



SEVEN THESES

ON IMPERIALISM

AND THE DRUG WAR

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BY

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION FROM KITES

kites received the following submission from Aiyanas Ormond, a leading activist within the International League of People's Struggles chapter in Canada who also has considerable experience and knowledge on the question of the bourgeoisie's drug war, which he's accumulated from eleven years of work in the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users. Beyond their specific analysis of the drug war, these theses also provide a model for making specific class analysis—defining who are our friends and who are our enemies—and outlining a program for class struggle based on that analysis.

I. THE CRIMINALIZED DRUG INDUSTRY IS FULLY INTEGRATED INTO THE GLOBAL MONOPOLY CAPITALIST ECONOMY (IMPERIALISM).

Profits from the illicit drug trade are stashed in big banks and financial institutions. It is an open secret that this money is laundered through the big banks. US bank Wachovia—now a part of Wells Fargo—recently paid authorities \$160 million for its role in laundering money from the criminalized drug industry. In 2012, UK bank HSBC paid almost \$2 billion in fines for stashing drug money.¹ The head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has stated that during the 2008–9 financial crisis, drug profits constituted a key source of liquidity (cash available for investment) for the big banks, and that, as a result, \$352 billion in drug profits were “absorbed” into the economy.²

While the illicit nature of the criminalized drug industry creates particularities in how the industry works (such as the use of

1 See Ed Vulliamy, “How a big US bank laundered billions from Mexico’s murderous drug gangs,” *The Guardian*, April 3, 2011 (theguardian.com), and Matt Taibbi, “Outrageous HSBC Settlement Proves the Drug War Is a Joke,” *Rolling Stone*, December 13, 2012 (rollingstone.com).

2 See Rajeev Syal, “Drug money saved banks in global crisis, claims UN advisor,” *The Guardian*, December 13, 2009 (theguardian.com).

crass physical violence as the main mechanism for disciplining workers, collecting debts and resolving intra-industry conflicts), it is nonetheless subject to the basic economic logic of capitalism in its imperialist stage, just like its non-criminalized counterparts. Thus there is a high degree of concentration and monopolization in the industry, especially at the level of transportation and distribution where the profits are greatest. The biggest organizations in the illicit drug industry have billions of dollars in annual revenues and highly defined organizational structures.³ An analysis of the internal economic structure of illicit drug organizations in Mexico revealed well-defined city or region based units, regular rates of compensation for employees, and systems for centralization of profit and capital investments.⁴

In an industry subject to the basic rules of monopoly capitalism, we can see the same dynamics of class stratification and of exploitation and super-exploitation of labour in the illicit drug industry that we see in non-criminalized monopoly capitalist enterprises.

In the production of plant-based drugs, peasant and small farmer cultivators in the Third World produce cocaine and poppy plants to sell to monopoly or oligopoly buyers who are the price setters similar to other cash crops (think coffee!). Small producers make a rational economic decision to grow the criminalized plants as a cash crop in response to pressures from rents, interest rates, input costs and the other economic forces that shape their conditions of survival. In plantation production, farm workers can make somewhat higher wages than in other crop cultivation, keeping in mind that 'regular' wages for agricultural workers in the Third World are frequently below the cost of subsistence and reproduction. But the 'value added' in cocaine production comes mainly when it is moved across bor-

3 Chris Matthews, "Fortune 5: The Biggest Organized Crime Groups in the World," *Fortune*, September 14, 2014 (fortune.com).

4 See "The Drug Problem in the Americas: Studies," Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States, 2013 (cicad.oas.org).



Poppy cultivators in Afghanistan. Afghanistan produces approximately 90% of the world's opium, and its production levels hit an all-time high under the US-led military occupation.

ders, and this profit accrues overwhelmingly to the criminalized drug bourgeoisie.

