Invigorating and historic victory

UChicago grad workers win union

By Workers World Chicago bureau

In a decisive and historic victory in the struggle for graduate workers at private universities across the United States, the graduate workers at the University of Chicago voted overwhelmingly on Oct. 17-18 to form a union. Cast were 1,103 yes ballots and 479 opposed.

In August 2016, the National Labor Relations Board overturned its 2004 ruling that graduate students at private universities are not statutory employees. In the previous decision, the petition of graduate workers at Brown University to affiliate with the United Auto Workers was rejected, thanks in large part to union-busting efforts of Brown’s then-provost and current UChicago President Robert Zimmer.

Due to their victory, UChicago graduate employees will be represented by Graduate Students United, which is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers and the American Association of University Professors. Like their colleagues at New York University and Yale, the GSU had developed a longterm organizing presence on campus, even when the hope for official recognition as a union was dim.

GSU organizing for past decade

GSU was founded in 2007 after the university implemented a funding initiative that promised better financial support and working conditions to incoming students, without making any changes to that of existing students. Through extensive research, GSU organizers found that graduate student labor made up a third of teaching on campus — a substantially higher figure than the university boasted in its undergraduate recruitment literature.

GSU soon developed a democratic organizing structure and was a driving force in campus labor struggles, fighting for better financial support and wages, resources for graduate student parents and reductions in fees. In the absence of GSU’s legal union recognition, the university administration itself has taken credit for many of these concessions that would have been impossible without grassroots organizing.

Solidarity work has also been an important part of GSU’s campus presence, with members serving as key organizers in struggles against the university’s private police force as well as in the successful fight to reopen the UChicago Hospital’s Level 1 adult trauma center to serve the South Side of Chicago.

The UChicago administration deployed a largely legal strategy in their anti-union efforts. UChicago’s legal counsel on Sept. 22 filed for both a stay of the election, in an attempt to prevent graduate workers from voting together, and a review of the election order. The review sought to overturn the regional labor director’s decision for the election to proceed, by appealing to the NLRB where two Trump appointees have just been confirmed. The stay was not granted, and

Continued on page 3

UChicago graduate students as they began their victorious vote, Oct. 17.

FLORIDA STUDENTS

shout down speaker 5

BROWN BERETS

MARCH 5

TAKING A KNEE

FOR JUSTICE 6

From the general’s mouth

EDITORIAL 10

SMASHING RACISM AND FASCISM

PUERTO RICO struggles to survive 4, 11

Labor rally for Puerto Rico in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 18.

CATALONIA showdown 8

INDONESIA MASSACRE and U.S. role 9
Worker exploitation and the mental health crisis

By Mike Kuhlenbeck

Workers are facing a mental health crisis stemming from exploitation of the capitalist system. Working long hours for meager pay and mistreatment at the workplace can lead to increased risks of anxiety, depression and high suicide rates for workers, according to recent mental health studies.

The study “Workplace Wellness Report: Mind the World at Work” published by Mental Health America (MHA), measured “workplace stress levels and overall mental health” for 17,000 workers surveyed over a two-year period. It concluded that workplace stress increases the risk of mental impairment.

According to the MHA report, workers who experience the heaviest toll on mental health are in the industries of manufacturing, retail, and food and beverage. These professions fall under the categories of workers who are underpaid, underappreciated and overworked.

The University of Michigan Comprehensive Depression Center highlights the following workplace stressors: job strain, work-life interference, workplace discrimination and harassment, and job insecurity.

Three Stanford University scholars concluded in a 2015 study that work injustice and worker-family conflict have the same impact on health as doing shift work and putting in long hours. Researchers Jeffrey Pfeffer, Stefanos Zenios and Robert Siegel also concluded that “the strongest and biggest impact overall is lack of health insurance. It ranks high in both increasing mortality and health care costs.”

Additionally, “Another big driver of early death is economic insecurity, captured in part by unemployment, layoffs and low job control.” (Stanford Graduate School of Business)

Job insecurity is one of the biggest stress factors for workers. The fear of unemployment keeps many people up at night, as they wonder how they will survive in today’s cut-throat economy. As noted by the American Psychological Association, “Adding to the pressures that workers face are new bosses, computer surveillance of production, fewer health and retirement benefits, and the feeling they have to work longer and harder just to maintain their current economic status.”

Reports such as the MHA report are useful, but they often suffer from a fatal flaw. Often the so-called “solutions” put forward boil down to encouraging employers to boost the self-esteem and confidence of the workers — rather than offer concrete security, such as higher wages or health insurance. These researchers overlook or ignore the exploitative nature of capitalism, for it is the nature of this system to force workers to sell their labor-power to the lowest bidder.

Employers maximize their profits by cutting labor costs. They achieve this by downsizing, offshoring and automation. Such concerns become a burden and mental health is put at risk.

As Workers World contributing editor Fred Goldstein writes in his important 2008 book “Low-Wage Capitalism”: “Capitalism, the system of production for profit in the interest of the owners and its distribution planned to satisfy and guarantee only profit.”

Workers can benefit in many ways from the fight for a living wage and the right to a union, such as the Fight for $15 movement launched in recent years. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) has stated that if workers organize unions they can secure wage increases, access to healthcare, improved workplace safety and better hours. (“How today’s unions help working people,” Aug. 24)

Those who produce the wealth should not have to pay for it by sacrificing their mental and physical well-being. In order to confront this crisis, workers must confront the very system that is endangering their lives.

Contact a Workers World Party branch near you:

Workers World Party is a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party inside the belly of the imperialist beast. We are a multinational, multigenerational and multigendered organization that not only aims to abolish capitalism and imperialism, but to build a socialist society because it’s the only path to end the world and the planet itself in the never-ending quest to go to college. Black and Brown youth and trans people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

WWP fights for socialism because the working class produces all the wealth and performs all the services the prior- ity of which is social, not capitalist.

Wages are lower than ever, and youth are saddled with seemingly insurmountable student debt, if they even make it to college. Black and Brown youth and trans people are the lowest bidder.

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Veterans Administration workers demand: ‘Fill the job vacancies!’

