

HOUSING EMERGENCY



RESIST FORD!

Page 5

ABOUT SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

What We Stand For

- An end to poverty wages; raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, as a step to a living wage
- A 35 hour working week without loss of pay
- A living income for those unable to work
- Reverse the cuts and privatization of public services
- Fully funded, high quality, free public education from early childhood to university
- Massive public investment in health care, child care, education, affordable housing, clean energy and mass public transit
- Phase out the tar-sands and nuclear power, with retraining and good union jobs for displaced workers
- Higher taxes on the rich and corporations
- Democratic unions run by and for the members, with elected union officials paid the same wages as those they represent
- End discrimination – full equality for all
- Equal rights for immigrants and refugees
- The right to self-determination and self-government for all Indigenous peoples, and respect for historical treaties and resource rights
- Defend the right of Québec sovereignty; for a socialist Québec in a voluntary socialist Canadian association
- Scrap USMCA and other exploitative trade deals
- Democratic public ownership of key sectors of the economy
- A socialist transformation of society to allow for the democratic planning of the economy based on the interests and needs of the overwhelming majority



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Socialist Alternative Helps Elect Swanson

Chris Fofonoff

Elections can be difficult terrain for socialists, but sometimes have to be traversed to advance the fight against capitalism. In Vancouver's crucial 2018 elections, Socialist Alternative was fully committed to electing Jean Swanson and the other COPE candidates.



Going poster for the Swanson and Sawant rally

Preparation was key. We focused on Grandview–Woodland, where we campaigned for Swanson in the 2017 by-election, and knew soaring rent was the top issue. The neighbourhood has 29,000 residents, 64% renters, who we focused on, aiming to establish the red banners of COPE and Socialist Alternative.

Over the summer, we petitioned on the main street for The City We Need, discussing left-wing politics with people clutching babies and grocery bags and gaining activists for the campaign. After Labour Day, our door-knocking teams were out four days a week. We tabled 11 times, leafleted much of the area and posted 6 times. For the last two weeks, it was daily activity.

Accurate and consistent reporting is important to ensure we are on target. We collected over 3,500 petition signatures from the streets and doorsteps. We canvassed 131 apartment buildings (target 100), including 13 First Nations' housing, and spoke to 1,226 people (target 1,000) with 62% COPE supporters. We raised over \$250 for COPE. We also sold 350 Socialist Alternative magazines and several people are interested in joining us.

On Election Day, more than 50 volunteers canvassed for over 12 hours on doorsteps to successfully maximize the votes. We canvassed 81 buildings, 17 of them twice, as well as doing several tables and poster three times.

Socialist Alternative provided the backbone of the Grandview–Woodland campaign, which was described as the "gold standard" of the election. We surpassed our targets, had great fun and good political discussions. More importantly, COPE scored big wins.

Housing Emergency

Simon Schweitzer and Corey Snook

Across Canada housing is in crisis, gripped by manic speculation. Vancouver and Toronto are the bleeding edge, but all the large cities follow close behind. Median rents for new listings in Vancouver are \$2,100 for a one bedroom, \$2,260 in Toronto. Homelessness is soaring and co-op housing is under threat. Even Vancouver's dilapidated SROs (one room, no kitchen, a shared bathroom, and usually with cockroaches) now rent for nearly \$700 a month.

Ownership is completely out of reach. The Broadbent Institute reports that the cost in labour time of an average house for the average worker in Canada was 184 weeks in 1971. This had soared to over 400 weeks by 2014. Now, Toronto and Vancouver are much worse. The average price of a home in Toronto is \$875,000, which means that with a median family income of \$78,373 it would take 580 weeks to pay for. Vancouver's median family income, \$72,662, would take 930 weeks to pay for an average house costing \$1.3 million.

As interest rates rise, this pushes up mortgage payments, making housing more unaffordable. According to the RBC, in September 2018, home ownership costs 88% of median income in Vancouver and 76% in Toronto. Across all of Canada the average is 54%. Canada Mortgage and Housing Company defines affordable housing as households spending 30% of their income on housing. The increase in mortgage rates also threatens recent buyers with being unable to make the payments.

Behind unaffordable housing is the market, treating housing as a commodity to buy and sell rather than as a place to live. Speculators, and their friends in government and business, claim that housing must be profitable or it will never be built. They argue for more density and smaller, luxury units as the market's realistic solution to the housing crisis.



Tent Cities Growing in Canada

However, speculation demands maximizing property value, the faster the better, and so rents must be raised. Landlords use renovations to evict tenants paying affordable rates. Even better, from the developers point of view, is demolishing existing buildings to make room for glass towers of luxury condos. This destroys affordable rental units and does not solve the housing emergency.

Market advocates say that Canada's housing problem is scarcity, yet Vancouver has 25,000 empty units and Toronto 66,000. The reality of market pragmatism is increased supply of luxury housing at the expense of existing affordable housing. Those who can't afford the high rents are pushed either to the fringes of cities with endless commutes or to the fringes of society to join the growing ranks of the homeless — 2,181 in Vancouver and 8,715 in Toronto.

The housing emergency is Canada-wide. In Prince Edward Island, the rental vacancy rate was 9.3% in the urban centres in 2014, now it is 0.3% across the island. PEI has the highest percentage of workers earning less than \$15 an hour and the highest rate of workers in seasonal employment. Now there is a hellscape of skyrocketing rents and widespread renovations.

While Doug Ford attacks rent control in Ontario, and BC's Rental Housing Task Force tries to please both sides, people are beginning to resist. The burgeoning tenants' movement in Vancouver helped elect Jean Swanson to City Council and has won some victories to protect renters (see page 8).

The market is at the root of the housing emergency in Canada, and worldwide. We must look beyond it for solutions. Alongside strong rent controls, Canada needs massive investment into public housing, built by union labour working for publicly-owned construction, funded by taxing the rich.



Vancouver Tenants' Union Protest Renovations

Women Rising: for Socialist Feminism

Leslie Kemp and Aiden Sisler

Women across the world – of all walks of life and backgrounds – are walking off the job, demonstrating in the streets, organizing community defense and social media campaigns. In November, 17,000 Google workers around the world walked off the job to protest workplace harassment and inequality. In Glasgow, 10,000 mostly women, with men supporting, struck for equal pay.

