Poisoned by GM and racism
Flint demands water justice

By Martha Grevatt
Detroit

Each new day brings more front-page headlines about the Flint, Mich., water crisis. The latest outrage is the admission that an outbreak of Legionnaires’ disease (a type of pneumonia) occurred shortly after Flint began drawing water from the Flint River in 2014. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines an outbreak as two or more cases. From June 2014 until November 2015 there were 87 known cases, resulting in 10 deaths. Only on Jan. 13 did Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder announce that an outbreak had “been discovered.”

While safe to drink, Legionella are water-borne bacteria that affect the lungs when inhaled as droplets or steam. Even Flint residents who stopped drinking the suspicious water could inhale it while bathing. Others who boiled water to eliminate E. coli bacteria could also have inhaled Legionella. E. coli was one of the first contaminants detected in the water after the switch away from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD).

Marc Edwards, University of Virginia professor and water safety expert whose research confirmed that toxic levels of lead in the water were caused by a failure to add anti-corrosion chemicals to the Flint River water, says that the lapse also caused the Legionnaires’ outbreak. “The general idea,” he explained, “is that the lack of corrosion control in the Flint system ate up the disinfectant, the chlorine that’s normally put in the water to kill these bacteria, and it also caused the release of iron to the water.” These two factors allowed Legionella to grow.

That amounts to murder. The chemicals that could have prevented both the Legionnaires’ outbreak and the lead poisoning emergency would have cost about $100 a month.

All of the 9,000 children under six, the most vulnerable age group, are assumed to be affected. Lead poisoning affects young brains, impeding intellectual development and causing behavioral disorders. It occurs disproportionately in poor, especially Black and Brown children, who often live in older buildings with lead-based paint. The resulting disabilities put them on a fast track in the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

In Michigan, a young African American with a disability is 25 times more likely to end up in prison than a white youth with no perceived disabilities. The medical costs of early intervention, which can minimize the damage done by lead, are astronomical.

An unknown number of older children and adults will also suffer. Lead can cause hearing and memory loss, kidney failure, high blood pressure, and nerve and digestive disorders. There are concerns about whether inmates housed at Flint...

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Ongoing struggles honor Dr. King


• BALTIMORE PPA
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  ‘Refuse the debt’

• EXTREME WEALTH, extreme poverty – Editorial
‘Concussion’ tells truth about NFL medical neglect

By Lamont Lilly

Through a vast display of medical examinations and scientific data, the film “Concussion” directly links repeated violent brain trauma of National Football League worker-athletes to dementia, depression, memory loss, mental illness and even suicide. The truth is all laid out here in a melodramatic and undeniable fashion.

It’s an ugly reality, and a bit uncomfortable for most football fans, but the truth is, the NFL is a billion-dollar industry that does nothing about its player-employees. To the owners, management and corporate CEOs who reap most of the NFL’s financial gains, the NFL brand is the greatest, most profitable form of entertainment in the world.

For the worker-athletes, professional football is a beloved passion that requires great strength, power, speed and brains. But as the workers, they are also a game that may cost them their lives.

For those who want the truth, “Concussion” truly is a monumental film that needs and deserves to be seen. Will Smith fans won’t be disappointed. Smith does a damn good job in this movie. As a seasoned veteran among Black actors and obvious artistic descendant of Sidney Poitier, Smith fully embodies the Nigerian-born former Steeler great, (center) Mike Webster. Following an induction into the NFL, Hall of Fame, Webster was found in his car after having committed suicide.

After a thorough autopsy and a series of medical examinations, Dr. Omalu comes to realize that the long-time Steeler great, “Iron” Mike Webster, had been quietly going insane for years. In a brief span of time, Webster went from being a well-paid NFL warrior to being homeless, sniffing glue and pulling his teeth out with pliers.

Webster had received more than 70,000 violent blows to the head from his childhood up through his 18-year career in the NFL. As Dr. Omalu states in the film, “The human brain wasn’t meant to absorb that kind of constant violent impact.” The team owners may deny it, but the raw physical evidence cannot.

The further he delves, the clearer it becomes to Omalu that the NFL’s hard-hitting brand of violent entertainment and high-speed collisions are not only costing worker-athletes their teeth, arms, legs: Repeat violent brain trauma is costing them their lives. Omalu coins this condition “chronic traumatic encephalopathy.” It’s important that these worker-athletes know the ugly truth about this business.

Just like the corporate giant tobacco companies used to deny the impact of their products on cancer rates and other related illnesses, “Concussion” clearly illustrates how the NFL, just as guilty in the denial and impact of consistent brain trauma. The numbers, however, speak for themselves. Eight former employee-players of the NFL have committed suicide since 2011.

Suicides expose NFL’s ugly truth

Dave Duerson was NFL “Man of the Year” in 1987 and a two-time NFL Super Bowl champion with the New York Giants and Chicago Bears. In 2011, he killed himself by putting a shotgun to his chest and pulling the trigger. Duerson was only 50 years old.

Kurt Crain of the Denver Broncos and Miami Dolphins was 66 when he committed suicide; Ray Easterling of the Atlanta Falcons was 62. In 2012, former San Diego Charger Junior Seau, one of the NFL’s all-time greatest linebackers, was a young 43 years old when he committed suicide. Andre Waters died at 44; Jovan Belcher at 25 and Paul O´Neill at 29. All died from self-injected gunshot wounds.


According to a recent Boston University School of Medicine study, out of 34 NFL football players tested postmortem, 31 tested positive for clear signs of CTE.

More than 4,500 former NFL players are now in class-action suits against the NFL for its lack of care and denial of medical evidence. How can we cheer our heroe---

Continued on page 3
For second year #OscarsSoWhite decry Hollywood racism

By Monica Moorehead

On Jan. 14, much of the world watched in shock and anger the announcements of the nominations for the upcoming 88th annual Academy Awards, also known as the Oscars, which recognized virtually all white acting performances.

