade. The vast majority of these projects will affect lands and waters that are vital to the cultures and economies of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Canadian and international law requires protection for Indigenous peoples’ relationships with their traditional territories, including careful, unbiased consideration of the potential impacts of all decisions and a meaningful role for Indigenous peoples in the decision process. Projects should take place only with the free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous peoples who will be affected.

However, the reality is very different. Over the last three decades, Alberta has licensed more than 2,600 oil and gas wells on the traditional territory of the Lubicon Cree, more than five wells for every Lubicon person. This is territory that the Lubicon have relied on to hunt, fish and trap, which is now crisscrossed by more than 2,400 km of oil and gas pipelines. In 2011, one of the largest oil spills in Alberta history sent 28,000 barrels of crude oil into wetlands near the Lubicon community of Little Buffalo.

Indigenous people, alongside many non-Indigenous people, had to fight for years to stop Enbridge’s pipeline to the BC coast. The Grassy Narrows First Nation in Ontario are still fighting after decades to have the mercury poisoning removed from their river. They have

also fought for years against clear-cut logging of their area. The Inuit of Clyde River have been fighting to stop seismic testing for oil as it endangers marine mammals. The resistance of the Mi'kmaq First Nations won at least a temporary moratorium on fracking in New Brunswick.

In many of the environmental struggles being waged from sea to sea to sea, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples stand together.

The biggest battles at present are in western Canada, especially BC, over pipelines, the tar sands, fracking and Site C. The Trudeau government will seek to keep struggles separated and isolated in different regions. Part of successful struggles will be to build wider links and solidarity.

In these struggles, we consistently emphasize the importance of both good jobs and the environment and reject the capitalists' claim that we have to choose between them. Our most important role in all these struggles is to "bring to the fore the property question," pointing out that the private ownership of land, resources and capital stand in the way of policies that will provide both good jobs and a healthy planet.

## **Immigration and Racism**

The Indigenous peoples continue to face the worst discrimination and racism. This section deals with racism faced by non-Indigenous peoples.

The Canadian elite claim that this is a multicultural society. While the level of police brutality and state repression is not as harsh as African-Americans and Mexicans face in the US, Canada is not free of discrimination and prejudice. Recent immigrants, those who have lived in Canada less than 10 years, face barriers to gaining well-paid jobs including language, unrecognized educational qualifications and

out-right discrimination. Unemployment is higher among recent immigrants and they suffer a poverty level roughly double, around 20%, the overall Canadian population.

Canada, as a capitalist state, has institutionalized racism and state repression, as divisions within society help the ruling class's rule. Politicians may make speeches about being a "welcoming country" and Canadians "truly believe diversity is a source of strength," but some also play up prejudice. Almost all, by their actions, breed insecurity and anxiety that feeds racism and prejudice.

The history of Canada, since the start of European colonization, is of waves of immigrants arriving. Most were fleeing hunger, starvation, dispossession or persecution. Each new wave faced institutionalized discrimination, whether they were Irish, Chinese, Japanese, South-Asian, Italian, African-American or Jewish. Until after World War II, most immigrants faced a hard life with many living in squalid conditions in cities or doing hard physical labour living on the land.

In recent decades, immigration from Europe has declined with most immigrants coming from Asia and to a lesser extent Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean and South America. All continue to face varying degrees of racism. Throughout Canada's history immigration has been controlled based on race (Chinese head tax) and religion (Jews fleeing the Nazis were refused entry), politics (socialists, union activists and communists were barred or deported), economics and other forms of discrimination (until 1976 gays and lesbians were an "inadmissible class" of immigrants).

Economic interests dominate Canada's immigration rules, as low-paid, low-skilled workers are only allowed temporary residency to be exploited, while permanent residency is increasingly restricted to high skilled workers or

the rich. Temporary foreign workers commonly come from Latin America and Asia with their permission to be in Canada usually tied to them working for a specified employer. There are widespread labour abuses and cases of withholding of pay, and non-payment of wages. Few ever gain permanent residency. Most work in low-paid jobs in the fast food, farming, meat and fish packing and care-giving. There is an element of systemic racism in their circumstances and labour conditions, such as minimum wage regulations not covering farm workers or the lack of rights for live-in nannies. Canada's Auditor General released a damning report in 2017 pointing to abuses and the lack of government oversight of employers using temporary foreign workers.

