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Polluters must pay for Flint crisis

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GET THE LEAD OUT!

By Kris Hamel
Detroit

More horrors are being exposed daily by the corporate-owned news media regarding the criminal water poisoning of Flint, Mich., residents. Up until now the media have gone along with Republican Gov. Rick Snyder's racist, reactionary program.

The New York Times, an important voice of the liberal bourgeoisie, especially in an election year, published two editorials on Flint. The first on Jan. 22 was headlined "Depraved Indifference Toward Flint," followed by the command on Jan. 24: "Fix Flint's Water System, Now."

The Times editorial board chose their words carefully. "Depraved indifference" is not just extreme indifference to human suffering or a psychopathic lack of empathy. It is also a legal term which — if allowed to be applied to Snyder and his lackeys — would remove from government immunity possible criminal charges of gross negligence and manslaughter.

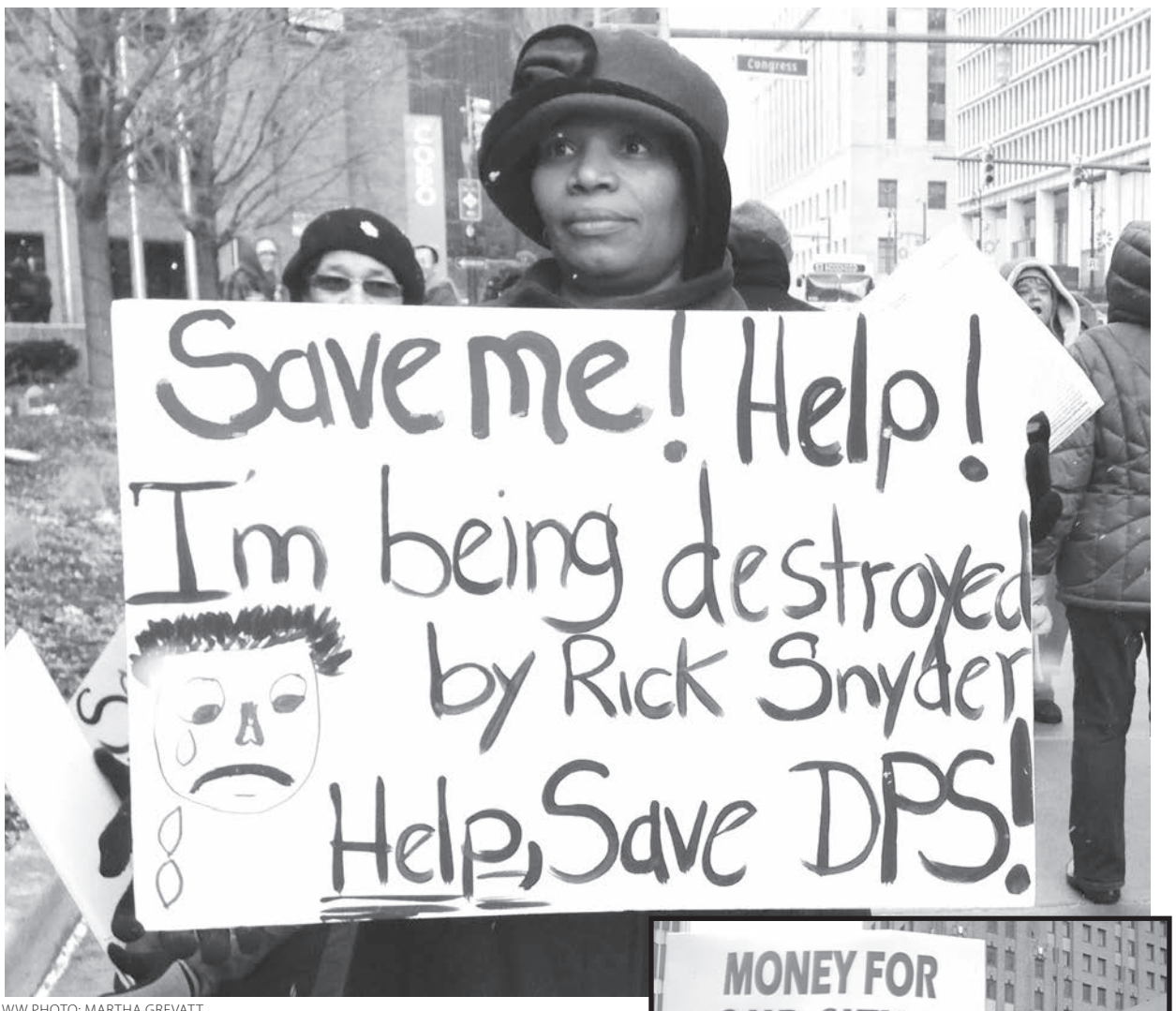
Many people in and outside of Flint are calling for Snyder's resignation and arrest. The Democratic Party and liberal media, such as MSNBC's Rachel Maddow, have put the sole blame for this mass health and humanitarian crisis on Snyder and his administration. They knew about the lead for over two years, yet ignored Flint residents' pleas concerning their water.

Of course, all people and organizations of good conscience rightly should condemn every act by all those involved in the state's racist, anti-poor inaction and indifference toward the majority-Black city of Flint.

Every single person responsible should be held criminally accountable. Every demand made by Flint residents should be met. The criminal banks and General Motors must pay reparations to the community for the life-altering health and other damages that families and individuals are facing.

The impoverished African-American community bears the brunt of Flint's water genocide. So do the Latino/a and other oppressed communities, along with poor whites. Thousands of children, many facing permanent brain damage, and their families face a lifetime medical and social crisis.

The lead poisoning of the city's water and its people is being condemned worldwide as a crime against humanity. "Flint" has become synonymous with what a capitalist government will allow that irreparably harms its own people. But why?



WW PHOTO: MARTHA GREVATT

How could this happen?

Because of the moral turpitude of racist, reactionary Republicans? Because they are evil politicians who care nothing for the people they serve? That is probably very true, but that is not what caused the Fint water crisis.

Under alternating Republican and Democratic governors, cities in Michigan have been in economic decline for almost 40 years. Since the auto industry's restructuring, which began in 1979 with Chrysler, and then GM's massive downsizing in the 1980s, Michigan lost hundreds of thousands of auto jobs.

Flint, the former center of GM production and birthplace of the United Auto Workers union, was hit hard. GM shut most of its Flint plants from 1986 to 1988 and destroyed the city's economic base. Workers World Party members organized a campaign then, demanding that Democratic Gov. James Blanchard declare both a state of emergency and a moratorium on plant closings. We organized a large rally at Harris Auditorium and a national conference on plant closings at the UAW home local of the Flint sit-down strikes.

Activists invaded the National Governors Association meet-

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Detroit, March 2005

WW PHOTO: CHERYL LABASH

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Planned Parenthood vindicated

Makers of fraudulent videos indicted

By Sue Davis

In a dramatic turnaround, two of the right-wingers who created a fraudulent series of videos designed to discredit and ultimately destroy Planned Parenthood, the largest nonprofit health care provider for poor and working women in the U.S., were indicted on Jan. 25.

The charges grew out of a two-month investigation of Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast by a Houston grand jury to determine if Planned Parenthood had engaged in the illegal sale of fetal tissue for profit. That is what the deceptively edited videos created by the so-called Center for Medical Progress attempted to show when they were released last July.

Once it became obvious to the grand jury that Planned Parenthood was blameless, the evidence revealed that the right-wing group CMP had engaged in many illegal practices — including falsely presenting CMP as a biological research group, registered with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 nonprofit charity in order to receive unlimited, anonymous donations. Rather, it is a front group for an anti-abortion sting operation.

Two CMP videographers, David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt, were charged with second-degree felonies, which carry a 20-year sentence in Texas, for tampering with government records — creating phony driver's licenses in order to gain access to Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast and interview providers there. Daleiden was also charged with trying to procure human fetal tissue for pay.

An article posted on Oliver Willis' blog, "Who's Behind the Center for Medical Progress?" reveals the nefarious web of anti-abortion, Christian zealots and domestic terrorists behind the misnamed "Center for Medical Progress." (oliverwillis.com, July 30, 2015)

David Daleiden honed his skills creating fraudulent videos as "director of research" for the virulent anti-abortion Live Action group, founded by Lily Rose in 2004. The group produced a series of anti-choice videos from 2010-13 that accused abortion clinic providers and workers of illegal and unethical practices. The videos and the organization have since been widely discredited. Willis conjectures that it's "actually possible" that CMP is a cover for Live Action.

Operation Rescue, one of the most vocal, reactionary anti-choice groups with ties to white-supremacist, racist, right-wing groups, worked "in consultation" with CMP on the videos. Troy Newman, OR president and board member of CMP — who "retired" after the indictments — defended Paul Hill, who was convicted of murder in the 2003 killing of Dr. John Britton and James Barnett outside a Pensacola, Fla., abortion clinic. OR said such murders are "justifiable" to protect the unborn. Newman advocates and practices terrorism in many forms, including stalking, harassing and intimidating clinic workers, patients and escorts.

Cheryl Sullenger, OR senior policy advisor, served time for attempting to bomb a clinic in San Diego and aided Scott Roeder, who killed abortion provider Dr. George Tiller in his church in Wichita, Kan., in 2009.

The most alarming aspect of the fraudulent videos is that many right-wing legislators in Congress and various states, as well as reactionary presidential candidates, lauded the videos and promoted a national campaign to defund Planned Parenthood. That would endanger basic health care delivery for millions of poor and working women, disproportionately women of color, immigrants, homeless women, young women, victims of domestic violence and terrorism, women living in rural areas, and women with disabilities.

Planned Parenthood was also subjected to terrorism, including several instances of arson and three murders at a clinic in Colorado Springs, Colo.; a series of insulting Congressional hearings; and investigations in a dozen states, which produced no charges.

On Jan. 15, Planned Parenthood filed a lawsuit in San Francisco federal district court against the CMP, alleging that the group, by setting up a fake tissue procurement company and using fake identities to set up private meetings, engaged in wire and mail fraud violation, unlawfully invaded Planned Parenthood's privacy, and engaged in illegal secret recording and trespassing.

While legal, safe abortion has been the law of the land for the past 43 years, all women's right to exert control over their own bodies is far from guaranteed. This spring the Supreme Court is hearing the first case about abortion rights in 25 years. The struggle for reproductive justice continues.

Kathy Durkin contributed to this article.

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MUNDO OBRERO WORKERS WORLD

Who we are & what we're fighting for

Hate capitalism? Workers World Party fights for a socialist society — where the wealth is socially owned and production is planned to satisfy human need. This outmoded capitalist system is dragging down workers' living standards while throwing millions out of their jobs. If you're young, you know they're stealing your future. And capitalism is threatening the entire planet with its unplanned, profit-driven stranglehold over the means of production.

Workers built it all — it belongs to society, not to a handful of billionaires! But we need a revolution to make that change. That's why for 57 years WWP has been building a revolutionary party of the working class inside the belly of the beast.

We fight every kind of oppression. Racism, sexism, degrading people because of their nationality, sexual or gender identity or disabilities — all are tools the ruling class uses to keep us apart. They ruthlessly super-exploit some in order to better exploit us all. WWP builds unity among all workers while supporting the right of self-determination. Fighting oppression is a working-class issue, which is confirmed by the many labor struggles led today by people of color, immigrants and women.

WWP has a long history of militant opposition to imperialist wars. The billionaire rulers are bent on turning back the clock to the bad old days before socialist revolutions and national liberation struggles liberated territory from their grip. We've been in the streets to oppose every one of imperialism's wars and aggressions. ☐

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Labor at the crossroads?

By Carl Lewis

On Sept. 19, 1981, the AFL-CIO, under pressure from the rank and file as well as union locals throughout the country, organized a Solidarity Day march in Washington, D.C., that drew over half a million people. It was the first national demonstration by organized labor in decades, and perhaps the only one since.

The events leading up to this march were both historic and important. The event that led up to the march was the strike, beginning Aug. 3 of that year, of 15,000 air traffic controllers, members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization, who walked out and struck against their employer, the Federal Aviation Administration.

Higher wages were not the central issue in the PATCO strike. The main issues were understaffing, which also impacted on the safety of commercial airline travelers, forced overtime and stress-related illnesses, both physical and emotional, that had forced many controllers into either early retirement or long absences from work.

The response of the Ronald Reagan administration was swift and brutal. Reagan warned the workers that if they did not return to work within two days, he would invoke the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act and terminate all the workers. There were to be no negotiations to end the strike, but only total surrender to all the demands of the government. The strikers rejected this extortion, and 12,000 workers stood fast and remained on the picket line. Many participated in mass civil disobedience, which led to dozens of arrests and imprisonment.

AFL-CIO failed to act

Sadly, despite the outpouring of working-class support for the strike action to defy the ruling class, reflected in the Solidarity march a month later, the AFL-CIO leadership became both hesitant and frightened. It put a brake on calls for a general strike, as well as any further broader mobilizations of direct action called by other unions.

In point of fact, the AFL-CIO told other unions representing the airline industry to return to work and ignore PATCO picket lines. The results, clearly seen within a year, were disastrous and foreboding. Isolated by the lack of a proactive stance by the AFL-CIO, PATCO was outlawed by the courts and the Reagan administration. Active members were blacklisted and marked against further employment that had anything to do with the profession of air traffic control.