In the Spanish state, over 1.5 million students emptied their classrooms and 100,000 participated in over 60 demonstrations in November. The student strike was called by the Sindicato de Estudiantes (students union) and Libres y Combativas (free and combative, socialist feminist platform of the CWI in

the Spanish state). They explained how the movement of working-class women is completely linked to the struggle against social injustices and oppression of the capitalist system.

In Ireland, the Socialist Party and its socialist feminist platform, ROSA, played a vital role in winning the right to abortion. Ruth Coppinger, Irish MP and member of the Socialist Party, is a high-profile campaigner for women's rights.

Socialist Alternative Canada will be marching on January 19 under our new banner, "Women Rising: for Socialist Feminism." The banner features portraits of feminist socialists Clara Zetkin whose resolution to an international socialist conference started International Working Women's Day, Rosa Luxemburg (page 14),

US civil rights leader Rosa Parks, Québec union activist Lea Roback, Indigenous women's rights advocate Mary Two-Axe Early, and Marielle Franco, a recently murdered councillor for Brazil's left-wing PSOL.

We know that women's equality will never be won under capitalism. Socialism is necessary to win women's rights and a decent standard of living for all of us. The rising of women means the rising of us all.



The Land We're On

Allie Pev

For 500 years, Indigenous people have waged a war of resistance against the Canadian colonialist state which stole most of their land. Today Indigenous lands make up less than 0.5% of Canada's land mass. Colonialism has robbed nations of their languages and culture, which since time immemorial provided the means to balance and restore relationships, nurture the land and future generations. Socialist Alternative Canada uses our political analysis and perspectives to engage in the struggles around us. As we live on stolen Indigenous land, we have an obligation to engage in struggles with Indigenous peoples.

We stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en as they fight the construction of a natural gas pipeline through their sovereign, unceded territory. The elected band councils within Wet'suwet'en territory have agreed to the pipeline. Band Chiefs and Councils are an imposed system by the Indian Act, accountable to the federal Indian Affairs Department rather than their own community members. They see the economic benefits including jobs for their community, and with the alternative being few jobs and entrenched poverty, their decision is understandable. But it is colonialism

and capitalism that puts Indigenous leaders in often untenable positions: ongoing poverty versus destroying the lands and waters that they have relied on for generations upon generations. The hereditary chiefs, the traditional leaders, have not been consulted and are opposed to the pipeline.

Canada's provincial and federal governments continue to benefit from colonial law by undermining Indigenous people's traditional governing models. This allows the Canadian state to continue resource extraction that benefits corporations and pushes Canada towards climate catastrophe.

The working class and environmentalists gain strength from standing in solidarity with Indigenous peoples in their fight to protect their land and their right to self-determination. The system of private property and capitalism can never nurture human needs or sustain the land. We work for fundamental change: towards a future that provides equally for us all.

Restoring these relationships would be revolutionary: it would mean changing our relationship with the land, allowing us to resume our responsibilities towards all living things. In the words of Grand Chief Stewart Philip: "the voice of the land will finally be heard."

Build Resistance to Ford's Attacks

Socialist Alternative Ontario



Doug Ford, Ontario's new Premier, moved rapidly following his populism-fuelled election victory in which he vowed to be "The Premier for the People."

Workers' rights have been attacked. Cancelling the agreed \$15 an hour minimum wage increase has cost low-paid workers \$1,000 a year. Yet, the province's highest paid got a tax cut worth \$275 million a year. The agreed two paid sick days, wage equity and protection for temporary and casual workers have all been scrapped. Ford stopped the proposed 3% increase in disability payments, returning to the right-wing myth that the best social program is a job.

Housing, already unaffordable in Toronto and surrounding areas, will be more expensive with the elimination of rent control on new housing units, a gift to developers.

Environment took a major hit with cancellation of the Green Energy program, halting hundreds of renewable energy projects. Instead the new Ontario Carbon Trust will pay big polluters \$400 million in the hope they will reduce emissions.

Education was returned to the dark ages, with the scrapping of the 2015 sex education curriculum. Health has also come under attack with the elimination of the OHIP-plus Pharmacare plan for adults under 25, leaving many young people burdened with paying for essential medications.

Ford undermined Toronto's democracy, cutting city council from 47 to 25. Oversight of the provincial government was slashed, with the firing of Ontario's Chief Scientist and the Office of the Child Advocate. Ford eliminated the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and the Anti-Racism Secretariat. Children, Indigenous rights, science and tackling racism are not important in Ford's "Open for Business" province.

By arbitrarily changing the accounting system, he's more than doubled the claimed provincial

deficit to \$15 billion, to justify further massive cuts across all public services.

The election of Ford is part of a worldwide trend of the collapse of centre parties, fuelled by anger at decades of mounting austerity and inequality, and the smug indifference of liberal elites. The only successful answer to the populist right is bold, socialist policies. Unfortunately, in the recent election the NDP did not do this and therefore failed to win the victory that was there for the taking.

While parliamentary resistance to Ford is to be welcomed, the fight back will need to come from outside the legislature – from unions, grass-roots campaigns and youth. We can look to what happened in the 1990s, the time of the PC government of Mike Harris. Within five months of Harris being elected, we saw the first of several "days of action," (regional one-day strikes) organized by trade unions and community groups across the province. Unfortunately, seven months into the Ford government, there are few signs that similar protests are on the agenda of organized labour.

However, there are some signs of hope. Fight for \$15 and Fairness remains the most active organization, fighting the minimum wage freeze and cuts to workers' rights. The leaders of Ontario Public Service Employees Union and Unifor have announced an alliance to fight the closure of the GM and Maple Leaf food plants. Francophone organizations protested cuts to services, with some success. One of the most inspiring actions was the high school walkouts in Guelph and elsewhere on the issue of the sex ed curriculum.

These are a start to stopping Ford by building a strong unified movement that opposes the billionaire class. A successful struggle, building on the tradition of the 1995-98 Days of Action, will take to the workplaces, streets, schools and lands. Socialist Alternative will campaign for this unity in action. We support a bold democratic socialist program to end austerity and root out capitalism that breeds it.



