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# **RIISING PRICES, RENTS & CLIMATE DISASTER MAKE THE RICH PAY**



# 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.**
- **Defend wages:** Unions should demand Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) clauses in all new and existing contracts.
- **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 six continents. For news from around the world: [internationalsocialist.net](http://internationalsocialist.net)**

**If you agree with the ideas in this magazine, join Socialist Alternative!**

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## Socialist Alternative Growing

### The Editors

Starting with this issue we are moving to publishing more frequently, and our readers will see five issues a year with a newly designed look. This is an important step towards our goal of producing a monthly publication.

This change reflects Socialist Alternative's growing membership and nation-wide readership; people are looking for answers amidst the deepening crises of capitalism and a looming climate disaster.

What is needed is not just a description of how bad things are, but political clarity, an analysis of why the world is the way it is, combined with a program of how to win struggles and pave the way to socialist transformation of society. We draw on the rich history of the working class and Marxism and apply it to today. This is what you can find in our material, both in print and online.

Socialist Alternative, in its decade of building in Canada, has a proud tradition of combining bold socialist ideas with on-the-ground action to improve the lives of everyday people. We helped win a \$15 minimum wage and 5 paid sick days in BC. We've been part of housing campaigns that have won victories from coast to coast.

As we expand into new cities and towns and deepen the roots of our existing branches, we need a more regular magazine as part of our campaigns, recruitment, and analysis.

You can now subscribe to Socialist Alternative's magazine for a modest \$2 a month or \$24 a year and receive each printed issue delivered to your mailbox. With an additional donation, you can become a sustainer of our magazine and build the forces we need to win a livable future. ★

**Watch for details online at: [socialistalternative.ca](http://socialistalternative.ca) or email us at [contact@socialistalternative.ca](mailto:contact@socialistalternative.ca)**



*Socialist Alternative Summer School in Vancouver.*

# Climate Disaster: Fighting for a Future

Grace Bodie and Violet Forrie

The dangerous impact of fossil fuels on the climate has been known for decades. Now unprecedented climate disasters are happening all the time. Climate scientists warned for years of worse floods, droughts, storms, fires and record-breaking temperatures, but big business ignored them and even tried to deny the science. ExxonMobil knew the impact of CO<sub>2</sub> on climate in the 1970s but, to protect its profits, it spent decades and millions of dollars denying climate change, despite its harm to people and the planet.

Climate change is hitting working people and poor the hardest. Yet climate change is ultimately caused by big business and a system that concentrates on accumulating ever more money while largely ignoring the deadly consequences for humanity. One hundred large corporations are responsible for 71 percent of all CO<sub>2</sub> released in the last 35 years.

Youth of today are especially afflicted. More than anyone, we are faced with the question of a future without security and the looming possibility of human devastation or even extinction. A good life with a decent job, a home, access to food for ourselves and our future children is threatened as we also shoulder the weight of finding solutions to the climate crisis.

## “Net-Zero” Nonsense

The Canadian government has proposed “net-zero” by 2050, like other nations. Simply put, the idea is that natural gas, oil, and other carbon-emitting fuels will continue to be extracted and burned. However, with carbon capture technology, the emissions produced will be captured and stored. This technology doesn’t yet exist at a level to reach “net-zero” in time to stop catastrophic temperature increases. Even if CO<sub>2</sub> releases were eliminated in Canada, fossil fuels would still be exported to be burned. Global emissions, which do not recognize countries’ boundaries, would continue to increase while the Canadian government and its capitalist class could pretend to have clean hands.

## The Problem is Capitalism

Fortunately, many young people understand the problem and are seeking a solution. Their future is threatened, and they aren’t going to take it lying down. In the last decade, young people have been on the forefront of rallies, marches, sit-ins, die-outs and strikes to protest governments, corporations and institutions that continue to pollute the planet. There is a growing understanding that capitalism is behind climate change. As Greta Thunberg said recently at the mass protest against coal expansion in Germany, “Governments and corporations are ... actively destroying the environment.” Fridays for



Future stated, “Climate struggle is class struggle.”

As climate change is rooted in capitalism’s political and economic system, the struggle should strive to build support across the working class. By drawing connections between the issues of the climate crisis and capitalism, we can build a broad working-class movement built on solidarity and an understanding of how all our lives, and our liberation from the oppressions of capitalism, are profoundly interconnected.