This also gave the green light for the ruling class to open up a barrage of attacks against the labor movement. Interestingly, the mouthpiece for the capitalist class, the Wall Street Journal, stated just as much in an Aug. 6, 1981, editorial, saying Reagan should break the strike "for all sorts of far-reaching reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with relations between the Federal Aviation Administration and PATCO." It added that "more important are the commitments to rebuild military strength, to restore the dollar to soundness, to cut taxes [on the wealthy, of course!] and regulations, to resist Soviet imperialism [sic], and to curb the wild ascent of federal spending."

So there you have it. The die was cast and the script was written for defeats in other labor struggles throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Notable were Hormel Meat Packing, where the United Food and Commercial Workers refused to support Local P-9 in its struggle against a 23 percent wage cut; the defeat of Phelps Dodge copper miners in Arizona, where after a three-year struggle the corporate giant carried out the largest decertification in U.S. labor history, decertifying 35 locals in 13 different unions, an act that was declared legal by the National Labor Relations Board; and the defeat of the Greyhound bus drivers, represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union, when 12,000 workers walked off the job, as well as many other labor struggles where the ruling class was emboldened by the defeat of PATCO.

Boston bus drivers and social unionism

The systemic root causes of the crisis in labor result from a number of factors, chief among them total reliance and dependence on the Democratic Party. This is the model of "business unionism," as opposed to social unionism, which takes a holistic approach to what unions should look like, i.e., mobilizing the constituent base, nonconcessionary bargaining, the fight against globalization of capital, international solidarity with other workers, especially in developing countries, and an anti-capitalist framework for struggle.

The AFL-CIO has a blind spot when it comes to the Democratic Party and its bipartisan unity with the Republican Party and the ruling class on deregulation of the economy, cutbacks in social services and the privatization of jobs in the public sector, as well as the increasing ability of capitalism to outsource industrial as well as high-tech jobs. Most important are both parties' alliance with the ruling class on wars and imperialism and their promoting the idea that the working class has a common interest with its employer.

An exemplary model of social unionism, on the other hand, can be seen in the recent victory of the school bus drivers in Boston. In 2013, Veolia Transportation, now known as Transdev, contracted with the city of Boston to run the school buses. It soon started violating central provisions of the union contract of Local 8751 of the United Steelworkers of America. The modus operandi of the company was to break the union.

When the union leadership was falsely accused of instigating a wildcat strike, Transdev fired four officers of the local. However, if Transdev had done its research it would have found that Local 8751 was not your typical union. The union won its first contract in 1978 and has fought against the attempt to resegregate the schools. It has also built a rock-solid relationship with the parents of the children, as well as community groups. Some 98 percent of the local's 900 members are people of color: Haitian, African-American, Latino/a and Cape Verdean.

The local has been involved with the anti-war movement, the struggle against racism and support for Palestine, as well as demonstrating for LGBTQ rights. This past Dec. 23, members not only ratified a four-year contract, with back pay, but also won back the four fired union officers, who had faced red-baiting because some are members and leaders of Workers World Party.

This is not only a victory of the school bus drivers and their union but a victory and a model for all unions and the working class in general. Progressives and the left need to start from the bottom up in supporting and mobilizing unions, and using class struggle unionism as a model. □

Walmart strikers win at NLRB

By Chris Fry

Years of workers' struggle against Walmart's bosses led Jan. 21 to a National Labor Relations Board ruling that Walmart must offer to reinstate 16 fired workers who joined the "Ride for Respect" set of strikes in 2013. Those strikes culminated in a large protest at the company headquarters in Arkansas organized by the union-supported group, "OUR Walmart."

The judge also ruled that Walmart must pay the workers all their back wages, and that the company must hold meetings in 24 of its stores "to inform workers of their rights to organize under U.S. labor law." (reuters.com, Jan. 22)

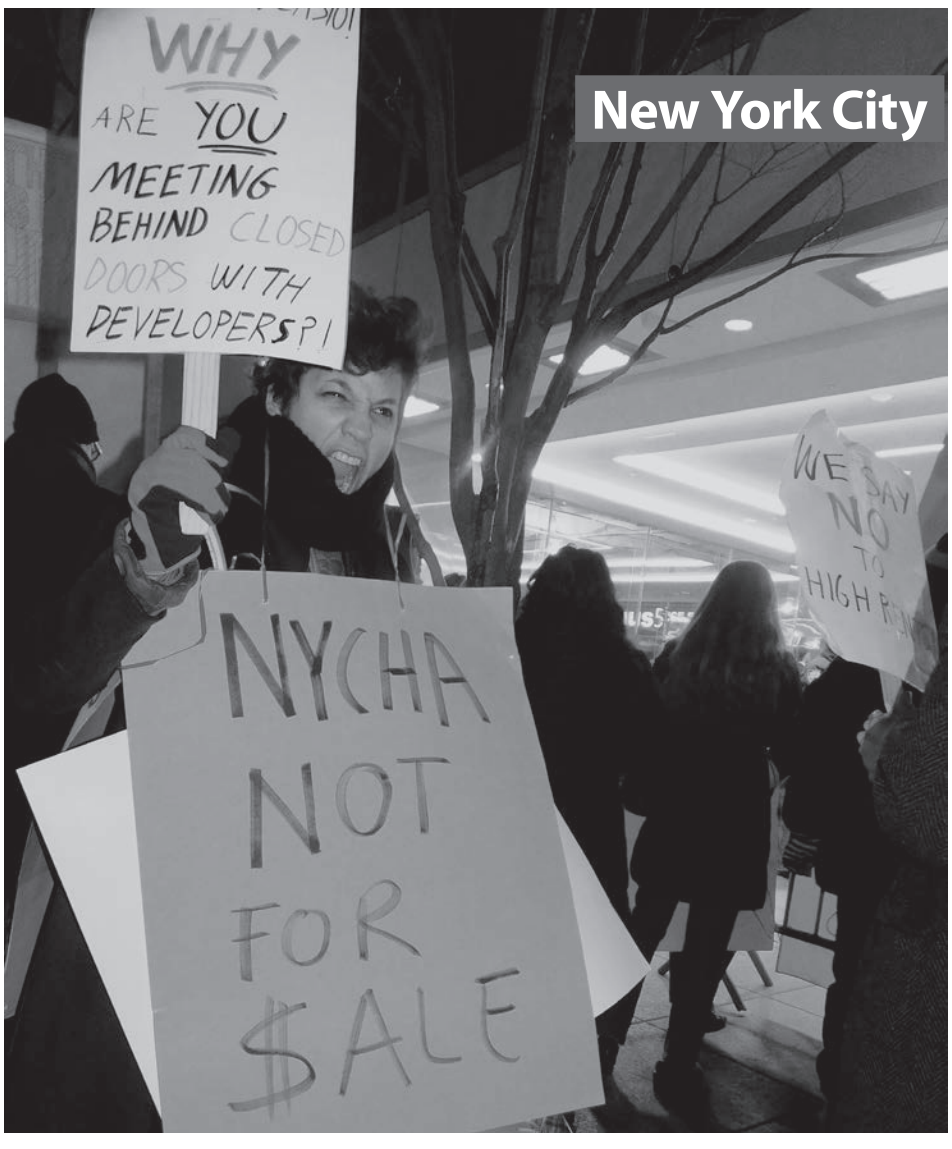
Of course, corporate executives for Walmart, owned by the Walton family with a net worth of $144.7 billion, plan to appeal this ruling. All workers should be aware that the NLRB has far too often reversed its own rulings that aid workers. It was the struggle of the brave Walmart workers and indeed all the low-pay workers fighting for $15 an hour that set up this victory and will be essential to sustain it.

Jess Levin, spokesperson for the pro-union group, "Making Change at Walmart" (MCAW), declared: "Not only is this a huge victory for those workers and Walmart workers everywhere who continue to stand up for better working conditions, but it sends a message to Walmart that its workers cannot be silenced." (makingchangeatwalmart.com, Jan. 21)

Lawyers from the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, which has been supporting Walmart workers in their campaign for better pay, better working conditions and a union, are representing these workers.

Walmart is infamous for its low pay and bad working conditions. Many of its workers must supplement their pay with food stamps. One Walmart store went so far as to organize a canned food drive, asking Walmart customers to donate food to its store workers, rather than pay them enough for them to be able to buy food themselves. □

Tenants' rally confronts realtors



A large multinational protest chanted while mostly white men — "suits" — entered the New York Hilton Jan. 21 for a realtors' event. The Real Estate Board of New York's 120th annual banquet began with a $1,100-a-plate dinner and featured New York Mayor Bill de Blasio as guest speaker.

A statement distributed by the Citywide Alliance Against Displacement tells of whole communities being evicted and destroyed, small businesses losing their livelihood and working-class families losing grocery stores: "We denounce the underhanded deals between developers and NYC elected officials who receive large campaign contributions from them. We reject Mayor de Blasio's zoning plan for NYC that promotes luxury development, ... displacing more people of color and working families, and eliminating more affordable units than it claims to create. We call on all New Yorkers to join in a grass-roots alliance to stop Mayor de Blasio's developer-led zoning plans."

The protest demands called for protection against displacement. Unity was strong and expressed in three languages. For more information on follow-up plans, visit NYnotforsale@gmail.com.

— Photo and report by Anne Pruden

Supreme Court case threatens unions

By Jeremy Baumann

A current Supreme Court case will determine whether or not unions can continue to collect fair share fees — the dues nonmembers pay in exchange for collective bargaining benefits.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments regarding Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association on Jan. 11. A ruling is expected no later than June 30, the end of the court's current term.

The case started when Rebecca Friedrichs, an anti-union kindergarten teacher from Orange County, Calif., and nine other teachers filed a suit against the CTA, an affiliate of the National Education Association, on April 29, 2013. The plaintiffs are represented by the viciously right-wing Center for Individual Rights and the bigoted Christian Educators Association International.

CEAI's sole purpose is to raid members from the two national teachers' unions — NEA and the American Federation of Teachers — with the goal of breaking them. Propaganda used by CEAI against NEA and AFT has little to do with the unions' positions toward public education, but instead attack them for being pro-choice and supportive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and queer teachers and students. (Trans* is used with an asterisk to indicate the spectrum of all the different genders of people who do not conform to the either/or of male/female or masculine/feminine.)

If the court rules on the side of Friedrichs, it would overturn its 1977 decision in Abood v. Detroit Board of Education, which permits unions in states that allow public sector collective bargaining to receive fees from nonunion members that are equivalent to members' dues, since all workers in a fair share shop receive contractual benefits through union representation. Union dues are used to generate resources, communication and representative services.

On the date of the hearing, people rallied outside the Supreme Court on both sides of the class picket line. "This is a people's court," stated CTA member and supporter Maya Walker. "I worry that with the wrong decision in Friedrichs, I will not be able to advocate for my students." (neatoday.org, Jan. 12)

National wave to bust our unions

In 2011, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and reactionary legislators started rolling back union rights by passing Act 10, which cut collective bargaining rights for public sector workers, as of June of that year. Walker signed a so-called right-to-work (for-less) bill, which prevents unions from requiring all workers to pay dues, in March 2015.

Since then unions in Wisconsin, particularly in the public sector, have lost more than 50 percent of their membership. As anyone who has ever been in a union knows, a loss of numbers weakens union power. The undermining of public sector unions has been especially damaging to the most oppressed workers: women of color.

Currently, there are 21 fair share fee states and 25 so-called right-to-work states. Since 2011 in Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana have also adopted right-to-work. Attempts have been made to turn Ohio into a right-to-work state, and they are now being made in West Virginia, where workers of all occupations are already among the lowest paid in the U.S.

In West Virginia, private sector unions such as the Steelworkers and Mine Workers would be the hardest hit, since state and education employees already work under right-to-work conditions. A bill that was introduced last year and could possibly be reintroduced this year would eliminate payroll deductions; if passed, all members would be dropped from union rolls.

A major lobbyist outfit behind many of the right-to-work laws and all other anti-union legislation is the American Legislative Exchange Council. It was founded in 1973 by pro-segregationist, Illinois state House staffer Mark Rhoads and Paul Weyrich, a co-creator of the far-right Heritage Foundation. Their initial intention was to eliminate environmental protection, workplace safety and minimum wage laws. Rhoads and Weyrich were proponents of apartheid South Africa and the former racist, settler-ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), prior to the country's 1980 liberation by the Zimbabwe African National Union. ALEC's roots are an example of how right-to-work legislation is directly tied to Jim Crow oppression.