The massive and rapid increase in availability of synthetic drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine is indicative of a transition to industrial production of these substances.⁵ There may be some cottage production of crystal meth. However, especially where production is based in the mass market in countries like Canada, monopolistic and oligopolistic control of the distribution infrastructure means price setting by the big criminalized drug enterprises in the long term. So the drugs that are increasingly dominating the illegal mass market are produced in industrial-type facilities with normal capitalist relations of production. Workers in these production facilities, mostly in the Third World, are most assuredly not getting a share of the high profit margin that the criminalization of the industry as a whole creates.

On the streets and in our communities, the illicit drug trade is organized much like any other industry, with poorly paid employ-

⁵ See the report from United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime report "Understanding Clandestine Synthetic Drugs," June 2001 (unodc.org).

ees doing the transactions, holding small amounts of product and cash, and providing ‘security services,’ while better remunerated but still waged low-level managers watch and direct the business, and mid-level managers organize the cutting, storage and distribution of larger amounts and so on up the chain. As with all capitalist enterprises, the profits are centralized with the top-level managers and owners.

A pop-culture fixation on the trappings of gang life obfuscates the fact that the criminalized drug industry bourgeoisie has much more similarity than difference with their non-criminalized counterparts.⁶ This drug industry bourgeoisie makes its money exploiting workers, the same as the non-criminalized bourgeoisie, and therefore share their class outlook and interests. While this criminalized bourgeoisie may be derided and even despised by their non-criminalized counterparts, there is every indication that what they aspire to is integration into the ranks of their non-criminalized counterparts, joining bourgeois political parties and social clubs, sending their kids to private schools and elite universities and grasping on to all the trappings of bourgeois success.

2. IN OUR URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES, THE WAR ON DRUGS IS A STRATEGY FOR THE REGULATION OF LABOUR, SOCIAL CONTROL AND CONTAINMENT.

As we can see from the class analysis above, poor and working-class communities are already exploited by the criminalized drug industry the same way that we are by other capitalists that operate in our communities ‘providing’ low paying jobs and products that are frequently sub-standard and or harmful (think of the junk food industry, payday loan and cheque cashing places, or alcohol and tobacco). But then poor and working-class communities are additionally oppressed by the police, social workers and health professionals who police, surveil, label, criminalize and otherwise

6 See Michael Vigil, “The Structure and Psychology of Drug Cartels,” *The Cipher Brief*, June 15, 2016 (thecipherbrief.com).

control and harass people under the cover of the war on drugs.⁷

The war on drugs has been central to the policing of poor, Indigenous and oppressed nationality communities for more than a century. In fact, looking at the drug war through a historical lens makes it abundantly clear that the main function of drug prohibition and the drug war is as a justification for surveillance, policing and social control of groups and communities that are viewed as presenting a threat to the existing imperialist order (both domestically and internationally).

As Susan Boyd explains, the first real drug prohibition in Canada was the prohibition on drinking alcohol imposed on Indigenous people by the first iteration of the Indian Act. It was a “punitive and racialized social control mechanism used by Indian Agents and the police,” and thousands of Indigenous people were arrested and incarcerated under the law.⁸

The next round of drug laws were aimed at Chinese immigrants who had been brought in as a source of cheap labour for the construction of the transnational railroad, but were subsequently viewed as a problem: a threat to the project of a ‘white’ Canada for politicians and ‘nation builders’, and as labour competition for white workers.⁹ Criminalizing, controlling and excluding Chinese workers was a strategy for regulating labour supply, something that both the dominant forces in the white labour movement and the

7 Raising kids in an urban poor community, you can really see how both sides of the drug war take advantage of the limited options of proletarian youth to recruit to their gangs: the police with sports events, ‘cadets’, and cops in schools actively targeting and recruiting ‘good kids’ while criminal gangs offer ‘bad kids’ a chance to make some decent cash, a sense of belonging and an apparent pathway to wealth and power.

