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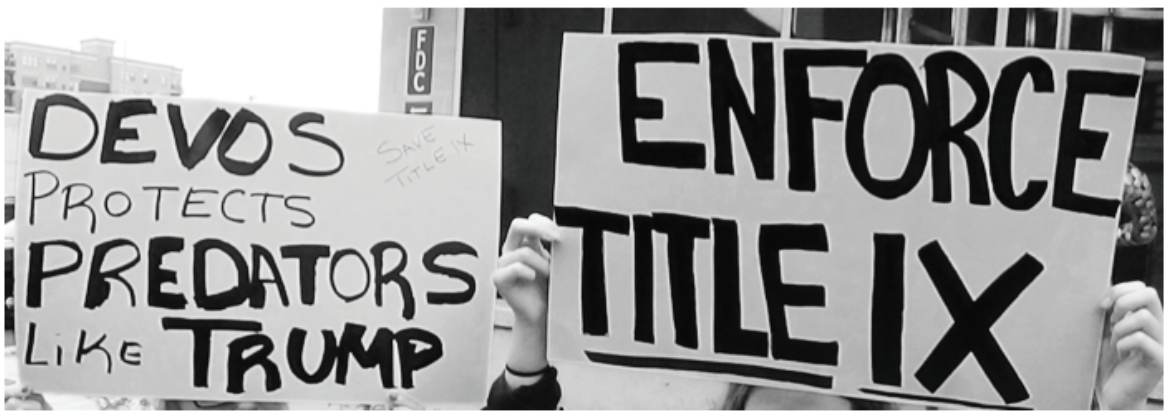
## A threat to Title IX

# Education Secretary DeVos attacks abuse survivors

By Sue Davis

*Bulletin: Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is preparing to remove civil rights protections for students of color, reported EducationPost.org, Dec. 13. (tinyurl.com/ybx9lghh) This can only ramp up racial bias in regard to Title IX as discussed in this article.*




Education Secretary Betsy DeVos' proposed revisions of Title IX regulations, covering sexual harassment, assault and abuse in K-12 schools and federally funded colleges and universities, were designed to make it easier for educational institutions to avoid dealing with such issues and harder for survivors to bring charges against perpetrators.

That turns the original intent of Title IX upside down. Title IX is a landmark civil rights law passed in the Education Amendments of 1972 to prohibit sex discrimination in federally funded education programs. That's why DeVos' revisions are adamantly opposed by survivors' advocates, women's and LGBTQ rights organizations, and educational and legal groups.

But the proposed revisions align perfectly with the misogynous stalking practices of DeVos' boss. Predator-in-chief Donald Trump boasts about his sexist conquests, while current headlines delve into his payoffs silencing two mistresses.

DeVos was doing Trump's bidding when revamping Title IX regulations, published Nov. 16, after consulting so-called "men's rights" groups which promote the myth of "false accusations." DeVos' predecessor called such cases "exceedingly rare."

According to the National Women's Law Center, more than 3 million students will be sexually assaulted in 2018; less than 10 percent will report that to administrators. More than 1 in 5 women, nearly 1 in 18 men and nearly 1 in 4 transgender and gender-nonconforming students in college are sexually assaulted annually.

During college, 62 percent of women and 61 percent of men experience sexual harassment. During grades 7-12, 56 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys are sexually harassed. In reporting harassment, women and girls of color, students who are pregnant, parenting, LGBTQ or gender-nonconforming are more likely to be ignored, punished or labeled "promiscuous."

### Proposed changes in Title IX rules

Two major changes in the regulations would make it harder to convict an assailant. (Source: The National Women's Law Center, "DeVos's Proposed Changes to Title IX, Explained," nwlc.org)

One change raises the standard for a case from "preponderance of evidence" to "clear and convincing evidence." Preponderance is the standard used by federal courts in civil rights cases and all other types of student misconduct.

The other change radically upgrades sexual harassment from "unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature" to "unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex that is so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person access to the [institution's] education program or activity." This stringent definition would force a survivor to meet an extremely high test.

Strict definitions of evidence allow institutions to address only the worst cases of sexual harassment and abuse. This may force survivors to suffer more before they seek help. Institutional responsibility for sexual assault or harassment is also limited to "school-sponsored activity" and doesn't include online communication, though much informal student interaction occurs through school-provided social media sites.

Previously students could report abuse to a trusted teacher, resident advisor or coach. Now, only a Title IX coordinator with "the authority to institute corrective measures" or K-12 teacher who has "actual knowledge" of abuse can take action. That would let Michigan State

*Continued on page 4*

**DEFEND JAZMINE HEADLEY *editorial*** 6

**SOMALI WORKERS PUSH BACK AMAZON** 5

**SOCIALISM & THE ENVIRONMENT** 6

**LIFE AND DEATH *editorial*** 6

Jazmine Headley and her son Damone.

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**YELLOW VEST MOVEMENT**

***Solidarity in New York*** 5

***Macron backtracks*** 7

***Grows across Europe*** 7

# Inmates expose systematic abuse in Georgia jail

**By Christian Noakes**
**Atlanta**

Gwinnett County Sheriff Butch Conway and Lt. Col. Carl Sims currently face a federal lawsuit in response to widespread abuse of inmates. Plaintiffs are 75 current and former inmates whose testimonies have revealed systematic cruelty at the county jail.

Central to the lawsuit are restraint chairs used to strap down inmates' hands, feet and heads. In one instance, guards strapped down a military veteran with PTSD after also stripping him of his clothes. Similar brutality has been meted out to several other inmates with physical and mental disabilities.

Another plaintiff, 26-year-old Shelby Clark, was severely beaten and partially blinded after guards hit her for having a mental breakdown — one hit her in the face several times. (tinyurl.com/yahku7dx)

Such inhumane tactics are used by the jail's "Rapid Response Team," which receives orders and direction from the police officers charged. According to one of the attorneys filing the suit on behalf of the current and former inmates, video evidence shows that there is often no apparent reason for many of the team's violent assaults. Guards can be seen in some cases entering cells using "nonlethal" SWAT tactics on noncombative victims — many of whom are then strapped down for hours.

In Georgia, inside the Gwinnett County jail.

Created in 2008, the Rapid Response Team has a long-established record of unwarranted and excessive force. The current lawsuit was preceded by a similar suit by other inmates in 2015 — a case which is still pending.

The Gwinnett County jail Sheriff's Office is far from an anomaly. The prison is not a "failing in the system," but displays the brutal efficiency of a prison system meant to mentally and physically break those it cynically claims to be "rehabilitating."

The jail illustrates perfectly how the prison system, which functions as an apparatus of class rule and white supremacy, both exacerbates and criminalizes mental health conditions in the working-class people subjected to its tortures. □

# In 26th murder of 2018, Black trans woman activist killed

**By Martha Grevatt**
**Detroit**

Kelly Stough, a Black trans activist, was found dead Dec. 7 in the Palmer Park neighborhood of Detroit. A Baptist minister, Albert Weathers, has been charged in the shooting. Stough's murder is being treated as an anti-trans hate crime.

Kelly Stough, who also used the name Keanna Mattel, was the 26th trans person known to have been murdered this year in the U.S. Nearly all of those killed were women of color.

Stough, who was 36 years old, had been an activist in her community. In 2015, after the killing of Amber Monroe, another Detroit trans woman of color, Stough told the Guardian: "The police are unaware with our struggle, so they have no sympathy for us." (NBC News, Dec. 12)

Jessica Chantae Stough, Kelly's mother, echoing the sentiment of many, told NBC:"I want people to know that because she was transgender doesn't mean that she was not loved, that she was not cared for. She has a family who cared about her, who loved her and I want them to know that transgender ladies — expressly those of color — they're just not throwaways; people care about them."

*Continued on Page 3*

## See you next year!

**Hello, readers! Workers World publishes 51 issues every year. This issue is number 51. Next week we'll be taking our usual annual break and will be back the first week of January 2019. Enjoy the winter solstice while keeping warm and strong for the revolution! See you then.**

**— WW editorial staff**

# WORKERS WORLD this week

★ **In the U.S.**

Ed. Secretary DeVos attacks abuse survivors ..... 1
Inmates expose abuse in Georgia jail ..... 2
Black trans activist murdered ..... 2
Judge in Mumia appeal requests evidence ..... 3
Indigenous protest in Chaco, New Mexico region .. 3
On the picketline ..... 4
NYC: 'Yellow Vest' protest against fare hikes ..... 5
Somali workers push back against Amazon ..... 5

★ **Around the world**

Carbon tax NO, green jobs YES! ..... 6
Yellow Vests in France: Macron scam fails ..... 7
Protests spread in Europe ..... 7
Is Europe a powder keg? ..... 7

★ **Editorial**

Life and death ..... 6
When a cops are 'just doing their job' ..... 6

★ **Noticias en Español**

Solidaridad en la frontera ..... 12

# WORKERS WORLD

Workers World Party is a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party inside the belly of the imperialist beast. We are a multinational, multigenerational and multigendered organization that not only aims to abolish capitalism, but to build a socialist society because it's the only way forward!

