

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

April 2023 - No. 24

suggested donation \$3 / solidarity donation \$10

- ★ Alberta Election p. 5
- ★ Save Jobs and Old Growth p. 6
- ★ Money for Death but Not for Life p. 11
- ★ Ban Caste Discrimination p. 13

Produced by volunteers & printed with union labour



**WE CAN'T AFFORD  
CAPITALISM**

# 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**,  
an organization active on six continents.  
For more news from around the world:  
**internationalsocialist.net**

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

Find out more and follow us:

[www.socialistalternative.ca](http://www.socialistalternative.ca)



[socialist.alternative.canada](https://www.instagram.com/socialist.alternative.canada)



[socialistalternativecanada](https://www.facebook.com/socialistalternativecanada)



[SocialistAltCA](https://twitter.com/SocialistAltCA)

## Protecting Old Growth and Jobs

*Angelina Berlinic and Ethan Joseph*

On February 25, Socialist Alternative joined the United for Old Growth Rally on lək̓ʷəŋən territory, at the Victoria legislature. Our eight members marched with thousands of people, dressed in colourful costumes. Socialist Alternative Canada and over 200 organizations signed onto the United for Old Growth Declaration. Our intervention included petitions and placards that detailed our demands:

- Protect at-risk old growth forests! Put ecosystems above profit!
- End the corporate-controlled forest tenure system!
- Democratic, public ownership and control of the forest industry!
- A just transition to good, secure jobs for all forestry workers!
- Fully involve First Nations and other forest-dependent communities. Free, prior and informed consent: these are their lands!

We collected 88 signatures on our petition and donations for our organization and sold 33 issues of our new magazine. People even asked to purchase our placards to put on their lawns! We were engaged throughout the rally, chatting to those who approached our table, resonating with our demands and the common fight against capitalism.

Our emphasis on closing the divide between workers and the environmental movement engaged many rally goers. As the forestry industry continues to cut jobs and BC's luscious environment continues to be destroyed, we recognize that our key opponent is the capitalist system. It is only possible to move forward arm in arm, truly "United for Old Growth." ★



*Socialist Alternative at the Old Growth Rally. Photo credit: Liz Cronin*



# Solidarity: The Heart of the Working Class

Uros Novakovic

*"We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old, solidarity forever."*

The experience of solidarity is familiar to every working person. Solidarity is the unexpected help from a friend you didn't know you had; it's a co-worker covering for you when the boss comes around; and it's when you pitch in to help a friend in need, even when you're struggling yourself.

Working people know what solidarity is, and what it is not. They know that it is often not comfortable nor easy. It demands care, courage, discipline, and sometimes a real sacrifice. Solidarity receives no accolades, but it makes all the difference.

An act of solidarity transforms the world. If only for a moment, it breaks through the atomized isolation of individuals, and connects people to each other. It breaks through the cynicism and madness of workplace pecking orders. It renders ridiculous the unnatural prejudices of sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc. that the ruling class uses to keep the working class divided.

The experience of solidarity exposes the reality of capitalist exploitation. It makes the contours of the class struggle and the task at hand easy to discern. Solidarity is the hinge point where one's personal experience connects to the great historical struggle for freedom and dignity.

## Solidarity as Working-Class Virtue

The oppressed have always understood the virtue of solidarity. Their heroes are outlaws who stole from the rich and gave to the poor, brave servants who risked harm to help one another, and those who gave up fame and wealth to do the right thing. The ruling classes know that working-class solidarity is a threat, so they promote their own preferred virtues instead.

The ruling class substitutes solidarity with sympathetic charity. "Give to the needy," they say. But solidarity is neither sympathy nor charity. Solidarity can only exist amongst equals and requires real sacrifice. For many this is time and/or money. Sometimes, it is petty honours and distinctions that capitalism uses to try to divide workers such as career "opportunities." Charity, in contrast, allows those who bestow it to gain recognition, accolades, and even financial benefits.

The ruling class substitutes solidarity with personal self-improvement. "Be the best you can be," they say. But solidarity does not require perfect individuals. On the contrary, it is rooted in the recognition of individual



Photo credit: Eric Pan

imperfection, but that these are overcome and transcended through cooperation.

The ruling class substitutes solidarity with a multitude of virtuous causes, as long as it retains its wealth and power, with the consequence that even the causes it claims to promote are sabotaged. When people call for the end of exploitation and suffering, the ruling class tells them that it will come if only they wait patiently. But solidarity is not directed at those in power to ask them for a better world. They will never grant it. Solidarity binds together the powerless and gives them the power to act themselves.

## Solidarity as a Revolutionary Practice

The vast majority of people recognize the flaws of capitalism: the destruction of the environment on which we depend, endless wars, oppression, hunger, and countless human lives it sacrifices. But capitalism will not be ended by wishing it to be so, nor by asking the ruling class to make it happen. Capitalism perpetuates itself through material constraints it imposes upon the working class: the need to keep a job and pay rent, while alienating and atomizing them to prevent their organization. "Anti-capitalist" posturing, no matter how rhetorically radical, does not overcome these constraints.

The only way forward is through class struggle and working-class political empowerment independent of the bosses and their political institutions. The power of the working class requires unity, which is built with solidarity. United, the working class is the most powerful force in history.

Solidarity opens the possibility of a better world — a multitude of possible futures which we can't even imagine.

Solidarity forever. ★

**Subscribe online** to get future issues of *Socialist Alternative* delivered to your mail box:



# Crisis in Ontario Health Care

Tim Heffernan and Jackson Douglas

This was one of Ontario's darkest winters in over 80 years. The gloom wasn't just due to the weather. For health care workers, in particular, it has been a period of low pay, overwork and understaffing with all that entails for patient care. Ontario's health system problems remain deep seated.

