

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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WORKERS STRIKE BACK



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. ★



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Socialist Alternative's Conference a Huge Success

Uros Novakovic

Forty members and international guests gathered from April 7 – 9 in rainy Vancouver (on the unceded, traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations) for the 4th National Conference of Socialist Alternative Canada. Our international guests came from the US, Québec, Mexico, and China-Hong Kong-Taiwan sections of the International Socialist Alternative (ISA).

The conference marked another important step forward to build SA in Canada. Nearly every member contributed in some way to making the conference a success: from political preparation, chairing and speaking; to the necessary tasks of arranging and providing accommodations, setting up the venue; planning, purchasing, preparing and tidying up meals; planning and operating technology; taking photographs; organizing the book table; and managing finances.

Plenary discussions on World Perspectives, Canadian Perspectives, the Building Report and Resolution, and Youth Perspectives and Struggle featured high quality contributions from many comrades. There were two sets of workshops: the first on perspectives for the US, Latin America, China, and the nature and causes of inflation; the second on: writing, personal political development, and political interventions at tables and events. The conference elected a new National Committee, Grievance Committee, and auditors and approved a Code of Conduct.

In the midst of the multiple nightmares of contemporary capitalism, many of which were taking place in Vancouver during the conference, the calm, precise analysis of the present situation presented by SA members and based on first-hand experiences of working people worldwide felt like an island of sanity and reason — a counterpoint of clarity, hope and purpose in a world of turmoil. ★



Socialist Alternative Canada's National Conference in Vancouver

Looking to Socialism

Grace Bodie

Canadian young people are increasingly attracted to socialism. The Fraser Institute found that 50 percent of people aged 18–24 agree that socialism is the ideal economic system, while only 41 percent agree it is capitalism. In fact, 17 percent of the age group agreed “communism” is the ideal, showing a strong mood for radical change.

This is no surprise given the multiple crises youth experience in capitalism today. Young people can no longer afford to live in this system. Jobs don't pay enough, and the rent is too high. Work is soul-sucking, exacerbating poor mental health. Social supports, including health care and education, lack proper funding. Instead, money is poured into weapons of war and pipelines that are hurtling the planet towards climate catastrophe, while the profits go to the billionaires.

Increasingly, young people are making connections between the world's problems and capitalism. More are refusing to suffer in silence and accept a world without a future. Their experience shows that government and big business aren't going to save them — they need to take action. From the Women, Life and Freedom movement to the Black Lives Matter protests, from protecting queer youth from right-wing attacks to climate and anti-war rallies, youth are always at the forefront. Indigenous youth defend their land from destruction by resource extraction, and work to ensure their communities can heal and thrive. Young people are unionizing their workplaces, including at big corporations like Starbucks and Amazon.

Socialism Amplifies Solidarity

The ideas of socialism resonate with youth seeking alternatives to the current system. The cut-throat world of production for profit and ruthless competition contradicts young peoples' experience of human nature. In their own communities, with their coworkers, and in common struggle, the experience of solidarity plants the seed to imagine that another world is possible. Socialism amplifies the best parts of human nature: solidarity and cooperation, rather the worst parts: greed and domination.

Young people feel cognitive dissonance between the stated values of capitalist society and the practical reality. We are supposed to live in a democracy, but we don't have democratic control over the use of resources, our workplaces, or what is produced and how. Why are the super-rich the only ones who get to decide?

Unfortunately, it is often the populist right's voices that seem the loudest against the inequality of society's wealth and power. They appeal to genuine anger and alienation but direct their attacks at scapegoats and out-groups rather



than at the capitalist system. Wherever the left has loudly called for change, with messages of working-class unity across race, gender, sexuality, and nationality, such as from Corbyn in the UK, Sanders in the US, or Mélenchon in France, these have rallied huge numbers of young people. Canada's NDP supports the status quo with only minor reforms. But today the status quo can't hold, and minor reforms don't motivate young people who are hungry for revolutionary change.

The Path to Real Change

Young people have the most to lose from the climate disaster. They understand the need for society's resources to be put towards a green transition, based on international cooperation. They understand the need for more support for mental health and addiction, for affordable housing, food, and education. Young people can see there is so much work to be done, but these are not the jobs on offer. Human beings want to be useful; socialism offers a world where work fulfills social needs and people can use their many skills to support their communities, their families, and themselves.

Socialist ideas give an understanding of how to win real change. The united working class has the potential power to overthrow capitalism. It is a huge task to dismantle a system that reaches every part of human life. But the labour of the working class is the source of all profits, so the working class can bring down capitalism and build a socialist society. Young people today can help to draw together all struggles against exploitation, oppression, war, and climate catastrophe to build a united working-class movement for revolutionary change. ★

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Keep Agricultural Land

Leslie Kemp and Alex Aiello

Imagine what BC and the Fraser Valley would be like if the Agricultural Land Reserve did not exist. Former NDP Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and Richmond City Councillor, Harold Steves, mused in a recent interview that “the Fraser Valley would have industry all the way to Hope. Farms would be scattered. We would be very dependent on Mexico and California and hydroponics for much of our food.”

That BC still has a significant area of protected farmland is down to activists, including Steves. After the City of Richmond rezoned half its area in 1959, 12,000 acres of farmland was lost, including some of the Steves’ family’s farm. Steves ran as an MLA, joining the NDP’s left wing, and helped write policies to protect BC’s farmland. When the NDP was elected in 1972, it focused on changing BC. It ushered in a huge wave of reforms including public auto insurance, a provincial ambulance system, human rights legislation and the most progressive labour laws in Canada. The NDP’s most far-reaching action was to create the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), a shock for real estate agencies and speculators. In contrast to the present, Steves said the NDP of the 1970s had “a truly socialist vein. The Land Act was the most socialist legislation they enacted.” The ALR was the first and boldest legislation in North America to protect farmland. Today, it covers about 4.6 million hectares across BC.