Capitalism and imperialism threaten the peoples of the world and the planet itself in the neverending quest for ever-greater profits.

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repression, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny, LGBTQ oppression and mistreatment of people with disabilities. It means joblessness, increasing homelessness and impoverishment and lack of hope for the future. No social problems can be solved under capitalism.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world, yet no one has a guaranteed right to shelter, food, water, health care, education or anything else — unless they can pay for it. Wages are lower than ever, and youth are saddled with seemingly insurmountable student debt, if they even make it to college. Black, Brown and Indigenous youth and trans people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

# *Join us in the fight for socialism!*

The ruthless ruling class today seeks to wipe out decades of gains and benefits won by hard-fought struggles by people's movements. The super-rich and their political representatives have intensified their attacks on the multinational, multigender and multigenerational working class. It is time to point the blame at — and challenge — the capitalist system.

WWP fights for socialism because the working class produces all wealth in society, and this wealth should remain in their hands, not be stolen in the form of capitalist profits. The wealth workers create should be socially owned and its distribution planned to satisfy and guarantee basic human needs.

Since 1959, Workers World Party has been out in the streets defending the workers and oppressed here and worldwide. If you're interested in Marxism, socialism and fighting for a socialist future, please contact a WWP branch near you.❑

## Contact a Workers World Party branch near you:

**workers.org/wwp**

**New York**
147 W. 24th
New York, NY 10011
212.627.2994
wwp@workers.org

**Atlanta**
PO Box 18123
Atlanta, GA 30316
404 .627.0185
atlanta@workers.org

**Boston**
284 Amory St.
Boston, MA 02130
617.286.6574
boston@workers.org

**Bay Area**
bayarea@workers.org

**Buffalo, N.Y.**
335 Richmond Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14222
716.883.2534
buffalo@workers.org

**Cleveland**
P.O. Box 5963
Cleveland, OH 44101
216.738.0320
cleveland@workers.org

**Detroit**
detroit@workers.org

**Durham, N.C.**
804 Old Fayetteville St.
Durham, NC 27701
919. 322 .9 970
durham@workers.org

**Houston**
P.O. Box 3454
Houston, TX 77253-3454
713.503.2633
houston@workers.org

**Philadelphia**
P.O. Box 34249
Philadelphia, PA 19101
610.931.2615
phila@workers.org

**Portland, Ore.**
portland@workers.org

**Salt Lake City**
801.750.0248
slc@workers.org

**Tucson, Ariz.**
tucson@workers.org

Workers World
147 W. 24th St., 2nd Fl.
New York, NY 10011
Phone: 212.627.2994
E-mail: ww@workers.org
Web: www.workers.org

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Editor: Deirdre Griswold

Managing Editors: John Catalinotto, LeiLani Dowell, Monica Moorehead, Minnie Bruce Pratt;
Web Editors: Ben Carroll, John Steffin

Production & Design Editors: Gery Armsby, Jayla Hagans, Sasha Mazumder, Scott Williams

Copyediting and Proofreading: Paddy Colligan, Sue Davis, S. Hedgecoke

Contributing Editors: G. Dunkel, K. Durkin, Fred Goldstein, Martha Grevatt, Teresa Gutierrez, Berta Joubert-Ceci, Betsey Piette, Gloria Rubac

Mundo Obero: Redactora Berta Joubert-Ceci; Alberto García, Teresa Gutierrez, Carlos Vargas

Supporter Program: Coordinator Sue Davis

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# Judge in Mumia appeal requests evidence of Castille bias

**By Betsey Piette**
**Philadelphia**

Philadelphia Common Pleas Court Judge Leon Tucker filed an order Dec. 7 giving 10 days for attorneys for Mumia Abu-Jamal and the Philadelphia district attorney's office to provide input on former Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Ronald Castille's possible violation of a PA Judicial Canon on Conduct requiring recusal if there was an appearance of bias or lack of impartiality.

Tucker is requesting opinions on how this code of conduct applies to Abu-Jamal's appeal and how it fits into the U.S. Supreme Court case Williams v. Pennsylvania, upon which the appeal is based. Lawyers must respond by Dec. 17 unless an extension is requested and granted.

Tucker took final arguments on Dec. 3 from attorneys for Abu-Jamal and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Both agreed they had no additional evidence to submit. The judge's new request is very important in that it asks for opinions on how the application of the Judicial Canon on Conduct applies to Abu-Jamal's case and how it fits into the Williams case.

The question of possible judicial bias extends to Castille's activities on capital cases — not just as the former district attorney — but while he was running for election as a judge or was a judge.

### Castille's focus on 'police killers'

Tucker is considering the broader argument that due process requires an unbiased decision maker. Abu-Jamal's attorneys added this second legal basis to grant the political prisoner new appeal rights in amended petitions and oral arguments during an Oct. 29 court proceeding. They argued that Williams provides a specific application of that principle as applied by SCOTUS in a case where the prosecutor later became the judge on the same case.

Due process claims based on judicial bias do not require proof of actual bias, only the appearance of bias — that "a reasonable observer could conclude that a judge harbored disqualifying bias against the petitioner." The question is whether the judge would be neutral or whether there is unconstitutional potential for bias. The PA Supreme Court has maintained that recusal is required wherever there is substantial doubt about a jurist's ability to preside impartially.

Commonwealth attorneys claim that during months of searching hundreds of boxes of DA records documents showing Castille was personally involved in Mumia's case were not found. But the prosecution released documents that expose Castille's personal bias on capital cases. One was a letter DA Castille wrote in June 1990 to then Gov. Robert P. Casey, a death penalty opponent, who would not sign death warrants.

Urging Casey to "send a clear … message to all police killers that the death penalty in Pennsylvania actually means something," Castille asked Casey to sign death warrants and provided him with a list of capital cases where they could be applied.

Abu-Jamal's case was not on the list because his case was still being appealed to SCOTUS. However, Abu-Jamal's attorneys assert that Castille's letter to Casey targeted Abu-Jamal. His was one of three capital cases at that time involving a convicted so-called "police killer." They charge that this reflects Castille's personal involvement in a critical decision in Abu-Jamal's case.

### Castille: FOP's 'Man-of-the-Year'

Evidence also surfaced of DA Castille's support for a campaign by former PA State Sen. Mike Fisher regarding passage of legislation that would further restrict state appeals of death penalty convictions. The legislation included removal of final approval for death warrants from the governor's office. A status report on certain death row inmates that was sent to Fisher included Abu-Jamal's name.

Abu-Jamal's attorneys stated on Oct. 29: "On Sept. 23, 1988, DA Castille wrote directly to Fisher urging passage of an amendment to the death penalty law and conveying his fears about the impact of Mills v. Maryland." (That U.S. Supreme Court case, a 5-4 decision in 1988, reversed a Maryland Court of Appeals death sentence affirmation on the ground that the jury verdict form used was unconstitutional.) Castille feared that "Mills may lead to the vacating of scores of death penalties." Abu-Jamal's appeal contained a Mills claim regarding Judge Albert Sabo's improper instructions to the jury, which became the basis for overturning his death sentence.

There is ample evidence of other instances of Castille's bias and that he took responsibility for death sentences. The Williams decision included citations from news articles quoting Castille bragging about putting "45 murderers on death row." Some 36,000 Pennsylvania police officers endorsed him. The Fraternal Order of Police gave Castille "Man-of-the-Year" awards, political support and donations during his campaign for the PA Supreme Court.

The American Bar Association filed an amicus brief in the Williams case, which noted that Castille was on "a crusade against" the Federal Community Defender Organization that represented Williams. The ABA notes, "He was incensed by its involvement in state post-conviction proceedings, and even more so by its zealotry on behalf of its clients."