Ontario's per person health spending in 2020 was the lowest in the country. And it has the fewest Registered Nurses (RNs) per capita. An additional 24,000 RNs are needed now to reach the national average. The shortage is basically down to nurses' pay (limited by Bill 124 that only allows a one percent yearly wage increase for public sector workers) and stressful working conditions caused by having to work up to 16-hour shifts. While the government did allocate an extra \$15 billion for health care in its March budget, the plan to add an extra 7,000 beds is meaningless when there are no nurses to staff those beds. The projected nursing shortfall is 33,000 by 2027. Hospital emergency departments across Ontario were forced to close 158 times in the past year, resulting in the equivalent of 184 lost days, mainly due to staff shortages.

To top this, the Ford government, never a fan of the public sector, is increasing privatization. In March, Ford introduced Bill 60; officially named *Your Health Act*, it would be better called *Their Profits Act* as it will expand the role of for-profit private clinics. This may reduce wait times for procedures like cataract surgery, but it will come



Nurses in Toronto demanding better wages, staffing, and conditions

at a cost. The real crisis in hospitals is attracting and retaining nurses and other staff. Already, hospitals are filling workforce gaps with nurses hired from agencies at more than twice the hourly rate that staff earn. As private centres expand, more nurses will be drawn to the higher pay and predictable work schedules that these centres can offer.

Ford thinks the problem can be solved by building more hospitals and providing more beds. He's partially right but he is so wrong in thinking that good health care is simply a question of bricks, mortar and beds. ★

# Vancouver Schools: No Cuts, No Closures!

Ray Goerke

Students and teachers are struggling in BC with underfunded and understaffed schools. The NDP's budget doesn't do enough to address teacher shortages and increasing enrollment. The BC Teachers' Federation states that 73 percent of teachers have increased workloads since COVID, and over a third are considering leaving their jobs.

The provincial government can raise taxes on the rich and highly profitable corporations. Local school boards are funded by the province, which is why parents and students need trustees that will take the fight to the legislature.

Vancouver's school board is dominated by the right-wing ABC party, friends of big business and the well-off. They

won't support either raising taxes on themselves to fund schools or demand more funds from the province. Instead, ABC will cut programs, close schools and sell land.

It will take a movement of parents and students to pressure the school board trustees to stop cuts and closures. A strong campaign can expose the hypocrisy of elected officials and force them to change course.

COPE school board trustee Suzie Mah is building a movement for *No Cuts, No Closures*. Mah has only one vote on the board, but she can be the movement's voice and direct the pressure onto the ABC trustees. In 2013 in Seattle, despite having just one city councillor in support, Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant, and all other city councillors opposed, the pressure of a mass movement won a \$15 minimum wage in Seattle.

If you're in Vancouver, sign the *No Cuts, No Closures* petition and join the movement to defend public schools. ★

[www.copevancouver.ca/no\\_cuts\\_petition](http://www.copevancouver.ca/no_cuts_petition)



# Alberta's Election

Davis Hay

After a few years of turmoil, Alberta faces a decisive election on May 29. The reversal of the deep-rooted hatred for the United Conservative Party (UCP) that gripped the province during Kenney's reign is astonishing. Trading Premier Jason Kenney (the hated elitist) for Premier Danielle Smith (quietly, a registered corporate lobbyist, but loudly, a reactionary right-populist) meant a new face for the UCP. Two of Kenney's elitist stooges, Environment Minister Savage and Finance Minister Toews, are not seeking re-election. Toews attacked nurses' wages and removed auto insurance rate caps, while Savage served the interests of the fossil capitalists. Shedding these ministers that assaulted working people and the environment helped refresh the UCP's image and cleanse some of the bitter taste of its first term.

## UCP Buys Votes But Will Charge for Health Care

The province is flush with cash, based on the recent boom in fickle oil prices, ending the fiscal year with a whopping \$10 billion surplus. Now the UCP is flashing the money to grab some votes through direct cash payments to families and promising investment in health care and education after cutting both — and illegally spending millions on advertising it. But they still plan to leave \$2.4 billion untouched in the next budget. There is no reinvestment in post-secondary funding after three years of painful cuts, meaning students face more tuition increases. The UCP will continue privatizing parts of the health care system, including lab services and surgical facilities, ensuring that more public money ends up in private hands. Smith has declared that she plans to establish Health Spending Accounts and co-payments to get people paying directly for health care. Many voters are undecided, uninspired by either the UCP or NDP. Yet enough Albertans are back in love with the UCP and its plan to “fight Ottawa,” despite the cuts and scandals, that it could, unbelievably, win again.



Smith's UCP will increase charges for health care



Climate protesters in Calgary, the main election battleground

What is the appeal of the UCP despite its recent record? The UCP is successful in rural areas and most of Calgary because these voters perceive that the party most supports rural communities and the province's economy. Alberta's economy produces the most money in Western Canada (biggest provincial GDP), and is heavily reliant on fossil fuels, which account for over 20 percent of the GDP. Many rural communities depend on only one or a handful of employers in extractive industries. There is a widespread feeling amongst rural dwellers that they produce a lot of the province's wealth but receive few services in return. To win the rural vote, the NDP needs a bold campaign that promises to dramatically improve access to public services, along with public ownership of extractive industries to secure well-paying union jobs in a transition to a green economy. They need to combat unemployment and inflation.

## NDP Missed a Golden Opportunity

Socialist Alternative has consistently warned against the NDP's soft approach, supported by most unions and many on the left. The NDP and the Alberta Federation of Labour missed a golden opportunity to launch a fierce campaign to kick Kenney and the UCP from office at the height of their unpopularity. The hatred for the UCP was palpable, and Albertans would have supported a no-holds-barred campaign against them. Even if such a campaign failed to remove the UCP, it would have built momentum for the impending election. But the situation is now a nail-biter, with the UCP favoured to win. The UCP has rural districts locked down, as these communities perceive the NDP as offering little. Calgary is the epicentre of the race, where the NDP will need to flip several seats.

