

WORKERS WORLD



Workers and oppressed peoples of the world unite!

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Detroiters score victory as Court nixes giveaway to banks

By Kris Hamel
Detroit

In what the corporate media have called a “stunning blow” to Wall Street, two of the biggest capitalist banks have been barred from making a deal that would take an additional \$165 million from the people of Detroit. The ruling by a federal bankruptcy judge also prevents a third bank from getting another \$34 million for financing the deal.

It was headline news not just in Detroit but across the United States. The New York Times put the story on the front page, along with an accompanying photo of a demonstration with a hand-painted sign reading “Bank of America owes Detroit for destroying our neighborhoods!” Abayomi Azikiwe of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions & Utility Shutoffs was quoted in the Times article.

U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judge Steven Rhodes ruled Jan. 16 that the city of Detroit, which is in Chapter 9 bankruptcy and under the control of an “emergency manager,” could not go forward with its loan deal with Barclays bank to pay off Bank of America and United Bank of Switzerland for what is called a “swap termination.”

Organizers with the Moratorium NOW! Coalition called Rhodes’ ruling

“courageous” and a “big win for the people of Detroit.” The group has consistently opposed and organized a struggle against the emergency manager and the bankruptcy of Detroit, and demanded cancellation of the city’s debt to the banks.

The trial, which began Dec. 17 and ended Jan. 13, was attended by community activists, city retirees and residents, who were present when Rhodes delivered his decision. Some had participated in a protest outside the courthouse earlier that day, despite blowing snow and bitter temperatures, as well as in many previous demonstrations there.

Clapping erupted when people’s anti-foreclosure attorney Jerry Goldberg exited the courtroom after the decision. Goldberg, an activist and former auto worker, is one of the lawyers who opposed the deal.

What are swaps?

Interest rate swaps have locked Detroit and other cities across the country into

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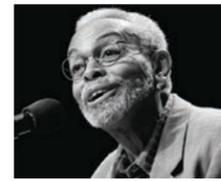
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demand living wage

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Local 32BJ of the Service Employees union organized a protest on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Jan. 20, to demand the day as a paid holiday for airport contract workers. Hundreds of workers marched across the LaGuardia Airport access bridge in Queens, N.Y., after the airlines and the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey repeatedly refused to make MLK Day a paid holiday. These workers also want 32BJ recognized as their union. These contract workers at the three Port Authority airports —

LaGuardia, Kennedy and Newark — receive minimum wages, no sick days, insufficient medical care and hard working conditions.

There was broad community support for the protest. About 30 people, including 32BJ President Héctor Figueroa, Rep. Charles Rangel and some members of New York’s City Council and State Assembly, sat down on the bridge in a preplanned civil disobedience and were arrested.

— Report and photo by G. Dunkel



Walmart workers jolt NLRB

By Dante Strobino

The National Labor Relations Board on Jan. 15 issued its broadest complaint yet against major transnational corporation Walmart for violating workers' rights. It says that the company illegally fired and disciplined more than 117 workers, including those who participated in actions that took place in June 2012 to demand better pay and more workplace rights.

According to a press release issued the same day by "Making Change at Walmart," which is anchored by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union: "The complaint finds that Walmart sought to intimidate and silence workers through illegal activity in 14 states, naming 63 individual store managers and [David Tovar], the company's vice president of communications. Most troublesome, it shows a systematic policy of unlawful retaliation conceived at the executive level, yet again demonstrating Walmart's perception that it is above the law."

If Walmart is found guilty, workers could be awarded back pay, reinstatement and the reversal of disciplinary actions. Additionally, the company could be required to inform and educate all employees of their legally protected rights. Walmart has until Jan. 28 to respond to the complaint.

Walmart workers fight back against corporate greed

The NLRB's action would not have occurred without the courageous struggle of Walmart workers. Despite intense intimidation from their bosses at all levels of the corporate chain, from floor-level supervisors to the corporate spokesperson, these workers have joined in strikes and job actions in hundreds of cities and dozens of states, most notably during and after "Thanksgiving" shopping rushes in late November 2012 and 2013.

"Walmart workers like me are calling for better jobs for all Americans," said Colby Harris, a fired worker from Lancaster, Texas, who is quoted in the press release. "It's not right that so many of us are struggling to get by on less than \$25,000 a year while the Waltons have more wealth than 42 percent of [U.S.] families combined. Today the federal government confirmed that Walmart is not above the law, will be held accountable, and I have rights."

Walmart, like many corporations, refuses to schedule workers for full-time work schedules of 40 hours per week. "OUR Walmart" is organizing around a demand that all 1.3 million Walmart employees get paid at least \$25,000 a year, which a vast majority do not earn. Meanwhile, Walmart made \$17 billion last year in profits and the Waltons — the richest family in the U.S. — have accumulated \$144.7 billion in net worth, which has come from superexploiting and grossly underpaying its workers.

Walmart workers must continue to struggle to make sure that the Board's complaint gets implemented. Yet, some Walmart workers are winning individual cases in several states. In Kentucky, Walmart rehired an unjustly fired worker, Aaron Lawson, and provided full back wages for the time he was out of work. He had been fired after he distributed informational leaflets and challenged the company's efforts to intimidate those calling for better wages and consistent work hours.

In California, workers won an important ruling by the NLRB against Walmart for 11 violations of workers' rights after so-called "Black Friday" worker protests in 2012.

Warehouse workers take action

A federal court in Los Angeles ruled on Jan. 12 that Walmart and its warehouse operator must face trial to

determine whether they are liable as "joint employers" for violating the workplace rights of hundreds of workers at three southern California warehouses. The workers filed a class action lawsuit in October 2011. They alleged that those who load and unload Walmart's truck containers — many of them longtime employees at these warehouses — were routinely forced to work off the clock, denied legally required overtime pay and retaliated against when they tried to assert their legal rights or even asked how their paychecks had been calculated.

The workers are organizing together through "Warehouse Workers United," a campaign of the Warehouse Workers Resource Center and a member of the Food Chain Workers Alliance.

Warehouse workers in the Chicago area, who are organizing with the United Electrical Workers Union and "Warehouse Workers for Justice" campaign, have also won millions of dollars of back pay for unjustly disciplined warehouse workers, including those employed by a Walmart operator. Workers are fighting for heat in an Indiana Walmart warehouse where many got frostbite while working during the recent polar vortex subzero temperatures.

For more than two years, a rising tide of unorganized low-wage workers have stood up to and challenged some of the largest corporations, such as Walmart, McDonald's and Bank of America. The unorganized are increasingly uniting with unionized workers in their cities and forming local worker assemblies that seek to unite all workers in the fight for higher wages, dignity, rights and democracy on the job.

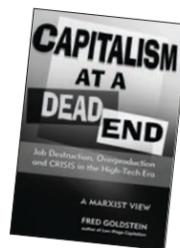
In Baltimore, the "We Deserve More Workers Assembly" has brought together SuperShuttle airport transportation workers, employed by transnational corporation Veolia, and is linking them with fast-food, Walmart and public employees. Despite a massive show of airport police, who ejected them from the SuperShuttle holding lot, 35 decorated cars, including many SuperShuttle employees and labor and community supporters, made their way to the Baltimore-Washington International Airport loop on Dec. 21 to conduct a "Caravan for Justice" in support of the shuttle drivers.

"We Deserve More Workers Assembly" will host a mid-Atlantic regional Workers Assembly on Feb. 15 to build a fighting program of action. Learn more about this at peoplespowerassemblies.org

As part of the Southern Workers Assembly, workers are forming "Local Worker Assemblies" in Goldsboro, Charlotte and Raleigh, N.C. They are uniting fast-food workers and low-wage public service workers, including city workers, state mental health workers, education workers, and others to challenge their bosses and right-wing politicians. See southernworker.org □

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 www.LowWageCapitalism.com Available at Amazon and other bookstores.

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Workers World
147 W. 24th St., 2nd Fl.
New York, N.Y. 10011
Phone: 212.627.2994
E-mail: ww@workers.org
Web: www.workers.org
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Editor: Deirdre Griswold
Technical Editors: Lal Roohk, Andy Katz
Managing Editors: John Catalinotto, LeiLani Dowell, Leslie Feinberg, Kris Hamel, Monica Moorehead, Gary Wilson
West Coast Editor: John Parker
Contributing Editors: Abayomi Azikiwe, Greg Butterfield, G. Dunkel, Fred Goldstein, Teresa Gutierrez, Larry Hales, Berta Joubert-Ceci, Cheryl LaBash, Milt Neidenberg, Bryan G. Pfeifer, Betsey Piette, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Gloria Rubac
Technical Staff: Sue Davis, Keith Fine, Bob McCubbin
Mundo Obrero: Carl Glenn, Teresa Gutierrez, Berta Joubert-Ceci, Donna Lazarus, Carlos Vargas
Supporter Program: Sue Davis, coordinator

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National Office
147 W. 24th St. 2nd Fl.
New York, NY 10011
212.627.2994
wwp@workers.org

Atlanta
P.O. Box 5565
Atlanta, GA 30307
404.627.0185
atlanta@workers.org

Baltimore
c/o Solidarity Center
2011 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218
443.221.3775
baltimore@workers.org

Bay Area
1305 Franklin St. #411
Oakland, CA 94612
510.600.5800
bayarea@workers.org

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

Buffalo, N.Y.
367 Delaware Ave.
Buffalo, NY 14202
716.883.2534
buffalo@workers.org

Chicago
27 N. Wacker Dr. #138
Chicago, IL 60606
chicago@workers.org
312.229.0161

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

Denver
denver@workers.org

Detroit
5920 Second Ave.
Detroit, MI 48202
313.459.0777
detroit@workers.org

Durham, N.C.
804 Old Fayetteville St.
Durham, NC 27701
919.322.9970
durham@workers.org

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

Los Angeles
5278 W Pico Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90019
la@workers.org
323.306.6240

Milwaukee
milwaukee@workers.org

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

Pittsburgh
pittsburgh@workers.org
Rochester, N.Y.
585.436.6458
rochester@workers.org

Rockford, IL
rockford@workers.org
San Diego
P.O. Box 33447
San Diego, CA 92163
619.692.0355
sandiego@workers.org

Tucson, Ariz.
tucson@workers.org
Washington, D.C.
P.O. Box 57300
Washington, DC 20037
dc@workers.org

Water still unsafe after Elk River chemical spill

By Benji Pyles
Charleston, W. Va.

Jan. 19 — A chemical spill into the nearby Elk River has caused hundreds of local residents to be hospitalized. Now, 10 days after the initial spill, many of the 300,000 people who had to avoid tap water since Jan. 9 find it is still contaminated. People are still being burned and suffering respiratory stress and nausea when using the water after it was deemed safe.

Thousands of gallons of crude methyl cyclohexane methanol (MCHM) had oozed through a porous containment wall from a Freedom Industries' containment tank into the river and subsequently passed into a water facility intake that serves the 300,000 area residents with tap water. The tanks had not been inspected since 1991.

Hospitals stayed open during the whole period. A nurse, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Workers World she received a chemical burn while working.

Freedom Industries then moved the containers of crude MCHM to nearby Nitro, W. Va. When the Department of Environmental Protection inspected the new storage location, it cited Freedom for five different violations, one of which was the lack of secondary containment structures. Other violations include failing

to follow stormwater and groundwater guidelines, not filing monitoring reports and not properly storing drums with potential contaminants.

Freedom files for bankruptcy

Businesses and individuals have filed 30 lawsuits to make claims against Freedom of lost business, health concerns, medical monitoring and more. Some of the filings are potential class actions, and some seek punitive damages.

Freedom Industries filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on Jan. 17. The bankruptcy documents revealed that Freedom owes more than \$2.4 million in taxes to the IRS dating back to 2000. The bankruptcy is likely aimed at sheltering Freedom from claims for the damage.