Precarious Work: Reject the "New Normal"

Aiden Sisler

More and more Canadians find themselves in precarious work. This comes in many forms — jobs without regular hours, so-called self-employment, and freelance, contract, temporary and part-time jobs. These insecure jobs are widespread across many sections of the economy including: education, information, cultural, retail, entertainment, accommodation and food services.



from CCPA

These lousy conditions make life stressful and exhausting. This is on top of a minimum wage that in many places is well below the poverty line. It is hard to make ends meet; half of Canadians are living paycheck to paycheck. Particularly hard hit are those aged 15 to 24 and over 65, women, people with disabilities, migrants, and racialized workers. 44% of Canadian millennials report precarious jobs that damage their mental and physical health, with long-lasting "scarring effects."

Universities once provided good jobs - but not any more. For example, over half of all Ontario students are taught by temporary staff as universities increasingly employ highly-qualified workers on part-time, short-term contracts. A degree does not guarantee security.

Of course big business likes this world. It boosts their profits as they save on sick pay, pensions, health care and more. Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, restricts the toilet breaks of the Amazon workforce and uses electronic tags to monitor them. Billionaire bosses make their money from the super-exploitation of their workforce. Yet, Finance minister, Morneau, says people should accept this "new normal" of "job churn."

Workers facing this new "normal" are resisting. They can, and increasingly will, unite to build unions, using their untapped collective power in a fight for their rights.

A Tale of Two Provinces

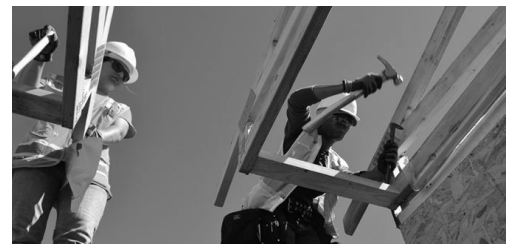
Pete Marlowe

For workers in two provinces, given the largely sorry state of Canadian politics, it's the best of recent times, it's the worst of recent times.

BC's minority NDP government is reversing some of the previous "Liberal" government's most viciously anti-working-class legislation. It is tweaking the Labour Code, governing union activities, and the Employment Standards Act, regulating the minimum rights workers can suffer and maximum pain that employers can inflict. However, this is unlikely to go beyond restoring a few previously-lost protections. Will it address the precariousness of the new "sharing" economy, where workers are forced to share more and more of the wealth they create and their working hours between three jobs?

In Ontario, Canada's most right-wing government is reversing the fragile reforms the previous government introduced, in a failed attempt to win votes. Ford has repealed most of Bill 148, including the changes that made it easier for workers to unionize, while scrapping the Ontario College of Trades. The yet-to-be-defined replacement regulations will undermine trade's training and apprenticeships. BC's "Liberals" did this in the past, with the highly desirable consequences for some businesses of creating an underskilled, underpaid, terrified and temporary workforce.

In recent years the unions have relied too much on lobbying politicians for legal reforms



and protections. The recent changes in Ontario demonstrate the weakness of this approach. Workers built unions often in defiance of unfair laws, the courts and police. Strong unions enforce workplace rights, rather than merely relying on laws. To re-build unions' strength, workers will need to organize, rather than putting their faith in fickle politicians.

The BC Federation of Labour's submission to the Review Committee states that "one of the chief purposes of the Code, in our view, is to ensure labour peace in the province." Socialist Alternative, in contrast, urges all workers to fight against the worsening of times under capitalism, and for a true workers' transformation of society, with the best of times to come.

Life of a Nursing Student

A Student

Training to be a nurse is fulfilling and rewarding. It is also hard work. I'm from a working-class family, had my children relatively young and moved to Canada with minimal educational qualifications. I had written off attaining a degree due to limits of time and money. However, working dead-end jobs led me on this journey, which has already taken seven years, to become a registered nurse.

Nursing school is tough and requires students to be successful in every area of study and practice. Academic papers and studying pharmacology, pathophysiology and nursing electives are essential. We have to apply theory into practice to provide safe patient care. The students I know are supportive friends, committed and passionate about becoming highly skilled members of the health care team.

However, nursing school also comes with hardship. The many hours needed leave little time for a normal family life. This is even more difficult for many students, including myself, who have to work part-time jobs to make ends meet. The average debt for a degree in Canada is over \$25,000, and nursing is no exception. For the many without family support, it is much higher.



Nurses provide a necessary service to society. Yet the prohibitive cost is an unnecessary barrier to filling the growing demand for nurses. The high cost of education is unjust.

Just a fraction of the vast wealth of the richest 1% would guarantee the next generation of doctors, nurses, teachers, scientists, engineers, artists, etc. Capitalism always puts profit above society's needs. Therefore, the fight for socialism is essential to secure a future based on the needs of the many, not the few.

What Makes Me Angry

Bill Hopwood



General Motors makes me angry. They are closing the Oshawa car plant. It's not like GM is short of money. Their profits were \$3.3 billion for the third quarter of 2018, with even more expected this year.

2,500 workers will directly lose their jobs. The waves of suffering will spread out with over 20,000 jobs expected to disappear in Canada by 2025.

After a serious fire in 1899 damaged the McLaughlin Carriage Company, the City of Oshawa gave it an interest-free loan. GM took over the plant in 1918. It has made vehicles and profits for GM for over 100 years.

GM continued the tradition of wangling money out of governments. *Macleans* (November 29, 2018) has a long list of interest-free loans and handouts from government to GM. The biggest, in 2009, was \$10.5 billion. It is not clear if GM ever repaid all that bailout.

