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# Elected Venezuelan gov't beats back coup attempt

By John Catalinotto

*Bulletin, Jan. 22—The Venezuelan Ministry of Defense announced today that the Bolivarian Armed Forces had repelled an attempted attack on their facilities in Caracas. At 2:50 a.m. local time, "A small group of assailants assigned to the zone commando No. 43 of the Bolivarian National Guard, betraying their oath of allegiance to the Homeland and its institutions, moved on two military vehicles, then broke into the headquarters of the urban security outpost located in the town of Petare, Sucrem, removing a cache of weapons of war and kidnapping under threat of death, two officers and two national guard members of the aforementioned outpost," said Captain Gerson Soto Martínez, commander of the Macarao police coordination post. (Telesur English, Jan. 22)*

*The captain also said that the criminals surrendered and were captured, their weapons recovered, and they are providing information to intelligence agencies. The Bolivarian Armed Forces categorically rejected the acts of the low-ranking officers of the National Guard.*

*While the immediate coup attempt appears crushed, it takes place amid a growing effort by U.S. imperialism and reactionary forces in Latin America to overthrow the legitimate Venezuelan government, using sanctions, subversion and economic sabotage to impoverish the masses. Under those conditions, those who oppose imperialism and colonialism should consider any steps the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela uses to defend itself as legitimate.*

Jan. 21 — U.S. imperialism and its lackey governments in this hemisphere, with the strategic collaboration of West European imperialism, have opened up an intensified attack on the sovereign Bolivarian government of Venezuela and its president, Nicolás Maduro.

The new offensive began Jan. 6 when the 14-country Group of Lima, formed in 2017 allegedly to peacefully resolve conflicts within Venezuela, voted 13 to 1 to prevent representatives of the Venezuelan government from entering their countries. Only the new Mexican government led by President A.M. Lopez Obrador voted against this shameful declaration.

The regimes running the other countries — Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and St. Lucia — did the bidding of their local oligarchies and U.S. imperialism.

President Maduro was inaugurated Jan. 10 for his second term, based on his overwhelming electoral victory last May, when he got over two-thirds of the votes cast. Even taking into consideration the low turnout in the May election, Maduro had a stronger electoral victory than did right-wing presidents, including Mauricio Macri in Argentina, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Iván Duque in Colombia.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence immediately denounced Maduro's taking office as illegitimate. Pence and Trump lost the popular vote in the U.S. election in 2016, but that did not stop this arrogant attack on the Venezuelan president.

On Jan. 11, a politician with little name recognition inside Venezuela, Juan Guaidó, who headed the now defunct National Assembly, said he was ready to assume the responsibilities of executive power. Since this sounds exactly like he was calling for a military coup, he was arrested on Jan. 13.

**Pence, Bolton, Pompeo attack Maduro**

Guaidó then got further verbal support from Pence, National Security Advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. That means he has the blessing of the most aggressive militarist faction of U.S. imperialism.

One can hardly imagine any administration other than the one in Washington openly and unashamedly calling for the overthrow of a sovereign elected government.

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Women and gender oppressed people rallied and marched in hundreds of cities on Jan. 19. Here, GABRIELA USA delegation of Filipino women at Foley Square rally in New York. See article, page 3.

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# Reclaiming the radical legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

The legacy of the historic Black Civil Rights and Freedom Movement, and the contributions of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., were remembered in the U.S. on Jan. 21 in thousands of small and large events. Noteworthy was the highlighting of the radical foundations of MLK Day by emphasizing Dr. King’s condemnation of the devastation of U.S. wars, racism, imperialism and capitalism.

In Detroit, Gail Walker, keynote speaker at the 16th annual Martin Luther King Day event, emphasized King’s radical legacy. Walker, executive director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization/Pastors for Peace, contrasted King’s actual, radical politics to the sanitized portrayal most people in the U.S. hear about. Walker also paid tribute to her late father, IFCO/PFP founder and previous director, the Rev. Lucius Walker.