When a company files for Chapter 11, it must find a lender to finance its restructuring. This financier in turn gets first dibs on acquiring company assets if it goes under completely. A company named "Mountaineer Financing, LLC" is acting as financier for Freedom.

According to the West Virginia Secretary of State website, this company was incorporated the exact same day, Jan. 17, as Freedom declared bankruptcy. The website lists two officers of the company. The first officer listed for the new company is a man by the name of J. Clifford

Forrest, who is also the current owner of Freedom Industries.

This maneuver could allow the owner to keep control of Freedom's assets while avoiding some of the claims against Freedom. West Virginians are familiar with these questionable maneuvers.

For as long as can be remembered, industry bosses and the state Legislature have been hand in hand in fighting against regulation of things such as clean water. For instance, when a coal company pollutes the water, a private company such as West Virginia American Water will come in and supply clean water for aid.

The Jan. 16 Charleston Gazette reported that the "aid" water West Virginia America was distributing was itself contaminated. People refused to drink it as it smelled just like their contaminated water at home.

This aid is paid for not by the coal company but mainly through state and federal agencies. The coal giants have their way in West Virginia. In fact, King Coal's irreparable damage to the water tables throughout the state is why as many as 300,000 people throughout the nine counties affected by the spill are all on one water intake in the first place.

Both Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin have been extremely

active in the media attempting to convince everyone that the chemical spill was not the fault of the coal industry. Manchin defended Big Coal to Chris Hayes of MSNBC saying, "You wouldn't have the country you have today if it wasn't for the coal industry."

The best Congress money can buy

Freedom Industries is not itself a coal company, however. It is a distributor of a chemical specifically used for the processing of coal for the Koch Industry subsidiary Georgia-Pacific.

The Huffington Post reported that House Speaker John Boehner had received \$5,000 from Freedom's vice president of sales and marketing. When pressed for a comment on the spill he said, "I am entirely confident that there are ample regulations already on the books to protect the health and safety of the American people."

On Jan. 11, the same day as the chemical spill, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a Republican-sponsored bill that will gut U.S. toxic waste cleanup regulations. H.R. 2279, otherwise known as "The Reducing Excessive Deadline Obligations Act," would basically eliminate the power of the Environmental Protection Agency to impose clean up deadlines and weaken the government in forcing

Labor movement intervenes for school bus drivers

By Tony Murphy

BOSTON

Veolia Transportation, the giant transnational conglomerate, is finding itself increasingly isolated in its attempt to break the leadership of United Steelworkers union Local 8751, the Boston school bus drivers union.

A week after the union-busting, anti-labor firm lost its commuter rail contract, Boston area labor leaders issued a joint call for "Solidarity Day 2" — the Feb. 1 demonstration at Veolia's corporate offices that will demand reinstatement of the four leaders fired by the company in November.

Steve Tolman, president of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO; Rich Rogers, executive secretary-treasurer of the Greater Boston Labor Council; John Shinn, District Four director of the United Steelworkers International; and Myles Calvey, business director of IBEW Local 2222 (Verizon workers) signed the call.

Among the initial endorsers of Solidarity Day 2 are Paul Kilduff, president of the American Postal Workers Local 100; Charles Clemons, founder and manager of Touch Radio 106.1, Minister Don Muhammad, Nation of Islam Mosque 11, the Coalition for Equal Quality Education and others (download leaflet at tinyurl.com/ldvevn9).

The campaign for USWA Local 8751 has already shown that Veolia isn't all-powerful. Although the company is appealing the decision, the four have won the right to collect unemployment benefits, thanks to the intervention of Mass. AFL-CIO head Steve Tolman.

This helps the case of the drivers as it contradicts the notion that the firing of the drivers was "justified." In the face of the groundswell for the school bus drivers union, Veolia is proceeding with its show trial of the four fired drivers, with a grievance hearing set for Jan. 23. The demands of finance capital — demands that dictate Veolia's actions and mandate austerity for all of society — have a much bigger agenda than four firings. The ultimate goal is to tear up the contract altogether and set wages at historic new lows.

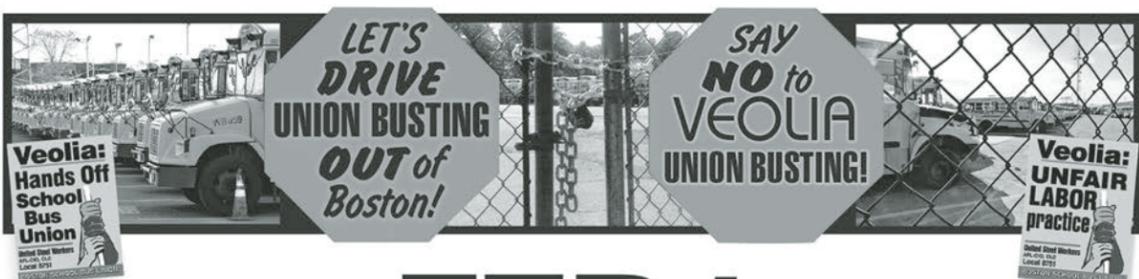
Also at stake for the Boston community is the resegregation of Boston schools, a campaign that the school bus drivers have been involved in fighting. Veolia is helping this racist campaign by paying for its billboards.

Veolia is also hoping it can make the drivers' firing a fait accompli before its contract to run the school bus system is further scrutinized by Boston's City Council. On Jan. 15, the same day the joint call was issued for Solidarity Day 2, Boston City Councillor Charles Yancey issued his 2014 legislative agenda.

The top item? A hearing investigating Veolia's multiple violations of the school bus employment contract — which put it in violation of its vendor contract with the city of Boston. □

Labor & Community Stand with USW L. 8751 School Bus Union

SOLIDARITY DAY



SAT ▶ FEB 1 ▶ 1 PM
FREEPORT BUS YARD
Gather at corner of Dorchester Ave. and Hoyt St. ▶ Outside Veolia Corporation

Reinstate the fired leaders



Steve Gillis Andre Francois Stevan Kirschbaum Garry Murchison

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Paul Kilduff, Pres., American Postal Workers Union Local 100*
John Shinn, Dir. of District 4, USW*
* for identification purposes

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Coalition for Equal Quality Education
Minister Don Muhammad,
Nation of Islam Mosque 11
Former City Councillor Chuck Turner
Smedley Butler Brigade, Veterans for Peace
International Action Center
Women's Fightback Network,
and more

On the Picket line

by Sue Davis

Low-wage workers in six states get raises

While the federal minimum wage is stuck at \$7.25 an hour, some low-paid workers in six states will get raises this year. The state of Washington's minimum wage, highest at \$9 an hour, rose to \$9.32 in 2014, since it is tied to inflation. Other states are catching up. As of Dec. 31, the minimum wage in New York state rose to \$8, with an increase to \$8.75 at the end of the year and \$9 by the end of 2015; the lower minimum wage for workers who receive tips also increased. In Rhode Island, the minimum wage went from \$7.75 to \$8 on Jan. 1. Also on that day, Connecticut's minimum wage rose from \$8.25 to \$8.70, with a raise to \$9 set for Jan. 1 of next year. California's minimum wage will go from \$8 to \$9 in mid-2014 and then to \$10 by 2016. After Gov. Chris Christie's veto, New Jersey voters passed a minimum wage increase to \$8.25, which is tied to inflation.

Washington, D.C., and two adjoining Maryland counties are raising the minimum wage there to \$11.50 an hour. That means that this area, with a significant population larger than that of 15 states, will have a minimum wage higher than any state. It's predicted that D.C. organizations will put a referendum on the 2014 ballot to raise the minimum to \$12.50. Ballot initiatives to raise the minimum wage in Alaska, Idaho and South Dakota are pending, with legislatures in Delaware, Massachusetts and Minnesota considering raises. (dailykos.com, Dec. 29) Meanwhile, a judge ruled on Dec. 27 that an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in SeaTac, Wash., would not apply to low-wage workers at Sea-Tac Airport. To aid the workers' appeal of the ruling, sign their petition at airportworkersunited.org. Stay tuned.

Report reveals bank tellers are low-wage workers

Here's another way that banks are raking in millions: They're paying their tellers and customer service representatives, who are predominantly women, wages so low that these workers have to depend on public assistance to survive. According to a report by the Labor Research and Education Center at the University of California, Berkeley, \$899 million in tax dollars provides yearly public-aid benefits, with \$534 million for Medicaid and medical insurance for children, \$250 million in tax credits and more than \$100 million for food stamps. Essentially, these tax funds are subsidizing the banks, who are paying less in wages than is needed for workers to survive. In the nation's financial center, New York state, the Committee for Better Banks reports that about 40 percent of tellers collect some form of public aid, to the tune of \$112 million annually.

Pay inequality is glaring in the wealthiest, most powerful industry in the world. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual income for a bank teller is \$24,100, or \$11.59 an hour, while the median salary of a chief executive officer is \$552,000. In fact, Wells Fargo's John Stumpf was the highest paid banking CEO at \$22.9 million in 2012, with the bank reporting \$12.4 billion in profits. Meanwhile, the average Wells Fargo bank teller made less than \$11 an hour, or approximately \$22,600 a year. So it's not just fast-food, retail and airport workers who are terribly exploited in low-wage jobs. They're joined by workers on banks' bottom rung. (thetstreet.com, Jan. 8)

Women win in union jobs

We knew it all along, but the study entitled "Working Women and Unions" issued December 2013 by the Center for Economic and Policy Research confirms that women need union jobs. "Even after controlling for factors such as age, race, industry, educational attainment and state of residence, the data show a substantial boost in pay and benefits for female workers in unions relative to their nonunion counterparts. The effect is particularly strong for women with lower levels of formal education." Statistics show that women in unions on average earn 12.9 percent more than their nonunion sisters, and are 36.8 percent more likely to have employer-provided health insurance and 53.4 percent more likely to be covered by employer-provided retirement plans. That means it's time for women workers to revive an old slogan: If you don't have a union, fight to get one; if you have one, fight to make it fight.

USPS workers first in holiday deliveries

Even though Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) and other right-wingers are trying to privatize the U.S. Postal Service, they can't refute facts. During the 2013 holiday shipping season, which had 19 percent higher package volume than last year, only USPS postal carriers and mail handlers made sure packages were delivered on time. Meanwhile, UPS and FedEx management failed to arrange on-time deliveries. So much for privatization. Don't mess with the 238-year-old USPS! (dclabor.org, Jan. 8) □

Detroiters score victory as Court nixes giveaway to banks

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loan deals where banks were paid interest rates up to 1,200 percent higher than the actual floating rate for the bonds to which they were linked. Such swaps were a huge boondoggle for the banks and a bust for the cities when interest rates went down to zero as a result of the federal bank bailout in 2008.

Goldberg explained swaps to Workers World: "Detroit is just one of many cities that were sucked into these complex financial transactions by the banks. The deal was set up where the city paid a fixed interest rate to the banks, while the banks paid the floating rate tied to the Libor.

"When interest rates went down beginning in 2008, because of the federal bank bailout, the city had to pay the banks the difference between the 6.23 percent fixed interest rate and the approximately 0.5 percent floating interest rate on the bonds. This amounted to \$50 million per year, or \$300 million between 2008 and 2013, in addition to the termination fee which the banks are now demanding."

The original deal with the banks to terminate the swaps was made by Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr, who was appointed by the right-wing governor of Michigan to take over Detroit's finances. Under the deal, the city would have had to pay Bank of America and UBS some \$230 million, or 75 percent of the swap termination fee of \$290 million. To pay this amount, Detroit would have had to take out a loan from Barclays, which would then charge the city up to 8.5 percent interest, plus millions in fees.

Judge: 'just too much money'

Orr's investment banker, Kenneth Buckfire, failed miserably to justify the deal in his testimony. On Dec. 18, after rigorous cross-examination of Buckfire by Goldberg and other attorneys, Judge Rhodes ordered the city and the banks to enter mediation



and come up with a better deal for the city.