Ontario’s Greenbelt was established in 2005 to provide regulatory protection from sprawl in one of North America’s fastest growing urban areas. Its 810,00 hectares encompasses farmland, forests, wetlands, and watersheds around the Golden Horseshoe. Under Doug Ford’s leadership this land is “Open for Business,” putting the very ecosystems that ensure clean air, water, and food at risk. Ford justifies this



Part of the boundary of the Greenbelt in Ontario

decision by claiming the need for 50,000 houses, viewing the Greenbelt as the ideal location to satisfy this “need.” Only 5 percent of the province’s land is farmable, and that number is quickly dwindling due to Ford helping his developer friends get richer. Through Minister’s Zoning Orders, environmental regulations are being disregarded, enabling expedited development on previously protected land. The consequences of paving over the Greenbelt are sinister and irreversible.

In the eyes of Capitalism, everything is expendable in the pursuit of profit. Even Canada’s fertile farmland is not immune to this destructive ideology. The Ontario situation is particularly concerning, with the province losing 319 acres of farmland every day in 2021, a staggering 55 percent increase from 2016. This trend is fueled in large part by urban sprawl and is unsustainable.

While BC’s ALR, now 50 years old, is “so ingrained, politicians don’t dare change this,” Steves worries about the long-term erosion of the ARL. Past provincial governments removed large acreages at Terra Nova in Richmond and the Spetifore Farm in Delta and the current NDP government removed land for the Site C Dam in Peace River and recently approved a policy to allow Agritech (non-soil-based industry) in parts of the ALR. A key issue is a significant portion of land in the ARL is out of production, used for mega estates, which sometimes lease their land to blueberry farmers. Some is used for horse farms and golf courses. The provincial NDP reduced the allowable size of mansions to a maximum of 5,300 square feet. In the face of increasing food prices and food insecurity, Steves says we need farms to grow vegetables for people in BC.

Farmland is the backbone of Canada’s food security. Losing it would increase dependence on imports, with no control over its quality, price or origin and making it more vulnerable to climate change. Socialism would protect farmland, democratically plan food production and prioritize the needs of the majority over the profits of a few. Our future depends on protecting and enhancing the Greenbelt, the ALR and other agricultural land in Canada. ★



NDP Fails in Alberta

Davis Hay and Bill Hopwood

The NDP led the United Conservative Party (UCP) by over 10 percent in opinion polls in 2021. Yet, the UCP won the poll that matters: Alberta's 2023 election.

In 2020 and 2021, the UCP was hated, with its factions at each others' throats. Then-leader Kenney zigzagged on COVID health policies, attacked workers and starved public services, while giving the fossil fuel industry billions.

The NDP and the Alberta Federation of Labour needed to launch a serious mobilization in support of public services and workers, and against the UCP. Even if this did not drive them out, the mobilized energy would have flowed into an election victory. Instead, the NDP and AFL stuck to electoralism, snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Socialist Alternative had warned against this mistake since 2021.

The NDP gave the UCP time to replace Kenney and revive their fortunes. The new leader, Danielle Smith, used high oil prices and provincial revenues to go on a spending spree and give cash handouts — bribes.

The Election Campaign

The NDP's fatal strategy was appealing to conservatives rather than using bold policies to win working-class and young people's support. They claimed to be for "all Albertans" and "not the UCP." They focused on lambasting Danielle Smith for controversial statements, such as comparing vaccinated people to Hitler supporters. This strategy doesn't work against right-populists. It failed against Doug Ford in Ontario and Trump in 2016 and will fail against Pierre Poilievre in the next federal election.

The \$15 minimum wage pledge was important to the 2015 victory, but an increase was not mentioned in 2023. It did not promise to fully reverse the UCP's cuts to corporate tax and restore funding to health, education, and housing.

The UCP claimed to provide jobs and a strong economy, while attacking Trudeau and the federal Liberals. Anti-Trudeau feelings are widespread and the NDP is seen as tied to Trudeau, the tail of the Liberal dog.



Bumper sticker slogan around since the 1980s



Fires ravage Alberta, but no action on climate. Photo: Brigette Loonskin

For the NDP to win in rural and smaller towns it needs a radical program to overcome right populism. Many Albertans still see the oil and gas industry as the economy's backbone although it is shedding jobs. Suncor, a highly profitable oil company, announced 1,500 more jobs cut three days after the election. It isn't the NDP that destroys jobs — it is big business.

In the UCP's leadership struggle, Kenney referred to some opponents, including Smith, as "lunatics." But once Smith won the leadership, the UCP united behind her. While the UCP stuck together during the election, the deep divisions will surface in government. Take Back Alberta, which is anti-vaccine, strong on conspiracy theories, hostile to traditional conservatives and aims for an independent Alberta, has significant influence in the party.

A Divided Province

The result may demoralize some NDP and union activists, who will seek to blame voters, especially in rural areas. This ignores the NDP's failure to run an inspiring campaign with bold policies. Turnout was down from 2019.

The UCP will attack workers' rights and public services. Smith has long advocated to privatize health care and education and trying this could provoke major resistance.

Smith, a former oil industry lobbyist, gave the industry a \$100 million tax break. The UCP will piss away another oil boom and not diversify the economy. When this oil boom ends, Alberta will again face mass unemployment. Even while fires devastated the province, the NDP barely mentioned climate change, afraid of UCP criticism. While a strong program for an energy transition that tackled climate disasters and warned of the dangers of relying on boom-and-bust commodities might not have won this election, it would have put the NDP in a strong position when this boom ends, or worse fires ravage the province.

Alberta is a deeply polarized province. Socialist Alternative fights to free Alberta from the oil industry's boom and bust and replace it with a diverse economy, a healthy environment and good jobs and services. ★

Fighting Caste Discrimination

Chris Fofonoff

Since April, Socialist Alternative and several partner organizations, including the Ambedkar International Social Reform Organization (AISRO) and the Poetic Justice Foundation, have been fighting for an official ban on caste-based discrimination in British Columbia.