8 See Susan Boyd’s video presentation “An Illustrated History of Canadian Drug Policy and Prohibition,” Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research at the University of Victoria, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tF2gpg2QgFo>).

9 Labour competition in the context of a workforce that had been racially stratified since the earliest period of colonization and where bosses had extensive experience playing on divisions between European, Indigenous and Chinese workers.



In early 20th-century Canada, drug laws criminalizing the use of opium were targeted overwhelmingly at Chinese workers and were used as the basis for mass deportation and sowing divisions with other sections of the working class. Pictured above are a group of Chinese workers in 1917 at “Camp Petawawa,” a war-time interment camp in Petawawa, Ontario that is now the site of a Canadian Forces Base.

capitalists were trying to do, though with different medium and long term objectives.

Laws criminalizing the use of opium were enacted in 1908. Between 1908 and 1922, three-quarters of those convicted under these drug laws were Chinese.¹⁰ Between 1923 and 1932, 761 Chinese Canadians (2% of the Chinese immigrant population of Canada at the time) were deported, and many others spent time in prison for drug offenses.¹¹ Along with the racist Chinese Exclusion Act, deportation of Chinese Canadians for drug offenses became a means of controlling the supply of labour to stabilize Canadian capitalism during the period of extremely high unemployment after 1929.

In the US, prohibition and criminalization of particular drugs were explicitly linked to the ‘danger’ posed by specific oppressed nationality groups: Chinese immigrants (opium), Black folks (cocaine), Mexican workers (marijuana), and urban Black commu-

¹⁰ See Wikipedia entry “Drug policy in Canada” (Wikipedia.org).

¹¹ See Catherine Carstairs, “Deporting ‘Ah Sin’ to Save the White Race: Moral Panic, Racialization, and the Extension of Canadian Drug Laws in the 1920s,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* (Vol 16, 1999), p.65-88 (available at: utpjournals.press).

nities (crack). While the public justification for these policies has been made in the name (explicitly or implicitly) of protecting white people from people of colour, their material impact is regulation of the labour market and greater social control over oppressed nationality working-class people to facilitate their super exploitation by bosses.

In each of the instances, the functionality of the drug war was to build a cross-class white supremacist base for a carceral and militarized social control of oppressed nationality proletarians who can be at turns either super exploited or completely marginalized from the capitalist economy, depending on the labour needs of the system. The super-profits accruing from the condition of limited freedom of these workers then flows mainly to the ruling class with some benefits trickling down to the white middle and working classes.

In addition to this basic economic instrumentality, the drug war fulfills a broader ideological and propaganda function useful for controlling the working class. Aside from bolstering white supremacist ideas and loyalties within the white working class, the war on drugs and its propaganda about the ‘menace of drugs’ and drug users serves to divide the working class more broadly, including dividing working class communities of colour and Indigenous communities, and even dividing militant and revolutionary working-class organizations from an important potential social base: poor people who use drugs and/or participate in the criminalized drug industry. If drugs/people who use drugs/people who sell drugs can be scapegoated as the source of the very real problems facing poor and working-class communities—poverty, joblessness, and multiple forms of intra-class and inter-class violence—then imperialism, the economic and political system that actually shapes our social and economic environment, gets a pass.

3. THE DRUG WAR IS NOT, AS SOME LIBERAL CRITICS DECLARE, A FAILURE.

So for the imperialist ruling class and imperialism as a system, the drug war has actually been an extremely successful strategy. That's why, even despite its pseudo-scientific justifications being completely discredited, and despite a significant shift in liberal public opinion, the drug war continues to persist and even expand.