Answers will not come from another market “reform,” greenwashing corporations or piecemeal “solutions.” Instead, young people need to build mass movements that will challenge the capitalist system with a bold, socialist plan, with leadership that will act in crisis, and that will unite people to overthrow the oppressive capitalist system.

Socialist Alternative youth attended protests at COP26, where hundreds of thousands took to the streets in Glasgow and Edinburgh to protest government inaction. We were also at COP15 in Montréal. Indigenous leaders and youth held protests inside the conference room and on the streets, standing firm against Canada’s colonial policies and destruction of Indigenous land.

As long as wealth is in the hands of capitalists, they will continue to pollute for their own profits. An international plan of cooperation is needed to tackle climate change, and the other sufferings capitalism inflicts. The public ownership and democratic control of the energy, transportation, banking, mining, logging, and other polluting sectors is the way forward to stop the destruction of our planet.

Our planet is not for sale. We are campaigning to make sure it’s liveable for today and tomorrow’s generations. ★

Follow us:   [SocialistAlternativeYouth](#)

# Ford's Ontario: For-Profit Everything

Jackson Douglas

In 2018, Doug Ford declared that “Ontario is open for business.” He has been true to his word. With health care privatization, destruction of protected natural land, and a housing plan that will boost developer profits, big business is booming while most people are struggling to make ends meet.

In mid-January, Ford announced his plan to deal with the surgery backlog from COVID delays, long-term cuts and staff burnout. It sends patients to private for-profit clinics for surgeries. This will be more expensive for the public and won't address the real problems. Emergency rooms are overcrowded; necessary surgeries, including cancer operations, are being postponed; long-term care is ignored; and old people are neglected. Meanwhile, the COVID epidemic continues.

Ford's policy will draw staff away from hospitals, where they are most needed, to private clinics that pay more than the government allows in the public system.



Ontario health workers protesting health care privatization

For-profit clinics will charge patients for everything they can to make profits for the owners. The Loblaw-funded Maple clinic charges \$69 for a virtual doctor visit, even for people with public health insurance. This should be illegal, but the company uses a loophole by spuriously linking patients with out-of-province doctors. Addressing the real health care issues needs a massive investment in staff, hospitals and long-term care. That would include paying nurses and care workers a decent salary that catches up with inflation and more.

Ontario's Greenbelt is the world's largest area dedicated to the protection of farmland, forests, wetlands, rivers, and lakes, an essential source of agricultural farmland and ecological biodiversity. Yet, Ford wants to cut into large swathes of it for a quick buck. Bill 23, *The Build More Houses Faster Act*, promised 1.5 million new homes by 2031. There is plenty of urban land available for publicly-owned affordable housing that could be built to meet people's needs. Instead, Ford is opening up the Greenbelt for private housing builders. This will allow Ford's developer friends to make big bucks with no guarantee of more affordable housing. Developers make more money off urban sprawl and expensive condo towers.

The threatened general strike that forced Ford to retreat last year showed that workers have the power to fight back and win against the Ford government. Pushing back against the slippery slope of privatization in health care and housing will take a unified working-class movement. ★

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## Smith and UCP are Degrading Public Health Care

Davis Hay

Alberta's beleaguered health care system is under assault by creeping privatization and surging respiratory illness, including new COVID variants. The last three years of COVID have made people more susceptible to sickness, especially after the UCP dropped all public health measures. Children's hospitals are over maximum capacity as more children are sick with influenza and RSV. Meanwhile, Danielle Smith and the UCP pick fights with Ottawa to distract from real social issues. But the *Sovereignty Act* will do nothing but waste valuable time and resources, and the UCP will use it to protect the interests of fossil fuel companies at everyone else's expense.

Smith will cut health care funding, accelerate privatization and make patients pay out-of-pocket. She has said, “once people get used to paying out-of-pocket for more things, then we can change the conversation on healthcare.” After the leadership race, Smith and the UCP quickly began privatizing community lab services in urban centres, immediately increasing wait times. Instead of the UCP working to recruit more health care professionals, stagnant wages and benefits drive health care workers away, and nurses and doctors face sickness and burnout. Staff shortages force municipal hospitals to close their emergency departments all too frequently. Wages, benefits, and quality of care would only decline under a private system that's all about profit.

Alberta's health care system needs investment in public surgical centres, community care, palliative care, and home care to reduce the burden on hospitals. Albertans must organize and fight to expand and defend public services from the UCP before it's too late. ★

# What Makes Me Angry (and Why I'm A Socialist): "Rugged Individualism"

Larry Hyink

"Why am I a socialist?" The main reason can be distilled to its essence in a rant I gave to an acquaintance who was going on about their "independence:" that they didn't need nobody; they built their own house, and...