By WW Staff

Members of the American Federation of Government Employees held a “Fully Staff the VA” informational picket at the Salem, Va., Veterans Administration hospital on Oct. 21. A rainbow of labor and community supporters, including members of the Roanoke Peoples’ Power Network, Southern Workers Assembly, Virginia AFL-CIO and Workers World Party, joined the picket line. AFGE members across the United States are fighting back against the Trump administration’s union-busting assault on the VA. "We write to those who work at VA hospitals. Currently there are 49,000 job vacancies at VA hospitals in the U.S., many for doctors, nurses, mental health professionals and other essential caregivers. Meanwhile, with a $700 billion Pentagon budget recently passed by Congress, the banks continue to be bailed out by the federal government and corporations receive billions in tax breaks and receive sweet-heart Pentagon contracts. Speakers in Salem described how workers at the VA are confronting massive budget cuts, attrition, low wages and other austerity attacks — with the worst effects on workers of color and women. These conditions are having a horrendous effect on patient care at VA hospitals nationwide. But AFGE members aren’t taking these attacks lying down. Numerous AFGE protests in a variety of forms are taking place in Washington, D.C., and the VA hospitals and patients are speaking out and taking action.

For more information on upcoming events: @AFGENational, afge.org and facebook.com/AFGEUnion. The AFGE is also asking supporters to contact Congress at 1-833-480-1637 to demand that VA staff vacancies be filled.

Invigorating and historic victory
UChicago grad workers win union

Continued from page 1

the review has yet to be heard. UChicago administration and President Zimmer have made it clear that they will continue this legal route in an attempt to delegitimize and negate the election results. Provost Daniel Diermeier announced this plan in an email to graduate workers and faculty on Oct. 19. UChicago will join several other universities calling on the NLRB to reverse the August 2016 decision. The administration has further emphasized its legal strategy by hiring Proskauer Rose, the same team that fought graduate worker unionization at Cornell, Duke and Columbia universities.

Battling anti-union rhetoric

In a further attempt to undermine graduate workers, the administration has framed anti-union messaging as neutral intellectual debate. Their depiction of the union as a third-party entity, interested only in collecting dues at the expense of academic integrity, is a common thread in anti-union rhetoric throughout the U.S.

The administration has also leaned on faculty, many of whom are insecure in their own employment, to move graduate workers away from voting “yes” through one-on-one lobbying and department-wide emails. Representatives of the university have spoken at length in different forums about the unique and indispensable relationships between graduate workers and their faculty mentors. They depict a union as an interfering presence that would fundamentally change those relationships, while using faculty as their mouthpiece for this messaging.

The graduate workers’ win at UChicago is likely to have an invigorating effect on similar campaigns across the country. While the win is significant, so too will be the struggle to bring the administration to the bargaining table. No graduate workers on a private campus have bargained for or ratified their first contract yet, even though labor law requires administrations to come to the table in good faith. UChicago graduate workers have a fight ahead of them, but they also have considerable momentum from their victory.
Puerto Ricans organize themselves to revive

By Linda Backiel
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Damage caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria have already reached $90 billion—surpassing the $87 billion “debt” imposed on Puerto Rico by the rapacious banks.

Faced with this dire situation, the Fiscal Control Board has asked the federal judge in charge of the Puerto Rican government’s bankruptcy process to prevent vulture funds and other bondholders from claiming for themselves the emergency funds that the U.S. government has authorized to alleviate the humanitarian disaster.

Puerto Rico is on the verge of a health crisis, with outbreaks of dengue fever, chikungunya, Zika, leptospirosis, conjunctivitis, scabies and other diseases that spread due to ruin, heat, lack of clean drinking water and water contaminated with debris and live and dead animals.

After almost a month since Maria hit the island, according to Puerto Rican government figures, barely 8 percent of its roads are open and only 17 percent of Electric Energy Authority (AEE) customers have power. This figure includes government agencies, hospitals and businesses. The truth is that very few houses have electricity, and less than 60 percent of the population has access to telecommunications.

The lack of relevant information and transparency is making people desperate. If the priority is to save lives, why, of the 79 open hospitals, do only 45 have power from the AEE with the others dependent on generators? Who determines the priorities? When ordinary people, waiting all day in the sun to receive a generator for their home, heard that AEE had given priority to energizing “The Mall of San Juan,” a luxury mall built on the ruins of a demolished public residential building, they were on the edge of rebellion.

Puerto Rico is experiencing a massive exodus

Some 5,000 Puerto Ricans leave the country daily. No one knows how many will return or how long the exodus will last. Soon, the estimated figure of 5 million in the United States and 3.6 million in Puerto Rico will have to be revised.

Economists estimate that it will take 5 to 10 years to see any economic recovery.

The governor keeps announcing grandiose plans and astronomical numbers that he claims have been granted or expended by U.S. personnel and various so-called relief entities. But there is little progress to be seen on the ground.

There is a severe scarcity of generators, batteries, candles, water, fresh fruits and vegetables, hot food and water to cook rice. The 21 municipalities where coffee is produced will not be able to generate anything for three years—the time it will take to plant thousands of trees and harvest the first crop.

Puerto Rico’s Finance Department (Hacienda) was left without funds and without its computer system. The judicial branch, the least powerful branch of government, began to function partially this week. The cases scheduled for October will not be heard until December.

According to an Oct. 16 article in El Nuevo Dia, a quarter-million homes were damaged and some 10 percent of the population was left homeless. Some families still live in the only room in their house that was not destroyed.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency offers financial help to rebuild homes, but only to those who have the little of ownership or receive the government’s permission. This disqualifies many who, driven by necessity and lack of affordable housing, occupied properties abandoned by the government or the prior owner.

There are 2,500 public housing units available, but by the time Maria arrived the waiting list was already 25,000 people.

Over 18,000 vacant homes that were repossessed by banks should be available, but only 6,000 are actually eligible,

There are 4,000 un-owned new homes that are not being used to house the homeless.

There are no cables left to repair the electricity, telephone, cable and internet lines that Maria collapsed. FEMA has hired the mayors who send out cleaning brigades to clear the roads and collect debris. FEMA wants the workers to leave the cables aside and avoid breaking them so they can be fastened to others that are also broken.

But workers do not open roads or collect debris on foot; they ride machines that do not allow them to distinguish between thin cables and branches of fallen trees. It has been confirmed what AEE workers have denounced for years—that AEE’s warehouses are empty. There are no cables, posts or other material needed to replace the system.

