

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

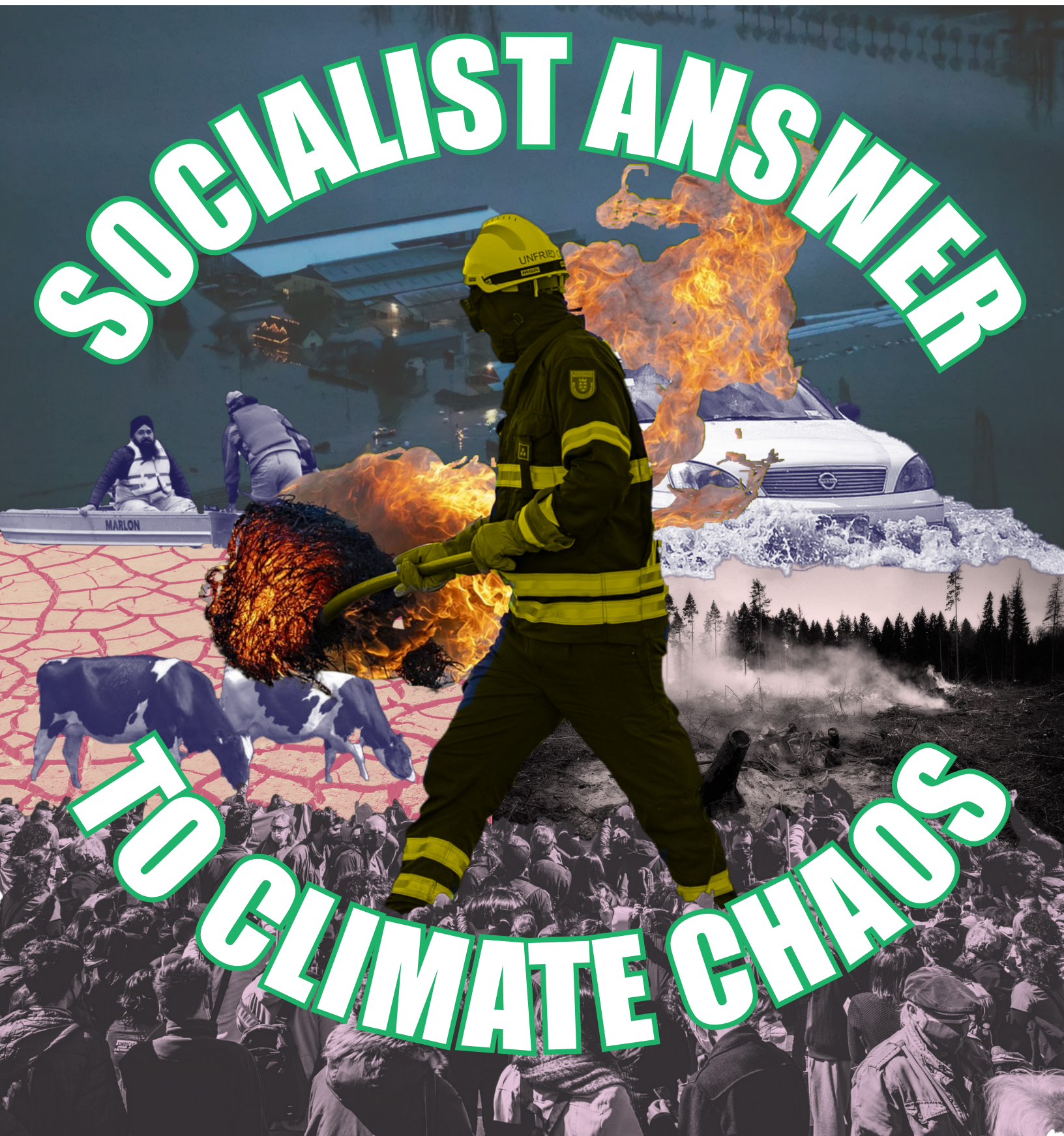
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Winter 2022 – No. 20

Produced by volunteers & printed with union labour

SOCIALIST ANSWER



TO CLIMATE CHAOS

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 jobs and a living wage for all.**
- **Put planet before profit:** fight climate change with a green jobs program.
- **Take the market out of housing:** for a mass program to build and renovate decent, safe and affordable public housing run by tenants' democracy.
- **Fight for health, education and services:** seize tax havens and drastically increase taxes on the rich and big corporations, to fully fund public services.
- **For fighting, democratic unions** run by and for the members to campaign for better pay and working conditions.
- **Respect and enforce existing Indigenous treaty and resource rights.**
- **Take into public ownership key sections of the economy** including banking, the internet, the energy industry, transportation and privately-owned utilities.

Join **Socialist Alternative** to help create a future free of exploitation and oppression, where people and the planet flourish. ★



Socialist Alternative Canada is part of International Socialist Alternative, active on all six continents.
For news from around the world:
internationalsocialist.net

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Climate Disaster: Fight for Our Future!
Come out to support protests at COP26!

Saturday, Nov 6, 2pm (Pacific Time)
Douglas College, New Westminster, room N2201
Unceded QayQayt Nation Territory
across Canada on Zoom: bit.ly/FightforOurFuture
Local youth climate activist speakers and
International speaker from Glasgow, Scotland
Proof of vaccination required for in-person attendees

simon fraser student society RBC Douglas College & Simon Fraser University socialistalternative.ca

Left: Hundreds of these posters were put up in schools and universities in at least eight cities across Canada.

Below: Socialist Alternative Youth organized a rally in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders to demand RBC defund the Coastal GasLink pipeline



Above: International Socialist Alternative sent over 300 members to Glasgow for COP26 to demand real action on climate change. Over 100,000 people were in the streets to demand action from world leaders.

Youth – Fight for a Future!

Grace Bodie and Maurice Lee

The climate disaster is real and getting worse. In the last year, records have been smashed. In BC the summer's record heat dome, which killed 600 people, was followed by an extreme fire season. Then, record autumn floods, which at one point had cut off every road into the Vancouver region. This winter started with an icy grip and record cold temperatures in many places. The prairies suffered a deep summer drought, blighting crops. Atlantic Canada has been battered by record storms.

With all this, it is no wonder that there is an increasing sense of dread among younger generations. A growing number of Doomers believe that there is no way to avoid climate change that will inevitably lead to human extinction. While some may not be so ultra pessimistic, hopelessness and despair are common trends that are no doubt exacerbated by the struggles facing Millennials and Gen Z's today.

Government Inaction and Empty Promises

Politicians saying that it is up to young people to take action to stop climate change adds to the gloom. Why don't they act? Why leave it to us?