The victory in Seattle, led by Socialist Alternative's councillor Kshama Sawant, reverberated with millions in India and around the world. Our coalition, inspired by and based upon the Seattle victory, launched the BC campaign with a public meeting in Surrey headlined by Kshama. She closed the event emphasizing what a *fight* it was in Seattle to win the first ban on caste discrimination outside of South Asia, the multi-faith and working-class movement they built and that was needed to defeat the pro-discrimination forces of the Hindu right-wing in the United States. We'll have to build similar movements here in Canada.

Since the launch, the coalition has collected over 2,500 signatures on our petition to the BC government, engaged in hundreds of great conversations with enthusiastic members of the public (including countless great responses at Vancouver's and Surrey's huge Vaisakhi parades), and received endorsements and other support from groups such as the New Westminster Teachers' Union. We expect more union locals to declare support



Socialist Alternative and AISRO at Vaisakhi

for the campaign in the coming weeks.

If you are a union member, contact Socialist Alternative about getting your union involved in this vital campaign — unions are one of the most powerful forces that working-class people have to defend their rights and to push for new ones. Even if your union is not nearly as active or radical as it should be, they can be pushed to support this movement for greater protections in the workplace and elsewhere.

Do this if you're not in BC! This campaign can spread across Canada and can strengthen and work with other anti-discrimination movements already in existence.

We invite you, your friends and colleagues to attend our rally on June 17, starting at noon in Holland Park, Surrey, and marching to the 5X Punjabi youth music festival outside Surrey City Hall! ★

Where is the promised \$10-a-day Child Care?

Leslie Kemp

After years of calling for \$10 a day child care, parents were greatly relieved when the *Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act* was introduced. Still being debated in parliament, its key goal is to “support the establishment and maintenance of a Canada-wide early learning and child care system where families have access to affordable, inclusive and high quality early learning and child care programs and services regardless of where they live.”

Despite the 2021 promise of \$30 billion in new spending over five years for a national system and \$9.2 billion annually after that, there are serious gaps. While all provinces and territories have signed on to the plan, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that 48 percent of younger children live in a child-care desert where at least three children compete for each licensed space.

Although the average child-care fees have been reduced by at least 50 percent, there's a serious shortage of full-time licenced child-care spaces: just 759,000 spaces for 1.97 million children needing care.

Laura, a Calgary SA member with two young children, had difficulty in finding care. Child-care workers are skilled but because of long hours and low pay there is an acute shortage, which results in a 6-12 month wait lists for subsidized places.

Socialist Alternative supports a nation-wide system that ensures every child has affordable, quality and culturally-appropriate care. Only when the workers who provide this care are treated with respect and good pay, can this laudable goal be achieved. ★



What Makes Me Angry: Get Used to It

Larry Hyink

Sometimes, a capitalist or one of their flunkies says something giving the game away. Huw Pill (\$303,597/yr), Chief Economist of the Bank of England tells us, “someone needs to accept that they’re worse off and stop trying to maintain their real spending power.” He’s talking about small businesses trying to stay afloat and workers asking for higher wages. He’s backed by his boss Andrew Bailey (\$834,893/yr) who also warns against the dangers of allowing workers a living wage.

Their thinking is shared by the head of the Bank of Canada, Tiff Macklem (\$463,000-\$545,000/yr), in a gentler, more Canadian way. Asked about the impact of his interest rate hikes on Canadians’ increasing inability to afford food and shelter, he replied, “We’re using our instruments for Canadians to control inflation. But the impact isn’t equal across everybody. And, you know, that’s something we can’t do a lot about.”

What a guy!

In other words, if you have to live in a cardboard box thanks to high interest rates, Tiff’s tender banker’s heart pulses for you but, it’s for your own good. His hands are tied.

Just to be clear, it’s only working people who get lectured about getting used to poverty for the good of the nation. Wealth and income inequality continue to rise with an ever-larger chunk of the national economy being sucked up by the 1 percent. Pill, Bailey and Macklem haven’t given a stern warning to big business owners to hold down profits to fight inflation.

Of course not! They are well paid managers of the banking system. Under capitalism, the banking system serves the capitalists. Sure, inflation faces working people with utter destitution, *but*, long term, high inflation erodes the accumulated value of all the stacks of cash the rich have squirreled away.

Horrors!

Can you guess which group central bankers are most concerned about?

So, there it is, folks. We’re all (some exceptions apply) just going to have to get used to being poorer so we can win that war on inflation. Maybe banks could issue medals to the newly impoverished, commemorating their contribution to the cause.

Naw, it would cost too much.

Wouldn’t it be better to explore a socialist alternative where the needs of the 99 percent are the priority? ★

The life of a... Grocery Store Worker

Anonymous

I’ve been in the grocery industry all my working life. I’ve been at this store for over a decade. I know the business pretty well.

Some workers haven’t had raises in years. Nearly everyone earns less than \$20 an hour and many are locked close to minimum wage. The boss doesn’t want us to talk about our wages, but we do anyway. We all hear frequent complaints from customers that everything is too expensive. I think most of the workers have given up trying to persuade customers that they’re not getting ripped off. These days, I just say that if I had my way the entire grocery industry would be publicly owned and run at a much lower cost. Everyone knows that the franchisees and executives are getting filthy rich from high prices, but everybody has to eat, right?

When the boss does decide to leave her office and do some real work, it usually feels like unwelcome interference rather than a helping hand. She cares more about making a good impression on executives rather than making logical decisions, stressing everyone out and running us all ragged just to impress some corporate bigwigs who may or may not stop by for 15 minutes. Nothing is worse than having the entire back room flooded with product because she decided to order blindly without getting our opinion or even checking what we already have on hand. Everything has to be done her way — our knowledge and experience don’t matter.