Although most Canadians claim they are not racists, a large number of visible minorities report racist abuse. While this abuse most likely comes from only a minority of the population, it is real. The targets of racism vary in Canada, apart from the universal racism faced by Indigenous peoples. In Vancouver, Chinese people face widespread prejudice. In Ontario, people of African descent face more discrimination.

Most recent immigrants live in the large cities, while much of the population of rural and smaller town Canada are descendents of previous waves of immigrants. It is usually areas with a lower proportion of immigrants where racism is worse. Union density is lower among recent immigrants than the Canadian born workforce. Black women have a higher union density than the Canadian average and South Asian men are near the average. Recent Chinese immigrants have significantly lower union density. This is in part due to the areas of work immigrants are in. However, the unions need to do more on this as an important part of rebuilding strong unions.

Attacks on Muslims are the most widespread and dangerous expressions of discrimination. While there is widespread and genuine hostility to racism and discrimination, this is not enough to counter it. Socialists need to actively oppose racism and discrimination and put forward a class program to tackle poverty and the lack of homes, good jobs and services, rather than just a moralistic or physical opposition.

Immigrants and racial minorities are workers, women, young people and care about the environment. They participate in rallies and demonstrations on many issues.

## **Women**

Across the world, there is a growing new wave of feminism which rejects the corporate and individualistic feminism which dominated much of the mainstream in recent years. This is shown by recent mass movements in Ireland, Poland and Argentina. There is widespread outrage at the refusal of institutions, such as universities, to act on sexual harassment and abuse. The election of Trump will undoubtedly fuel these growing movements. At this stage, there are signs of this growing mood in Canada. Slut walks started in Toronto. There have been demonstrations against harassment and rape across Canada and Québec. However, so far the movement is not yet at the level of mass strikes or protests of other countries.

Although Trudeau made much of a gender-balanced cabinet, the reality is not so impressive. Oxfam Canada criticized Trudeau for not turning his words into action. The 2017 Budget had some modest changes, but in typical Liberal manner, nothing fundamental on the pay gap, such as legislation on pay equity, raising the minimum wage or a publicly funded affordable childcare program. These are policies that would make a real difference.

Women are now around half the workforce but their annual earnings averaged 66.7 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2011. Even among full-time workers, women workers in Canada had average earnings of 74 cents for every dollar men earned in 2014. There is widespread institutional sexism and harassment such as in the courts and the RCMP.

Universities in Canada have a dismal record in dealing with abuse. Women are more likely to suffer poverty than men. For some groups of women poverty is very high, such as women with disabilities, 33%, visible minority women, 28%, and single mothers, 21%. Cuts to public services and the lack of affordable childcare hit women more than men.

The women's movement in Canada, as in much of the world, is fragmented. This will not be overcome by discussions between the fragments, rather by new forces moving into action. There are significant divides within the US women's movement. Before Trump's election, there had been a growth of protest against attacks on reproductive rights and sexism, but the divides remained. Now with millions of women moving into action against Trump attacks, the divides are pushed back. More importantly the different trends of analysis and program for the way ahead will be tested and the more successful will gain support. Marxist Feminists will participate in this process seeking to clarify ideas and recruit women to the fight to end capitalism and patriarchy. A similar process will apply in other areas of struggle as well.

Women will move into action not only on gender-based issues but also on broad economic, social and environmental issues. Idle No More was initiated by four Indigenous women. A key fact is that women workers now have a higher rate of union membership than

men. This will have profound impacts on both unions and women's struggles.

## Young People

Young people across the more advanced capitalist countries face the reality of worse living standards than their parents. Alongside this, there are growing signs of struggle such as the Québec Maple Spring, Spanish student strike and the school walkouts in the US. Also left candidates such as Corbyn, Sanders and Mélenchon gained widespread support among young people – rebutting the slur that they are non-political and apathetic. Canadian youth face this same reality, although the struggles, apart from Québec, are less developed – so far.

Good secure jobs are hard to find; as Liberal Finance Minister, Bill Morneau, said about the gig economy, “get used to it.” Officially, youth unemployment is 13.3% (an underestimate), double the Canadian average. Young people now pay a fortune to get a degree that does not get them a job. The amount owed to the Canada Student Loan Program is over \$19 billion and is increasing by nearly \$1 million per day.