On top of climate disaster, young people face the rapidly inflating rental market, student loans that plague over 1.7 million Canadians, the drawn-out misery of COVID thwarting livelihoods and causing death, and a job climate riddled with dissatisfactory minimum wage jobs, issues that affect minorities and BIPOC disproportionately. Like no generation before, young folks are questioning if they will be able to afford the cost of living. Will they have to give up having a family? Will their homes be destroyed by floods or fires? Will they live to see their grandchildren grow up? All while the ruling class ignores the problems.

Although science has been clear for years, governments continue to make empty promises, continuously putting polluting big business endeavours over climate, and setting totally inadequate climate goals like net-zero by 2050. A high school activist from Vancouver, Grace Hodges, aptly makes the connection "that climate change is engineered by the uber-wealthy colonial class." Despite the realistic threat of climate death and the grim consequences, unsustainable practices are protected because they drive profit and uphold the capitalist status quo. While Grace feels a "strong sense of fear in the face of climate change," she also feels responsible to take action and not allow dread to "lead her down a path of nihilism."

Organizing to Fight for a Better Future

While capitalism brings ongoing wave of crises, young people show their determination and eagerness by addressing socialism as the only way out for humanity. On November 6, Socialist Alternative Youth (SAY) held a rally, "Climate Disaster: Fight for the Future," at



Rally against RBC organized by Socialist Alternative Youth
Douglas College, in solidarity with the protests at the COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Grace and Isabella, another high schooler, gave powerful speeches making the point that capitalism not only destroys the planet's ecosystem but it provides no solution to the current crisis. They took real action to prove that mass organization is needed to respond to the climate crisis. One day before the rally, Isabella and Grace were part of the walkout of 100 students at New Westminster Secondary School, a strike demanding action for climate change. It is a strong message to society that the young, who caused the least climate change but will suffer the most, are determinedly seeking a socialist change.

COP26 was a failure, a global greenwash festival by capitalist politicians. International Socialist Alternative (ISA) understands that real changes come from a correct political understanding and mass revolutionary movement. ISA mobilized 300 members and supporters from a dozen countries to COP26 in Glasgow as part of building a strong socialist force to give a clear answer to the climate crisis.

On December 21, SAY organized a 60-person rally outside the Commercial Drive branch of the Royal Bank of Canada to protest its role in the Coastal GasLink pipeline project that threatens the unceded lands of Wet'suwet'en and the lives of Indigenous people. The banks, BC's government, investors, and capitalism do not care about the consequences of climate disaster but blindly chase short-term profits. Capitalism does not offer a bright future. However, when the working class, young people, women, Indigenous people, LGBT groups are organized and united, socialist change is possible and Socialist Alternative Youth is continuously fighting for it. ★

For more information about Socialist Alternative Youth, check us out on

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socialistalternative.ca

Doug Ford's Hypocrisy as Election Looms

Josh Wigmore



Workers demand a \$15 minimum wage in Ontario

After multiple crises and COVID failures, support for Ontario's conservatives dropped in 2021. Premier Doug Ford faces an election in June 2022 in an uncomfortable position compared to his populism-fuelled election victory in 2018. From this difficult position Ford has re-found his urgency to appear as an advocate for working-class interests with pro-worker sounding policy announcements like the *Working for Workers Act* and an announcement to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, despite being the one who scrapped the \$1 hike only three years ago and \$15 now falling below the living wage for all of Ontario.

Yet at the same time as the supposedly pro-worker Bill 27, the attack on the wages of nurses and other public sector employees continues. The Tories imposed Bill 124 in 2019 that fixed pay increases to one percent a year. Inflation at the end of 2021 was over four percent. So, although they are "essential workers" on the frontlines of overloaded hospitals and facing frequent school outbreaks, their real wages are being cut. Even with the positive elements of Bill 27, such as the right to disconnect from work and washroom availability requirements, there is no effective enforcement policy to stop unsympathetic employers from simply ignoring these measures.

Food bank visits have increased by 45 percent in 2021 and homelessness is rising, yet the Ford government's response was to end the eviction moratorium even as COVID cases soar again. The government also refuses to reverse its 2019 cuts to public legal aid that helped provide low-income Ontarians with legal representation.

Workers face the danger of themselves or their loved ones contracting COVID but are allowed just three paid sick days for specific COVID-related emergencies. The mandated isolation period for those potentially infected with COVID has been cut to just five days,

benefiting employers but horrifying public health officials everywhere.

Despite Ford's rebranding, his government's continued attacks on public sector workers and public services reveal his true character as an advocate for big business. Ford's hope of surviving the election is boosted by some union leaders and the NDP's weakness. Scandalously, union leaders Jerry Dias of Unifor and Warren Thomas of OPSEU shared the press conference announcing the \$15 minimum wage. The NDP is the official opposition but has similar support now as in the 2018 election.

Ford knows "left" policies are popular. The NDP and Ontario unions should not allow him to look like a friend of workers. Imagine if a united labour movement put forward a bold socialist program to increase the minimum wage to \$20 an hour, offer 10 permanent sick days for workers, build affordable housing, offer free public transit, and reinvest in public services after years of Liberal and Conservative austerity. ★

Precarious Renters

Simon Schweitzer

In March 2020 when COVID hit Canada, average rents in Vancouver, Canada's hottest housing market, were hitting record highs, \$2,200 for one-bedroom units. The provincial government announced an eviction ban and a rent freeze. Average rents dropped through 2020, bottoming out at \$1,900. The BC government lifted the rent freeze on January 1, 2022, allowing increases of 1.5 percent on existing tenants. However, there is no control on rents if the tenant moves or is driven out. By the end of 2021, rents for new leases are nearly back to their previous levels.

Vancouver's rents are the most notorious in Canada but cities and even smaller towns across the country are seeing rent increases. While the dollar amounts are not as eye-watering, provinces like Saskatchewan and New Brunswick don't even have the meagre rent controls of BC and Ontario. This means that renters in Saint John, NB, are hit with a 61 percent increase as property speculators move in.

Landlords and their apologists claim that increasing rents is the only way to compensate landlords for maintenance costs or to spur investment in new rental housing. Rather than effectively justifying rent increases this raises the question: if housing for profit can only provide unbearably expensive homes, then why is housing provided on a for-profit basis? Housing should be based on need, not greed. A CCPA

Alberta's Woes Continue

Davis Hay

Jason Kenney claims that “Alberta is back” amidst a supposed “economic recovery.” Working people are not seeing this so-called recovery. Kenney is taking credit for slightly higher energy prices. There is strife in the UCP party because of COVID zigzags; public opinion polling has placed the premier’s approval rating as low as 22 percent. There will be challenges for leadership of the party, most likely from former Wildrose leader Brian Jean, but Kenney’s inner circle will fight to maintain control. They may be able to weather the storm by resorting to anti-democratic measures to tighten control over the party and raise more funds from the wealthy (see Bill 81).