It is the lack of maintenance that led to the collapse of the electrical generating and transmission systems. FEMA awarded $420 million contracts to a U.S. company for repairs—one of many such contracts—but the recipients do little other than pay their employees and distribute profit to the U.S.

Still, the communities are standing strong, serving hot breakfasts and offering medical, dental and educational services to their children, thanks to volunteer community labor.

The unions have opened “region center of solidarity” for their members and families where they offer everything from medical services to help with requests for material assistance. Restaurant chefs are providing meals to refugees and others.

Almost all musical institutions and many artists are contributing their “grains of sand”—offering concerts and serenades, including to people waiting in long lines at banks.

The past stage of a supposedly happy and satisfied Puerto Rico waiting to be exploited by tourists and speculators has collapsed. Behind the scenes there is a Puerto Rico that is organizing itself to revive, building on its native roots to develop new institutions that serve the Puerto Rican people.

People-to-people aid for Puerto Rico

What follows is the text of an email from the International Action Center sent to activists around the United States.

The International Action Center is launching a people-to-people aid campaign for the ultra-devastated nation of Puerto Rico.

The IAC is collecting monetary donations to send to politically established grassroots organizations—specifically the Puerto Rico Teachers’ Federation (FOMP), which is working with other unions and groups organizing working brigades throughout the island to help poor communities, teachers and students who lost everything.

Why is the IAC launching this campaign? The entire world has seen the utter destruction of the beautiful island of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria hit the Caribbean on Sept. 20. Weeks after the hurricane hit, millions remain without food, water or shelter. Almost the entire island has no electricity. People are dying, hungry and desperate despite the fact that it is well-known that the U.S. could alleviate the situation if it really wanted to.

It will take years to repair Puerto Rico. But if the solidarity movement does not continue its work in the U.S. to demand genuine aid, the island could be rebuilt entirely for the needs of the banks and the corporations. The gentrification we see in our neighborhoods will take over the entire island.

Furthermore, the struggle against colonialism and for the independence of Puerto Rico could be completely derailed as a result of this catastrophe. We are confident, however, that the Puerto Rican people will not allow this to happen.

The IAC wants to do its part to help. We are carrying out people-to-people solidarity by sending money to organizations that have long been in the struggle to defend the people from U.S. imperialism.

Long after the news of Puerto Rico is off the front pages, solidarity actions with Puerto Rico and all the Caribbean will be urgent. The U.S. solidarity movement is now discussing people-to-people work brigades as well as continued protests to demand real aid, not military occupation for Puerto Rico. Furthermore, the IAC’s arrogant actions toward Puerto Rico cannot be used by the Democrats to overlook the real issues. It was under the Democratic administration of Barack Obama that the Promesa Act was passed, forcing Puerto Rico to pay the illegitimate debt of $72 billion.

Donate to the IAC at iacen.org. One hundred percent of the money collected will go to the FOMP with a message of solidarity against U.S. imperialism.

We are calling for:

End to PROMESA, repeal the Jones Act
No privatization of the island!
Puerto Rico for the Puerto Ricans, not the banks!
Cancel the debt and pay reparations!
No militarization of Puerto Rico!
Solidarity with the Virgin Islands, Haiti and all the Caribbean!

Labor rallied for Puerto Rico in Washington, D.C.

On Oct. 18, demanding Congress provide much-needed post-hurricane relief as well as cancellation of the island’s debt incurred through Wall Street exploitation. Over 100 workers converged on the U.S. Capitol, representing Service Employees Union 32BJ, United Auto Workers, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and ACT UP Philadelphia.

After lobbying by union leaders, members with signs and banners massed inside the Dirksen Senate Office Building to pressure Congress to vote for a group of resolutions they followed up with a march to the headquarters of Housing and Urban Development and then on to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in Harrisburg to call for immediate hurricane relief funds for Puerto Rico as well as for Texas, Florida and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

— Report and photo by Joe Piette

From San Juan

Labor unions rally for justice for Puerto Rico

Linda Backiel, a lawyer living in San Juan who is a longtime advocate for Puerto Rican independence, is a guest contributor to WW.
No fascists in Florida!

By Devin Cole Pensacola, Fla.

Nazi and white supremacist leader Richard Spencer descended Oct. 19 on Gainesville, Fla., to the University of Florida, in his first campus appearance since he and other fascists participated in the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Va., back in August.

Their extreme-right bigotry led to violence against oppressed people, like the beating of DeAndre Harris, a Black man who is now being arrested and charged for trying to defend himself, and also to the death of Heather Heyer, an anti-fascist protester who was struck and killed by white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr., using his car as a weapon.

The anticipation behind Spencer speaking at UF has been building for months. The university had initially denied him permission to speak there, citing safety concerns after the Charlottesville gathering. But after facing legal threats, the school gave him permission to rent space. UF is a public university, meaning that anyone has the legal right to speak on the campus. But the UF administration attempted to distance itself from Spencer’s politics and presence, even releasing a message from UF President W. Kent Fuchs, who denounced the speech as “abhorrent.”

Spencer was scheduled to take the stage at 2:45 p.m. EDT, and was immediately met with hundreds of anti-fascist protesters who shouted him down repeatedly. These protesters inside were backed by thousands positioned outside who were going toe-to-toe with white supremacists who had shown up to support Spencer. One unidentified Nazi was punched in the face, and a few others sustained injuries.

Spencer at first said that he would “stay there all day” spewing his vile rhetoric, but at the end of it all, he cut his speech short, having barely gotten a chance to speak due to the consistent booing and chanting of the crowds inside. Though there were Spencer supporters there, they were in fewer numbers and easily overpowered. Eventually, the UF campus was taken back by anti-fascist protesters. Neo-Nazis are planning a rally in middle Tennessee later in October, and seem to be shopping around for locations, especially in the South, where they feel the police will “keep counterprotesters back,” according to one white supremacist quoted in USA Today. (Oct. 12)

We must look to the incident at the University of Florida as a reminder of how to handle Nazis and white supremacists who feel they deserve a platform. We must take away their platform and see that they do not get it back.