Despite bitter cold leading to the cancellation of a planned march, hundreds attended the spirited indoor rally called by the Detroit MLK Day Committee and sponsored or endorsed by over 50 community and labor groups.

Committee organizer Abayomi Azikiwe chaired the rally, which was opened by the host, Father Near of the historic St. Matthew’s & St. Joseph’s Episcopal Church. Also speaking were Sean Crawford, a General Motors worker whose plant is slated for closure; and Rev. Bill Wylie-Kellerman representing the “Gilbert Seven” — Poor People’s Campaign members arrested for blocking the downtown streetcar Q Line, so-named for billionaire Quicken Loans owner Dan Gilbert.

Other speakers were UNITE-HERE President Nia Winston, whose union waged a successful strike against Marriott’s Book Cadillac hotel; Aurora Harris, poet and representative of the Lecturers Employee Organization, which fought for and won a decent contract for nontenure faculty at the University of Michigan; youth organizer Jonathan Roberts; and Detroit School-Board-in-Exile member Elena Herrada.



Keynote speaker Gail Walker emphasizes radical politics of Dr. King at Detroit celebration.

WW PHOTO: MARTHA GREVATT



WW PHOTO: VIVIANA WEINSTEIN

In Denver, 20,000 people marched.

Over 5,000 people marched from Garfield High School into downtown Seattle on the 37th annual MLK Day. This year’s theme was “Affirmative Action = Justice.” Affirmative action in Washington state was overturned in 1998 by two arch-racist leaders with corporate backing, using ballot initiative I-200.

Continued on Page 5



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

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

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

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

people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

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

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

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

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## Coast to Coast

# Women's marches hit all forms of bigotry

By Kathy Durkin

Tens of thousands of protesters marched in 89 cities around the world on Jan. 19 in conjunction with the third annual Women's March in Washington, D.C. The massive demonstration there two years ago — to protest Donald Trump's inauguration as president — along with coordinated actions across the U.S., marked the largest protests in U.S. history. Millions participated. In solidarity, actions were held around the globe.

This year, U.S. demonstrations took place from coast to coast to protest the racism, xenophobia and misogyny emanating from the White House and to demand rights for women, people of color, workers and gender nonconforming people. However, there were deliberately divisive racist and Islamophobic slanders against Women's March Inc. leaders of color.

Spurious, bogus attacks were leveled by the corporate media and Zionist and other right-wing forces against Tamika Mallory, Carmen Perez-Jordan and Linda Sarsour for alleged "anti-Semitism." They were also criticized for supporting Palestinian rights. Sarsour, who is proudly Palestinian and Muslim, is recognized as a strong defender of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign exposing Israel as an oppressor of the Palestinian people.

Even though many march organizers around the country had supported women Democratic candidates running for Congress in the midterm elections, the Democratic National Committee caved in and dropped its sponsorship of the Washington demonstration in response to the attacks. A rival group, Women's March Alliance, which organized separate marches in some cities, did not address racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

However, Planned Parenthood stayed strong, among many other groups, as did Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, who is Jewish.

Around the country, marchers lined up with one grouping or the other. In some cities, there were two actions. Unfortunately, a few marches were cancelled. Women's March, Inc. mobilizations stressed the importance of leadership by women of color in over 200 sister actions.

In an interview with CBS, Sarsour said the real controversy should be about a president who cages migrant children, shuts down the government, sides with white supremacists and is complicit with the war on Yemen. (Jan. 17)

### Unity march in Washington

Tens of thousands of people gathered at Federal Plaza in Washington. Many in the multinational, multigender and multigenerational crowd traveled there to support inclusivity and equality for all women. The appointment of misogynist Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court had motivated some women to participate. Government workers showed their anger at the government shutdown and withheld paychecks.

A Jewish Women of Color contingent led the march. Hand-held signs supported the Los Angeles teachers' strike, as well as im/migrant rights and women's reproductive health. Some signs stressed that Black Lives Matter. Other placards opposed Trump's border wall and the shutdown. A group of high school students, wearing the hijab, chanted, "Refugees are welcome here!" Other Muslim women carried signs



WW PHOTO: BRENDA RYAN

Disabled women hold action Jan. 19 inside New York's Grand Central Terminal.

with various slogans.