### Refusal to recuse in Abu-Jamal's case

In 1996 Abu-Jamal appealed his post-conviction challenge to his death sentence and death penalty denied by Judge Sabo to the PA Supreme Court over his 1982 conviction by a mostly white jury for the 1981 shooting of police officer Daniel Faulkner. He also filed a motion requesting that Justice Castille not hear the case. The grounds for requesting the recusal were based on Castille's FOP relationship and defense of prosecutorial conduct in the face of evidence of significant prosecutorial misconduct.

As a former Philadelphia district attorney, Castille's name appeared on appeal briefs which argued that Abu-Jamal's trial was fair and that evidence against him was compelling. Castille oversaw the legal efforts to keep Abu-Jamal on Pennsylvania's death row.

Abu-Jamal's lawyers at that time requested that Castille not deliberate over their client's appeal because of his prior role as DA and his long-time association with the FOP, which actively campaigned for Abu-Jamal's execution.

Arguing that his decision not to step down from the hearing was a "personal one for him alone to make," Castille noted that while the FOP endorsed him, it also endorsed four other PA court justices hearing the case. Castille claimed he had never "personally" participated in any aspect of Abu-Jamal's case. Yet four years earlier when he ran for the state court, four aides reported that as district attorney, Castille was actively involved in death penalty cases, particularly "high-profile cases," of which Abu-Jamal's topped the list.

Whether Judge Tucker is genuinely interested in evidence of Castille's inherent bias regarding the class of capital cases involving murders of police officers or if he is simply seeking to cover all bases and make his decision appeal-proof remains to be seen. Due to the long history of this case, Abu-Jamal supporters know that reliance on the courts to rule fairly for Mumia is never a given.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is innocent. A judicial win and granting new appeal rights for him would be a significant decision against the widespread policy whereby former prosecutors are elected and appointed as judges with the financial and political support of police organizations.

Abu-Jamal's supporters have already launched an Emergency Response Network to fill the streets whichever way Judge Tucker rules. Demonstrations will take place outside the DA's office at 4 p.m. on the day after Tucker's decision. For more information and to sign the pledge to show up, go to Mobilization4Mumia.com. ❑

# Indigenous protest land grab in Chaco region

**By Stephanie Tromblay**

Native activists and environmentalists protested in Santa Fe, N.M., on Dec. 5 against the Bureau of Land Management's illegal auctioning of 84,000 acres of sacred and fragile lands in the Greater Chaco region and the Greater Carlsbad Caverns region in New Mexico. The state is second only to Utah in numbers of acres on the block for lease sales for fracking and resource extraction.

The Chaco region has been home to Pueblo and Diné (Navajo) peoples for millennia. Chaco Canyon contains several ancient Puebloan ancestral ruins of apartment and community buildings, which comprised a former city of immense cultural significance.

The BLM deferred sale of 1,040 acres within the 10-mile proposed protection zone of Chaco Culture National Historical Park as a result of 10,000 formal protest letters being hand delivered to it on Oct. 31. This was the largest protest ever organized in a public comment period concerning oil and gas extraction leasing in New Mexico.

The parcels being sold near Chaco are adjacent to many Diné communities where residents already suffer the impact of fracking leases — such as polluted air, damaged roads, light and noise pollution, increased cancer rates and respiratory illnesses, anxiety and depression, and harm to livestock. Indigenous communities depend upon the land for sustenance and survival. Residents near Carlsbad Caverns have also suffered similarly from fracking operations.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who is under investigation and resigned on Dec. 15, did not consult with any of the Pueblos nor the Navajo Nation to conduct cultural resource surveys of sacred sites. The December lease was widely criticized by tribal, state and other entities, including the All Pueblo Council of Governors, the Navajo Nation, 15 Diné Chapter Houses, the Eastern Navajo Agency Council and Governor-elect Michelle Lujan-Grisham. The Navajo Chapter Houses have demanded a moratorium on new drilling and leasing in their communities.

E. Paul Torres, the chairperson of the All Pueblo Council of Governors and a former governor of the Pueblo of Isleta, stated: "Pueblo ethnographic information is scarce or entirely absent from the archaeological and academic record that the BLM relies upon in attempting to meet its duties under the National Historic Preservation Act. However, this does not mean the Pueblos' living ties, knowledge of cultural sites and ability to identify the footsteps and fingerprints of their ancestors does not exist." (Santa Fe New Mexican, Dec. 4)

The action on Dec. 5 was called by Pueblo Action Alliance and the Red Nation. For more information, see #NoNewLeases #ProtectChacoCanyon #FrackOffChaco #FrackOffNM #WaterIsLife #KeepItInTheSoil #CantDrinkOil.❑

# Black trans woman activist killed

*Continued from page 2*

**Kelly Stough**

Friends and family have organized fundraisers to help with funeral costs. A gofundme appeal raised nearly $5,000.

In 2017, at least 29 trans people were murdered in the U.S., where the recorded number of murdered trans people has been over 20 every year since 2013. About 85 percent of those killed have been Black and Brown. For trans women of color, the murder rate is 1 in 2,600, compared to 1 in 19,000 in the general population. (mic.com/unerased)

This appalling statistic does not take into account suicides, deaths from denial of medical care or deaths where the victim's gender identity is not reported. Trans women of color also suffer a high rate of physical and sexual assault.

As Stough herself observed three years before she was murdered, the capitalist state is not going to help stop what has been called a form of femicide. People must organize to stop these racist, anti-trans lynchings.❑

# On the picket line

By Alex Bolchi and Sue Davis

## Calif. mental health care workers' strike wins solidarity

From Dec. 10 to 15, the 4,000 members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers showed strength in the streets when striking their employer, Kaiser Permanente. These mental health professional workers are psychologists, therapists, social workers, psychiatric nurses and addiction specialists who treat patients with depression, bipolar disorder and other conditions. On Dec. 12, the strike not only expanded to 15 hospitals and 85 clinics, but members of the California Nurses Association and Stationary Engineers Local 39 joined picket lines!

Kaiser, the country's largest nonprofit healthcare maintenance organization, currently provides coverage for about 8.8 million Californians. The company makes record profits — $2.6 billion since the beginning of 2018 — and their executives get huge payouts.

Kaiser has refused to ensure that its hospitals and clinics are fully staffed. Patients often wait more than a month to be seen because there's only one full-time mental health clinician for every 3,000 Kaiser patients. Management has refused to hire enough mental health therapists since 2015. (NUHW, Nov. 29)

That's why "there's a critical condition every day of the year," said NUHW President Sal Rosselli. (Daily Democrat, Dec. 11) As demonstrators rallied with chants and signs — "Care delayed is care denied!" — members of other unions and community groups showed solidarity as workers fought the good fight to end the access crisis!

## Strike Victory at Chicago Charter Schools!

Nearly 500 Chicago Teachers Union-represented teachers ended a successful five-day strike and won a tentative contract in the unlikeliest of places — a charter school network. This was the first charter school strike in U.S. history! (Chicago Tribune, Dec. 10) Teachers shut down 15 schools where they teach more than 7,000 students, who are 90 percent Latinx. These educators, who earn up to $13,000 less than their counterparts in the Chicago Public School system, work for Acero, formerly known as the UNO Charter School Network, which went union five years ago.

Acero teachers demanded — and won — equal pay for equal work with CPS educators, class size reductions with penalties if violated, management commitment to comply with teacher staffing levels, sanctuary school protections in contract language and equal pay for equal work when Acero educators teach CPS students.

"This is a victory for every educator who sees children getting short-changed by privatization and charter operators putting their business models over the needs of our students," said Chris Baehrend, chair of the CTU Charter Division. (CTUlocal1.org, Dec. 16)

## Successful national hotel strike ends in 8 cities

San Francisco, the eighth and final city in the 7,700-worker strike at 20 Marriott hotels across the U.S., reached a settlement when UNITE HERE Local 2 workers voted Dec. 16 to ratify a four-year contract. This settlement marks the end of the largest multicity hotel industry strike ever, with workers making huge financial sacrifices to win the strike. It was nine weeks after seven UNITE HERE affiliates, spanning eight different locations — Boston, Detroit, Honolulu, Maui, Oakland, San Diego, San Francisco and San Jose — first walked out on Oct. 3. (WW, Dec. 1)

The San Francisco contract, like all eight settlements, mark historic level wage and benefit increases; sexual harassment protections, including removal and banning of guests who violate women workers; and bargaining power for workers as the hospitality industry tries to introduce automation in hotels.