At police chiefs convention

Philly cops riot against protesters

By Joe Piette Philadelphia

Protesters calling for the abolition of police rallied outside the International Chiefs of Police Convention in Philadelphia on Oct. 21 and then marched through Center City streets. At the end of the demonstration, as protesters were approaching the hated statue of former Philadelphia police chief Frank Rizzo, cops rioted. Six marchers were arrested, some injured.

March participants instituted jail support at the 9th Precinct, Hahnemann Hospital and finally the 15th Precinct until 3 a.m. in support of those brutalized by the state’s thugs. Instead of the cops being charged with riot and assault with deadly weapons, six activists will have to go to court to defend themselves against false and outrageous charges ranging from disorderly conduct misdemeanors to centuries old, sustained police terror and oppression of black, brown and poor communities.

Philly for Racial, Economic and Legal Justice organized the protest. During the rally and march, the group’s members spoke on a sound system and handed out fliers explaining why police abolition is needed. Their leaflet begins with: “Police abolition is a political position and community-based restorative process to self-governance in response to centuries old, sustained police terror and oppression of black, brown, and poor communities.

Brown Berets demand end to cop violence

Organized by the Brown Berets de Tej-Aztlan, a rally and march to condemn police violence gathered victims’ families and activists together on Oct. 22. Janie Torres, whose brother was viciously beaten and thrown into downtown Buffalo Bayou to drown on Cinco de Mayo in 1977, rallied the crowd, saying, “I was a child when my big brother was murdered 40 years ago and I will continue to protest killer cops for the next 40 years until they stop killing our people.”

A special honored guest was Omar Garcia, a survivor of the 43 students who were disappeared on Sept. 26, 2014, from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers’ College in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. Respected Mayan elder, Teresa, urged everyone to continue their solidarity and unity with all victims of governments and police violence all around the world.

— Report and photo by Gloria Rubac
Players resist NFL owners

By Monica Moorehead

Bulletins: African-American reporter Jemele Hill was reinstated to her hosting job on ESPN’s Sports Center on Oct. 23 following a two-week suspension. Hill, who called Donald Trump a white supremacist in November, was suspended for asking fans to boycott advertisers of the Dallas Cowboys, whose owner Jerry Jones threatened to bench players if they didn’t stand during the national anthem.

While Colin Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback, continued his protest against police brutality and racial oppression by taking a knee during the playing of the national anthem in 2016, the NFL season has seen a decrease in the number of players taking a knee. In October, the New York Times reported that only 18 NFL players and 58 team owners met with players at the offices of the NFL in New York City to discuss the protests that began in 2016.

The players stated that their protests will continue until the NFL takes a more proactive role in providing resources to oppressed communities to help bring about equality. This is a just demand since the NFL is the richest professional sports league in the U.S., raking in billions of dollars in profits, especially from television revenues. These players have made it very clear that taking a knee during the anthem is a form of protest against police brutality and racial oppression.

Kaepernick and giving him an opportunity to negotiate the league’s collective bargaining agreement, was chosen by the State Board of Regents, a body largely composed of appointed members.

Nearly every leader of the right is white, replied: “The oppositional spirit of our times is being erased by this trend.”

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By Deirdre Griswold

“Whose state? Our state” – meaning all nationalities

As we explained in Part 2 of this series, in the early years of the Bolshevik Revolution deep social advances were codified that made it the most enlightened country in the world regarding women’s rights and the elimination of state suppression of lesbians and gays. All this happened in a few years despite the wretched material conditions of the masses, who bore the brunt of the human and material costs of World War I and then the civil war that followed the revolution, in which domestic counter-revolutionaries – the “white terror” – were reinforced by the military intervention of 14 imperialist countries. Yet despite all the material difficulties, another most important advance was made in this period. It was the building of a multination state based on the Soviets – the workers, peasants and soldiers – that brought together all the peoples formerly oppressed and exploited by the czarist autocracy and the Russian bourgeoisie. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was established in 1922 and was able to unite 69 different nationalities, spread out over 11 time zones, under one Soviet government.

How could this be done equitably and with safeguards for the oppressed nationalities when the Russians were the majority and some of the nations brought under Russian rule by czarist conquest were not only poorer and even less developed, but quite small?

The answer, arrived at after lengthy discussion with all the peoples involved, was a bicameral government with two houses: the Soviet of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers Deputies and the Soviet of Nationalities.

Sam Marcy on the Soviet state

Sam Marcy, the founding leader of the Workers World Party, wrote an article titled “The Structure of the Soviet State” for publication in the Workers World dated Sept. 1, 1988. It is worth quoting extensively:

“The attitude of the ruling classes of any capitalist state which deals specifically with the question of nationalities in a revolutionary way which had never been done before. It created an equality between the two chambers, one based on representation according to the proportion of the population, the other on guaranteed representation for every nationality. In this way, not only the general interests of the working class are reflected, but also the very special and important interests of the nationalities.”

When the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, what followed was a true disaster for the working class – and especially for those nationalities not Russian, who have not recovered to this day. The indices of social welfare – infant mortality, maternal deaths, life expectancy, alcoholism and drug abuse, prostitution, unemployment, spread of infectious diseases – all worsened dramatically in a few short years.

We said earlier that this series would examine the objective reasons for political regression in the Soviet Union, which ultimately led to its collapse without the workers being willing or able to mobilize significantly in its defense. There were, of course, tremendous struggles within the party that broke up after Lenin’s death. Much has been written in support of one leader or another. Our focus here is not on who was right, but on why this struggle needed to happen in the first place.

For that, we need to understand the material conditions that undermined this great experiment and what led it, rather than putting it all down to the personalities of any of the Soviet leaders, be they Stalin, Trotsky, Khrushchev or Gorbachev and the rest of the crowd that actually presided over the dissolution of the first workers’ state.

Next: Wolves in sheep’s clothing.

The Clan & Government: Foes or Allies?

The capitalist government has covertly encouraged and promoted the Klan over decades. It is often overlooked in media reports that the durability of the Klan rests on long-term support of the state.

The capitalist government not only tolerates organizations like the Klan, but once the class struggle of the workers and oppressed peoples takes on the character of a mass movement, the capitalist government is more likely to encourage the Klan.

If the U.S. is resorting to armed nuclear force on a world scale, to threatening nuclear first-strikes, it is likely that the existence of the oppressed and oppressed will prevail.