Certain employees always have a target on their backs, and they’re always being watched closely. The boss has cultivated a little social group that meets for lunch every day and even gossips about other employees. It’s disgusting and toxic; some people need to learn that the boss is not their friend. ★



Workers Strike Back!

Bill Hopwood

Over the last thirty years, academics and pundits have written off the working class, arguing that it has changed or disappeared. The last few years has shown how wrong they were, with major strike waves in many countries including France, Britain, Portugal, Iran, Myanmar, India, Colombia and others.

In the US, unions are more popular than at any time since 1965, with 71 percent support. This popularity has seen many move to unionize, including at Amazon, Starbucks, Apple stores and others. However, big business is determined to resist this basic democratic right, spending over \$433 million a year to stop union drives.

Canada saw the most days lost in strikes in 2022 since 2009. This upturn in strikes was driven by private sector workers, with the most days lost in over 20 years. This year's PSAC strike, the first since 2004 and longer lasting, will probably push the figures for 2023 to a similar level as 2022.

Attacking Workers

Over several decades, big business and governments attacked workers' pay and conditions to boost profits. Laws were changed to reduce the democratic rights of unions to organize and strike. Factories in some of the richest countries were closed and jobs were moved to lower-wage economies. While this weakened unions in the rich countries, it greatly strengthened the working class around the world.

Real wages in the richer countries stagnated. Canadians' real average hourly wages have not improved since 1981. The wealth went overwhelmingly to the rich and corporations. Between 1982 and 2018, the average income of the richest 1 percent doubled, while for the poorest 90 percent it stood still or even declined. Government tax cuts to the rich and big business boosted their wealth, robbing workers and the poor to give to the rich.

COVID made these trends worse, with job losses concentrated among low-income workers. "Essential workers," who kept their jobs, such as in health facilities, food production and processing, transport and warehouses, and manufacturing, often had to work long hours in unsafe conditions with a higher risk of infection and exhaustion.

The Working Class is Back

The recent strikes have pushed the working class back into the public's awareness although, contrary to claims, it never went away. Years of stagnant living standards, growing inequality and poor working conditions have piled up. Soaring inflation, with wages not keeping up, has made matters worse. The Bank of Canada keeps pushing up interest rates that further squeeze living standards as mortgage, rents and debt charges have soared. After decades of soaring house

prices, average Canadians have one of the highest household debt burdens in the world. Workers have had enough.

Currently faced with a political impasse, with a choice between parties that support the failing status quo and right populists offering no way forward, workers are looking to make gains through workplace struggles.

Strikes and working-class mass struggle are growing more common — both for better wages and conditions, and for social and environmental justice. Climate activists are turning away from small individual actions to mass activity and linking with workers, an important step forward. Climate change's many disasters are hitting many working-class people with fires, floods, storms and heat waves. Fridays for Future stated "climate struggle is class struggle."

The many struggles of women for equality, reproductive rights and against sexual violence have organized strikes (with men also participating) in Latin America, Spain, Switzerland and Iceland.

Workers' strikes and protests have been central in struggles for democratic rights and against state repression. Resistance to the Myanmar coup was led by strikes and mass protests of teachers, health workers, textile workers and others. The Iranian working class was an important part of the mass movement against state oppression. While these movements have so far not succeeded, they weakened the regimes and laid the foundation for future successful struggles.

Why the Working Class?

Marxists have always pointed to the working class as the key force to make change and that mass struggles were crucial to winning major reforms. This is not to romanticize the working class, which includes all of society's prejudices. The working class makes things happen, as COVID clearly demonstrated. It is workers, not bosses or bankers, that feed society, keep the lights running and provide all the other vital services. Without workers, the bosses cannot make profits.

Social and economic changes have produced new groups of workers such as in tech and logistics. Currently most of these workers are not unionized but have enormous potential economic power and there are growing moves towards forming unions. A hundred years ago, longshoring was the ultimate gig employment. Every day, workers turned up at the docks looking for a day's work, with the boss picking who they wanted, depending on the number of ships in harbour and which workers they liked. After titanic struggles, longshore workers built powerful unions. The same process will take place in the modern-day "dark satanic mills" of Amazon warehouses.



Working together produces shared experiences and common consciousness. Workers have collective grievances and struggle most effectively together as a workforce. Marx explained that the working class, through its shared experiences, comes to be not only a class “in itself,” but a class “for itself.” Of course, this process is not universal, inevitable or uniform. The bosses use ideology to deliberately foster multiple divisions, along the lines of gender, skill, public or private, religion and ethnicity. Good workers’ leaders work to unify the working class around a clear program that rejects concessions to the bosses.

Neoliberalism attacked class consciousness and solidarity, arguing instead for individualism. As Thatcher famously lied, “there is no society, only families and individuals.” Decades of neoliberalism’s failures to deliver better living standards, secure jobs or a healthy planet is a more powerful teacher than lectures in ideology. Workers and young people are increasingly looking to class struggle, solidarity and socialism.

Fighting Leadership Needed

One of the biggest obstacles that workers face to successful struggles is the so-called leadership of the unions and “left” political parties. Most of them still cling to neoliberal views that there is no alternative to capitalism. Therefore, they limit demands to what the bosses will agree to, rather than provide a clear program and strategy for working-class victories.

Some union leaders seem to think they should have the same lifestyle as the bosses rather than that of their members. Some even seem open to corruption in search of the good life. Some Canadian union leaders get over \$200,000 a year, far more than their members.

Union leaders knowingly recommend bad pay deals such as the BCGEU in BC and CUPE in Ontario, in 2022. Laura Walton, CUPE leader in Ontario, stated that “as a worker, I don’t like this deal.” In both cases only a fraction

of the strength of all the public sector in the province had been used to try and win a better contract. Many workers were unhappy with the new contracts, with large minorities voting to reject a below inflation pay agreement.