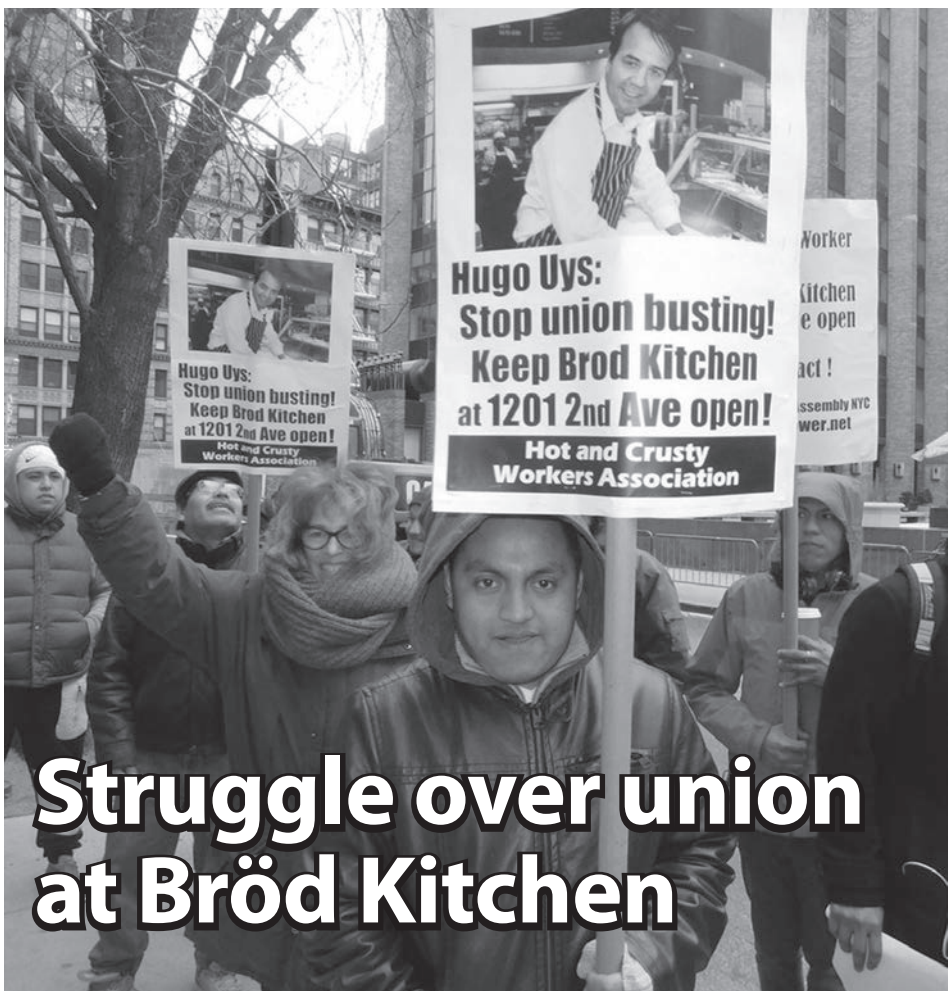
As pointed out in a Jan. 21 WW article, "What are needed are People's Assemblies to organize and educate workers on how to win wage increases and safety measures and to raise their consciousness." (tinyurl.com/wwWVaWorkers)

The AFL-CIO should mobilize a national march or several marches — along labor-community lines — well before the June 30 deadline. There should also be militant occupations to shut down Washington, D.C., as a way to put pressure on the Supreme Court justices.

Conscious workers need to do all we can to educate and agitate against this union-busting climate. We also need to explain to union members how their struggle is tied to the fight against national oppression and racist police killings and discuss the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement.

We can take inspiration from the victorious Boston school bus drivers of Steelworkers Local 8751, who just won a 26-month battle against the rotten Veolia/Transdev Corp., or from the courageous members of the Detroit Federation of Teachers and their current fight for safe schools.

Smash "right-to-work"! No to racist Jim Crow! □



WW PHOTO: ANNE PRUDEN

Struggle over union at Bröd Kitchen

By G. Dunkel
New York

The owners of Bröd Kitchen on Manhattan's trendy Upper East Side suddenly announced on Jan. 14 that they would permanently shut down the unionized bakery/restaurant the following day. This threat to throw 19 workers out of their jobs was a clear attempt at union-busting. The company made the announcement just as it was supposed to begin negotiations for the union's second contract. The union represents primarily immigrant and African-American workers, some of whom had left other jobs to work at Bröd.

Bröd is the new name of the Hot and Crusty bakery. In 2012 workers there waged a historic unionization campaign, led by the Laundry Workers Center and shown in the award-winning documentary "The Hand That Feeds." They fought hard for a better life for themselves and all workers, forming their own union, the Hot and Crusty Workers Association, which won paid vacations, de facto seniority, a union hiring hall and other crucial rights.

By trying to wipe that out, Bröd's owners are pushing forward a climate in which every right won by working people is under attack.

Against this attempted union-busting, a strong coalition of trade union and student militants as well as immigrant activists rallied outside Bröd's new West 4th Street store on Jan. 28. Between 200 and 300 people were at the protest.

Their main slogan was "Stop union-busting at Bröd Kitchen."

The rally was endorsed by New York City's Central Labor Council. Student groups from both New York University, which is close to the new Bröd, and Hunter, close to the old Bröd, were strongly present.

Unions that came included Bricklayers, UNITE-HERE Local 100, United Food and Commercial Workers, Domestic Workers United, postal workers, NY Taxi Workers Alliance, Brandworkers International, TWU Local 100 and the Professional Staff Congress, as well as a class from Union Semester, DC37 Local 768.

Activist groups at the rally included the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Families for Freedom, Street Vendor Project, People's Power Assembly, Crown Heights Tenant Union, 99 Pickets and Justice First. □

Iowa joins historic struggle for $15

By Mike Kuhlenbeck
Des Moines, Iowa

Iowa joined the Fight for $15 when the first fast food strike in state history erupted on Jan. 28, the day of the Republican presidential debate in Des Moines.

Employees from across Iowa, a so-called "right-to-work" state, walked off their jobs that day to demand living wages and the right to a union. McDonald's workers struck at a store on the northeast side of the city at 6 a.m. and at another on East University Avenue at noon, followed by a march and protest downtown. They were the first such actions in Iowa.

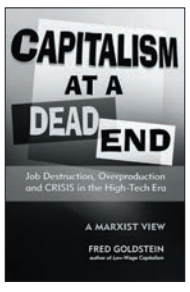
From across the Midwest, hundreds of workers in fast food, child care, home care and other trades started assembling at Cowles Commons in downtown Des Moines at 5 p.m. Some carried signs and banners proclaiming "STRIKE: Raise pay, live better," "Fight for all workers" and "Come get our votes: #FightFor15." They chanted, "The people united will never be defeated!" and told all candidates, regardless of political party, they will not receive workers' support if they don't support the fight for $15.

The demonstration was organized by the Service Employees International Union and Iowa: Fight for $15, a project of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement. United Auto Workers unionists were also there.

Drivers in passing cars honked their horns to express solidarity with the marchers, who braced themselves against the wind as they reached the Veterans Memorial Auditorium at the Events Center at dusk. They chanted, "We work! We sweat! Put $15 on our checks!"

Speeches in front of the auditorium were in both Spanish and English. Terrance Wise of Kansas City spoke about how workers in the restaurant sector work long hours and still cannot afford basic needs, and noted, "We're making history." □

Capitalism at a Dead End
Job destruction, overproduction and crisis in the high-tech era



For more information on these books and other writings by the author, Fred Goldstein, go to **LowWageCapitalism.com**
Available at online major booksellers

Flint water crisis grows

State, GM give no assistance

By Martha Grevatt
Detroit

As its two-year anniversary approaches, the Flint Water Scandal keeps growing. In April 2014 Flint dropped the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department as its primary water supplier and started drawing water from the Flint River, a decision made months earlier. The excuse for the switch — that this was cheaper than renewing Flint's contract with DWSD — has come under fire. DWSD recently released communications from 2013 telling Flint it would actually be cheaper to stay with DWSD!

Last October, Flint finally hooked back up with DWSD, but this has brought no relief to children or parents. Every picture speaks volumes. A mother is shown bathing an infant in scarce bottled water to keep him from getting a painful skin rash. A parent's skin is covered with lesions because there isn't enough bottled water to go around. Yet residents are only being told the water is unsafe for drinking, not for bathing.

The world has seen the now-famous photos of the brown tap water that residents were told was safe to drink. In some homes the water is still yellow after passing through a filter. People are snatching up cases of bottled water faster than they are delivered. Those without cars are pushing shopping carts or carrying cases on their shoulders in the cold and snow.

Already the effects of lead can be seen in children who are suddenly failing in school subjects that were a breeze for them before, or whose bones ache, or whose immune systems are compromised. It will be years before the full impact on this city of 100,000 is known, especially on children under six and those whose mothers ingested lead while pregnant.

Lead levels in the water have tested as high as 4,000 parts per billion. The federal government considers 15 ppb cause for concern. Free filters are ineffective at levels above 150 ppb.

The Flint River ran clean for thousands of years. Industrial pollution, primarily by General Motors, changed that. Nevertheless — according to Virginia Tech University professor Marc Edwards, the water safety expert whose research team confirmed the lead presence in Flint water — if anti-corrosive chemicals had been added to the water, lead would not have leached from aging pipes into the water system.

The cost of adding such phosphates to the river — a routine water treatment practice — would have been at most $150 a day. Not adding phosphates, which coat the pipes and prevent them from leaching toxic metals, has also been blamed for copper poisoning and a Legionella outbreak that has killed at least nine Flint residents.

Now the cost-saving measure, driven by capitalist austerity, has turned into a multibillion-dollar blunder. The millions being spent on bottled water, filters and now recycling are the tip of the iceberg. The water infrastructure, corroded beyond repair, could cost $1.5 billion to replace. The cost of providing proper nutrition, health care and extra help in school to 27,000 children under 18 is astronomical.

Money exists to fix this catastrophe

In the face of this catastrophe, the state has come up with the paltry sum of $28 million in aid. Gov. Rick Snyder says there needs to be further study before a decision can be made to replace the pipes. Washington is sending only $80 million to Michigan — an unforgivable loan with only $17 million going to Flint.

The state is sitting on a half-billion-dollar budget surplus and could use its "rainy day fund" to help Flint. Upon taking office, Snyder created tax breaks for corporations worth $1.7 billion annually. In just one year this giveaway would be enough to rebuild Flint's water grid!

A modest cut in the bloated Pentagon budget could rebuild aging water infrastructures, not only in Flint but for communities across the country that could experience a similar disaster. Already Sebring, Ohio, and St. Joseph, La., are seeing the same water issues as Flint.

The dearth of state assistance has meant that every person in Flint, a Black-majority city with a 40 percent poverty rate, must carefully conserve their ration of clean water. This is in Michigan, a state surrounded by four of the five Great Lakes, which hold 20 percent of the world's freshwater.

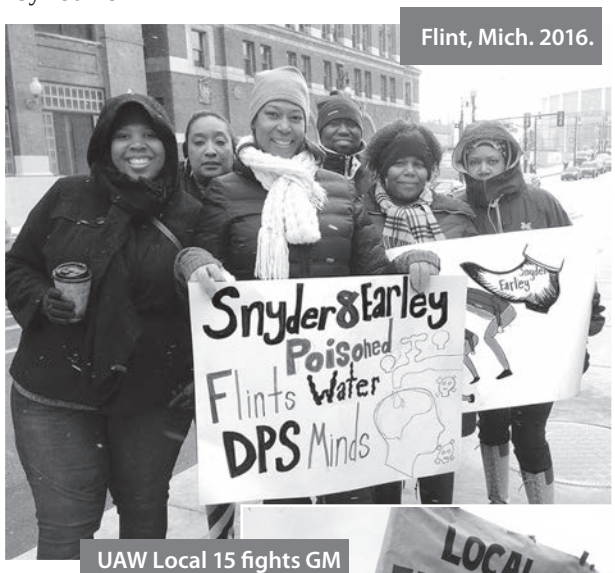
To make matters worse, residents have been told that they must pay for their poison — or have their service disconnected. Once that happens, Child Protective Services can remove children from the home.

Not everyone can even get clean water. Thousands of Latinos/as live in Flint. Literature about the crisis has only been available in English. At the fire stations where bottled water is distributed, signs are posted demanding residents produce state IDs. So-called undocumented workers do not have state IDs and could face deportation if they try to get water. Seniors and people with disabilities also face particular difficulties accessing water.

Flint's tragedy is compelling. More celebrities, especially from the hip-hop community, have become donors. Mosques, churches and synagogues all over the country have sent water, and Black college sororities and fraternities have raised funds for Flint.

Union members are arriving with truckloads of water and filtration supplies and delivering them door to door. Plumbers, who have been installing filters for residents at no charge, are now replacing faucets that the filters don't fit. Unions owe

Continued on page 11



Flint, Mich. 2016.

UAW Local 15 fights GM plant closings, 1987.

Detroit demonstration at Conference of Mayors meeting demands Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm declare an emergency moratorium on foreclosures , Nov. 27, 2007.

A moratorium on foreclosures demanded during State of the State address, Lansing, Mich., Feb. 3, 2009.

WW PHOTOS: MARTHA GREVATT (TOP), CHERYL LABASH

GET THE LEAD OUT!

Continued from page 1

ing in Traverse City demanding the plant closings moratorium and set up a Tent City of the Unemployed, Underpaid and Homeless on Lansing's Capitol grounds.

But Gov. Blanchard quietly allowed the plant closings to move forward. Flint's auto workforce was reduced from 80,000 union jobs to 8,000 today.

After its population declined from 200,000 to 124,000 by the mid-2000s due to auto restructuring, Flint was then hit with a second corporate attack, this time by the big banks and financial institutions.

Flint residents, like those in Detroit, were targeted by the racist banks for predatory subprime mortgage loans and refinancings, which led to massive home foreclosures. While Flint was running a budgetary surplus as late as 2006, some 24,000 additional residents were forced out of the city because of foreclosures. Detroit experienced 65,000 mortgage foreclosures in a two-year period and lost 240,000 residents.

WWP activists spearheaded a campaign in 2007 when the housing crisis first manifested itself, demanding that Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm declare a state of emergency and place a moratorium on foreclosures and evictions, modeled on the 1930s moratorium that existed in Michigan and 25 other states during the Great Depression. We got a bill for a two-year moratorium introduced in the state legislature by then-State Sen. Hansen Clarke.

After countless demonstrations and home defenses, Granholm finally gave her reason for opposing the foreclosure moratorium: "The banks wouldn't like it."