Up to 81,600 Albertans were waiting for surgery in the first half of December, while 43,000 residents of Lethbridge do not have a primary care physician. Alberta Health Services shut down the Emergency services in four rural hospitals in November. Red alerts increased across the province, occurring when there are not enough emergency personnel available for ambulances. From October 23 to 26 there were at least 20 red alerts throughout numerous communities. Twenty-one communities faced ambulance shortages



Picket line at Concordia University of Edmonton

during December 3 to 5. There’s been a 30 percent increase in emergencies since the start of COVID.

Káínai and Siksiká First Nations are speaking out against coal company Montem Resources. The company offered to fund their own study on the impact of a proposed mine in the Rocky Mountains, wanting the First Nations to withdraw their request for a federal environmental review, but the company hasn’t been communicative since July. It is hard to imagine any kind of deal with Montem that will not be an exploitative pile of trash. Without taking the struggle in the province against new coal mines to a higher level, coal mining will continue to threaten water sources.

AUPE members avoided serious concessions in a new collective agreement with the government but did not gain much. Nurse Practitioners have won union recognition, while UNA nurses who pushed back against pay cuts are now getting pay increases and a lump-sum bonus in a new collective agreement. Workers at the deadly High River Cargill plant won a 21 percent wage increase over six years, thousands of dollars in bonuses, and better health benefits. Concordia University of Edmonton Faculty Association won an improved contract after 11 days on strike in January.

In municipal elections, voters roundly rejected right-wing candidates. Expect continued small-scale struggles against the UCP, largely from the anti-coal movement, Indigenous communities, and unions. Unfortunately, the NDP, backed by many unions, seems to be waiting until the 2023 election, giving the UCP time to do more damage or reverse their fortunes. Socialist Alternative believes that the time is now for a campaign to kick out the UCP. ★

— Resistance Pays Off



Berlin renters carry a banner: “Housing For All!”

study shows that developing non-profit housing could reduce rents by up to 49 percent in Vancouver.

Renters in Berlin have shown the way. In 2018 a mass movement of tenants campaigned to expropriate large properties from the corporate firms who owned much of the city’s rental stock. They won a five-year rent freeze. However, recognizing that this would not suffice, the movement gathered 350,000 petition signatures to force a referendum in September 2021 — 56.4 percent voted in favour of expropriation. While the referendum is not binding, there is enormous pressure to take 240,000 units into public ownership. Measures such as strengthening rent control, won recently in Vancouver’s SROs, are important ways to limit the damage to renters but ultimately, housing must be developed without the expectation of profit if it is to be affordable. ★

Indigenous Struggles Against Environmental Racism

Leslie Kemp



Sign at Grassy Narrows First Nation warning of poisoned water system

the evil of capitalism was twinned with that of colonialism, focused on acquiring economic and/or political control over other territories.

In Canada, capitalists' wealth has always been based on resource expropriation, exploitation and extraction. Indigenous people — who developed a diverse range of technologies and cultures and made their livelihoods from gathering plants and berries, fishing, trapping and hunting — were in an unequal power relationship with fur traders, land developers and other colonial interests. Indigenous societies had a relationship with the land based on stewardship and care, not on private ownership.

Indigenous people and their land stood in the way of capitalist profit, colonial control and imperial aspirations. This is as true now as it was when Europeans first arrived. Capitalism claims a racial neutrality of sorts: *we don't care who we exploit, as long as we get the profits*. But the reality is far different. Almost all those who are exploited are poor, working class, people of colour, Black or Indigenous. In this unequal power relationship, the reality of environmental racism rears its ugly head.

Fundamental to good environmental policy are principles of stewardship, ecological thinking, social justice and fair distribution of wealth. Yet overwhelmingly, communities that have less money and power are confronted with unwanted industrial waste, pollution and environmental damage. This often intersects with racism.

In Canada, environmental racism has many faces, ranging from the stealing of Indigenous lands to the poisoning of waters and lands. The Grassy Narrows First Nation was on the receiving end of untreated mercury discharged between 1962 and 1970 from the chlor-alkali plant next to the Dryden pulp mill causing continuing, irreparable damage to fish, animals and

Capitalism's overriding imperative is to extract wealth from the land and labour in order to enrich the elite. Workers struggle to survive or eke out a living as profits flow into the pockets of the wealthy. As capitalism replaced feudalism, the exploitation of both land and labour played out in countries around the world. As Europeans sought new markets for goods, and new people and territories to exploit,

humans. The First Nation and Métis communities in Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan, downstream from Fort McMurray on the Athabasca River, have been severely impacted by pollution from the tar sands.

The frequent disregard of treaties signed between Indigenous Nations and the Crown, including expropriating Indigenous land for military purposes, is another form of environmental racism. The Stony Point Reserve near Ipperwash on Lake Huron was appropriated in 1942 for use as a military camp during World War 2. The Dene and Cree First Nations, as well as nearby Métis, lost huge parts of their land in the 1953 establishment of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, violating Treaties 6 and 10. In both cases, local Indigenous peoples have struggled to take back their land.

Environmental racism also includes the complete lack of consultation, or at best, a pretense of consultation as in *we've already decided what we are going to do, we just want to let you know and maybe see how we might support your community*.

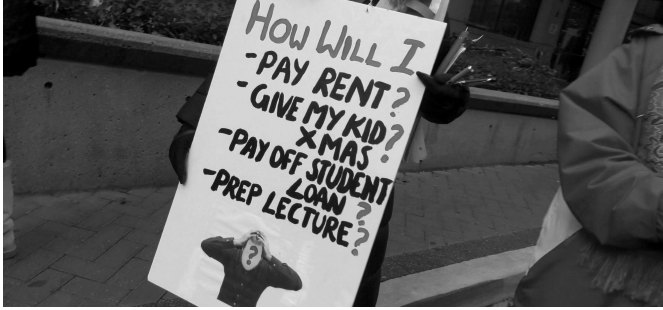
The struggles of the Wet'suwet'en and their hereditary leadership over the past two years are part of a long line of Indigenous peoples' struggles to protect their land, culture and sovereignty from the relentless drive of colonialism and environmental racism. The Wet'suwet'en have been ignored, while the resource extraction industry is actively supported by the state. This includes the courts that grant injunctions supporting industry over Indigenous self-determination and the RCMP, with its long history of using force to exert domination.