After the court-ordered mediation, attorneys for the emergency manager and the city, from the global law firm Jones Day, announced they would seek approval of a new agreement. The trial was reconvened on Jan. 3.

This new deal would have paid Bank of America and UBS \$165 million, with an additional \$34 million to Barclays in interest and fees. Under this agreement, the people of Detroit would see 20 percent of their city income tax revenues pledged to pay off the banks over the next four years.

Judge Rhodes in his ruling said it was "just too much money," called it "another hasty deal" by the city, and denied the motion to approve the new deal. In doing so, Rhodes went against the recommendation of the judge he had appointed as mediator.

In his verbal opinion, Rhodes stated: "The city had entered into a series of bad deals to solve its financial problems. The law says that when the city filed this bankruptcy, that must stop. It also says that this court must be the one to stop it if necessary. It is necessary here.

"One hundred sixty-five million dollars is too high a price to pay for the city to put this issue behind it. It's higher than the highest reasonable number. It's just too much money."

Rhodes held that there was at least a reasonable possibility that legal challenges to the swaps

brought by a number of objectors and their attorneys would be successful, which could render the swaps void altogether. These objectors include the Detroit General Retirement System Board and the Detroit Retirees Association, as well as David Sole, founder of the Stop Theft of Our Pensions Committee and a Moratorium NOW! activist.

If such litigation against the banks were successful, it could mean that the banks would have to repay the city for \$300 million already paid to UBS and Bank of America on the swap deals.

'Cancel the debt!'

Rhodes' decision "squashed this attempted giveaway to two banks which have played a major role in the destruction of the city's neighborhoods with their racist, predatory lending and subprime mortgage schemes," Goldberg, Sole's attorney, told Workers World after the ruling.

"We made it real for the judge," said Goldberg. "We showed the horrendous impact these banks have had and will continue to have on the people of the city. In a city that's been devastated by the banks like Detroit has, how do you justify giving this kind of money to the banks? Even the judge couldn't see it."

Moratorium NOW! organizers are urging continued vigilance and struggle by the residents, workers and retirees of Detroit. "This victory was not just won in a courtroom," Abayomi Azikiwe, a coalition leader, told Workers World. "It was the ongoing mobilization of Detroiters against the banks that played a pivotal role in getting the judge to deny this giveaway to the banks that destroyed our city.

"We demand cancellation of the city's entire alleged debt to these racist banks, and reparations to Detroiters, along with a jobs program to rebuild our communities that these banks have destroyed by predatory lending and massive foreclosures." □

Protests demand Wendy's rehire worker



"We're going to beat! back! The bosses' attacks" was the chant of more than 35 people in front of the Wendy's at 85 Nassau St. in the heart of New York's financial district on Jan. 15.

As fast food workers have started to assert themselves and protest for better pay, working conditions and unions, retaliation by the bosses has grown more blatant.

Rynetta Bennett, who worked for this Wendy's for seven years, has been a leader in these protests. She was fired for having a wrinkled uniform and using company time to press it.

Every day at 4:30 p.m., workers from other fast food operations in the area, responding to the call of Fast Food Forward, members of 99 Pickets and the People's Power Assemblies have protested in front of and inside this Wendy's.

The size of the protests has grown over the week and will continue to grow until Wendy's rehires Bennett.

—G. Dunkel

Today's crisis of the cities and Dr. King's struggle legacy

By Abayomi Azikiwe
Editor, Pan-African News Wire
Detroit

The federal holiday that commemorates martyred civil rights, social justice and peace activist Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. takes on added significance this year in light of the renewed attacks on municipalities throughout the United States. Workers and students in public educational institutions are facing massive layoffs and school closings, while local government employees are threatened with job elimination and the theft of pensions and health care programs.

The city that has gained the most national and international attention in this regard is Detroit, where the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history was imposed on the majority African-American population last summer.

Stockton, San Bernardino and Vallejo, Calif.; Jefferson County, Ala.; Providence, R.I.; Harrisburg, Pa.; and other cities are either in bankruptcy or facing extreme austerity measures.

These developments are not taking place by accident. The character of capitalist restructuring has cut wages and social spending for several decades. What is now taking place in the public sector has been enacted by private corporations in auto and steel as well as in the service sectors.

Over the last period low-wage workers in the retail and fast food industries have struck back through mass demonstrations and one-day wildcat strikes. These actions have raised the level of political consciousness and social militancy of the workers themselves and their supporters.

In several cities and states across the U.S. there have been debates and legislative initiatives in governmental structures aimed at raising the minimum wage. Nonetheless, what underlies the growing impoverishment of the working class and nationally oppressed in the U.S. is the mad drive for profits on the part of the ruling class.

Focused on ending poverty

After 1965, with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the Civil Rights Movement began to focus more on the plight of African-American workers and the persistent poverty in rural areas and cities. In 1966 King joined the Chicago Freedom Movement, relocating to that city for several months and staying in a housing project, where he saw directly the impact of racial discrimination in the northern region of the U.S.

During the Chicago campaign of 1966, when the mass movement took demonstrations into white areas demanding open housing, King and his comrades met violence from racist mobs whose attitudes were no different than those of racist mobs in the South. During that summer the African-American and Puerto Rican communities erupted in urban rebellion, illustrating the degree of urgency related to the struggle to eliminate national oppression and economic exploitation.

After eight months of organizing and struggle in Chicago, King did not achieve the aims he had set out to accomplish. The elimination of substandard housing, the creation of jobs and the liberation from national oppression can only be ac-



New York City airport workers demand a paid King holiday and a union on Jan 20.

WW PHOTO: BRENDA RYAN

complished through the building of a decisively anti-capitalist mass movement.

National oppression and imperialist war

By early 1967, King had come to realize that his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, could no longer refrain from speaking clearly in opposition to the war in Vietnam and linking the war to the failure of the federal government to effectively implement programs to address structural unemployment, inadequate housing and institutional racism.

More than a year before SCLC came out against the war, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee on Jan. 4, 1966, issued its militant statement against the occupation of Vietnam, which said:

"We believe the United States government has been deceptive in its claims of concern for the freedom of the Vietnamese people, just as the government has been deceptive in claiming concern for the freedom of colored people in other countries such as the Dominican Republic, the Congo, South Africa, Rhodesia, and in the United States itself.

"We, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, have been involved in the Black people's struggle for liberation and self-determination in this country for the past five years. Our work, particularly in the South, has taught us that the United States government has never guaranteed the freedom of oppressed citizens, and is not yet truly determined to end the rule of terror and oppression within its own border."

In a major speech on April 4, 1967, "Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam," which linked opposition to imperialist war and the struggle to end poverty, King said: "I have worked too long now and too hard to get rid of segregation in public accommodations to turn back to the point of segregating my moral concerns. Justice is indivisible. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. And wherever I see injustice, I'm going to take a stand against it, whether it's in Mississippi or in Vietnam."

From Memphis to Detroit

King's last campaign was in support of winning recognition for African-American sanitation workers in Memphis. The workers had walked off the job on Feb. 4, 1968, after two of their colleagues were killed in an industrial accident directly brought about due to racism.

The strike galvanized the African-American community and the national leadership of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. The workers were seeking recognition as an AFSCME union in a city where collective bargaining and strikes were outlawed for municipal employees.

Nearly 46 years later in Detroit, workers within the majority African-American city are under serious attack. Retirees are being threatened with the theft of their pensions.

The intervention of the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and its allies has been instrumental in the overall political and ideological struggle to change the character of the debate and discussion related to the economic crisis. The agents of the bankers and corporations, who say that the unions, pensioners and corrupt politicians are responsible for the imposition of emergency management and bankruptcy, have been answered with demands for the cancellation of the debt, the preservation of pensions and reparations for the rebuilding of the beleaguered city.

The corporate media have echoed the position of the ruling class, saying there is no alternative to the dictatorship of Wall Street and the imposition of austerity. The Moratorium NOW! Coalition has responded saying there would be

plenty of money for the maintenance of city services, pensions and jobs were it not for the illegitimate bank debt that is strangling Detroit, along with other cities across the U.S.

The crisis of the cities in the U.S. is mirrored by the economic and social conditions in Southern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and other capitalist-dominated states and regions of the world. It will take a nationwide and indeed international movement of workers and the oppressed to overthrow the system of monopoly finance capital.

King's opposition to imperialist war is also essential in the overall struggle for emancipation. The Pentagon budget continues to drain the resources that are so vitally needed to rebuild the cities and reemploy the workers with decent wages and conditions of employment.

If King were alive today, he would be in the forefront of the current struggles against the destruction of the cities and the impoverishment of the workers and oppressed. He would be seeking to end the U.S.-NATO occupation of Afghanistan, the growing intervention by the Pentagon in Africa, and the escalating drone attacks throughout Central Asia, the Middle East and the African continent.

The way his legacy, and that of the Civil Rights Movement as a whole, can truly be honored is to continue and intensify campaigns against poverty, national oppression and imperialist militarism. It is only through such efforts that humanity will be genuinely liberated and attainment of peace and social justice can be realized for the majority of the people across the planet. □

Creative tactic to save hospital



WW PHOTO: ANNE PRUDEN

On the heels of 12 hospital closings in the last 10 years, a creative new tactic has emerged in an effort to stop the epidemic of hospital closings. The New Brooklyn Theater is showing Edward Albee's play about 1930s Jim Crow Memphis and the famous blues singer, Bessie Smith, who died on the way to a hospital there. Albee's play, "The Death of Bessie Smith," is being produced inside Brooklyn's Interfaith Medical Center in solidarity with the fight to keep Interfaith open.

On Jan. 17, hospital workers staged a successful occupation there when the hospital chief executive officer tried to cancel ambulance service and was forced to resign after hiding in his office. The ambulance service was restored. Medical statistics show that if Interfaith closes, 250,000 women in central Brooklyn will not be

able to have screenings for breast cancer.

Many unions as well as community groups and elected officials have joined this fight, including 1199 SEIU, New York State Nurses Association and Communication Workers Local 1180.

You still have a chance to be part of this inspiring linking of creative art with anti-racist, community and labor solidarity if you contact nbt@newbrooklyntheater.com to reserve a seat. Because of the tremendous outpouring of support, the play has been extended for additional showings Jan. 23-26, Jan. 30-Feb. 2 and Feb. 6-9. Thursday, Friday and Saturday performances are at 7:30 p.m., and the Sunday performance is at 2 p.m.

Be there! An injury to one is an injury to all.

— Edward Yudelovich

Amiri Baraka: Poet on Fire (1934-2014)



By Mumia
Abu-Jamal

Jan. 10 — The name Amiri Baraka has been known to me since my teens, when I was a member of the Black Panther Party.

His name was often linked with that of Dr. Maulana Karenga (credited with founding Kwanzaa) of the Los Angeles-based US Organization, which began as competition with the L.A. Black Panthers for influence in Black L.A., and evolved into a deadly feud between enemies, aided and abetted by the maliciousness of the F.B.I.

But Baraka posed an intriguing figure, for he radiated both love and rage, funneled through his poems, which pulsed with revolutionary fire.

He was born in 1934 in Newark, N.J., as Everett LeRoy Jones, and became a rising star of the Beat Era in the East Village of New York.

When he joined the U.S. Air Force, he found a revelation in books, while traveling in Chicago. He saw a bookstore with a green door (called the Green Door) and within he had an epiphany. In his 1984 autobiography, ["The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka"] he wrote: "Something dawned on me, like a big light bulb over my noggin. The comic strip idea lit up my mind at that moment as I stared at the books. I suddenly un-

derstood that I didn't know a hell of a lot about anything. What it was that seemed to me then was that learning was important. I'd never thought that before." (pp. 343-344)

That moment spurred him on to seriously read, study and enlarge his understanding, not for a grade, but for the simple "joy" of learning. He gorged himself on books on all kinds of subjects — poetry, history, statistics and beyond.