This year and every year, for the first time since 1997-1998 that not one Black actor was nominated for either a best actress, best actor, best supporting actress or best supporting actor award in consecutive years.

Most notable snubs included Will Smith for “Concussion,” Michael B. Jordan in the title role of “Creed,” Nona Gaye for “Ms.QDebug,” Jesse Williams for “Candace,” Tyrese Gibson for “Pain & Gain” and Jada Pinkett Smith for “Focus.”

“Concussion” is that it pulls back the curtain on how heartless, greedy and uncaring the ruling-class elite can be. While coaching my members should also participate in a boycott of the Academy ceremony to show anti-racist solidarity.

Director Spike Lee, who received an honorary Oscar in November for more than five decades of filmmaking, Jan. 14: “We may win an Oscar now and then, but an Oscar is not going to fundamentally change how Hollywood does business. We are talking about oak wood stars. I’m talking about executives. We’re not in the room.” (New York Times, Jan. 15)

Black women actors like Viola Davis, Taraji P. Henson, Kerry Washington and Forest Whitaker; Halle Berry is the only African-American woman.

“Out of the Academy’s 15 branches, White males direct 90 percent of each branch, except for the acting branch, which is 88 percent white. The Academy’s executive and writer branches are a stark 88 percent White. The cinematography and visual effects branches are 95 percent white.

“Sexism is also rampant within the Academy. According to the Writers Guild of America, women made up a mere 17 percent of employed writers in 2011. Martha Lazien, in San Diego State University study, stated that in 2011, women made up 18 percent and 9 percent of the Academy’s producer and director branch.

“The median age of all Academy voters is 62. Fourteen percent of voters are under the age of 50. Academy membership is for life, whether members still work or not.

“Out of the 43 members of the Academy’s powerful board of governors, only six are women, one of which is the only person of color on the board.

“Academy reflects the racism and sexism that are prevalent throughout the U.S. capitalist society, from those who control Wall Street’s profits to those who dominate the big-business parties of the Democrats and Republicans. The Academy, since it was founded in 1927, has paid only lip service to promoting affirmative action throughout the film industry for people of color and women.

“Denzel Washington stated: ‘If the country is 12 percent black, make the Academy 12 percent black. If the nation is 15 percent Hispanic, make the academy 15 percent Hispanic. Why not?’ (Los Angeles Times, Feb. 10)

“People of color and women involved in TV production do not fare any better. According to a report released by the Directors Guild of America on Sept. 16, based on 2,600 episodes that appeared in primetime across all broadcast, basic cable and premium cable during the 2010-2011 season, white males directed 77 percent of all episodes; white females 11 percent; Black males 11 percent and Black females just 1 percent. For one-hour series, white males directed 80 percent of shows; for half-hour series, white males directed 74 percent.”

Iowa protest tells Trump: ‘Stop racist attacks!’

By Mike Kuhlenbeck

Protesters denounced Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump’s “racist attacks” during his live, Jan. 15 appearance, ignoring existing player conditions: headaches, torn ligaments, concussions, sprained ankles and more. Instead of receiving proper assessments, current and former players are often diagnosed and denied effective treatment.

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Baltimore PPA leads housing fight

By David Card

Baltimore

In September, women at the Gilmore Homes public housing complex began to publicly complain of regular sexual abuse by repair workers, criminal abuse that sometimes included rape. The women residents had been forced to perform sexual acts in exchange for necessary repairs. The housing commissioner, Paul T. Graziano, had been made aware of the situation several times and consistently failed to remove the abusers from their positions. The public housing residents, led by the People’s Power Assembly, filed a federal lawsuit against the Housing Authority of Baltimore seeking to have the City Council remove theirleanor” — often banks and investment firms — from the housing market. The new law took effect. It says that “rightful owners” — often banks and investment firms — “have no emergency savings for such things as a $1,000 emergency room visit or a $500 car repair.”

The article also cited a U.S. Federal Reserve survey, which reported that among those who had savings before 2008, 57 percent had used up some or all of the funds during the banker-caused Great Recession and in its aftermath. Moreover, 56 percent of seniors and a whopping 67 percent of millennials — many burdened by huge student loan debt — do not have enough savings to cover unexpected expenses.

With no real recovery for many workers and oppressed people from the 2008 economic crisis, and signs of a downturn brewing, millions of families are vulnerable to a new wave of foreclosures and eviction. Across the country, grassroots organizations are fighting back. As the crisis deepens, the movement which is demanding a moratorium on all foreclosures and evictions is bound to grow and get stronger.

Police killing of child shows brutality of evictions

By Chris Fry

State Constable Clarke Steele shot and killed 12-year-old Ciara Meyer in her home in Penn Township, Pa., on Jan. 11. Steele had come to evict her family from their home because they owed $5,896.85 for three months’ rent. When Steele arrived at the house, Ciara’s father, Donald Meyer, first shot the door and stated: “This is my home. I’m going to lock it up. Rather than back away, the cop pulled his gun out of the holster and fired. The bullet grazed the adult’s arm and struck Ciara, killing her. Ciara was the 21st person and the first child to be killed by police this year, reported the Jan. 12 Guardian.

In typical capitalist “justice,” Meyer — who never fired his weapon — is the one who is charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, “terroristic” threats and reckless endangerment. Steele was not charged.

Note the sharp contrast between this cop’s shooting of a resident trying to stop his family from being thrown onto the streets and the state and federal officials who ordered the armed, wealthy ranchers who are occupying an Oregon wildlife sanctuary on Indigenous peoples’ land.

Human toll of evictions, foreclosures

This fatal incident puts sharp focus on the ongoing housing crisis that so many working-class families have faced in the U.S., particularly since the Great Recession began in 2008. Oppressed communities and poor public schools in the country have been particularly hit hard.