It is shocking just how blatant environmental racism is. Indigenous people have been fighting and continue to fight against racist, colonial, capitalist exploitation. After years of struggle including launching a court challenge, in 2000 the Labrador and Québec Innu won a temporary halt of NATO's low-level supersonic flights over their territories. As important as these victories are, environmental racism will continue as long as capitalism exists. Only a socialist system based on the collective needs of all people can eradicate racist environmental practices and land theft. ★



Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders resisting Coastal GasLink

Life of a Precarious University Instructor



"What're you doing next semester?" ... "We'll see if I get assigned a class." ... "You don't know if you have a contract yet!? Don't classes start next month!?"

This is a reality for many university instructors. Just-in-time hiring mirrors just-in-time production. But rather than Skip the Dishes, instructors are gig workers that can be rebranded as Skip the Tenure.

Years of consistent sessional contracts don't even guarantee basic courtesies. I haven't heard a peep from a university where I worked seven consecutive semesters — during which I picked up classes mid-way through a semester to assist a burnt-out colleague, pivoted rapidly to online learning during COVID, and agreed to teach a brand-new class without any additional pay and very little preparation time. *But one day the contracts just stopped coming, without an explanation.* Not even a simple email. Was it because of budget cuts and COVID uncertainty? Or was it my critical pedagogical practices? I may never know.

The culture creates paranoid casual instructors disgustingly underpaid and under constant surveillance. And leads to standardized courses with outdated textbooks, endless performance reviews, pay that is divorced from class sizes, and working other precarious jobs during the semester.

An insidious result is that the incentives for quality teaching are purely *immaterial*. This encourages courses centred on memorizing and multiple-choice tests, not around critical thinking assignments that challenge students to ask questions.

But we still do these things. Both our labour and our belief in the emancipatory potential of education are exploited. Students, paying large sums of money, can be part of that exploitation. They send urgent emails, make passive-aggressive remarks, and expect flexibility, empathy, and emotional support at all hours. Universities set students and teachers in conflict. Often, students see me as an obstacle on their way to that degree, not as a possible companion in empowerment and consciousness. The pressure is palpable: students and teachers are supposed to treat each other as commodities; universities are now sites of competition, rather than learning and camaraderie.

J. Cole said it best: I'm "teetering between enlightened and insanity." ★

What Makes Me Angry: COVID and Capitalism



— Cui Bono? Larry Hyink

Lucius Cassius, a Roman judge, had a reputation for wisdom by repeatedly asking in cases, "Cui Bono?" or "Who Benefits?"

Starting the third year of the COVID pandemic, the answer is obvious:

Canadian Banks once again posted record profits and bonuses, while at the same time raising service fees, because in times of crisis they owe it to their shareholders to be as greedy as possible.

Ordinary rich folks are okay too. In 2021, Canadian billionaires increased their wealth by \$78 billion.

Just a crew member on the good ship, "Free Enterprise?" Console yourself, maybe there's some, um, "trickle down" just for you. Even better, swabbie, governments across the country are now giving you the opportunity to work with COVID so you can continue to be "productive," keeping those profits coming till you drop. Proud Canadians can't have our billionaires begging for spare change at international gatherings of the rich and useless.

Health care teeters on the brink with the pandemic, and Canada's capitalists chant, "we're all in this together" while milking COVID relief funds and dodging taxes. Meanwhile, COVID rolls on and cash provided by taxpayers to the rich by "their" (whose?) governments allow them to explore exciting new opportunities like buying up housing so working people can compete with hedge funds in the "free market" in a bidding war for a home.

Even better, feelers are going out from various, um, entrepreneurs about handing over more of the health care system to the private sector. With luck, investors can make a pile *and* evade responsibility for criminal negligence just like in long-term care.

Canadian Capitalists, and their flunkies and skills in government, talk about "balance" between keeping the economy running and keeping people safe. Translating this dreck into English: the profits need to keep rolling in without letting so many bodies pile up that the peons start wondering whether running the world to benefit a handful of greedy parasites is a good idea. We need a Socialist Canada run by and for the people who actually labour and produce the country's vast wealth, not for those for whom too much is never enough. ★



Before COP26, Greta Thunberg rightly stated, “Blah, blah, blah. Words that sound great but so far have not led to action.” Most of the promised reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions aren’t until 2030 or 2050, meaning releases and global warming will continue for decades. While 450 banks pledged to reach “net zero” by 2050 — 28 years away — for now they continue pouring money into fossil fuels. Canada’s big five banks provided over \$700 billion to fossil fuel companies since the 2015 Paris Agreement, which set the goal of a 1.5°C increase to avert disaster.

Carbon Action Tracker calculates that these promises are totally inadequate and the world is heading to be at least 2.4°C warmer by 2100, and maybe much worse. Many of the targets are “net-zero,” essentially magical thinking based on currently non-existent carbon-capture technology, which means burning fossil fuels will continue.

Climate change is due to increased CO₂, and other gases, in the earth’s atmosphere, which holds in more of the sun’s energy. More energy means stronger storms; higher average temperatures (that melt the polar icecaps and glaciers and cause more frequent and intense heat waves); and more evaporation (leading to more rainfall and floods); and all the cascading impacts all these cause.

Tipping points

The 1.5°C limit is not a political limit but a physical limit. The earth has already warmed 1.2°C, with catastrophic consequences of more extreme droughts, floods, heat waves and fires. Western Canada’s glaciers will be almost gone by 2070, with dire consequences for the rivers, and the agriculture and life that rely on them. As the earth warms, these changes will not be uniform: there will be rapid changes. With more energy, earth’s systems become unstable and then break down, forming new patterns. These tipping points, once crossed, are almost impossible to reverse.

The West Antarctic ice sheet is melting fast. It is increasingly feared that the entire ice sheet will collapse, raising sea levels by at least 10 feet. This could flood up to 500 million people’s homes and drown entire island nations.

The Amazon rainforest is in danger of collapse, with 18 percent logged. When around 25 percent is destroyed it will turn into a grassland savannah, devastating its 30 million people, including the 3 million Indigenous peoples, and releasing vast quantities of CO₂ into the atmosphere.

Other tipping points including the loss of biodiversity and pollution including from plastics. These and other “planetary boundaries” define the “safe operating space for humanity.” The real likelihood of crossing these boundaries, with the dire consequences for humanity,



are the result of over 200 years of capitalism’s assault on nature.

Capitalism can’t solve climate change

The lack of action to avoid these tipping points is neither an accident nor a moral failing. Although sections of business and government understand the urgency of climate change, their room for action is limited by the capitalist system.

Over 170 years ago, Karl Marx explained that ecological crises are inevitable in capitalism as it separates humans from nature. Previous human societies had socially regulated ecological relationships with the environment. People shared common land and resources and could ensure its and their long-term health: the Indigenous philosophy of considering impacts for seven generations. Capitalism stole the land by enclosing the commons and robbing Indigenous peoples — tearing people from the land. Expropriating shared land and turning it into private property led to the robbing of resources and dumping of pollution. Capitalism caused a “metabolic rift” between humans and the environment.