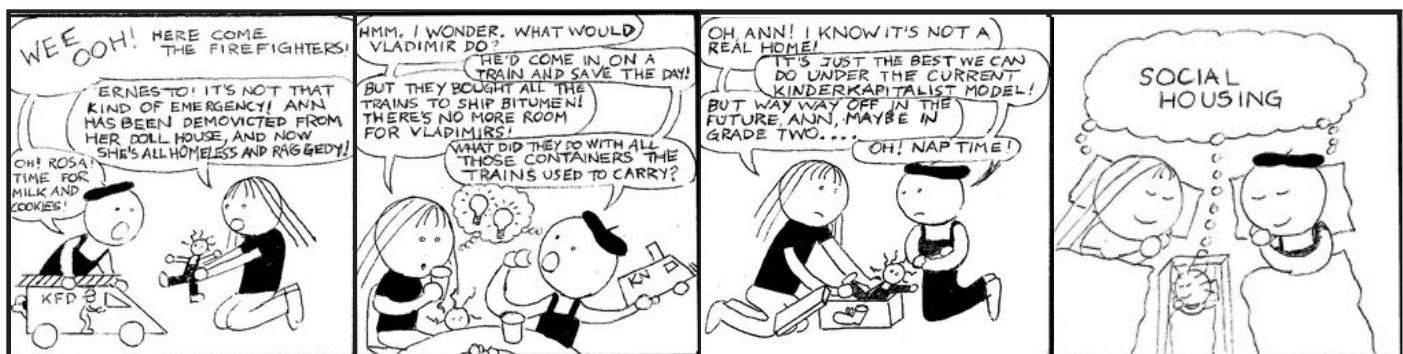
Unifor, the plant's main union, has protested and lobbied, but GM is standing firm on the closure. Unifor's 2016 deal included accepting poorer pensions for new starters, in exchange for a pledge to keep the plant open. This was claimed as a important victory at the time. Unions should learn not to trust company promises.

The workers can't expect Doug Ford to help; he said the closure is "done" and there's nothing the government can do. The workers do have power to resist. GM wants the equipment in the plant. Unifor should organize to occupy the Oshawa plant. Occupations have an honourable history in the autoworkers' struggles — it was how the workers unionized the first GM plant, in Flint in 1937.

All Canadian workers owe a huge debt to the Oshawa workers. Their successful strike, also in 1937, opened the door to the massive increase in union membership. All Canadian unions should rally in support of an occupied Oshawa plant. Given the huge handouts to GM, a key demand could be "Nationalize, Don't Subsidize."

Kindergarten Kommies

Pete Marlowe



Election Victory in Vancouver

Chris Fofonoff and Allie Pev

Vancouver voters made history on Saturday, October 20, 2018 by electing veteran organizer and community campaigner, Jean Swanson to city council in the city's most important electoral victory in decades. She, with one school board and two parks board candidates, was elected under the rejuvenated Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) banner.



The campaign's centrepiece was not Jean or the other COPE candidates themselves, but the platform, which featured policies that none of the softer-left candidates could touch. Called *The City We Need* it included: a four-year rent freeze, a progressive property tax on homes valued at over \$5 million (the "mansion tax"), free transit passes for children and those earning under \$50,000 a year, modular homes to ensure that every homeless person in Vancouver would have a roof over their head, and much more. These were demands that reflected the reality of life for most Vancouverites struggling with soaring rents, homelessness, and being priced out of their city. All strong transitional demands that Socialist Alternative could and did enthusiastically support (see page 2).

Swanson's campaign's enthusiastic support was not based on nice words or sunshiney appeals claiming that this campaign stood for everything and, thus in reality, nothing. We named our enemies — the ruling Vision Vancouver party, property developers, and big landlords. The campaign, involving hundreds of activists, used time-honoured methods of public work, tabling on main streets, leafletting, and door-knocking in order to spread our message to those who would be most energized and inspired by our platform.

Swanson's success was built on the 2017 by-election, when she came from nowhere to second place. This built a strong coalition of support, hammered out key policy ideas and re-drew Vancouver's political map.

Socialist Alternative's Seattle city councillor, Kshama Sawant, helped inspire Jean and the campaign. Sawant gave a fiery speech at the election's biggest rally, one

week before the election. She gave fair warning that once left-wing parties are inside the council chambers they will face enormous pressure from developers and their supporters. Elected representatives are supposed to play nice and dilute their demands once on the inside, as so many left parties and candidates have before. And forget about the election promises and the campaigners outside the council.

Swanson and this campaign will not go away. One of the surest mistakes a left organization can make is to leave its elected representatives adrift in the shark-infested waters of a parliament or city council. Even the noblest, savviest, most dedicated fighters for the working class — and Swanson is certainly in that high calibre — will be little more than a harmless and easily ignored protest vote if they're abandoned by the movement which laboured so long and hard to get them there.

With only one solidly pro-worker, pro-renter councillor up against nine other councillors of varying political persuasions a campaign outside of city hall is vital to make any gains, as demonstrated by Sawant's successes in Seattle. Without that movement-building, one councillor is inevitably ineffective, which would serve as a massively demoralizing force for those who rightly look to elections as a part (though not the whole) of fighting for a juster world.

Elections can be an indispensable tool in spreading ideas if skilfully utilized to show people that they can fight back in an organized, effective way against the forces in society that are trying to hold down their wages, raise their rents, attack their communities, and further enrich the wealthiest ruling class in history. Campaigns can build support for radical and socialist policies and get people active. However, elections should not be contested just for the sake of running candidates; elections are hard work and it's vital to go into each with soberly assessed and achievable plans and goals.

The approach in Vancouver has already borne results, and in short order, too. The campaign won its first concrete victory before a single vote had been cast; with three weeks to go until election day, the BC government backtracked on the 4.5% allowable rent increase for 2019 that it had announced just two weeks previously. Thanks to the public outcry that the



What We Think

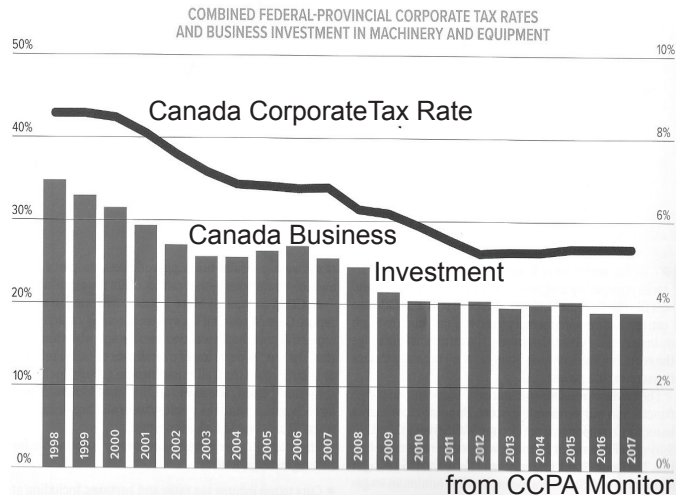
campaign helped to amplify, the increase was quickly cut to 2.5%, saving the average Vancouver renter \$500 a year. While not an unequivocal, total victory, it is still an immensely powerful confirmation that it was the COPE campaign that was exerting influence and setting the tone.

