

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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- Alberta: P. 3
- Indigenous Land Defence: P. 5
- COVID Disaster: Pp. 7 - 9
- Climate and Jobs: P. 10

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# ABOUT SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

## What We Stand For

### The Whole System is Rotten

We oppose capitalism's focus on profit before people and environment. Capitalism does not serve the interests of the vast majority of humanity.

- **Ensure secure income and housing for all.**
- **Ensure major taxation of the super-rich and big corporations** and close all tax havens to raise the necessary funds.
- **Bring into public ownership key sections of the economy** including banking, the internet, the energy industry, transportation and privately-owned utilities.
- **A comprehensive, universal, public health system**, integrated with social care.
- **A Green Jobs Program** to provide well-paid union jobs that meet human and environmental needs, including a shift to renewable energy, a mass program to build high quality social housing, refit existing buildings, and upgrading the rail network for passengers and freight.
- **Democratic control of work and society.**
- **Justice for all people** with everyone having guaranteed access to food, quality housing, health care, child care, education and basic amenities including quality drinking water.

**For a Socialist Reconstruction!**



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International Socialist Alternative,  
active on all six continents.**

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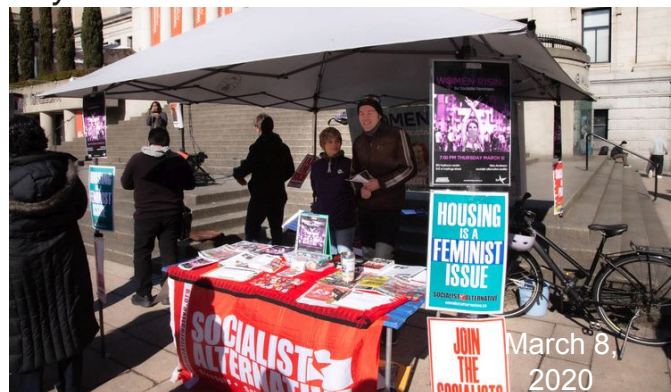
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magazine, join Socialist Alternative!**

We invite you to check out our website,  
which has longer versions of many of the  
articles here, and much more.

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## Socialist Alternative in 2020

Ray Goerke



2020 was an extraordinary year for Socialist Alternative Canada as it was for all Canadians, adapting to life under a pandemic. While being safe, the need to criticize capitalism's failures and point to a socialist alternative was greater than ever.

Before COVID restrictions we attended rallies in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en land defenders and sent over \$700 as a donation. In Metro Vancouver, along with COPE and Unite Here Local 40, we co-hosted the first rally in the city for years to mark International Working Women's Day on March 8.

As COVID mounted, Socialist Alternative rapidly moved online. We held 20 online Canada-wide open Zoom meetings with attendees from seven provinces. We published over 650 new articles by Canadian and international authors and more than doubled the visits to our website.

Alongside activity we emphasised our political development. In addition to organizing online reading groups, 23 members attended International Socialist Alternative's first ever online summer school, the Virtual Marxist University. The event was an incredible success with 70 discussion sessions attended by over 1,500 people from around the world, in up to 9 languages with a finance appeal that raised \$326,480.

During the brief re-opening in the summer, our members attended rallies and marches in solidarity with working class and Indigenous people including Mi'kmaq fishers, Black Lives Matter protesters, and unionized hospitality workers.

Socialist Alternative Canada is growing faster than ever. In Metro Vancouver we grew from one branch to two, with both branches holding weekly online branch meetings. Across the country our membership increased by a third, with new members in BC, Alberta, and Ontario. You could be our next member! Join Socialist Alternative today!

# The UCP's Disaster for Alberta

*Laura and Jared Blustein*

Alberta faces historic suffering and struggles, and the governing United Conservative Party (UCP) continues to demonstrate total disregard for our communities. They put corporate profits and cronyism over the health and prosperity of our province and people. Premier Kenney's handling of COVID nearly drove Alberta over a cliff.

Instead of supporting the security, health and resilience of Albertans, Kenney chose to announce health care cuts of \$600 million and laid-off 11,000 health workers. This follows the fight Kenney picked with doctors at the start of the pandemic, cancelling their pay agreement, which resulted in 40% of them threatening to leave the province.

Kenney stated that COVID restrictions would be "an unprecedented violation of fundamental, constitutionally protected rights and freedoms." Yet killing people is an attack on their freedom. UCP resisted restrictions, believing this would help profits, yet the delay in action is worse for jobs and small businesses.

Faced with record COVID rates and deaths, in mid-November Kenney placed restrictions on private social gatherings, but with little impact. Only on December 9, were stronger restrictions finally implemented. Furthermore, the Alberta government stated that all Albertans should "avoid non-essential travel outside Canada." Yet seven UCP politicians decided that we're not all in this together and travelled abroad during the holidays, provoking fury.

## COVID only Latest Disaster

Albertans were already reeling from the collapse in oil prices and the UCP's disastrous economic policies. The UCP gave over \$4 billion in tax breaks to foreign-owned oil and gas corporations in 2019. It announced almost \$8 billion in outright purchase and guaranteed loans to the Keystone XL pipeline, which may never get built. These undermined the province's finances, now facing a deficit of \$24 billion, so there has been little support for Albertans, faced with local businesses closing and mounting unemployment.

At the start of 2020, the UCP announced the partial closure of 20 parks and removed 164 from the Park system, claiming \$5 million in savings. Yet, Kenney squanders \$30 million yearly on his futile "energy war room." The UCP ended the long-standing limits on coal mining in the Rocky Mountains. This flies in the face of climate change, endangers several species already under threat and could poison water supplies for people and farms across the southern prairies. They since did a semi-retreat under mass pressure.

Kenney continues to pick fights with Ottawa. He wants to replace the RCMP with a provincial police force – a previous attempt ended in 1932 due to gross



over-spending. The UCP is also proposing to leave the Canada Pension Plan and put the funds into Alberta Pension, leaving Albertans' pensions in the untrusting hands of Kenney. As the auditor general flagged \$1.6 billion worth of accounting errors and oversight issues, working Albertans will no doubt be the victims in this UCP scam.

## Oil Myth

There is a widespread Alberta myth, boosted by Kenney and company, that the oil sector is the driver of the economy and jobs. The oil sands are shedding jobs: 35,000 jobs have gone since 2014. Cenovus cut another 2,000 at the start of 2021. Yet the oil companies are still paying dividends; between April and June 2020, Canadian Natural Resource Ltd. gave out \$500 million to shareholders.

Over-reliant on fossil fuels, Alberta is vulnerable to a boom-bust cycle. During the boom years the government neither saved nor diversified. The Heritage Fund has only \$16 billion; if it had followed Norway's path it would be worth nearly ten times as much. Alberta has many potential renewable energy sources, which if developed would provide more jobs and a secure future.