Businesses try to avoid paying the cost of environmental destruction in order to maximize shareholders’ profits. A company that pays for the environmental costs will be outcompeted by those that do not. An attempted capitalist solution is to add the environmental costs with market mechanisms, like a carbon tax.

Carbon taxes are regressive, mostly paid by working-class consumers. Yet the richest one percent of humanity produces twice as much CO₂ as the poorest 50 percent. Often the large industrial polluters are exempt from the tax. Wealth and profit taxes would ensure the big polluters pay.

Carbon taxes at best have a marginal impact and, even

ure, How to Win?

and Lev Lynds

if they were much higher, would take far too long to cause meaningful change. Worse, they leave the bosses in charge of the transition — the same group of people who got us into this disaster! Some say that climate change is so dire that socialism must wait, instead focusing all efforts on reforms now to avert catastrophe. But capitalism is the root cause of the disaster, so reforming capitalism cannot solve the climate crisis. A rapid and planned transition from fossil fuels is necessary!

The International Energy Agency (formerly a pro-oil group) stated that *all* investment in fossil fuel extraction must stop *now* to reach the 1.5°C target. Yet, Trudeau's government still spends billions of dollars on pipelines and fossil fuel subsidies.

Fossil fuel companies' value is based both on their sales and their reserves still in the ground, to be extracted later. Compelling companies to leave the oil unused would decimate their value. This destruction of capital would wreak havoc on the stock market and hit the banks hard. No capitalist government will contemplate this.

Canada's government tries to justify continued fossil fuel production, claiming it will help pay for the transition to a green economy. This is crazy, false logic. The government can find money if it needs to; when COVID threatened the economy, the government rapidly gave businesses over \$110 billion funding without strings.

Climate change is global; it requires international cooperation. As COP26 showed, each country tries to protect the interests of its own capitalist class, making meaningful consensus almost impossible.

A Real Climate Program

A credible green transition includes expropriating and phasing out fossil fuel production and massively investing in good new jobs. This would include expanding renewable energy: wind, solar, water and geo-thermal; enhancing public transit, long-distance freight and passenger rail; dramatically reducing waste in supply chains and production processes; and restoring the environment. This great rebuilding needs the support and participation of the majority of the working class.

There is no shortage of work in building a green economy, and there is no shortage of people who need jobs! Many workers are stuck in soul-crushing and body-destroying gig work. They would welcome well-paid, secure, and satisfying jobs. The bosses claim there is a conflict between the environment and jobs, seeking to divide workers. But it is the bosses who regularly destroy jobs. It is the working class that has defended jobs and the environment from capitalist mismanagement. Oil and gas workers support pipelines for the high-paying jobs. A Just Transition, with guaranteed good jobs, is



Trudeau's response to fires and floods

needed to win the support of oil and gas workers.

A comprehensive Just Transition requires international planning and cooperation, with the common ownership of the major industries, run democratically. This would be nothing like crown corporations run by appointed bureaucrats. Democratic economic planning would be accountable to the working class and would incorporate their knowledge and experience.

How to Win

Winning this program to end climate disaster will not be easy. The rich will never willingly give up their wealth and power. Throughout history, it is mass movements that have fundamentally changed society. 2019 saw the largest ever mobilizations for climate change action, with a million in Canada marching on September 27. There were also impressive blockades of roads, ports and rail lines in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders.

We need to build upon these mass mobilizations! They build awareness and solidarity, and delay and boost the cost of producing fossil fuels; however, alone they cannot stop climate change. Mass movements require democratic structures and conferences to agree and coordinate strategies such as escalating strike action, which could win real victories.

The working class is the largest and most powerful force in society. We are the essential workers that make everything, run the hospitals and staff the stores. Our exploitation generates all the bosses' profits. Strikes are one of the most powerful tools to hit the capitalists where it hurts.

Capitalism's profits come from the exploitation of workers and the expropriation of nature. Capitalism, as Marx wrote, undermines "the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the worker." It is time to overthrow capitalism, to expropriate the "few usurpers by the mass of people," and carry out a socialist transformation of society, to benefit humanity and nature. ★

Imagine: Time in a Socialist Society

Leslie Kemp



We are so embedded in the world we know that it's sometimes difficult to imagine what a different world or future could even look like. Like a fish who doesn't recognize the water it swims in, many people often take *what is* for granted. It's the unconscious acquiescence of many aspects of our lives that allows things that should be totally unacceptable to keep happening.

This is how many people view *capitalism*. We don't really like it but that's the way things are — the way our economic system functions. We can tweak it to make it more palatable or a bit more friendly, but that's about it.

Stop. Wait! How many times have you heard this?

For a socialist, this kind of narrative rankles. Why shouldn't we try to improve our lives and those of others? Why should we accept the status quo? For many, including young people who most keenly feel the despair of a crumbling world, it's resignation. Putting up with the system because it all seems so inevitable.

"It doesn't have to be that way." As The Blow Monkeys song goes, "you've got to ask for more." This is the first step. We have to ask more from life, we need to challenge the status quo and, most importantly, imagine what a different, better world could be. In this socialist world, things would be better.



Where to start? There is so much wrong with capitalism. Take the unprecedented inequality, which keeps on growing, even under a pandemic. The richer get richer while many of us struggle to pay rent, buy food or find rewarding and well-paying work. Precarious jobs lead to precarious lives. The list goes on... from expensive education, inadequate health care, climate disasters, poor public transit, drug poisoning, lack of decent housing and time!

Time? How does that belong on this list? Given that it's a new year, let's start with imagining how time could be different in a socialist society.

Unlike the daily grind of capitalism's pressure to perform, work harder, improve grades, advance in your career, buy more things, do more things, and keep better track of your goals and time, socialism would allow laziness. Laziness? Think about a lazy river, winding its way through the landscape. Or when you lazed away a long summer day. When was the last time you did this? Slow and relaxing, laziness has a lot of virtues.



It suggests a rhythm of life. It recognizes ups and downs, the ebb and flow of the tides, the clouds floating by in a gentle breeze and times when the winds blow fiercely. It suggests a rhythm of life that involves watching and waiting, punctuated by energetic activity. The seasons reflect this kind of rhythm — the anticipatory, eager activity of spring planting, the patient watching and nourishing of summer, the hope and hard work of the harvest and then the restfulness of winter. Humans in agricultural societies lived these rhythms for millennia. Gathering and hunting societies did too.