The destruction caused by the banks' predatory lending, on top of GM's auto restructuring, was the final blow to Flint's financial solvency, with the city facing a $40 million deficit by 2010.

Cancel the debt!

In 2012, Snyder appointed an emergency manager for Flint. Formerly called, and rightly so, emergency financial managers — emergency managers usurp elected officials' powers. They have the legal authority to bypass the state constitution, abrogate union contracts, lay off and reduce municipal workers' wages and benefits including pensions, cut and privatize city services, and take other actions against the residents and workers to ensure that the banks and financial institutions are paid.

That is their primary and singular goal. It does not matter what the cost and devastation are to the population when this payback is carried out.

With the African-American and Latino/a communities in Michigan and across the U.S. having suffered the most with corporate restructuring and victimization by the banks in the subprime mortgage debacle, it is no accident that every majority African-American city and most school boards in those cities have been placed under emergency management by successive governors, culminating with criminal Snyder.

Not only are African Americans denied the democratic right to vote and govern, for which millions fought and many died, but emergency management dictates that oppressed communities and poor whites must suffer whatever is necessary so the banks get their money.

Emergency managers are appointed to oversee capitalist austerity against the people. The same type of austerity is imposed on people in Greece and Spain, Flint and Detroit. The corporations pay nothing or get tax credits (or refunds!), while the people starve or die to make sure the banks are paid.

It is not a question of "balancing" a budget or "saving" money. It is about the most expedient way to give the most money to the big banks. The Flint crisis shows this in sickening detail. To save a meager $60,000, state officials refused to use anti-corrosive chemicals to prevent lead contamination in Flint's water system, and then covered up their genocidal crime for over two years.

The demands of Flint activists must be met. But it is critical to also place demands on GM and the banks, who have been silent in offering aid — even while an outpouring of solidarity and generosity has been displayed by workers, community activists and entertainers across the U.S. and beyond.

GM, garnering big profits, should repay at least $4 billion to Flint, and the banks should contribute at least $2 billion more to rebuild Flint's infrastructure and housing stock, relocate residents and pay for the long-term health care and education needs of Flint's 8,000 lead-poisoned children.

Activists are planning a demonstration outside General Motors world headquarters in downtown Detroit to demand the corporation be held accountable for its role in the destruction of Flint. See moratorium-mi.org for details. ☐

BLACK HISTORY MONTH MATTERS

By Dolores Cox

February is designated as Black History Month. It is a reminder that Black lives do matter, have always mattered and will continue to matter. It places focus on all persons of African descent throughout the African Diaspora, celebrating their survival, against all odds, of brutalities and inhumane acts experienced by them, and also those who have been targets of racial hatred and violence for centuries, and have endured the permanence of racism.

The truth is that without Black history there would be no world history. Black history is not only a history of resistance and struggle. It is also a history that reveals that European culture and capitalism were shaped by it from their very inception. Consider the African culture's influence in math, science, art and astronomy.

Black history exposes a truth about humanity's journey to the present. There is an inescapable link between the history and struggles of African peoples, enslaved and free, and the evolution of both U.S. and world histories and civilizations. Black people are in and of Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean. Blacks have experienced the horrors of chattel slavery and now wage slavery, producing profits with their bodies, brains and their wombs, which shaped nations and economies worldwide. The destruction of capitalism is crucial to the destruction of racism.

WW Commentary

History books in a white supremacist culture erase and distort Black history. African-American historian, educator and author Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), the initiator of Black History Week in the early part of the 20th century, used the week as a political and psychological weapon to counter the blatant racism that Black people encountered in their daily lives. The week has been expanded to a month. Woodson is referred to as "the father of Black History Month."

Today's nationwide Black History Month has the same purpose as Woodson's because blatant racism still prevails. In 1933, Woodson wrote the best-seller book, "The Mis-education of the Negro," in which he addresses Western philosophical and ethical indoctrinations within their educational systems, from kindergarten to the university, particularly as they relate to misconceptions, brainwashing and justification of oppression of the "Negro" race.

African-American historian and scholar Dr. Henrik Clarke (1915-1998) is quoted as saying: "History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. A compass they use to find themselves on the human map of geography. It tells a people where they have been and what they've been. But more importantly, what they must be, where they still must go and what they still must become. It is essential: a road map for living. If they don't know their history, they can't chart their future." (hunter.cuny.nyu)

Knowledge and understanding of Black history rejuvenates those who are weary of the struggle to be free, and rejuvenates organizing and institution building. It celebrates and honors the ancestors' unrelenting quest for liberation and self-determination.

Despite it all, African descendants say: "Still we rise! We shall overcome! We're still here! Lest we forget!" □

VERNON DAHMER 1908-1966

Unsung martyr of Civil Rights struggle

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

Vernon F. Dahmer Sr., a staunch NAACP activist and a close friend of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was killed on Jan. 10, 1966, in a Ku Klux Klan terrorist raid on his home at Kelley Settlement in Hattiesburg, Miss.

The Dahmer family had received numerous threats prior to his death. He and Ellie Dahmer, his spouse, took turns sleeping in order to guard the home. That was not enough to ward off Klan attacks that fateful morning when his small grocery store and home were invaded and firebombed at 2 a.m.

In the 1950s, Dahmer and other activists, including Medgar Evers, were victimized for establishing an NAACP Youth Chapter in Hattiesburg. The "One Person One Vote: The Legacy of SNCC and the Fight for Voting Rights" website noted that this was a bold move by the organizers: "However, when its young president, Clyde Kennard, tried to enroll at a segregated college, he was framed for a petty crime and sentenced to seven years in prison. When Kennard became seriously ill, his jailers refused to give him medical treatment. He died not long afterwards."

Nonetheless, Dahmer continued to struggle for Civil Rights, serving as NAACP president in Hattiesburg at a time when such a public stance made one a target of the Klan and the White Citizens Council. He was a proponent of universal voting rights and pledged his life to eliminating obstacles that prevented African Americans from gaining full access to the franchise.

Civil Rights groups vs. racist state govts

Dahmer mentored SNCC organizer Joyce Ladner during her early years when he took her to political activities and demonstrations protesting legal segregation. During the late 1950s when Ladner was a teenager, she learned firsthand about the dangers of Civil Rights activism when the NAACP was outlawed in Mississippi and other Southern states.

In 1956, several Southern states initiated legal actions against the NAACP, saying the organization's existence defied state statutes. State governments demanded the Civil Rights organization's membership lists and financial records. If these documents had been turned over to these authorities — many of whom were Klan and White Citizens Council functionaries — then NAACP members and contributors would have faced physical and economic retaliation by the white ruling class.

By their actions, these racists aimed to force the NAACP out of existence as the African-American struggle grew in influence — as exemplified by the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the mass response to the lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till. The African-American youth was killed in Money, Miss., in August 1955 while visiting from Chicago.

NAACP state chapters defiantly refused to hand over membership rolls. Consequently, huge fines were levied against them, and organizers were threatened with imprisonment. The NAACP fought these attacks all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in a landmark case titled NAACP v. Alabama.

The high court ruled in the NAACP's favor in 1958, noting that the state's attempt to suppress the organization by demanding its membership records violated the Constitution's guarantee of freedom of association. Other NAACP chapters in Southern states also gained favorable court rulings. However, reactionary attacks against the NAACP and other Civil Rights groups continued into the 1960s.

Klan targeted Dahmer

Teaching for Change's website published remarks by Ladner prepared for the 50th anniversary commemoration of Dahmer's martyrdom, hosted by the Clarion Ledger in Jackson, Miss., on Jan. 8. She said, "In his short 58 years, Dahmer launched voter registration drives, and adhered to the philosophy that it was his responsibility to be his brother and sister's keeper. Perhaps it was also his economic independence that made him a target for the Ku Klux Klan."

Ladner explained that Dahmer "annexed large tracts of land, built a commercial farm of cotton, owned a saw mill, a planer mill, and a grocery store. He hired his Black neighbors from Kelley Settlement to work for him, thereby carrying out his philosophy of being a good neighbor. This was largely unheard of in the fifties and sixties because very few Black people owned businesses. The jobs he provided reduced Black flight to Northern cities and strengthened the local community. Vernon Dahmer was a generous man who believed in the power of a united community."

The attack on Dahmer and his family was ordered by Sam Bowers, one of the most notorious KKK Grand Wizards of the period. Consumed with virulent hatred of African Americans, Bowers, like the Klan's early founders in the late 1860s, came from an affluent family whose members were involved in business and politics.

The New York Times on Nov. 6, 2006, the day after Bowers' death, described the morning of Jan. 10, 1966, when "Mr. Bowers sent two carloads of Klansmen with 12 gallons of gasoline, white hoods, and shotguns to the Dahmer house near Hattiesburg, Miss. ... The burning gasoline was tossed into the house; Mr. Dahmer, whose lungs were seared, held attackers at bay so his family could escape, then died later in the arms of his wife."

The Times said Bowers was a "leader of the most violent and secretive division of the Ku Klux Klan, the Mississippi White Knights, which at its peak had up to 10,000 members. ... The F.B.I. attributed nine murders and 300 beatings, burnings and bombings to Mr. Bowers and the group. ... On Feb. 15, 1964, he coaxed 200 Klansmen assembled at Brookhaven, Miss., to join him in founding the Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization that defined itself in its unhesitating willingness to use violence."

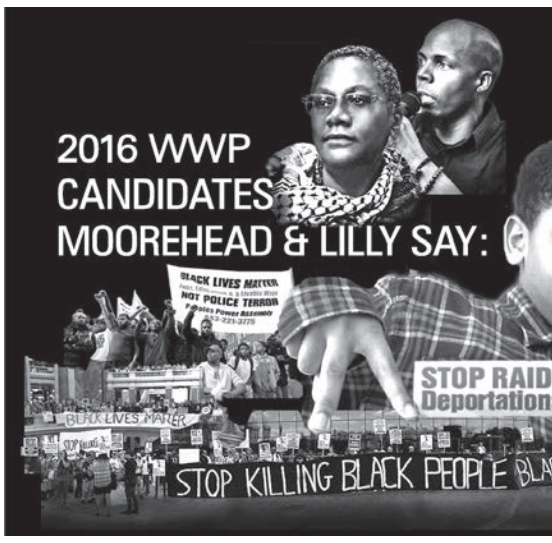
Four unsuccessful attempts were made to convict Bowers for Dahmer's murder, but the fifth trial in 1998 won a conviction and life sentence. It was Ellie Dahmer and the Dahmer children who persisted in keeping the case in front of Mississippi authorities.

Bowers died in a Mississippi prison at the age of 82. Despite his death and that of other Klan leaders, racist violence remains a stark reality in the U.S. well into the 21st century.

Racist killings, such as Dahmer's, inspired SNCC leaders and others to adopt Black Power and militant self-defense as a political strategy in 1966. Five decades later there is a resurgence of anti-racist demonstrations and urban rebellions.

There is still strong resistance by law enforcement organizations, prosecutorial agencies, and local, state and federal courts to pursuing criminal cases against perpetrators of racist violence against African Americans and other oppressed peoples.

Congress never passed a federal anti-lynching law after numerous attempts during the early 1900s when mob violence against African Americans was routine, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries. Today, neither the House of Representatives nor the Senate has taken any legislative action aimed at ending the blatant state repression against people of color communities. □



Black History Mon

The heroic Black Lives Matter movement is the latest chapter in the centuries-long struggle to end the brutal, genocidal history of racism, starting with slavery, that permeates every aspect of U.S. life. However, that continuing history of vicious oppression and criminal exploitation is not common knowledge today.

That's why Workers World makes a big deal of Black History Month, as we commemorate the many sacrifices and valiant struggles of African Americans from slavery to the present day to eradicate institutionalized racism, root and branch, in this country.

But, as you know from reading this newspaper, Workers World doesn't just cover the Black struggle one month a year. We write about it in depth all year,

CLAUDETTE COLVIN *Catalyst for 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott*

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

Many people think of Rosa Parks when they celebrate the victory of the 1955-1956 Montgomery bus boycott that ended segregation in U.S. public transportation.

But before Rosa Parks, there was a 15-year-old African American, Claudette Colvin, who on March 2, 1955, refused to give up her seat on a city bus to a white rider. With her fierce and militant action, she was the first person to commit civil disobedience in the boycott struggle. As one local organizer commented at the time, Claudette "brought the revolution to Montgomery."

Colvin was on her way to Booker T. Washington High School that morning. School studies during February had concentrated on the U.S. Constitution and she was thinking over these lessons when a white rider boarded. No seats were available in front of her and other Black riders. Jim Crow law demanded that whites never sit behind African-American riders.

The bus driver yelled at Colvin to move toward "the back of the bus." She decided, "I wasn't gonna take it anymore," and refused. As white cops were dragging her by her arms off the bus and handcuffing her, she answered none of their questions but chanted over and over, "It's my Constitutional right!"

PHOTO: MICKEY WELSH

Claudette Colvin at 12 (left) and still defiant in 2005 (above).

The cops charged her with violation of the state segregation laws, disturbing the peace and "assaulting an officer" — though she had been nonresisting.

In later interviews, she made clear that her anger and will to resist had been building since her first memory of racism, at four years old. She was radicalized at 13, when a 16-year-old schoolmate, Jeremiah Reeves, was tried and falsely convicted of raping a white woman. In

Continued on page 11

Protesters demand answers in police shooting

By Erica Mines, Matty Starrdust and Rufus Farmer
Chester, Pa.