In Detroit, where 40 percent of residents live below the poverty line and where property tax rates are among the country’s highest, 62,000 homeowners face foreclosure, many because they owe back taxes or huge water bills. How are Michigan’s right-wing Legislature and Gov. Rick Snyder “handling” this housing crisis? In September, their new law took effect. It says that “rightful owners” — often banks and investment companies that bought homes at “tax auctions” for as little as $500 — can now lodge criminal rather than civil charges against those who pay the price: “It is said that the ‘offender’ residents trying to stay in their homes can face felony charges.” (Reuters, Jan. 11)

Cheryl West, a Detroit resident, had lived in her Victoria Park home for 60 years when all of her belongings were thrown into two dumpsters in broken windows, black mold growing uncontrolled, rodent pests and infestations, and severe water damage. While the case of the woman without heat for her home was perhaps one of the most egregious cases of a violation of human dignity, all of these issues are chronic and by no means short term.

Many residents said that their issues had gone on for months or even years, with not even an attempt to fix them made by the housing authority. The incredible public response of the community combined with the outrageous conditions found in the housing complexes have led the PPA to begin a campaign demanding justice for public housing residents.

Continuing the work of Dr. King

The year 2016 is an important year in the struggle for housing justice in the U.S., as it marks the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Chicago Freedom Movement by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In 1966, Dr. King traveled to Chicago and, together with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, began a struggle against slums and discrimination. The struggle there was instrumental in forcing the U.S. government to pass the 1968 Fair Housing Act, which ended legal segregation in housing based on race.

While the legal segregation of the mid-20th century has been defeated, national oppression and de facto segregation are still very much a reality throughout the country.

Baltimore is no exception. The slums of Baltimore, which include both private and public housing, make up a majority of the city and are inhabited overwhelmingly by people of color. Low-wage jobs and unemployment are the norm. The schools are underfunded and opportunity is denied to young people are dwindling every year. This situation cannot continue.

Since the first visit to Gilmore Homes, teams of activists have visited many other public housing projects throughout Baltimore on a weekly basis, including McCullough Homes and Latrobe Homes. Activists are recording and compiling evidence of the horrible conditions that exist, while also organizing people in the housing projects to join the struggle.

All of this organization and data will be used to hold a People’s Tribunal in Baltimore in late February that will put the city itself on trial for these inhumane conditions. The tribunal will demand that the firing of Commissioner Paul Graziano, the making of repairs in the public housing projects, as well as making affordable housing a right in Baltimore.

Event honors captured Black freedom fighters

Several hundred people filled New York’s Martin Luther King Jr. Labor Center on Jan. 17 for a ceremony sponsored by the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee, which sponsored the dinner, speaks to these families and with some former political prisoners who were asked to the stage. She honors fallen political prisoners and especially Herman Ferguson, who, with partner Ilyasu Ferguson — pictured sitting with a cane — started these dinners to raise commissary funds and build support for political prisoners. To the right of Ferguson is former political prisoner Lyman Stewart.

Dequi explained, “Our political prisoners are living in a nightmare reality that most people could never imagine. Our political prisoners are the vanguard. ... The task is to inspire more people to be active. Freedom will not happen without demands from us”.

Story and photo by Anne Pruden

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Boston school bus union leaders return to work

By Martha Grevatt

For 26 months beginning October 2013, when they were falsely accused of staging an illegal walkout, four fired leaders of the Boston School Bus Drivers Union waged an uphill battle against the notorious Veolia/Transdev Corp. to get their jobs back. It took the full mobilization of the militant rank and file, combined with a rock-solid support coalition that united long-time labor leaders with veteran African-American community activists Chuck Turner and Mel King, to win their reinstatement on Dec. 23.

United Steelworkers Local 8751 members were the first to return. When President Andre Francois, Vice President Steve Kirschbaum, Financial Secretary Steve Gill and Recording Secretary François Merhi returned to the bus yards Jan. 5 after the winter holiday break.

Francois and Local 8751 Guide Chantal S. Casimir — who works in the Reidsville yard, where Kirschbaum worked before being fired — described their triumphant return and the struggles that have followed. Right now, a big fight is to get the company to pay the millions of dollars it owes the 900-plus drivers in retroactive pay increases, going back to when the old contract expired in 2014. On Jan. 15, the workers rallied to demand their retro pay.

Workers World: How was it, finally going back to work?

François: It was electric. Everybody was shaking your hand and hugging you and saying ‘we’re happy you’re back’.

Each of us went to a particular yard. I went to the one, Charlestown, where I always worked, where the whole yard voted for me except for one person. It was somewhat surreal. The fact that it was a long time coming, you are asking yourself, ‘Is that for real?’ that you are back to start getting a paycheck. You feel relieved with a lot off your shoulders.

WW: We’re looking forward to thanking your supporters that were there with you. You are eager to get back at the job and start doing things. The fight is not over, because you are going to face the boss, who is going to renegotiate before the ink is dry. Today [Jan. 11] we had a bunch of conditions we had to fight.

François: When was it like when Steve Kirschbaum came back to work?

Casimir: Oh my gosh, it was great. Everybody was really excited to see him. When he came to have a meeting with us we couldn’t wait to see him. Everybody was dy-ing to see Steve come back.

It was a great victory, especially for me, because I know they were illegally fired. There were times I had to stay away because it would upset me so bad I couldn’t sleep. It was just in my mind so much knowing they didn’t do anything, but they got fired. And they got fired for who? For me and all the other drivers. When they came up with the final offer with the contract, the only thing everybody was thinking of was: When are the four coming back? Since they came back we have hope. It’s going to take time but everything will fall into place again.

WW: How is it now at work?

François: I feel that there is so much to do. We are in the yards just about every day. I go to all four yards. We have an issue lately, it is the retro check. A lot of people are glad we are back but every time they see us they ask us, “When are we going to get our retro?” The company is doing a job to get the members mad at us.