WHY COLIN KAEPERNICK IS RIGHT

100th anniversary of Bolshevik Revolution

‘Whose state? Our state’ – meaning all nationalities

“In the first place, it is based not on the landlords and capitalists, not on the existence of private property in the means of production, not on wage labor employed in the course of production, but on a new social system where the means of production are socially owned and the economy is in the hands of the people.”

“If there is another feature of the state structure of the USSR which is just as fundamental, yet the bourgeoisie here and their myths of apologists and historians rarely refer to it. It is even neglected in much of the progressive and radical literature of the workers’ movement. And yet, if this feature was understood, it would be helpful to first look at the innumerable capitalist state structures, their internal characteristics, the internal contradictions and make sure that the nationalities within the country are represented in all of them.

There may be references in the constitution to equal protection of the law, due process and so on. There may be special legislative bodies and courts for certain people. But there may be no specific arm within the constitution, or within the structure of any capitalist state which deals specifically with the question of nationalities. This differentiates the USSR from all the capitalist federations. In the Soviet of Nationalities:

“From the point of view of its external characteristics, the USSR has this in common with some of the capitalist states: It has a bicameral system. In this sense, it seems like the U.S., but the two arms of its legislative structure are very different from the two houses of Congress here.

Soviet of Nationalities a revolutionary departure

“This bicameral system is found in the highest governing body, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which consists of the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of the Nationalities. The Soviet of the Union is chosen on the basis of proportional representation — each deputy represents an equal amount of people. In the Soviet of Nationalities, each nationality is guaranteed a set number of deputies.

“The members of both chambers serve equal terms, and no bill can become law unless adopted by a majority of both chambers. The all-important second arm is of extraordinary significance, particularly in the epoch of imperialism, in which the imperialist character is a characteristic feature. It is the kind of structure which, if incorporated into a bourgeois state, would tremendously assist the struggle of the oppressed nationalities against the dominant nationality.

In constructing this mechanism for governing the Soviet state, the goal was acknowledged recognition to the existence of nationalities in a revolutionary way which had never been done before. It created an equality between the two chambers, one based on representation according to the proportion of the population, the other on guaranteed representation for every nationality. In this way, not only the general interests of the working class are reflected, but also the very special and important interests of the nationalities.”
Showdown looms in Catalonia

By John Catalinotto

Oct. 23 — In response to the arrest of two Catalanian political leaders by the Spanish state and to Spanish Prime Min- ister Mariano Rajoy’s announcement that the central regime would depose Cata- lonia’s regional government, 450,000 people took to the streets of Barcelona in protest on Oct. 21.

Rajoy, who leads the Popular Party (PP), the most right-wing of the para- laymen parties, said he would invoke Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution. This means seizing control of Catalonia, including its economy, telecommunications, radio, television, police and infra- structure, and imposing new elections in Catalonia within six months.

The federal Senate, set to meet on Oct. 27, must authorize Article 155. The PP, along with the center-right Citizens party and the so-called Socialists (PSOE), are expected to join in authorizing Article 155. Since the PP in Catalonia won only 8.5 percent of the vote in the regional parliamentary elections, this would im- pose, in effect, a minority regime on the region’s 7.5 million people.

Catalonia’s regional leader Carles Puig- demont, who heads the major bourgeois party currently promoting independence for the region, called a meeting of Parlia- ment for Oct. 26. He says the Catalan gov- ernment will then call for independence.

Should this go forward, there could be a showdown on Oct. 27, which would involve the federal state using force against Catal- onians people for self-determination.

The last outpouring of state force against Catalans, when federal police tried to stop the Oct. 1 referendum on self-determination, led to a massive outpouring of Catalans, angry at the attempt to crush their rights. While the overall movement was led by bourgeois parties, leftists were active in broad- based Committees to Defend the Repub- lic (CDRs) that organized and protected the voting places.

Of the 2.3 million who voted, 40 per- cent of total voters, more than 90 percent opted for independence from the Spanish state.

What does Spain consist of? The Spanish state rules over different peoples, not all of whom consider them- selves Spanish. In particular, the peoples of Galicia in the northwest, the Basque Country in the north and Catalonia in the northeast have their own languages and cultures. In each of these regions there have been significant indepen- dence movements.

After fascist Francisco Franco’s mili- tary rebels won the civil war in 1940, his regime imposed a brutal rule on all these peoples, outlawing local languages and crushing by force the workers’ move- ments throughout the Spanish state and any movement for self-determination.

Following Franco’s death in 1975, a new regime was established in 1978 called the “Transition.” Left-wing par- ties were legalized and allowed to run for Parliament. A certain amount of autono- my, which eventually included language rights, was allowed to the regions.

The rule of big capital remained. The oldFalangist fascists remained in the police and army and in the judiciary, and its politicians formed the PP, which has served to make it impossible for the structures of the state, which were built on the backbone of Francoism, to be capa- ble of responding to political demands with anything other than repression. Likewise, the Catalan process — like any major struggle against hegemony — has engendered a major process of popular organization, around the CDRs, which should remain in place.

That is, the CDRs could provide a structure for truly popular resistance in Catalonia and inspire struggle among the other peoples to the regime in Ma- drid that has been running the Spanish state since the Transition of 1978.

Statement of Red Roja

Analyzing the seriousness of the cur- rent political crisis, Angeles Maestro of Red Roja, a statewide revolutionary or- ganization that supports self-determina- tion, wrote: “The massive mobilization of the Catalan people — as in other times and in other ways, that of the Basque peo- ple — despite its determination and in- volvement of hundreds of thousands of people, has been unable to achieve its objectives of self-determination, but it has served to make it impossible for the structures of the state, which were built on the backbone of Francoism, to be capa- ble of responding to political demands with anything other than repression. Likewise, the Catalan process — like any major struggle against hegemony — has engendered a major process of popular organization, around the CDRs, which should remain in place.”

48th NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING
Thursday, November 23, 2017 12 Noon
Cole’s Hill (hill above Plymouth Rock)
Plymouth, Massachusetts

Unite with us in our struggle to create a true awareness of Native peoples and demonstrate the unity of Indigenous peoples internationally.

Help shatter the untrue glass image of the Pilgrims and the unjust system based on racism, sexism, homophobia and the profit-driven destruction of the Earth.