UNITE HERE Local 5 (Honolulu) President Gemma Weinstein noted that "One job should be enough" was a constant chant on picket lines and slogan on signs. (bigislandnow.com, Nov. 28) Union members all over the country walked the lines in solidarity with UNITE HERE members.

## Workers win union at Ole Miss

All campus workers in the United Campus Workers of Mississippi, an affiliate of United Campus Workers-CWA, became the first higher education institution in Mississippi to have a union. The union, certified in November by the Communication Workers, did not have to seek approval from the university because it's not a university-sanctioned organization.

UCW started at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville in the late 1990s to organize professors, custodians, grad students and cafeteria workers into one big union. Even without collective bargaining rights, they won major contract improvements and defeated outsourcing work to private contractors with collective action and protest.

UCW has now expanded to Georgia and Mississippi, with workers at Ole Miss working closely with both chapters. "We want to build and sustain social and economic justice in our workplaces and in our communities," Jessica Wilkerson, a professor of Southern studies and a lead UCWM organizer, told the Daily Mississippian. "We're interested in the broad range of labor issues. If you come to work and feel unsafe because of racism, sexism or homophobia, that's a labor issue. That would be something, as a union, we would want to address." (thedmonline.com, Nov. 29) □

# Education Secretary DeVos attacks abuse survivors

*Continued from page 1*

and Penn State, with perpetrators like Larry Nassar and Jerry Sandusky, respectively, off the hook.

The new rules automatically exempt religiously affiliated institutions from Title IX; currently they must file a formal request for exemption. Students may not know until it's too late that they won't be covered by rights conveyed in Title IX.

Institutions may offer students "supportive measures" to help them stay in school, such as counseling or modified work and class schedules, but only offer "mutual" restrictions on contact between parties. If an institution believes transferring a perpetrator from classes would pose an "unreasonable burden" on them, then the survivor must make changes, imposing a burden on them.

Institutions can now propose mediation, often used to resolve peer conflict — both sides take responsibility so they can compromise. But mediation is never appropriate for resolving sexual assault cases, which is why it's previously been prohibited.

### Will cross examination eliminate racial bias?

The most controversial aspect of the proposed regulations is allowing sexual assault survivors be cross-examined by an advisor for the accused, while an advisor for the survivor may cross-examine the accused. Such confrontation, even if the two sides are in different rooms or participate via videoconference, could intensify the survivor's trauma, forcing them to drop the case or deterring them from initially reporting.

Lara Bazelon, a University of San Francisco law professor, contends in her Dec. 5 op-ed in the New York Times that rules of cross examination are needed. She argues this will counter the racial bias that permeates every aspect of U.S. society. Bazelon runs a pro bono clinic with her students to advocate for low-income students of color facing expulsion from allegations of sexual assault.

Noting that the Office of Civil Rights does not collect data on race in Title IX cases, she cites analysis of assault accusations at a private college in upstate New York where 4.2 percent of students were Black in 2012-13. There, 50 percent of sexual-violation accusations were against Black students, and 40 percent of Blacks went through the disciplinary process.

"We have long over-sexualized, over-criminalized and disproportionately punished black men," writes Bazelon. "It should come as no surprise that, in a setting in which protections for the accused are greatly diminished, this shameful legacy persists."

Bazelon contends that cross examination is in line with a Michigan court ruling last August which found that a public university "must give the accused student or his agent an opportunity to cross-examine the accuser and adverse witnesses in the presence of a neutral fact-finder."

But will cross examination be impartial? Will it go beyond "he said, she said"? Will due process promote fairness and justice?

That depends on who is administering each case and what biases they bring to the proceedings. The current Trump administration's abysmal racist record hardly suggests that DeVos' rules are being implemented to counter racism.

### Voice your views before Feb. 28

The proposed changes to Title IX regulations are not final. There is a public comment period from Nov. 29 to Jan. 28. The Department of Education must incorporate all comments into the final rules.

The NWLC objected to the timing of the 60-day period, which included finals, holidays, school breaks, and sent the DoE a letter Nov. 26 co-signed by 123 organizations and 231 individuals requesting a 60-day extension. The letter urged the DoE to "schedule public hearings at school districts and college campuses throughout the country to encourage additional input from students, teachers, administrators and advocates" so "those most affected … are given the opportunity to engage and give the Department the benefit of a robust rule-making process."

The Seattle Times reports the University of Washington has scheduled discussions on three campuses Jan. 14-17. Victor Balta, a UW administrator, was concerned about the "narrowed definition of sexual harassment," which might create an "erosion of trust and confidence" in student views of UW. (Nov. 29)

Comments should be posted on regulations.gov under the title "Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance" listed on Nov. 29.

The National Women's Law Center suggests two ways to submit comments: 1) Send a prewritten statement (tinyurl.com/y993az264). 2) Write a personal comment using a customizable format (tinyurl.com/y92v5szu). It's urgent to submit comments before the Feb. 28 deadline. □

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New York City

# ‘Yellow Vest’ protest against transit fare hikes

**By Tony Murphy**
**Queens, N.Y.**

Showing solidarity with and taking inspiration from the French uprising that defeated a fuel tax increase — and then won more concessions from the Macron government — New York activists held a ‘Yellow Vest’ protest on Dec. 11 against local transit fare hikes.

Activists with the People’s MTA, Rise & Resist and the Peoples Power Assemblies/NYC demonstrated outside the fare hike hearing in Queens, held by the bank-controlled Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Then the protesters went inside to testify.

Placards read, “Our subways need elevators, not racist ‘broken windows’ policing,” “No fare hike for a subway that is not accessible” and “Disabled Lives Matter.”

At the hearing, the New York Yellow Vest activists made the same point as members of the French rebellion: The fare increase is the tip of the iceberg on top of a mass of inequalities. The anger over the NYC subway fare hike is anger over the daily indignities faced by the 5.5 million people who take the subway every day.

### Protesters list demands

At the top of the protesters’ list of problems are the transit system’s criminal lack of elevators, racist New York Police Department harassment of riders of color, and overall chronic malfunctions and service disruptions.

Only 1 out of 4 transit stations has an elevator, and those that exist are constantly breaking down. People who use wheelchairs frequently plan trips around accessible stations, only to find out-of-service elevators when they get to those stations. That means missed appointments, canceled plans and more time spent rerouting to a different, supposedly accessible station — where the same thing can happen again.

Sometimes the elevators even malfunction with people in them, who then have to be rescued by EMS or fire department teams.

Accessibility for wheelchair users also allows accessibility for single parents or anyone with baby strollers who have to hope someone will help them carry their children up or down stairs. Older riders or anyone whose walking is impaired continually struggle up and down the steep stairs at the city’s many elevated lines.

Since the 7 train in Queens is a series of elevated lines, the location of the hearing in Queens was an opportunity for protesters to highlight the line’s daily mishaps and serious problems. The 7 train will be the one most affected by the arrival of Amazon, whose executives were actually told by MTA President Andy Byford that Queens was a “transit wonderland.”

Riders of the 7 train laugh at that. On Dec. 10, at the 7 line’s Court Square station, an elevated station with tracks on either side, the overcrowding caused by late trains became so dangerous at least one person was knocked down.

On Dec. 11, signal problems caused the Queens’ Astoria-Ditmars station to be shut down completely during morning rush hour. Hundreds of riders couldn’t get to work.

When protesters and others spoke at the hearing, all of these frustrations — the missed job interviews, the write-ups for being late, police harassment, lack of accessibility — poured out. Their anger was supercharged by the glaring hypocrisy that New York city and state are giving Amazon $3 billion in tax credits and grants to locate in Queens.

A rider asked the wealthy MTA board members if they themselves actually used public transportation. After several meekly raised their hands, People’s MTA member Tsehai Hiwot testified at the microphone, “That’s bull. I don’t believe it. You have private cars or take taxis.”

### Cops in France — and in NYC transit system

The role of cops in targeting workers, especially those of color, in the NYC transit system is another parallel to the struggle in France. There, the response of the capitalist state has been repression to the just demands of the people. With millions in the street, even as the French government has been forced to make concessions, the degree of repression has included teargas, water cannons and hundreds of violent arrests.

**Dec. 11 protest.** WW PHOTO: TONY MURPHY

In the New York subway, the repression functions at a different level — though it is still potentially deadly. On Dec. 3, MTA President Byford announced that, to “save money,” the MTA would be cleaning trains less and cutting back on heat in the winter. But he also blamed the fare increase on “fare-beaters” and said he was creating “fare-evasion strike teams” backed by the NYPD.