Housing, especially in the wider Toronto and Vancouver regions, is unaffordable.

Some commentators have presented the poorer circumstances for young people compared to their parents as a generational conflict. This masks the real culprit of young people's situation. The ruling class has waged a war to drive down wages and reduce public spending on services, which have both hit young people hard with soaring university costs and lower paying jobs. Many of the older generation have also been hit by these same processes, but not as widespread.

As part of the growing polarization of society, and the continuing more privileged background of university students, alt-right groups have appeared at some universities. We need to have

a sense of proportion about these tiny forces. Much more widespread is a progressive outlook, although at this stage the majority are not active in left-wing or socialist organizations. Young people on many social issues are the most radical section of society, such as on LGBTQ+ and women's rights, immigration and refugees, the environment and climate change, and Indigenous rights.

Apart from Québec, the student movement is relatively weak and unwilling to take to militant struggles. Many students, because school costs so much and there are so few good jobs at the end, are focused on getting good grades, etc. They are not active in politics and campaigns as they still see the solutions in the neoliberal individual framework rather than rooted in society. Young people are under-represented in unions, in part due to the nature of the jobs they are getting but also a failure of unions to explain their importance and to mobilize.

There is however a growing number of young activists, compared to two decades ago when neoliberalism was triumphant. While specific struggles around issues that impact young people and students may not be high, young people are to the front on a wide range of issues. Also, they are often the most open to connecting issues, such as environment and social justice, and socialist ideas. Support for Bernie Sanders in Canada was highest among young people. This is a tide that will grow.

## **Cuts and Austerity**

Whatever the claims of the Federal Liberals, across Canada public services are under constant attack through underfunding. Many provinces have cut services or are not keeping funding in line with inflation. In 2016 in Newfoundland and Labrador, there was widespread opposition to drastic cuts to public

services including health, alongside tax increases.

Across Canada there are many long-term social justice campaigns on issues such as poverty, public health provision, housing and homelessness, and childcare. Most of these tend to be charities or NGOs and are not great at mobilizing or activism. However, we should keep an eye on these as at times there can be activities and struggles.

A key issue is health. Canadians are proud of the public health system, especially in contrast to the disastrous private system south of the border. The US spends 17.1% of GDP on health compared to Canada's 10.7%, yet Canada has better health outcomes including longer life expectancy and lower infant mortality. However, there are real gaps in Canada's system such as the lack of national pharmacare and the exclusion of dental and optical coverage.

There is creeping privatization with private clinics and charges. A Québec court ruling in 2005 opened the door a crack and Dr Day is trying to win a court case to open the floodgates. A much more widespread threat is the constant underfunding of the public health system. The Liberals have successfully pushed through Harper's reduction in future health funding which will inevitably lead to reduced provision in the future. The fate of the British NHS is a warning – officially there is still a universal public health system, but it is grossly underfunded and the private sector has a thousand tentacles strangling it.

There are constant local campaigns and struggles that flare up against cuts and the impacts of austerity. Often these are focused on a specific issue such as the closure of a facility – a school, hospital, etc. When these struggles are in our local areas, we should seek to be involved.

# Canadian Politics

## Liberal Government

The Federal Liberals won a resounding victory in 2015, riding the strong mood in society not only to kick out Harper, but for radical change. They were assisted by the timid platform and campaign of the NDP who assumed that their position as the official opposition to the Tories was enough to carry them to victory – instead the NDP dropped from 103 seats in 2011 to 44 seats (with 30 more seats in the new House of Commons) in 2015. Although the Harper government had carried out attacks on services, it failed to inflict a major defeat on the unions or fundamentally shift the outlook of Canadian society.

Liberal support continues among the mainstream, although the honeymoon is largely over. Since the autumn of 2016 their support in the polls has dropped from nearly 50% to around 40% with increased support for both the Conservatives (around 35%) and NDP (around 15%). Most Canadians look aghast at Trump's election and many have a smug sense of superiority to Americans.