In July 1960, he would hit another "turning point." He went to Cuba. In his 1966 essay, "Cuba Libre," he recounts his reaction to harsh criticism of the U.S. Empire, saying, "I'm a poet ... what can I do? I write, that's all. I'm not even interested in politics."

A Mexican poet, Jaime Shelley, responded acidly, "You want to cultivate your soul? In the ugliness you live in, you

want to cultivate your soul? Well, we've got millions of starving people to feed, and that moves me enough to make poems out of."

That trip radicalized him and his poetry, and spurred him on to Black cultural nationalism, revolutionary nationalism, Marxism and the building of Black community organizations.

The impacts of learning and Cuba kept him seeking the correct synthesis of revolutionary politics to transform society.

Although lesser known, he was a music critic of considerable insight. His love of jazz was deep; even spiritual. But he also loved RnB (rhythm & blues), gospel and blues, as cultural expressions of various stages of Black life. He also dug rap, it being at bottom, poetry; but he condemned the corporate control over its production and distribution.



Left to right: Amina Baraka, Iyaluua Ferguson, Suzanne Ross, Larry Holmes, Amiri Baraka and Herman Ferguson demand freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, Harlem, 2008.



Amiri Baraka

Of rap, he wrote: "That's why Rap delighted me so and still does (even though now it's been widely co-opted by Uncle Bubba and the Mind Bandits) because I could see that some of what came out of us had taken root. An open popular mass-based poetry. It arrived, that's why the corporations moved so swiftly to "cover" and co-opt. Why the disappeared Grand Master Flash and Afrika Bambaata, accused Prof. Griff of the Big A-S and brought in fresh rap like Two Live Crew. Gangsta rap was also brought in to exchange political agitation with ignorant braggadocio and thuggish imbecility, justifying the state n—r you annihilation program." [p.502]

Amiri Baraka and his wife, Amina, were good friends of MOVE's Pam Africa, and spent time together when she was in Newark.

But Baraka put his best self in his poems, which revealed his wit and his anger. In his 1979 poem "In the Tradition," he has a line that said it all: "n—r music's about all you got, and you find it much too hot."

Amiri Baraka was 79. □

Amiri Baraka honored

Amiri Baraka — an award-winning poet, playwright and Black revolutionary — died on Jan. 9 at the age of 79 in Newark, N.J., following a short illness. He was a supporter of many left-wing causes, including the ongoing struggle to free political prisoners like Mumia Abu-Jamal. In 2009, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture held a 75th birthday tribute event for Baraka in Harlem, N.Y. A memorial and funeral were held for Baraka at Newark Symphony Hall on Jan. 18, where thousands of people attended to celebrate his life and immeasurable political and cultural contributions. The following are excerpts from the obituary that was distributed at the memorial.

Amiri Baraka (aka Imamu Baraka, aka LeRoi Jones) was born Oct. 7, 1934, in Newark, N.J., to the late Coyt Leroy Jones and Anna (Russ) Jones. He left Howard University a semester short of graduating and later joined the Air Force, where he was discharged because of his affiliation with reading material that was considered subversive.

After leaving the Air Force, Amiri moved to New York, where he took an editorial job at a music magazine, The Record Changer, and settled in Greenwich Village. He co-founded a literary magazine, Yugen, which published his work and that of Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Jack Kerouac. With the poet Diane di Prima, he established and edited another literary magazine, The Floating Bear. He also started a small publishing company, Totem Press, which in 1961 issued his first collection of verse, "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note."

"Mr. Jones considered himself a largely apolitical writer at first. His poetry was concerned more with introspection, but he was radicalized by traveling to Cuba

in 1960, the year after Fidel Castro came to power, to attend an international conference featuring writers from an array of third world countries. As a result, he later said that he came to believe that art and politics should be forever linked." — Margalit Fox, New York Times

His political awakening was soon manifested in his work. His first major book, "Blues People," published in 1963, placed black music — from blues to free jazz — in a wider socio-historical context.

Baraka's reputation as a playwright was established with the production of "Dutchman" at Cherry Lane Theater in New York on March 24, 1964. The controversial play subsequently won the Obie Award for Best Off-Broadway Play and was made into a film in 1967. The critically acclaimed play was revived by Cherry Lane Theater in January 2007 and has been reproduced around the world.

In 1965, Baraka moved to Harlem where he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School. BARTS lasted only one year but had a lasting influence on the direction of Afro-American Arts. BARTS sent five trucks a day into the Harlem community, full of artists and poets, to display artwork and perform poetry readings, music and drama. Performances were given in changed locations each day. Vacant lots, playgrounds and housing projects pushed art that would be "Black as Bessie Smith,"

mass-based, revolutionary and taken to the people; reflecting the intensity of the entire Black Liberation Movement. In 1966, when BARTS was dissolved, Baraka returned to Newark, his hometown.

In 1966, Amiri married Amina Baraka, formerly Sylvia Robinson. Together they inaugurated The Spirit House and the Spirit House Movers that brought drama, music and poetry from across the country to Newark. The Barakas founded the Committee for Unified Newark and the

Congress of Afrikan People. Both CFUN and COAP led support in the election of Kenneth A. Gibson as the first Black mayor of a major northern city, spearheaded by the 1972 Gary, Ind. convention. In 1968, Baraka

co-edited "Black Fire: Anthology of Afro-American Writing," with Larry Neal.

Amiri and Amini Baraka founded Kimako's Blues People, a multimedia arts space, from a small theater in their Newark home. Amiri founded the jazz/poetry ensemble Blue Ark, which played at the Berlin Festival and throughout the U.S. His jazz opera, "Money," with Swiss composer, George Gruntz, was performed in part at George Wein's New York Festival in the early 90s. "Primitive World," with music by David Murray, was also performed in part at same New York Festival, at the Nuyorican Poets' Cafe and the Black Drama Festival in Winston Sa-

WHYS (Nobody Knows the Trouble I Seen)

If you ever find yourself,
somewhere lost and surrounded by enemies
who won't let you speak in your own language
who destroy your statues & instruments,
who ban your omm bomm ba boom
then you are in trouble deep trouble
they ban your own boom ba boom
you in deep deep trouble
humph! probably take you several hundred years
to get out!

— Amiri Baraka

Press conference, protest challenge Fox News over Abu-Jamal case

By Betsey Piette
Philadelphia

On Jan. 17, dozens of people gathered for a press conference and protest outside Fox News in Philadelphia to denounce the attacks of Fox analysts and the Fraternal Order of Police on political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and on Debo Adebile, President Barack Obama's nominee to the U.S. Department of Justice, because of Adebile's legal advocacy work for Abu-Jamal.

On Jan. 8, professor Johanna Fernandez, a member of Abu-Jamal's legal defense team, was contacted by Fox to appear on the Hannity show to respond to Adebile's nomination as assistant attorney general of the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ. Fernandez's attempts to present the facts of the case were repeatedly interrupted. The program's goal was clearly to present the views of the FOP and the prosecution in Abu-Jamal's case. They were also intent on using Adebile's connection to Abu-Jamal's case to further their racist attacks on the Obama administration.

While an attorney for the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, Adebile provided support for attorneys who successfully argued for relief of Abu-Jamal's 1982 death sentence due to erroneous instruc-

tions given to the jury by the prosecutor. On Dec. 7, 2011, Abu-Jamal's nearly 30-year death-row sentence was reversed, yet he remains in prison for life, without parole. His supporters continue to fight for his release.

The FOP and their supporters, among them Fox analysts, are afraid that a long-standing effort to pressure the DOJ to reopen the case against Abu-Jamal might actually happen with Adebile as head of their Civil Rights Division.

Opening the press conference, Johanna Fernandez, representing the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, described being invited to appear on the show by FOX News. "What happened was a circus during which I was shut down and not given enough time to develop an argument. The manner in which Fox News handled the situation speaks to false journalism and represents the kind of bully tactics meant to silence our side and silence dissent.

"If Fox would have allowed me to speak, I would say Mumia is innocent and ask why exculpatory evidence was suppressed at his trial by the prosecution and judge. The fact that a fourth man, Kenneth Freeman, was witnessed running from the crime scene was acknowledged in a concurrent

trial happening at the same time for Mumia's brother Billy Cook."

Fernandez also noted that while the FOP attacks Abu-Jamal, it is the police who are terrorizing the Black community and murdering innocent people with impunity.

Abu-Jamal's brother Keith Cook traveled all the way from North Carolina to attend the press conference to state clearly: "Mumia is innocent. What we have out here are people who don't have the facts, and instead of trying to get to the truth keep repeating the same lies and rhetoric they have for over 32 years."

Suzanne Ross, a longtime activist in the movement that stopped two state attempts to execute Abu-Jamal in the 1990s, compared the FOP to 1930s Nazis. "Mumia should never have been on death row for even one day. It is frightening that FOX News gives the FOP the opportunity to get their fascist message out. Fox News is collaborating with murderers."

Berta Joubert from the International Action Center sent a statement that compared the FOP and Fox News attacks on



WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

Fox News picketed over racist coverage of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Philadelphia, Jan. 17.

progressive U.S. lawyers to those of repressive Latin American regimes such as Colombia's which have "attempted to silence the voices that speak the truth and expose injustice." Joubert noted that in 2012 there were 355 attacks on human rights advocates, mostly lawyers, with 69 killed by the paramilitary forces created by the U.S.

Representing the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, Pam Africa ended the press conference by calling on everyone to get involved with ongoing efforts to bring Abu-Jamal home. She stated: "The FOP's tactic is intimidation, but they cannot stand up to the power of the truth. We call on Obama to release Mumia now!" □

Milwaukee

Demand justice for Corey Stingley

Special to Workers World
Milwaukee

Outraged community members are responding with ongoing protests to a Jan. 10 announcement by Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm that he would not file criminal charges against three white men who killed Corey Stingley, a 16-year-old African-American, in 2012. Since the announcement, a series of community protests have occurred, statements have been issued and further protests are planned.

"Like the murder of Trayvon Martin, this is the continuation of an unjust and shameful system of criminal injustice which regards Black lives as more threatening and less valuable than white lives," said Mike Wilder, co-director of the African American Roundtable, in a statement released Jan. 14.

'The murder' of a son

Family and supporters of young Stingley held a press conference Jan. 15 at the Center Street Library in Milwaukee, calling for a federal investigation into his death. Stingley was removed from life support on Dec. 29, 2012, two weeks after being wrestled to the ground and choked by three older white men — Jesse Cole, Robert Berringer

and Mario Lauman — in a suburban convenience store in West Allis, a suburb west of Milwaukee. The men who killed him claimed to have been conducting a "citizen's arrest" after Stingley returned alcohol he had allegedly considered taking on Dec. 14.

Tory Lowe, who chaired the press conference, compared the killing of Stingley to the deaths of other Black youths, such as Trayvon Martin, at the hands of police or racist vigilantes. After Lowe named Derek Williams, who died in police custody in 2011, and Daniel Bell, who was shot in the back by police in 1958, audience members spontaneously shouted out the names of other young Black men, many their own relatives, who were killed by Milwaukee police.

Craig Stingley, Corey's father, demanded the resignation or voting out of office of Chisholm, whom he called "incompetent." He said Chisholm's decision is a travesty of justice. Chisholm has not shown the family his report and has tried to prevent them from independently investigating what Stingley called "the murder" of his son. "We have not been represented," he said.

Stingley displayed his son's death certificate, took spectators scene by scene through a surveillance tape showing how his son was put in a headlock and violently thrown to the floor, and reported what he had learned



PHOTO CREDIT: OCCUPY RIVERWEST

Craig Stingley, father of Corey Stingley, demands justice for his son at Milwaukee County Safety Building, Jan. 17.

from witnesses in his own investigation. He said his son's doctors told him "his brain died from the top down" after a "sudden, violent event" that cut off the blood supply.