Picking up a nail, I cut them off. I worked years in a steel wire mill, and, among other things, we made thousands of TONS of nails. A nail starts as iron ore, which is mined, refined into steel rod, drawn into wire, cut and shaped into nails, packed into boxes, shipped to distributors and contractors, and, finally pounded above the door to hold the horseshoe in place over your "do it yourself" house. Thousands of people are involved in making and distributing a nail, not to mention milled lumber, electrical wiring, window glass, insulation, oh, and the water that comes out of the damn tap.

Now, conceivably, you could cast iron nails from ore you'd smelted yourself, but I've never met any individualist quite that rugged.

The glaring truth is that our production is social. The tools and appliances that give us the luxury of pretending that we don't need nobody are produced

socially by thousands of other people.

This isn't surprising since we're a social species. As far back as the fossil record goes, we've lived in groups. Well, duh, any species needing 10-12 years before its young can survive on their own is not one that "don't need nobody." Our ability to cooperate and pass on knowledge is what led to our species' spectacular success. It brought us from the caves to the miracles of science.

It's also brought us to the brink of extinction.

This isn't the result of our talent for cooperative labour, rather, because the course of this productive juggernaut is set by a tiny group of people who "own" it and are only interested in their own profits and privileges.

This is why I'm a socialist. Unless we put these massive productive forces in the hands of those who do the work for the benefit of everyone rather than the 1%, we are on the road to suicide as a species. I believed that 55 years ago when I became a socialist and, on the basis of the evidence, I believe it even more today. ★

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## Life of a Carpenter

As a beginner in the carpentry trade, there's a lot to learn. Keeping myself safe and developing my skills are my top priorities. But my supervisors keep drilling into my head: "time is money." I've got to get good fast, under the constant watch of them laying down the law.

After a day of pushing my body past its limit, adrenaline pumping through my veins, I've still got to finish the day's tasks. Injuries and wear-and-tear on the body are part of the job. In orientation they taught us ways to manage it. I think about taking a break to do my "recommended stretching throughout the day," but then I hear another voice in my head: "If we don't keep up with the schedule, every day we are losing thousands of dollars."

They've got me chipping concrete with a hammer drill. It's my first time and I end up spraining *both* my wrists. At the next morning's safety meeting the supervisors remind us how important it is to speak up for ourselves when feeling fatigue. But that's hard to do when they're constantly warning about "money lost."

Sometimes my co-workers take days off due to stress or injuries. Everyone brings their own set of strengths to the site, so you notice when someone's missing. But



then that loss of skill gets boiled down to "money lost," and I start to feel indifference to the project. It's hard to be invested in how it turns out when everything comes down to money. Sometimes we'll be at a standstill for a few moments with no instruction. I can't help but wonder: "Where's the *time-is-money* talk now?"

I like being a carpenter, it's satisfying work. But threat of "money lost" means I'm constantly risking injury, and it makes me resent the work I like to do. I can imagine a site where the structural integrity of a build is valued as much as the safety and longevity of its builders. My co-workers and I know how to make high quality builds that meet people's needs, while doing the work in a safe and sustainable way. But we'll never have a chance to do that while the industry is based on making profits. ★

# Cost of Living Crisis: Make the Rich Pay

Tim Heffernan and Bill Hopwood

Chicken breasts \$27 a kilo! Food prices are up 11 percent in the last year, and it is even worse for some basics: edible oils, pasta and flour are all up over 21 percent, butter 17.8 percent and vegetables 13.7 percent.

Canadians face hard choices when food shopping. A recent Ipsos poll found that 53 percent worry they “might not have enough money to feed their families.” Over 6 million Canadians rely on charitable food programs, double that of three years ago. This year will be worse with 22 percent of Canadians (and 35 percent of young adults) expecting to need charities to meet essential needs. Food banks are overstretched.

Most other essentials are also up in price. Recent headlines have pointed to a drop in the rate of inflation; however, the cost of living is still going up, only a bit slower.

## Bank of Canada Makes Things Worse

The Bank of Canada has jacked up interest rates in response to the soaring cost of living. After promising low interest rates for years, the Bank abruptly reversed course over 2022, raising the interest rate from 0.25 to 4.25 percent — a huge increase. Rather than ease the cost-of-living crisis, this makes it worse, increasing charges on debts, mortgage payments and rents, up over 11 percent since 2021.