The Liberals are trying to keep a sunny face, but as they face hard decisions this will become more difficult. Approving the Kinder Morgan pipeline to Vancouver has demonstrated the lack of sunshine and may cost them seats in Metro Vancouver. On the other hand, the Liberals seem to be courting the right-wing of the NDP and this decision may help them build a base in Alberta. If they can keep the NDP's national below 20% in support, it probably assures a Liberal government, at least, until a major crisis hits. Some union leaders are willing to go along with friendship with the Liberals. There is a history in several provinces of union

leaders supporting the Liberals rather than the NDP.

The Liberals have made some changes such as announcing an Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and the return of the long-form census. However, there have been few substantial changes.

Among activists there is a growing realization that the feeling the Liberals created in the election of radical change was mostly one of image, and the main policies continue as before, only now with a smile. The Liberals, as in the past, run on the left in the election but rule on the right. The Liberals fought hard for Europe to agree to the CETA agreement negotiated by the Harper government. If Trump had not ripped up the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Trudeau would have happily signed it. In spite of all the talk at the Paris Climate Conference, Trudeau supports building a tar sands' pipeline through Vancouver and other environmentally-damaging projects. They pushed through Harper's health cuts, refuse to support anti-scab legislation and look set to continue the attacks on Canada Post. They have not scrapped or amended the anti-democratic Bill C-51 and are bringing forward Bill C-23 which enacts a Harper agreement to increase the legal powers of US customs and immigration officers on Canadian soil. To cap it all, they have reneged on the very clear election promise to change the electoral system. This is a warning of other betrayals to come.

One of their new actions is proposed widespread privatization. The planned new infrastructure spending is to be financed by selling off current public assets including ports, airports, etc. The infrastructure will be built through Public-Private Partnerships. These

schemes almost always run over budget while cutting corners on quality. All of this is a license to print money for big business and undermines democratic control of public services and assets. None of this was in the election platform. Already there have been union protests and even a section of business is concerned about the inevitable increase in charges at airports and ports.

However, the Liberals have several things going for them. The first is the weakness of the Tories and NDP, at least until after their leadership elections and probably beyond that. The second is that the rest of the world looks much scarier, more dangerous and financially insecure than Canada. As long as the economy holds up, they can probably maintain support of over one-third of the electorate, usually enough to form a government. At this stage, it seems most likely that the Liberals would win the next election in 2019.

Importantly, the Liberals are doing a great job for the ruling class continuing the broad policies of both previous Liberal and Conservative governments. There are two differences, both favourable to big business, between this government and Harper's. The policies are delivered with a Trudeau smile rather than a Harper scowl – provoking less anger. Secondly, the government's investment in infrastructure is good news, given the lack of private investment. The investment is linked to the privatization of both present and future public assets. While the Tories complain about the deficit, given the massive cuts to tax rates for corporations and the rich, it will be paid off by the working class. A brilliant scam for the elite. In many ways, compared to Harper, the Liberals are more astute from the point of view of the ruling class.

Further ahead they will face serious challenges. Young people and Indigenous peoples, especially, voted in 2015 in much larger

numbers than in previous elections and overwhelmingly for the Liberals. The Liberals cannot deliver substantial improvements in living standards for either section of society, as that would require very deep-seated changes which is more than capitalism is likely to accept. At some stage, these people will turn on the Liberals, realizing they were conned.

## **Tories**

After the disaster of the 1995 election, Reform and Progressive Conservatives joined together to form the Conservatives. Interestingly, in many provinces they continue as PC and in some cases, such as Newfoundland and Labrador's Danny Williams, were more progressive than many Liberal and even NDP provincial governments.

Harper managed to hold together an at times tense coalition of social and economic conservatives. Immediately after the 2015 defeat he stepped down. The first response of the interim leader, Rona Ambrose, was to distance the party from Harper saying, "the Bad man's gone away."

The leadership contest has revealed sharp differences within the party. Kellie Leitch pandering to latent prejudices has made much of screening immigrants, visitors and refugees coming to Canada for "anti-Canadian values," code for racism. The election of Trump further boosted her right-wing rhetoric and just hours after Trump was declared winner, she emailed her supporters. "It's an exciting message and one that we need delivered in Canada as well ... It's why I'm the only candidate who will ensure that every visitor, immigrant, and refugee will be screened for Canadian values." However, most Tories knew her rhetoric would not win votes and she gained only 7% of the first-round votes and hardly picked up any more support on the later ballots.