## Resistance

The UCP's failures are facing growing opposition with Kenney the most unpopular premier in Canada, with only 30 percent approval. Polls show an increasing shift to the left and there is growing interest in socialism. Civil-society solidarity economy projects are popping up across Alberta.

Defeating Kenney will take more than public opinion. On October 26, hundreds of workers engaged in wildcat strikes across the province in response to the UCP's attacks on public health. The Alberta Federation of Labour has talked of strikes. Coordinated action of workers can force retreat and even drive the UCP from office.

# Online Study Sucks

Mason Kerr



Universities are fleecing students this year as COVID restructures everything except paying for education. Post-secondary tuition rates haven't dropped at all since the virus hit and courses went online. I now pay the same price for half as much time with educators.

My friends at Simon Fraser University and the University of BC face fee increases this year of 2 percent for Canadians and 4 percent for international students. Canadian students, excluding Québec, owe the federal government \$22 billion in loans.

Universities and governments are happy forcing us to pay an arm and a leg to get a poor-quality education. It's clear that teachers were unprepared for the transition and are making do the best they can. They don't have the time or supports to give us the education that we paid for. Theory lectures have been cut in half and discussion is relegated to posting in forums.

Meanwhile, students are floundering trying to make rent with one or two jobs (if they're lucky) and simultaneously being blamed as young people for spreading the virus.

In this context, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said in her fall economic statement that "the government proposes to reduce student debt by eliminating interest on the federal portion of the Canada student loans and Canada apprentice loans. I remember vividly struggling with my own student loans, and I am glad to help relieve our young people."

This statement insults students' critical faculties and moral sensibilities. Freeland is a 1990s Rhodes Scholar and Harvard graduate. Her parents, both lawyers, sent her to one of Canada's top academic high schools. In today's dire situation, the best our government can do for students is to stop charging them additional interest on their loans.

After the government refused to extend a six-month repayment freeze, it was clear that students buried in student loans are going to be screwed. Embarrassingly, US students might get their loans forgiven or reduced while we up north are left to languish.

# What Makes Me Angry:

## Travel Privilege!



Larry Hyink

Some elected folks think it's okay preaching obedience to public health orders, then taking off for the beach without so much as a jaunty "aloha" to the rest of us.

Citizens are angry at Alberta's Tracy Allard and her "tradition," (undoubtedly dating back to the time of the druids) of a holiday trip to Hawaii. She was one of six Alberta Conservative MLAs who took trips to the sun (gotta wonder if they got a group tour rate). These clowns are from a government that was last to bring in any COVID action in Canada, instead blathering about "personal responsibility," a policy apparently only meant for us, not them!

Then there's former Ontario Finance Minister Rod Phillips topping his hypocrisy sundae with bullshit sauce in a video pretending to be home. Still, my favourite is Don Plett, Conservative Senate leader, and charter member of parliament's Trump Fan Club. His "adios suckers" routine came only after signing a declaration restricting MPs' travel.

Pundits express "shock" at elitism and, um, "private privilege." How, they ask, can these people travel while admonishing peons to stay put?

Hi Everybody! Welcome to the wonderful world of privilege. "Privilege" joins two Latin words meaning "private law." The privileged have money and perks to avoid trivial everyday hassles the rest of us face, like, y'know, food, rent, transport, medicine, etc. No shock required. The 1% and their loyal flunkies got addicted to their pre-pandemic world of privilege. Private law was more tolerated, not so noticeable and way less infectious, back then.

Other officials who traveled are different. Niki Ashton (NDP) and two Liberal MPs traveled for family illness or death, not a holiday ... but still ...

Socialists are clear: elected representatives calling for sacrifices must share those sacrifices in an exemplary way. This is an important legacy of the early egalitarian days of the Russian Revolution. We're not really "all in this together," if people making decisions can avoid the negative consequences of their policies! Socialists like Seattle city councillor Kshama Sawant live like their constituents, even refusing pay higher than a skilled worker, and donating the rest. Canadian politicians might follow this example, postponing some good things in their lives until we can all share.

One can dream. Or struggle to win representatives who will.



# Indigenous Struggles Continue

Allie Pev

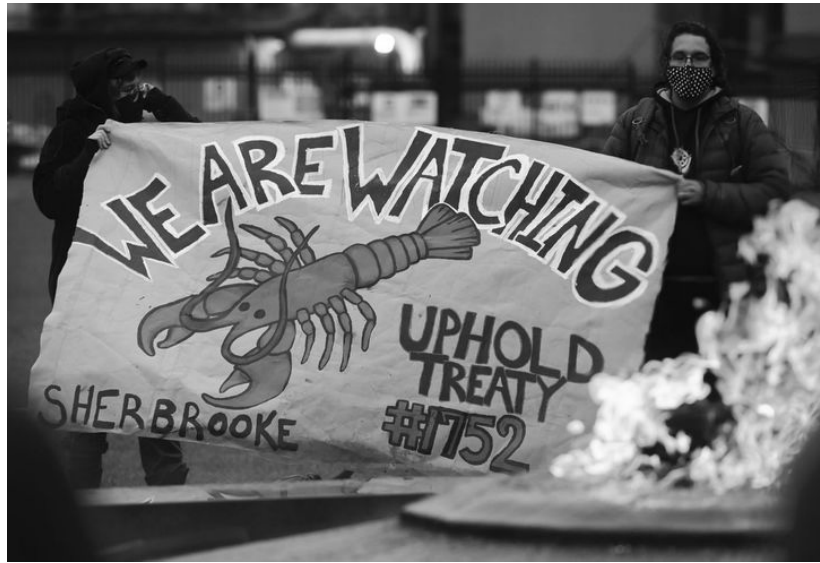
Not even COVID stopped the determined actions of Indigenous land defenders. They carried out some of the biggest actions that Canada has ever seen in response to the further invasions of sovereign Indigenous territories by the Canadian state. Peaceful blockades and rallies took place on rail lines, parliament grounds, various cities' intersections and at government ministers' offices.

There was an international outcry at the RCMP's violent invasion of Wet'suwet'en lands and the threats to peaceful elders by heavily armed paramilitary forces. The momentum of action was building as COVID swept across the nation. Yet still, Wet'suwet'en land defence continues.

Despite COVID, struggle has continued. Members of the Six Nations have been at their reclamation camp, 1492 Land Back Lane, since July opposing a housing development on unceded lands in Caledonia, Ontario. A treaty in 1784 granted land, including the 1492 Land Back Lane area, to Six Nations along the Grand River. Yet courts have issued an injunction against the land defenders and there have been multiple arrests.

Mi'kmaq treaties, of 1760-61, guarantee their right to sustain a "moderate livelihood." The 1999 Supreme Court of Canada Marshall decision upheld this right, yet in 21 years Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans has not acted to enforce this right. On September 15, Sipekne'katik First Nation announced they would be launching the Sipekne'katik Rights Implementation Fishery. Non-Indigenous commercial fishers violently attacked and intimidated Mi'kmaq fishers, destroying equipment and property. The RCMP stood back and watched.