They [Transdev] want to bring their own agenda that they never sat down with us to discuss — not in negotiations, not any other time. They want to implement things without talking with us. Before [under the previous union administration] these committees were in the contract, but they were not functioning. Now we told them we have a retro review committee, a grievance committee, civil rights, safety — but they don’t want to do any of that stuff. They turn their heads. And they are mad they had to allow these grievance and bring us back.

The accident review committee, we are going to get that going. They go crazy firing people for minor dents. Incidents are being called preventable accidents. That is because we didn’t have the ARC going.

We are going to make sure that they don’t set us up again. They act real nasty and they try to divide us. I had to tell them, “I feel in your mind you haven’t brought us back, but you have to get it in your mind, we are back.” We are equals. We are, all four of us, ready for it.
Poisoned by GM and racism, Flint demands water justice

By Kris Hamel

Detroit

A series of rolling sickouts for several months have exposed the highest-achieving students in a class, with not enough text-understaffed. They often have 50 or more throughout the city and the deplorable sharp focus the crisis facing teachers, staff and students in public schools throughout the city and the deplorable conditions these workers and youth face.

More than a half-billion dollars in debt, DPS has been run for years by a state-appointed emergency manager who has usurped the elected school board in all decision making. Teachers, who have taken sharp cuts, deeply understaffed. They often have 50 or more students in a class, with not enough textbooks and dreadful conditions.

Students and teachers in crowded classrooms huddle in jackets because of inadequate heat in dilapidated buildings with crumbling infrastructure, often containing black mold and other toxins. Functions, classrooms and public restrooms are not uncommon. Bathrooms, with many of their fixtures missing or broken, have no toilet paper. Supplies are short or nonexistent. Even Mayor Mike Duggan saw a dead mouse and "deeply disturbing" conditions when he made a media show out of touring some of the schools on Jan. 12, the day after 64 schools were closed due to teacher sickouts.

Detroit schools lost 84,000 students, or two-thirds of DPS enrollment, between 2005 and 2012. This was largely due to lack of jobs and the mortgage foreclosure crisis, which struck this majority African-American city with fraudulent subprime home loans, coupled with the proliferation of private charter schools and the opening up of suburban districts to rob Detroit of many of its highest-achieving students.

Gov. Rick Snyder, a capitalist and re-actionary, appointed an emergency manager who took the city of Detroit into bankruptcy. The emergency manager, appointed under a law that guarantees the payment of debt service to the banks, took the Detroit Public Schools into unpayable bonds.

No. 1 priority: Pay the banks

Today, the number one item in the DPS budget is loan repayment and debt service to the banks and financial institutions. In February, the debt service is set to skyrocket ("balloon"), with the total debt up 74 percent from last year and with debt payments representing a whoppin' 97 percent of DPS's payroll costs. Debt payments of 10 percent of payroll costs are considered alarming.

Snyder is now under fire for sitting on information and failing to take action while the children and residents of Flint, Mich. — Flint's EM when this crisis began, the current DPS emergency manager! — have been poisoned by lead and other toxic metals in the city's water system.

Snyder's $715 million solution to the DPS crisis? Make up a new system that is debt-free, alongside the current one, to manage the schools where debt is paid down. However, the caveat is that the new system of DPS is a school board dominated by Snyder appointees. Detroit schools will not return to control by an elected board until 2017, and even that will be determined by a board dominated by Snyder appointees. Detroit schools will not return to control by an elected board until 2017, and even that will be determined by a board dominated by Snyder appointees.

In addition, the new school board will have no oversight over the many charter schools which have proliferated in the city or over the Education Achievement Authority, a special district that manages "underperforming schools." The EAA is riddled by corruption and failed to provide students even a minimum education.

Mass actions by teachers, after years of complaints that went nowhere, barely finally brought this crisis to the light of day. Teachers, parents, students and community members, including the elected Detroit School Board in exile, continue to fight the state for control of the Detroit schools and an end to the financial crisis and austerity that have brought suffering to so many.
Global warming shuts down subway tunnels

By G. Dunkel

In New York City, some 300,000 workers use the "L" subway train every workday to travel between Brooklyn and Manhattan.

There are not any viable alternatives to this train for Brooklyn residents.

One of the subway tunnels damaged by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 has been declared unsafe for use by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which has eight more to fix. The Canarsie Tube, which is the tunnel the L runs through, was flooded by seawater during the storm surge that created much damage, even when it was not flooded, the temperature is dire need of repair.

On the anniversary of the storm, the MTA announced that it was raising proposals for repairs of the Canarsie Tube. The MTA laid out three options: Close the tube entirely for three years, close it but continue to use the other tunnel; or do the work on weekends. Any of these options would be an inconvenience for hundreds of thousands of people and involve additional hours spent traveling.

It has not been fully established whether the unprecedented track of Superstorm Sandy — which started its existence as a late-season hurricane and became a deadly storm surge that created much damage, as well as a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions — caused a cost of $36 billion. The MTA, a body of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, pays for $7 billion of its capital improvements through a tax on gasoline and a toll on the Manhattan Bridge. The MTA is a public benefit corporation and operates as a not-for-profit institution.

The MTA has been facing tough times in recent years due to a series of floods and hurricanes that damaged the system. The agency has been working to improve its infrastructure, but the damage caused by Hurricane Sandy highlighted the need for further investments in the system.

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Thousands march vs. war, capitalism

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

Gunmen attacked a four-star hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on Jan. 15, highlighting so-called “Islamic extremist” organizations’ operations in West Africa — and the role of Burkina Faso and other regional states as partners in French and United States “counterterrorism” operations.

The attack took place at the Splendid Hotel, a facility popular with foreign nationals, diplomats and military operatives, as well as tourists who visit West Africa. Nearby Cappuccino Cafe was sprayed with bullets, leaving many casualties.