Kevin O’Leary, while not as much a social reactionary as Leitch and Trump, is an economic brutalist, saying in 2011 “Elect me as prime minister for 15 minutes. I will make unions illegal. Anybody who remains a union member will be thrown in jail.” He welcomed growing inequality, describing it as “fantastic news.” However, having created a stir, he dropped out probably realizing he would not win.

The leadership election campaign has not given the Conservatives a boost in public support, in fact it may have done them harm, as it revealed to many Canadians the nasty side of the party. Although the more extreme voices did not do well in the leadership contest, both finalists Bernier and the winner Scheer are economic and social conservatives, views that reflect the outlook of the party membership. However, they are not the views of most Canadians and “Harper with a smile” as Scheer is described will have a hard job to erase the memory of Harper and win in 2019.

## Populists and Far-Right

There is a continuum of right forces, but also sharp divisions between them, ranging from traditional right parties to right populists such as Leitch to outright neo-fascists. In much of Europe and the US the new right of populism and prejudice has grown. So far, this has not had as much impact in Canada.

Right-wing populism taps into the insecurity and loss of self-esteem of individuals and communities where the main workplace has gone, the textile mill, mine, food factory or sawmill has closed. Although there isn’t a geographic rust belt as in the US, the same process is happening in communities all across Canada and Québec. The unions and the NDP have no answer, while the right appears to give answers, simplistic yes, but they seem to fill the void. There are similar areas in the suburbs of

some big cities, areas that feel left behind. An early variant of Canadian populism was Rob Ford, former Mayor of Toronto.

There is a possibility that in the future the Conservative coalition Harper held together could fracture, with a wing around someone like Leitch, moving to reactionary social policies on immigration, women’s rights, etc. There is a smaller base in Canada than the US for the reactionary views of racism, misogyny, etc. of Trump. Only 17% of Canadians before the US election said they would have supported Trump. But Trump won in spite of these views not because of them. He won by convincing people he would bring back jobs.

However, there are signs that a right populism that focused on jobs, etc, could get support. A recent Edelman poll found rapidly growing distrust of politicians, business and the media; most Canadians (55%) say the system is not working for them; 80% think the “elites” are out of touch with regular people and growing concern that newcomers are damaging “national culture.” An Angus Reid poll found Canadians divided on refugees. When asked about the number of refugees coming to Canada, 47% thought the number was right, 11% said it was too low while 41% said it was too high. Young people were generally more positive about refugees than older people.

At some stage, unless there is a strong left voice, it is possible, even probable that right populism will emerge in Canada. Imagine Canada after eight years of Liberal rule, with mounting economic hardship and the NDP still stuck in its current moderate uninspiring stance. A right populism framed as a campaign to “defend Canada,” bring back jobs, etc., could easily make real gains especially among older, mainly white, voters, in smaller towns and rural areas.

The election of Trump and the rhetoric of Leitch and others has emboldened the far-right. There

is a core of alt-right around Rebel, etc., and a neo-fascist fringe, which at this stage, is a tiny minority. None of these forces have anything like the base that the neoright have in Europe. But the attack on the mosque in Québec City shows that the far-right are capable of violence. The mass revulsion and expressions of solidarity show the overwhelming mood of Quebecers and Canadians.

The best way to counter the rise of the right is a program that tackles the social issues that breeds their support. Moral appeals to tolerance and harmony have little or no impact. The speeches by politicians in the wake of the Québec City shooting, that implement cuts and austerity and even flirt with prejudice, are hypocritical and will have no impact.

Our main priority to counter the growth of the far-right is to strength the workers' movement and build support for economic and social policies that tackle poverty and alienation in both rural and urban areas. A clear socialist program and strong campaigns can, in the future, win some supporters of right populism to the socialist banner.

## **New Democratic Party**

The NDP has long been the third party in Canada. While it has never formed government federally, its existence has helped to win important reforms for working people. The huge swing to the NDP in 2011 resulted in it being the official opposition for the first time ever. The NDP gains were in Québec where the strong anti-Harper mood combined with the crisis of the Liberal party (its worst result in Canadian history) and the collapse of the Bloc paved the way to the NDP going from two seats to 59. Over the following four years, the NDP played virtually no role in the Maple Spring, while its moderate program did not encourage large numbers of people to join. The NDP failed

to sink roots in Québec and lost most of its seats in 2015.