Pre-COVID, fights against damaging extractive resource projects showed governments' and industry's blatant disregard for Aboriginal Title. Despite the government pledging to act on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report, they ignore the harm caused to Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people when in proximity to man-camps. The pandemic added another dire layer: the large numbers of workers criss-crossing remote Indigenous territory brought greater risk of COVID-19 to remote communities. Elders are knowledge and language keepers in communities; they are also the most vulnerable to this disease. Unsurprisingly, outbreaks have occurred at work sites, including Site C dam, two along the LNG pipeline running through Wet'suwet'en, and at the Kitimat LNG site. Only on December 29 was a health order issued to limit the number of workers at sites.



People have not experienced this pandemic the same; poverty, inequality and mental health have all worsened with the woeful responses from all levels of government. Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable. It is impossible to wash hands frequently with unsafe water. There are 58 long-term drinking water advisories in effect in 40 reserve communities. It is impossible to physically distance in over-crowded housing. Health facilities in remote communities may not exist or are not capable of handling an influx of patients. Even with a vaccine rollout, COVID's impact will last for years.

Capitalism did not cause COVID, but the pandemic has exacerbated every hellish nightmare capitalism breeds. Unemployment, debt, loss of income, grief, and housing insecurity were bad before the pandemic and now they are worse.

Underlying all the Indigenous struggles is the issue of land. Capitalism's view of land is explained by Locke, a 17th Century English philosopher, "[e]ven if land is occupied by indigenous peoples, and even if they make use of the land themselves, their land is still open to legitimate colonial expropriation," as capitalist use will increase the exchange value realized from it. In contrast Indigenous people, and all who care about the environment, say people should not exploit the land but rather like a good family "they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition," to quote Marx.

No gesture by politicians saying they support Indigenous rights can overcome the contradictions over land. The 2020s will further push youth and the working class to join in solidarity with Indigenous peoples' struggle. Land should be cared for by all, for the well-being of all for the next seven generations to come.

# Women Mobilize Against Oppression

Leslie Kemp



Victory in Argentina!

When most people think back to 2020, they will remember the pandemic. Another notable feature of 2020 was the leadership of women in mass protests around the globe, raising their voices against oppression and violence against women, and wider social and economic injustice.

## Women take to the streets

The *ni una menos* movement began in Argentina in response to femicides but its rallying cry has echoed around the world. Described as a “shout of resistance, struggle, pain and rage” against the “denial of a life free of violence,” it has mobilized women across Latin America. A million marched in Chile on March 8, International Women’s Day. In Mexico City, 80,000 marched to protest violence against women.

The police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the US saw a massive pouring of people onto the streets all around the world. In Canada, the shooting death of Chantel Moore, a young woman from the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation, by police in New Brunswick doing a “wellness check,” outraged Canadians. Women led marches protesting racism and violence in many cities, including in Vancouver.

Polish women protested Poland’s court decision to ban abortions. They were in the streets, week after week, in the hundreds of thousands. In Belarus, women became “the face and driving force” of a movement which aimed to challenge the fraudulent election of Lukashenko, Europe’s last dictator who called women “too weak for politics.”

Women in India were leaders in two of the biggest protests in recent times, against the Modi government’s new farm laws and challenging the citizenship amendment act earlier in the year. The leading role played by women challenged long-held stereotypes of women as passive victims.

As 2020 came to a close, Argentinian women won a years-long battle for the right to abortion.

## Roots of Women’s Oppression

While the roots of women’s oppression is based in class society, women’s oppression takes a particular form under modern capitalism. COVID has exposed the uneven impact of COVID’s ravages on women and other vulnerable groups, contradicting the mantra of “we’re all in this together.” We never were.

Violence against women is a reality, pandemic or not. COVID accentuated the violence, as lockdowns forced women into close living arrangements with violent partners. This is both the open violence of a partner and the insidious violence of society: workplace harassment, the everyday fear that many women experience just by walking alone at night on the street, the heart-wrenching discrimination Indigenous women experience in the health care system and the distorted and stereotypical media portrayals of women in the media.

Globally, capitalism’s misogyny has led to the deaths of thousands of women essential workers: in long-term care, hospitals, food services and other work vital to the running of society. Women’s work as caregivers is both undervalued and underpaid. Women often bear the burden of childcare alone and face the difficult choice of earning money working outside the home, or staying at home, caring for their children. Many women simply do not have a choice. In Canada, 1.5 million women lost their jobs early in the pandemic, and women’s participation in the labour force is at the lowest level it’s been in three decades.

While Canada had its share of protests in 2020, giving voice to women’s concerns about racism, inequality and climate change, there isn’t a broad women’s movement. In past decades, liberal feminism fought for reforms but did not challenge the fundamental roots of women’s oppression, nor the oppression of LGBTQ+ people, people of colour, immigrants and all working-class people. Currently in Canada, the key leaders of women’s struggle are Indigenous and women of colour. There is an urgent need to fight for key reforms such as affordable, accessible childcare, real equal pay, the protection of essential workers and ending violence against women. It is only through movements of working-class women and their allies that women’s equality is possible.

For more on Socialist Feminism  
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INTERNATIONAL  
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# Capitalism's COVID Disaster

Tim Heffernan and Bill Hopwood

A year into the COVID pandemic, it is still out of control. Apart from a few, governments have been incompetent or criminal allowing the virus to spread death, fear, misery, mental illness, and more. In 2020, about 90 million people contracted COVID and nearly two million died. The main policy has been to wait for vaccinations, which have started to be delivered, but there are many questions and a long way to go.

Though it was known that a second wave would come, none of the larger provinces attempted to eradicate the virus. This was like firefighters getting a blaze under control and leaving while the embers were still smouldering – inevitably the flames would re-erupt.

Disgracefully, once the number of cases went down in the summer, everything reopened. There was no preparation for the second wave. The federal and provincial governments should have mass produced PPE and test kits, and established rigorous testing and tracing systems, and comprehensive isolation strategies. Alongside these strong public health programs, we needed social and economic policies including universal paid sick leave, comprehensive childcare and ending homelessness. All long-term care homes should have been brought into the public sector with full staffing on decent wages.

In Canada, only the Atlantic provinces have any claim to be doing a good job. Politicians in the six large provinces keep doing too little, too late as cases soar, claiming they want to protect business. Ontario is a hopeless confusion of mixed messages and half measures. Until recently even in areas under lockdown, malls and big box stores were booming, while small neighbourhood businesses suffer. Across Canada the long-term “care” homes, dominated by profiteers, understaffed with underpaid workers, continue to be death camps. Ontario has announced plans to make improvements – in five years time!

COVID has cruelly exposed class divisions in Canada. Poor, racialized, Indigenous and young people have been hit much harder, as have women. The better-off have been able to work from home in large houses. Essential workers – many young people and new immigrants – have to go to work, travel on public transit and are less able to isolate at home. Yet they have been blamed for spreading COVID. Spread is mainly at work, in long-term care homes and education yet governments don't act on these, instead attacking individuals' actions. Women have had to juggle jobs, many essential and low paid, with childcare, often in small apartments.