After a several-hour standoff involving more than 100 hostages, Burkina police and soldiers, led by French and U.S. Special Forces, stormed the hotel and retook the area. Paris and Washington maintain military operatives in this landlocked nation and coordinate a task force ostensibly designed to track down members of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and similar organizations. (BBC, Jan. 18)

Hostages released after the operations said gunmen targeted those who appeared to be of European origin; many were laid wounded after being hit by bullets. One U.S. citizen, six Canadians, French, Dutch and Swiss nationals were among the deceased.

Burkina Faso’s government declared three days of national mourning beginning on Jan. 17 and announced that police and military forces stepped up security measures there in conjunction with neighboring states, including Mali, which has experienced similar incidents.

Easily elected President Roch Marc Christian Kabore stated, “These truly barbaric attacks by terrorism and terrorism alone, against innocent people, claimed by the criminal organization al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), seek to destabilize our country and its republican institutions, and to undermine efforts to build a democratic, quiet and prosperous nation.” (Aljazeera, Jan. 18)

The online agency SITE, which monitors global posts on such actions, reported that AQIM had taken responsibility.

Power struggles add to instability

The impoverished state of Burkina Faso underwent a national uprising in October 2014 that ousted longtime Western-backed dictator Blaise Compaore. After mass demonstrations pushed for Compaore’s removal, another coup occurred illustrating divisions in the military.

In September, an attempted coup by the Regiment of Presidential Security (RSP), headed by Gen. Gilbert Diendere, sought to oust interim President Michel Kafando weeks before the election. Diendere was a former ally of the ousted Compaore, who is now in Ivory Coast. Nevertheless, Roch Marc Christian Kabore was elected as the new head of state on Nov. 29.

In 2015, during the transition and period leading to the national elections, Diendere attempted to take power ostensibly to halt the election and change the character of the constitutional model — decisions regarding the elections and the current government’s composition resulted from negotiations among various political interests, the military and the regional Economic Community of West African States.

Pascaline Compaore, a junior fellow at the Conflict Prevention and Risks Analysis Division, noted in an article posted Jan. 13 on the website of the Institute of Security Studies in Dakar, Senegal, “[Former President] Compaore’s regime depended heavily on the ... Regiment of Presidential Security. Despite the former president’s ousting, the RSP continued to interfere in the political transition process. Some of its members, under the leadership of General Gilbert Diendere, were responsible for the 17 September 2015 coup attempt, which resulted in the disintegration of the corps.”

The report continued, “The coup d’état pointed to a lack of concrete progress in neutralizing the RSP. During the first post-putsch cabinet meeting, it had been decided that the RSP should be disarmed and reintegrated into other army formations. That some of these soldiers could continue to threaten the country’s security and stability remains a cause for concern. The dismantling of the RSP created an important security gap, which must be addressed with urgency given the volatility in the region and the backdrop of instability in the country.”

This Jan. 15 attack is not the first; there have been two other incidents in northern and western Burkina Faso. Mali underwent a similar disturbance in November at a hotel housing foreign diplomats and Western military personnel.

According to the UN, the hotel and café, the Burkinabe Ministry of Defense released an advisory reporting that 20 armed men killed a policeman and a civilian in an attack on the village of Tin Aabo in the country’s northern region. It was not immediately clear who was behind that incident.

In December, the French embassy warned its citizens not to travel to a national park in eastern Burkina Faso amid reports that Malian-based Islamist groups had pledged to disrupt foreign nationals. Al-Mourabitoun, which claimed responsibility for an attack in Mali late last year, said in May that it was holding a Romanian man abducted from northern Burkina Faso.

In other reports, 50 unidentified gunmen carried out an offensive operation near a Burkina Faso security base near the western border with Mali in October; three people were killed. The then-transitional government blamed the incident on disgruntled elements in the RSP who were involved in September’s attempted coup.

Operation Barkhane and ‘war on terrorism’

Burkina Faso and Mali have become centers in the U.S. and French “war on terrorism.” Large deployments of Imperialist and French military troops are also in Niger and Chad. Operation Barkhane, a force based in Chad, was established in 2014 to combat Islamist fighters throughout the Sahel region, is stationed at the Splendid Hotel in Burkina Faso. This French-led unit was created in 2014 as the successor to other military contingents in Mali, known as Operation Serval, and Operation Epervier in Chad.

Burkina consists of a 3,000-person French force permanently headquartered in N’Djamena, Chad’s capital. The operation has representatives from five countries — the former French colonies of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. They are described as the “G5 Sahel.” The current operation’s military units are named after a crescent-shaped dune in the Sahara Desert.

Until recently, Burkina Faso was a major producer of gold and other agricultural commodities exported to Western states. It has emerged as a major center for gold mining, and is now the fourth largest producer of the mineral on the African continent.

Neighboring Niger contains large deposits of uranium, which is mined and controlled by the French-based Areva nuclear energy corporation. The U.S. has$6.5 billion in defense contracts with the government to help contain the once heavily armed Islamic radical groups. The G5 Sahel operation has only 1,000 members, but it is expanding. The U.S. also offers security assistance to the military.

In contrast, there were no foreign soldiers in the 2014 coup attempt. The coup was to neutralize the remnants of the anti-military attitude of the central government.

Despite the efforts of the UN and France, the country’s military is considered one of the most effective in the region. In December, the UN said that the country’s military was capable of conducting operations and coordinating a task force ostensibly designed to track down members of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and similar organizations.

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Public workers under attack

By Carlos Lewis

Argentina’s rightist government, led by newly elected President Mauricio Macri of the Cambiemos political coalition, has terminated the employment of 100,000 federal and state employees in the first seven days of 2016. Macri won the second round of a close election against Daniel Scioli of the center-left faction of the Frente para la Victoria (an electoral front) and the Justicialista Party (a continuation of the Peronist Party) in November.

From May 2003 until last November, former President Nestor Kirchner, who died in 2007, and his widow, President Cristina Fernandez, had set the tone for Argentine politics. While not challenging the capitalist system, they implemented a moderate social democratic program that provided some measure of relief and the working class — compared with the neoliberalism of the 1990s — and maintained Argentina’s economic independence from U.S. imperialist domination.