After the stunning defeat in the October 2015 federal election, Mulcair remained leader without any significant outcry. Six months later he was defeated by a slim margin (52%) at the national convention, but will continue to be leader until October 2017, two years after leading the party to defeat. This indicates the lack of an energetic membership.

The NDP, at best, proposes partially reversing the cuts made by previous governments, but it does not campaign for reforms that would weaken capitalism, never mind raising, even in general, the idea of socialism. The leadership claim that their priority is winning elections, and use that as an excuse for centrist policies, yet consistently they lose elections.

Provincially, the NDP is only the government in Alberta and in an unstable alliance with the Greens in BC. It finished third in the last Ontario election, suffered a heavy in Manitoba and was kicked out of government after one term in Nova Scotia.

The general mood of the NDP membership seems to be resigned acceptance of not winning. Some even tried to find false cheer in the 2015 election pointing to the NDP's 44 seats, the second best number in the party's history. The leadership's lack of vision and drive makes sections of the NDP's supporters and even membership open to the Liberals. Clearly the Liberals won the support of large swathes of NDP voters in 2015. Some union leaders have fallen for Trudeau's charms. The Liberals hope to consolidate their hold on a section of the NDP and so hope to consolidate their position in power. The Liberals are courting the Alberta NDP (by approving pipelines and exploiting the tensions between the BC and Alberta NDP) and some of the Ontario union leaders that flip-flop between the Liberals and the NDP.

After the April 2016 conference that defeated Mulcair and agreed to discuss the Leap Manifesto, some on the left hoped that the NDP would see a movement something like Corbyn or Sanders to shift the party towards more campaigning activity and radical ideas. So far, there is no sign of such a movement or the emergence of such a figure.

The weakness of the party's democracy is demonstrated by the failure so far to commence the agreed debate in every constituency on the Leap Manifesto, the lack of any involvement of the membership in drawing up election platforms and by the requirement to pay \$30,000 to enter the leadership contest.

During the leadership campaign, there will be talk in support of more progressive issues and tackling inequality but it is unlikely any candidate will talk of revolution, challenging capitalism or socialism. Unfortunately, it seems that none of the candidates will wage an enthusiastic campaign of mass mobilizations that marked the successful campaigns of Sanders, Corbyn and Mélechon. Unless the NDP breaks from its habit of moderate programs and timid campaigning, it is unlikely to break out of its long third-party status.

## **New Workers' Party**

The Committee for a Workers' International recognizes that the collapse of Stalinism and the neoliberal onslaught pushed back workers' organizations. This means there is a need to strengthen and re-build the unions and build mass workers' parties. These parties would bring together different struggles – labour, women, environment, Indigenous, anti-racist, etc. – in a democratic structure. They would campaign year-round, stand in solidarity with struggles, be a forum for democratic debate and discussions, and run candidates for elections.

In most countries where there were traditional mass workers' parties these have either disappeared (Italy) or been transformed into openly capitalist parties (Ireland, France, Greece and Spain).

The CWI's view that Marxists need to both build their own revolutionary organization and help to build or re-build mass organizations is different from many on the so-called revolutionary left. Some have no engagement with working class life and struggle and most others think the way ahead is simply to build their own organization.

The nature of the NDP is not clear-cut; it clearly has its roots in social democracy and as a workers' party. While it has moved right, it has not decisively gone over to being an openly capitalist party in the way the former social democratic parties in Greece, Spain, France and Britain have. This is for a variety of reasons, including never having been in government federally and the current existence of two dominant pro-capitalist parties. It has moved to the right, it is largely empty of members especially youth, and hardly has any activity between elections.

The NDP still does have direct connections with the unions, has an electoral base and a significant section of the membership considers themselves socialist. However, it does not fill the role of an effective workers' party.

The potential for a campaigning democratic left party in Canada is good with relativity intact unions and an undefeated working class. A Finder poll of 18,000 people in nine countries in May 2016 found Clinton in the lead in eight, but in Canada Sanders beat Clinton and Trump. If the NDP moved to the politics and campaigning approach shown by Sanders or Corbyn it could make a real impact. However, there is little sign of such a movement at present. It seems most likely the NDP will continue to sit a little to the

left of the Liberals but not generate wide energy or enthusiasm by adopting a left platform. At present, it is in a halfway stage and to some extent blocks the road to a new party.