Five people were arrested on Jan. 29 after 25 protesters occupied the Chester, Pa., City Hall to demand answers about the 2014 police killing of Frank McQueen. The protest was organized by McQueen's mother, Delphine Matthews, and his sister, Phillisa Matthews. It had support from Black Lives Matter Philly, the Philly Coalition for REAL Justice and other progressive organizations.

Since June 2, 2014, when police riddled the body of 34-year-old McQueen "execution style" with over 28 bullets, every attempt by his family to retrieve information has been blocked by the city of Chester. Demonstrators hoped to meet with Chester's newly elected mayor, Thaddeus Kirkland, to request release of information regarding McQueen's death.

On arriving at City Hall, protesters agreed their action would be a noncontrational demonstration where they would simply exercise their right to freedom of assembly. On entering the building, most demonstrators quickly sat on benches in the lobby, holding signs that read "Justice for Frank McQueen" and "Release the information."

A smaller group approached the receptionist to request a meeting with the mayor. Within minutes, a staff person from the mayor's office escorted Delphine Matthews, other family members, two private investigators, radio host Andre Roxx, who had aided in getting Frank McQueen's story on the air, and Asa Khalif from Philly REAL Justice upstairs to meet with the mayor.

Police gather in building

The building typically has just one police officer on hand for security measures. However, after Matthews and her supporters were escorted upstairs by Chester city officials, additional law enforcement began entering the building. Around 10 minutes later, other police officers, including both uniformed and plainclothes cops, arrived.

For over an hour, the cops never spoke with demonstrators. They allocated a space for media to interview one of the investigators working with the Matthews family. None ever stated that the protesters' assembly was unlawful. At no time did the demonstrators block entrances to the building or interfere in any way with official business.

Meanwhile, during the meeting in Mayor Kirkland's office, a heated exchange ensued between the mayor and Asa Khalif. Kirkland had to be restrained by his staff members and Khalif was told to leave the meeting, which he did.

When Khalif rejoined the other demonstrators in the lobby, he began to fill them in on the meeting upstairs. At this point, police detectives ordered everyone to vacate the building, saying they were trespassing on city property and would be arrested.

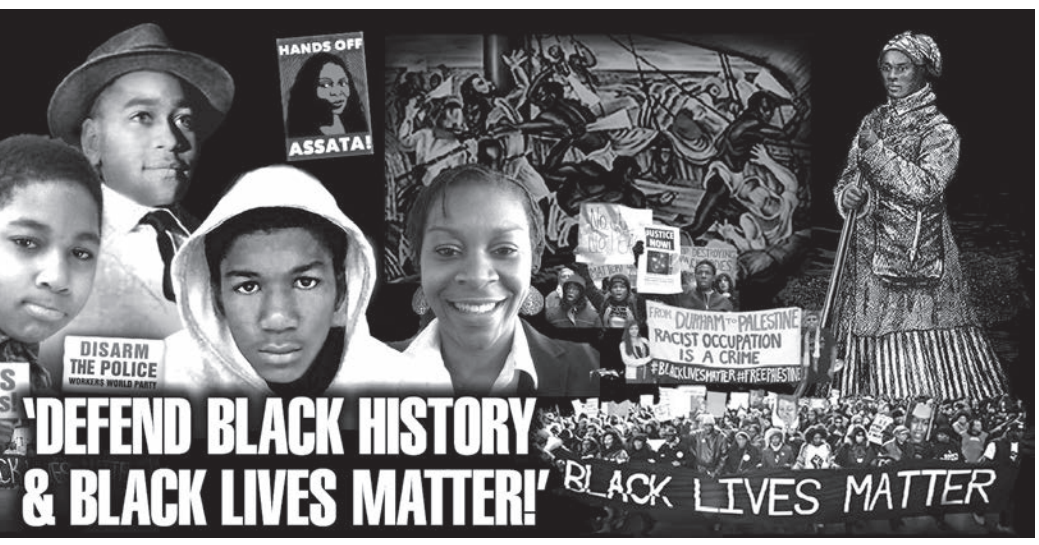
With little to no understanding of the exchange that had occurred upstairs, demonstrators began to ask why, after over an hour of peaceful assembly, was it now unlawful, and what was the state of the others still in the meeting with Kirkland. With a unified understanding of police brutality and to ensure no one was left behind in the hands of oppressive police, some in the lobby refused to leave without Delphine Matthews and the others still meeting with the mayor.

Rather than answering their concerns, police arrested five demonstrators, who were released a short time later with citation offenses. It was later learned that Mayor Kirkland agreed to have the information requested by McQueen's family released in a week.

As protesters gathered outside the city jail following the release of the five, several Chester residents expressed their support on learning what the action was about. Their solidarity was not surprising, given the demographics in Chester, where more than half of the 34,000 residents are African-American, most living in extreme poverty.

Chester, dotted with vacant lots and abandoned houses, resembles a mini-Detroit. Until very recently, Chester was a food desert with no supermarkets. The heavily indebted school system is being privatized. City government, dominated by four council members, seems completely detached from the people living in the impoverished communities surrounding City Hall. Kirkland, now mayor, still retains his position of 23 years as a representative in Pennsylvania's General Assembly.

The authors of this article were among the five arrested.



th Matters: SUPPORT WW

every year. Our coverage includes the racist poisoning of water in the majority African-American city of Flint, Mich., as well as the daily cop murders of Black and Brown people all around the country. We also expose the criminal injustice system that allows killer cops to walk free — like the one who arrested Sandra Bland in Texas and the one who executed 12-year-old Tamir Rice while he was playing with a toy gun in the park in Cleveland. Even if the cop who murdered Laquan McDonald in 2014 in Chicago was indicted, he might get a slap on the wrist like the cop who only served 11 months for killing Oscar Grant in Oakland in 2009 in cold blood.

WW bases our weekly coverage of the ongoing Black struggle here, and the one in Africa to throw off imperialist chains, on the principle of self-determination: that oppressed people have the right to fight to end all forms of inequality and injustice — by any means necessary.

If you appreciate that coverage and more, it's time to join the Workers World Supporter Program. We established it in 1977 so readers could help us publish anti-racist, working-class truth and build the many campaigns needed to make qualitative, revolutionary change that crushes capitalism and ushers in socialism.

Write checks to Workers World and mail them, with your name and address, to 147 W. 24th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10011. Or donate online at workers.org/donate/. We are grateful for your help in building the revolutionary press in the U.S. □

'Justice for Dontay Ivy!'
BLM disrupts mayor's speech

By Chris Fry
Albany, N.Y.

More than 100 protesters packed the rotunda of the City Hall in Albany, N.Y., on Jan. 25 to demand justice for Dontay Ivy. Ivy, a 39-year-old Black man who suffered from mental illness, was taking his regular nighttime walk last April 2 when he was Tasered, clubbed and tackled by several Albany cops. Ivy suffered a heart attack shortly after the assault and died.

The cops admitted they had no reason to stop Ivy, yet none was charged with any crime for his death. His killing has sparked outrage from the African-American community and its supporters. Protesters have called for the firing of Albany Police Chief Brendan Cox, as well as the arrest and prosecution of the cops responsible for Ivy's death.

Defying a large police presence, the City Hall demonstration, organized by the Black Lives Matter chapter of upstate New York, interrupted Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan's "State of the City" address. Protesters hung banners from the ceiling behind the podium, one reading "Justice for Dontay" and the other "State of Denial."

For 20 minutes, the crowd prevented Sheehan from speaking, chanting "No justice, no peace!" and "Fire those cops!" Then the crowd filed out, singing "I can't breathe," a ballad inspired by the killing of Eric Garner at the hands of New York City police. (timesunion.com, Jan. 26) They held their own "State of the City" rally outside on the City Hall steps, where they proclaimed that Albany is a place where a Black man is "guilty until proven innocent."

"What I would like to hear is an acknowledgment that this is what happens and that we're not making this stuff up," said Sean Desiree, cofounder of the newly announced upstate Black Lives Matter chapter. (twcnews.com, Jan. 25) □

Imperialists put former Ivory Coast president on trial

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

Feb. 1 — The International Criminal Court put former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo on trial Jan. 28 in the Netherlands. This takes place nearly five years after Gbagbo was overthrown by French paratroopers. Washington backed the French intervention.

The imperialist states and their allies have committed egregious war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as the destruction of Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, etc. These crimes have displaced 60 million people, creating the greatest number of refugees and internal and external migrants since the end of World War II. Despite these crimes, none of the imperialist leaders has been investigated or prosecuted by the ICC.

From an historical perspective, out of all the former slave-trading and colonial states, including the U.S. and many NATO countries, none has paid reparations to its former subjects. Nor have any been held legally accountable for centuries-long crimes that reaped billions in profits and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of millions.

In 2010, Gbagbo challenged Paris' move to install Alassane Ouattara, a former International Monetary Fund functionary and darling of imperialism, as head of the West African state. Ivory Coast is the world's largest producer of cocoa and contains significant offshore oil and natural gas resources.

The Gbagbo administration made numerous efforts to resolve disputes surrounding the 2010 national elections. Nonetheless, Paris, with the backing of Washington and its allies in the regional Economic Community of West African States, rejected peace overtures and a recount of the vote.

The imperialists and their allies in Ivory Coast were determined to remove Gbagbo and his political party from power. Consequently, they went to great lengths to stage the coup that installed Ouattara. At present the West hails Ivory Coast as a success story, since the imperialist countries have been able to make a deep penetration of its economy.

Gbagbo has pleaded not guilty to four serious charges, including murder and rape, allegedly carried out by his supporters under his directives. These occurred during clashes that resulted in 3,000 deaths after disputes surfaced over the 2010 presidential election results. ICC prosecutors in their opening arguments on Jan. 28 told the court that Gbagbo unleashed violence against his supporters in order to remain in office.

Defense says trial motivated by politics

Lawyers for the defendants, who include former first lady Simone Gbagbo and youth leader Charles Ble Goude, are emphasizing the role of France in Ivory Coast's inability to resolve its own internal problems. They argue that French military operatives arrested the former president in a makeshift residence and this poses a challenge to the character of the ICC, which is based at The Hague.

Simone Gbagbo was tried in 2014 and sentenced to 20 years in prison by Ivorian authorities under Ouattara. No members of Ouattara's Rally of the Republicans party have been indicted by the ICC or Ivory Coast prosecutors.

Defense attorney Jennifer Naouri said, "Laurent Gbagbo continually sought solutions to the post-electoral crisis, proposing for example that votes be re-counted. Ouattara didn't agree to this." (Reuters, Feb. 1)

Gbagbo supporters in Ivory Coast and internationally have pointed out the bias of the proceedings. After the isolation and arrest of Gbagbo, his spouse and other key leaders in April 2011, Western nations immediately recognized Ouattara as the "legitimate head of state" in Abidjan. This same policy continues, even though Gbagbo retains tremendous support inside Ivory Coast.

At the opening of the trial, hundreds of members and friends of Gbagbo were at the court. Many wore shirts with Gbagbo's image, calling for his release from prison in the Netherlands.

In the same article, attorney Naouri emphasized, "Gbagbo will never be able to shed the image of an anti-French nationalist that has been stuck to him by supporters of Alassane Ouattara. The French establishment will never accept him."

Gbagbo began his career as an academic, having earned a Ph.D. in history. He was banned from his teaching post and imprisoned in 1971 for supposedly lecturing in a "subversive" manner.

Left-wing ideologically, he became a trade union organizer among educators during the 1980s. Gbagbo opposed the first Ivorian leader, President Felix Houphouet-Boigny, a protégé of French neocolonialism who ruled the country for three decades.

Gbagbo helped form the Ivorian Popular Front in 1982 and was exiled to Europe the same year. He returned in 1988, only to be imprisoned again in 1992. Gbagbo took power through an electoral process accompanied by a popular uprising in 2000. He ruled the country until he was overthrown on April 11, 2011.

ICC trial and African Union Summit

This trial comes amid growing controversy within the African Union and other nongovernmental forces over the character of the ICC and its sole preoccupation with the kidnapping and persecution of African leaders. Gbagbo is the highest-ranking political official to be tried by the court, which was established through the Rome Statute treaty in 2002.

An ICC case against Kenya's president, Uhuru Kenyatta, collapsed in 2015 after the defense effectively challenged the credibility of witnesses against him. However, his vice president, William Ruto, is still embroiled in a legal battle with court prosecutors, led by Gambian national Fatou Bensouda.

Kenyatta was actively opposed by the U.S. and Britain when he won the elections in 2013. Both the British and U.S. governments, under Prime Minister David Cameron and President Barack Obama, respectively, leveled threats against Kenya, saying there would be consequences if Kenyatta won the poll.

At the 50th anniversary AU Summit in Ethiopia in May 2013, widespread criticism of the ICC and its failure to recognize the sovereignty of African states prompted calls for the AU to withdraw from the Rome Statute. Numerous African states have not signed the agreement and consider themselves not bound by its conventions.

Although the U.S. and some European imperialist states do not recognize the supposed authority of the ICC, Western capitals use the court as a tool of the foreign policy imperatives of Washington, London, Paris and Brussels. In Libya, for example, when the Pentagon, the CIA, NATO and their allies sought a legal rationale for the massive bombing of the North African state in 2011, the ICC rapidly indicted Libyan leader Col. Moammar Gadhafi, members of his family and other officials.