We will show up in solidarity with Indigenous struggles throughout the world, and espe- cially our relations in Puerto Rico & the Caribbean and Mexico suffering from hurricane and earthquake devastation compounded by colonialism.

Special message from Leonard Peltier

For more information/orientation: United American Indians of New England info@uaine.org www.uaine.org
Facebook event: facebook.com/events/1879024508769

 supported by 850 people sentenced to jail. More than 850 people — including Rock activists sentenced to jail. Judge placed them in custody immediate- ly, and conviction of some and not others has been arbitrary and targets what police and state’s attorneys call agitators.”

Despite these sentences, the water pro- testers remain committed to the struggle. A statement from the Indigenous-led Freshet Collective on Oct. 19 quoted Ed- die Bad Hand, who was acquitted at the same trial: “These people were not guilty, regardless of what [the state] said. No one should be found guilty.”

Bad Hand urged his fellow water protec- tors to “stay strong, Continue to stand and keep believing in what you stood for.”

#NoDAPL

Water protectors sent to jail

By Chris Fry

Following the directions of Big Oil’s Dakota Access Pipeline company, North Dakota Judge Thomas Merrick on Oct. 19 convicted and sentenced two water protectors to jail for their role in the pro- test at Standing Rock last year.

Even the prosecution had not recommended jail time. Neither activist has any prior crim- inal record.

Retired environmental biologist Mary Redway, 63, was sentenced to six days in jail for disorderly conduct, while school teacher Alexander Simon, 27, was sen- tenced to 18 days in jail for “physical ob - struction” and disorderly conduct. The state’s attorneys call agitators.”

The convictions of Redway and Simon stem from a peaceful protest of water protectors on Oct. 20, 2016, when 120 people were arrested while holding signs and praying in a pasture, protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline that threatens Native land and the water supply for mil- lions of people in the region. Originally, the charges were dismissed, but with the company’s check in hand, the state re- charged these and other activists.

Judge Merrick tried to prevent out-of- state lawyers from assisting the Water Prote- ctor Legal Collective, the Indige- nous-led legal team. In an Oct. 19 state- ment following the trial, the collective stated: “We see this decision as his attempt to send a message that people will face harsh sentences regardless of innocence or guilt as a means to put pressure on oth- ers with pending charges to take pleas or for- go trial. The prosecutorial discretion and conviction of some and not others has been arbitrary and targets what police and state’s attorneys call agitators.”

Despite these sentences, the water pro- testers remain committed to the struggle. A statement from the Indigenous-led Freshet Collective on Oct. 19 quoted Ed- die Bad Hand, who was acquitted at the same trial: “These people were not guilty, regardless of what [the state] said. No one should be found guilty.”

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Coverup continues of U.S. role in Indonesian massacres

By Deirdre Griswold

Recently declassified documents from the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia show, according to major big business media outlets, that Washington was well informed about the horrors committed by the Indonesian military in 1965-66 that killed up to a million people and destroyed the left movement in that country.

This sounds like a big exposure. But, in fact, it is really a continuation of the coverage of the U.S. role in the massacres. What the capitalist media are not saying now, and only hinted at then, is that the U.S. government was not just a spectator, but egged on and facilitated the military coup and the slaughter of Communists and progressives that followed. (A book on this subject, “Indonesia 1965: The Second Greatest Crime of the Century” by Deirdre Griswold, can be read online at workers.org.)

This U.S. crime was understood by many people on the left at the time. The Pentagon was already pouring an armada of troops, aircraft and ships into Indonesia between 1950-53 that left millions of casualties but could not overturn the revolutionary government. All of Southeast Asia — Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia — was in ferment against the imperialist powers.

At the end of World War II, the resource-rich country of Indonesia gained its independence after more than 300 years of brutal colonial rule by both the Netherlands and, for a time, England. The nationalist government, headed by Sukarno, formed a bloc with the large Communist Party there and made several attempts to set up an alliance of developing countries independent of imperialism.

During the Sukarno years, the U.S., while professing friendship, made several clandestine attempts to break up the nation of Indonesia, which stretches across 3,000 islands in the southwestern Pacific. A CIA pilot, Allen Lawrence Pope, was actually captured when his plane crashed on one of these missions in 1958.

So when news about the Indonesian massacres first became public, it was clear to many that this was instigated by Washington as part of its wide-reaching efforts to roll back the revolutionary tide sweeping through Asia. One of the people who took a stand was the eminent British philosopher and mathematician, Bertrand Russell, who was also a strong opponent of the Vietnam War.

In the United States, the only organization to rally against the massacres was Youth Against War & Fascism, the youth arm of the Workers World Party. YAWF held several demonstrations in New York, and on June 2, 1966, sponsored a “Public Inquest” in New York City. The accounts were first reported in the Western press, among officials in Washington, but not the press of the more hopeful political developments elsewhere in Asia.

On October 1, 1965, first reports were received in the Western press, events which suggested a momentous change in Indonesia, the accounts were immediately picked up by the Western press. The membership was over 3 million.

Indonesia had the largest Communist Party outside of the communist countries. The membership was over 3 million. Active supporters were estimated to number between 15 and 20 million people. The Western press would have us believe that a disciplined party of such dimensions, with vast popular support, made a reckless bid for overt power without a street demonstration, a strike or a call to struggle by the leadership.

During October 1965 two representatives of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, close associates of mine, were in Jakarta on my behalf attending a conference. In Jakarta few had any doubt about what was taking place around them. The United States Seventh Fleet was in Javaean waters. The largest base in the area, feverishly constructed by the United States but a few months earlier on the southernmost point of the southernmost island of the Philippines, was ordered “on alert.”

General Suharto’s forces, the Indonesian massacres than is generally realized. General Suharto’s forces, at times severely short of food and munitions, have been getting aid from here through various third countries, and it is doubtful if the coup would ever have been attempted without the American show of strength in Vietnam or been sustained without the clandestine aid it has received indirectly from here.”

During October 1965 two representatives of the British anti-war and peace movement and the socialist movement. The initiative taken by Youth Against War & Fascism in the United States, the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in Britain and solitary individuals in other countries, the peace movement and the socialist movement, must be maintained. Bertrand Russell, as he imagines the slaughter which has swept a country of one hundred million people. Bertrand Russell on the Indonesian massacres

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“American military help, urged the Times in London, was “another indication that there may be some hope in Asia.”