The day after the press conference, the Milwaukee Medical Examiner ruled Corey Stingley's death a homicide.

Bring racist killers to justice

The press conference was followed by a protest rally at the Milwaukee County Safety Building Jan. 17. Despite bitterly cold, below-zero weather in the midst of a snow storm, more than 100 people participated. They demand Stingley's three killers be brought to trial immediately, that Chisholm resign, and that the U.S. Justice De-

partment investigate the killing.

People came to the rally from around metropolitan Milwaukee and northeastern Wisconsin. Many organizations were represented, including the National Black United Front, the Latin American Solidarity Committee, The Justice Coalition, Occupy Fond du Lac, Occupy Milwaukee, Occupy Riverwest, Wisconsin Bail Out the People Movement, Wisconsin Jobs Now and Workers World Party.

On Jan. 18, U.S. Department of Justice officials said they will "review" matters involving the death of Stingley. In a written statement, U.S. Attorney James Santelle claimed Stingley's family has so far not provided sufficient evidence to suggest possible civil rights violations. Santelle said that his office would review Stingley's death to determine if an "investigation is warranted, without any present commitment to or plan for prosecution."

A community meeting is planned on Jan. 23 at the African-American Women's Center, 3020 West Vliet St. in Milwaukee at 5:30 p.m. to discuss ongoing protest activities.

To demand justice for Corey Stingley, contact the Milwaukee County District Attorney John Chisholm at 414.278.4630 or da.milwaukee@da.wi.gov. □

'Trayvon 2' fight for justice

By Terri Kay
Oakland, Calif.

More than 75 supporters packed the courtroom on Jan. 13 to support "the Trayvon 2," Hannibal and Tanzeen, who were arrested during the massive protests after the George Zimmerman verdict, which let Zimmerman off scot-free for the killing of Trayvon Martin. Hannibal and Tanzeen, who, significantly, are both men of color and Muslims, are the

only ones still facing charges.

The preliminary hearing was rescheduled to March 6 at the request of the prosecution, after the failure of their main witness, the arresting officer, to show, despite being subpoenaed by the defense. The judge was forced to issue a bench warrant for the Oakland Police Department officer to assure his presence in March!

After court was adjourned, the supporters gathered in the hallway to hear

the Trayvon 2 address them. Hannibal observed: "They think we're going to bow down and take a plea. It's important for other people to witness this ... important to share this moment as a community. We can have all these people who can tell the truth. I'm confident, based on the support we're getting, that we're going to see justice. We're out here for Trayvon Martin, Kenneth Harding, Ranisha McBride and many others. It's such a beau-

tiful thing that you all are here."

Tanzeen added some serious notes about what was required to win: "We also need money and organizers." Donations can be made for their legal defense and support at wepay.com/donations/1872666567.

Supporters are asked to pack the courtroom again at their next hearing date of March 6 at 8 a.m. in the Wiley Manuel Courthouse on 7th and Washington streets in Oakland. □

Teachers' strike shuts Puerto Rico's schools

By Berta Joubert-Ceci

Thousands of teachers, students and their families and progressive organizations shook Puerto Rico's local government as they went to the streets all over the island on Jan. 14 and 15 to demand that the cost of PR's severe economic crisis is not carried on the backs of the public school teachers.

Puerto Rico's economy defaulting

Since last fall, the U.S. financial firm, Moody's, has been threatening to lower Puerto Rico's credit rating to junk status because of difficulties paying \$70 billion of its public debt.

For decades, island administrations have been selling bonds to sustain a parasitic colonial economy. The money obtained from these bond sales have been used to honor public employees' payrolls, build some infrastructure — not always necessary — and mostly pay back the country's debts.

No significant amount from these bonds has been used to create meaningful jobs that would ease the chronic unemployment, which, as of November 2013, was a whopping 14.7 percent. (tradingeconomics.com)

Because of the triple tax exemption on the interest paid by the PR government at local, state and federal levels and the extremely high yield of Puerto Rican bonds, they are greatly sought after in U.S. financial markets. Besides, there is the assurance that they will be paid since the island's constitution guarantees that holders of bonds get paid before any other creditor. Puerto Rican bonds are held by more than 70 percent of municipal bond funds across the United States.

Island's administrations sell out the people

Since around 2006, that is, even before the major financial crisis in the USA, the island has been in an accelerating economic downturn. There is a popular saying in PR: "When the United States has a cold, Puerto Rico gets pneumonia." This saying expresses the colonial condition — that every economic indicator is worse in Puerto Rico because the island lacks self-determination to guide a course that benefits its people instead of Wall Street.

Every local administration, be it from the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP) or the PPD, the pro-colony Popular Democratic Party — these parties alternate in government every 4 to 8 years — has imposed austerity measures that have deepened the masses' plunge into poverty and have sold out the island through privatizations and regressive taxes.

The current governor is the PPD's Alejandro Garcia Padilla. His campaign promise highlighted his "will" to govern for the people. Nevertheless, to satisfy U.S. investors, in the short time he has been in office since January 2013, he has imposed many anti-people measures. He privatized the airport and highways, increased water and sewage service rates by 60 percent, increased the age of retirement and reduced government workers' pensions.

Now Garcia Padilla is demanding reductions of public school teachers' wages. There are more teachers in the island than government employees: 42,000 active and 38,000 retired teachers. Teachers do not receive Social Security, so any reduction in their pensions will leave them with little to no income.

On Dec. 24, as a cruel holiday gift, the governor signed into law (Law 160) the reduction of pensions for teachers and judges.

Teachers resist, call work stoppage

This latest attack, with the announcement of pension "reform," aroused strong popular resistance. Teachers, already organized into a Broad Front, vowed to fight back, calling for a 48-hour work stoppage the first two days of classes on Jan. 14-15.

The Broad Front in Defense of the Teachers' Retirement System is composed of six main organizations: Educators for Democracy; Unity, Change, Militancy and Union Organizing (EDUCAMOS); National Union of Educators and Workers in Education (UNETE); Teachers' Association of PR (AMPR); National Organization of PR School Directors (ONDEPR); and the Organization of School Directors and Administrators (ODAE).

Eva Ayala, the head of EDUCAMOS and one of the main leaders of the Front, spoke with Workers World/Mundo Obrero on Jan. 19 about the work stoppage, meetings with the governor, the

Front's demands and strategy, the situation of teachers and the next steps in the struggle.

Ayala called the stoppage "very successful" and shared some of the experiences and feedback. Despite her hoarse voice — a product of constant actions and shouting in the rain that led to a cold — she conveyed the great enthusiasm of the striking teachers.

"This was a strike in all the barrios in Puerto Rico. I took on the task of visiting several towns, and it was very interesting that there were marches in every town I visited, of teachers, parents and students. It was a scene never seen in Puerto Rico.

"I thought that if there were marches in every place in PR the first day, then it would be a sea of people the following day, and that is exactly what happened. I have gone to many protests in my life, but I've never seen something like this.

"The success occurred because even teachers' organizations that do not have a tradition of protesting were involved." She pointed out that the membership pushed the hesitant conservative leadership into action. The organizers divided the island into four regions and visited each one to explain the situation to teachers, students and the communities.

Another reason for the success, she said, was the participation of school directors and supervisors' organizations that usually play a conservative role.

"When I was asked the day before how many people will participate, I said 82 percent, based on the responses we had received from teachers, but it surpassed all our expectations." All the schools were shut tight.

Another factor Ayala stressed, besides the participation of students and parents, was the involvement of the labor sector. "An element that has never been in these actions was the participation of every labor sector, encouraging the parents to not send their children to school, giving enormous solidarity, helping in logistics, etc. Definitely the teachers are in the struggle.

"Some even called it a 'perfect work stoppage.'"

Front's demand and strategy

Moody's demanded the Puerto Rican government reduce teachers' pensions to avoid getting the bonds rated as junk. The teachers' demand is brief and to the point: Do not touch teachers' retirement fund.

Ayala said, "We know there is a deficit; the retirement board needs \$333 million to solve it. But we have a strategy that we brought to the governor."

Among the nine points of this strategy is to increase by 1 percent the contribution of foreign companies. One of the reasons the economy is in shambles is that PR is a tax paradise for foreign companies. Even after tax-free legislation was

overturned in 1996, low taxes and loopholes for these companies still make it lucrative for them. This effectively transfers money from the Puerto Rican people to the pockets of Wall Street financiers.

Said Ayala, "These foreign companies get more than \$30 billion in profits per year and only pay 4 percent to the government, and this percent will be eliminated in 2017. This [1 percent] increase alone could be assigned to the teachers' retirement system."

Ayala reminded us that the teachers "have not had a salary increase in more than a decade. And with our low pay, we have to pay for materials needed in the schools, such as newspapers, copies, paint for the building, computers, etc."

The government, which is a colonial government, is at a dead end. Governor García Padilla met with the Front on four occasions before the strike and promised that he would not harm them. Since he is a tool of imperialism, however, a colonial administrator has no power. He very obediently signed into law the Wall Street-drafted law against the largest agency in the island, the education department. In the process he hurt directly or indirectly all the people of Puerto Rico.

Next steps

Stressing that "in PR, 82 percent of teachers are women," Ayala continued: "A high percentage of these are household heads. At the elementary level, the proportion of women exceeds 90 percent. This implies that the dismantling of the Teachers' Retirement System mainly concerns women. That's why we have always said that the teachers' struggle in our country — and in this case the fight in defense of our retirement system — has a woman's face."

This is not the end of the struggle. A Dialogue Committee has been established with the participation of the Front, the government and the Archdiocese. The committee has barely a couple of weeks or so to work.

On Jan. 14, the first day of the strike, the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico stopped the implementation of the teachers' retirement reform law pending a study by a special commissioner who should make a final determination no later than Feb. 7.

Teachers continue holding demonstrations and wearing black shirts on Wednesdays, and will continue exposing the grave situation.

Regarding the committee, Ayala said that the Front has warned that if no results are seen, they will continue the struggle in the streets.

In the meantime, the Front says it urgently needs funds to operate and organize and asks people to send checks to EDUCAMOS, P.O. Box 642, Comerío, PR 00782. □

M★NDO OBRERO

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estos ataques por parte del Estado sobre los movimientos sociales y activistas progresistas pacíficos.

Uno de los objetivos declarados de las negociaciones es la participación de los miembros de la guerrilla de las FARC en la vida política. ¿Qué garantías habrá para que puedan ejercer este derecho en paz? Si estos ataques en contra de las/os luchadores sociales que no están en la lucha armada continúan, ¿qué pasará con aquellas/os que depongan las armas para incorporarse a la vida política? ¿Habrá

una repetición de la masacre de la Unión Patriótica en la década de 1980, cuando alrededor de 4000 miembros de la UP fueron asesinados/os sistemáticamente?

Solidaridad internacional libera Julián Conrado

Antes de concluir debemos celebrar la reciente liberación de Julián Conrado, el "cantante del pueblo". Conrado es un miembro de las FARC que fue detenido en Venezuela en mayo de 2011. Salió de prisión el 9 de enero después de que el

gobierno de Colombia anunció la suspensión de la solicitud de extradición.

Conrado se había unido a la insurgencia como muchas/os, porque enfrentó persecución política. Él era parte de la "comisión temática" de las FARC, durante las negociaciones de paz en 1998-2002 con el gobierno de Andrés Pastrana. Conrado había ido a Venezuela para recibir tratamiento médico, pero fue detenido por pedido del gobierno colombiano.