According to the Feb. 1 Guardian newspaper, referring to the 26th Ordinary AU Summit held on Jan. 30-31, "Members of the African Union have backed a Kenyan proposal to push for withdrawal from the International Criminal Court, repeating claims that it unfairly targets the continent. Chad's president, Idriss Déby, who was elected African Union chairman at the two-day summit in Addis Ababa, criticized the court for focusing its efforts on African leaders."

Deby said, "Elsewhere in the world, many things happen, many flagrant violations of human rights, but nobody cares." Of the nine countries targeted by the ICC, only one is not in Africa: Georgia, a nation that was part ofthe former Soviet Union. ☐

Free Mohammed al-Qeeq!
Hunger strike turns spotlight on G4S

Thanks to the Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network for the following report.

New Yorkers took to the streets on Jan. 22 and again on Jan. 29 to protest the complicity of the G4S corporation in Israel's imprisonment, torture and oppression of Palestinians, and to call for freedom for imprisoned Palestinian journalist Mohammed al-Qeeq. January 29 was al-Qeeq's 66th day of hunger strike. He is now shackled to a bed in Afula Hospital in critical condition and has been denied access to independent medical care.

PHOTO: SAMIDOUN NETWORK

Protest targets G4S corporation, which profits from Israel's brutal imprisonment of Palestinians.

The Israeli military ordered Al-Qeeq imprisoned under administrative detention for six months, renewable without charge. He has had no trial and any evidence against him is secret. Al-Qeeq is the latest of a number of Palestinians – including fellow journalist Nidal Abu Aker – to undertake a long-term hunger strike against the use of administrative detention without charge or trial. Some 45 prisoners affiliated with the Palestinian leftist party, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, launched a two-day hunger strike in solidarity with al-Qeeq, demanding his immediate release.

The Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network has been holding weekly protests outside the New York offices of the firm G4S, the world's largest "security" company and second-largest private employer. G4S provides security systems and control rooms to Israeli prisons, checkpoints and police training centers, placing G4S and its equipment at the heart of the "matrix of control" that governs Palestinian lives under occupation and apartheid.

Some 220 community organizations, trade unions, faith and student groups from around the world, following calls from Palestinian prisoners and Palestinian organizations, have urged a boycott of G4S. An international petition has especially urged the United Nations to stop doing business with this multinational corporation because of the role it plays in widespread torture and human rights abuses in Palestine and around the world.

In late January the Hollands Kroon municipality in The Netherlands rejected a contract with G4S following a campaign by BDS activists, including the GreenLeft party, urging that G4S be excluded on human rights grounds.

G4S also runs prisons and immigrant detention centers in the U.S. and in many other countries.

Join Samidoun Palestinian Political Prisoners Solidarity Network every Friday at 4 p.m. as it pickets in front of the office of G4S at 17 West 44th Street in New York.

For more information, contact www.samidoun.net. ☐

Bangladeshi solidarity with BLM

PHOTO: BACC

In solidarity and unity with the Black Lives Matter movement and immigrants under attack, the Bangladeshi American Community Council held a Town Hall meeting in Parkchester, Bronx, on Jan. 31. The meeting followed the hospitalization of a prominent member of the community, who had been attacked by youths influenced by media demonization. Based only on his beard, they called this Bangladeshi man "ISIS."

The People's Power Assembly, International Action Center, Why Accountability, Pakistan USA Freedom Forum and Guyanese American Workers United participated and spoke, along with several religious leaders and community groups.

— Sara Flounders

Workers challenge France's 'state of emergency'

By G. Dunkel

France's government, with the backing of the majority of the French ruling class, has used the reaction to two armed attacks in and around Paris last year, one that cost many lives, as a pretext to impose authoritarian rule through a state of emergency. The French working class has responded by resisting this rightward lurch by a government that is "Socialist" in name only.

A reflection of this resistance was the Jan. 27 resignation of Christiane Taubira, the minister of justice in Prime Minister Manuel Valls' cabinet. Taubira said she resigned because she could not support the French government's recent proposal to remove French citizenship from anyone convicted of a "terrorism-related" offense.

Even though polls say 75 percent of French citizens support strengthening the security apparatus, the left in France opposes the state of emergency, especially the attempt to remove French citizenship.

Taubira is a Black woman who represents French Guiana (Guyane) — a French possession in South America with the status of Overseas Department — in the French Parliament. She is not a member of the Socialist Party. Taubira's political history includes running for president of France in 2002. She got much publicity in 2012 by being the most effective spokesperson in Parliament for the right of all people to marry, which earned her the undying enmity of right-wing French politicians.

Taubira is currently in the United States, speaking at New York University's law school and getting an honorary doctorate in law and human rights from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. When she resigned, French television made a point of showing her wearing a helmet and riding her bicycle away from the Hôtel de Bourvallais, the site of her ministry. She quipped that she wasn't going to use Uber, which is currently the target of a major protest movement in France by taxi drivers and other workers.

Taxi drivers, farmers block roads, protest 'police state'

The national taxi driver unions and farmers made a much more direct challenge to the state of emergency.

Beginning with a few roadblocks in Paris on Jan. 21, taxi drivers extended their strike throughout the major commercial centers of France, blockading major highways with their bodies. In Paris, they concentrated on the roads leading to the major airports and fought with the cops, setting fires and using smoke flares, to keep the roads closed.

French television showed men in business suits running on the shoulders of the highways, dragging their luggage and trying to make their flights. Air France warned that the taxi strike could "greatly disrupt" access to airports in Paris, Toulouse, Bordeaux and Marseilles.

After drivers' union leaders met with Prime Minister Valls, he declared:

"There is a right to protest ... even during a state of emergency. But violence is unacceptable." (Al-Jazeera, Jan. 26)

Valls did promise to review the disparities between how the state taxes and regulates taxis and how it treats Uber cars. The drivers then called off their strike.

Farmers throughout France, especially in the west and Brittany, have been protesting low prices and a market structure that makes it uneconomical to produce and sell their products. They also have been blocking roads with burning tires and other farm trash, as well as heaps of manure.

There has been no mention of invoking the state of emergency, which theoretically would prohibit such protests.

In a protest that was openly political, thousands of people marched in over 70 French cities on Jan. 30 to demand an immediate lifting of the state of emergency and to express their outrage over the government's plans to revoke the French citizenship of those convicted of terrorism.

The organizers — "We will not give up" and "Stop the state of emergency" — formed a coalition that included unions like the CGT, the biggest workers' federation, and the FSU, the main teachers' organization, civil groups like "Housing Is a Right" and human rights groups. In Paris, they marched behind banners reading "State of emergency, police state" and "My France of liberties, where are you?"

Attacks become pretext for state of emergency

In early January 2015, attackers had killed 11 staff members and their security guards at the office of Charlie Hebdo magazine, which had satirized the prophet Mohammed. A few days later, an attack on a kosher supermarket called Hyper Cacher killed four people.

The French government, under the slogan "Je suis Charlie" ("I am Charlie"), mobilized a demonstration of reportedly 1.25 million people and 50 heads of state. It was really a show of support for French imperialism, which has been intervening militarily in North and West Africa and Syria, causing enormous damage and loss of life. Those in Paris who dared to say "Je suis pas Charlie" ("I am not Charlie," in the French vernacular) were either ignored or suffered serious reprisals.

On Nov. 13, a coordinated series of attacks in Paris and its suburbs killed 130 people. The day after the attacks, the French government declared a "state of emergency" which allows it to ban demonstrations of all sorts, assign anybody it wants to house arrest and conduct searches and seizures without judicial oversight. It also mobilized over 100,000 gendarmes (militarized cops) and soldiers to "guard" transportation and mass transit.

The state's repressive apparatus put hundreds of people under various forms of house arrest and made thousands of searches.

The right wing has used the attacks to target immigrants, especially Muslims, including the new refugees coming from Syria.

Parliament extended the state of emergency for three months before the government's declaration expired. The government now says it wants to extend it from February to May. It also plans to modify the country's constitution to make states of emergency easier to declare and perhaps make them permanent. But these maneuvers are awakening resistance in the working class. ☐

Mixed signals on Cuba

U.S. eases restrictions but levies fines

By Cheryl LaBash

The U.S. Treasury and Commerce departments on Jan. 27 jointly issued revisions that would further ease trade and travel restrictions imposed on Cuba. However, just a week earlier, the Office of Foreign Asset Controls (OFAC) had announced the first fine this year for violation of the U.S. blockade of Cuba.

So, as of Jan. 27, Cuba can officially buy some materials — although not agricultural commodities expressly prohibited by law — from the U.S. on credit. But what bank will risk advancing money if the regulatory arm of the blockade continues to mete out fines for trade with Cuba?

Just since Dec. 17, 2014, when a new U.S. policy toward Cuba was first announced, Washington has fined about six U.S. and foreign entities an accumulated value of $2.8 billion for doing business with Cuba. Going back further, to the beginning of the Obama administration in 2009, there have been 47 fines levied for violations of regulations against Cuba and other countries, with an accumulated value of $14.3 billion. (Prensa Latina, Jan. 29)

The first fine levied this year provides a striking example of the detailed extraterritorial reach of the U.S. economic war against Cuba. It's a $140,400 fine assessed on $284,515 worth of architectural and design work performed in 2009-2010 for a Qatari company by a British subsidiary of the U.S.-based WATG Holdings Inc. of Irvine, Calif.

For a company that OFAC characterized as "a relatively large and sophisticated multinational architectural design company," this was a small project involving a Qatari company's hotel contract, but one "in which Cuba or its nationals had an interest." In the view of OFAC, "the apparent violations caused significant harm to the Cuba sanctions program objectives because WATG-UK provided ... architecture and design services in support of Cuba's tourism industry."

Perhaps more important to OFAC than the fine is the international self-monitoring put into place at WATG, to insure future compliance with U.S. unilateral economic sanctions.

For the first time, though, the new regulations allow approval of exports to Cuban state-owned enterprises, agencies and organizations that provide goods and services to the Cuban people. However, this relaxation of restrictions explicitly excludes tourism — emphasized by the Qatari hotel fine — as well as mining and other extraction considered to be revenue generators.

The U.S. blockade of Cuba, a web of laws and regulations woven over more than 50 years, has failed in its objective of starving the Cuban people into a revolt against the socialist revolution. But every strand that unwinds seems to also encounter another knot. Now there will be U.S. "wink-wink-nod-nod" tourism, along with simultaneous attempts to choke hotel construction.

What Obama can and cannot do

President Obama is barred from making changes in four areas. He cannot 1) allow U.S. subsidiaries in third countries to trade with Cuba, which would violate the

Torricelli Act; 2) allow travel to Cuba for tourism, barred by the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000; 3) lift the requirement for Cuba to pay in cash and in advance for U.S. agricultural products stipulated by the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000, and 4) lift the ban on transactions with nationalized U.S. properties, set by the Helms-Burton Act.

However, Obama can exercise his authority in the following areas: 1) authorize the use of the dollar in international transactions; 2) permit Cuba to import from third countries products with more than 10 percent U.S. components; 3) allow Cuban entities to open correspondent accounts in U.S. banks; 4) end the policy of financial persecution against Cuba; 5) not impede the granting of credits or other financial facilities; 6) allow imports of Cuba's exportable products or services; 7) authorize Cuban planes and boats to carry passengers, cargo and mail between the two countries; 8) authorize direct exports of U.S. products to Cuba; 9) authorize companies to invest in Cuba (international firms have submitted more than 400 proposals for investment in the Mariel Economic Zone); 10) remove the limit on Cuban products that can be imported by U.S. visitors to Cuba; 11) authorize U.S. citizens to receive medical treatment in Cuba; and 12) allow the distribution of credits, loans and financing for the acquisition of products in the U.S. market. Although it seems the new regulations allow this last point, without authorizing Cuba to use the dollar in international trade, the actual implementation is questionable due to the risk of OFAC fines and record keeping.

With the increased flow of open travel to Cuba advertised and reported in the corporate media, on Facebook and throughout social media, there is an illusion of normalcy. It hides the fact that the U.S. blockade by the economic giant just 90 miles to the north is still in place.

The only place in the world that U.S. residents cannot freely travel to is still Cuba. All travelers departing on charter flights or returning from Cuba through Mexico or Canada are required to state what license category they claim authorizes their travel. Proposed legislation in the House and the Senate — HR 664 and S299 — could finally end these restrictions, but demands must be made for that to happen. Travel challengers with the Venceremos Brigade and Pastors for Peace have fought for these rights over decades.

The Cuban authorities say that to completely normalize relations with the U.S., Washington should lift the economic blockade, return the territory now illegally occupied by the U.S. naval base in Guantánamo Bay, stop illegal radio and TV transmissions to the island, and suspend actions intended to subvert internal order in the Caribbean nation. ☐

WORKERS WORLD
editorial

What Iowa shows

It would be rash to read too much into the caucuses held Feb. 1 in Iowa, so far as predicting the outcome of the next U.S. presidential election. Iowa is not typical of the country. Had those participating in the caucuses moved to the right, that might be dismissed as not representative of the great masses of people concentrated in large cities. The U.S. as a whole is much more multinational, much more people of color than Iowa.

But the voters there didn't move to the right. Those in the Democratic Party caucuses almost selected Bernie Sanders as the Democratic candidate, and the Republicans pulled back somewhat from Donald Trump, whose racist, anti-immigrant vitriol is exceeded in volume only by his immense fortune.

Trump has positioned himself as an outsider and a warrior against the putrid establishment — as though his billions did not put him square in the middle of that nest of vipers.