The battle has not let up at all since the election. On December 4, less than a month after Swanson's inauguration as a city councillor, with over 100 boisterous activists in council chambers and two overflow rooms, Vancouver City Council unanimously passed her Motion 10 against renovictions, possibly the biggest driver of the city's sky-high rents. This victory, the biggest for Vancouver's renters (53% of the population) in at least a decade, came not by glad-handing in back rooms, but by well-organized, public militancy.

The campaign won't win every battle and the ruling class is already finding its feet to fight back, moving to weaken Motion 10 and organizing against higher taxes on luxury homes. This reinforces the fact that the campaign needs to go back onto the streets, doorsteps and workplaces with activity and rallies to build strength.

Across Canada there's a need for strong radical movements for housing and economic justice. Activists in other cities can learn from Vancouver's example and start to win *The Country We Need*.

Swanson Speaks to Supporters in City Hall



Trudeau brags about Canada's low unemployment, officially 5.6%, the lowest in decades. However, the reality is not so great. Many of the new jobs are part-time or precarious, and good-paying jobs are disappearing, such as at GM and Bombardier.

In spite of the claim of nearly full employment, there is no real increase in wages. This is an ideal time for unions to push for higher wages, but so far the leaders show little sign of action.

The economy is slowing down; employment increased by 0.9% in 2018 compared to 2.3% in 2017. Canada's economy relies on the housing bubble and construction. The insane price increases in Vancouver and Toronto are slowing while new home construction spending dropped 4.7% in the autumn, the largest fall since 2009. Interest rate rises are squeezing people's pockets and autumn spending on durable goods and vehicle purchases was down. Canadian's personal debt is sky-high, owing \$1.78 for every dollar of income.

Big business has enjoyed large tax cuts; the federal corporate rate is down from 36% in the 1980s to 15% now. This was supposed to boost investment, yet Canadian corporations continue to hoard around \$700 billion rather than invest. The world economy faces dark clouds, which could hit workers hard.

In the 2015 election, the Liberals made promises on the environment and promised to "restore fair and balanced labour laws." Yet, they bought a pipeline that will boost climate change and illegally legislated CUPW (the postal workers' union) back to work.

The recent victories of the Conservatives in Ontario and the CAQ in Québec show that right-wing populism can gain ground in Canada as in other countries. Unfortunately, the NDP shows little sign of building a movement to challenge the Liberal's hypocrisy and a growing populist right.

The success of *Solidaire* in Québec shows how to answer the right and Liberals. Canadian workers need a political party that campaigns all the time, not just during elections, with bold socialist policies.

World Economy Since Great Recession

Daniel Petrovic

The Great Recession of 2008, triggered by a bursting housing bubble in the US, resulted in mass unemployment, working-class people losing their homes, reduced wages and cuts to public services.

Governments around the world slashed interest rates and propped up the banks with massive bailouts. The Great Recession cost the global public at least \$15 trillion in bailouts and lost output. While the poor and working class suffered, bankers flourished. Real wages have not recovered compared to pre-recession levels, even in the US and Canada where official unemployment rates are at historic low levels. Inequality is at historic high levels.

The capitalist class has taken almost all the gains of economic growth, which has been sluggish compared to the 1960s. Most bailout money was not invested in production, it went into financial bubbles, such as the global housing bubble.

After a modest recovery, European and Canadian economies are slowing. The US is on a "sugar high" after the bank handouts and Trump's tax cuts, but warning signs are growing. China's rise is shaping world economics and politics. China was a motor of world growth after 2008. Now the economy is slowing, it has a mounting debt problem and large overcapacity. The world economy faces the prospect of a trade war between the US and China triggered by Trump's tariffs, a sharp slowdown of the Chinese economy, a banking collapse or financial bubble burst. While capitalists largely ignore the growing ecological

crisis, it is hitting profits as well as causing suffering to millions of ordinary lives. There is a worldwide mountain of debt, estimated at \$US250 trillion.

Workers are told that the world economy is a mysterious natural world order that they can do nothing about. It is not, rather it is a system of organizing society to produce profits for the few.



By their labour workers add value to goods and services. What they produce is owned by the capitalists. Workers are paid for the time they work, but this is not as much as the extra value they produce. The unpaid value created by workers is surplus value, appropriated by the capitalists. This profit is divided between the direct employers of workers, and the banks and landlords.

As workers are not paid for all that they produce, who buys the rest? The capitalists buy some as luxuries. However, economic growth relies on capitalists investing in production. They will continue to invest only if they are confident they can sell more goods, as they only get their profits when the commodities are sold. Eventually, the markets are saturated and there is no reason to reinvest, workers are laid-off and the economy goes into recession. This is the regular capitalist cycle.

Capitalism has cut workers' wages and public services since the 1980s. This boosted profits, which had fallen in the 1960s and 1970s. However, as workers had less to spend, the market for goods declined. To avoid recession, workers were encouraged to go into debt and consume more than they earn. The collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and Russia and the opening of China to capitalism supplied new low-wage workers and new markets.

Finance capital has risen in dominance, no longer confined to providing needed credit to industry but generating profit through fictitious capital in the form of speculation and bubbles. Sooner or later, this fiction crashes to earth. Financial crises are increasing, with the working class carrying the costs.

The working class produces the wealth of society. It has the power to control the production and distribution of goods and services. A socialist society would allow the majority of humanity to fully enjoy fruits of their labour while protecting the environment.