What Byford proposed as a “fairness” measure has taken on a scary form. As of Dec. 11 the MTA has begun positioning metal detectors, complete with eight cops — some in riot gear with submachine guns — and dogs in a bogus “anti-terrorist” campaign. Right now the metal detectors are at the 42 Street Port Authority station, but the NYPD says it will station them at other stops. Bag checks are already happening at other stations.

Speakers at the Dec. 11 hearing blasted the MTA for blaming its fare increase on fare-beaters. Protesters denouncing the racist character of the plan for “strike teams” pointed out that since Amazon paid no federal taxes in 2017, the real fare-beater is Jeff Bezos, its owner.

MTA’s plan for more NYPD aggression means increased summons and arrests of riders of color in the transit system. In 2018 police issued “fare-evasion” summons to 25,000 people, with 90 percent of them people of color. The racist profiling problem became so rampant that the New York District Attorney’s office was forced to announce it would stop prosecuting fare-beating as a crime. (tinyurl.com/y84kvjuh)

But the bank-controlled MTA is pushing back. It claimed the DA’s decision caused fare evasions to spike and released a video of riders jumping over turnstiles. Of course, the MTA video provided no context for all the transit problems, delays and riders’ frustrations.

Some of the people testifying at the hearing wondered out loud: “Which is more criminal: Evading the fare? Or evading the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act for 30 years?” □

## ‘We are not robots’

# Somali workers push back against Amazon

**By Harvey Markowitz**
**Minneapolis**

Chanting “Together we can make history/in every warehouse, in every city,” nearly 500 workers and supporters rallied in support of East African workers here on Dec. 14. The workers have stunned the country by forcing industry giant Amazon to negotiate with their demands, a first-of-its-kind achievement.

The Dec. 14 protest took place on a Friday afternoon at the Amazon Fulfillment Center in Shakopee, nearly half an hour from downtown Minneapolis. The rally was timed so that workers walking out after their shift could directly join with jubilant supporters on the picket line.

Workers took turns expressing their grievances with the corporate giant to the eager crowd of supporters. Chants such as “Amazon, hear our voice!” and “We’re people, not robots” were conducted in English as well as Somali, Amharic and Oromo.

The struggle waged by the workers from East Africa at the Shakopee facility constitutes the first time that U.S. workers have brought Amazon management to the negotiating table, according to the Nov. 20 New York Times. Though management has conceded some demands since negotiations began, the workers at the rally stated that Amazon’s response has not come far enough. (tinyurl.com/y9q9ndya)

The Minneapolis protest, organized by the Awood Center, represents a new stage in the burgeoning movement for collective bargaining rights in the U.S. The Awood Center is described on the web as “a place for the East African Community to learn, defend our rights at work, and build East African worker power.”

### Fighting for health care

Health care is one of the key issues for the East African workers. The barriers to health care they experience at Amazon are all too common for many workers in other settings in the U.S.

WW PHOTO: HARVEY MARKOWITZ

**Somali workers protest Amazon’s mistreatment.**

The story of Khadra Kassim, who was pregnant when she was injured while performing her duties at Amazon, has been widely reported, including in the Times. While the media correctly reported Kassim was turned away when she went to the Amazon on-site medical office, key facets of the episode have been omitted.

Kassim stated at the rally that she had not at first been aware there was such a facility. The company had not sufficiently informed her, and they had not put in place adequate Somali-language communication. She was also turned away because she was a “new hire,” as the company-provided health insurance only activates after a worker has passed a probationary period arbitrarily set by management.

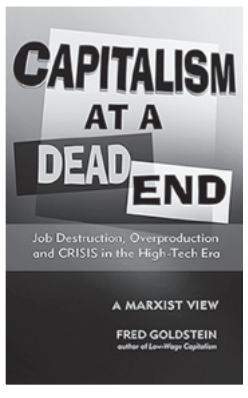
Kassim pointed out at the rally that she has been out of work since September due to other work-related injuries. Amazon has not helped her with those either.

### ‘We are not robots’

Rashid, a young Somali man who spoke, noted that the effort to organize workers at Amazon was easy because many workers were already united in their indignation with the company. He attested that Amazon has not so far taken a retaliatory approach in response to the workers’ organizing, but perhaps that’s only because of the tight unity among the workers, based on shared culture, language and community.

Rashid exhorted workers around the country to join the struggle for workers’ rights: “Amazon thinks we are like robots, but we are not robots. They want us to compete with robots, work like robots work and have the same speed. ... I think everybody in the world has the same problem, but they are not having their voices heard.”

Rashid also stated that workers should not back down even in the face of powerful companies like Amazon. Because no matter how strong they can appear, the struggle of the workers at Amazon proves that big business can be brought to negotiations through concerted worker actions. □




**Capitalism at a Dead End**

**by Fred Goldstein**

**Available at online booksellers.**

WORKERS WORLD

*editorials*

# Fighting for life and health

Recent statistics compiled by the World Health Organization show that a baby born today in China, Japan or Korea has a longer healthy-life expectancy than a child born in the United States. (People in the U.S. live a little longer, but are sicker as they grow old.)

Keep that in mind when you read that a federal judge in Texas has just shot down the Affordable Care Act. If upheld on appeal, his ruling would make life expectancy and other health statistics even worse for people in the U.S.

Declining life expectancy is a measure of the deadly stranglehold that banks and corporations exercise in this country, which a generation ago boasted the highest standard of living in the world but now sees increased poverty and poverty-related diseases.

Think of it! In three countries, all of which were greatly destroyed by war and two of which were also impoverished by generations of colonial rule, life has vastly improved over the last half century, now surpassing the U.S. in a vital measure of health.

The Affordable Care Act, which this unelected judge in Texas has tried to kill, is not a national health plan of the type won in many capitalist countries by strong workers' movements. Nor does it deliver the type of universal, free medical care instituted in countries where socialist revolutions came to power.

But it has made it easier for people here with pre-existing conditions to get health insurance. It has also facilitated the expansion of Medicaid coverage to 10 million more poor people. Under the ACA, more money has been appropriated for Medicare as well as for Indigenous people's health. It has also made it easier for people to get cheaper generic drugs.

All this is now under attack.

Who gets to be a federal judge? The one in Texas responsible for this ruling, Judge Reed O'Connor, was appointed by George W. Bush. Besides ruling the entire Affordable Care Act unconstitutional, he has also ruled against laws supporting immigrants, transgender people and Indigenous children. In other words, he's a thorough reactionary who has been in a powerful position for years, dispensing "justice" on behalf of the super-rich.

There will be a movement to roll back this reactionary monster's ruling. Not only is it a direct attack on the people's right to health care, but it is also roiling the companies that make profits off of such care. It's a contradiction of capitalism that the right-wing ideologues it spawns can shoot the system in the foot.

The genuine people's movement shouldn't be on the defensive. Now is the time to fight for free, universal health care for all! □

# When cops are 'just doing their job'

Perhaps you saw the horrifying video last week of cops brutally tearing a 1-year-old baby out of his mother's arms in a Brooklyn food stamp office, while bystanders yelled in protest.

Then perhaps you saw news coverage later that smeared and discredited the African-American mother, Jazmine Headley, for having been charged in New Jersey with "credit card fraud."

The smear tried to reduce her to "unfit mother, no big deal."

Wrong. Big deal.

Headley was sitting on the floor in the overcrowded waiting room, playing with the baby as she waited to try to get her childcare benefits reinstated. When she objected to how security guards ordered her to stand up, they ended up brutalizing her, arresting her, taking her baby away and getting her sent to jail on Rikers' Island.

Why? Not because she was an unfit mother — she is not. She was there in that office being a good mother.

But she ended up in jail because the cops were doing their job — as assigned to them by the repressive state.

Because the police are not paid to be friends of poor people, working-class people, people of color, LGBTQ people, women or any gender-oppressed people. They are never, ever really around to help those in need.

No, the cops are everywhere for one reason, and one reason only — to keep us in line, to keep us quiet and obedient, to threaten, to beat, to kill, to do whatever they can to protect the property of the rich and the laws of an unjust state — and to keep those of us bound by oppression from rising up.

The cops were "just doing their job" — terrorizing Headley for demanding her rights.

The cops were "just doing their job" protecting Big Business property rights by enforcing a warrant on a struggling woman who only maybe had committed a "crime of survival" against a multibillion-dollar corporate credit card company.