From the point of view of reflecting the class struggle, the entire electoral process is very skewed. Some of the most militant actions being taken by low-wage workers these days involve immigrants, many of them undocumented. They are not allowed to vote, so the impact they are having on organized labor and on class consciousness in general is not reflected in the elections — except insofar as it has raised a general consciousness of oppression and the need for change, particularly among young people.

Yet, all this considered, we cannot ignore what appear to be distinct signs of a shift in the political mood, reflected in the Iowa votes.

That Sanders, the Senator from Vermont who describes himself as a democratic socialist, came within three-tenths of a percentage point to edging out Hillary Clinton, a veteran of Democratic Party establishment politics for decades, merits analysis. It probably came as a shock to many who have lived their whole lives in a political environment where socialism has been considered treasonous, if not downright satanic.

In Europe, where capitalism has been just as venal and murderous as in the U.S., from the days of outright colonialism to today's imperialist stranglehold over most of the world's finances, a "democratic socialist" in politics is no big deal. The ruling classes there know how to coexist with parties that "peacefully" compromise with the system, hoping they can extract a few concessions. But in the U.S., the expression of support for socialism of any kind by the voters has been totally suppressed since the days when Eugene Debs ran for president from his jail cell in 1920.

Sanders actually does not represent any party, which may be part of his strength at this point in the race, when the political establishment is highly suspect. He is an Independent, but running as a Democrat in the primaries.

There can be no doubt that the deepening pain felt by large sections of the working class and many in the middle class, too, has influenced this electoral outcome. Whether it's health, joblessness, debt, imprisonment, depression and despair, the crumbling infrastructure, the growing climate crisis — the majority of the population have become increasingly disenchanted with the system. This is turning into anger against the super-rich and their political pawns. In many cases, it has led to activism around a sea of social causes, most of it progressive, although not all.

Nowhere is the pain being felt more keenly than among the nationally oppressed peoples — Black, Latino/a, Indigenous, Asian, Muslim, documented and undocumented. All social indices show the devastating effects of racism and discrimination in this country.

This is where Sanders has been weak. And the Iowa polls showed it. The Black vote there, according to preliminary reports, went mostly to Clinton.

Sanders' focus on the workers — or "middle class" — as a whole leaves out the tremendous inequalities that exist, even after centuries of struggle by Black, Latino/a and Indigenous people against oppression and even extermination at the hands of the European settlers and their descendants. When Sanders talks about improving the economy, attacking the huge income disparity, tackling corporate criminals, it is all good. But it is not enough.

Without solidarity, no real progress can be made by the working class in the United States against the ruthless exploitation and oppression imposed every day by the bosses and their repressive state. In this country, the biggest obstacle to solidarity has been racism and national oppression.

It's a good thing that the Black Lives Matter movement did not wait for the elections before getting out into the streets and mobilizing against racist police terror and all the other injustices of this system. This is where any progress will happen — for the same reasons that it took the Civil Rights Movement to break down segregation as a legal system.

Workers World Party is running its own candidates in this presidential election — Monica Moorehead for president and Lamont Lilly for vice president, both African Americans — to emphasize that the struggle against racism and national oppression is the key to any successful uprooting of this decaying capitalist system. We feel this is a good time to reach out, not just to get votes, but to inspire those who have had it with capitalism and need to know that building multinational class solidarity will unleash the power we need to win such a revolutionary sea change. ☐

PHOTO: AMERICAN SERVICEMEN'S UNION

From left, Pfc. Ernest Bess, attorney Michael Kennedy, Pfc. Guy Smith, Sp/4 Albert Henry, Pvt. Ernest Frederick, Sgt. Robert Rucker, Sp/4 Tollie Royal. October 1968 at Fort Hood, Texas.

Michael Kennedy, 1937-2016
A warrior in the courtroom

By John Catalinotto

Leftist political organizers and spokespeople of the late 1960s under attack from the authorities preferred a special attorney: one who would allow them to bring out their politics in a trial, defend them like a tiger, work pro bono and still find a loophole to win acquittal.

Few lawyers fit that description. But one who did was Michael J. Kennedy of the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, who died this Jan. 25 at the age of 78.

For decades Kennedy represented leftist radicals and liberation fighters, including Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton, Weather Underground leader Bernardine Dohrn and the Native protesters who engaged in armed self-defense in 1973 at Wounded Knee, S.D.

Workers World Party's respect for Kennedy's contribution grew through his excellent legal and political defense of organizers in the American Servicemen's Union. The ASU, with WWP's support, organized enlisted service people in the U.S. Armed Forces during the war against Vietnam, with the goal of breaking the chain of command between the Pentagon generals and the GIs.

Kennedy represented ASU chairperson Pvt. Andy Stapp during Stapp's field board hearing in January 1968. Through a series of questions, Kennedy let Stapp turn the hearing into a launching pad for the union. Replying to a Kennedy question, Stapp said: "[GIs] want to be able to sit on boards of courts-martial. They want an end to racism in the barracks. They want a federal minimum wage. They want a right to disobey an illegal order. They want a right to elect their officers." (The Bond, Feb. 18, 1968)

Stapp was thrown out of the Army, but served no time, and the ASU grew to be a powerful anti-war and anti-racist force.

The relationship with Kennedy soon aided the anti-racist struggle within the U.S. military. Some background: Following Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination on April 4, 1968, Black people erupted in a righteous revolt in about 100 U.S. cities. Some 22,000 federal troops and 34,000 National Guard were deployed throughout the country, most heavily in Chicago, Washington and Baltimore, where they joined police actions to repress the revolts. It was a bigger version of what happened in Ferguson, Mo., in the summer of 2014.

Some 5,000 GIs from Fort Hood, Texas, were sent to Chicago in April 1968 with orders to shoot to kill any arsonist and shoot to maim or cripple anyone looting.

In August of that year, in preparation for antiwar protests at the Democratic National Convention to be held in Chicago, thousands of troops at Fort Hood again received orders to deploy there to patrol Black neighborhoods. But the African-American troops at Fort Hood wanted nothing to do with shooting people they considered their sisters and brothers. On the evening of Aug. 23, some 160 Black GIs came together at Fort Hood to discuss how to refuse riot duty in Chicago.

At dawn the next morning, military police arrested 43 of the Black troops, attacking and beating some of them. Alerted by sympathetic GIs at Fort Hood, the ASU organized publicity and legal defense for the Fort Hood 43. The best lawyers, including Kennedy, were with the NECLC, which took the case.

In 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War, GIs sometimes received four years in jail just for handing out leaflets. Yet at Fort Hood, the military officers feared provoking more struggle. So thirteen of the 43 were fully acquitted. And of the 12 convicted by special courts-martial, not all received the full six months maximum.

Kennedy defended the six "ringleaders," who faced general courts-martial in October and possible five-year sentences. The GIs were able to take the stand. Pfc. Guy Smith told the court: "I demonstrated against Army policy here and in Vietnam. ... There is racism and prejudice here." In his summation, Kennedy also challenged the officers, saying: "The Army's racist policies are on trial. Indicate that you will work to end racism in the Army." (Workers World, Nov. 10, 1968)

The officers didn't end racism. But they flinched: Two GIs got three months, two got bad conduct discharges, and two were fully acquitted. They all considered it a victory for the Black GIs, the ASU — and Kennedy.

Catalinotto and Stapp visited Fort Hood in 1968 to organize support for the Fort Hood 43.

MARXISM, REPARATIONS & the Black Freedom Struggle

An anthology of writings from Workers World newspaper. Edited by Monica Moorehead.

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Black Youth: Repression & Resistance LeiLani Dowell
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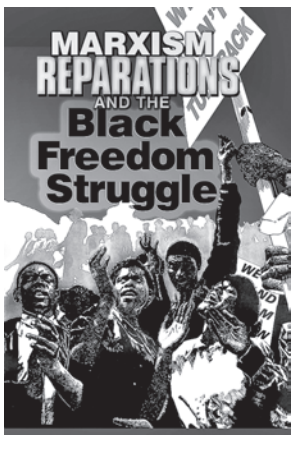


GRAPHIC: SAHU BARRON

Methane leak continues to threaten L.A.

By Scott Scheffer
Los Angeles

In what is being called the most destructive environmental accident since the BP Horizon oil spill, methane gas is continuing to escape from a three-month-old leak in Los Angeles.

Although emergency measures by engineers and workers have slowed the leak, higher than normal levels of methane have now been detected in a wide area of the San Fernando Valley. Spikes in the levels of benzene and other known carcinogens added to methane have been detected in air samples by the Environmental Defense Fund.

Some 2,500 households have been evacuated — including the family of California's Secretary of State — and many more are on a waiting list. Two schools have been shut down and school buses that serve communities as far away as Santa Barbara are being rerouted. Health symptoms reported include nausea, nosebleeds, headaches and vomiting, and there is concern that a huge explosion and fire could occur.

The Aliso Canyon reservoir — one of the largest in the U.S. — lies more than a mile below the surface at the very northern edge of Los Angeles. Its huge capacity isn't simply to meet the needs of Southern California's population. Like the oversized warehouses of Walmart or Amazon, the size of the reservoir enables SoCal Gas, the utility that owns the site, to buy massive quantities of natural gas from other parts of the Southwest and as far away as Canada when prices are low and sell when prices are high. This helps insure their approximately $100 million in annual profits.

In the months leading up to the discovery of the leak, the 63-year-old reservoir was filled nearly to capacity.

The well that is leaking — called SS-25 — is one of 90 at the site. The gas is transported from the reservoir to the surface through a 3-inch pipe, encased in two more steel pipes of larger diameter. The outer casings are meant to be protection in case of a leak. But instead, SoCal uses the steel casing to inject more gas downward. At the time the leak was discovered, the casing was pressurized at 2,600 pounds per square inch.

The leak's source is thought to be a rupture about 1,000 feet below ground level. The cause could be corrosion from various chemicals used in the process, vibration from earthquakes, or possibly even fracking. Engineers detected the sound of the leak from SS-25 four years ago, but apparently no orders to repair it were issued.

Workers are drilling a relief well to try to siphon off the gas where the pipe intersects with the top of the reservoir more than 8,000 feet down. Best estimates say they'll get there at the end of February, but it is a huge engineering challenge and there is concern that if their calculations are only slightly off, they will miss the target.

SoCal Gas was recently forced to admit that they lied to the California Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources five years ago, claiming they replaced the safety valve on SS-25 back in 1979 when in fact they had removed it. They were then given permission to raise rates to cover the costs of safety upgrades.

How could such wildly dangerous practices be allowed? The federal Department of Transportation has left regulation of Aliso Canyon and similar storage facilities up to the states. California is an energy-rich state where transnational corporations make billions in profit every year. SoCal Gas is a division of Sempra Energy, one of the largest natural gas companies in the world. They send out armies of lobbyists to turn back efforts to strengthen regulations and make sure that regulatory agencies are staffed by corporate-friendly bureaucrats.

Public pressure and union workers' struggles in many other states have led to frequent monitoring for leaks plus requirements that safety casings be filled with concrete and operational safety valves be installed on each well. Such measures would have prevented the disaster at Aliso Canyon.

This leak is being called the worst at a natural gas facility in California and may have a 10- to 20-year negative impact on global warming. Leaks and explosions occur throughout the country with more and more frequency. Even the pipes that deliver natural gas to residential neighborhoods are decrepit. In recent years deadly explosions have happened in densely populated Philadelphia and Detroit. In 2010 a gas explosion in San Bruno near San Francisco killed eight people and destroyed 38 homes.

This crisis has occurred in the most polluted region in the United States. It adds to the host of issues being raised by organizers in South Los Angeles fighting against environmental racism, like high levels of lead in school playgrounds and oil fields spewing diesel fumes right next to residential African-American and Latino/a communities.

Environmental groups have done a remarkable job of keeping up the pressure regarding Aliso Canyon. There are now multiple class action suits, the California State Assembly has passed a resolution calling for the closure of the Aliso Canyon Site, and U.S. senators from California are calling for a federal review of SoCal's practices. But as long as giant corporations are allowed to own and sell natural resources for profit, the contest between workers and communities will continue. The environmental movement has to broaden, link up with the struggles of unions and embrace the issues of environmental racism that plague working class communities.

Private ownership of natural resources is a recipe for disaster. Energy belongs to the people! □

Claudette Colvin

Catalyst for 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott

Continued from page 7

a 1953 trial riddled with the racist fraud and lies of segregation, he was ultimately sentenced to death.

Colvin describes his conviction as "the turning point" in her life. She plunged into political activity — attending rallies, writing letters and raising money for his defense. She became active in the NAACP, ultimately becoming the youth secretary.

By 1955, she had "formed a mission" for herself: She would become a lawyer and fight for her freedom and that of her people — like Harriet Tubman. She was also ready for action that March morning.

Civil rights organizers, including Parks, had been advancing moderate demands to white Montgomery authorities to alleviate the racist verbal and physical assaults on Black bus riders.

Then Colvin's arrest angered the entire Black community and made a boycott seem possible.

But movement lawyers and organizers were afraid they couldn't win a boycott lawsuit with Colvin as its public face. There was intense pressure under violent segregation to maneuver using the "respectability politics" being challenged in the current era by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Colvin was a proudly defiant teenager. Her background was thoroughly working class — her parents were a domestic worker and a gardener — rather than professional. The white judge in her case cleverly distorted her public image by dropping all charges except for "assaulting a police officer." So organizers turned from Colvin to Rosa Parks as the test case of civil disobedience.

A turn towards activism

Colvin continued to find her path to action and defiance. On a personal level, she anticipated the "Black Is Beautiful" movement by refusing to straighten her hair "to try to look white."