BC’s public sector workers were negotiating with an NDP government that claims to be on the side of workers, yet it would not agree to a wage increase in line with the cost of living. Although Trudeau forced PSAC workers into a two-week strike, and legislated port and postal workers to end strikes, still the federal NDP acts like the tail of the Liberal dog, not presenting any bold alternative policies that would benefit workers.

The looming world recession may temporarily reduce strikes and protests, as workers worry about losing their jobs. But it will make the economic misery worse and re-enforce awareness of capitalism’s failings. After a possible lull, the anger will re-emerge.

Socialist Alternative campaigns for policies that can help workers struggle and win, including:

- Fighting, democratic unions run by and for the membership to campaign for better working conditions and pay, including Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) clauses in all contracts.
- Full-time union officials and representatives to be elected regularly from the membership, subject to recall and receive the same wages as those they represent.
- Unions to organize the unorganized with bold campaigns focused on youth, women, people of colour and migrant workers.
- Solidarity actions with the struggles of workers and the oppressed in Canada and internationally — an injury to one is an injury to all.
- Unions to play a leading role in building broader movements for social change and in the building of a mass workers’ party. ★

Indigenous Resistance

Allie Pev, Michif Cree member of Socialist Alternative

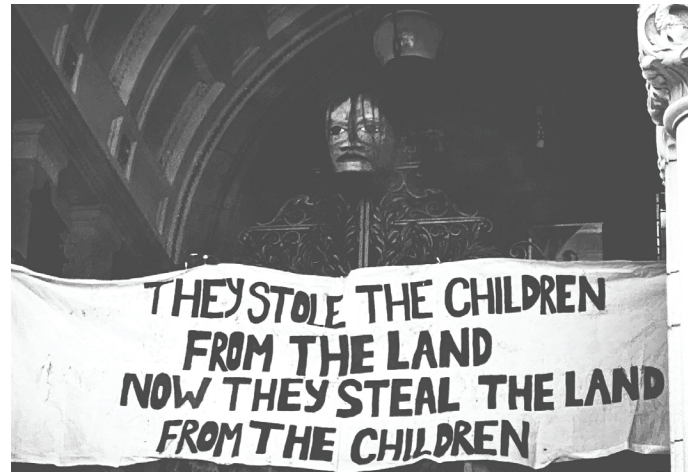
This Spring marked two years since the announcement of the 215 unmarked graves found on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation land. Since then, numerous similar announcements from nations across the country have confirmed what Indigenous people have always known: residential schools' purpose was to "kill the Indian in the child." This implies a spiritual death but if a physical death occurred, the church and state could dig six feet of earth and carry on.

The schools may be closed but Indigenous children are still being taken — 53.8 percent of children in foster care are Indigenous, despite accounting for only 7.7 percent of the child population in 2021. The child and family services (CFS) system has long been dubbed "the new residential schools." Despite it not being an explicitly stated goal, extensive state-sanctioned separation of families has the impact of severing cultural and spiritual connections children have to land, family and community — and Indigenous children are still dying. In 2014, Tina Fontaine, aged 15, was murdered while in the care of Manitoba Child and Family Services. She vanished despite having been in contact with two police officers the night before she was last seen, while having been reported missing, and was admitted into hospital and in custody of a CFS worker. Her body was found in the Red River on August 17, 2014. The person charged with her murder was acquitted.

Systemic oppression, discrimination, racism, and neglect run deep in the foundations of Canada: 156 years post-confederation and incomprehensible trauma shakes our communities.

But we're still here.

Colonial violence, as horrific as it is, is only a small portion of our history and it will not be our future. Our present is marked by the courageous resistance



of Indigenous youth. Climate change is choking us in brutal heat and smoke, washing away homes in severe flooding, decimating salmon populations and poisoning waters. Indigenous youth have taken to the front lines to defend their territories from the exploitative interests of the state and big business. In early 2020, solidarity with Wet'suwet'en rail blockades emerged across the country, halting freight operations to a tune of 0.3 percent of Canada's GDP (for context, that's equivalent to the entire growth estimated for the Canadian economy in the final quarter of 2019). This boldly linked the fight against the theft of Indigenous land to the need for coordinated national actions that hit the corporations where it hurts — their profits. COVID-19 interrupted actions but youth re-emerged through the "Decolonial Solidarity" national campaign, targeting RBC as the number one financier of the Coastal Gas Link pipeline, and of fossil fuel development.

The next seven generations depend on this continued, coordinated, growing resistance to the system that has allowed for the degradation of land and culture. Religion and government both try to paint a picture of remorse: the Catholic Church's repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and Canada's *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. The truth is much darker: the colonial and genocidal history taints the present.

The current system, capitalism, cannot cure the diseases it creates. We can take on the struggle against capitalism and oppression through the combined strength of Indigenous and non-Indigenous working-class people, by building a movement with a clear program to address the needs of Indigenous peoples. This program includes: protecting treaty rights, land, language and culture, combined with workers', women's and LGBTQIA+ rights. Coordinated actions that build the momentum of struggle can take on this system, which continues to harm Indigenous children and their futures by robbing them of healthy land, air and water. ★

Imagine: A Socialist Housing Program

Simon Schweitzer

One hundred and fifty years ago, Friedrich Engels wrote that the solution to housing for the working class was, in fact, workers not owning their own homes. Today it is a myth that owning a home is the path to financial security.

Housing in Canada is becoming ever more expensive: buying a house is the most unaffordable in over 40 years. Mortgages are now being extended to over 30 years, making home-owning for many working people a shackle that binds them in debt for decades to come. Mortgage comes from the French words meaning *dead pledge*.

For renters, the anxiety of steep rent hikes or having to find a new place to rent due to renovation or demoviction is too much to bear. Rent for new tenants was up 18 percent in 2022 and even worse in Vancouver and Toronto.