Polarization in Québec: Struggle Ahead

Martin LeBrun

Québec politics are polarized. The Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), a xenophobic, pro-business party won a majority government in October's election with 37% of votes. On the left, Québec Solidaire (QS) had the biggest breakthrough for Québec's left in decades, going from three to ten elected MNAs and jumping to 16% of the vote. The Québec Liberals and the Parti Québécois that ruled Quebec for 42 years, got their lowest results ever. After decades of public service cuts, private sector handouts and corruption scandals, voters abandoned them.

CAQ leader Legault spoke of "change." But, like the "old parties," the CAQ panders to big business. Its school tax cut will reduce revenue by \$700-\$900 million a year, to be made up by layoffs and service cuts. Workers won't see any real tax break; the cut benefits the wealthy, such as the richest family, the Desmarais, who gain \$111,450 annually on one property alone!

Barely mentioned before the election, Legault's plan to fire all public sector workers who wear religious symbols has been front and centre ever since. Legault claims catholic symbols are "historical, not religious" while especially targeting Muslim women who wear hijabs. The Confédération des syndicats nationaux is opposed to any restrictions on workers wearing religious symbols. Hopefully the other unions and QS will follow suit.

The CAQ will continue to attack workers and minorities. However, especially given Québec's history, there will be resistance against austerity and discrimination. Part of unionized workers' (36% of workers) struggles will be to reclaim their organizations from union bosses still loyal to the untrustworthy PQ.

QS has a key role in mobilizing around its political program outside of the National Assembly. There is a real potential for QS, the unions and others to build a mass movement, defeat the CAQ and build a mass workers' party in Québec. Alternative Socialiste (CWI in Québec) is part of QS and will work with others to realize the opportunities.

**For more information on Quebec
and Alternative Socialiste:
alternativesocialiste.org**



US: Workers' Strikes Increasing

Patrick Ayers, Socialist Alternative, US



The 2018 mid-term elections were a defeat for Trump. The Democrats retook the house with the most women elected ever. Some left Democrats were elected, reflecting the growing desire for change. The continuing battles against Trump and the contest for the Democrats' 2020 Presidential candidate will intensify. There is a significant, but largely unreported, increase in workers' struggles.

Over 30,000 teachers at 900 schools in Los Angeles went on strike on January 14, after a 98% vote in favour. This continues last year's wave of teachers' strikes, starting with 45,000 teachers in West Virginia. These strikes and walkouts rolled on into Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, Colorado, Washington and New Jersey. The number of teachers on strike in 2018 was the highest in 25 years. Teachers' actions won significant victories.

Over 5,000 hotel workers in Chicago struck 26 hotels in September, followed by hotel strikes in eight other cities in October. There were also big strikes at Google and McDonald's, in telecommunications, construction and healthcare including 53,000 workers at the University of California medical centres in November.

The number of strikes in 2018 was the highest since at least 2000. The total number of workers taking action may be the highest since the 1980s. While still a low level compared to strike action in the late 1960s to the early 1980s, it is a sign of a much-needed revival. Private sector union membership is only 7%. Union rights face increasing attacks by right-wing courts, a threat that cannot be underestimated.

These strikes give a glimpse of the desire of American workers to fight back against modern capitalism's worsening working conditions and low pay, along with sexism and racism in the workplace. The growing socialist movement in the US has a critical role campaigning for militant policies to rebuild the power of the American working class.

**For information on the US and Socialist
Alternative: www.socialistalternative.org**

Brazil: Bolsonaro, The Empty Discourse of an "Outsider"

from *Liberdade, Socialismo e Revolução* (CWI Brazil)



Bolsonaro's election as president shocked millions in Brazil and around the world. Even the *Economist* magazine says he is "a threat to democracy." Yet the CBC reported on "new investment opportunities" for Canadian companies. Opportunities in destroying the Amazon rainforest and in privatization, but corporations' search for profits cares nothing for human rights or the environment.

Bolsonaro's victory follows an international trend of centre parties collapsing and the rise of right-wing populists, who claim to be "outsiders" or "anti-elites." He blamed all the corruption and crime on the Workers Party (PT), Brazil's government for 15 years. Initially the PT introduced reforms to reduce poverty and improve education and health. However, these were paid for by an export boom of commodities, especially to China, rather than on a socialist program. Brazil remained one of the world's most unequal countries.

When commodity demand and prices dropped, Brazil suffered the worst recession since the 1930s, with unemployment nearly doubling and the economy contracting by 8% between 2014 and 2016. The PT increased its retreat from its radical past and instituted austerity.

Corruption, which has always plagued Brazil, poisoned some PT leaders. The bourgeois media hypocritically attacked the PT, ignoring the deeper corruption of the major capitalist parties, paving the way to a parliamentary coup that removed the PT president Rouseff and allowing the formation of a more right-wing government, led by Temer. The still popular, former PT leader, Lula was also imprisoned to stop

him running and probably winning the presidency.

Bolsonaro claimed to be an outsider, untainted by corruption. Bolsonaro promised stability and an end to crime — Brazil has one of the highest murder rates in the world. Poverty is constantly criminalized, with state violence the response (including under the PT). Before the 2016 Olympics, the police and army arrested and murdered street children.

Bolsonaro's victory was not inevitable. In April 2017 a mass general strike forced Temer's government to retreat, but that movement was not built upon. While Bolsonaro is not a fascist and fascism is not in the cards, that doesn't diminish the dangers or the setback of his

victory. The far right in the police, army and proto-fascist gangs will be confident to physically attack workers, socialists, activists, black, Indigenous and LGBTQ people. Bolsonaro, who praises the former dictatorship and defends torture, will increase state repression and attack workers' and women's rights. He says he will ban all "red bandits," referring to leaders of PT, PSOL (Party of Socialism and Liberty, in which CWI Brazil participates) and MTST, the homeless workers' movement.

The capitalist class would prefer a different president, but they will ignore his reactionary deeds, to gain from his cuts and privatization of public services, and attacks on pensions and workers' rights.

Bolsonaro's support is not deep, and just as with Trump in the US, he will unleash resistance in defence of democratic, human and workers' rights. Already there are mass demonstrations, new people are becoming active and committees of struggle are forming. A united front of the workers' movements can help learn lessons from Bolsonaro's victory and pave the way to his defeat.