COVID pushed the economy into the already



looming recession. One in six Canadians have been laid off. Millions more jobs and many small businesses only exist due to government support. Entire sectors such as airlines, tourism, and parts of service and retail may never recover. COVID dealt further blows to struggling oil and gas.

Yet the super-rich are richer. Forty-three billionaires increased their wealth by \$53 billion between April and October 2020. The highest paid 20 percent of Canadians have increased their income during COVID and have amassed some \$90 billion in savings. The low-paid half of the population is worse off and struggling with mounting debt and rent arrears. Almost half (46 percent), up ten points in the last two years, of indebted Canadians say debt is having a negative effect on their mental health.

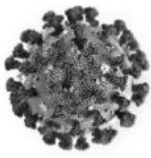
The government sent 400,000 letters from the Canada Revenue Agency to people who “mistakenly” received CERB payments, demanding repayments. Yet many big companies claimed the Canada Emergency Wage subsidy and used it to boost dividends. No threatening letters from the government.

Government spending has, so far, masked the depth of the economic recession and economic misery. However much of this has benefited the rich and big companies that don't need the money.

COVID has destroyed neoliberalism's claims that the market can solve things, small government is best and there is no society. It has shown we need essential workers, not bankers, government actions are vital, and we need society.

Capitalism turned a virus into a disaster. A democratically planned society would have been prepared for a pandemic and would have acted quickly to protect people.

Another good reason for a socialist alternative!



## A Personal Support Worker

A Toronto PSW, who is a refugee claimant from Nigeria with two university degrees.

*What drew you to Personal Support Work?*

When I was young, I cared for my ill grandparents and found that I enjoyed caring for people – elders, people with disabilities and mental health challenges. When I came to Canada, I felt that PSW work would be a good and immediate way to contribute and provide service to my new country.

*What challenges have you faced as a PSW during COVID?*

I started my job while completing my training; it was a fast immersion during a difficult time. I work at a not-for-profit for seniors run by the City of Toronto. Initially there were PPE shortages, so we had to re-use masks and gowns. After many shifts, I came home fearful of giving my son the virus. I took many steps to minimize risk – changing clothes, showering immediately upon arriving home.

Many residents suffer from dementia and forget about precautions when they're infected. It is our job to get them back to their rooms, but we constantly worry about exposure. We are tested every two weeks, and several colleagues have contracted the virus. When people hear that you are a PSW they tend to avoid you, fearful of catching the virus. I am constantly worried about taking transit and shopping.

*Will you get the vaccine when it's available to you?*

It is being offered to us, and some of my colleagues have had it. I am worried about short and long-term side effects. Also, many of us PSWs are newcomer African women – with our colonial history we have a healthy skepticism of measures implemented to “keep us safe.” So often, they have proven to be otherwise. Nonetheless, I will probably take it, as it is probably worthwhile as I have a high-risk job. We will see.

## A Nurse

I work in long-term mental health rehabilitation. Right away, I want to say that I love my job – especially the interpersonal aspect of it. We support our patients by establishing a strong, long-term rapport. For better or worse, this means I become (to a point) emotionally involved in their welfare. It is this emotional involvement that can be distressing.

Most psychiatric patients are here on an involuntary basis. They consider themselves prisoners with few precious freedoms. Now COVID has snatched away these freedoms: no more day trips, no more take-out, no more walks, no more cigarette passes, and one-hour visits with family – once a month if you're lucky. All this hits both the patients' and my mental health. Still, I try to help them on their journey. Eventually, their emotional regulation and daily function improve, while hallucinations and delusions taper off. After

## A Doctor

Nearly a year into COVID and what have we learned? Chloroquine and household bleach do not work, while 19th century public health measures – handwashing, masking, social distancing and efficient screening programs – once again work. One thing is certain. This virus, highly contagious and moderately virulent, has cut like a gamma knife to the rotten core of capitalism, exposing its blatant contradictions, inequities and failings.

Working-class and poor people around the world have borne most of COVID's wrath, with mass unemployment, soaring income precariousness and evictions, greatly impacting morbidity and mortality. In Toronto, your postal code and your work is highly predictive of your risk of contracting COVID and dying. These are national trends, continuing the inequalities of class, racism and sexism that are in the foundation of Canada. Exploited migrant workers, especially in farming and food processing, have died disproportionately. Personal



enough progress, they are discharged. At this point I should be happy – discharge is kind of like graduation.

Instead, I am worried and angry. Worried, knowing what they're being thrown back into. Many will return to living in squalor on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, far away from the support they need, and close to a dangerous supply of street drugs. Most will be re-admitted sooner or later. My anger comes in when I think about how many times my clients have been through this cycle, and how it is enabled by the complete lack of material support from the system.

Not even the pandemic, with its sharp spike in overdose deaths and mental illness, has moved the province to improve this support. The government continues to subject the vulnerable population to the same cycle of crisis and medical treatment. It's both inefficient and inhumane. If that's not emblematic of capitalism, I don't know what is.

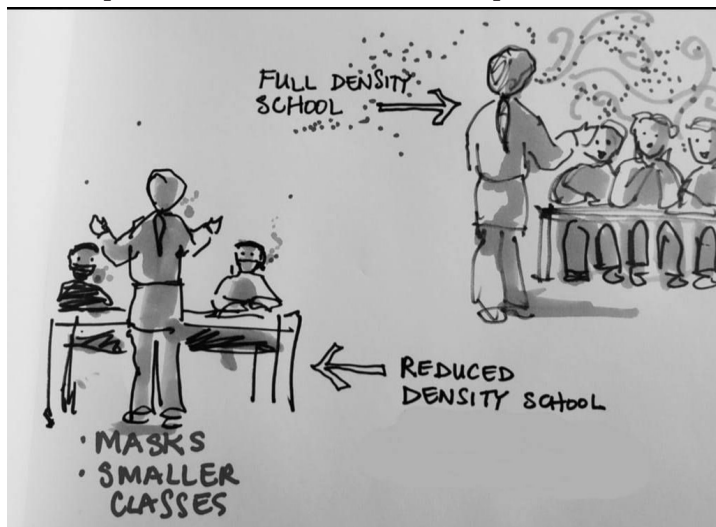


# g COVID-19

Support Workers, who form the critical foundation of our healthcare system, and the elders they serve, have been neglected in a vacuum of leadership, and the worship of profit.

On top of the deaths, the greatest toll is on our collective mental health. Young people in particular, are suffering from anxiety and depression in unprecedented numbers. Mental illness is soaring. The vast uncertainty in our world, coupled with poverty, lack of housing and unemployment, rampant before COVID but greatly exacerbated by it, are creating a true, mental health crisis, in a system poorly prepared for it.