Speakers, mainly longtime activists and women of color, called for the shutdown to stop and federal workers to be paid. They raised many women's issues and promoted the rights of LGBTQ people. The need for an intersectional women's movement was stressed. Perez-Jordan reiterated that she and the other women leaders condemned anti-Semitism, homophobia and transphobia. Mallory stated her solidarity with her Muslim, Latinx, Asian, disabled and Jewish sisters.

Three Jewish speakers addressed the crowd: Abby Stein, a transgender woman and rabbi; Yavilah McCoy, founding member of Ayecha, an advocacy group for Jewish people of color; and April Baskin, a Women's March, Inc. steering committee member.

Near the stage, Indigenous women held a banner calling attention to the number of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirits.

### Solidarity at New York's Foley Square

In New York City, there were three protests. The Women's Unity Rally held near government buildings in Foley Square drew between 4,000 and 5,000 people. It was organized by the Women's March NYC, which was affiliated with the D.C. protest, and by the New York Immigration Coalition. It brought in a myriad of issues, struggles and forces, including im/migrant rights, sexual abuse, and workers' and LGBTQ rights.

The spirit of solidarity permeated the multinational, multigender, multigenerational crowd. Maya Edery of Jewish Voice for Peace stressed: "We should always be following the leadership of those most impacted by oppression, and this rally really uplifts the leadership of women of color, which is why I chose to be here." (Gothamist.com, Jan. 20)

As Women's March NYC director Agunda Okeyo spoke, a right-wing Zionist seized the microphone to disrupt the rally, but was quickly escorted offstage. Okeyo refused to be silenced.

Some political figures promoted voting as the means to make social change. Many other speakers stressed the need for an intersectional women's movement, led by women of color, low-income workers, immigrants and LGBTQ people.

Representatives of the National Domestic Workers Alliance and other labor groups attended and spoke. Speakers denounced all forms of bigotry. A Palestinian-Jewish speaker linked Israel's oppression of the

Palestinian people to U.S. abuse of migrants — and called for solidarity. Congressperson Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, well-known feminist organizer Gloria Steinem and actor Christine Lahti also spoke.

Workers World Party was there in a contingent with the People's Power Assembly/NYC, Gabriela, the International Working Women's Day Coalition and International Women's Alliance. With them were Honduran activists holding placards calling for solidarity with the Honduran resistance and honoring murdered Indigenous leader and environmentalist Berta Caceres.

A powerful Non-March for Disabled Women held inside Grand Central Station after the Unity Rally demanded rights for people with disabilities, including accessible subway transportation. Rise and Resist organized it and Women's March NYC supported it. People's Power Assembly/NYC participated.

The Women's March Alliance, the group that had split from the Women's Unity Rally over the bogus charge of anti-Semitism, was organized by Katherine Siemionko, a former Goldman Sachs vice president. It held a march on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

### Boston: 'Until all voices are heard'

Gathered behind a beautiful red banner that declared, "No More Stolen Sisters!" the Indigenous people's contingent, organized by the United American Indians of New England (UAINE), led the crowd of thousands through Boston's streets. The theme of this Women's March was "Until all voices are heard."

UAINE leader Mahtowin Munro opened the rally with an impassioned speech, focusing on the epidemic of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirits (MMIWG2S). She connected this racist, anti-women violence to the rise of white supremacy, coupled with the construction of pipelines on Indigenous lands.

Munro further addressed the colonial border violence impacting migrant women and their families and demanded that "this genocidal U.S. government policy must be stopped." She called for action to support Indigenous peoples' resistance across the globe, from Palestine and Puerto Rico to Chile and British Columbia. She gave support to struggles for land rights by the

Mashpee and Aquinnah Wampanoag people and the movement to eliminate racist depictions, from sports mascots to the bigoted Massachusetts flag.