If the UCP wins, it will squander yet another oil-based boom. Socialist Alternative fights for good jobs and services based on a diverse economy freed of the boom and bust of the oil industry. ★

# BC's Forest Crisis

*Harland Bird and Allie Pev*

This year is the 30th anniversary of the climax of the “War in the Woods” to save old growth in Clayoquot Sound, when almost one thousand people were arrested for blockading logging trucks belonging to the private company MacMillan Bloedel (now owned by Weyerhaeuser). This was the biggest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history until 2020, when it was surpassed by the actions at Fairy Creek, which also aimed to protect BC’s unique old growth forests. Yet, in the three decades since 1993, and despite continued mass opposition, the destruction of these forests has continued apace. And now thirty years of governments’ persistent failure to protect the forests are bearing bitter fruit in the form of massive flooding, streams that are too warm for spawning salmon, and huge job losses across the forestry industry. An unheeded warning voiced by protesters in Clayoquot Sound is on the brink of becoming an accurate description of modern-day BC: “no trees, no fish, no jobs.”

Underscoring this fact, Canfor announced earlier this year that it is permanently closing its pulp and paper mill in Prince George, as well as closing a sawmill and pellet plant in Chetwynd and another sawmill in Houston, BC, which was the largest in the world when it opened a mere twenty years ago. Hundreds of jobs have been lost, and communities are reeling. These are not isolated incidents, but part of a larger trend. From 1997 to 2017, BC lost nearly 50,000 forest jobs, halving the workforce. None of this was due to protecting old growth forests.

Now Canfor, Interfor, and West Fraser, having consumed huge swaths of BC’s forests, are migrating to the southern US where forests regenerate more quickly. In 2020 Canfor invested US\$100 million in the purchase of a sawmill in South Carolina less than one month after announcing the closure of its Isle Pierre sawmill near Prince George affecting 94 workers. All three companies raked in massive profits in 2021 from the harvest of giant BC trees, and the unchecked exporting of raw logs and lumber in record numbers. Now they are taking their profits and leaving for greener pastures.

This is not because environmental protections are too strict in BC: on the contrary, the province still does not even have species-at-risk laws; and the infamous “unduly restrict” clause, which prioritizes the timber output over all else, is still in operational effect.

These companies are leaving because, after decades of unsustainable clear-cut logging, BC’s forests are simply almost all gone.



*One of the authors at Clayoquot Sound, 30 years ago.*

Premier Eby has admitted that BC’s forests are “exhausted.” But despite recently pledging to phase out the “unduly restrict” clause, expand deferrals (which delay or restrict logging), and fully involve First Nations in forestry, it is clear that Eby’s NDP is not up to the immense task now at hand. These small steps are not enough. BC has the lowest value added, making things from trees, of any forestry region in North America, yet is still exporting raw logs and cutting down trees to make pellets for burning in Britain. All this must change, but it cannot be left to the big forestry companies.

While the NDP claim that old growth logging is at a record low, their lack of open and clear reporting makes many suspect that the government is fudging the numbers and continuing “talk and log” tactics.

Socialist Alternative demands: the protection of old growth forests and an end to the corporate-controlled forest tenure system; democratic public ownership and control of the forestry industry; and a just transition to good secure jobs for all forestry workers. We demand Indigenous and other forest-dependent communities have free, prior and informed consent and control over their lands. The profit-driven system that is destroying forests and jobs needs to be replaced with planning for healthy communities and woods. ★



# What Makes Me Angry: The Missing Part of Canada's Health Care "Debate"

Larry Hyink

Listening to and reading about the so-called health care debate you'd get the feeling that our only options are more privatization or tons more money for the publicly funded public-private train wreck that Canada is dealing with today.

To get an idea of the end of the line for the privatizers, the US's free market paradise has a life expectancy lower and an infant mortality rate higher than Canada's, while spending twice as much per person on health care (\$10,856 vs \$5,190 USD in 2019). On the other hand, Cuba, which spends roughly 20 percent per person (\$1,032 USD in 2019) of what Canada spends on health care, has virtually the same life expectancy as Canada and a lower infant mortality rate.

Obviously, capitalism is bad for your health.

Cuba's socialist health system provides first world health care in an impoverished third-world country crippled by a ferocious American embargo. Not only that, Cuba, unlike Canada, has built a world-class pharmaceutical industry. Finally, Cuba has about 9 doctors per 1,000 people as opposed to Canada's 2.6, which means that everyone has access to a doctor and, more than that, Cuba can still send hundreds of doctors abroad in humanitarian medical brigades.

This is what is missing from the debate on Canadian health care: an actual Socialist Alternative. For most people, the Cuban system sounds pretty good. For a capitalist, there is one *big* problem: *No Profits* (sort of the point of socialism). The Cuban version of socialism has its problems, but that doesn't mean that the "debate" can ignore an example that delivers good results for much less money. The defects of the Cuban system, like the Canadian public system, are largely those of underfunding. In Cuba this is because it's a poor country. In Canada this is because the "debate" is only about how much more public money is

siphoned into the pockets of the private sector. Think of what a socialist health care system would look like in Canada if it were funded with our first world resources.

Canadians need to hear about a real alternative, a Socialist Alternative. ★



# The life of a... Tech Worker

The tech industry demands a lot, often too much, from its workers. After a decade in the industry, I still have to spend a lot of my personal time staying ahead of the latest trends. Just as my day starts to wind down, my senior managers will drop their latest interest in AI on me. Now I'm stuck spending all my evening researching AI to figure out how it can possibly be incorporated into our product. After putting in all this work, I know that they'll end up changing their minds or forget all about it when the next shiny new development comes along.