Vaccines offer hope, however deep questions about their long-term efficacy and safety remain. They will definitely put selection pressure on the virus and facilitate possibly more infectious and lethal mutants to evolve. They may induce a false sense of security and an abandonment of the public health measures that have been the most effective response to COVID. I know that capitalism is bad for public health and the virus has proved this.



## A Teacher

In-person school is essential. Parents have been able to go to work, families are getting more equal access to education and generally everyone's mental health is benefiting from face-to-face interactions. Throughout the fall my high school students have been very committed: always wearing their masks, rarely lamenting the open windows (rain or shine) and engaging in their learning. They want to be in class; they need to be there.

But teaching in the second wave of COVID has been challenging. We've added hours to our working days, relearning and reorganizing our jobs for the third time since March to align with changing COVID protocols. Interactive learning activities are vital to education, but these have to change due to the never-ending fear of infection. This makes for an emotionally draining working and learning environment.

School reopening went better than expected but

## A Toronto High School Student

Most schools are similar, so most students can relate to my experiences.

I knew the autumn was going to be a complete and total failure even before going back as we were only given two days' notice of our schedule. When I set eyes on my once well-trodden stomping grounds, now completely foreign and frankly, frightening, this was confirmed. I arrived early, so I could avoid crowds and the tearful reunions of my classmates. But everyone else had the same idea, because at 8 am the yard was completely packed. Some were physically distancing, but not most. But there were no monitors enforcing distancing or mask wearing.

School staff and students hate the School Board's management so much because they do not ask the teachers for their opinions on anything, and god forbid asking students what they want. Curriculum, supplies, landscaping are all completely out of the school's control to a point that is almost laughable.

The School Board's lack of regard for students and teachers is on full display in the COVID plan. The first thing any teacher or student would suggest for back to school is staggered start and end time, so that students don't rush out all together. The majority of higher-ups in the Ontario education office went to private schools. No wonder they have no idea. So we all come in at 8:45 and all leave together at 12:30.

The School Board higher-ups are unconcerned with the students' desire to learn safely in class rather than online, instead trying to convince the media there's a plan in place. If they focused on making sure students are safe, then word of mouth would be more beneficial than the publicity they are trying for. Democracy in education would make for better school in or out of COVID.

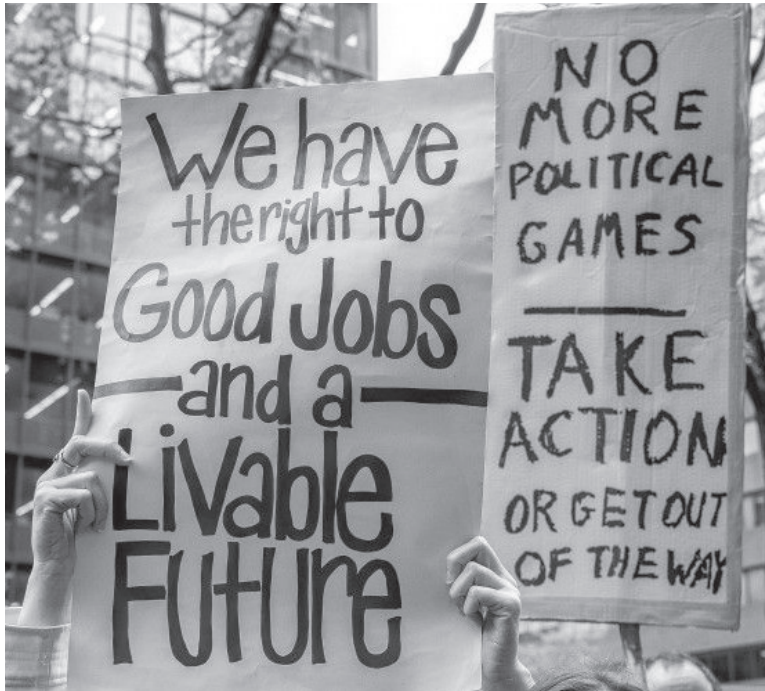


anger rose, as mounting cases led to stricter health restrictions everywhere but in schools. On November 18, NDP Premier Horgan claimed that "children are not transmitters of COVID ... Adults ... are bringing the virus into the classrooms...and that's led to outbreaks." He not only ignores multiple studies showing children can transmit COVID, but continues to refuse mandating masks in schools. This absurd hypocrisy needs to end. In my school the teachers only find out that our class has been ordered to stay home due to an outbreak when no one shows up for class. We want greater transparency, physical distancing, access to fresh air and mandated masks.

The BC Teachers' Federation is demanding class sizes of 15 to allow social distancing, but the government isn't listening. The union needs to mobilize teachers to successfully build union and public pressure to make our schools safer.

# The Struggle for Jobs and Climate

Ray Goerke and Will Munro



2020 is the warmest year on record according to NASA, topping off the warmest decade. COVID, and the recession it triggered, has forced climate change into the background. Nearly one in ten Canadians is unemployed, and of those who are employed, more than one in five report being underemployed. On top of the grinding anxiety and isolation, millions of Canadians are increasingly unable to meet their basic needs.

The global working class is living hand to mouth, becoming increasingly desperately impoverished in the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In contrast, billionaires are buying another yacht and building luxury bunkers in New Zealand, and fretting on television about “overpopulation.” A Swiss bank reported that during the pandemic, billionaire wealth has increased to \$10.2 trillion – up almost a quarter since the pandemic’s start.

## Climate Disaster

Yet 2020 was also a year of huge fires and super storms, showing that the climate disaster is building. The reality is the economic crisis and climate change are deeply interconnected, and they need to be tackled together.

Politicians say that working people need to make sacrifices to fight climate change. It is true that due to COVID there is less commuting and only the rich are flying, which according to a study in *Nature* has reduced global emissions by 8.8 percent. But personal actions are a drop in the climate change bucket. Just 100 companies were responsible for 71 percent of global emissions between 1988 and 2017. An Oxfam

study found that the wealthiest 1 percent are responsible for double the emissions of the poorest 50 percent. The rich are destroying the planet and they want working people to pay for it.

Alberta’s Conservatives have doubled down on oil, which is no surprise as oil runs in their blood. Unfortunately, the NDP when in government failed to diversify the economy and break oil’s grip on the province. But even politicians who talk about climate change are failing. Trudeau has continued to push his Trans Mountain pipeline even though there is no economic or ecological basis for it. BC’s NDP government has continued to subsidize the huge liquid natural gas (LNG) project, including supporting the RCMP’s invasion of Wet’suwet’en. The NDP still pushes the Site C dam that is over-budget and at severe geological risk, and its main role is to provide electricity to LNG. All the major energy construction sites continued through COVID outbreaks.

Capitalism has been unable to deal with COVID, which is fairly simple – test, trace, isolate and PPE. There is no way it will deal with climate change; after 30 years of conferences things are getting worse.