For information
on Brazil and
LSR:
www.lsr-cit.org



Protest Sweeps France

Clare Doyle, CWI

A massive tide of protest of *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) in France has become a revolt of the oppressed against “the president of the rich,” Macron.

While a tax increase on diesel sparked the protests, they rapidly became about France’s inequality and Macron’s policies. He was a rich banker before the election, represents France’s elite and super-rich, and describes himself as the Roman god Jupiter or Napoleon. Macron is now France’s most unpopular leader.

The mass protests forced Macron to retreat, reversing the fuel tax hike, scrapping a proposed new tax on small pensions, increasing the minimum wage by €100 a month (\$150) and more. However, he did not reverse the massive tax breaks to the super-rich or end his attacks on labour rights and social protection.

The government claimed the diesel tax was to protect the environment, but it was rightly seen as another tax on workers and farmers. Initially the protests were in rural areas and the urban edges, and had a mixed political outlook. The far-right attempted to get support but was largely rebuffed. As the movement grew, the demands became more clearly left-wing and class-based. As well as the concessions Macron gave, other demands included: Macron resign, build five million new homes, reverse all privatizations and ban genetically-modified foods.

Workers have joined the protests and demonstrations in Paris and around the country. Students set up blockades and joined the struggle, angry at the so-called reforms, which restrict entry to university. Images of armed police towering over kneeling school students with their hands on their heads or tied behind them further enraged people. Melenchon, the



left presidential candidate in 2017, who won more than seven million votes, has supported the protests.

The movement in France has inspired workers and young people internationally. The victories won so far show that elected governments are not invincible. They are an example to union leaders everywhere who refuse to fight austerity.

The battle with Macron and his rich backers is not over. Protests continue. The government has announced new repressive laws. Most of France supports the protests, including previously comfortable middle layers. France has a proud tradition of protest, including the huge general strike of 1968. If the union leaders called a general strike it could remove this unpopular government and would, like in 1968, pose who should rule society — the rich or the people? The crucial element that can turn this massive cry of rage into a force for transforming society, on socialist lines, is a party that has this as its clear aim.

For more information on France and Gauche Revolutionnaire: www.gaucherevolutionnaire.fr/

Refugees, the Troubling Math

Rocco Trigueros

No other word in our contemporary vocabulary elicits the amount of fear, support or rejection as the word “refugee.” In the recent US elections, Trump claimed the US was facing “an invasion” from a caravan of a few thousand desperate people fleeing persecution, poverty and violence. He ordered thousands of troops to the border and shut down the US government trying to bully congress to provide funds for a useless wall.

While many Europeans welcome refugees, European Union politicians and countries blame them for every problem. These refugees are fleeing the horror of war and brutal repression. Most are from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Somalia, countries that have recently suffered military interventions from the west.

Internationally there are 68.5 million refugees; only 25.4 million have fled their home country and mostly to neighbouring poor countries — Turkey, Iran,

Lebanon, Pakistan and Uganda — living in squalid camps. Half are children.

The suffering that drives people to leave their homes, family and friends to take a dangerous and long journey in the hope of finding safety is immense. The few people that actually survive the ordeals of desert, open water, hunger and mistreatment to reach a country that is supposed to provide them with a safe haven are met mostly with government hostility. Most refugees are twice attacked, in their home country and when they flee.

Canada takes a few refugees; in 2017 it admitted less than 0.2% of the world’s total refugee population. Recently, around 35,000 asylum seekers (0.1% of Canada’s population) came to Canada from the US. Doug Ford calls them “illegal border crossers,” seeking to whip up prejudice. They are not “illegal.” Canadian law recognizes their rights to seek protection. Prime Minister Mackenzie King refused Jewish refugees in 1939. Socialist Alternative rejects the intolerance of him and people like Doug Ford today.

When Canada Invaded Russia



Review of *From Victoria to Vladivostok*

by Ben Isitt

Bill Hopwood

World War One's four years of slaughter were not enough for Canada's ruling class. By early 1919, they had sent 4,200 troops to Vladivostok, part of a global capitalist invasion aiming to crush Russia's new workers' republic.

The Bolshevik-led Revolution of November 1917 terrified the capitalist classes, as they faced mutinies in the French, British and German armies and, on the home fronts, workers demanded jobs, good pay and more.

By December 1917, the capitalist rulers were united in plans to crush the revolution. In the summer of 1918, workers' rule in Vladivostok was overthrown by Chinese, US, Czech, Japanese and British troops. By September 1918, while war continued in Europe, there were 350,000 anti-Bolshevik forces in eastern Russia.

Towards the war's end, Canada experienced strong opposition to conscription; strikes for higher pay, a shorter work-week and union recognition; and widespread socialist agitation. Canada's rulers claimed that WW1 was to defend democracy, yet in 1918 fourteen workers' organizations, many publications and almost all strikes were banned.

The troops, assembled in Victoria to sail to Russia, mostly opposed going. The Labour Council held meetings against the invasion, with nearly 1,000 troops turning up. Troops were forced at gun-point onto the departing boat.

The anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia were demoralized, divided and incompetent. The Red Army waged a political and military campaign, making class appeals to the opposing troops. By summer 1919, most Canadian troops were withdrawn and the other foreign forces withdrew over the next months.

The troops brought a bear back to Canada, which lived in Stanley Park zoo for 20 years. Indicating their mood, the bear was named Trotsky, the leader of the army they had been sent to fight.



Murder of Rosa Luxemburg, 1919

A page from history

Leslie Kemp

100 years ago Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were brutally murdered. Luxemburg, the German working class's strongest theoretician, and Liebknecht, its most



esteemed leader, won their reputations through years of consistent struggle.

Luxemburg was early to recognize the political atrophy of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Bernstein argued in the 1890s that socialism could be achieved by gradually reforming capitalism and that the SPD cease to be a party of social revolution. Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution*, written in 1899, stated that Bernstein questioned "the very existence of the social democratic movement." His ideas led to almost all SPD leaders, and most workers' leaders worldwide, voting for the slaughter of World War One.