Cambiemos is a coalition of market-oriented Argentine business elites that openly embraces the doctrines of the early 1980s, and clos- er adherence to U.S. interests. In brief, neoliberalism means using government to shift wealth from the poor and workers to the capital owners and the elites. The shift in Argentina is part of a wave of U.S. instigated attacks on progressive and social democratic governments in Latin America, especially Venezuela and Bolivia, but including Brazil and Argentina.

Immediately after Macri entered office, he fired 10,000 public employees, replaced cabinet of ministers created a new ministerial office termed the “Ministry of Modernization.” This ministry was to replace the 24,000 in public workers. Then, on Jan. 6, some 10,000 of these employees were laid off.

One of the first acts of a neoliberal regime in any country is to implement a “downsizing” of the public sector. This includes cutting any social welfare and/or safety net program which is typical of the capitalist welfare state, but which they find no longer sustainable. This is the modus operandi for capitalism at work. The aim is to fire public workers and a government that follows the dictates of the World Bank, the Inter- American Development Bank and other imperialist mech- anisms.

The Macri campaign’s promises to his capitalist and imperialist promoters are reflected in the first 100 days of the new presi- dent, Gabriela Michetti, who called the fired workers “political activists” and prom- ised to get rid of them. (TeleSur, Jan. 6)

It is common in any capitalist govern- ment where different classes and groups oppose each other to purge the public ap- pointees as well as elected officials of the defeated opposition party.

The ousting of the Macri regime, howev- er, target masses of public worker jobs for the chopping block, and not so much the administrators. Michetti arrogantly re- fers to these workers as being “illegals,” a pasta dish that in colloquial terminolo- gy is used to describe “unproductive pub- lic service workers.”

Public worker unions fight back

Both the Union of Civil Employees of the Nation (UCPEN) and the Associated Federation of State Workers (ATE), representing tens of thousands of public workers, took to the streets and demonstrated as an average TeleSUR reported that ATE leader Hugo Godoy labeled the cutbacks “a grave situ- ation” and stated, “The union is prepar- ing several further steps to secure labor stability for the country’s 3 million public sector workers,” including 600,000 who are marginally employed.

Godoy added, “We are in a state of alert and mobilization and are taking mea- surses everywhere there are layoffs.”

On Jan. 8, ATE declared a national strike against the government and its plan to destroy public jobs and devalue the currency amid future plans to open up the country to more foreign trans- national companies. These actions are consistent with Cambiemos’ plant and conciliatory prostration before monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

Argentina’s La Plata municipality, political leaders of strikers with tear gas and rubber bullets that left several wounded. According to the Jan. 9 newspaper La Nacion, “The workers were presenting a decision by local mayor Julio Garro that cancelled the 4,500 contracts on Dec. 31.”

Both ATE and UCPEN have petitioned for an injunction to suspend Michetti’s actions. What is clear is that the tension within the context of class conflict is growing and is pushing past the setback at the ballot box to a struggle in the streets and workplaces.
To greet the super-rich, now meeting in Davos, Switzerland, anti-poverty analysts from Oxfam—who challenge capitalism’s symptoms without challenging the disease—have issued a new report on wealth inequality.

Back in the Cold War, when every aspect of capitalist culture exuded anti-communism, it was constantly drummed into the U.S. working class that “Karl Marx was wrong: The workers are becoming middle class.” Presidential candidates still talk about the middle class. But the Oxfam report shows this phrase is empty: “In 2015, just 62 individuals had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people—the bottom half of humanity. This figure is down from 388 individuals as recently as 2010.”

That’s quite a concentration of wealth. Indeed, these few super-rich amassed even more riches. An Oxfam illustration shows that while in 2010 they would have needed a giant airliner to travel together, now they can all fit in a bus. Not that any of them would ever travel in a bus, without servants, aides, secretaries and bodyguards.

What is worse, the 3.6 billion people at the bottom got even poorer. And that’s despite the fact that several hundred million Chinese workers rose out of real poverty in that time.

Now let’s examine Oxfam’s report from another angle: “The richest 1 percent now have more wealth than the rest of the world combined.”

This level of wealth concentration arrived a year earlier than Oxfam had predicted. It has brought greater instability and erosion of support for the system of capitalism. It means that even for those with a few possessions, life is precarious. And Oxfam shows that even in the imperialist countries, so-called “middle class” workers are losing out:

“One of the key trends underlying this huge concentration of wealth and incomes is the increasing return to capital versus labor. In almost all rich countries and in most developing countries, the share of national income going to workers has been falling.”

Oxfam emphasizes that low-wage workers, disproportionately women, are suffering the most. In the U.S., there is no doubt workers of color also lose the most.

To summarize: A strong worldwide trend shows this system is concentrating greater wealth in fewer hands while impoverishing billions and grinding down those who sell their labor—leading to growing instability, even in imperialist countries like the United States.

Oxfam’s leaders think the solution is to call for stricter enforcement of tax laws. But they have little hope it will happen, since the super-rich own the government. Oxfam, like a preacher, can rage at greed and corruption, but the fault lies not in “sin,” but in the motivating force of the capitalist system itself. The goal of production is not to raise the living standards of the people, but to increase the profits of those who claim ownership over this vast, socially integrated economic system.

To reverse the growing inequality, to eliminate poverty, to transform the great wealth now being created into the property of the people, we must replace capitalism with socialism. We must build the fighting party with this goal. Solidarity between the working class and the most oppressed is the essential ingredient in winning this struggle. Unity can be built only by putting first the interests of those most pushed down by this vicious system. We must start yesterday.

It is the only way forward.


Chicago BLM occupies police bank

By Rebecka Jackson

Long Beach, Calif.