Max Frankel describes the Johnson administration’s “delight with the news from Indonesia” and the private responses of “officials ... elated to find their expectations being realized.” (New York Times, 12 March 1966)

The great industrial corporations and the Pentagon to which they are allied have brought the world to a point not previously reached since Hitler’s advent. From Vietnam to the Dominican Republic — to Indonesia — the source of murder and misery stems from Washington. Only now is the truth coming to light despite the efforts of many, especially those whose contributions to this important volume are so clear, forceful and unanswerable.

No small part of the essential task before us in exposing the full dimension of the evil represented by the Johnson administration and those it serves, is the obligation to alert the left in America to its full responsibility. With the exception of the initiative taken by Youth Against War & Fascism in the United States, the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in Britain and solitary individuals in other countries, the peace movement and the socialist movement must be maintained.

How cavalier are the words Reston uses. How nutritious are the stories he tells us blandly six months after the event. The Times in London states: “The Reston story is headed “A Gleam of Light in Asia.” He describes these events as “another indication that there may be some hope in Asia.”

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James Restin wrote in the New York Times on 30 June 1966: “One of the most persistent complaints among officials in Washington is that our political troubles are not balanced adequately by reports in the press of the more hopeful political developments elsewhere in Asia.”

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The new administration never gives us a chance to forget that it is a vipers’ nest of racism and militarists.

The president, as bigot-in-chief, inducted the widow of African-American soldier Sgt. La David T. Johnson, one of four U.S. soldiers killed on Oct. 4 in Niger. In the midst of offering her a “condolence call,” the POTUS couldn’t resist the opportunity to remind the widow, Myesha Johnson, that “your guy ... knew what he signed up for.”

So I turn to that phrase later despite its clashing with the whole idea of consoling someone who is grieving, it is revealing about the nature of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Myesha Johnson and her mother-in-law, Cowanda Jones-Johnson, both heard Trump’s disrespectful words as they drove to Miami to retrieve their deceased loved one. So did U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson, an African-American Democrat of Florida and a close family friend, who was in the vehicle and heard the call on speaker-phone.

Wilson publicized the call between the president and Johnson. Trump, who insulted and attacked the family of a fallen Muslim soldier during the election campaign, replied by insulting Wilson.

That the POTUS is not only racist but plays to racism among his base supporters is nothing new. That he responds to any criticism like a whiny child is nothing new. What was new was that on Oct. 20, Gen. John Kelly, the chief of staff — one of the generals who is supposed to be among the “results” in the White House and who represents the Pentagon’s immersing in the executive branch — fully supported the president against Rep. Wilson and, by extension, Ms. Johnson.

That Kelly, too, shares the racism that permeates this administration should not surprise us. He and Trump should both be condemned for their words. What is surprising is that a Marine general, who knows there are many African-American Marines, would openly reveal his attitude.

The crux of the matter for Kelly is in the phrase, “He knew what he signed up for.” For Kelly, the U.S. working class who join the troops should be doubly proud to be.

But while the POTUS is indoctrinated to believe that they must be ready “to die for their country,” that’s not what the troops of the new profile he has objected to and “sign up for.” They kill and die, mostly kill with U.S. firepower, to protect the economic interests of the .01 percent that owns 90 percent of the wealth and exploits labor worldwide.

In reality, Sgt. Johnson signed up to participate in a professional military that serves the interests of the imperialist ruling class. The Pentagon indoctrinates U.S. youth in chauvinist “patriotism,” but the interests they are made to fight for are strictly mercenary.

The U.S. ruling class wants the troops, and especially the Black troops, and civilians too, to refrain from asking the big questions that were raised by these outrageously insensitive and racist events:

What is the Pentagon doing in Africa? Why are U.S. troops in Niger? And why are they dying for the gang of racists in Washington?

Artists against — No thanks

As a feminist and a Marxist, I have long struggled with the distinction between an artist who abuses women and his art. Harvey Weinstein’s myriad transgressions are way too fresh, too calculated, too fiendish. I want him to be sentenced to the U.S. equivalent of the Robben Island prison.

Now, considering Woody’s thinly veiled appeal for Weinstein, I won’t believe that he must be ready “to die for their country,” that’s not what the movies of the new profile he has objected to and “sign up for.”

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Behind anti-gov’t protests in Togo

Editor’s note: U.S. military presence and intervention continue to ramp up on the African continent, with reverberating consequences. Bourgeois news sources trumpet the devastating bombing deaths of more than 300 people in Somalia on Oct. 14, but forget to mention that the inert of the same day, two months ago, killing 30 civilians. (Guardian, Oct. 17) U.S. politicians make patriciotic hay from the death of four Special Forces soldiers in Niger on Oct. 4, but never mention that the U.S. is building a massive “hunter/killer” drone base, the largest U.S. Air Force expeditionary base of all time, attempting to control much of West Africa. (CNN, July 21)

Despite their propaganda, U.S. or European powers never send troops or economic emissaries to countries in order to “keep the peace” or to “stop the struggles of other countries,” but always to set up a platform for exploitation and domination, or for destabilization of a country trying to wrench its political independence from their grasp.

The following article on the West African country of Togo gives important context for current internal struggles there, as opposition parties resist a current administration backed by former colonizing power France.

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

In Togo, opposition demonstrations against the government, restricted by Togolese authorities, went on without interruption beginning on Oct. 18. These actions, which have spread broadly across the nation since the start of the month, have been a source of concern to the current government.

Fourteen opposition parties and coalitions are united in an effort to force the removal of the regime of Faure Gnassingbe, the president whose father took complete control of the country as a result of a military coup engineered by France during the 1960s. Togo has a population of 7.8 million people, with a tumultuous history of colonialism and apartheid. Anti-government forces had began mobilizing for marches when the minister of territorial administration, Payawoda Boukpessi, declared a national conference in the capital of Lome that street demonstrations would not be allowed on the scheduled days. The spokesperson for the government emphasized that people would not be allowed to gather at fixed spots instead of taking to the streets in marches.

Presenting a facade for the real actions, Boukpessi stressed on behalf of the administration that “there have been calls for civil disobedience, calls for economic sabotage, even calls for murder initiated by protesters targeting the authorities and members of their families as well as sequestering every part of the capital, Lome.”