My colleagues and I spend countless hours after work reading, taking courses, attending conferences, and coding personal projects in the little time we have outside the office. But despite all that effort, we have very little job security. Many of my friends and co-workers, highly talented and committed to the industry, have found themselves caught up in waves of mass layoffs. Often, these layoffs follow managerial screwups, including investing in projects and directions that my co-workers and I advised against. Today the tech sector is shedding jobs, with over 120,000 layoffs globally in the first three months of this year.

Lately I've been responsible for onboarding new junior developers. Since we're already in a crunch period, this means my 10-hour days have extended to 14 hours as I split my time by helping them through their projects and completing my own. I tell junior developers: "In this job you have to be passionate if you want to make it," as I was told when I started. Between the long hours, personal time investment, competition over positions, unreasonable deadlines and ever-shifting company mandates, it's no surprise a global study found two in five tech workers are at high risk of burnout. I don't know how I could get through the day if I didn't at least on some level enjoy the work. ★



# We Can't Afford Capitalism

*Bill Hopwood*

In early 2020, COVID engulfed Canadians and the world in turmoil that has not ended. War in the Ukraine, convoy in Ottawa, inflation everywhere, fear of a banking crisis and another recession.

In June 2022, inflation was above 8 percent, the highest rate in over 40 years. It has declined to 5 percent, but prices are still going up. Prices in grocery stores are increasing by more than 10 percent a year. Rents are soaring. Average rent for new leases is up over 10 percent and much worse in Metro Vancouver, Toronto and Calgary, at around 20 percent. While house prices have dropped slightly, the cost of buying a house is up due to higher interest rates.

The only response to inflation is the Bank of Canada, along with central banks around the world, pushing up interest rates. This increases the squeeze on workers' living standards as it increases debt charges, mortgages and rents. The theory behind raising interest rates is to reduce demand and eventually it is hoped prices will stop rising. Historically, this only works when it causes a recession.

Either way, with higher interest rates or more unemployment, and possibly both, big business wants workers to pay for the crisis that they did not cause.

## A Look at Inflation

It is absolutely clear that wages have not caused inflation. Wages in Canada are going up slower than the cost of living, so workers are becoming worse off. The bosses and the Bank of Canada blame workers' wages to justify cutting living standards.

The last three years brought together several factors that combined to push up prices and caused the cost-of-living crisis. COVID disrupted production and delivery systems, so there were shortages of goods and parts. A worldwide shortage of microchips, that are used in everything, hit production of many goods such as cars and household appliances.

The war in Ukraine pushed up the global price of oil, which in turn increased the cost of making and delivering many products. It also disrupted food supplies as Ukraine is a major producer of grain and sunflower oil. Climate change continues to disrupt and lower food production, and floods and fires also impact other parts of the economy.

The years of easy money with ultra-low interest rates and central banks providing billions of dollars to big business fed speculative bubbles on the stock market, bitcoin, etc. Most do not directly impact ordinary people, but speculation is a factor pushing up housing prices in Canada and around the world.

Many corporations took advantage of rising prices to boost profits. Oil companies and big grocery stores had a record

year for profits in 2022. These companies are profiting from people's misery.

Raising interest rates does not tackle the main causes of inflation and there are reasons that inflation may continue longer than is claimed. The war in Ukraine drags on and climate change is getting worse. Supply chains continue to be disrupted as companies move production out of China to other "friendly" countries, as part of the deep-seated conflict between the US and China.

Governments could act. They could stop corporations from raising prices and hold down profits or tax super profits and use the funds to help the low-paid. They could raise wages of their workers in line with the cost of living, and start investing in infrastructure and force corporations to invest in training to overcome supply chain bottlenecks and claimed skill shortages. All of these would hurt the super-rich and big business, so of course neither the Liberals nor the Conservatives will do that.

The collapse of several banks in the US and Switzerland is a warning of problems ahead. The 2008 recession started with a financial crisis. The global banking system is full of speculative bubbles from the easy money years that may well burst and hit real people just as happened in 2008-09.

In early 2023, unemployment was low, and the economy was growing, giving rise to hopes of no recession. However, there are many warning signs. The Bank of Canada may well push interest rates higher as inflation continues. This will hit the construction industry, already starting to slow, which is a major driver of jobs and economy. Canadians' increasing debt burden will reduce spending, which will reduce employment. A major shock to the world economy could rapidly push Canada into a recession.

## The Housing Nightmare

Canada had a housing crisis before inflation, and the Bank of Canada has made it worse. Housing costs, along with food, are now the fastest rising items in workers' budgets. Since higher interest rates increase mortgages costs, the Bank of Canada's housing affordability index is at the worst level in years. Homeowners used 62.7 percent of their income to cover their housing costs. No wonder Canadians are drowning in debt, standing at 180 percent of income. Bankruptcy and home foreclosures are going to get worse.

Rents are soaring as people who can't afford to buy are renting. Faced with high demand, landlords are pushing up rent as fast as they are allowed. In some provinces there are no rent controls and even in the provinces with controls, these are very weak.





Canada has a shortage of affordable, publicly owned, rental homes. Building of public rental units almost ceased after the federal Liberals slashed spending on social housing in the 1990s. If these programs had continued there would be some 700,000 additional affordable rental units.

Big landlords with deep pockets are taking advantage of higher mortgages to buy up housing. Investors own 40 percent of condos in Ontario, 36.2 percent in BC and 36.6 percent in Nova Scotia. There are many reports of investors buying a rental property, evicting the current tenants, and pushing up rents by 60 or 70 percent. Investors want to make money.

Canada urgently needs strong rent controls to stop landlords jacking up rents, and a national housing strategy focussed on building good quality, publicly-owned rental units. Housing policies, where they exist, concentrate on “encouraging” private developers with grants and loans, and plans to cut regulations. Reliance on the market caused the housing crisis. The market is about making money so it will not provide affordable housing for working people. It will continue doing what is profitable, whether that is tearing down older affordable rental buildings to build luxury units or evicting tenants and jacking up the rent.