A socialist society would return to this rhythm, a rhythm that is built into nature and arguably, inherent in human nature. This would involve times in each day, week, month and year for relaxation and reflection, for reading and roaming, for planting and harvesting, for digging and creativity. ★

Socialist Kshama Defeats Right Wing

Greyson Van Arsdale

On the morning of December 4, more than 200 people gathered in a muddy park in Seattle, shivering in the cold drizzle but undeniably energized. These volunteers gathered tables, canopies, hand-warmers and campaign leaflets, and mobilized to more than 70 intersections across Seattle's District 3. It was the final weekend of a more than year-long campaign to defend Seattle's only socialist councillor, Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant, from being recalled by the city's biggest businesses and burgeoning right wing.

The recall battle was Kshama Sawant's and Socialist Alternative's third time fending off an attempt to drive us from City Hall since Kshama's first election in 2013. Unable to defeat Kshama in a regular election, Seattle's elite conjured a recall election on trumped-up, racist charges, and set it for just a month after the general election.

Using Class Struggle to Fight Voter Suppression

Seattle had never seen an election in December, and the obvious intent of the recall was to use this unprecedented timing to suppress the historic voter turnout that powered Kshama's previous re-elections. In the end, by fighting for every vote possible from working people, young people, renters and people of color, our movement defeated this right-wing recall by 310 votes, even on the most difficult terrain we had ever faced.

The approach that Socialist Alternative took in this battle against the recall stands in contrast to the approach taken by progressive candidates running in Seattle's November elections. Despite massive corporate spending in each major race, buoyed by an emboldened right wing, the established progressive candidates didn't campaign against their opponents as representatives of big business. Worse, though, these progressive candidates largely failed to adopt demands that spoke to working peoples' needs. In the case of Nikkita Oliver, who ran for City Council, they removed the demand for rent control from their website entirely.

The US is deeply politically polarized, and this polarization is not superficial — its basis is the vast and growing gap between what working people need and what capitalism is willing to give. For socialists, our job is not to pave over this polarization, but to relentlessly stand on the side of working people and build movements to win.

The Need for a New Workers Party

This approach is desperately needed now, as the Democratic Party has shown more clearly than ever its unwillingness to be a vehicle for working peoples' political interests. The Biden White House has publicly



Victory speech after beating the right-wing recall

rescinded its campaign promise to cancel student debt and has stated its commitment to restarting student loan payments in 2022. The Biden administration's signature "Build Back Better" plan has been effectively stripped of all gains for working people as well as any semblance of action on climate change, even as the Democratic Party holds a majority in Congress. The Democratic Party has also failed to use its majority to protect the right to abortion outlined in *Roe v. Wade*, which is under attack from the Supreme Court and the right wing nationwide. Instead, they funnel the energy needed to fight against these attacks into fundraising efforts for the 2022 midterm elections. After relying on promises to carry him into office, it's clear that Biden's first year in office has been disastrous for working people.

Socialists should respond to these failures not by carrying water for the Democratic establishment, but by leading our own charge against the right wing and building movements to actually deliver. The victory against the recall in Seattle shows how, even on the most hostile possible terrain, an independent socialist approach that refuses to pull punches against the political establishment can energize thousands of working people into action. It is this energy, this level of action from working people, which has propelled Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant in Seattle to win the \$15 minimum wage, the Amazon Tax, historic renters' rights victories, three consecutive election campaigns and this latest recall battle.

As Kshama said in announcing our victory, "If a small revolutionary socialist organization can beat the wealthiest corporations in the world here in Seattle again and again, you can be sure that the organized power of the wider working class can change society." ★

For more information on Socialist Alternative in the US: socialistalternative.org

Mass Struggles in Latin America

Bri Smith

Over the last two years, the people of Bolivia, Honduras, Peru and Chile have elected different shades of left parties into government. Polling indicates that Brazil and Colombia are set to follow later this year. All these wins were the result of working-class organizing, mass protest movements and mobilizations.

Left parties in nations like Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador had an earlier wave of victories in the 2000s, which carried out popular reforms to reduce poverty and improve conditions for the majority. However, while some of these administrations claimed to be socialist, none succeeded in making decisive steps beyond capitalism. Corporate elites were left in power, blocking and undermining progressive programs with the support of a reactionary press. International capitalism and falling prices of key exports only further worked to weaken these governments. Although most of these left parties were removed (often through corrupt court cases and military intimidation), the majority of the working class remained unswayed by new right-wing administrations.

Bolivia's reactionary 2019 coup, for example, was defeated through a series of road blockades, strikes, and mass rallies. Millions of Chileans took to the streets in a struggle of their own, in 2019 – 2020, winning a new constitution to replace that of the old dictatorship. Semi-revolutionary protests in Colombia, starting in April 2021, continue across the country in response to tax increases targeting the working class.

While the reforms of the early 2000s left capitalism intact, this new left wave can take things further. The urgent challenge now posed is that of disempowering the ruling class entirely and moving beyond capitalism's limits. The history of working-class struggle provides valuable insight into how this can be achieved.

In Paris, 1871, the masses took power and began constructing the first "worker's state," before being crushed by capitalist reaction. Marx and Engels drew important lessons from this experience; namely, that the working class cannot use the existing state to take power, and that its success ultimately meant building and defending institutions of its own creation. This lesson – outlined best in Lenin's *State and Revolution* – was taken on board by the Bolsheviks as the theoretical backbone of Russia's October Revolution.

The bloody 1973 coup in Chile reinforces Lenin's warnings. In trying to build socialism "from the inside" (i.e., through capitalist state bodies), President Allende's socialist coalition was met with immediate sabotage by big business and the courts. Ultimately, Allende was violently overthrown by a US-backed coup on behalf of the oligarchy. The dictatorship which followed, led by Pinochet, remained in power for decades.

History shows that the capitalist class will use every dirty trick to keep control of its wealth and power. The workers' movement needs leaders who understand that and have policies to mobilize mass support in overcoming capitalist resistance. Today, socialists must work to embody these lessons around the world.★

For more information on Brazil and Latin America: Isr-asi.org



Protests at Plaza Baquedano, Santiago, Chile in 2019

Québec's Early Childhood

Martin LeBrun

Lost in COVID and the holiday season was the major victory of Québec's 11,000 early childhood educators. They won improvements in working conditions, pay and the quality of child care. On December 21, they voted 93 percent in favour of a new three-year contract, calling off a planned escalation to their strike from rolling to indefinite after a tentative agreement was reached on December 9.

The workers' union (FSSS-CSN) negotiated an 18 percent raise for qualified and specialized educators and raises of 8 - 12.5 percent for other sector workers. They also won a 3 percent signing bonus on wages earned during year one of the pandemic. Initially, Québec's CAQ government was only offering 6 percent, hardly an incentive for new workers to enter a sector plagued by labour shortages! The CAQ is promising child care accessibility with 37,000 new day care spots, but zero details on finding 17,800 additional workers.