Luxemburg and Liebknecht were among the handful of leaders who opposed the war; both were imprisoned. As the horror of the war mounted, their ideas gained support. They welcomed the Russian Revolution of 1917, which boosted opposition to the war. In November 1918, the German navy mutinied, and within a few days the war was over, the monarchy overthrown and, with workers', sailors' and soldiers' committees everywhere, the potential of a socialist workers' republic existed.

Luxemburg and Liebknecht helped form the Communist Party of Germany, recognizing the need for a Marxist revolutionary party like the Russian Bolsheviks to complete Germany's revolution. The SPD leaders were determined to save German capitalism and one leader, Noske, stated he would be the "bloodhound." He unleashed the military and the semi-fascist Freikorps to crush the Berlin workers' uprising and murder Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

A true internationalist, Rosa was part of revolutionary movements in Poland, Russia and Germany. Rosa and Karl were principled fighters for working class independence. Their murder did not end their ideas and inspiration, these live on.

Invest in Jobs Not a Pipeline

Bill Hopwood



Paradise Fire, California, killed 86

In 2018, fires raged across BC's forests — stoked by climate change. The Federal Court of Appeal delayed construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline to Vancouver. The International Panel on Climate Change gave a stark warning that society needs to rapidly and radically reduce the release of CO₂. Yet Trudeau decided to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline with \$4.5 billion of taxpayers' money. As if we need more fires than last year.

The Court ruling is merely a delay, as the government does a second rushed consultation with First Nations and seeks ways to mitigate tanker impact on orca whales. The government has repeated its commitment to build the pipeline, using our hard earned tax dollars.

Trudeau falsely claims the pipeline "will create 15,000 new, middle class jobs." Tragically Alberta's NDP premier Notley has also swallowed the jobs' myth. Kinder Morgan's own submission stated that the project would create 90 permanent jobs and 2,500 construction jobs for two years. Construction costs are estimated at \$9.3 billion. The government is proposing to spend at least \$13.8 billion to provide a few short-term jobs, while damaging the environment and ignoring Indigenous' rights.

Another myth is that the pipeline will significantly boost the price of Alberta's bitumen. There is no basis for this, as the lower price is mainly due to the much higher cost of transporting and refining bitumen compared to normal crude oil.

Instead, spending \$14 billion would provide 18,000 good jobs for over a decade. It would provide clean water for all First Nations' reserves. Canada could begin the necessary dramatic shift to clean energy by investing in renewable energy, insulating buildings to reduce fuel use and cost, and investing in public transit.

It will take a mighty struggle to stop Trudeau's pipeline mania. Socialist Alternative campaigns for a mass movement that hits profits as the best way to stop the pipeline.

Climate Change Made Me Sick



Aiden Sisler

Last summer, BC was covered in thick forest fire smoke. In Vancouver, the sun was a pale orange ball and air quality was among the world's worst.

I rushed to St. Paul's Hospital emergency during an asthma attack — my first since age four. Walking just two blocks to the bus stop, my throat closed up. My vitals were so bad I was rushed past many others waiting in discomfort to a room filled with people inhaling medicine to open their airways. It was harrowing to see people from five to seventy years strapped to the tanks. Many seemingly healthy young people were there.

After five hours, I was sent home and referred to specialists, but face a six-month wait to deal with my breathing and heart issues. I missed many workdays, was forced to stay indoors for days on end, my partner had to run errands, my social and political life disappeared and I couldn't sleep due to constricted airways. My health bills jumped by over \$350 a month.

People were advised to stay indoors or go to public places for cleaner air. This is no answer — people have to go to shop and work, some outside. Even indoors, air quality was low. People who are homeless or in poor quality housing are at most risk.

Capitalism makes people and the planet sick. We need a healthy socialist world for all!



Forest Fire Smoke, Vancouver

Climate Disaster (Continued from back page)

Providing these good jobs will require employment to be based on social and environmental needs, not profits for the few.

The working class has the potential power to control the economy and change society. It will need clear socialist policies, militant actions including strikes and electing socialist candidates independent of corporate money.

We need to overthrow capitalism. We are socialists, first and foremost, because we care about humanity and want to see it prosper. The task ahead is daunting, but not impossible. This is not the apocalypse yet, and in a socialist world, it won't be.



Will Munro

This is not the apocalypse . . . yet. But, the recent raging fires, droughts, hurricanes, floods, storms and melting ice feel like it. And these are the impacts of just a 1°C increase in global temperatures.

The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report stated with “high confidence,” that human activities have already increased global temperatures by 1°C. Based on current trends, the increase will be 1.5°C by 2030. They warn that an increase over 1.5°C will cause a planet-wide ecological disaster unlike anything seen by humanity. To prevent this, greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced by 49% by 2030, and to net zero by 2050. If not, the global temperature increase will exceed 2°C. That would be the apocalypse.

Awareness of human-caused climate change has existed for a long, long time. In 1960, the US Science Advisory Committee warned that CO₂ emissions could have a “greenhouse warming effect.” Since then the evidence for climate change has only piled up. Achieving the target emission reductions are entirely realistic: the technology and knowledge exist. The barrier is the current economic and political arrangements.

However, to protect their economic interests, fossil fuel industries, conservative think tanks, and right-wing media have spent trillions of dollars trying to

discredit climate science. The US president is a climate change denier, and his administration has done all it can to deregulate the fossil fuel industry, increase reliance on coal and petroleum and stop development of alternative energy sources. While Trudeau is not a denier, his government’s actions increase greenhouse gas emissions.

The evidence is clear: capitalism cannot fix climate change. Capitalism is a system to maximize profits for the owners of the economy. Tackling climate change requires prioritizing science over profits and long-term international planning and cooperation, which is impossible for competing companies and countries.

Fixing climate change will take the working class fighting in solidarity. Capitalists have harnessed climate anxiety to sell products: Tesla cars, organic foods, and a whole host of other “green” products. However, these are a drop in the ocean as 70% of all emissions are caused by just 100 corporations. While changes to individual lifestyles are welcome, these alone will not deal with climate change.

A united working class requires linking tackling climate change to economic justice. Workers will need to be retrained and have good jobs in renewable energy, public transit, ecological construction and environmental repair. There is a lot of work to do.

Continued on page 15