At this stage, we mainly agitate for the idea of a new party, but it is not a realistic prospect in the short-term. A workers' party is much more than a coming together of various small left groups. While the left at times can cooperate on specific campaigns, a formal amalgamation of them would be a setting for endless fruitless debates. It will require new forces taking to struggle and ideally a movement of a section of the NDP (like around Lafontaine in Germany or Mélenchon in France) or the union movement (like the RMT in Britain) to establish a workers' party.

We need to recognize the experience of Corbyn in Britain or Sanders in the US. As other roads to building a new political force that represented workers were blocked, the working class turned to an ex-workers' party and a bourgeois party. It cannot be excluded that as the social pressures grow in Canada these will find expression in the NDP. However, just as Corbyn discovered, the party apparatus would do everything in its power to block the transformation of the NDP into a radical campaigning workers' party. As we have said about the British Labour party, it is really two parties at war within one structure. Either the right-wing Blairites are ejected or the Corbynistas will be defeated. The same scenario would probably apply if there was a serious attempt to transform the NDP.

We cannot rule out that at some stage there will be a real struggle in the NDP and that a section of the NDP will be a component of building a

new party. For now, and probably for quite some time, our main areas of work are outside the NDP as most radical youth or militant workers are not drawn to the NDP.

Many of the forces for a new workers' party will most likely come from outside the NDP. When there are signs that the idea of a workers' party is gaining support, we will put serious efforts into realizing it, whatever path leads in that direction.

The key features of a new party are that it is involved in struggle and does not limit its program to what capitalism demands, even if it is not explicitly socialist. Socialist Alternative would argue for a party that is federal in structure, allowing affiliation of unions, socialists, environmental, Indigenous and other organizations. The party would campaign, not just during elections, but continuously on the many issues people face. The party's life would combine activism, political education, cultural activities and solidarity. We envision a party that is rooted in communities and grassroots organizations, with strong democratic rights and controls. One of its purposes would be to contest elections, and we would propose that all elected representatives would be responsible to the party and only paid the average wage of a skilled worker.

It is unlikely that all of these features would be present at such a party's launch; it is likely to be less clear-cut. Over time, through debate and experience, the ideas of socialism would gain support.

# Canada Not an Island

Canadians have a sense that life here is better than in most of the world with no wars, famines, brutal austerity or Donald Trump. However, as this document has outlined, this stability and security is skin-deep and rests on weak foundations, with many trends towards greater instability and economic and political shocks.

It is true the cuts to living standards, public services, etc., have not been as deep as many other countries; nonetheless, the fabric of life has been undermined for several decades with no respite in sight.

Canada remains broadly socially progressive and the unions have substantial powers. The working class has not suffered serious defeats.

While there is not yet burning anger, there is a growing simmering discontent that the future storms will whip into anger. Canada is not isolated from world trends.

Around the world the established political parties are in crisis. In some, the post-war political parties have been totally upturned, with new parties emerging. In others, the surface names of the parties remain, such as the US and Britain, but the content has been drastically changed. This is not an even or tidy process and in some countries the right is leading the new formations as the left cling to the old parties, but in others the left has been dynamic, such as Podemos in Spain.

In Canada, it is unlikely in the short-term that a major break will emerge in the political system, still largely intact since World War II. The most likely forums for struggle will be in social movements, and possibly the unions. But at some stage the social pressures will find an outlet in politics and the present structures will rupture.

The general trends of Canadian society are towards increased instability and class struggle. We do need to be aware there can be, and probably will be, setbacks to this trend. A serious terrorist attack in Canada would temporarily boost reaction. However, although 9/11 boosted reaction around the world, it did not eradicate or overcome the fundamental contradictions of capitalist society. Today the contradictions are greater than after 9/11 – the world has been through the Great Recession of 2008.

## Our Priority

Our priority is to assemble the foundations of an organization. We have made significant strides in the last three years. Based on our perspectives, experiences here in Canada and internationally, and determination, we can look forward with confidence.

Canadian workers will re-learn the past lesson that mass movements make history, the necessity of class solidarity and political independence. The presently small forces of Marxism in Canada will be part of this re-awakening and through involvement will gather strength.