Over a century, imperialism has instrumentalised the war on drugs to fulfill important ideological, economic and organizational functions within the system:

- As explained above, the drug war has been used as a mechanism for social control of Indigenous, immigrant and oppressed nationality communities, and particularly the regulation and control of oppressed people's labour.
- With the emergence of permanent structural high unemployment, this function has been expanded to include the containment of whole urban poor communities.¹²
- At the international level, the CIA and other security agencies have actively participated in the transportation and distribution of illicit drugs as a way of funding proxy wars and so-called counterinsurgency free of any kind of public scrutiny (especially in Southeast Asia and Latin America).
- On the flip side, the war on drugs has been used as ideological cover for interventions in countries where there are strong revolutionary and social movements that represent a threat to imperialist interest, with Plan Colombia and its successor Plan Mexico (aka the Merida Initiative) as the clearest examples.
- Ideologically, the drug war has been a source of division for the working class, and a source of unity and mobilization for the ruling class.

¹² See Aiyanas Ormond, "The emergence of the neoliberal containment state in Canada, Part I", and "The Containment state as an instrument of Canadian capitalism, colonization and imperialism, Part II," *The Mainlander*, June 26, 2014 (themainlander.com).

- Economically, the super profits of the drug war are a source of cash liquidity, a source that is insulated from the most unpredictable crises of capitalism by virtue of being excluded from some of its ‘normal’ highly speculative mechanisms (like the stock market!).

These remain vital functions to imperialism, and despite diminishing popular support for the war on drugs, and some important international examples of reform, it continues unabated, and is in fact expanding in a big way in the Third World.

In Mexico, the U.S. is attempting to replicate its ‘successful’ strategy in Colombia, spending billions of dollars militarizing the entire country, destabilizing communities and targeting leftist guerrilla forces and insurgent social movements, in a process that Dawn Paley calls ‘Drug War Capitalism.’¹³ The death toll from drug war violence in Mexico is in the hundreds of thousands, with tens of thousands more missing. And, similarly to Colombia, where cocaine production hit an all time high in 2017, there is no real impact on the supply of illicit drugs.¹⁴

The recent deployment of the drug war by various regimes in Asia follows a familiar pattern: playing to populist sentiments of middle class voters while targeting urban poor communities. In the Philippines, the murderous drug war waged by the US-Duterte regime has killed more than 12,000 people in just 18 months.¹⁵ The drug war targets and sows fear in poor communities. It bolsters the militarized power of the reactionary state and its ties to imperialist military and police forces, who supply funding and ‘expertise’ to the local forces of repression and containment. And the same tactics of extrajudicial killings are now being used against leaders of the National Democratic mass movement, peasant and worker

¹³ See Andrew Smolski, “Drug War Capitalism: An Interview with Dawn Paley,” *Counterpunch*, March 17, 2016 (counterpunch.org).

¹⁴ Sibylla Brodzinsky, “Colombia producing more cocaine than ever before, UN figures show,” *The Guardian*, July 14, 2017 (theguardian.com).

¹⁵ See “Philippines: Duterte’s ‘Drug War’ Claims 12,000+ Lives,” Human Rights Watch, January 18, 2018 (hrw.org).



A protest by the Stop the Killings network combines with a funeral procession for 18-year-old Ephraim Escudero, who is one among thousands who have been extra-judicially executed in Duterte's drug war. This procession took place south of Manila in San Pedro City in late 2017.

organizers and human rights defenders. This model is also being replicated in Bangladesh and Indonesia in some version.

4. DRUGS AREN'T INNATELY GOOD OR BAD, AND DRUG USE HAS TWO SIDES.

Years ago, Deborah Peterson Small described drug addiction to me as "a good relationship gone bad," and it took me years of trying to understand my own experiences and daily interactions with habitual drug users to understand what she meant by this.

People become habitual or compulsive users of drugs to deal with the trauma, pain and alienation that are produced and reproduced daily in a sick imperialist society. This includes family and sexualized violence, workplace injury, the alienation and boredom of work or unemployment, parental neglect, racism and forced migration, social exclusion and stigma and many other forms of physical, psychological and social violence meted out as a predictable consequence of a system that puts profit and power for the few ahead of the needs of the many.