In political work, Colvin's history-making action was finally acknowledged when she became one of four plaintiffs in the legal suit Browder v. Gayle, attempting to end segregation in public transport. Other plaintiffs included Amelia Browder, a college-educated seamstress, and Mary Louise Smith, a teenager also arrested, after Colvin and before Rosa Parks, for refusing to move to a segregated bus seat.

Colvin's testimony in federal court was decisive as she entered into verbal combat with racist attorneys. She specifically named the sexual and racist abuse of Black girls as part of her motivation to act. She spoke of her determination at the moment she had been put in an adult jail cell and heard the key turn in the lock.

At that point, an African-American woman in the audience began to sob uncontrollably and had to leave the courtroom.

One of the lawyers for the plaintiffs said later, "If there was a star witness in the boycott case, it had to be Claudette Colvin."

The three federal judges took 10 minutes to decide, 2-1, in favor of Colvin and the other plaintiffs, that segregation in U.S. public transport was unconstitutional — a ruling upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, in a decision as momentous as Brown v. Board of Education.

By the time of the court case, Colvin had become a single mother. Despite the historic court victory, she was under law a felon, having been found guilty of the false charge of assaulting a cop. Known throughout town as "the girl who got arrested," she was unable to get steady work in Montgomery, as violent white-supremacist threats, murders and bombings continued.

Colvin finally moved north to New York City, where she still lives, finding work there as a nurse's aide until she retired. In a 2005 interview, she said of her action: "Mine was the first cry for justice, and a loud one. I knew then and I know now that, when it comes to justice, there is no easy way to get it. You have to take a stand and say, 'This is not right.' And I did."

Background information and quotes in this article are from Phillip Hoose's book, "Claudette Colvin" (2009).

Flint water crisis grows

Continued from page 5

a debt to Flint. The 1937 Flint sit-down strike, a 44-day occupation that forced General Motors to recognize the United Auto Workers, was one of the most important milestones in U.S. labor history.

Racism-fueled austerity poisoned Flint

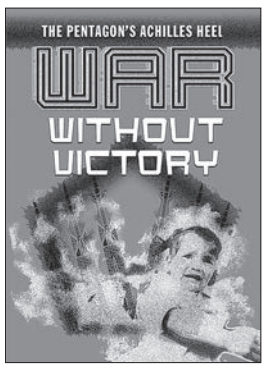
African Americans are still due reparations for the centuries of unpaid labor performed by their ancestors and for the many years of racist Jim Crow segregation, discrimination, lynchings and state violence that followed. Flint's crisis would not have reached such epic proportions if it had occurred in a wealthy white suburb. Now Flint deserves reparations for the state's racist and callous disregard for human life.

The water infrastructure must be rebuilt top to bottom, and every healthcare need created by this scandal must be provided for. There must be a moratorium on water shutoffs, and the water department must refund payments made for poisoned water. Repairs to homes, appliances and any belongings damaged by the tainted water must be made at no cost to residents. Reparations must be paid for pain and suffering.

GM and the bankers owe Flint. GM's Jim Crow hiring practices kept most jobs off-limits to Black workers until the UAW demanded equal opportunity on the assembly line. The company abandoned Flint in the 1980s, closing plants and cutting 80,000 jobs while keeping high-tech plants open in the white suburbs. GM left behind a toxic mess and used bankruptcy to avoid the cost of cleaning it up.

After GM left, the banks took advantage of Michigan's emergency manager law to make sure debt service was paid first. The banks forced austerity on Black-majority cities like Detroit and Flint, just as they do in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Capitalist austerity drove the decisions that poisoned Flint.

The banks and GM got bailed out. Let them pay for the crisis they created. □



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Libertad para Oscar López Rivera, ¡YA!

¿Qué impulsa las sacudidas a la economía?

Por Sara Flounders

La clase obrera en EUA ha sufrido golpes devastadores desde la crisis económica capitalista del año 2007. Ahora la amenaza de una nueva recesión se percibe a través de los mercados financieros.

Los presupuestos municipales y estatales ya han sido recortados a nombre de la austeridad. Los servicios gubernamentales, entre ellos los de hospitales, escuelas, bibliotecas, agua y alcantarillado, han sido privatizados - vendidos para generar ingresos inmediatos necesarios para pagar los intereses de los préstamos bancarios. El impacto de estas políticas criminales se puede ver en el agua envenenada de Flint y en las deterioradas escuelas desde Los Ángeles y Detroit hasta Filadelfia.

Aunque se espera una nueva ronda de despidos, el número de personas que participa en la fuerza laboral ha llegado a su nivel más bajo en 30 años a pesar del crecimiento de la población. Los salarios reales, estancados desde 1979, según un informe del Instituto de Política Económica del 19 de febrero del 2015, no han mejorado desde entonces.

Las/os trabajadores cuya labor produce toda la riqueza, han estado recibiendo una porción cada vez más pequeña del valor que producen. El 56,3 por ciento de la población de EUA está ahora viviendo de cheque a cheque, con menos de $1,000 en cuentas corrientes y de ahorros combinadas. Y el 24,8 por ciento tiene menos de $100 en sus cuentas. (Forbes, 6 de enero)

Los salarios estancados y reducidos, junto al aumento de la productividad del trabajo, han conducido bajo el capitalismo, a la extrema concentración de la riqueza en manos privadas en una escala desconocida en la historia. Las 62 personas más ricas del mundo tienen ahora tanta riqueza como la población de 3,5 mil millones más pobre. (Oxfam, 17 de enero) Hace cinco años, 388 súper-ricos tenían este estatus criminal. La asombrosa concentración de la riqueza continúa sin cesar.

Aniquilada una quinta parte del valor de papel

La otra característica endémica del capitalismo que Marx explicó hace 165 años se impone una vez más. El capitalismo - el sistema económico basado no en la producción social, sino en la expropiación privada - nunca ha sido capaz de resolver los ciclos tambaleantes de expansión y recesión causados por la sobreproducción. La sobreproducción de toda mercancía está nuevamente sacudiendo los mercados financieros.

La producción industrial y el rendimiento manufacturero se han reducido al mínimo.

La caída en el precio del petróleo desde más de $110 el barril en junio de 2014 hasta debajo de $30 en la actualidad, ha recibido una gran atención. Sin embargo, un colapso similar ha ocurrido en los productos industriales, acero, tuberías, metales, carbón, oro, aluminio, zinc y los principales cultivos alimentarios.

Desde el Año Nuevo, los mercados bursátiles de todo el mundo han estado cayendo inexorablemente. Desde Dow Jones de Nueva York y el S&P 500, hasta las principales bolsas de valores europeas de Londres, París y Berlín, a los mercados de Dubái, Tokio, Hong Kong y Shanghái; juntos han perdido más del 20 por ciento de su valor, entrando en lo que se llama un "bear market" (mercado en la baja).

Una quinta parte de toda la riqueza del mercado de valores en el mundo ha sido eliminada. Esto puede no afectar inmediatamente a la mayoría de las/os trabajadores. Pero la manera de los capitalistas lidiar con la pérdida de su riqueza especulativa es de irse contra las/os trabajadores que tienen menos de $1,000 o $100 a su nombre.

En su discurso sobre el Estado de la Unión, el presidente Barack Obama destacó un aumento modesto en trabajos de servicio con los salarios más bajos - desde centros de llamadas hasta los restaurantes de comida rápida. Sin embargo, cientos de miles de trabajadoras/es en la industria pesada, la producción de energía, la banca y los servicios financieros - desde DuPont, Alcoa, John Deere y BP hasta Morgan Stanley - ya han sido despedidas/os en el último año.

Rescate financiero profundizó la crisis

Los economistas capitalistas, reticentes a utilizar el término "recesión," han inventado un nuevo término para denominar un período tan largo sin crecimiento económico: "estancamiento secular". Se han celebrado conferencias internacionales y escrito numerosos trabajos académicos sobre este tema. Estancamiento secular es un término muy difuso que oculta la realidad. El capitalismo, para expandirse, debe encontrar mercados en los que vender sus productos con ganancias. Cuando no puede hacer esto, todo el sistema mundial entra en una espiral de crisis.

Los rescates no han tenido éxito en poner en marcha a la economía. Años de tasas de interés de casi cero para estimular préstamos gigantes supuestamente para estimular la producción, puede que hayan empeorado esta crisis capitalista.

Un periódico británico cita las palabras de un funcionario de la Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económico: "La situación es peor de lo que era en 2007. El mundo se enfrenta a una ola de impagos épicos de deuda. Nuestra municiones macroeconómicas para combatir las crisis, esencialmente han sido totalmente utilizadas"., dijo William White, el presidente con sede en Suiza del comité de revisión de la OCDE y ex economista jefe del Banco de Pagos Internacionales (BPI)." (Telegraph, 19 de enero)

Barcos 'Zombi'

Hay sobreproducción de mercancías, desde petróleo hasta los productos terminados como juguetes, ropa y autos. Hay hasta un exceso de los grandes buques de contenedores que mueven más del 95 por ciento de los productos manufacturados del mundo.

La industria del transporte marítimo se enfrenta a su peor crisis en memoria reciente, después de años de rápida expansión alimentada por la deuda barata. La flota mundial se duplicó en tamaño de 2010 a 2013. (Reuters Business Insider, 20 de enero)

La competencia entre las compañías navieras ha impulsado la construcción de una nueva generación de súper cargueros que puede transportar 19.000 contenedores, en comparación a los buques anteriores que llevan solo 5.600. Se necesitan años para construir este tipo de buques. Los pedidos fueron colocados cuando se esperaba una recuperación global completa después de 2009.

Las corporaciones navieras que financiaron sus flotas con un 60 por ciento de deuda y con 40 por ciento de liquidez, han visto desvanecerse esa liquidez.

Ahora, flotas "zombi" aceptan fletes a precios irrisorios sólo para poder seguir a flote. Pero los propietarios no tienen esperanza de pagar el capital en sus préstamos. Los bancos tienen miedo de destapar estos préstamos porque entonces se verían obligados a ponerlos en la lista de pérdidas.

El Baltic Exchange, que ha establecido tarifas de envío por más de dos siglos y medio, dice que la situación que sus miembros enfrentan es sombría.

Gigantes derribados por la deuda

Aún grandes empresas multinacionales que han sobrevivido décadas de caos capitalista en el pasado se tambalean ahora. Años de interés de casi cero por ciento provocaron que muchas de las mayores empresas mundiales de mercancías, asumieran enormes deudas para invertir en una mayor expansión y en fusiones. Pero ahora que el precio de las mercancías ha bajado a la mitad o incluso a un tercio del valor que tenían hace un año, el valor de mercado de estas empresas ha entrado en una caída libre.

Una de las más grandes y antiguas corporaciones mineras de oro y cobre, la Freeport McMoRan, está en crisis después de sacar grandes préstamos hace unos tres años para compras en petróleo y gas. Ahora con el exceso de petróleo, las acciones de la compañía han caído de $60 por acción a menos de $4. Freeport McMoRan, valorada ahora en $4.8 mil millones, está sobrellevando una deuda de $20 mil millones, por lo cual está recortando puestos de trabajo y todos los gastos de capital. Pero para cumplir con sus pagos de la deuda, sigue produciendo petróleo, incluso a precios sumamente bajos. (New York Times, 22 de enero)

Anteriormente, durante las caídas de precios, los productores de mercancías inmediatamente reducían la producción. Pero esta vez, debido a sus enormes deudas, continúan inundando el mercado, empeorando así la situación.

Capitalistas culpan a China de sus problemas

El exceso actual de mercancías a nivel global está siendo atribuido a una desaceleración en el crecimiento de la República Popular China — la segunda economía más grande y de más rápido crecimiento del mundo.

El caos y la competencia despiadada del sistema capitalista en sí nunca es culpado. Por ejemplo, tanto corporaciones estadounidenses como alemanas han agravado las condiciones en China en las plantas que son empresas conjuntas. La decisión de Volkswagen, GM y otros fabricantes significativos de automóviles de frenar su producción en China debido al exceso de oferta mundial de automóviles, significó que cancelaran primero las bonificaciones para las/os trabajadores en sus plantas. "Los bonos típicamente suelen ascender a más de la mitad del salario neto de las/os trabajadores de la línea de ensamblaje". (Reuters, 15 de septiembre, 2015)

Estas gigantescas corporaciones internacionales no solo cortan el pago que se llevan a su casa las/os trabajadores de la línea de ensamblaje, sus horas de trabajo, los descansos y el número de turnos, sino que ellos y otras grandes empresas occidentales también cortaron miles de millones de dólares en los planes de expansión que tenían en China. Por supuesto, todos estos recortes en inversiones que fueron anunciados hace más de tres meses, tuvieron repercusiones sobre el mercado de valores chino.

Estos cortes abruptos han estimulado el aumento de los esfuerzos para desarrollar unas relaciones y un comercio más estable entre China, Rusia, América Latina y África. Un artículo cubano titulado "Resistiendo las tormentas del siglo 21" escrito hace pocos días, expuso que este comercio que se está desarrollando rápidamente es de beneficio mutuo. Para el año 2014, el valor del comercio bilateral entre China y América Latina era 22 veces más de lo que había sido en 2000. (Granma, 19 de enero)

No se puede predecir cuán profunda e insuperable será la crisis venidera, ni qué la va a provocar. Pero la urgencia de que las/os trabajadores hagan sonar la alarma y organicen una fuerte lucha está fuera de discusión. □