Canadians have mountains of debt, as they try to maintain living standards. Total consumer debt climbed to \$2.32 trillion in 2022. Non-mortgage debt was \$591 billion, averaging \$21,128 for each consumer. Household debt is now \$1.84 for every \$1 of income, the highest ever.

The head of the Bank of Canada, Macklem, is clear he wants workers to pay for the surging cost-of-living crisis that they did not cause. He urged employers not to raise wages that maintain living standards. He didn't tell corporations to cut their profits and pass this on with lower prices. Clearly, he is on the side of Bay Street and big business.

Central banks around the world are using a crude tool to tackle the complex causes of inflation. The disruption to supply chains triggered rising prices in early 2021. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 gave a further boost to food and oil prices. Climate disasters disrupted food production adding to costs. Years of easy money with low interest rates and trillions of dollars injected into the world economy by central banks in response to the recession of 2008-09 and the COVID crisis provided fuel to the inflationary fire, as the housing price bubble demonstrated. Some corporations are taking advantage of inflation to push up their prices and profits.

Raising interest rates will not improve supply chains,

end the war in Ukraine, tackle climate change or slash corporate profiteering. The real purpose is to cause a recession in the hope that this will slow inflation. However, it will be at the cost of more misery, due to rising unemployment and risk of mortgage defaults.

## Corporate Profits Soaring

Oil companies are making record profits. The cost of producing oil in Canada did not change over the last two years but the prices for consumers soared. This resulted in super-profits for oil and gas companies — up \$38 billion, or more than 1,000 percent, since 2019.

While in some sectors profits are down, overall big business is doing well with profits up 30 percent. A report from the Centre for Future Work found that after-tax corporate profits took 17.4 percent of GDP in 2022, the highest share in history.

Chief Executives' (CEOs) income also soared with the 100 highest paid CEOs receiving an average of \$14.3 million in 2021, the largest amount ever, up 31.2 percent from the average of 2020. Not everyone is hit by inflation.

Canada's big three supermarket chains — Loblaw, Empire (Sobeys) and Metro — continue their profiteering. Food retail profits jumped by 120 percent or \$2.8 billion from 2019. Economist Jim Stanford stated that “the supermarkets have made hay on the crisis of the pandemic and everything that's happened afterward.”

The Empire chain CEO said, “I refuse to apologize for our success.” The “success” of bumper profits comes at the misfortune of millions, suffering reduced living standards and real hunger.

## No Help from Politicians

Politicians do nothing about inflation, falsely claiming it is up to the Bank of Canada. They could introduce price controls and a limit on profits, and heavily tax excess profits and soaring wealth and use this to help people struggling with the cost of living.

All agree that supply chain disruptions are a cause of inflation and other problems. The government could act to raise low wages and force employers to provide training to deal with skill shortages. One example is the truck driver shortage, expected to reach 55,000 by 2024. The government could insist on quality training for drivers, clamp down on wage theft and long hours, step up safety inspections on companies and increase the provision of rest areas and services on the road.

Instead, the Liberals do nothing. The Conservative's new leader, Poilievre, abandoned his embrace of cryptocurrencies (after their dramatic crash); now he wants to slash public spending. This will not tackle inflation but will make life harder for the majority of



*CUPE education workers and supporters protest the Ford government and demand pay increases in line with inflation*

Canadians who want improved public health, education, and seniors' care and protection of the environment.

Neither the Liberals nor Tories will tackle corporate profits. But both agree to increase military spending, with billions more on fighter jets, naval vessels (running billions of dollars over budget already) and other expensive equipment. Military spending increases inflation.

Unfortunately, the NDP remains the tail of the Liberal dog, occasionally wagging some criticisms. But it does not put forward a distinct bold program to tackle inflation and Canada's many other economic woes such as lack of investment in production, the low growth of productivity and soaring inequality.

### **Workers Not to Blame**

Inflation is not caused by workers demanding "excessive wage increases." Prices have been surging ahead of wages since mid-2020, and workers' living standards are falling. Companies have record profits and government revenues are up due to inflation: both can afford to pay higher wages. .

Workers need unions that fight to defend living standards. It's one thing to demand better pay, it's something else to get it. The Ontario CUPE strike of education workers in 2022 showed the strength and weakness of the unions and the leadership.

Ontario unions threatened a general strike over Doug Ford's attack on union rights; Ford was forced to back down. However, when it came to delivering a pay raise inline with inflation, CUPE came up short. By calling off the strike the union lost negotiating power. CUPE leaders recommended a pay settlement far below the rate of inflation. A similar below inflation deal was agreed by BC's public sector unions, without a unified struggle of all workers.