The ruling class has hired cops to do the job of protecting this rotten system.

And Jazmine Headley did her job in fighting for herself and her child.

Our job is to build unstoppable forward motion against repression, racism, sexism, capitalism — and to resist, resist, resist. □

**Dabancheng Power Station, the first large-scale wind power plant in China, is also the largest in Asia, with an annual generated power of 18 million watts.**

WW Commentary

# Carbon tax NO, green jobs YES!

**By Deirdre Griswold**

This is a critical time for the world. What happens over the next few decades can determine the health of our planet for centuries to come.

Every aware person should certainly know by now that the U.S. government is the biggest obstacle to any meaningful global effort to cut carbon emissions.

But it isn't just Trump, troglodyte that he is. Scientists have been ignored by every administration in Washington since they first began alerting politicians about climate dangers at least 40 years ago.

So what can be done about it? This is where the environmental movement needs to differentiate itself from Al Gore and others who have campaigned for a carbon tax as the answer to reducing emissions. That is a totally false position and covers up class truths about the economy.

This problem has just been brought into sharp focus by the Yellow Vest rebellion in France, where millions of workers and petit bourgeois have been in the streets fighting the French government over an increased tax on petrol — gas and diesel.

The rich, reactionary French president, Emmanuel Macron, has had to pull back from implementing the tax right now. From being fairly popular just a year ago, he is now a hated embodiment of rule by the super-rich.

Macron is no great environmentalist, but he thought he could put a new tax over by cloaking it in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

However, French workers had already been pushed to the wall by the cuts in real wages and benefits that are occurring in every capitalist country.

For people in France who need to drive cars or vans to work and earn a living, the tax, camouflaged as "green," was the last straw.

### What workers need

This is not just a French problem. Workers in the U.S. are facing the same freight train of capitalist austerity, precarious jobs and declining purchasing power.

We all know how Trump tricked a lot of workers into voting for him by attacking regulations that he claimed destroyed their jobs. He made a big point of appealing to coal miners and factory workers — particularly white workers who at one time were making a living wage but now fear being pushed out of the job market.

Trump's promises of jobs may be wearing thin, but just seeing him discredited or losing the next election is no answer to this huge problem.

What needs to be done is to put forward a program that can win workers to the environmental struggle based on their immediate needs. A carbon tax won't do it.

First of all, no workers should lose their income when a polluting plant or mine is shut down. That's number one.

Workers need a guarantee that they'll get retraining and an income for as long as it takes to find another job. How can workers put long-term environmental issues first when they're agonizing over how to pay next week's rent, buy food and cover medical bills — and afford gas in their cars so they can get to work in the first place?

This demand should be at the top of the environmental movement's agenda.

### Workers need to know there IS another way

Polls show that "socialism" is no longer a creepy scare word to most people in the U.S., particularly young people. But the movement needs to educate people in this country about what's actually happening in socialist countries. There are a lot of lies to overcome, but facts are stubborn things and can be brought before the people.

All you hear from the capitalist media is that China has become the world's biggest producer of carbon emissions. Okay, that's true. But here is what you don't hear and need to know: Per person, China's emissions are just **one-third** of those by people in the U.S.

According to COTAP.org (Carbon Offsets to Alleviate Poverty), China's emissions are 6.2 tons per person. But U.S. emissions are 17.5 tons per person, even after so much U.S. heavy industry has been shut down in recent decades.

Meanwhile, China, in just a couple of generations, has become the world's largest producer of manufactured goods. It has been able to do this while building up a tremendous infrastructure, and that of course takes energy.

Yet China has been able to keep per-person emissions much lower than the U.S., even while raising the standard of living. Hundreds of millions of Chinese people have been raised out of deep poverty.

### Socialism means public ownership and central planning

How can a still-developing country do this? China can make these advances because the basic infrastructure is publicly owned, not in the hands of a profit-seeking, parasitic ruling class.

And China's development is planned — with fighting climate change built into that plan. Even though the Chinese Communist Party decided in the 1980s to allow some private ownership in order to acquire the capital and technology needed for its industrial development, the 90-million-member party, which led a thoroughgoing socialist revolution that triumphed in 1949, is in command and sets the rules.

Cuba is another socialist country that shows how a publicly owned and centrally planned economy, even one blockaded by the U.S., can move forward in protecting the environment.

Only 4 percent of Cuba's electric power comes from renewables, but it is implementing plans to raise that to 24 percent by 2030. China has helped Cuba acquire the technology to make solar panels. Many different agencies of the Cuban government are coordinating efforts to derive energy from biomass, wind and solar.

In moving away from fossil fuels, these socialist countries did not tax the workers or cast them out of their jobs. In China's case, it has built up hydroelectric dams, wind farms, solar fields and mass transit, modernized the power grid, and at the same time set aside hundreds of billions of dollars to maintain and retrain coal miners and other workers whose polluting industries were being phased out.

It can be done. Let's fight for it. We can't let capitalism wreck our planet. □

# Yellow Vests in France: The Macron scam fails

**By Rémy Herrera**
**Paris**

Dec. 15 — In his brief Dec. 10 television address, French President Emmanuel Macron outlined the measures aimed at calming the popular anger of the "Yellow Vests": 1) the pay of workers receiving the minimum wage (SMIC) would increase by "100 euros per month" starting January 2019; 2) a bonus "which will have no tax or charge" would be paid at the end of 2018 by "all employers who can"; 3) the payment of overtime would again be tax-free; and 4) the increase in the general social security tax (CSG) would be canceled in 2019 for retirees receiving less than 2,000 euros ($2,268) a month.

Despite the brevity and technicality of the remarks, it didn't take the French very long to calculate what they were going to gain in this case: almost nothing! The president performed one of his theater scenes — for which his spouse [an acting teacher] has been training him since he was 16 years old.

However, this communication included a hypocritical solo in a guilty tone, something to which Macron, usually so scornful, had not accustomed his fellow citizens. Presidential arrogance decreased in tone, but not his incredible talent for sleight of hand!

Between threats of increased repression and overplayed compassion, Macron the magician pulled out of his hat a thin bouquet of faded flowers: four measuring spoons that made the French look like beggars and served as a pretext for the dominant media to shout out for an end to the mobilization of Yellow Vests.

**Concessions concede little**

The reasons:

1. The 100 euro increase in the SMIC will mainly come from the automatic legal increase of 25 euros, which will buy two take-out meals at McDonald's, with ice cream, and the rest from the payment of an activity bonus that was already planned. Clearly, this increase was budgeted for the year 2019; in reality its introduction is just moved up by a few months.

2. Very few workers will be affected by the other bonus, called "exceptional," because its payment is left to the good will of the bosses. Only large firms will be able to pay it, certainly not small and medium-sized enterprises. As this bonus is exempt from "social security contributions," the bosses who can give it will even gain in doing so rather than increasing salaries!

3. The tax exemption for overtime pay was already planned for 2019. It restores a system set up by former President Nicolas Sarkozy. On the contrary, what should have been proposed is to shorten the work week to share work with the unemployed and part-time or precarious workers. Of course the bosses should also pay the millions of overtime hours already worked by workers, but still not paid by employers (or the government).

4. As for the so-called "helping hand" to pensioners, we are being lied to once again: After having seen their retirement pensions reduced over the past 18 months — though Macron had sworn during his election campaign to protect them — not only will pensioners gain nothing (what was announced is the waiver of an additional tax). Above all they will lose even more purchasing power, since the increase in the value of pensions as of January 2019 — plus 0.3 percent — will not even compensate for the rate of inflation — plus 2 percent — expected for 2019.

This false generosity of a "president who listens to the French" is therefore in the end nothing more than a hidden deepening of the logic of neoliberal austerity. Private sector wages are still not rising, civil servants' salaries remain frozen, unemployment benefits continue to be cut.

Basically, who are the "great forgotten" in the presidential speech? The rich! Big business and stock shareholders are rubbing their hands: No new contributions will be asked of them. The wealth tax is not restored!

The torrents of public money offered as gifts to transnational corporations through the "tax credit for competition and employment" (CICE), without any guarantee of productive investment or job creation, are not slowed down! And the "reforms" of the destruction of State and public services, pension systems, social protection of citizens ... are not being challenged!

Three days before the president's announcements, the French Senate had voted to reduce the "exit-tax," a mechanism for taxing unrealized capital gains when wealthy taxpayers transfer to their home outside France in order to benefit from more advantageous taxation abroad.