## A Socialist Plan for Jobs and Climate

Rather than propping up the oil and gas industry, a socialist green jobs program is needed. This means expropriating the oil and gas companies and phasing out the tar sands. But that does not mean leaving the oil and gas workers behind; they deserve guaranteed support and compensation during the transition. Unlike the present bosses, a socialist plan would look after workers. There is so much work to do from expanding public transit and long distance rail for freight and passengers, to building renewable energy sources; all would provide well-paid union jobs. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, every \$1 million dollars invested in a green economy creates ten times as many jobs as the same amount invested in oil and gas.

Climate justice and economic justice are linked inextricably. Capitalist structures that caused such widespread economic devastation and suffering during this pandemic are the exact same structures that will guarantee humanity’s extinction in the next century. This is the grotesque contradiction of capitalism, that in a time when there is so much work to be done for the future, there are so many unemployed. The working class will solve climate change, but not by giving more of the wealth of society to prop up the same companies that caused this mess. We will do it by taking the productive forces into public ownership and democratically planning production to meet human needs.

# US-China "Cold War" Will Continue

Corey Snoek

When the pandemic clears, a new reality of mass unemployment and soaring debt levels will become established. Pre-COVID saw stagnant wages, a high cost of living and bubbles in the stock market and housing. Now all these features are coupled with mass unemployment, a catastrophic collapse of small businesses and debt not seen since WW2.

As panic sets in for the capitalist class, a major feature of the coming period will be a move towards protectionism and nationalism across the world.

There will be a step back from the globalization of the past decades. Trump's turn away from international trade and diplomacy didn't take place in a vacuum. Worldwide, neoliberalism was already stalling as an economic system. The response to this stagnation was capitalists across the world calling on their local politicians to defend their interests through tariffs and trade barriers. The most obvious factor in this has been the rise of the US-China trade war.

America's position as the major world power is faltering and China wants to take the crown. In the coming years both imperialist superpowers will attempt to carve up world markets at the expense of one another. This new cold war won't see the end of foreign investment and trade between them; decoupling the economies entirely would be impossible. In some ways the interconnectedness of China and the US could actually create more tensions.

In the last cold war between two superpowers (the US and the USSR), both blocks had separate fields of trade. USSR investment was small outside the Eastern Block and US investment in the USSR was non-existent. The current clash between China and the US has the potential to shift endlessly as markets are constantly fought over.

Trump's populism has lost America serious ground internationally. By trying to play hardball with everyone at the table, he gave China room to forge new trade deals with Europe and Asia. Even if these deals end up being superficial, the US will have to grant more concessions now to nations in talks with China.

Under Biden, tensions between the US and China will be heightened. The Democrats are every bit as



hawkish as the Republicans, but their government will be much better placed to form a trade block against China.

There is also the danger that this cold war could heat up with tensions over the South China Sea and other areas, or the possibility of proxy wars or minor skirmishes as seen in the recent border clash between India and China. The US will escalate the situation if it is to their advantage, but another factor will be Xi Jinping's lean to nationalism and holding on to his identity as a political strong man.

Asian and African countries are deeply indebted to China. If the US gives these countries, post-COVID, an avenue to renege on these debts, Xi will be forced to respond, possibly by escalating events elsewhere.

Politicians everywhere know that the recovery from COVID will not be even. The most dramatic feature of the coming period will be the sheer level of wealth inequality in society. This will be felt in China, which has one of the biggest property bubbles in the world, a growing layer of unemployed and underpaid post-COVID and a multitude of regional tensions inside its own borders. If a trade war further stalls growth in China, workers and young people will begin to see mass struggle as an avenue for change.

In the US and elsewhere 2020 saw mass movements erupt in the midst of a pandemic. That energy has only been partly released. Economists are talking of a K-shaped recovery where the living standards of the average worker continue to bottom out but the rich see their profits soar.

While the politicians and rich of the world look inward, the workers' movement will forge new paths for international solidarity. Mass movements will continue to jump borders and the possibility of overthrowing capitalism and building a new society will grow with 2021.

**For information on China and workers' struggles:**  
<https://chinaworker.info/en/>

# Trump Is Out – But Struggle Continues

*Rebecca Green*

Biden is President: millions in the US and worldwide are relieved. Overcoming widespread voter suppression, historic numbers of young, working-class, and people of colour decisively voted Trump out. Yet, Trump won the second most votes in history and this closeness allowed him to claim he won. He urged a mob to storm the Capital. The police let them off easy – contrast to cops killing peaceful Blacks!

Defeating Trump, with COVID raging, should have been easy. The Democrats sabotaged Sanders and his left-wing platform that mobilized millions. They opted for uninspiring and corporate Biden and lost seats in the House. The Democrat's establishment would rather have lost to Trump than support Sanders.

## **Biden in the White House**

Biden took office during a COVID nightmare with tens of millions facing hunger, poverty, eviction and mental health crises. He enacted a wave of executive orders and presented calm: rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement, extended the ban on evictions and foreclosures, continued the student loan repayments pause, cancelled the Keystone XL pipeline and more.

He has proposed a \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan to deal with COVID and the recession. Biden in office is bolder than in the campaign. He realizes the US is in a much deeper hole than 2009, with mass unemployment, huge personal debt, and hunger hitting 50 million people. The US ruling class knows they have to spend to save the economy. They are also fearful of mass anger at poverty, inequality and racism. However, as Biden aims to work with Republicans and has tiny majorities in both Senate and House, he may negotiate away these plans.

Biden claims “there is nothing we can do to change the trajectory” soon. Bold action including closing large workplaces, universities, etc would flatten COVID, but that means challenging big business.

With his firm allegiance to corporations, he will oppose systemic changes such as Black Lives Matter's (BLM) key demand of defunding the police and Medicare for All. He has a damning record on everything from cutting social security to bailing out the banks in the last recession.

With a corporate Democrat in the White House, and a party establishment that is hostile to the left, the underlying crises facing working people are not going to end. There is a real danger of far-right growth.

## **Establishment Attacks Socialist Sawant**

The global trend of attacks on left-wing leaders is growing, including trying to recall Socialist Alternative's Seattle councillor, Kshama Sawant. She won the November 2019 re-election, against huge sums of corporate cash. She then spearhead a movement that won a tax on Seattle's big businesses

to fund affordable housing.

The recall campaign is backed by Seattle's elite, including a Trump-supporting billionaire and corporate executives. Their accusations centre on Kshama's role supporting the BLM movement. They have, hypocritically, compared her democratic mobilizations to the storming of the US Capital. The undemocratic recall process protects the political establishment. An all-out campaign of socialists, community activists and the labour movement will be necessary to defend Kshama's seat.

As COVID cases skyrocket and many millions are facing economic disaster, we need to build the struggle independent of both corporate parties for Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, a cancellation of rent and student debt. The struggle continues.