Marxism provides a clear class analysis of society, tactics to win victories in struggle and the basis for unifying the different sections of the working class.

We face the most ruthless ruling class in human history. The working class has the mass power of numbers and potential control of all the wheels of society. However, if divided, this power remains a potential. The ruling class, aided by post-modern ideology, seeks to divide the working class into different “identities.” While recognizing that different sections of the

working class have different experiences of oppression, unity in struggle and solidarity provides the best opportunity to end oppression(s). "An injury to one is an injury to all." Unifying all the struggles around poverty, environment, women, job insecurity, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ+ people, ethnicity and race, culture and others gives the working class the greatest power to make real gains against oppression and face the common class enemy. With unity and clarity, the working class will win and liberate humanity to live in harmony with the natural world of which we are part.





# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

## Canada

If you agree with the analysis and ideas in this pamphlet, join Socialist Alternative Canada. We are a growing organization, having doubled our membership in three years. We produce a regular magazine and have a website and three facebook pages.

We are active in workplaces, universities and communities. Among our main activities are campaigns on campuses, fighting for a \$15 minimum wage and stopping environmental destruction. We also support the struggle of Indigenous peoples, campaigns for homes for all, workers defending their pay and conditions, stopping the alt-right, defending reproductive rights and much more.

As socialists, we are internationalists and have organized solidarity with struggles in Greece, Ireland and South Africa. We helped to elect and re-elect Kshama Sawant to Seattle City Council. We participated in the World Social Forum in Montreal with comrades from Québec, Belgium and the US.



As well as campaigning, we develop our political understanding organizing schools and conferences in Canada and participating in schools, camps and conferences in the US and Europe. We host frequent public meetings, often with international speakers.

We fight for every reform, while pointing to the need to end capitalism and its profit-driven destruction of the environment and human well-being. We work towards a mass, socialist transformation to a democratic and just society that puts the needs of humanity and the planet first. With the diversity and fertility of nature, the endless energy of the sun and the ingenuity of humans we can build a world without war, hunger, poverty, injustice or environmental destruction.

Socialism would see the end of the dictatorship of big business in our society. It would have nothing in common with the former Stalinist dictatorships of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Socialism is about the full flowering of human democracy and potential.

To join or find out more about Socialist Alternative please send us an e-mail:  
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Our Website has many articles on Canada and International news:  
[socialistalternative.ca/](http://socialistalternative.ca/)

Our three Facebook pages are:  
[www.facebook.com/socialist.alternative.canada/](http://www.facebook.com/socialist.alternative.canada/)  
[www.facebook.com/socialist.alternative.vancouver/](http://www.facebook.com/socialist.alternative.vancouver/)  
[www.facebook.com/TorontoSocialistAlternative/](http://www.facebook.com/TorontoSocialistAlternative/)



# Socialism is International

Capitalism is a global economic and political system. Climate change affects the whole planet. The workers' movement and socialism needs to be internationalist too.

## International

Socialist Alternative Canada is part of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), a democratic organization with members in 46 countries around the world. The CWI is involved in struggles: for better wages and conditions and basic union rights; to protect the environment; for women's rights; and against war, racism and oppression.



**SOCIALIST  
WORLD**.net

Committee for a Workers' International  
Comité por una Internacional de los Trabajadores



Read news and reports from around the world: [www.socialistworld.net/](http://www.socialistworld.net/)

## Québec

Socialist Alternative Canada works closely with our sister organization in Québec, Alternative Socialiste. They are active in the unions, fighting for \$15 and resisting the government's attacks on jobs, pay and services. Alternative Socialiste is an active part of Quebec solidaire, arguing the case for a bold socialist platform. They campaign in universities and the community, and to protect the environment and stop the far-right.



Read news from Québec: <http://alternativesocialiste.org/>

## The US

Socialist Alternative in the US is growing rapidly, increasing four-fold in five years. In 2013 Kshama Sawant was the first socialist elected to Seattle Council in 100 years. Sawant, with unions, the community and Socialist Alternative, launched the first successful campaign for a \$15 minimum wage. Now \$15 has spread across North America. Socialist Alternative is in the thick of the fight to stop Trump and the right wing's agenda and build a powerful socialist movement in the belly of the beast.

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Read news from the US: [www.socialistalternative.org/](http://www.socialistalternative.org/)