Alternative Socialiste members, from our sister organization, showed solidarity by visiting picket lines. Many picketers' concerns were addressed in the contract. Workers won more time to evaluate children's needs to adapt instruction, more time to plan and prepare healthy meals, two additional paid days off

India's Farmers Deal Big Blow to Modi

Chris Fofonoff

When Indian Prime Minister Modi and his right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party passed three neoliberal farming bills in September 2020, they could not have foreseen that they would be forced to repeal the laws barely 14 months later. Enraged farmers would not take these attacks on their livelihood in silence. Many of them were already crippled by debt-enforced poverty — according to government data, over 10,000 farmers had committed suicide in 2019.

The farmers organized to fight these pro-business reforms, most important of which was a dismantling of the *mandi* system, a mandated state purchase of staple crops which provides a guaranteed minimum price — an essential safety net for people producing food on small plots. This alone would have been a major transfer of wealth from India's millions of small farmers to global agribusiness.

Repeal of the bills required huge and sustained resistance for over a year by tens of thousands of farm families, who still had to ensure the tending of the land at home. They encamped on the borders of Delhi where police attacks against them were routine.

International pressure helped India's farmers exact too high a cost for the government to bear. Protests led by Indo-Canadians were held in nearly every major city in Canada, with some demonstrating daily for months.



Farmers and supporters on the march to Delhi

This pushed Trudeau to reluctantly condemn the farm bills in December 2020. This was a reversal of Canada's position, which in 2019 joined an Australian complaint in the World Trade Organization demanding India curtail subsidies for domestic sugar production.

A baffled CNN headline read "Indian farmers forced Modi to back down on new laws. So why aren't they going home?" For several weeks, the farmers remained, attempting to force actions such as raising minimum prices, the withdrawal of charges against protestors and compensation for the families of the 750 who died at the occupation. Though the farmers have now dismantled their occupation, many underlying issues are still unresolved. Their successful resolution will depend upon more militant action similar to last year.

The Modi government has been rightly condemned from outside of India for its Hindu supremacism and its hostility to democracy and minority rights. But the farm bills were textbook neoliberalism of the kind that Western governments have implemented for decades — Harper's early-2010s selling-off of the Canadian Wheat Board comes to mind. The governments of all these countries will continue to attempt these cash- and power-grabs for as long as capitalism remains.

India's farmers have shown that these can be pushed back. This success has weakened Modi, but not removed his government. Combining the farmer struggles with India's huge urban working class can win further victories. In November 2020, 250 million workers conducted the largest general strike ever, in support of the farmers and for their own demands. Another is planned for February 2022, with plans to link with farmers. These struggles will, and must, continue. ★

Educators Win Big

per year and workplace committees to support workers supporting special needs. Generally, special needs are only diagnosed and supported when children reach elementary school. However, earlier interventions are possible and beneficial if early childhood educators are able to advocate for children, provided they have the time to observe and document behaviour. The only unresolved issue is improving on the current ratio of one educator to eight children, which the union has vowed to keep fighting on.

This victory would have been impossible without the militant organizing of the largely female-identifying workers. Successful public mobilization was combined with an action plan, culminating in an indefinite strike. The workers worked with two non-unionized movements: *Ma place au travail*, organizing parents, and *Valorisons ma profession*, organizing non-unionized early childhood educators. A smaller number of workers in two other unions also agreed favourable deals after threatening to join the indefinite strike. This coalition applied maximum pressure forcing the CAQ to improve funding for early childhood education. Militant solidarity wins! ★

For more information on Québec and Alternative Socialiste: alternativesocialiste.org

The Japanese Internment, a personal memoir

Jim Sugiyama



Japanese Canadians forced into prison camps

In 2021, BC's government announced a *Health and Wellness Fund* for Japanese Canadians whose life assets were stolen from them and used to fund their incarceration in isolated prison camps from 1942 to 1946. In a brazenly token gesture, \$650 was bestowed on each living survivor, with no formal apology. This, almost 80 years after a thriving, law abiding community of 22,000 on BC's west coast was summarily rounded up and interned far from their home under the *War Measures Act*, invoked after Canada declared war against Japan. Most were Canadian citizens, but their rights were ignored. Most of the Issei (first generation in Canada) and Nisei (second generation) have now passed on. It was a meaningless act, an insult to our community.

Our mother, who sadly recently died at the age of ninety, was interned at Slocan in BC's interior. She, her three siblings and mother all suffered from rheumatic heart disease from untreated infections contracted in Slocan, with no access to medical care. Had her family not been uprooted, they would have had access to penicillin, which would have prevented this illness.

What price a human life? A community? Since the dismantling of Little Tokyo, East Vancouver in 1942, why isn't there a "Japan Town" anywhere in Canada? Why was there a 99 percent inter-marriage rate in Sanseis, the sons and daughters of internment survivors?

During their involvement in the redress movement, my parents recounted, with deep gratitude, the support of Indigenous elders. They believed in solidarity, that if Canada's government formally apologized for the internment, perhaps one day it would enact reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, survivors of the largest dispossession in a dark history.

Will the racists whose legacies live on in my community — Premier John Hart, RL Maitland, Ian Mackenzie, GW McPherson, journalist Bruce Hutchison who advocated "a pogrom of Japs" — ever receive their deserved infamy? They were mediocrities, purveyors of White Canadian sentiment. No statues to besmear or topple. What happened to Japanese Canadians in 1942 was the confluence of militant nationalism, racism and xenophobia, the progenitor of which is Capitalism. Until Capitalism is dismantled it will produce "new" victims — workers, the racialized, LGBTQ, women, Indigenous peoples and refugees and immigrants from around the world. ★

Five Little Indians

by Michelle Good

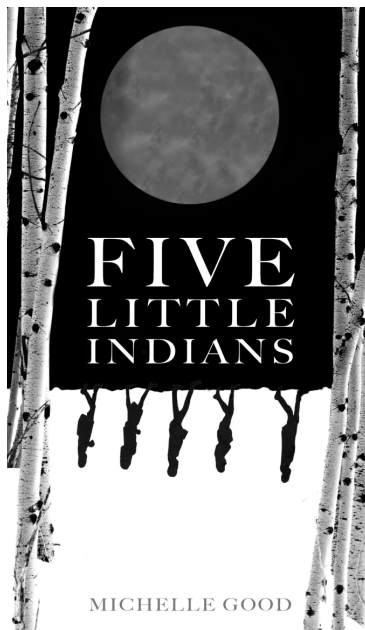
reviewed by Leslie Kemp



In a year when news of finding thousands of unmarked graves at former residential schools shocked many Canadians, it might come as little surprise that *Five Little Indians* was the top selling book in Canada. A first novel by Michelle Good, a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, the book has won several awards.