El que el gobierno revolucionario bolivariano de Venezuela detuviera a Conrado

trae a colación algunas de las contradicciones que preocupan a muchas/os de las/os revolucionarios que apoyan esta revolución. Pero es importante señalar que como proceso continuo, las revoluciones son transiciones desde el capitalismo con todos los peligros y problemas provocados por los ataques imperialistas y de la oposición derecha. Revolucionarias/os venezolanos sin embargo, incluido el Partido Comunista de Venezuela y otros, han mostrado su firme apoyo a Conrado y exigido su liberación de la cárcel. □

Colombia 2014: año de lucha en el horizonte

South Africa

Struggles continue in platinum mines

By **Abayomi Azikiwe**
Editor, Pan-African News Wire

An 11-week strike by 7,000 members of South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) has resulted in a settlement granting them a raise of 9.5 percent. The strike against Northam Platinum facilities at Zondereinde was a major challenge for the NUM in the face of intransigence by the bosses and competition from the rival Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU).

The strike reflected protracted strife in the platinum mining sector, where for the last year and a half tens of thousands of workers have dropped their tools. In August 2012, 34 platinum mine workers at Lonmin's facilities at Marikana in Rustenburg were gunned down by the Northwest provincial police.

The NUM released a statement on Jan. 17 stating: "The NUM will continue to fight for better salaries and better working conditions for our members. NUM will never allow a situation where our members risk their precious life going deep down in the surface of the earth in searing heat to earn poverty wages. It is unacceptable."

The statement adds: "This has been a peaceful, bloodless and effective legal strike. The NUM maintains that violent strikes are unnecessary and they should never be allowed to replace dialogue. We truly thank our members for their discipline during this tough and difficult industrial action here at Northam Platinum Limpopo."

While this strike has ended, other in-

dustrial actions may be looming in the most intense platinum-producing region of the Northwest. The rival AMCU, which now has more members than NUM in the Lonmin and Impala mines, may strike during the week of Jan. 20.

According to Business Day Live: "The NUM's fierce rival, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), is threatening to issue strike notices next week at Impala Platinum and Lonmin, the world's second — and third-largest platinum producers, respectively.

"Anglo American Platinum, the largest producer, also faces a strike as AMCU calls its members out to back its demands for entry-level wages to more than double to R12,500 (S.U.S. 1,150) a month." (Jan. 17)

South Africa is the world's largest producer of platinum, with approximately 80 percent of known reserves. During 2013, the bosses were threatening to lay off thousands of workers, claiming that demands for substantial wage increases were driving down profits and creating losses. Nonetheless, the miserable wages and conditions of employment created an atmosphere of militancy that the owners could not ignore.

Business Day Live stressed that "platinum company CEOs have warned against granting double-digit wage increases in an industry where more than half of the sector's mines are loss-making in the face of high input costs and relatively weak prices for platinum group metals." Similar arguments have been put forward by the capitalists in the gold sector, where

large-scale downsizing has occurred in South Africa over the last two decades since the African National Congress (ANC) has been in power.

Class and ideological struggles intensify

National presidential and parliamentary elections will be taking place in South Africa in April. The ANC's campaign Manifesto is calling for increased social spending and the creation of 6 million new jobs.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the nation's largest labor federation, has endorsed the ANC election Manifesto, although a fierce debate is going on within the organization.

COSATU participated in the formulation of the Manifesto and its launching on Jan. 11. The federation views it as building on what it considers the progress made over the last 20 years.

A COSATU statement issued Jan. 15 in support of the ANC election Manifesto lists several reasons for its endorsement. These points of agreement include a pledge by the ANC to increase wages and ensure collective bargaining and employment equity, along with reforming the financial sector of the national economy.

Other important issues relate to the ANC's pledge to "speed up the roll-out of our massive economic and social infrastructure programs, especially in energy, public transport, ICT and water supply, to unlock economic opportunities, create jobs and improve the quality of life of our people."

COSATU supports the Manifesto's call to "enforce legislation to eliminate abu-

sive work practices in atypical work and labor brokering and improve the capacity of the Department of Labor to enforce this and all other labor laws. COSATU will work with government to ensure compliance with these laws and will continue to campaign for the total banning of labor brokers."

However, the largest current affiliate in COSATU, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), has criticized the federation leadership for what it describes as its uncritical support of the ANC. NUMSA held a special congress in December where these differences were aired publicly.

Even though NUMSA has taken positions at variance with COSATU, the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the labor federation says that it will not suspend or expel the affiliate. There has been speculation that NUMSA may attempt to organize across sectors, which would violate COSATU's constitution of "one union, one industry," and possibly form a workers' party to eventually contest elections on a local and national level.

The ongoing labor actions as well as the upcoming elections will give a strong indication of the trajectory of the South African working class. Workers and youth have been strongly represented at the ANC's Manifesto launches throughout various regions of the country. If this is any indication of the popularity of the ruling party, it will be victorious in the upcoming elections, where the government for the next five years will be selected. □

'One abuse too many'

Rebellion against banks rocks Spain

By **John Catalinotto**

A mid-January mass rebellion in one neighborhood of a mid-sized city in north-central Spain beat back a rightist City Hall government and sparked solidarity protests in nearly 50 other cities. This first working-class victory since the capitalist crisis exploded in 2008 has turned the name of the area — Gamonal — into a cry of resistance that could reverberate from Athens to Detroit.

Historically an independent village, Gamonal later developed as the industrial area of the city of Burgos and became its main working-class residential neighborhood, filled with apartment houses. The capitalist collapse of 2008 closed the factories and left 80 percent of Gamonal's residents unemployed.

Burgos is a city of 180,000 people. Like most of Spain today, the whole city suffers high unemployment. Growing poverty has replaced working-class stability. As in the U.S., many were evicted, their homes turned over to the banks, so that now most people between 30 and 55 years old are living with their parents. In addition, the parents' pensions have been frozen by the national government, which is enforcing "austerity" on behalf of the biggest European banks.

The right-wing Popular Party — which governs the Spanish state — also heads the city government of Burgos. To fill the coffers of a powerful construction company, this government ordered a large

street to be torn down and replaced by an unneeded boulevard.

Besides squandering \$11 million and slowing traffic, the new set-up eliminated already scarce and inexpensive parking spots. The plan was to replace them with expensive private parking spaces beyond the reach of the unemployed residents. They would cost up to \$26,000 for a 40-year lease. (publico.es, Jan. 14)

Many left analysts have said this was the straw that broke the camel's back, the drop that overflowed the vase. It was one abuse too many.

Gamonal's community organization said 5,000 residents joined a demonstration on the afternoon of Jan. 13. When it was over, some 2,000 remained and occupied the construction area to prevent machinery from entering. (publico.es, Jan. 13 and 14) The next night, police began to attack and arrest demonstrators at random, with no restraint on their brutality.

Instead of stopping the protests, the police assault just brought out more people, who became furious with the police and with the banks that own the city — much as the banks now own Detroit in the U.S.

Leftist groups called solidarity demonstrations in at least 46 cities in all re-



Gamonal residents demand prisoners be freed. Burgos, Spain.

gions. The state authorities insulted and baited the demonstrators, charging them with planning violent and barbaric acts.

Most of those joining the demonstrations were workers fed up with the rapid impoverishment of a quarter of the population.

Burgos Mayor Javier Lacalle blamed the resistance on "outside agitators" from "ultra-left groups" who came from other parts of the Spanish state. It turned out, however, that all those arrested were from Burgos, and for once the corporate media contradicted the authorities. The mayor finally conceded and said the demolition and construction would stop, as the city could not guarantee safety at the site.

The residents are celebrating the victory, which they know may only be tem-

porary, and are continuing to demand the mayor resign and that the 46 residents still held in prison as of Jan. 19 be released. Those on the left analyzing "the lessons of Gamonal" can't resist remarking that the street ("la calle") beat Lacalle.

The group Red Roja, paraphrasing a remark by Argentine/Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara about the Vietnamese liberation struggle, called for "two, three, many Gamonals." (redroja.net, Jan. 18)

Many of Spain's 6 million unemployed are undoubtedly hoping that Gamonal is no accident. And given the similar situation throughout Greece and Portugal and in many other European and U.S. cities under the gun of the banks' austerity, if this is the start of a general rebellion, why should it stop at Spain's borders? □

WORKERS WORLD
editorials

The low-wage spark

The struggle to raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 an hour, which is being embraced not only by many unions but by a wide range of popular and community-based organizations, is a struggle to reverse the decades-long trend in the United States to impoverish the working class. This is especially so where the fight for a minimum wage is combined with the fight to organize workers into unions.

Adjusted for inflation, the minimum wage reached its all-time high in the late 1960s, when it was equal to almost \$9 an hour in today's money, according to the Pew Research Center. Some claim it should be closer to \$11 an hour.

Why the 1960s? Not coincidentally, that was a period of heightened struggle on many fronts, in which progressive movements could bring tens and even hundreds of thousands of people into the streets to demand civil rights; liberation for Chicano, Native and Black people; an end to the war in Vietnam; women's liberation; freedom for Puerto Rico; gay rights and many more. Interestingly, unions at that time were generally not in the forefront of struggle, with a few bright exceptions: those organizing hospital workers and farm workers.

These movements often met vicious repression, but they had many victories. Legal segregation was ended; the U.S. was driven out of Southeast Asia;

more jobs opened up for people of color and women; abortion was made legal. But the ruling class, the owners of the military-industrial-banking complex, remained in the saddle. They had bent a little in order not to break. One of their concessions was to raise the minimum wage.

Today's movement is grounded in the broad, multinational working class, especially its poorest sectors, a majority of whom are women, who may be targets of racism and anti-immigrant bias as well. With widespread, long-term unemployment caused by the unsolvable crisis of capitalist overproduction, workers of all ages are facing an uncertain future. Many live under extremely painful circumstances. For older workers, the loss of a job can be followed by loss of their homes, unemployment insurance, pensions and even the ability to look for work. For younger workers, it can mean being saddled with debt when the only jobs open pay the barest minimum, or below.

In the same period that the minimum wage has shriveled to far below even the barest subsistence level for a family, the profits of the rich have soared to almost unimaginable heights. This is the fuel for a new and mighty upsurge.

With resistance growing, and new organizations like the people's and workers' assemblies on the move, 2014 looks to be a year of great promise. □

Georgia rally demands Medicaid expansion

By Dianne Mathiowetz
Atlanta

From under a sea of umbrellas, a crowd of hundreds rallied here on Jan. 13, the opening day of the state legislature — the General Assembly — to press for the expansion of Medicaid in Georgia.

With a steady rain falling, speaker after speaker pointed out that human suffering and death could be avoided if Gov. Nathan Deal would agree to expand the eligibility of Medicaid coverage as provided for under the Affordable Care Act.

Some 650,000 Georgians who are ineligible to get Medicaid under the state's existing guidelines could receive health care under such an expansion. Many single adults who are unable to afford health insurance because they survive on poverty wages — such as fast-food, Walmart and domestic workers — would be covered. Others, members of working families who are poor, but not poor enough to receive Medicaid without the expansion, would receive preventive care for themselves and their children.

Although 100 percent of the increased costs would be paid with federal dollars for the first three years of the expanded program, Georgia's reactionary governor is one of 23 who are refusing to accept the benefits the law provides. Studies show that some 70,000 additional jobs would be created over 10 years and some \$30 billion would enter the Georgia economy

under expanded Medicaid.

Georgians face a right-wing agenda of voter suppression, anti-worker legislation, attacks on women's rights and unending tax breaks for the rich, similar to what residents of North Carolina have been protesting. Inspired by the Moral Monday actions in North Carolina that started last year, a number of grassroots and advocacy organizations and human rights activists began meeting in late summer to build a comparable movement in Georgia.

The expansion of Medicaid and the possibility of bringing health care services to hundreds of thousands of Georgians unites a broad range of interests, in both rural and urban communities across the state. "With recent public opinion polls showing that a significant majority of Georgians favor Medicaid expansion, the task is to galvanize opinion into political action and power," states Kamau Franklin, a key organizer.