The encouraging feature of the Ontario struggle was the enthusiastic support of workers across the public and

private sectors to stand together as well as the 50 percent public support for a general strike. Clearly, the tide of the class struggle, consciousness and labour militancy is turning.

Private sector unions are also stepping up action. Unifor saw 31 strikes during 2021, a new record. However, it's not just the number of strikes — it's how they are conducted and what they achieve. A key demand is wage increases above the rate of inflation, best won with a cost-of-living adjustment.

Gaining COLA requires a mobilized membership confident that it has a leadership that both wants to win and knows how to win. Democratic discussion within the union is vital to prepare demands, discuss and decide on actions and tactics, and decide on any settlement. A mass campaign to win a large majority for strike action is vital. If that isn't enough to force the employer to agree, then a determined strike, including defiance of back-to-work legislation is the path to victory.

Crucial to ensuring fighting union leaders is they should be regularly elected, be open to recall by the membership and receive the same pay as the workers they represent.

### **Looming World Recession**

Canada and much of the world is heading towards a recession, triggered by the soaring interest rates. The shift from relatively high employment to rising unemployment could be rapid.

This will be the third recession in 15 years. Clearly the capitalist system cannot deliver stability and quality living standards. It is dragging the world to climate disaster, and breeds war, oppression and poverty.

Around the world people are resisting this rotten system and looking for answers. Socialist Alternative Canada and our sister organizations in International Socialist Alternative are part of the global struggle to win a better future — a socialist world.

# Health Care on Life Support

Harland Bird

Canada's health care system is seriously ill. Emergency rooms are overflowing and some, in smaller communities, closed altogether. Deaths in emergency rooms are increasing. Staff shortages plague hospitals and long-term care. People on long wait lists for surgery are dying. Seven million Canadians do not have a family doctor. In late fall, children were experiencing a "triple-demic" of COVID, flu, and RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) that forced children's hospitals across the country to take drastic measures. Alberta put sick children in heated trailers and Ontario called in the Red Cross to help. Parents have been desperate due to shortages of over-the-counter cold and flu medicines.

The strain is everywhere at once. And though the system has yet to break entirely, many workers are on the verge of burnout, working long hours in an emotionally taxing environment.

Everyone agrees that things need to change. What they don't agree on is the diagnosis or the cure. Provinces argue that the crisis is due to lack of funds and the cure is more funds from the federal government. Doctors say they need more money, with some saying the fee-for-service system demands too much paperwork. Workers argue for higher levels of staff and more spaces in training programs.

While it is true the health system needs more funds and staff, a broader analysis is needed. The inevitable, predictable result of decades of neoliberal "cost-cutting" has reduced health care in Canada to a shell of its former self: for example, acute-care beds in Canada were cut from 4.99 per thousand people in 1978 to just 1.96 in 2018. The use of private long-term care homes, without strong government oversight results in inadequate care and insufficient space. Patients stay in hospital beds because there is no room in long-term care. They sometimes callously get discharged with nowhere to go. Homelessness drives illness and hospital visits. The shortage of family physicians means people

go to emergency departments because they don't have access to primary care.

## Federal-Provincial Conflicts Over Health Transfers

The federal and provincial governments have been at war over the federal health transfer. The federal government has asked provinces to allocate new funds for five priority areas — reducing surgery backlogs, enhancing primary care, expanding mental health services, fixing long-term care homes and "modernizing" the system through better virtual care and data-sharing between the provinces and Ottawa. As the crisis mounts, pressure on both sides will force them to some sort of agreement. Early on, the premiers refused to commit to data collection and sharing. Meanwhile, the inadequate response of the federal government has prompted NDP leader Jagmeet Singh to put his party's supply and confidence deal with the governing Liberals on notice.

## Curse of the Private Sector

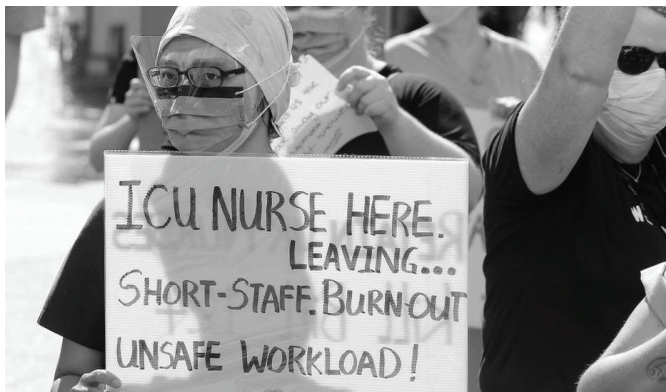
Doug Ford has announced that Ontario will increase the number of surgeries performed by private for-profit clinics. This will not improve patient care. Instead, it will drain staff from public hospitals, and benefit the owners of private clinics. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario denounced the move, saying it would actually increase wait times for urgent hospital care.