### Political Inaction

Politicians are doing little about the cost-of-living crisis, offering a few hundred dollars to compensate for soaring prices, but not taking action to rein in the price of food or housing.

The Liberals are increasingly out of touch. Poilievre makes a lot of noise, but his solution is to cut public services, which will make things worse for most people. However, given the Liberals’ failure, his pretence of caring for working people is winning the Conservatives more support.

Unfortunately, the NDP is not campaigning on a bold

program in the interests of workers. Instead, it tags along behind the Liberals, occasionally barking for something. The Liberals throw the NDP a modest bone, such as improving dental care, but make no progress on the much-needed and long-promised public pharmacare.

The main unions have not launched a united campaign to win Cost of Living Adjustments. Both in Ontario and BC, the public sector unions wasted the possibility of a united struggle, instead settling for wages that cut living standards.

### Socialist Alternative Needed

The rising cost of living is hurting most Canadians. The health system is in deep crisis. Climate change is getting worse, with new disasters every year. A major recession may be coming soon.

Yet the leaders of the workers’ movement — the unions and the NDP — are remarkably passive. Socialist Alternative, in contrast, argues for building a powerful movement with clear demands and actions to win a better world for working people.

Canada is awash with money. In the two years after March 2020, the wealth of Canada’s 59 billionaires increased by \$111 billion. Corporate profits are higher than at any time in history, at 17.4 percent of GDP compared to the historic average of around 10 percent. There is enough money to tackle the many problems.

We need economic democracy where workers decide on pay and conditions, the allocation of jobs, and the number and types of quality homes that are built. Canadian workers have the skill and knowledge to build a great health system and tackle climate change.

The key is taking the wealth of society into democratic public ownership, ending the rule of the tiny minority. We are actively building a Socialist Alternative. ★

# Alienation and Capitalism

Leslie Kemp and Ethan Joseph

Alienation is a defining feature of our epoch that Marx wrote about near the beginning of the industrial era. We are social animals and alienation goes against the very nature of our being.

Marx described how capitalism alienates us from our labour, from nature, from others and from self.

As workers, we are alienated from what we produce and from the act of producing it. This is as true in today's capitalism as it was in the industrial era. Those working in Amazon warehouses or in giant factories are mere cogs in the wheel to create mega profits for some of the wealthiest people on the planet. Their work's only meaning is to maximize profit for shareholders. Workers don't get to see the fruits of their own labour most of the time. There's an endless disconnect of workers, factories, machinery, shipping and retail outlets that separate the producer and consumer. Even workers who choose meaningful work, such as health care, teaching or other types of human care, face unrelenting pressure to do more and work faster. The quality of care they can provide is compromised by the pace and pressure to deliver more. This leads to a deeper form of alienation: an alienation from their own human nature, where caring for others is innate.

Alienation of humans from nature is part and parcel of capitalism. The value of nature under capitalism is in the forests that are toppled to create wealth for forest companies, the metals and oil that are extracted, the industrial agriculture and aquaculture that brings in profits. Jobs in extractive industries contribute to our disconnection from the web of life. Marx recognized that "The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material on which



his labour is realized, in which it is active, from which, and by means of which it produces. Thus the more the worker by his labour appropriates the external world, nature, the more he deprives himself of the means of life. Man lives on nature — means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die."

Alienation from others is part of capitalist society. Capitalism creates silos and competition that pits workers against other workers for attention, resources, higher wages and better positions. This leads to hostility, lateral violence and other useless antagonisms. Those who work in precarious self-employment have few connections with fellow workers.

This has profound implications for consciousness and for the struggle towards a better society, a socialist one. Capitalism's myths of freedom have created an individual, rather than a collective consciousness. Margaret Thatcher said there is no society: there are only families and individuals. But COVID has exposed this neoliberal lie. In reality, capitalism has given people little authority over their lives, has created deep divisions with growing and obscene inequality and a deep sense of social isolation.

Our very humanity — about creating, expressing, care and solidarity — is lost in modern capitalist society. The soullessness of much of work leads to a profound alienation that too often manifests in addictions of various kinds such as mindless consumption, substance abuse, gaming, and gambling. It also accentuates the mental health crisis.

It is crucial that the left does not simply critique capitalism but offers hope and a vision of a radically different kind of life and work. We need to engage workers and young people in the urgent struggle against the destructive forces of capitalism and towards a socialist society, where true freedom is possible — not the false freedom of isolated individuals, but freedom as part of society. The very act of engaging in struggle and feeling the power of collective action is one of the best antidotes to the despair and alienation so many of us feel. ★





# Money for Death but Not for Life

*Maurice Li, Chris Fofonoff, and Daniel Petrovic*

The bloody war in Ukraine shows no signs of ending. Putin sends waves of men to slaughter and Ukrainians, both soldiers and civilians, are dying in large numbers. Western countries, led by NATO, are not only sending a large amount of artillery to Ukraine, but are also expanding their own military forces.

Germany's military spending was less than 2 percent of GDP for over 70 years, due to the strong anti-war mood. In 2022 this was reversed as the German capitalist class more than doubled its arms budget from \$51 billion to \$108 billion. Germany has been one of the top four countries producing and exporting large quantities of weapons to Ukraine, including Leopard II tanks, battle tanks, and armored vehicles. NATO is strengthened in Europe with Sweden and Finland, both longtime "neutral" countries, deciding to join NATO.

For US imperialism, Ukraine has become a proxy war as part of the growing inter-imperialist struggle between the US and China. No matter how much money it costs, the US continues to provide Ukraine with billions of dollars of increasingly powerful and longer-range weapons.

The US has decided to spend \$10 billion to arm Taiwan, where in the past it had to buy US weapons. The militarization of Taiwan, supported by the US, has become increasingly reckless, and the regional conflict is becoming more and more dangerous.