In this context, using drugs isn't a bad thing, it's a rational response to a shitty situation. In most instances, people will use drugs in ways that are effective for managing their pain over the short, medium or long term, and cease using (or cease using habitually) as the process of healing advances. This is true even for those drugs that are popularly conceived of as "the most addictive," like heroin, cocaine and crystal meth.¹⁶

Drug use becomes a good relationship gone bad when the drugs are no longer salving the suffering, but become a source of suffering, and are perpetuating the pain. People frequently describe this as 'when you stop using the drugs and the drugs start using you.' When purposeful drug use, even if it is very habitual, becomes compulsive and starts to shape your behaviour and interfere with other aspects of your life, it's definitely a good relationship gone bad. And this isn't a permanent condition, but it can be one that's very hard to escape.

5. ADDICTION IS A PROBLEM, BUT IT'S NOT THE PROBLEM.

The use of substances to alter our consciousness or perceptions is extremely normal (almost universal) behaviour at the historical and social level. But that doesn't mean that addiction is normal, inevitable or okay. Compulsive use of substances that becomes unhealthy, undermines other aspects of our lives and feels out of control has long been recognized as a real problem. And we can recognize it as a problem without pathologizing it, or characterizing it as an individual failure or as a condition of permanent broken-ness.

The question is why, of the many people who use drugs, only a small subset end up with this harmful relationship with the drugs they consume?

In the progressive debate about the roots of drug addiction, the two most thoughtful, insightful and persuasive thinkers are Gabor

¹⁶ See Bruce K. Alexander, "The Myth of Drug-Induced Addiction," presentation to Senate of Canada, June 2010 (brucekalexander.com).

Mate and Bruce Alexander. Both of them marshal a wealth of evidence and insight and are well worth listening to. But for our purposes here, I'm just going to give a crass summation of their conclusions.

For Dr. Mate, addiction is a normal human response to suffering, particularly trauma (including inter-generational trauma) and pain (especially psychological, emotional and spiritual pain). Dr. Mate has gone on the record as saying that among his patients when he was a primary care physician in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, 100% of his female patients and a significant number of his male patients had experiences of serious childhood violence and abuse, especially sexual violence. Responding to this assessment of the root causes of addiction, Dr. Mate poses the question: "not why the addiction but why the pain?" As a medical doctor, Mate focuses on the individual experiences of addiction and his prescription—compassion and individual healing—is also centred on relationships at the individual (as opposed to social or class) level.¹⁷

Dr. Alexander views addiction as the product of social dislocation and social conditions: the alienation of people from their family, community, culture, identity and social networks and the inability to effectively re-establish or create an alternative to those social relationships.¹⁸ This explains why the emergence of addiction as a mass social phenomenon tracks so seamlessly with the development of capitalism and imperialism, which caused disruption of peasant agrarian society, massive waves of internal and international migration, wars and famine, alienated production process and individualized consumption oriented culture. Dr. Alexander's prescription for addiction is to re-connect to community and rebuild rich social networks, but it's unclear how he envisions that this could happen within a social system that is structurally and

¹⁷ See Gabor Maté's book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction* (Vermilion, 2018), for a fuller and much more nuanced version of his argument.

¹⁸ Best articulated in Bruce K. Alexander's book *The Globalization of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

systemically hostile to non-alienated (meaning non-marketized and commodified) relationships.

Both of these accounts are true and they are in no way contradictory. Many people who have immense suffering and trauma don't become addicted to drugs. Many people who have faced forced migration and attempted cultural genocide do not become addicted. But these are definitely the experiences and social forces at play in shaping how drugs are used in a society shaped by imperialism, and how harmful drug use and addiction emerge. And they are experiences that are produced and reproduced by imperialism on a daily basis precisely because these forces (alienation, social dislocation, inter-class and intra-class violence) are a permanent feature of imperialism. In my experience, when people are in this state (of addiction), it's because they meet both Dr. Mate and Dr. Alexander's risk factors for addiction, they are suffering at an individual level and they are cut off from the communities and social networks that would offer alternative ways of dealing with this pain, or would allow them to use drugs to navigate their pain without becoming wholly preoccupied with compulsive comfort seeking.