In a show of solidarity, the Rev. William Barber, a major force in the N.C. Moral Monday Movement, and a number of low-wage workers, part of NC Raise Up, joined the Jan. 13 demonstration. NC Raise Up has galvanized youth employed in the fast-food industry.

On Jan. 20, Moral Monday Georgia plans to bring the message of expanded Medicaid to the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. march in Atlanta and in other cities around the state. □

In a sea of reaction

Fighting for reproductive justice

By Sue Davis

What is the state of abortion rights in the United States on Jan. 22, the 41st anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion?

Not good. NARAL Pro-Choice America's national report card for reproductive rights in 2014 gave the U.S. a grade of D. Last year, 52 laws restricting abortion rights were passed in 24 states, and a Supreme Court case, introduced Jan. 15, threatens safe access to women's health clinics.

A total of 807 anti-choice laws have been passed by states since 1995, with more than 200 since 2011. In its Jan. 14 "State of the States" report, the Center for Reproductive Rights divides restrictions into four categories: limits on insurance coverage, bans on abortion care, targeted regulations on abortion providers, and restrictions on medical (prescription) abortions.

NARAL's 102-page report, "Who Decides? The Status of Women's Reproductive Rights in the United States," details each state's status. While 10 states enacted 16 pro-choice measures last year, 14 states have total bans on abortion rights, 12 of which were enacted before the Roe decision in 1973. These laws would immediately take effect if Roe is overturned.

Twelve states already had bans on abortions after 20 weeks without an adequate health exception; they were joined by Texas and North Dakota in 2013. Arkansas passed a ban after 12 weeks. All bans defy standards set by the Roe ruling.

Congress debated 87 anti-choice bills in 2013, many related to gutting abortion and contraceptive coverage in the Affordable Care Act. Fortunately, all were defeated. (For details, see CRR's study, "Under Attack: Reproductive Rights in the 112th Congress.")

However, two congressional actions severely limited reproductive rights: food stamps cut by the sequester and long-term unemployment insurance ending in 2013. Reproductive justice is based on the premise that all women, regardless of nationality, class, gender or sexual identity, and various abilities, must have the right to have and raise healthy children as well as to control all aspects of their own lives. Being able to feed and provide for themselves and their children is essential to ensure those rights.

More of the same in 2014

On Jan. 13, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of a federal court ruling rejecting Arizona's 20-week ban on abortions. It's not clear how this will affect bans in other states, though it might encourage new lawsuits opposing them.

On Jan. 15, the Supreme Court heard arguments for and against a Massachusetts law that established a 35-foot buffer zone around women's health care clinics. Marty Walz, of Massachusetts Planned Parenthood, told NPR Jan. 15 that "nothing else in our 30-year history has worked" to keep anti-choice protesters from harassing clients and staff when entering or leaving clinics.

It must be remembered that two clinic workers were murdered and five injured in 1994 at a Planned Parenthood clinic in

Brookline, Mass. Walz noted buffer zones are around all polling places as well as the Supreme Court. The court approved a clinic zone in 2000, though its composition is now more anti-choice.

On Jan. 17, a federal court blocked a demeaning, medically unnecessary ultrasound law in North Carolina. The law required that doctors show women seeking an abortion an ultrasound picture and describe the fetus in detail to shame women into canceling their abortion.

Congress initiated its first 2014 anti-choice measure on Jan. 15 when the House Judiciary Committee passed HR7, which would ensure abortions are not directly funded by any federal program or department. Since 1977, the Hyde Amendment has denied Medicaid coverage for abortions for poor women, who are disproportionately women of color, rural and young. By imposing new requirements in the tax code and on the private insurance market — that eliminate deductions for abortion services — it would impose sweeping restrictions that make abortions less affordable for all.

But the law's most controversial provision — the most vicious, invasive attack of women — would require the Internal Revenue Service to conduct audits of rape and incest victims who have abortions and women who have abortions for life-threatening complications to ensure they're not committing tax fraud. That means the IRS would have the final say over what "counts" as a sexual assault or a life-threatening situation, forcing women to prove their case. Only the most profoundly misogynous, reactionary minds could dream up such a draconian anti-woman law.

What is to be done?

A pro-choice law was proposed in Congress in 2013 with by-partisan support, the Women's Health Protection Act of 2013. As Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) wrote in a Nov. 13 op-ed posted on the Huffington Post blog, the law is needed "to stop states from subjecting reproductive health care providers to meet burdensome requirements that are not applied to medical professionals providing similar services." Its purpose — "to protect a woman's right to determine whether and when to bear a child or end a pregnancy by limiting restrictions on the provision of abortion services" — is based on the due process and equal protection clauses in the 14th Amendment.

Though the national organizations that traditionally defend and promote reproductive rights oppose all attacks on abortion rights and support the WHPA, they offer few other concrete solutions. They do mount pro-choice demonstrations in states against specific attacks, as they did in North Carolina, Virginia, Wisconsin and Michigan last year. They also rely on social media to activate a strong pro-choice response to hostile legislation throughout the country.

There has not been a national mobilization in Washington, D.C., in defense of choice since 2004 largely because groups that have organized them depend on voluntary contributions and demonstrations cost millions of dollars. Nowadays groups are pouring funding into filing lawsuits in various states and promot-

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Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

The 12th anniversary of the arrest of Ahmad Sa'adat

The following statement was released by the leadership of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine on Jan. 15:

To the struggling masses of our people ...

On January 15, 2002, the Palestinian Authority security apparatus committed the crime of arresting Comrade General Secretary Ahmad Sa'adat and his comrades Ahd Abu Ghoulmeh, Majdi Rima-wi, Hamdi Quran and Basil al-Asmar, in compliance with the requirements of security coordination. This did not stop the attacks on the resistance, the escalation of settlements and the building of the segregation wall.

The Authority's crime was completed by the enemy's attack and abduction of the comrades from Jericho prison, when all agreements were disregarded in U.S. and British collusion with the attack, which exposed the inability of the Authority to protect even its prisons, while our comrades were taken to spend long years in isolation — for which the occupation is not solely responsible.

We honour these heroic comrades — at their forefront, Comrade leader Ahmad Sa'adat, and affirm today that he was unanimously re-elected with full confidence in his leadership as General Secretary by the Central Committee and the Seventh National Conference of the Front. This is a well-deserved trust that he has earned, demonstrating steadfastness, clarity and unwavering commitment to struggle, principled and ready for struggle, with a broad political vision and carrying a high level of national respect. He and his imprisoned comrades, and all of the prisoners of our people together are at the forefront of the strug-

gle, insisting on Palestinian national goals and rights in their totality on the ground, without prejudice, compromise, negligence, or barter.

To the masses of our resisting people ...

The courage shown by the people of Qusra village and its area are a brilliant example of the struggling steadfastness of our people and their willingness to continue in all circumstances to confront and resist the enemy and their settlers. As we call on all to be inspired and learn from the steadfastness of our farmers and our prisoners, we are fully aligned with the alternative they present to relying on the futile negotiations. It is clear that the goal of the negotiations is the liquidation of the national liberation cause of our people, enhancing the status of the Zionist entity in the Arab world, and opening the doors to the official Arab regimes to normalize relations with it.

Today, we confront the ongoing lessons of Oslo and all subsequent agreements and negotiations, while the Palestinian Authority continues to drive the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] into relying upon this absurd and devastating process, attempting to close the door on a popular option while yielding to U.S. and Arab reactionary pressure.

To our people and our nation ...

This date shares an appropriate coincidence with the shuttle diplomacy tours of the Secretary of State of the U.S. imperialists, between Palestine and the Arab countries, in order to liquidate our national cause and replace it with the issue of exchanges of land and population, drawing borders, and in support

of the Israeli demand for recognition of the enemy state as the "state of the Jewish people." This is an attempt to liquidate the Palestinian right of return and to whet the appetite for ethnic cleansing against the rights of our people in the areas of Palestine occupied in 1948.

All of this comes with total disregard of international legitimacy and United Nations resolutions on Palestine, and of the United Nations as a reference, to implement the U.S./Zionist vision.

What is happening now requires popular confrontation of any party who seeks to negotiate a temporary or permanent solution that detracts from fundamental Palestinian national rights. This moment requires of all national and social forces among the Palestinian people to mobilize to thwart this new scheme, to protect the resistance option, and return the Palestinian issue to the U.N. as a reference, with its resolutions to be implemented — not negotiated.

Our cause is in danger from this heated American pursuit to enforce upon us the terms of the enemy. It seeks to take advantage of the state of demobilization and national division, and the resulting confusion about events in the Arab world. It is clear that the leadership of the Authority is unable to confront, and its options have been reduced to negotiations, negotiations, and then more negotiations.

It is urgent to move past the era of division and return to the clear Palestinian national constants, build our movement and abandon once and for



PHOTO: ALARAB.NET

Ahmad Sa'adat, center, under arrest.

all the illusions that have proved thorny and dangerous. It is our people's right to know what is going on in the corridors and backrooms of negotiations, and it is their right to decide and judge on the basis of that reality.

To the masses of our great people ...

On this occasion, we reconfirm our emphatic commitment to our pledge to the heroic comrades and all of the martyrs and prisoners. We renew our rejection of security coordination and we demand to put an end to the continuing illusions of negotiations amidst a frenzy of settlements and settler violence. We call for an end to the devastating division and the rebuilding of the Palestine Liberation Organization on the basis of a principled political strategy and a national democratic movement to restore the political unity of our people in the homeland, diaspora and exile, to rise and march again in the national liberation struggle.

Salutes and tributes to our comrade General Secretary and his comrades

Glory to the martyrs, freedom for the prisoners

Unite to confront Kerry's plan for the liquidation of our national cause

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

— Political Bureau January 15, 2014

Continued from page 10

ing activism in local areas, as they did in Albuquerque, N.M., last year where they helped overturn a 20-week abortion ban.

But that's not enough to turn back the reactionary onslaught, which is showing its ugly, racist, sexist, anti-lesbian-gay-bi-trans-queer, anti-labor, anti-poor, pro-rich, pro-austerity, undemocratic face throughout the land. What's needed is to draw lessons from successful movements in the past, like the massive Civil Rights Movement led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

During this King holiday, it's timely to remember that women protesting in the streets for legal abortion propelled the Republican-majority court to decide in favor of Roe in 1973. So it's time for women rights' activists to join with all groups under attack — all low-wage workers in fast food restaurant and retail jobs as well as bank tellers and airport workers, all workers fighting for unemployment and union rights, and all those in low-income and oppressed communities fighting for their very survival — in a massive people's power movement.

Only a united movement can make power to the people — and reproductive justice — a global reality. □

Petition protests Interpol's arrest of journalist

By John Catalinotto

After 13 days in prison following an international arrest warrant issued against him, Kimyongür Bahar, a Belgian citizen of Turkish origins, is currently under house arrest in Massa, Italy. Bahar is an anti-war activist and political journalist who the Turkish government, led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has declared to be a "terrorist" even though his actions involved organizing legal protests in Belgium and not in Turkey against the Turkish regime.

His real "crime" has nothing to do with so-called terrorism, but rather for his good work in denouncing the undemocratic aspects of the Erdoğan government, which has repeatedly demanded that he be arrested and extradited to Turkey. Should that demand be carried out it would put not only his freedom but his life at risk.

Bahar has degrees in Art History and Archaeology at the University of Brussels. He is the director of the Interna-

tional Institute for Peace, Justice and Human Rights, and is a spokesperson of the Committee against the Interference in Syria.

We know Bahar at Workers World for his excellent journalistic work clarifying both developments in Turkey and in the rest of the region, especially in Syria. In November, he organized a public demonstration in Brussels against Western intervention in Syria, which is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths and of destitution for millions of Syrians.