There is growing talk of a Pacific NATO. The leaders of Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia attended a NATO summit for the first time in June 2022. Multilateral military partnership agreements (QUAD, AUKUS) signed under US support have connected Japan, Australia, India, and other countries to share technology to establish a nuclear-powered submarine fleet and increase military cooperation in transportation to counter China's rise.



*Stockholm protest against Sweden joining NATO*



*Billions more are spent on arms, including Leopard 2 tanks*

Significantly, Japan announced that military spending will dramatically increase to 2 percent of GDP over the next five years to counter threats from China and North Korea. This is an historic change from the pacifist stance of the Constitution's Article 9 agreed after World War II. Japan's military spending will reach \$76 billion in 2023. The role of Japan is to help the US to balance the geopolitical power in the Indo-Pacific region.

The US 2023 defence budget is \$813.3 billion, while China's military spending has reached \$224 billion this year, a 7.2 percent increase from last year. Superficially, China's military spending seems relatively small compared to the US, but China's military spending does not include forces such as the armed police and the coast guard. Some reports even suggest that China's defence spending is about 40 percent higher than the published figures.

Canada is getting in on the arms bonanza for the merchants of death. The Liberals are on a shopping spree for weapons. They plan to buy 15 new warships at a lifecycle cost of \$306-billion over 30 years as well as eight patrol ships costing \$6.6 billion, two supply ships at \$4.1 billion, and two icebreakers for \$7.25 billion. The air force is getting 88 F-35 fighter jets costing at least \$70 billion over their lifespan. In addition, there is a huge overhaul of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), and a new Nanisivik naval base in Nunavut.

The push for militarization becomes inevitable and pervasive, due to capitalism and nationalism. Vast amounts of resources are invested in military, competition for resources, land, and geopolitical power, making the tension of war increasingly explosive. Looming in a frightful background is the threat of nuclear weapons.

At the same time the needs of life — a living wage, good health, affordable housing, education and a strong social safety net are neglected. Only by persistently building an international socialist anti-war movement can the working class regain control over social resources, safeguard life and property, and put an end to imperialist wars. ★

# Strike Wave in Western Europe

Violet Forrie

Britain, France and, recently, Germany, have been rocked by massive strike waves.

600,000 workers in Britain have walked off the job over the past half year. Workers in health care, transportation, education, post office, universities, schools, industry, government and more continue to strike. They have had enough of decades of austerity and low wages. In the midst of the soaring cost-of-living crisis, they are rejecting the employers' below inflation wage offers.

Frightened by these strikes, Sunak's Tory's are bringing in even more repressive anti-union legislation. The Labour Party is failing workers, not supporting the strikers, and firing members of the shadow cabinet that went on picket lines.

In France, millions have taken to the streets in opposition to Macron's government for the rich. Macron has cut taxes for the richest of France but is attacking workers. He is increasing the age of retirement and the number of work years required to qualify from 41 to 43. This blatant austerity measure is disguised as "pension reform."

Workers and the public are squarely against this attack. Paris has had demos of over a million. Energy workers have blocked facilities and turned the power back on in many homes unable to pay for inflated prices. Students have assembled on the streets, taking time away from studying and classes.



British postal workers striking for better pay

Macron used a clause in France's constitution to railroad the changes through without a vote, as he knew he would lose.

In Germany, a growing strike wave came together on March 27 in a "Megastrike," which brought together workers in transport and the public sector. Germany was paralysed as hardly a plane, train, bus, or tram moved. Freighter ships were stopped.

Many, even on the left, have written off the importance of the working class as "out-of-date." These movements show the working class is back.

Unfortunately, many union leaders are unwilling to use the full power of the workers; instead they seek to move rapidly to negotiate. Workers need to transform the unions into democratic organizations willing to work and strike together. The last few months have shown the power of workers. If united, they can win major victories. ★

## Québec's Public Sector Needs Militant Struggle

Martin LeBrun

Québec's public sector unions have formed a Common Front to negotiate for 420,000 members. The health workers' unions (FIQ and FIQP), representing 80,000 workers, are also negotiating. The unions are demanding improved pay and working conditions, especially in health care hit hard by the pandemic, and by burnout and chronic labour shortages.

Tensions are running high. The contracts expire in April and the CAQ government is dragging its feet, with little negotiation in the past six months. It is offering below-inflation pay increases.

Workers are starting to take action. In January, 80 percent of nurses at the Maisonneuve-Rosemont hospital in East Montreal threatened to resign en masse due to

compulsory overtime. Their ER is chronically at 25 percent overcapacity.

In February, the health service in Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du-Québec announced obligatory overtime of one in three weekends. It also planned to make nurses work on units they are not trained for, raising concerns about safety and quality health care. An unprecedented 95 percent of nurses voted in favour of mass resignations! Days before 500 nurses were set to quit, a labour tribunal ruled that the mass resignations are an illegal action. Yet, it is apparently perfectly legal to underfund health care and work yesterday's pandemic heroes beyond breaking point.

It will take powerful and united action to force the CAQ to improve pay and conditions. Health and other public sector workers in Québec should learn from the experience of their colleagues in BC and Ontario, where failure to take united action resulted in pay increases below inflation. ★

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



# Ban Caste Discrimination

*Kshama Sawant and Bill Hopwood*

It is rare for a city council resolution to resound around the world. The February 21 decision of Seattle City Council to ban caste-based discrimination made global headline news. Seattle is the first jurisdiction outside of South Asia to take this stand.

As millions, especially in India, are encouraged by this historic step, activists in North America are seeking to spread the ban.