The federal government's solution is building more homes, in the vain hope that will drive down the cost of housing. But Toronto, like the rest of Canada, has far more homes than needed. Its homeless population is around 8,000, with 100,000 vacant housing units. One quarter of homes in the Toronto area are owned by investors whose purpose is speculation. "Building more homes" will not result in more people being housed unless there is a dramatic change to the kind of housing supplied.

Canada's economy relies on the property market, with housing construction growing five times faster than the overall economy in spring 2022. Home building is primarily driven by speculators and financial institutions. Human needs are much less important. It is unlikely that the government will enact a policy that will bring down housing prices and kill one of the few golden geese for profits. Maybe Engels was right.

Rather than individual workers paying a lifetime of rent or a mortgage, together the working class could fight



to control housing collectively. A society that provided housing as a right would first ensure that everyone has a secure and comfortable place to live. There would not be empty speculative properties, and large mansions would become community homes or facilities.

Rent would be based on income. Decisions about running existing and future housing would be taken democratically by the people who live in them, the workers who design and build them, and the neighbouring communities.

People would decide where to build homes not on the value of the land, but on how close people wanted to live to other parts of the community including workplaces, restaurants, schools, parks, etc. The designs of homes would reflect the way people wanted to live in them. The layout of rooms, common areas in apartment buildings, and the visual style would enable the people in the community to live together in the ways they decide to.

Old buildings would be upgraded to provide quality and environmentally sustainable homes. All construction, both of new and renovated homes, would be of high quality as the industry would no longer be driven by short-term profit. Workers would be well trained and have union protection.

Housing would be designed to be environmentally friendly, not near any pollution sources, well insulated for winter and naturally cooled for summer. There would be plentiful greenspace, nearby shops and community facilities, and good public transit so less space would be given up to cars and more to people. They would be mixed communities for all ages. There would be no super-rich or extremely poor so no more ghettos or elite gated developments.

There would be a variety of options to meet various needs and tastes. Some could be like the large, high-quality apartments Vienna built 100 years ago, that are still popular today. Or entirely new forms could be developed, based on new ways of living together in a new society that organizes its activities in radically new ways.

Such a housing program is impossible in a society based on profit. A socialist society would provide housing that enriched and enabled the lives of people and their communities. ★



Vienna's social and co-op housing gives a hint of what is possible

Cold and Hot War: What's at Stake for the Working Class?

Ray Goerke and Bill Hopwood

The new Cold War, dominated by the growing tensions between the US and China, is a struggle between the world's two largest imperialist nations over resources and markets, especially strategic resources like rare earth minerals and semiconductors. Their economic decoupling is accelerating, and each side is trying to draw its allies and trading partners into their own economic bloc.

Unlike the first Cold War, this is not a conflict between two different economic systems: both sides are capitalist. The misnamed Chinese Communist Party (CCP) presided over capitalist restoration in China in the last forty years.

It's also not a conflict between "democracy" and "authoritarianism." Canada's Conservatives and Liberals supported increased trade with China for decades. They claimed that capitalism would bring democracy to China, which was never likely and has not happened. The western capitalists profited from trade with China, but now China is strong enough to threaten their dominance. The change in rhetoric from "more trade to bring democracy" to "less trade to fight authoritarianism" is about profits, not democracy.

The US has a long and bloody history of supporting dictators, organizing coups against democratically-elected governments and military invasions of other countries. It is no friend of democracy or of workers' rights.

Government Surveillance Ramping Up

The proposed *RESTRICT Act*, backed by Biden and the Democratic and Republican parties, would increase the US government's broad powers of surveillance. It would make it a crime to use VPNs to access banned websites and would allow authorities to spy on people's smartphones and computers.

The Chinese dictatorship represses and spies on its own people. The CCP monitors social media and cracks down on anyone with "incorrect" political stances, including feminists, national minorities and working-class activists. Internationally, activists and journalists who criticize the Chinese government face harassment and threats of violence.

Government surveillance on both sides will increase as the Cold War escalates. The working class cannot rely on mainstream parties and must build its own organizations to secure and defend democratic rights.



War is the Consequence of Imperialism

Cold Wars risk becoming Hot Wars. There is a real risk of a military conflict between the US and China over Taiwan. Currently, both sides wish to avoid this as neither is assured of an easy victory, but circumstances can shift rapidly.

The Ukraine War is an example of the Cold War becoming hot. Xi and Putin don't always agree, but the threat of Western imperialism draws them together. Trade between Russia and China jumped to a record \$190 billion in 2022. US imperialism has used the Ukraine War to draw other Western powers closer and increase pressure on China. Canada has increased military spending and pressure is growing for more including up to 12 nuclear-powered submarines at an eye-watering cost of around \$400 billion over 30 years.

The US has sent \$46.6 billion in military aid to Ukraine. Germany and France sent billions in weaponry too, even as millions of French workers strike to defend their pensions. NATO military aid and the Ukrainian troops' high morale has been decisive in the war, so far. But long-term exposure to death and violence is taking its toll, with the morale of some Ukrainian troops in decline.

This will be a drawn-out war. The Russian military's advance is stalled. The Ukrainian military has been preparing for a "spring offensive," but leaked Pentagon documents reveal doubts that it will be successful. There is no basis for peace negotiations. Zelensky maintains the hope of a full military victory with more NATO weapons. Putin cannot accept failure and is under pressure from Russian warmongers who fear defeat and a Western coup.