And just three days after the speech on Dec. 10, the management of the Ford automotive group confirmed its decision to close its Blanquefort plant, on the outskirts of Bordeaux, and to lay off more than 850 workers — who had accepted wage cuts in recent years to, they were told, "save the company." Everything has changed so that nothing changes.

**Union demonstrations strong**

What reasons would there be for the Yellow Vests and all the workers to stop fighting? On Dec. 14, a day of action, strikes and demonstrations organized at the call of the CGT (General Confederation of Labor), FO (Workers' Force), FSU (Unitary Trade Union Federation) and Union Syndicale Solidaires (of which SUD [Democratic Unitary Solidarity] is a member) drew thousands of people in Paris and several other large cities in France to support the immediate increase of wages and pensions, and the defense of social protection. Contingents from high schools joined the protest.

The next day, Dec. 15, was "Act V" of the Yellow Vests' mobilization. It took place in a particular context: that of a terrorist attack which occurred a few days earlier in the streets of Strasbourg, killing five people and imposing a moment of meditation in the country — and the postponement of a motion of censure presented by the left against the government in the National Assembly.

The Macronian regime responded to the fifth demonstration of the Yellow Vests like a circus tamer trains a beast: by beating it with a stick and a whip — after the tiny treat [Macron's speech] given Monday evening. The deployment of police forces was impressive: one police officer for every demonstrator throughout the country. In Paris there were even two police officers per demonstrator. Dozens of Paris metro stations were closed, and searching spots had been set up in train stations and various public places the day before.

Some 168 arrests were made in the capital, and 115 people were put in police custody. That evening, the social networks of the Yellow Vests were already inviting us to an "Act VI" on Saturday, Dec. 22, to "prepare for Christmas Eve in Paris" and "the victory of the people." □

*Herrera is a Marxist economist, a researcher at the Centre national de la Recherche scientifique (CNRS), who works at the Centre d'Économie de la Sorbonne, Paris. WW staff translated this article.*

**Marching across bridge in Rotterdam, in the Netherlands.**

# Yellow Vest protests spread in Europe

**By G. Dunkel**

Other countries in Europe besides France have seen marches and protests of people wearing yellow vests. Most of them have been relatively small, hundreds of people. But they raise the same issues as in France — high taxes, low salaries and high prices that have people running out of money before the end of the month and their next paycheck.

In the Netherlands, there have been marches in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague, involving hundreds of people, chanting and distributing leaflets.

In Belgium, the response has been much more militant. On Dec. 15, according to Belga, a press service, workers struck hundreds of factories — more than 260 plants in metal working and textile alone. All three of the major unions — the General Federation of Belgian Workers (FGTB), the Confederation of Christian Unions (CSC) and the General Central of Belgian Liberal Unions (CGSLB) — supported the strike. The FGTB estimates that Belgian workers have lost 2.3 percent of their purchasing power in the past three years.

There were also demonstrations, which involved throwing paint and eggs, in front of the prime minister's party office and the headquarters of the Employers Federation. Mass transit throughout the country was spotty. (Le Quotidien, Dec. 15)

On the southern border with France, Belgian protesters in red, green and yellow vests cooperated with French yellow vests by blocking highways and other roads, filtering traffic so they could leaflet the cars and trucks going by. □

# Europe: A powder keg?

**By Filipe Diniz**

*This opinion article was published Dec. 13 in Avante, the newspaper of the Portuguese Communist Party. It succinctly describes the growing inequality and poverty in Europe — both East and West — since the end of the Soviet Union. It was translated by Workers World Managing Editor John Catalinotto with permission of the author.*

In the European Union of 28 countries (EU28), 118 million people (23.5 percent of the population) were at risk of poverty in 2015. This risk affects both workers with jobs (12.3 percent in 2017) and the unemployed (32.7 percent).

The increasing precariousness of labor relations means that the risk of poverty for workers between 18 and 24 is 12.5 percent; while for workers between 55 and 64, it is 8.8 percent. The risk of poverty for full-time workers is 8 percent, for part-time workers 15.8 percent. In the EU, those in the highest quintile, or fifth of the population, are paid 4.1 times what those in the lowest quintile are paid.

In the EU28 in 2017, 8.1 percent of families were unable to adequately heat their homes; 30.9 percent could not afford one week of holidays per year; 8.4 percent could not afford a quality meal even every other day; 9.3 percent had arrears on housing expenses since 2003; 7.8 percent of households had great difficulty sustaining themselves; 35.6 percent had no possibility of enjoying any leisure activity.

Also, 26.5 percent of EU28 households had to make heavy payments for rentals and mortgages; 5.8 percent had no means to travel by public transport; 25.5 percent were unable to replace used clothes with new ones; 13.1 percent of households had leaky roofs, with wet walls, floors and foundations and rotten wood in windows and floors.

It is really unnecessary to go to Eurostat [the source of all the above numbers] to see the extent of the existing economic and social divide. Exploitation, poverty and inequality exploded after the fall of the Soviet Union. Capitalism was judged to be the be-all and the end-all. But the alternative will arise precisely from the intolerable nature of capitalism itself. And from the unstoppable struggle of the workers and the peoples. □

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FOTO: GERRY CONDON

**Los delegados y activistas de FIRE que trabajan con veteranos deportados de los EUA se solidarizaron en la frontera de Tijuana. De izquierda a derecha, Lupita Cibrian de los Veteranos de la Frontera; Rosa María de la Torre, Gloria Rubac, Sara Flounders de FIRE; y Blanca de los Veteranos de la Frontera.**

# Solidaridad en la frontera

## Delegacion de FIRE lleva suministros a la caravana

**Por Ted Kelley**
**Tijuana, México**

Una delegación de solidaridad organizada por Fight for Im/migrants and Refugees Everywhere (FIRE, siglas en inglés) viajó a México del 6 al 9 de diciembre para reunirse con organizadoras/es de la caravana y brindar ayuda humanitaria a las miles de familias centroamericanas que se encuentran abandonadas en la frontera con Estados Unidos.

La delegación de FIRE se unió a las/os activistas de Border Veterans, una organización para veteranas/os del ejército de EUA que fueron deportados, Veterans for Peace de EUA y también con grupos de iglesias locales y miembros de la comunidad para llevar los suministros que tanto necesitan las familias migrantes en Tijuana como en el cercano Barretal, el campamento de refugiados más grande para solicitantes de asilo en México.

FIRE se reunió con caravanistas en Barretal pocos días después de que las lluvias torrenciales azotaran el campamento, inundando los baños y empapando las tiendas, las mantas y la ropa de las/os residentes. Las temperaturas caen en picado durante la noche, por lo que la humedad, combinada con el intenso frío, dificulta aún más las condiciones para las/os 4.000 a 5.000 migrantes en Barretal.

Sin embargo, cuando la delegación de FIRE llegó al campamento el 6 de diciembre para traer calcetines limpios, toallitas, jabón de baño y otros artículos de tocador, el espíritu del campamento ya había mejorado. La música resonaba en una máquina de karaoke mientras las/os migrantes cantaban, algunos jóvenes bailaban y jugaban fútbol, y se hacían preparativos para un pequeño festival para las/os niños. La caravana está compuesta casi exclusivamente por familias jóvenes, con muchas/os niños pequeños y bebés entre ellos.

"Están viendo a toda una generación de personas desplazadas", le dijo un organizador hondureño llamado Dani a la delegación de FIRE. "Y es una gran generación. He conocido aquí a muchas/os futuros cantantes, músicos, artesanos y activistas.

"Quiero agradecer a aquellas/os en los Estados Unidos que nos han ayudado. Sé que las/os norteamericanos tienen un gran corazón y son un pueblo que se solidariza con nosotros. Gracias por su apoyo y por sus nobles corazones. Las/os mexicanos también".

"No creía que pudiera existir tanta empatía, tanta devoción, que ustedes [activistas estadounidenses y mexicanos] han demostrado".

Continúa Dani, "Pero, sabemos que hay personas en todo el mundo que no están conscientes del origen de estos problemas. Por eso defienden causas que son una mentira, causas que son asesinas. Al hacerlo, piensan que luchan por cosas buenas, pero están luchando por cosas malas. Pueden estar asesinando poblaciones enteras, pueblos inocentes".