More than 300 protesters gathered to demand accountability for the murder of Noel Aguilas Jan. 16 in Long Beach, and then marched to the Compton Courthouse, shutting down the Metro Blue Line along the way. Aguilas was brutally killed in May of 2014 by two Los Angeles County Sheriff’s officers who then lied to cover up his death. Aguilas family has recently been able to secure a video of the 2014 incident which clearly shows one sheriff first shoots Aguilas’ partner, and then attempting to execute Aguilas while Aguilas’s hands are behind his back. The officer who witnessed his partner’s death shot him in the back as he lies on the ground, handcuffed. Byphantas are heard off-camera describing the execution.

We watch. A thin, young body flounders on the ground as heavy men bear down on his back relentlessly. The men are wearing their motions heavy and unarticulated. We feel the despair and fear of their victim. We know his panic. One inept officer shoots his corpulent partner. The truth from May of 2014 is now undeniable, trapped in video evidence.

We already know Noel’s fate before the video starts to play. We have heard his story told by his mother, his fiancee, his friends, so we watch knowingly for his execution. We attempt to brace ourselves as we hear digital witness to murder. The shooting officer now focuses his weapon on Noel and pulls the trigger casually; a lubberly murder, a crime that was committed as easily and freely as taking a deep breath. Unsafe if the shot landed, the next officer does the same: He shoots. For these officers, this is standard practice.

Stopping a young man, invading his privacy and body, and then ending his life for us at the bottom of nothing. The system is linked to the dispositions of the ruling class.

We wait. Each time we lose a life to the police a small part of us waits for justice. We wait for a break in the system, we wait to be recognized, we wait for someone to do the right thing. This waiting lasts only moments. Again we see the coverup, the dismissal, the victim blaming. We know justice cannot be served through this system.

We organize. Noel’s fiancee, Mary Her- rera, galvanized by her infant daughter Noe, leads the effort. She has strong support from Long Beach organizers including Michael Brown, co-founder of Black Lives Matter who has been rallying supporters from all over Los Angeles to ”ask for accountability and justice.” Brown explained, “(Noel) was killed by deputies [Jose] Ruiz and [Albert] Murad,” and both officers were cleared of any wrongdoing in February although the case has generated huge concentration of wealth and incomes is the increasing return to capital versus labor. In almost all rich countries and in most developing countries, the share of national income going to workers has been falling.”

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Across the U.S.: Stop killer drones!

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

Multiple protests against death-deal- ing drone warfare took place across the U.S. on Jan. 12, a National Day of Action to Stop Killer Drones. The ac- tions were scheduled to expose the real “State of the Union” as President Barack Obama hyped U.S. greatness in his an- nual speech. Secret U.S. military docu- ments leaked by an anonymous whistle- blower reveal that 90 percent of U.S. drone assassinations kill civilians, including children, rather than the alleged targets. (The Intercept, Oct. 15)

Mohammed Tuaiman, a 13-year-old Yemeni boy killed by a 2015 CIA drone strike, said of the drone “death machines” in a Guardian interview before his death: “A lot of the kids in this area wake up sleeping from nightmares and then some now have mental problems. They turn off the area with hell and continuous horror, day and night, we even dream of them in our sleep.” Earlier still, Charles Tuaiman, Mohammed’s father and brother. (Guardian, Feb. 10)

On the Day of Action, resisters were ar- rested at Creech Air Force Base in Neva- da, Beale AFB in California and in Wash- ington, D.C. Later solidarity actions are planned at CIA headquarters in Virginia
By Berta Joubert-Ceci

The year 2016 has just begun, and it already appears that it fits the classic definitions for Puerto Rico. The huge public debt of $73 billion and its default remain the problem which the corporate news media has neglected. Even though Puerto Rico’s colonial government has cut essential services trying to pay that debt and has put the majority of Puerto Rican families into misery, the main center of attention and action in Puerto Rico is really elsewhere: in its political entities.

For many years there has been discussion of this status and even referendums on it. Because these referendums were structured within a colonial state and imposed to a certain extent by the U.S. metropolitan, they have actually been unlawful and meaningless. The current discussion, however, which is a result of the enormous crisis at all levels affecting the country, have legitimacy because only a sovereign Puerto Rico’s status can the people find the path to a real solution to this deep crisis.

After more than 117 years of a colonial process, we are seeing how we think and reason, even a patently obvious truth can be disguised and presented as its opposite. This has been the case in Puerto Rico. The classroom, radio, television and all spheres of social life have served as platforms used by the empire to hide the obvious reality that Puerto Rico is a colony. They instead disguise this colony as a country with autonomy and sovereignty.

This truth was precisely what Lollita Lebrón, Irving Flores, Andrés Figueroa Cordero and Rafael Cancel Miranda tried to expose to the world when they spoke in the U.S. Congress on that March 1, 1954.

To hide from the international community its terrible role as the oppressor of a people — a truth which if exposed could retard the progress of its Cold War against the Soviet Union — the U.S. for decades pushed a false image of “Puerto Rico: a commonwealth through a constitutional relationship.” This relationship was granted to Puerto Rico that granted limited rights under a ridiculous euphemism — “Commonwealth” or “Free Associated State,” a concept in itself contradictory. As of 1953, the imperialists no longer accounted for their colony at meetings of the United Nations, since they presented Puerto Rico as a “nearly” sovereign country that had its own Puerto Rican governor elected by the people, not a Yankee nominated by Washington. The colony had been “perfumed,” and the U.S. could continue to exploit all the wealth it needed without any international objections.

A defining moment

That farce ended a few days ago when U.S. Attorney General Donald Verrill Jr. clearly stated that the Commonwealth has no sovereignty. It is interesting that these statements were made during a hearing where the attorney general appeared as a “friend of the court” before the United States Supreme Court in a case that has nothing to do with Puerto Rico’s economic crisis. This itself illustrates the urgency of the status issue.