Private care homes were death traps during COVID. Telus Health has launched as an online physician consultation service, amid allegations in BC of illegal extra-billing for publicly-insured services.

The Liberal-NDP agreement included the introduction of national pharmacare by the end of 2023. Canada remains the only country with a public health care system that does not cover prescription drug costs. Naturally, highly profitable big pharma opposes this reform.

## The Cure

Canada's health care system cannot be fixed by the current trends: lack of funding integration and training and support for workers, and increased privatization. A new direction would include an integrated system of community care through publicly-funded, salaried professionals; outpatient services, care homes and hospitals fully staffed with trained workers; publicly-provided dental care, mental health care, addictions treatment and pharmacare; and more emphasis on dealing with the social and economic causes of ill-health. Finally, we need to end the role of profit-hungry private businesses in Canada's health system! ★



Health care workers face burnout in understaffed system



# China's Crises Increase

Maurice Li and Chris Fofonoff

Xi Jinping crowned himself as China's lifetime dictator at last October's 20th National Congress of the misnamed Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and largely eliminated anti-Xi forces within the party. But since then, he has faced intensifying crises at home and abroad and has been weakened by the COVID disaster that has left the CCP regime even more vulnerable and open to further challenges by China's working class.

## COVID Disaster

Xi's vaunted "zero-COVID" policy was withdrawn after mass protests broke out in more than 39 cities and 160 university campuses in November 2022. This movement was historic as it was across the country, had strong popular support and openly opposed the national CCP leadership. The regime panicked and did a sudden and dramatic U-turn, ending all COVID restrictions without preparing the population or the health system.

Some Chinese experts estimate that 840 million people could be infected by COVID in the coming months. Already, hospitals and morgues are overwhelmed. Many local governments are advocating cancelling Lunar New Year gatherings and the granting of financial subsidies to migrant workers from other provinces to stop viral spread. Socialists argue that there is an urgent need to promote further vaccination, especially for those over 60, introduce mRNA vaccines, and strengthen the public health system. However, the CCP has shown little sign of budging on these ventures, unprofitable as they are in the short term.

Although the movement is largely suppressed, it changed the outlook of millions, proving that even the CCP's powerful censorship machinery and its draconian laws against "subversion of state power" cannot permanently stop the masses' resistance. The movement received solidarity overseas, including from International Socialist Alternative.

## China's Many Crises

The bourgeois media expect an economic recession in the US, China, and EU this year. China's state-capitalist system can intervene in the market more forcefully than governments in the West, but its macroeconomic control measures are becoming less effective. As part of the growing US-China conflict, the US has escalated it to a technology war, with export bans hitting China's technology industry. China's state-capitalist system, once attractive to many global corporations for its cheap labour without union rights, is now less attractive.

China's housing bubble has burst. The fall of the massive real estate sector (30 percent of GDP, and more



The Sitong Bridge protest inspired many across China

than twice the size of the US housing market), has slammed the economy hard. China's 2022 economic growth of three percent was, exempting COVID's 2020, its lowest since the 1960s.

China faces an economic downturn, high unemployment — youth unemployment is nearly 20 percent — and a decline of workers' income. China has a falling birth rate as young families cannot afford the cost of raising children, and 2022 saw its population decline, a further concern for the regime. In 2022 China was devastated by a major heat wave that wilted crops and dried up rivers. This is on top of other long-term environmental disasters such as water shortages and air pollution. All these crises are a time bomb for the regime.

## Future Possibilities

China's dictatorial system is inextricably linked to capitalism: the CCP is full of billionaires. The concealment of accurate medical data, the reduction of public health resources, the huge profits of private pharmaceutical and nucleic-acid testing companies, and the suppression of women's, national and democratic rights are all inevitable under the CCP. Therefore, any democratic movement must break with capitalism to succeed. After last year's massive movement, the regime is afraid of triggering more protests, hence its zero-COVID reversal.