La mayoría de estas familias jóvenes, que ejercen su derecho en virtud del derecho internacional para buscar asilo en los Estados Unidos, provienen de Honduras, donde un golpe de estado respaldado por Estados Unidos en 2009 ha provocado el colapso de la sociedad civil, la represión política y la violencia generalizada de pandillas criminales y fascistas. Claramente, las 13 bases militares de Estados Unidos actualmente activas en Honduras no se están utilizando para proteger al pueblo.

"¿Cuánto cree que cuesta mantener 13 bases?", pregunta Dani. "A una fracción de ese precio, ¿no se podrían construir 13 hospitales? ¿O 13 universidades?

### Resistiendo obstáculos

Es difícil determinar exactamente cuántos migrantes han venido a través de Tijuana en los últimos meses en busca de refugio en los Estados Unidos. Para este fin de semana, más de 2.000 familias habían solicitado asilo. Cientos más han arriesgado deportación, detención y muerte al cruzar la frontera sin documentos. Eso requiere evadir "el Muro" que contrariamente a la narrativa promovida por los medios corporativos y el racista de Trump, ya se ha construido y funciona como una profunda cicatriz en todo el México ocupado.

En total, es probable que entre 10.000 y 15.000 caravanistas hayan emprendido la desgarradora travesía desde Centroamérica hasta los Estados Unidos.

Las/os solicitantes de asilo tienen pocas opciones una vez que llegan a Tijuana con la esperanza de llegar al punto de control más grande de la frontera de los EUA a San Diego. Las autoridades de inmigración de ambos lados de la frontera han coordinado un sistema de boletos, en el que las familias pueden registrar su solicitud de asilo para recibir un número de solicitud. Luego, deben esperar hasta que ese número sea llamado, momento en el que son entrevistadas/os y EUA determina si tienen un reclamo válido.

Miles de familias se han registrado hasta ahora y muchas deben esperar varios meses para que se les llame. Si no están en la frontera de Tijuana cuando se llama su número, su registro se anula y deben comenzar el proceso nuevamente.

Si se acepta la solicitud inicial, se les permite cruzar a los Estados Unidos. Sin embargo, deben pagar una fianza de varios miles de dólares o someterse a usar un brazalete en el tobillo para que puedan ser rastreados por el Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas.

Las autoridades de los Estados Unidos niegan automáticamente las solicitudes de asilo a cualquier persona que haya sido deportada previamente de los Estados Unidos, así como a las personas condenadas por ciertos delitos en su país de origen. Si una persona que fue deportada anteriormente intenta solicitar el estatus de asilo con sus hijos, lo más probable es que las/os niños queden bajo la custodia de los Estados Unidos, mientras que los adultos son "removidos" de manera sumaria. Según la ley actual de los EUA, las personas cuyos reclamos se rechazan no se enviarán a la frontera con México, sino al país de origen del cual huyen.

Por lo tanto, las familias se enfrentan a un conjunto de circunstancias imposibles. Pueden quedarse cerca de la frontera de Tijuana, subsistir con la ayuda de una organización benéfica, o pueden regresar a México para quedarse en algunos de los campamentos de refugiados mejor abastecidos y arriesgarse a perder su turno para una entrevista de asilo. Aunque las/os trabajadores en México han estado recibiendo a sus vecinas/os centroamericanos, las tensiones entre las/os migrantes y las comunidades fronterizas están aumentando debido a las condiciones desesperadas y la falta de servicios sanitarios y de salud en el campamento.

El alcalde de Tijuana Juan Manuel Gastelum, similar a Trump, dijo que la situación ya se ha convertido en una "crisis humanitaria", pero se niega a comprometer recursos públicos para ayudar a las/os refugiados y migrantes. Gastelum, del Partido de Acción Nacional, ha pedido el arresto de las/os organizadores de la caravana y se ha puesto una gorra de béisbol roja que dice "Haz que Tijuana sea grande otra vez", que refleja el eslogan de la campaña de Trump 2016 "Haga que Estados Unidos sea grande otra vez".

Gastelum también popularizó un eslogan que ha sido adoptado por grupos anti-migrantes de extrema derecha: "México Primero".

### Apoyo sincero

Cerca de la frontera de Tijuana, en la mañana del 6 de diciembre, miembros de la delegación de FIRE notaron un taxi con las palabras "Apoyamos a Nuestro Alcalde" pintadas en el parabrisas trasero. Estaba estacionado a la vuelta de la esquina de un pequeño campamento de solicitantes de asilo que habían decidido esperar su turno a unos 100 metros de la frontera.

Había entre 25 y 30 madres, padres e hijas/os jóvenes, incluyendo bebés, que vivían en este campamento, y todos habían huido de la violencia en Honduras. Julio, uno de los solicitantes de asilo en este campamento, explicó que tienen hambre y hay escasez de suministros. Cuando se le preguntó si el gobierno local estaba brindando asistencia, dijo que las autoridades mexicanas son simplemente otros brazos del gobierno de los Estados Unidos que cooperan completamente con la Aduana y la Patrulla Fronteriza de los Estados Unidos.

En una pequeña plaza inmediatamente fuera de la frontera había una docena de jóvenes mexicanos que acababan de ser deportados. Solo unas semanas antes, la plaza estaba repleta de caravanistas y montañas de 10 pies de altura con cajas de suministros.

La ciudad de Tijuana luego ordenó que la plaza fuera desocupada para construir una barricada nueva, de apariencia amigable y colorida que lee "Tijuana, México" en letras grandes. La policía despejó la plaza de migrantes y dejó los suministros en la calle para que cualquiera se los llevara.

Héctor López y su esposa Lupita eran miembros de la comunidad que había estado cocinando comidas calientes para las/os migrantes en la plaza poco antes de que la policía los despejara; más tarde, se apresuraron a rescatar todos los suministros que pudieron. López es un veterano del ejército de los EUA que fue deportado a México en 2006.

"Sólo nací aquí. Pasé el noventa y cinco por ciento de mi vida en los Estados Unidos, por lo que soy estadounidense. Sólo nací en México", dijo Héctor a la delegación de FIRE en la oficina de Veteranos de la Frontera en Tijuana, mientras vestía una sudadera que decía Veteranos Por La Paz.

Continuó diciendo: "Si somos lo suficientemente buenos para morir por los Estados Unidos, y lo suficientemente buenos como para matar por los Estados Unidos, entonces, somos lo suficientemente buenos como para vivir en los Estados Unidos".

Además de proporcionar ayuda humanitaria y suministros necesarios, Héctor y Lupita López, junto con su colega Robert, otro veterano deportado y su cónyuge, trabajan incansablemente para combatir la desinformación generalizada que se transmite a las/os migrantes y solicitantes de asilo.

Las/os veteranos deportados también trabajan con grupos de la iglesia local para ayudar a las/os caravanistas con asistencia legal y servicios de asesoramiento y psicología. Son el tipo de socorristas que asisten tanto a migrantes como a deportadas/os. En general, desalientan a las familias de intentar cruzar la frontera "ilegalmente", especialmente porque Trump firmó una orden ejecutiva que hace que sea más probable que los progenitores puedan ser separados de sus hijas/os al hacerlo.

Pero mientras más esperen las familias, más necesitarán ayuda. Muchas familias son alentadas a encontrar trabajo e instalarse en México, ya que su seguridad y bienestar no necesariamente estarán seguros una vez ingresen a los Estados Unidos.

"La gente no está segura de cuándo será su próxima comida. Está claro que las autoridades están restringiendo los alimentos a propósito para que las familias se desgasten y sea más probable que firmen sus propios documentos de deportación", explica Lupita López.

Por ahora, estas miles de familias están esperando, desplazadas de su hogar por el imperialismo estadounidense.

Ha sido convocada una semana de acción en solidaridad con la caravana de migrantes, culminando el 18 de diciembre, Día Internacional de las/os Migrantes. FIRE y el Partido Workers World son copatrocinadores de eventos en varias ciudades de Estados Unidos.

"La gente sabe que no está sola. La gente tiene fe en que ustedes son los únicos que pueden derribar este muro, nadie más", dice Alfonso Guerrero Ulloa, un activista hondureño al que se le otorgó asilo permanente en México después de que estuviera en la mira de Estados Unidos y el gobierno de Honduras por su resistencia al imperialismo.

Ulloa ha ayudado a la coordinación con las/os caravanistas y ha sido fundamental en las líneas de suministro y seguridad en Barretal.

Mientras él dice esto, Ulloa es saludado por una joven que lleva a su hija de dos meses.

"¡Ah!" Dice Ulloa. "Y aquí está nuestra luchadora por la libertad más joven". □