The Erdoğan regime has been trying to condemn Bahar to 22 years in prison for protesting in Parliament against the practice of torture in Turkish prisons. In past legal cases, both Belgian and Dutch justices decided that the charges of terrorism against Bahar are unfounded.

Nevertheless, Interpol, the West European police agency, had him arrested last year, first in Spain and again on Nov. 21 in Italy. According to the constitution



PHOTO: DURSUN AYDEMIR

Kimyongür Bahar in Brussels on Nov. 13. His sign reads: 'No to war in Syria.'

of Interpol, it is forbidden to arrest people for ideological reasons, yet that is exactly what it is doing regarding Bahar.

Bahar's supporters in Europe have issued a petition demanding all charges against him be dropped. As of the evening of Jan. 12, some 3,572 people had signed, including Noam Chomsky. The petition can be found at freebahar.com in six languages, including English. □

COLOMBIA 2014: año de lucha en el horizonte

Por Berta Joubert-Ceci

17 de enero 2014 - Las agudas contradicciones entre las clases opositoras y la creciente exposición de las verdaderas intenciones de las fuerzas gobernantes de Colombia están alcanzando niveles que sólo pueden ser resueltos por una nueva

etapa en la lucha en el 2014. Los acontecimientos recientes en ese país — incluyendo el aumento de la participación del campesinado y de las/os indígenas en la resistencia contra el régimen — si continúa y crece — podrían finalmente dar un inmenso golpe al estado neoliberal y neocolonial de Colombia. Este estatus

ha mantenido fuera a la mayoría de las personas pobres y excluidas del goce de los beneficios proporcionados por las inmensas riquezas naturales del país.

Antes de examinar los nuevos acontecimientos, hay que recordar la realidad de Colombia y examinar esos acontecimientos en su contexto. Colombia sigue siendo el país más peligroso para las/os sindicalistas — el 60 por ciento de todos las/os sindicalistas asesinados en el mundo son asesinados en Colombia. Estos pérfidos actos son perpetrados por el Estado y las empresas transnacionales, junto con las fuerzas paramilitares.

No sólo las/os sindicalistas son las víctimas. Según un informe publicado en abril de 2013 por el Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), en promedio hubo seis violaciones a los derechos civiles cada día, incluyendo 565 atribuidos a los paramilitares, 268 a la policía y 187 al ejército. Diez colombianos por semana fueron asesinados por la violencia política. El informe también señala que durante la presidencia de Santos, el asesinato de civiles, los llamados “falsos positivos”, han aumentado, contrario a la versión ofrecida por la propaganda oficial. (rebellion.org, 11 de enero)

A pesar de este escenario, las/os activistas de las fuerzas progresistas del país han respondido a los graves ataques recientes con una valiente resistencia.

“Golpe de Estado” contra el alcalde de Bogotá

Como parte de una lucha constante, el 10 de enero más de 100.000 personas se manifestaron durante horas en el centro de la Plaza Bolívar de Bogotá para una marcha convocada en apoyo al alcalde electo de Bogotá, Gustavo Petro, y para defender la paz y la democracia. Petro había sido destituido de su cargo el 9 de diciembre por Alejandro Ordóñez, el procurador general de la nación.

El puesto de alcalde de Bogotá es el segundo cargo más importante del país después del de presidente de la nación. Esta ciudad capital de 8 millones de habitantes es el centro económico e industrial del país, contribuyendo un 50 por ciento de la renta nacional.

Petro es un ex guerrillero del Movimiento 19 de abril, popularmente conocido como el M19, que depuso las armas en 1990 en un acuerdo de paz con el gobierno. Durante su mandato en el Congreso de la República, primero como representante y luego como senador, Petro expuso los vínculos del gobierno de Álvaro Uribe con los criminales paramilitares, un caso conocido como “parapolítica”.

Esta exposición fue un paso importante en la revelación de los crímenes de los paramilitares y dio lugar a la acusación y el arresto de varios políticos, en su mayoría vinculados a la agrupación de Uribe. También provocó la hostilidad de Uribe y sus aliados, como el propio Ordóñez, que representan al sector más cruel de los políticos ultraderechistas y de la oligarquía.

En una columna de opinión del 29 de diciembre en el Washington Post, Petro explicó por qué lo removieron: Ordóñez lo había acusado de “mal manejo en los esfuerzos para cambiar la recolección de basura a control público”, y al hacerlo, atacó el sistema de “libre empresa”. También

dijo que la acumulación de miles de toneladas de basura entre el 18 y 20 de diciembre en 2012, “amenazó la salud pública”.

De hecho, Petro trató de “nacionalizar” la recolección de basura que estaba siendo monopolizada por contratistas privados, varios de los cuales eran aliados de Uribe. ¡Pero no sólo Ordóñez lo destituyó de su cargo, sino que lo inhabilitó para ocupar cualquier cargo durante 15 años!

Este es el mismo Ordóñez quien removió de su cargo a la valiente senadora afrocolombiana Piedad Córdoba hace algunos años.

Petro fue elegido en octubre de 2012, y a pesar de que no ha impugnado la base económica capitalista, su Plan “Bogotá Humana” ha desafiado los viejos patrones de administración de la ciudad. Un plan reformista, BH ha traído algunas mejoras sociales: abrió un hospital cerrado, redujo los pasajes de las principales líneas de autobuses privados, creó la Secretaría de la Mujer, prohibió las corridas de toros en la Plaza de Toros Santamaría, creó Centros de Atención Móvil a Drogodependencia (CAMAD) y ha iniciado otros programas sociales.

Desde que Petro asumió el cargo, Ordóñez y otros políticos derechistas se han opuesto a él, pero su intento por cambiar la recolección de basura privatizada de nuevo al control de la ciudad les llevó a tomar medidas.

Varios políticos uribistas han estado reuniendo firmas para convocar un referéndum revocatorio, que se celebrará el 2 de marzo, según el pronunciamiento final del procurador general en relación a la expulsión de Petro. Petro acoge el referéndum, afirmando que mostrará la opinión del pueblo bogotano.

Como señal de la hostilidad reaccionaria de la clase dominante hacia cualquier cambio del status quo, un joven seguidor de la administración de Petro, Gerson Martínez, un artista de rap, fue brutalmente asesinado el pasado 5 de enero. Una bandera de Bogotá Humana estaba al lado de su cuerpo. Martínez fue responsable de la organización de algunas de las manifestaciones de diciembre en pro de Petro.

La represión estatal continúa

El día antes de que Martínez fuera asesinado, el 4 de enero, la policía arrestó a Francisco Javier Toloza, líder del creciente movimiento social y político, Marcha Patriótica. Su arresto eleva a tres los líderes de MP detenidos en menos de dos años. Toloza es parte de la comisión internacional de MP y la Junta Patriótica Nacional. Los otros dos detenidos son Wilmar Madroñero y Húber Ballesteros.

Marcha Patriótica ha crecido en número y alcance político, lo que representa un verdadero reto al poder de la oligarquía. Compuesta por cientos de diferentes organizaciones de base en todo el país, está mostrando una voluntad decidida para cambiar el país en beneficio de los pobres y excluidos. No es de extrañar, dada la historia de Colombia, que el liderazgo de MP esté siendo amenazado, detenido e incluso asesinado.

En momentos en que el gobierno colombiano está llevando a cabo negociaciones de paz con las FARC-EP en Cuba, es importante analizar el significado de

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Conciencia de clase – de políticos y obreros

El fundador y cabeza del partido Workers World – Mundo Obrero, Sam Marcy, escribió que “la democracia es simplemente un marco que oculta el carácter de clase depredador del Estado burgués”. En un momento en que el pueblo trabajador en todo EE.UU. está lidiando para encontrar la manera de sobrevivir frente a los recortes de los beneficios por desempleo, un reciente análisis confirma la realidad del control del 1% sobre el 99%.

El análisis, completado por el Center for Responsive Politics (organización que investiga el efecto y el progreso del dinero, el cabildeo y las políticas públicas), y utilizando informes del año 2012, muestra que la mayoría de las/os miembros del Congreso son millonarios. Mientras que el Senado siempre ha sido un club de millonarios—el análisis detalla el patrimonio neto medio de todas/os los senadores en \$2.7 millones—y el patrimonio neto medio de todas/os los miembros de la Cámara en \$856,000, muy superior al ingreso medio de los hogares en los EE.UU. durante el mismo período, 53,046 dólares, (quickfacts.census.gov) y muchísimo más que el del 14 por ciento de personas por debajo del nivel de pobreza. Conjuntamente, el patrimonio neto medio de las/os 530 miembros del Congreso es de \$1,008,767. Al menos 268 miembros del Congreso tenían un valor neto medio de \$1 millón o más, según informa el Centro. (9 de enero)

Estas/os congresistas son los mismos que debaten la ampliación de los beneficios por desempleo que permitieron expirar a principios de este año. Millones de personas en los EE.UU. despertaron el 1º de enero con la perspectiva de que no habría dinero para apoyarlas, pocos puestos de trabajo disponibles en el mercado y mucho menos recursos para poder encontrarlos.

Es difícil ir a entrevistas de trabajo cuando no se puede poner gasolina en el tanque, o comprar un boleto de autobús o metro. Las cifras de desempleo están disminuyendo no porque la gente haya encontrado empleo, sino precisamente porque aquellas/os que ya no tienen la capacidad económica de buscar trabajo son eliminadas/os de las estadísticas de la fuerza laboral.

Permitir que estas/os políticos ricos tomen decisiones sobre los beneficios por desempleo es como pedirle al zorro cuidar el gallinero. Karl Marx escribió en 1859: “No es la conciencia del hombre [o la mujer] la que determina su ser, sino al

contrario, el ser social es lo que determina su conciencia”. El ser social de estas/os legisladores ricos les permite ver a las/os trabajadores como prescindibles, y sus dificultades son una vaga abstracción.

De hecho, el miembro más rico del Congreso, el congresista Darrell Issa, es el presidente del influyente y poderoso Comité de Supervisión de la Cámara, que pretende “existir para asegurar dos principios fundamentales. El primero, que las/os estadounidenses tienen el derecho a saber que el dinero que Washington les toma está bien invertido. Y el segundo, que las/os estadounidenses merecen un gobierno eficiente y eficaz que trabaja para ellas/os”. (Oversight.house.gov)

El promedio del patrimonio neto de Issa en el 2012 fue la extravagante cifra de \$464 millones.

Con todos los supuestos intentos de transparencia en las supervisiones del Comité, en el año 2012 las reglas para la presentación de informes de ingresos en el Congreso se cambiaron para que los ingresos por más de \$1 millón de los conyuges, en lugar de ser reportado en cifras reales, aparezcan simplemente como valores de “\$1 millón o más”. (opensecrets.org, 09 de enero) Esto permite que el Congreso diga que el valor total neto de sus miembros se ha reducido — y aún así, su patrimonio neto medio es mayor que nunca antes en la historia.

Así como el ser social determina la conciencia de la clase dominante en el Congreso, así mismo este determina la conciencia de las/os trabajadores. Este hecho es lo que obliga a estas/os políticos considerar la extensión de los beneficios por desempleo — el hecho de que mientras más tiempo las/os trabajadores pasen desempleados, las probabilidades son mayores de que se rebelen en contra del sistema que aumenta su sufrimiento con el fin de continuar llenando los bolsillos de los ricos. Comienzan a ver que el racismo, el sexismo, la intolerancia contra las personas LGBT, etc, son las herramientas que la clase dominante utiliza para dividirlos y comienzan a unirse y a luchar.

A medida en que más y más trabajadoras/es tomen conciencia del absoluto desprecio del sistema capitalista a su supervivencia, cada vez más llegan a la comprensión de que la única manera en que las/os trabajadores conseguirán un verdadero respeto, comprensión y atención es bajo un sistema en el cual las/os trabajadores sean la fuerza que guíe la toma de decisiones sobre sus propias vidas — o sea, un sistema socialista. □