The current approach to drug addiction, of stigmatizing and marginalizing people who use drugs, is a formula for exacerbating the situation and perpetuating addiction. And the economic reality of imperialism is such that frequently, people who are struggling with addiction will end up in an economic and social condition where they are being abused and re-traumatized in ways that will undoubtedly perpetuate continued compulsive drug use as a means of seeking comfort and escape. The basic logic and functioning of imperialism involve the exact opposites of the strategies that would help people overcome addiction (social integration, economic stability, compassion). So we shouldn't view the tendency to criminalize and punish as an optional strategy for imperialism, but as the essentially imperialist response to its self-generated problem of mass addiction.

6. WE NEED A CLASS ANALYSIS OF THE DRUG INDUSTRY TO IDENTIFY WHO ARE OUR FRIENDS AND WHO ARE OUR ENEMIES.

In order to fight back in the war on drugs and the war on the poor, we need to have a class analysis of the social groups involved, and know who are our friends and who are our enemies.

At the top of the list of enemies is the imperialist ruling class and their states, who have unleashed this murderous drug war for more than a century knowing full well that it had nothing to do with improving the lives of people. Quite the opposite: it is a targeted and purposeful attack against internally colonized people, the poor and oppressed nations. A subset of this group is those who directly profit from the misery of the drug war: the banks that launder the super-profits of the criminalized industry, the shareholders in the jails used to lock people up for drug offenses, owners of private treatment clinics and the bureaucrats and police chiefs who build bureaucratic and institutional empires on public funding allocated to the war on drugs.

Next up on the list of enemies are the big bourgeoisie of the criminalized drug industry. These are the scumbags who, in their quest for maximum profits, will flood our communities with an unsafe and unstable drug supply, allowing hundreds of thousands to die in the 'market adjustment.' They use murder, rape, torture, humiliation and other forms of violence to collect debts, discipline workers and secure their profits, and will unleash literal wars in our communities to secure their turf from their capitalist competitors.

The middle forces are on the one hand the mid-level managers of the criminalized drug industry (gang bosses, regularized enforcers and debt collectors, local and regional supply coordinators) and, on the other hand, the drug warriors who institutionally benefit from and perpetuate the drug war (cops, prosecutors, health care workers and recovery industry managers). They're not necessarily getting rich off the drug war, but it provides them with a relatively

comfortable and stable ‘middle class life.’ A small subset of these folks are potential allies, particularly mid-level ‘dealers’ who came from the streets and might have experiences of racism or exploitation that make them sympathetic to proletarian class struggle, or doctors and nurses who come to understand their patients and can no longer pretend that individual illness is the root of the problem. In the imperialist countries, the cops are really paid well and have been delegated class power that ties them very tightly to the imperialist ruling classes of their various countries—they are class enemies. But in the context of the oppressed nations, it might not always be like that. We shouldn’t rely on these middle forces, but they can be allies in particular campaigns, struggles or contexts.

Who’s on our side?

First of all, it’s the urban poor, Indigenous, oppressed nationality and working-class communities who face the worst consequences of the drug war, a tangled web of drug war ‘symptoms’ that includes: police violence and murder, addiction and all the strife and heartache within families and communities that it can engender, overdose, drug use related illnesses, child apprehension, drug industry violence, petty crime, sexual violence and exploitation, cops in schools, street checks and arbitrary bylaw ticketing. Organizing against the drug war is one of the ways that these communities can be moved into class struggle and connected to a broader working-class and anti-imperialist politics.