The story is gripping, devastating and heartfelt. It traces the lives of five survivors of a residential school on BC's west coast. Each of their stories begin with their release or escape from residential school when they were teenagers, although they have flashbacks to school experiences. All end up in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and all face the challenges of tackling the trauma they experienced in school as they try to forge a new life in the city. Their lives intersect and interweave, with each struggling to find their own path to liberation. What makes this book so important and compelling is that it exposes the cruelty of colonization as experienced by vulnerable children — innocent children who were forcibly removed from loving homes and taken to cold, dingy schools where no one cared for them except other students. And going back home proved impossible: the absence of children left families and communities with holes impossible to fill. It compassionately portrays the terrible legacy and long-term consequences of trauma on individuals, families and whole communities. While many will find the tragedy in this book grim, it also provides important testimony to the resistance, courage and strength of survivors.

Canadians should be shocked and disturbed at the finding of thousands of unmarked graves on school grounds. Schools should be places that support, nurture and educate young people. The vivid portrayal of the stories of these five children touches deep emotions that can be a catalyst to open hearts and build understanding of the deep-seated impacts of colonization. This book provides an important message for those who are willing to listen. The question is: will governments act to end Canada's long-standing genocidal practices towards Indigenous people? A socialist society *would* build a world where all children are cherished. ★



Poisoned Drugs Emergency

Bill Hopwood and Salman Zafar

2021 was the worst year in BC's poisoned drugs disaster. In the first ten months, 1,782 people lost their lives. There were 1,522 COVID deaths for the entire year. In 2016, BC declared a public health emergency after 474 deaths the year before. Six years later, four times as many people died. Policies and actions need to change.

These are people that could and should be alive. Racism is a factor. BC's Indigenous people die at three times the rate of other residents, with similar trends across Canada. BC is suffering the worst of the growing Canadian disaster. Politicians continue to refuse to act to save lives.

Most Canadians take some drugs: legal, prescribed and illegal. Some people must have a coffee to start the day or have a couple of evening drinks to relax. People take prescribed drugs to sleep, relieve stress or treat an underlying health issue. Others use drugs that, for various historical reasons, are illegal.

The 1920s alcohol prohibition in the US was a disaster. The fifty-year international "War on Drugs" is an equal disaster, causing untold suffering and deaths, and costing a trillion US dollars.

People use illegal drugs for similar reason to legal ones — to relax, relieve pain and stress, and escape from trauma. BC's health emergency was triggered by rising overdose deaths, mainly due to fentanyl added to opioids. Now many street drugs are contaminated by a cocktail of stronger and often fatal drugs.

The answer is straightforward — provide clean, safe supply. This would save lives and money, and take



Art by Smokey D in Vancouver

huge pressures off paramedics, the ambulance service and hospitals. It would also reduce the space for large drug operators, who care only about making money regardless of harm. Many are criminal but some are legal, like Purdue Pharma, which peddled OxyContin for years.

In BC, pressure is growing for changing policies. Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users and the Drug User Liberation Front, with Vancouver Councillor Jean Swanson, are recommending that drugs be decriminalized, so possession for personal use is allowed, and regulated, and made available through Compassion Clubs.

Living under the daily struggle of capitalism should not be compounded by being criminalized for using some drugs.★

Workers Stand Up (continued from back page)

Now inflation is back, running just below five percent. Food prices are up and expected to rise even more as drought and floods hit supplies. Housing keeps getting more insanely expensive.

Determined Unions Needed

Now is a time for workers to organize and win better wages and conditions. Union density has increased slightly in the last two years, both because of new workplaces being organized and because union workers were better able to keep their jobs. However, Canada so far has not seen an upturn in strikes as has happened in the US.

Unions have regularly won huge strike votes, often with over 90 percent in favour. Usually this results in improved offers from the employer and a settlement. In New Brunswick, CUPE employees voted 94 percent for a strike, which the government tried to defeat but failed. Tellingly, they had overwhelming public support at 82 percent. There have been other successful strikes including at Manitoba University, Vale Mine

and Québec's child care centres (see page 12).

Many workers in health, education and food processing feel that their union should take stronger action to demand safe working conditions due to COVID. Many workers would like the benefits of a union, but the employers use every dirty trick to try to prevent this.

Unions need to grasp the opportunity to reverse decades of stagnant wages. The rich have the money; Canada's billionaires scooped up an extra \$78 billion during COVID. The path to victory is by strong organizing in the workplace with clear demands for what is needed. With inflation, one such demand should be a guaranteed pay increase linked to the cost of living. Workers need unions that are democratically run by the members. Solidarity and not crossing picket lines are core to winning. Canadian unions cover five million workers, a huge and powerful force if confident and mobilized.★



Bill Hopwood

Two long years of COVID, and the deep economic recession that it triggered have transformed many people's attitude to work and life. Millions of workers were laid off or put on shorter hours, and many more worked from home. Others faced dangerous and unsafe conditions as they carried out "essential" jobs.

Now many employers across multiple sectors are worried about a labour shortage. What is happening?

As the economy went into free fall, unemployment soared to three million, 14 percent of the workforce. A broader indication of those out of work — the labour underutilization rate — reached 36.1 percent. Hardest hit were workers in restaurants, hotels, recreation and culture, and some retail. The impact was uneven, with young people, women and racialized groups hit hardest.

On the other hand, nearly a third of Canadians worked mostly from home. These were mainly white collar, administrative and professional workers.

As well as job losses, workers lost income. By April 2020, the lowest paid tenth of workers had lost 65 percent of their hours compared to before COVID, and therefore most of their paid income. By the end of that year, they were still down 39 percent of their hours. Government support with CERB did soften the loss of income but many are still struggling. The richest

New Brunswick CUPE employees voted 94 percent for a strike

10 percent actually gained jobs and income during COVID.

Now, as sections of the economy re-open, employers are seeking workers. There are shortages of workers in trucking, agriculture, restaurants and bars, meat plants and sections of retail. The real problems are low wages and bad conditions. If employers improved these, the labour shortages would disappear. Not surprisingly, there is a shortage of nurses and care workers after the gruelling two years they have endured. Some employers are now raising wages and offering signing bonuses.

Workers Want a Life

In Canada over three million people have had COVID, one in thirteen of the population. Over 35,000 have died. Almost everyone knows someone who has had COVID, and many have lost a friend, colleague or family member. This experience makes people think about what is important in life and work.

Maybe life is more important than work. People want time to relax, look after their children, and do things that are rewarding. A job with low pay, irregular and/or long hours, and a schedule with no planned shifts is not attractive. If the boss or customers are rude or sexual harassers, forget it! It is no surprise that workers are not keen on those areas of employment.