The lack of a clear political agenda for the mass movement in China, under the conditions of prohibition of any legal organization, makes it more difficult for the movement to sustain itself. At this stage random explosive movements are more likely. Socialists support working-class struggles, such as the strike of freight drivers in Guangdong province in November 2022 and establishing independent trade unions. A mass workers' movement, democratically organized, is the key to challenge the exploitation and oppressive dictatorial system of the ruling Chinese capitalists. ★

More on China: [chinaworker.info/en](http://chinaworker.info/en)

# The Communist Manifesto: 175 Years

by Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Leslie Kemp*

*The Communist Manifesto* advanced the key idea of class struggle as a historical process. Its opening line, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,” introduces history through a workers’ lens. It firmly places the working class as a driving force in making history. Since its publication on February 21, 1848, *The Manifesto’s* relevance grew, particularly with the growth of socialism, starting in Europe, from the 1870s. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, it became a foundational text for Marxists, worldwide.

Published in German as the Communist League’s platform, the manuscript was sent to the printer just weeks before the French Revolution of February 24. Soon it was translated into multiple languages including French, English, Danish, and Polish. The French translation came out shortly before the defeated revolution of June 1848 — the first great battle between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Since then, as *The Manifesto* predicted, capitalism has reached every corner of the globe. The key ideas of *The Manifesto* are both relevant and inspirational today.

*The Manifesto* describes how modern bourgeois society “sprouted from the ruins of feudal society,” which in itself was ridden with class antagonisms. Bourgeois society established new classes and new conditions of oppression, creating two classes “directly facing each other:” bourgeoisie and proletariat.

## Turmoil in World Economy

*Simon Schweitzer*

Inflation dominates the world economy, hitting workers’ living standards. Pro-business commentators falsely blame inflation on “labour shortages” or “excessive demand.” The reality is wages have not kept pace with inflation, so living standards have declined. Increasingly, workers are unwilling to do the same jobs at the same pay while prices rise.

Fragile global supply chains were shocked by COVID, climate disasters and the invasion of Ukraine, triggering inflation. Yet central banks around the world, “untouched by morning and untouched by noon,” insist that raising interest rates is the only cure. They ignore the pain this inflicts on most people with soaring debt charges, mortgage payments and rents.

Higher interest rates will not unblock supply chains, reverse droughts, or bring peace to Ukraine. They are driving the world into a recession and higher unemployment. They will devastate much of the neocolonial world. It is not clear that a recession will bring inflation to heel.

Neoliberal policies — “free trade” agreements, offshoring, cuts and privatization, and attacks on unions and wages



*The Manifesto* describes how capitalism drove, and in turn was accelerated by, colonization, trade in commodities and the search for new markets. The restrictive guilds were taken over by mass, industrial production. As markets grew, demand rose and industry grew, as did the proletariat and the formation of a separate class. Workers were exploited. “These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.”

Other key ideas, developed in other Marxist writings, describe how the modern bourgeoisie advanced its political clout through the creation of a modern state, whose executive is “but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

*The Manifesto* provides inspiration today with its closing words: “Workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of the world unite!” ★

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— no longer guarantee profits for capitalists. After a short bounce back in 2021, largely driven by COVID support to companies, speculative assets and tech companies, most advanced capitalist economies returned to near stagnation. Today cryptocurrencies have crashed, and tech companies are firing hundreds of thousands of workers.

Higher interest rates are a major shift after the decades of easy money with low interest rates and massive injections of money between 2008 and 2021, called quantitative easing. Neoliberalism is being discarded as the capitalist class searches for a way to restore profitability and stability. States are intervening more in the economy with massive spending programs like the *US Inflation Reduction Act*, with similar policies in other countries, including Canada. Offshoring is being replaced by friendshoring as the world decouples into competing blocs led by rival US and Chinese imperialism.

Systemic problems, like weak global supply chains and crises in food and energy production, require systemic solutions. But any changes based on capitalism will be aimed at ensuring profits for big business. Genuine solutions for climate change and hunger require democratic control of production and distribution for the common good. ★

# Women, Life, Freedom

Allie Pev and Leslie Kemp

Mass protests continue in Iran more than four months after Mahsa (Jina) Amini, a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish woman, was murdered by Iran's morality police under charges she wore a hijab improperly. The mass demonstrations and protests, led by young people, quickly spread throughout Iran, despite the regime's attempts to shut them down. With the movement, including strikes, reaching to over 80 cities, the regime shut down the internet and mobile networks. Increasingly desperate, Iran's rulers are using extreme repression, including death sentences. Thus far, four men have been executed for protesting. By early January, at least 481 people, including 64 minors, have been killed by the regime.