The caste system originated more than 2,000 years ago in South Asia but remains pervasive today. It is a system of oppression that divides people into a rigid hierarchy of groups based on birth, with “lower” groups facing serious discrimination and even violence by those “above” them. For centuries, the caste system has been systematically used by South Asian ruling classes to divide and exploit the mass of ordinary people. Those who were designated as the “lowest” castes — historically called “untouchables” — were the most cruelly exploited. Today, most people in this caste prefer the identity of Dalits, which means “those who have been broken but are resilient.”

While originating in South Asia, caste has spread around the world. Caste-based discrimination is a pervasive reality for caste-oppressed workers in the US and Canada, for example. On March 15, the BC Human Rights Tribunal found that a worker had been discriminated against based on his caste. In Seattle, many workers told the City Council of the discrimination they faced including in the tech sector, a big employer in the region.

The resolution was moved by Councilmember Kshama Sawant, a member of Socialist Alternative. It took a campaign to win as the movement had to overcome not only strenuous opposition from the Hindu right wing but also opposition of a different kind from Democratic politicians, who in



*Seattle wins ban on caste discrimination.*

various ways threatened to kill or undermine the legislation.

The victory in Seattle continued the fighting strategy independent of the Democratic and Republican parties. For nearly 10 years, Socialist Alternative and Kshama Sawant have used our council office to build movements to wrest major victories from big business and the city’s Democratic establishment. Our most high-profile opponent this time was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a far-right organization tied to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party. The VHP has been implicated, among other things, in the 2002 Gujarat massacre of Muslims. The right-wing Hindu American Foundation and the Coalition of Hindus of North America also set themselves against us.

It was not only those born into oppressed castes who fought for the legislation but also Muslims, Sikhs, Socialist Alternative members, union workers, dominant-caste Hindus, and white and non-white working people. The strength and unity of our rank-and-file movement won this victory.

Dalit activists in Surrey, BC invited Sawant to speak as they are launching a similar campaign in BC to get the legislature to ban caste discrimination. On Saturday April 1, 70 people came to a meeting, with several powerful speakers and Sawant, to launch the campaign. To win, it will take the same united campaign that mobilizes support from members of oppressed castes alongside a broad range of community activists from diverse backgrounds.

Socialist Alternative Metro Vancouver co-hosted the event and provided two speakers. Already we have put up posters, sent out social media notices and hundreds of emails to build support. We will be petitioning alongside community activists at Vaisakhi and after it, moving resolutions in union locals and helping in other ways to win a victory in BC. A victory here will help to spread it even further and build upon Seattle’s first step. ★

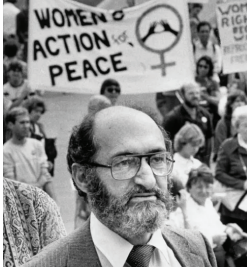
**For more on Socialist Alternative in the US:**  
**[socialistalternative.org](http://socialistalternative.org)**



*Sawant spoke to activists in BC to launch their campaign.*

## A Page from History: Abortion Rights on Trial

Rosie Camp



Fifty years ago, Henry Morgentaler was imprisoned after his first court case, beginning a 15-year struggle and resulting in the 1988 Supreme Court decision that struck down the law restricting legal abortion in Canada.

In 1969, therapeutic abortions were made legal in Canada, but were severely restricted. Many women were forced into illegal options. Every year thousands died, and more were hospitalized because of illegal abortions.

Working-class women led the way to demand access to safe and legal abortions. They organized workshops to teach women their rights, organized demonstrations, and set up illegal abortion clinics. In 1970, the Abortion Caravan traveled from Vancouver to Ottawa, and successfully occupied and shut down the House of Commons.

Henry Morgentaler became a high-profile face of the movement in 1973 when he declared he had performed over 5,000 abortions in defiance of the law. The Québec government prosecuted him, but the jury acquitted him. Clearly, the public supported safe abortions. But the appeal court overturned the acquittal and imprisoned Morgentaler.

In 1974, the Canadian Association for Repeal of the Abortion Law (CARAL) was created to push for safe, legal abortions and back Morgentaler's legal challenges. In 1975, while in prison, Morgentaler was on trial again, and again a jury acquitted him. He was released and charged again, but a third jury acquitted him.

After police raided Morgentaler's Toronto clinic in 1983, he challenged the law under the newly created *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In 1988 the Supreme Court struck down the law. This was a major victory that resulted in expanded access to legal abortion in Canada. Morgentaler would not have been able to succeed without the power of the movements that laid the groundwork and built the pressure of the campaign.

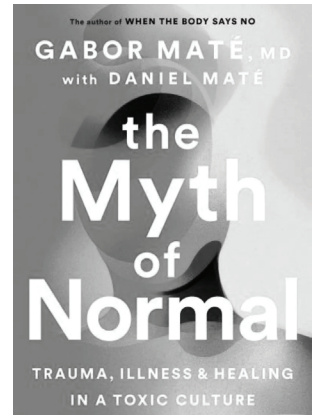
Today, access to legal abortions in Canada is not secure. It differs by province and is limited especially in rural areas. Only the power of movements can ensure abortion remains a legal right and fully accessible in Canada. Organizations like the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada advocate for abortion rights and access nationally. Socialist Alternative Canada signed on to the BC Reproductive Rights Manifesto, which calls for free and universal access to abortion across Canada and affordable child care, trans- and gender-inclusive reproductive care. ★

## Book Review: The Myth of Normal

by Gabor Maté

Leslie Kemp

Gabor Maté learned firsthand the impact of trauma. Being separated from his mother at 14 months of age, when his mother was forced into the Budapest Ghetto by the anti-Semitic right that was allied with the Nazi occupiers, made its mark on him. Fearing that he would not endure the terrible living conditions, his mother gave him to a complete stranger to send to his aunt.