Kristin Turgeon, representing the Women's Fightback Network, highlighted her struggles as a young disabled woman facing the challenges of "inaccessible train stations, streets and buildings; an extremely high rate of unemployment; and a lack of education, to the point where people don't know how to communicate with us." She stressed that the answer to capitalist-caused racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and war lies in forging unity and fighting for a socialist society.

Munro and Turgeon voiced support for the Palestinian people and connected their struggles to those facing Indigenous, nationally oppressed and poor workers in the U.S. Other speakers included fierce women leaders from Black Lives Matter, im/migrant rights, LGBTQ and young women's movements; Black and Jewish civil rights organizations; and elected representatives.

### Denver: 'No to Trump's wall!'

About 80,000 people turned out at the Women's March in Denver. Members of Indigenous nations and many other people of color and sexual orientations were among the mostly young protesters. Signs demanded equality, and many expressed anger at Trump and the Republican Party for their mistreatment of migrants and demands for government funds to erect a barrier wall on the southern border with Mexico.



WW PHOTO: VIVIANA WEINSTEIN

Denver Womyn's March, Jan. 19, brought out tens of thousands.

### Seattle: 'Indigenous women and girls matter'

In Seattle, a large contingent of Indigenous people led the mile-long Womxn's March of 20,000, which was peppered with signs and banners on various issues.

The next day, 500 Indigenous people and their supporters marched to Seattle City Hall in the MMIWG2S March. Rally leader Earth-Feather Sovereign of the Colville Confederated Tribes said: "There's an undeclared war against our people, especially toward our women, and especially from the corporate cartels which dig up and destroy Native lands."

At the spirited rally, marchers drummed and sang the song of the American Indian Movement. Abigail Echo-Hawk, author of a study by the Urban Indian Health Institute, reported on the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women, adding that many city police departments do not classify Indigenous women in compiling their reports. □

Contributors to this article include Jim McMahan, Monica Moorehead, Viviana Weinstein and the Workers World Boston bureau.

# Mumia supporters call out Philly DA for hiding evidence

By Ted Kelly  
Philadelphia

Supporters of former Black Panther and political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal held a press conference on Jan. 15 to denounce the highly suspicious, delayed release of new evidence related to Abu-Jamal’s case by the office of Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner.

Addressing a room packed with media and activists in West Philadelphia, Mike Africa Jr., son of recently freed MOVE 9 members Debbie and Mike Africa Sr., and attorney Rachel Wolkenstein, who represented Abu-Jamal in a 1995 appeal, made clear what Mumia’s advocates have known for decades: Authorities are hiding evidence to keep this innocent man behind bars.

As Workers World reported earlier (“Philly DA reveals hidden Mumia files after court ruling,” Jan. 14), the DA’s office made the fantastical claim that on Dec. 28 — one day after Philadelphia Common Pleas Judge Leon Tucker’s ruling granting Abu-Jamal new rights to appeal his unjust conviction — Krasner personally stumbled across half a dozen boxes filled with evidence related to the case in a previously “inaccessible” storage room while looking for office furniture in the bowels of the office building.

The boxes were marked “Mumia” or “Mumia Abu-Jamal” on one side and on the other “McCann,” referring to former Assistant District Attorney Edward McCann, who had close ties with the Fraternal Order of Police.

Larry Krasner and his assistants then kept this bombshell revelation secret for a full six days before officially notifying Judge Tucker and Abu-Jamal’s current attorneys, Judith Ritter and Sam Spital, that these hidden documents had been uncovered. They offered no explanation

for the delay. Midway through the press conference, it was learned that Tucker had issued an amended Post Conviction Relief Act order one day earlier so the Commonwealth must verify by a supervising attorney the location and status of boxes 1 through 29 referenced in the DA’s Jan. 3 correspondence. Tucker further stipulated that his court would maintain jurisdiction over the boxes and that previous discovery orders in April and June of 2017 would remain “perpetual.”