The case, known as Puerto Rico v. Sanchez Vallez, is one involving double jeopardy. The subject was tried in U.S. courts for illegal possession and sales of weapons, and he now asserts that he cannot be prosecuted for the same offense in local Puerto Rican courts. The Puerto Rico Department of Justice, however, says it does not have the financial charge people for the same crime because Puerto Rico has its own sovereignty. It has submitted to the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Gov. Alejandro Garcia Padilla of the Popular Democratic Party, which is a proponent and advocate of the colonial Commonwealth, immediately responded to Verrill with feigned indignation common to corrupt traitors of their own people. Were this not so tragic, it would be rich material for a comedy. Noting that the U.S. “changed its opinion,” the governor wrote that “the laws and the Constitution of the Commonwealth emanate from the power of the people of Puerto Rico in the exercise of their inherent right to organize themselves politically in their own government. The United States had also acknowledged this for decades before the international community.”

The Obama administration, however, through its Deputy Attorney General Nicole Saharsky, took a clear position at the Jan. 13 Supreme Court hearing when she said: “[F]irst and foremost, let’s face the fact, the current arrangement it has with Puerto Rico. That’s because Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory. The territories belong to the United States and are managed directly by the U.S. government under U.S. sovereignty. And second, it is Congress that makes the rules.”

Decision on the case is expected in the coming months.

This has great relevance now because as a result of a series of hearings in Congress on the crisis in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican government’s request for access to a bankruptcy law for debt restructuring, there is a congressional proposal to impose a so-called independent Federal Financial Control Board for financial oversight in Puerto Rico. This really would function as a junta to ensure payment to bondholders on Wall Street — because it could act outside the island’s legal and governmental framework. A true colonial junta!

Response of the movement in PR

This situation is helping to increase unity within the independence movement. One example could be seen at the Puerto Rican Independence Party Assembly last month, where the PIP’s candidate for governor, Maria de Lourdes Santiago, currently a senator representing the same party, was announced. At that meeting, various parties, organizations and personalities on the left and in the liberation movement who are not affiliated with the PIP met, and declared that they were growing closer and might create the consensus so necessary at this time for the struggle for independence.

Many individuals connected to the independence struggle have stated and demonstrated that this is the crucial year for sovereignty and independence.

Indeed, never before have there been such perfect opportunities for facilitating broad and open discussion with the people about independence. It is imperative that a campaign of popular education be held on the need for self-determination and liberation from the imperialist yoke, which demonstrates that only independence, not statehood, is the only status that can guarantee a future of social and economic justice for the people. The debt crisis has been the great school that is helping to remove the colonial cloud covering imposed by the empire.

Oscar López Rivera, the political prisoner who has spent 34 years in Yankee prisons for fighting for independence, is playing a very important role. Recently he wrote from prison a message to the people that his daughter, Clarisa López, read at the celebration of his birthday on Jan. 6. (See article below) In it, he urged the whole nation to unite to reject the payment of the debt and boycott it, calling also for unity and cooperation of the independence movement in a joint struggle. (See workers.org for full text of letter)

Joubert-Ceci is a member of the recently formed U.S.-Camden Board of Zoning Committee, which is composed of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora who are joining forces in the fight for the independence of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico

Refuse to pay debt

From a letter by Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar López Rivera (see workers.org for full text):

“My first suggestion is that we all Puerto Ricans get organized and take just one position: Refuse the debt payment and start a debt boycott. To begin with, we can start chanting: ‘That’s a debt I will not pay, that’s a debt I will not pay!’” (Esa deuda no la pago yo, que la pague el que la incurrió)

“We are poor, but we are hard workers and have every right to say no to the imperious demands that we pay the debt. Every Puerto Rican who cares about the future of Puerto Rico and wants a better and fairer world must say NO to the payment of the debt. And every Puerto Rican who aspires to political freedom must do everything he or she can possibly do to create unity among them in the struggle for independence.”

Protestors then went on to Beale AFB, where five activists blocked commuting traffic and were arrested. (Nike Resister, Jan. 19)
Enfrentamiento en Oregón y el papel del Estado

Por Sara Flounders

Derechistas fuertemente armados han ocupado el Refugio Malheur en Oregón desde el 2 de enero, declarando que está bajo control militar el Refugio Malheur, en el estado de Oregon. Algunos medios de comunicación corporativos han descrito a estos extremistas racistas como “milicia típica”, “luchadores de libertad”, “miembros de un levantamiento populista” e incluso como “manifestantes pacíficos”. Fox News, CNN y algunos programas radiales mantuvieron mentiras falsas hacia estas fuerzas y defendieron la demanda por el control irrecusable de tierras públicas.

Hasta ahora, las autoridades locales y federales han tenido límites y no han impuesto la ley marcial o llamado a la Guardia Nacional para poner fin a la ocupación armada.

La inacción en aplicar la ley en Oregón contrasta marcadamente con la respuesta policial en la ciudad de Baltimore, donde el ejército federal y la Guardia Nacional fueron finalmente reconocidos como una fuerza pacífica que fue “disuasiva, pero no suficiente”..

En esta era de privatización, no es extraño que haya descendencia de los continuos intentos de los pastores blancos que habían declarado guerra al gobierno federal para mantener su control sobre las tierras, los ganados y las especies subvencionadas de cientos de miles de acres de tierras federales, otro regalo del estado para multimillonarios. Muchos mega pastores ven al movimiento reaccionario de Bundys como un conveniente artilugio para poder obtener un mayor control de tierras públicas.

La influencia política de los grandes inversionistas puede explicar la cobertura favorable de la milicia Bundy en los medios. Saben que estas fuerzas no dejarían pasar su riqueza. Los Bundys y su calaña están tratando de construir sus propias fortunas a través del robo de tierra, racismo y violencia.

En 1922, el Ku Klux Klan tenía 14.000 miembros en el estado, pero solo 9.000 habían vivido, trabajado o tenido propiedades allí. En 1919, una ley federal de segregación residencial permitía que estas fuerzas no se enfrentaran a sus rígidas leyes racistas.