While Iranians have protested over food and water shortages, and the general economic misery in recent years, none have been as explosive as this wave. Protests over hijabs are not new: in March 1979, a week of demonstrations in Tehran, beginning on International Women's Day, defeated, for a time, the new Islamist regime's edict compelling women to wear hijabs.

Freedom for women means a life free of violence. This cry of freedom is echoed around the world. In 2022, four Indigenous women in Winnipeg were murdered: Rebecca Contois, Morgan Beatrice Harris, Mercedes Myran and an unknown female given the name Buffalo Woman by Elders. Grim headlines still point out the horrors of violence committed against women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ everyday around the world.

Freedom is about choice. Women are now banned from universities in Afghanistan. Women lack choice in many aspects of their lives, particularly women who are working class, poor, Indigenous, women of colour and 2SLGBTQQIA+. The oppression of women happens at all levels of society including in the home. More than half of women and girls killed by men are murdered by their current or previous partners. We are not safe in the streets — even going for a jog can be deadly.

Government, police and judicial institutions provide no safety. Roe v. Wade was revoked without a fight from



Austrian socialists in solidarity with the movement in Iran



The murder of Mahsa (Jina Amini) sparked a mass movement

the Democratic Party, putting the lives and well-being of pregnant people in jeopardy. London policemen have murdered and raped. The RCMP abuses women, even within its ranks. There is little protection for rape victims when the police and courts retraumatize them during lengthy, invasive and shaming trials that rarely result in a conviction.

Violence against women is neither natural nor inevitable. It is sustained and entrenched by a system that uses "divide and rule" tactics to create divisions in the working class. Women's inequality evolved over thousands of years along with the establishment of class society. Women will never be truly free until we get rid of this exploitative capitalist system, which benefits from women's unpaid and low-paid labour. We will replace it with a socialist society where all of us can live in freedom. ★

## The Rent's Too High

(continued from back page)

Housing should be a human right for all regardless of income. But the profit-based system treats housing as a commodity and as an investment for the rich. Meanwhile, working-class people, the poor, and the oppressed are driven deeper into debt or even onto the streets, sacrificed for profits.

No amount of fast-tracking approvals, re-zoning, or other deregulation measures will solve the housing crisis if the system is based on profits. All of Canada needs a mass program to build and renovate decent, safe and affordable publicly-owned housing run by tenants' democracy. Strong rent controls should be based on the unit, to stop renovations and skyrocketing rents. This program can be financed by taxes on the rich and by taking the big developers, construction companies, and corporate landlords into public ownership to be run in the public interest rather than for private profit. ★



## THE RENT'S TOO HIGH!

*Amanda Woods*

High interest rates, inflated land prices, big landlords and speculators are driving rents even more out of reach for workers, students, immigrants, those with disabilities, and the poor.

The average rent in Canada in 2022 was \$1,976, up 11.9 percent from last year. For a single income household working full time at the federal minimum wage of \$15.55, the majority of their income goes to rent. It's even worse in the major cities. In Vancouver, the average cost of a one-bedroom is \$2,600 per month. In Toronto, it's \$2,550. In Atlantic Canada, rent is up 32.2 percent since 2021.

Governments claim they have programs to address the crisis. They differ in the details, but most share the same flaw: claiming that the housing crisis is due primarily to lack of supply. Yet, Statistics Canada found there were 1.3 million empty homes in 2021. Supply-side advocates say that if it was easier for developers to get housing approved and built, eventually rents will drop. Developers build homes for profits, concentrating on the top of the market. It is reliance on the market and

profits that created the housing crisis.

At least 235,000 people experience homelessness each year in Canada. Homelessness is increasing as rents and mortgages soar. It disproportionately affects women and children escaping domestic violence, people struggling with mental health and/or addiction, and Indigenous people.

Homelessness and the crisis of affordability are due to neoliberal policies. From 1965 to 1995, social housing was 10 percent of housing built and there was virtually *no* homelessness. Between 1972 and 1984, over 20,000 units of social housing were built each year. If Canada had continued this rate of building social housing, there would be over 700,000 additional units of affordable housing. But social housing building virtually stopped after the federal Liberal government stopped supporting it in 1993. Neoliberalism also led to the weakening or ending of rent controls. Instead, developers and speculators make huge profits from the growing housing crisis. (*continued p. 11*)