It’s also the criminalized drug users who face the worst kind of violence and oppression both from the criminalized drug industry and from the police and the bourgeois State. They’re the ones who experience getting jacked up and beat up, go to jail, have their kids taken away, get surveilled in stores, patronized and mistreated by doctors and kicked out of public spaces. Democratic and liberation oriented organizations of people who use drugs are both an important element of resistance to the drug war and a countervailing force to harmful drug use and overdose in our communities.¹⁹

¹⁹ This is my firsthand experience of working with a mass organization of drug users over many years. It’s not an exaggeration to say that virtually every core

Finally, and in the long term, we need to include the waged and piecemeal workers in the criminalized drug industry, many of whom are slinging a lot of dope with no hope of ever getting rich off it. These folks are assailed on two sides: by the criminalized drug industry that wants to exploit their labour and by the bourgeois state that wants to use them as a propaganda prop and as fodder for police department budgets, prisons and the rest of the bloated criminal justice system. There are definite contradictions here, because these are people whose livelihood and short-term economic interests are aligned with the criminalized industry they work in, but they also face some of the worst violence and exploitation of the drug war.²⁰

7. IT'S POSSIBLE TO BUILD A CLASS STRUGGLE AND LIBERATION-ORIENTED MOVEMENT AGAINST THE WAR ON DRUGS.

As the crisis of imperialism deepens, building class struggle movements against the drug war can be an important component in a broader working class mass movement. To build these movements, we'll have to move beyond a leftist version of 'just say no to drugs' and start to deal with the concrete contradictions of drug use, addiction and the drug war in our communities.

The available point of departure for such a struggle is that the forces of the imperialist state—police, prisons, politicians, parole officers, paternalistic doctors and social workers, the child apprehension system—are the main enemy. On this basis, we can unite proletarians, especially proletarian youth, from urban poor, Indigenous

member of the organization would declare, at some point or other, that coming into an organization that accepted them for who they were, viewed them as assets and not a problem and oriented them toward changing the system "saved my life."

²⁰ This isn't a unique situation: it's also the case for workers in other harmful industries like the imperialist arms industry, the most destructive and unsustainable sectors of fossil fuel and other extractive industries, workers building pipelines across Indigenous territories, etc.

and oppressed nationality communities, along with organizations and networks of drug users, in a fight against police violence, criminalization, mass incarceration and other manifestations of the drug war. Based on this core, we can bring in middle forces like progressive nurses, poverty industry workers and others who have come to see the crass violence of the drug war for what it is.²¹ This core also creates a basis for discussion and potentially for joint action with low-level drug industry workers. Moving beyond this direct struggle with the enemy to develop an anti-imperialist analysis, a revolutionary orientation and proletarian forms of organization remains a challenge here as it is other mass work within the imperialist countries.

In this early stage, the contradiction with the criminalized drug industry as it manifests in our communities remains secondary. This could change over time depending on how the drug industry responds to growing working class power in our neighbourhoods and communities.

The bad news is that we are likely saddled with addiction, harmful drug use and the drug war until we defeat imperialism entirely. It's gonna be a long and bumpy road. The good news is that community organizing and class struggle are themselves bulwarks against addiction and harmful drug use, because they build social connection and give a productive outlet for expressing rage and processing trauma and grief through collective action. We will change ourselves, and our communities, by changing the world.

²¹ This type of alliance was realized for a brief period in the mid 2010s in my city in the form of a neighbourhood coalition. With regular monthly meetings, drawing 100–150 community members, and a membership that included low-income single parents, housing-project tenants, drug users, oppressed nationality youth, church people, social service workers and just a real cross section of the community. For a minute there was a sense of a real alternative pole of grassroots power in our community.



Poor People Fight Back!



the War on Drugs
& the War on the Poor

Public Meeting and Discussion

Thursday, May 17 @ 7pm
SFU Harbour Centre - 515 W. Hastings

Rally and March

Friday, May 18 @ 5pm
Hastings

A series of public events and actions against the war on drugs, held in May 2018 in Vancouver by the International League of People's Struggles and local activists in the downtown eastside network of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU).