**For information on the US and Socialist Alternative:**  
[www.socialistalternative.org](http://www.socialistalternative.org)



Kshama Sawant and BLM

## **Quebec: Bill 59**

*Alexandra L.*

Forty years ago, after years of struggle, Québec workers finally won a law to protect them at work. The progressive nature of these laws put Québec ahead of the rest of Canada. However, as time passed no government made any improvements to these laws, leaving Québec far behind in terms of workplace safety and compensation in case of accidents. When the law was passed, it was expected that safety measures would gradually be implemented in all workplaces. But, due to lobbying by business organizations, this never happened, leaving about 85 percent of Québec workers, mostly women, without any safety measures in their workplaces. In autumn 2020, the right-wing CAQ government proposed Bill 59, which will set Québec back even further.

On the surface Bill 59 is a significant step forward, with more workers covered by health and safety (HS) regulations, including interns and live-in caregivers. Yet, upon closer reading, the Bill makes bosses less

# Latin America: Struggle Returns

Ray Goerke

In 2019 Latin America was a centre of world turmoil and class struggle. In Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador, the working class, young people, women and Indigenous people rose up in strikes and demonstrations against their neoliberal governments. These struggles spread between countries. While COVID-19 paused the movements, it also worsened the underlying conditions of poverty and decay of public services, so that as 2020 progressed the struggle quickly resurfaced. A common thread is the masses rejecting not just individual politicians, but the whole political and economic system.

In Chile, mass demonstrations fought through murderous police repression to force the government to call a plebiscite on a new constitution. And while the pandemic delayed the vote until October, the masses delivered a resounding defeat of the establishment, with 78 percent voting to reject the Pinochet-era constitution and 79 percent in favour of an entirely elected Constituent Convention.

The call for a new constitution is echoed in Peru, where factional fights within the ruling class over corruption resulted in Congress impeaching the president. Peru has experienced one of the highest COVID-19 death rates worldwide, with very little government support to the people. The masses took to the streets, not to defend the ousted president Vizcarra, but to protest the whole corrupt system. In spite of violent police repression the protests forced the president to resign.

The people of Guatemala faced not only the pandemic-triggered economic crisis but also the

accountable for ensuring workers' health and safety. For instance, in a "low risk" workplace with over 900 workers, such as a hospital, HS representatives will only be allowed eight hours a month to do inspections. Furthermore, the International Labour Organisation recognizes 97 work-related illnesses, but Bill 59 only recognizes 43. PTSD is the only mental health issue recognized by the Bill, which does not even acknowledge metacarpal tunnel syndrome as a workplace risk. It will be even more difficult for workers to obtain compensation for work-related health problems.

Work should never be synonymous with injury or death but, when it is, employers should be held responsible and compensate workers. Bill 59, 120 pages long, is likely to pass soon and with little scrutiny.

Fighting for safe work environments is fighting for the working class. The Québec workers' movement must fight this Bill with all its might.

**For more information on Québec and Alternative Socialiste: [alternativesocialiste.org](http://alternativesocialiste.org)**



Mass protest in Chile

devastation of Hurricane Eta, which together have driven millions deeper into poverty. The government responded not by providing aid for regular people but by slashing health and education and giving handouts to big business. But the government was forced to retract the budget after tens of thousands took to the streets and set the Congress building on fire. Despite defiance from the president and violent oppression from the national police, protesters have continued demanding the president's resignation.

The year's end saw two victories. In the last days, Argentina's women won abortion rights after a long struggle. Before that, Bolivia's masses also celebrated. After winning the 2019 presidential elections, Evo Morales, leader of the MAS party (Movement for Socialism), was forced into exile by a coup over baseless allegations of electoral fraud. The far-right, racist, senator Jeanine Áñez took power and presided over a period of intense repression of MAS supporters and Indigenous people. But the Bolivian masses rallied in general strikes, roadblocks and powerful mobilizations to resist the coup and forced fresh elections in October 2020. The MAS candidate Luis Arce Catacora won in a landslide, proving the power of the working class and Indigenous people.

Across Latin America, struggles will continue. The masses can have no illusions in the national leaders' rhetoric of peace and reconciliation, which seeks to pacify the masses while maintaining capitalism's rule. The parliamentary and electoral structures created by the ruling class are used to contain mass movements. The way forward is for workers, peasants, and Indigenous people to strengthen their organizations and continue independent mobilizations with the goal of a socialist alternative.

**For more information on Brazil and Latin America: [lsr-asi.org](http://lsr-asi.org)**

# Canadian Communist Party

## Roots of the Party

Larry Hyink

When WW1 started, Canada had an active labour movement and several socialist groups. Given Canada's size, both labour and socialist movements tended to be regionalized. In addition, many of the most theoretically advanced socialists in these groups were immigrants, whose ability to communicate in French or English was limited or non-existent.

Despite these limits, the Canadian left was a growing force until the war brought "patriotic" repression. Militants opposing workers murdering each other for "King (or Kaiser, or Tsar) and Country" were silenced or jailed. Those with weaker principles succumbed to jingoism and shepherded workers to the slaughter.

Then, in November 1917, the Russian working class rose up and took power in a socialist revolution. The revolution was a thunderbolt to the left. Every socialist and labour group was forced to take a stand. Until then, most socialists were gradualists, believing socialism would either evolve through electoral reform or through teaching people to be socialists. The Bolsheviks were different: a disciplined revolutionary party that took theory seriously and struggled with workers day to day for a better life, leading them to victory when the opportunity came.

The ruling class was alarmed. Canadian troops were sent to Russia in a futile attempt to crush the revolution. At home there was mass repression of potential revolutionary movements. An abortive attempt to organize a communist party in 1919 was broken up by federal and provincial police.

Strikes increased from 1917, peaking in 1919 with 60 general strikes, most famously in Winnipeg, which workers ran for six weeks. Despite working-class militancy and solidarity, all were defeated by state repression and timid and vacillating union leadership.

The war, the Russian Revolution and the strikes led many labour militants to join the communists. Initially there were two communist groups, both offshoots of the split of the US's early communists. Members of both, plus the Communist International, recognized that a unified party would be far more effective. In 1921, they held a meeting that would transform the face of the labour and radical movement in Canada



Delegates to 1927 CPC Congress (l to r): Custance, Lawrence, Buhay and Buller



## Early Years

*Canadian Bolsheviks*, Ian Angus  
reviewed by *Chris Fofonoff*

Angus's book details the roots, development and destruction of the first, but briefly successful, effort to launch a Canada-wide Marxist party, the Communist Party of Canada (CPC).

A unified Communist party was founded in 1921, bringing together activists from several socialist parties, many of them leaders of union struggles. The CPC encompassed both great revolutionary energy and considerable naïveté. Its members, like many in the newly formed communist parties around the world, had romantic ideas of the Russian Revolution.

As Angus explains, the members saw the victory of the revolution but "did not see the years of preparatory work." Many in the new parties thought they just had to call for revolution ("One solution revolution"), refused to work in the existing reformist-led unions and were dedicated to an illegal party. Lenin wrote *Left-Wing Communism* to counter these trends. Its publication in Canada was an important corrective to excessive and hurried revolutionary optimism.