### ‘Evidence of cover-up of a frame-up’

Rachel Wolkenstein stated: “These boxes were secreted away. They were hidden. There’s only one reason you hide boxes. You hide them because you are hiding evidence of Mumia’s innocence ... evidence of the cover-up of a frame-up.”

Tucker’s ruling hinges on the involvement of former Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice and DA Ronald Castille, a virulent racist and hanging judge. Castille’s desire to execute alleged “cop killers” was so notorious that he became the subject of a U.S. Supreme Court case in 2016, *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, which set new legal precedent that it is unconstitutional for a judge to rule on an appeal in a case they were previously involved in.

As Wolkenstein explained: “Judge Tucker found that this has the appearance of bias and impropriety, and was as such a violation of due process rights to have what’s considered a fair and impartial tribunal whether at the trial level or at the appellate level. This is a very broad finding that goes way beyond Mumia.”

The ruling will allow Abu-Jamal to re-appeal his conviction before a new panel of the PA Supreme Court on all the issues that were brought up over 20 years of litigation, including being denied a jury of his peers when African Americans were



WW PHOTO

Michael Africa Jr. and Sister Empress Dr. Phile Chionesu at Jan. 15 press conference for Mumia.

excluded from the jury and being denied the right of representation — even the self-representation he requested.

Witnesses in the case were coerced, threatened or given promises to get them to lie outright about Abu-Jamal. Wolkenstein noted: “The U.S. Justice Department as well as then District Attorney Ed Rendell were absolutely personally and politically involved in the falsification of the confessions that Mumia supposedly made and did not make when he was critically ill and in the hospital and could not speak.”

Tucker’s ruling means that all this flagrant misconduct can be brought before an appellate judge. And it’s clear that Philadelphia DA Krasner has been withholding evidence that could aid in that appeal.

Black Panther Alumni Association member Paula Peebles; Deacon Matthew Smith with the National Action Network; Sister Empress Dr. Phile Chionesu, organizer of the Million Women’s March; and Rowan University Professor Sandra Joy also spoke at the press conference.

Peebles, whose organization supported Krasner’s campaign for district attorney in 2017, stated: “DA Krasner needs to come forward and do what’s right. When he was campaigning, he came to the African-American community for support. We were there when he needed votes, so Krasner, return the favor.” She urged people to confront Krasner whenever he speaks in public and demand he do right by Mumia.

Never before has there been more abundant evidence of the cover-up of the frame-up. The charges against Mumia Abu-Jamal must be dismissed immediately and our brother must be released. Every day that this case languishes in the arcane bourgeois legal process means another day has passed that an innocent man sits, sleeps and lives in a cage.

For nearly 40 years, Mumia has been the voice of the voiceless, echoing from within the darkest dungeons of this prison nation. The time has long since come for Mumia Abu-Jamal to be free, so his voice may be heard even clearer outside the walls that now confine him. □

# Life imprisonment — for profit — is the crime

By Ted Kelly  
Frackville, Penn.

When Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf ordered an unprecedented statewide lockdown of prisons last summer, the state’s Department of Corrections claimed that the crisis was prompted by prison staff becoming sick from illicit drugs somehow smuggled into state facilities. It was just a coincidence, the authorities said, that the lockdown was ordered in the midst of a national strike by prisoners to demand improved conditions and pay for their labor.

Now, over six months later, Pennsylvania authorities in Harrisburg have admitted that toxicology reports showed only one prison staff employee was exposed to anything resembling illegal drugs. Multiple prisoners in various corrections institutions across the state have claimed that it is the guards themselves, not prisoners or their visitors, who are responsible for the smuggling of illicit drugs into facilities.

Despite these revelations, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has already signed a \$4 million contract with Smart Communications, a corporation that profits from mass incarceration by posing as an expensive middleman for all prisoner correspondence. Currently, all prisoner mail in Pennsylvania must be forwarded to the third-party facility

in Florida where the mail is opened and photocopied. The facsimiles are then returned to the respective prisons in Pennsylvania.