The only force that can create lasting peace in Ukraine, Taiwan, and everywhere is the international working class. It was the Russian revolution and the mutiny of German troops that ended World War I. Mass protests and troop demoralization ended the Vietnam War. An international anti-war movement could unite working people in all countries to oppose war and militarism, and to respond to right-wing nationalism with internationalism and solidarity. ★

World Economic Turmoil: Central Bank Failures and Coming Recession

Ray Goerke

Central bankers' main job is to keep prices stable, and yet they completely failed to predict the spike in inflation that started in 2021. They presided over years of ultra-low interest rates, but have since been pushing up borrowing costs, making life even more expensive for working-class people, boosting housing costs — mortgage payments and rents — and debt charges. A wage-price spiral is a myth: wages are not keeping up with inflation, so workers' living standards are falling.

Bankers have also consistently underestimated how long high inflation will last. The US Federal Reserve projects that it will be back to two percent in 2025, but they gave multiple earlier forecasts that this would happen in 2023. So, reading tea leaves has as much value as the Federal Reserve projections. Inflation will likely last for a few more years.

The central bankers' method to tackle inflation has little connection to the real world. The COVID pandemic, the war in Ukraine, mounting climate disasters, and the economic decoupling between the US and China that is remaking global supply chains all contribute to world instability and inflation. None of these underlying causes are addressed by raising interest rates.

Will There be a Recession?

At the end of 2022, economic forecasters were predicting an imminent global recession, but this changed to optimism in early 2023. Hopes were raised by massive US government spending, due to the *Inflation Reduction Act* and the *Chips Act*, and speculation that the sudden collapse of the Zero-COVID regime in China, after widespread protests, would result in increased consumer spending. While the rest of the world was raising interest rates, the Chinese government lowered interest rates and added an extra \$256 billion in spending to prop up the country's failing property market.

These optimistic factors involved significant state spending trying to boost growth, rather than making structural changes. By the end of April, reality set in and forecasts again turned pessimistic, with the IMF predicting global economic growth of 2.8 percent, the lowest since the beginning of the century, barring the 2020 pandemic.

The structural problems of global capitalism are getting worse. China, despite massive injections of money



into the financial system, is experiencing deflation, or falling prices. Companies aren't investing, consumers aren't spending, and youth unemployment is at 20.8 percent. The government keeps adding more debt; local governments alone hold US\$13 trillion in debt.

US companies, in the years of easy money, took on increased debt burdens, which they were largely able to service due to big profits, much of it by price-gouging in response to inflation. Now with higher interest rates, many companies are facing bankruptcy.

The failures of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), Signature Bank, and First Republican Bank are further symptoms of structural problems. The US government took extraordinary measures to protect these banks' super-rich depositors. They gave SVB depositors \$209 billion, although they won't call it a "bailout." Despite the soothing assurances of corporate media, many banks in the US, and other countries — Credit Suisse had to be bailed out — are also at risk of collapse due to billions of high-risk uninsured deposits and so-called "unrealized losses."

Conditions in the neocolonial world are even worse with rampant inflation (100 percent in Argentina, 40 percent in Turkey), falling living standards and debt charges that risk bankrupting countries.

Inflation, increasingly bitter competition for markets and resources, and huge mountains of debt all contribute to this age of disorder. Everything is pointing to a world recession this year, with the risk of a serious financial crisis.

Make the Rich Pay

The working class should not pay for the problems created by the bosses' unstable economic system. The rich keep getting richer. Of all the new wealth created in 2021 and 2022, 63 percent went to the richest 1 percent of people, with only 10 percent going to the poorest 90 percent of humanity. All this new wealth was created by the labour of the working class. We demand the expropriation of the exploiters. ★

How Workers Can Tackle Climate Change

Harland Bird

The growing climate disasters, such as the fires ravaging Canada, hit working people and the poor around the world the hardest. Yet workers are not responsible for most environmental damage or for destroying jobs. The corporations and the super-rich are the culprits.

To hide this reality, the propaganda of the capitalist ruling class has tried to set the environment and labour movements against each other. But now the false dichotomy between a healthy environment and decent jobs is wearing thin. People are realizing that protecting the environment does not kill jobs — it can be a major job creator. The growing understanding that the bosses are the common enemy provides the best hope for a livable future: a workers' movement for climate justice.

The first steps in this direction are already being taken. In Austria, climate activists in groups like Fridays for Future recently stood in solidarity with rail workers who were striking for better wages, and activists blocking highway construction raised a lost wages fund for the highway workers. In Britain, climate activists in Just Stop Oil have not only supported striking rail workers, but also oil refinery workers, who went on strike. And Belgian activists under the banner Code Rouge expressed sympathy with striking oil refinery workers in France.

What these and many other activists have come to understand is that, in the hands of workers, labour unions and strikes can win real environmental gains. The workers have the power to stop the bosses from making profits, and thus the power to take on the capitalist system, the very root of the problem. The only way the environmental movement can win is to become a workers' movement.

Climate Justice is Worker Justice

It is becoming clear that abusing the environment doesn't make jobs better, but worse. Greenhouse gas emissions have accelerated, and yet wages have stagnated. Working conditions have deteriorated as events like atmospheric rivers, polar vortexes, and heat domes have become increasingly familiar. Many workers already associate climate change with unsafe working conditions. BC's Worker Solidarity Network reported that 77 percent of food service workers experience elevated concerns for their physical health during extreme weather events (especially heatwaves), while 84 percent experience compromised mental health. The UN says it is virtually certain that the next five years will be the hottest on record, so things will get worse.



Photo credit: Liz Cronin

The bosses profit from fossil fuel emissions, so big business and its politicians have failed to reduce them after decades of world conferences. Now they are pushing “net zero” — the lie that climate change can be stopped without reducing emissions. They don't care about the environment or jobs: they are not on the worker's side.

The drive for profit means they cut jobs. Half of BC's forestry jobs have been cut in the last twenty years, devastating many communities. Even Alberta's oil sands, despite increasing production and receiving billions of government subsidies, have shed jobs: the oil and gas sector employed 25,000 fewer workers in 2021 than in 2014.

Workers can and should demand improved working conditions and job security in the short term. But for the long term, many workers are realizing, there is no other option: if you want a decent job, climate change must be stopped.