The CPC was a new type of party, combining action, agitation and theory. Angus emphasizes the importance of learning revolutionary theory. The Communist International (Comintern), launched in 1919, initially worked to educate and co-ordinate the communist parties for the goal of world revolution. Angus shows how the party learned, with help from the Comintern, became an open party, and made successful strides in winning the best working-class militants and helping workers, such as Nova Scotia's miners, to win struggles.

Unfortunately, the Soviet Union's isolation and economic weakness resulted in its leadership degenerating and abandoning international socialism. This degeneration was both a cause and result of tragically wasted revolutionary situations in Germany, China, Britain, and elsewhere.

This cancer of Stalinism spread to the parties of the Comintern, so its function changed from ending the worldwide capitalist system to preserving the status quo. Socialists either learned to be yes-men (future leader Tim Buck), were programmed as such from the start (Stewart Smith), or resisted and were cast out (former leaders, Maurice Spector and Jack MacDonald). In 1928-29 the CPC became "Tim Buck's Party – which meant Stalin's party." It still recruited militants and did work in unions and amongst the unemployed, but it had lost its revolutionary edge.

To build Canada's revolutionary left, we can learn from our forebearers and *Canadian Bolsheviks* is valuable for the socialist movement today.

# Unite Here: A Fighting Local in BC

Mason Kerr

In the shadow of COVID-19, the fight for workers' rights rolls on. With the start of 2021, the hospitality union Unite Here Local 40 celebrated a victory for its latest members: the janitors working at Kitimat LNG. The janitors voted to unionize in the summer, joined Unite Here and entered into contract negotiations with their employer, Dexterra. The Kitimat facility, front and centre in the debate about pipelines in BC, had managed to avoid scrutiny regarding working conditions. It was months into the pandemic before BC's Public Health ordered a reduction in activity at the facility. It was in this context and under threat of strike that the janitors managed to negotiate increased wages and better conditions.

COVID outbreaks continue to be a problem in Northern BC work sites with over 50 cases at one stage at LNG Kitimat. It is these outbreaks that convinced LNG janitors that their current conditions weren't safe. So far, Dexterra has not fulfilled its promise around reconciliation that 60 to 70 percent of the workforce would be Indigenous.

In Vancouver, Unite Here Local 40, which won an important victory in hotels in 2019, is fighting to secure the right of recall for thousands of hotel workers who were laid off because of the pandemic. Over Christmas, dozens of long-term employees of Coast Hotels were issued termination letters. Local 40's president Zalida Chan reacted to the government's proposed \$105 million to boost tourism in BC, underlining that without a dedication to right of recall, this funding would not protect workers. "The lack of recall protections for workers has led to mass firings and extraordinary tactics on the part of employers who want to strip away years of gains made by workers."

COVID-19 has thoroughly exposed the injustices



## Socialist Alternative in solidarity with Unite Here

inherent in capitalism. It falls to the least valued, as shown by their pay and job security, to work to provide safety for those more valued. The treatment of hotel workers and the janitors who are sanitizing the LNG Kitimat facilities and workcamps shows this. The janitors say they learned about the last outbreak from TV before their employer notified them.

Sectors like tourism and energy rely on these truly essential workers. The union is waging a campaign to push the hotel owners to recognize the right of recall for hotel workers, against some hotels who are seeking to weaken the union. Unite Here is working on multiple strategies, including building a broad base of solidarity and support for their janitors and hotel workers. They will be hosting Zoom meetings throughout the winter where people can interact directly with these workers. It is clear to many workers that if the employer and the government are not going to prioritize safety, then they have to unionize and fight for themselves.

## Housing (from back page)

the "Eviction Bill" by tenants, it allows landlords to impose repayment schemes on tenants and to serve an eviction notice if tenants cannot meet the terms, without appeal to the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB). LTB cases soared, with 7,000 cases heard in November alone, overwhelmingly filed by landlords against tenants.

The only defence against the housing crisis is for tenants to organize together and build enough power to force politicians to enact their demands.

In Toronto, the onslaught of Bill 184 has spurred a rash of neighbourhood level tenant unions organizing to educate and defend tenants who are being pushed out of their homes under the new housing regime.

In Vancouver, the tenants' union is building a

campaign calling on the NDP government to cancel the rent debt. In October, Vancouver's City Council passed a motion to advocate to the provincial government for rent forgiveness. The tenants' union's campaign was recently endorsed by the BC Federation of Labour; such support from organized labour will be crucial if the balance of power is ever to shift away from landlords.

A deeper, Marxist analysis points out that the problems in the housing market are not only due to the greed of landlords and bankers, but with deeper, long term shifts in capitalist economies towards domination by finance and speculation. While defensive struggles are urgent, they need to be linked to a massive expansion of social housing, which is publicly funded and community controlled. Only by removing housing from the market can we protect our homes from the market's inevitable booms and busts.



## HOUSING CRISIS AHEAD

**Simon Schweitzer and Salman Zafar**

The housing crisis is brewing below the surface. Yet the headlines are about soaring house sales and prices. It is well established that housing is not affordable. This is true not only for big cities, but increasingly rents and prices are rising in suburbs and smaller towns and cities from Atlantic Canada to northern BC, as well-off people move out of big cities. Ahead lies an explosion of mortgage debt and rent, leading to evictions and foreclosures.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation states that not more than 30 percent of a person's income should be spent on housing. However, a Royal Bank of Canada 2020 report found 47.3 percent of income is required to cover home ownership cost in Canada, with the country's most expensive markets of Vancouver and Toronto standing at a staggering 74.7 percent and 64.5 percent. The average rent for a one-bedroom (\$1,950 and \$1,900) takes 45 percent and 34 percent of median income.

The situation is made worse by the rising unemployment due to COVID and the economic recession. COVID and the government's response have made the rich richer and most people poorer. Many people have piled up rent arrears and unpaid

mortgages, and credit card debt. The ratio of household debt to income, after an initial drop, has risen again to 170 percent.

While interest rates are currently among the lowest seen, in the next few years they could start climbing up. This would put many people with mortgages at risk of drowning in debt. Also, landlords would pass the burden of higher mortgage rates onto tenants.

The nightmare ahead for renters is evictions. The moratorium on evictions ended in BC on September 1, Ontario in August, Quebec in July and in Alberta even earlier. This has left many renters at the mercy of an unjust housing system, with people's lives on the edge of a complete breakdown.

In BC, the NDP imposed a scheme requiring tenants to repay any rent arrears due to COVID lockdowns by July 21, 2021. Unwilling to incur the anger of tenants at permitting a massive wave of evictions, or the anger of landlords at making them swallow the cost of the lost rents, the NDP prefers to push the eviction crisis off to the summer, hoping sunshine will disinfect the effects of the pandemic. In Ontario, the Ford government decided there was no need to forestall a rent crisis and in July passed Bill 184, the misnamed *Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act*. Known as