The word “trauma” comes from a Greek word, meaning “wound.” Maté says, “trauma is not what happens to you, but what happens inside you.” Lodged in our nervous system, it lasts long past the triggering incident. Trauma is not only caused by catastrophic events. Long-lasting marks are left by seemingly ordinary events: harsh comments, bullying or lack of sufficient emotional connection with nurturing adults. “Trauma pervades our culture, from personal functioning through social relationships, parenting, education, popular culture, economics, and politics. In fact, someone without the marks of trauma would be an outlier in our society.” The book suggests that much of ill health is due to the toxic culture we live in and the stress of living under capitalism.

Trauma impacts people by suppressing our instincts, limiting the ability to respond flexibly, distorting our view of the world, and creating alienation. He cites Marx as being prescient, when in the mid-nineteenth century Marx wrote about the impact of disconnection from labour as a meaningful activity over which we have agency and control. Maté maintains that “alienation is inevitable when our inner sense of value becomes status-driven.” The erosion of the middle class, and with it the lost promise of the middle-class dream, has caused people to experience loss of worth, distress and anger.

There isn't a simple way out. Maté suggests a few healing principles including authenticity, agency (not the bogus version under capitalism of “be all you can be”), healthy anger, and acceptance rather than tolerating.

Socialist Alternative offers the inspiration to fight against capitalism and for a better world where trauma is not so widespread. Join us! ★



# No Justice, No Reconciliation

Allie Pev

Indigenous days of awareness: Orange Shirt Day, Red Dress Day, and [Cancel] Canada Day stem from tragic, ongoing issues. The heart-wrenching May 27, 2021 announcement of 215 children buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School sears another date of remembrance into the hearts and minds of Indigenous people.

These days aren't marking anomalies in the history of the Canadian state — they are indications of the deliberate assimilation of Indigenous children, violence against Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people and the genocide of Indigenous nations.

How do you “reconcile” this type of violence? You can't under the current system.

The Canadian state operates and maintains its power and wealth by controlling the land and everything and everyone who lives on it. It uses every branch of the government and state apparatus to do so.

It greases the wheels for big business's smooth, unimpeded path to markets for the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion and Coastal Gas Link.

It has a police force at its beck and call to defend business interests; on March 29, 2023 RCMP Community-Industry Response Group raided Gidimt'en village site and arrested five land defenders.

Its judiciary enforces colonial laws knowing there is no adequate access to housing, health care, education, and income to support the overall well-being of Indigenous people.

None of the above fundamentally depends on the party in power. Conservatives under Stephen Harper cut public services and dismantled environmental protections.



Photo credit: Liz Cronin

Liberals under Justin Trudeau bought a pipeline resulting in taxpayers looking at a \$20 billion loss. The NDP under Jagmeet Singh signed a “supply-and-confidence” deal with the Liberals in March 2022, agreeing to work together on key policy areas including “reconciliation” with little to show for it.

Numerous studies, inquiries and reports have been commissioned to examine well-known systemic factors harming Indigenous people. As powerful as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action and the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into MMIWG are, or the 46 Articles of UNDRIP may be, they are incompatible with capitalism, which is based on private ownership and a ruthless pursuit of profit.

These tragic days of awareness will continue to be days of mourning and days of mobilization to demand a transformation of this cruel system. Endless political promises of reconciliation are meaningless in a system not capable of providing justice. We need to stand with Indigenous people and all oppressed people fighting capitalism and colonialism. When we fight together, we will win a better future for all. ★

## Stand Up for the Planet and People (continued from back page)

and people are forced to drive or fly to get between locations. Canada lacks a countrywide passenger rail network.

The issue is not technical — it is political. The technology to implement green alternatives for transportation, production, and energy exists. The issue is the unwillingness of the ruling class to limit its consumption, or for corporations to reduce profits. As long as they have a stake in becoming wealthier, the ruling class will continue to ravage the environment to the detriment of Indigenous people, young people's future, and the entire working class. We — the workers whose livelihoods are both tied

to a destructive economy and threatened by it — need to demand a different kind of future and a different system. We need a system that prioritizes the well-being of people and the environment over the profits of shareholders. To get there, we need to mobilize young people, workers and those who want a different kind of future. We need to build a mass workers' party, a democratically planned green economy and a socialist alternative. We hope you will join us in the fight for a better future. ★

Follow us:   SocialistAlternativeYouth

# SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

April 2023 - No. 24

suggested donation \$3 / solidarity donation \$10



Aden Andreassen and Grace Bodie

In September 2019, six to eight million people globally participated in the largest climate strike in world history. In Montréal, half a million people took to the streets and there were protests in 85 cities across Canada. However, since then the climate struggle has changed tactics, focusing on targeting financiers of fossil fuel production, including big banks.

Meanwhile, governments worldwide have continued to enable polluting practices globally — and show no signs of implementing a viable alternative. Most governments hope market incentives will convince polluters to reduce their carbon footprint. Convolutional carbon credit schemes provide an easy out but are rife with issues. First, the credits must cost industry less than the profits they make. Carbon credit markets are flooded with fraudulent credits, as researcher Barbara Haya discovered. Further, carbon credits don't help in moving towards more environmentally friendly production. A tradeable unit of pollution (as one carbon credit entitles

the owner to emit one ton of CO<sub>2</sub>) cannot decide which areas of production are necessary for a green society.

The issue here is obvious: the vastly uneven patterns of consumption created by capitalism, where the ruling class enjoys frivolous and wasteful goods with a large carbon footprint, are accelerating the oncoming climate catastrophe. Spending on items such as big yachts, expensive holiday resorts, luxury goods and private jets contribute significantly to carbon emissions. Over the last 25 years, the richest one percent of the world's population are responsible for more than twice as much carbon pollution as the 3.1 billion people who made up the poorest half of humanity.

Yet the needs of the vast majority of humanity go unmet: safe and affordable housing, nutritious food free from pesticides, and public transportation. In rural BC, which has challenging mountainous geography, there is little public transportation (*continued p. 11*)