Workers to the Rescue

Workers are the ones to stop it. The strike waves around the world show that the “working class is back.” In Britain recently, 60,000 union members, environmentalists and others jointly rallied for climate justice and in support of good jobs.

These steps should be built upon with more joint solidarity action between workers and environmentalists that is centred around a program of good jobs, protecting the environment and democratic control of industry.

The working class has the power to take the means of production, resource extraction, and transportation out of the hands of the profit-seeking capitalists and develop a democratic plan to retool them to prioritize people. From this would emerge a rational, democratically planned society that would address climate change. ★

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The Editors

Socialism is more popular with young people in Canada than ever before. With skyrocketing housing costs, the rise of “gig” work, more intense and unsafe working conditions, and the accelerating climate crisis, the new generation of working-class Canadians don’t see a future for themselves in the status quo. But the establishment media, consolidated into a few corporate monopolies, has no interest in giving a voice to working people. Independent analysis, by and for working-class people, who are actively campaigning to change society, can only be built with grassroots support from working-class people themselves.

Socialism is an idea whose day has come. Canadians are experiencing deep anger and alienation: life is getting harder, and everything is getting more expensive, while corporations rake in record profits. Unfortunately, the loudest voices challenging the status quo today aren’t coming from the left, but from the populist right. The working class is hurting, and the right provides scapegoats and conspiracy theories to draw people in. But a bold working-class analysis, unapologetically pointing the blame at the billionaires and their corrupt system, with a message of class solidarity against racial, gender, and national divisions, is much more attractive and convincing.



This is the analysis that *Socialist Alternative* offers. We tell the stories from the front lines of struggle against exploitation, oppression, colonialism, and the fight for a better future; and we provide the socialist analysis, strategy, and tactics needed to win.

This is the 25th edition of *Socialist Alternative* — an important milestone. We have increased our frequency of publication and plan to move towards 10 issues a year to achieve the quality and timely news and analysis that we want to provide. You can help make this happen by taking out a monthly or annual subscription. For just \$2 a month, you will receive five issues of *Socialist Alternative* delivered to your mailbox each year. Subscribers at the \$5 a month level will also receive International Socialist Alternative’s journal, *Socialist World*, three times a year. With your support, the socialist movement in Canada will continue to grow in quantity and quality, as we fight for the future we need. ★

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Pride is Protest *(continued from back page)*

Toyota (sponsor of LA Pride) has donated US\$600,000 to anti-LGBTQ candidates in the US since 2019. Corporate sponsorship has a price. Pride is no longer a day of protest for liberation: it is a depoliticized corporate marketing festival.

Recently, the right has accused major corporations like Anheuser-Busch and Target of “going woke.” But these companies are not on our side. The capitalist system is chameleon-like; it disguises itself with all the colours of the rainbow, while continuously dividing and squeezing working-class people — Queer ones harder than most. The same banks that sponsor Pride in June will foreclose on a trans couple’s home in July and slash their workforce in August. The capitalist politicians who march in Pride sell weapons to regimes that execute Queer people.

Continuing Inequality

We have come a long way in the fight for our rights, but much remains to be done. Schools are on the front line

as 82 percent of Queer Canadian students felt unsafe at school in 2022.

In BC, one in four Queer youth are forced out of their homes due to family conflict and they are up to five times more likely to go to bed hungry. Between 25 to 40 percent of homeless youth in Canada identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. Queer people suffer twice the unemployment rate of the general population.

Governments continue to assault Queer rights. New Brunswick’s Conservatives are weakening requirements to create safe school environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ people. Alberta’s UCP government has a track record of endangering Queer youth.

Now, facing growing attacks, is the time to struggle to defend and extend Queer rights. Make Pride a militant and radical event of solidarity among Queer people and the broader working class. When we fight together — for health care, good jobs, affordable housing and safety in schools — we win together. Pride is protest! ★



Violet Forrie and Martin LeBrun

Pride protestors demand access to medical services in the 1980s

Pride was born in struggle. The first Pride marches in 1970 in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles came one year after the Stonewall uprising, when gay young people resisted a police attack.

It was a time of struggle as workers and young people rebelled against conservative oppressions, demanding “Liberation.” There were movements of women, Blacks, and Indigenous peoples, an anti-Vietnam War movement and waves of militant strikes.

Now, as the right-wing mount attacks around the world, the Queer community should celebrate our history of fighting for a better future. Pride season is more than a time to cut loose. It is to celebrate the hard-won victories through mass movements, strengthen the defence of Queer rights today and to organize to extend them.

In response to growing social changes, homosexual acts between consenting adults were decriminalized in 1969. However, repression continued. Legally, gay men could not immigrate to Canada until 1977. Canada’s first Pride march was in 1971 on Parliament Hill. Pride Week in 1973 included an art festival, dancing, food, and rallies for gay rights in six cities.

On February 5, 1981, 306 gay men were arrested in bathhouses across Toronto. The next day, 3,000 protested outside the police station and Ontario’s legislature. That year, 1,500 marched in Pride, which was organized by the Lesbian and Gay Pride Day Committee. Since then, Toronto Pride has been an annual event. Police raids continued until 2004.

The 1980s AIDS epidemic hit Queer communities hardest. There was massive victim blaming. Governments’ failures pushed us to create our own support networks and campaign groups. The government finally caved, not out of benevolence, but because Queer people took action.

Rainbow Capitalism

After the Queer community had won many hard battles, in the 1990s, big business started sponsoring Pride and displaying rainbow flags. This is not solidarity but corporate “rainbow washing.” Adidas (sponsor of Toronto Pride) sponsored the 2018 Russian World Cup, ignoring Russia’s anti-LGBTQ laws. H&M (sponsor of LA and New York Pride) has manufacturing in China, which brutally represses Queer people. *(continued on p. 15)*