Despite the government’s claims of violent tendencies on the part of the opposition, it is the Togolese authorities who are responsible for several deaths, the wounding and injuring of scores of people along with the arrests, and the prosecution and imprisonment of leading political activists. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets in the last two months calling attention to the machinations of the government aimed at extending its dominance of political power. Most people in Togo work within the agricultural sector in cocoa and rubber plantations.

Mass discontent, calls for constitutional reform

The opposition forces moved forward on the actions slated for Oct. 18 with the intended purpose of bringing large crowds into the streets. The big march was directed toward the offices of the [West African regional group] ECOWAS in Lome.

Brigitte Kafui Adjamagbo-Johnson, a political leader of one of the anti-regime coalitions, said of the announced restrictions by the government: “The fight continues.”

Adjamagbo-Johnson, a longtime political activist, was, in 2010, the first woman to run for president of Togo. She has worked on various projects designed to improve the status of women inside the country.

During the largest anti-government demonstrations on Oct. 4-5, Adjamagbo-Johnson emphasized the willingness to negotiate on the part of the opposition, saying: “We can never say no to dialogue. The current government does not call for any dialogue despite seeing what is going on in this country. We all know that he has heard our messages that we are sending.”

Eric Dupuy, the spokesperson for the National Alliance for Change (ANC), reiterated that proper legal requirements for negotiations to end the political demonstrations were met, and consequently there was no basis for the announcement by Boukpessi. “If the government decided to break the law, the people will not respect it,” the ANC spokesperson said.

In response to the demonstrations, the Togolese Parliament (Unir) passed a draft bill calling for term limits. The legislation would ostensibly mandate a maximum of two terms of office for the presidency, not retroactive, but instead moving forward. Opposition parties have criticized the parliamentary action, noting that it would still allow Gnassingbe to run for an additional two terms of office, extending his tenure potentially to 2025.

Members and supporters of the ruling Union of the Republic (UNIR) party held their own series of demonstrations in support of President Gnassingbe on Sept. 20-21. UNIR has rejected the claims by the Pan-African National Party (PNP), the National Alliance for Change (ANC) and the Group of Six, who are all demanding sweeping political reforms.

Opposition members of Parliament refused to support the measures, saying they did not go far enough in guaranteeing genuine, democratic, practice. They are calling for the restoration of the 1992 constitution, which grew out of a national conference of negotiators, debates and discussions.

In the aftermath of the death of former President Eyadema Gnassingbe in 2005, his son Faure was installed, in contradiction to the Togolese constitution. In 2010, the Togolese constitution was amended, but it is the Togolese people, with the support of their families as well as supporters of the various opposition groups, it is the Togolese authorities who are responsible for extending their rule.

In response to the demonstrations, the Togolese constitution. … [They] call on the Government to set a date for the organization of the referendum on the draft bill. They encourage the opposition to take this opportunity to further advance the constitutional reforms.”

On Oct. 10, the opposition refused offers to meet with a delegation from the International Organization of La Francophone (OIF), which arrived in the country in an attempt to mediate the conflict between the government and the opposition. OIF is a relic of the Pan-African imperialist system from the late 19th century, consisting of representatives of 57 member-states who have French as their national language. The organization was relaunched in 1970 to promote joint action on the part of France and its current as well as former colonies.

“The situation in Togo requires drastic moves on the part of the government. Until the three-party system is established, unrest will continue.”

Oscar López Rivera on U.S. colonialism

By Dolores Cox

The Caribbean island of Puerto Rico has been a colony since it was invaded by the U.S. in 1898. Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens in 1917. It is the homeland of Oscar López Rivera, a leader in the Puerto Rican independence movement. López Rivera was imprisoned for 35 years in a U.S. federal prison, much of it in solitary confinement. He was pardoned by President Barack Obama in 2017.

While visiting the community of Las Monjas in San Juan on Oct. 18, after Hurricane María, López Rivera said in an interview with Democracy Now that the hurricane had been a devastating experience for him, primarily because one of the first things he noticed was gentrification. “It is a reality we see across the nation. The hurricane was a devastating experience for him, primarily because one of the first things he noticed was gentrification. “The state is a very bad landlord, it is erasing communities, including the one here, will be displaced once it is beautified, embellished and groomed. And once they can wipe out the residents, then they will invest. They will buy. They will move in; they will invest. They will buy condominiums, especially hedge funds, moving into Puerto Rico in force, knowing that what they invest now will be multiplied, reflecting how the colonizer treats the colonized.”

Federal government response

One Donald Trump has no sense of respect for Puerto Rico,” said López Rivera. “He has demonstrated it already by doing what he’s done. It is shameful for me to see a president toss things to people who are suffering so much. The way that they came in with FEMA [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] and Homeland Security reflects what colonialism is to Puerto Ricans. FEMA can come into Puerto Rico and start destroying Puerto Rico, but what can they do, and be totally disrespectful. Homeland Security comes in bearing arms. It’s almost incredible how they treat people, dehumanize our population. Treating us not like citizens, but like animals. From the medical side of Puerto Rico, we are being killed by neglect. It reflects the response of Donald Trump and the U.S. government to the crisis.”

He believes that most Puerto Ricans want to be Puerto Ricans. “Once we become colonized by the U.S., we will lose our national identity. I look at Ha-waian Natives and Native Americans on reservations as an example, losing their culture, their language, their lifestyles and their land. And that’s what’s going to happen to Puerto Rican. The Hawaiian Native American population is the overwhelming majority of prisoners are the Natives; the same thing with Alaska. Puerto Ricans will not be better off by an independent state if the majority of the population or people lose their identity, they are a little dehumanized. This is the reality we are facing as Puerto Ricans.”

“In the U.S. I have found young Puer-to Ricans who really love P.R., and who want to do something for P.R. For me, Puerto Rico has to be the promised land of all Puerto Ricans, wherever we are,” added López Rivera.
Puerto Rico enfrenta genocidio

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

Lo que está ocurriendo ahora en Puer-

to Rico solo puede describirse como
genocidio, Auschwitz en la isla. Los
capitalistas y el gobierno de Estados

Unidos en el carnet de sus socios.