This costly process has caused prisoners to receive mail as late as two months after correspondence was sent. It also poses serious constitutional issues, as correspondence between prisoners and their lawyers is also opened and photocopied by prison authorities, thereby negating any pretense of the right to private counsel, as outlined in the Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Moreover, prisoners are never notified when their outbound mail has been opened or rejected. Grounds for rejection are sometimes as simple as writing the recipient’s first initial instead of the full name. More commonly, letters are sent back by Smart Communications without any indication of the reason why.

### Lockdown measures persist

In Frackville State Correctional Facility in central Pennsylvania, the lobby and visiting room look much the same today as they did last July. Rows of vending machines that were previously stocked with snacks and drinks for visitors to purchase and consume with their loved ones stand empty, six months after their contents were raided by corrections officers for “safety reasons.” No prisoners have been allowed to take photographs with

their visitors since the lockdown, either. While these lockdown measures were supposed to be lifted after 90 days, just in time for inmates to break bread and take pictures with their families for the fall and winter holidays, the state arbitrarily extended the ban. Photos and food won’t be allowed back into visitors’ room until sometime this Spring, authorities say. And the microwave that was in the visiting room to heat up commissary food items like small frozen pizzas has been permanently removed.

### Prison activist for 25 years speaks out

“They’ve made the innocent pay the piper for everyone else,” says Bryant Arroyo, folding his hands in front of him. “Including my family.”

Arroyo is an indefatigable 47-year-old prison activist. Mumia Abu-Jamal once dubbed him “the world’s first jailhouse environmentalist” for his successful campaign to cancel a \$100 million plan to build a toxic coal plant near the Frackville facility. Twenty-five years ago he was sentenced to life without parole for a crime he didn’t commit. He has led a boycott of the new third-party mailing system, as well as against the draconian new visitation policy. As he has said previously, “I’m not going to subject my grandchildren to this.” (“Inmates in Pennsylvania prisons launch boycott of prison profiteers,” WW, Sept. 25)



PHOTO: BENJAMIN IRVING

Bryant Arroyo has spent 25 years behind bars.

The continued crackdown on prisoners’ rights after the 2018 lockdown is an act of “deliberate maliciousness, imposed on whimsical pretenses,” says Arroyo. “They could have addressed the alleged issue like any other time this cropped up.”

Arroyo has suggested that if prison authorities were truly concerned about drug smuggling and didn’t just use the lockdown as a way to disrupt the strike activities in Pennsylvania prisons, they could have easily used existing protocols to address such events. There is already

*Continued on page 8*





Furloughed and unpaid federal workers line up for free, hot meals at the World Central Kitchen in Washington, D.C. Over 4,400 meals were served on Jan. 16.

# Who gets paid and who doesn't

By Betsey Piette

As the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history enters month two, Trump and congressional leaders appear incapable of resolving the crisis they have created, and unwilling to do more than repeatedly trade barbs or blame each other for the crisis. But then, unlike some 800,000 federal workers, neither Trump nor members of Congress have been financially hurt by the shutdown.

Salaries of the president and his office staff, including appointees, members of Congress and Supreme Court justices, are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and will be uninterrupted throughout the shutdown. While some Congress people have said they will forego being paid during the shutdown, it is their choice to make.

No one is forcing Trump, his staff or the members of Congress to work without pay or risk losing their jobs. None are living paycheck-to-paycheck like 78 percent of all U.S. workers, according to a Jan. 11 report by Forbes.com. No one in the White House or in the halls of Congress faces the loss of food and housing security resulting from the extended shutdown.

In fact, a majority of the members of Congress, including both Republicans and Democrats, are millionaires. In 2016

the median net worth of U.S. Congress members was \$1.2 million and continuing to grow, at the same time that net incomes for most workers in the U.S. were on the decline. The recent November election may have resulted in some lower-income people being elected as representatives in the House, but by and large it remains a millionaires' club.

The majority of political appointees are also guaranteed to be paid by the Office of Personnel Management, which considers them to be "entitled to the pay of their offices solely by virtue of their status as an officer, rather than by virtue of the hours they work." While 400,000 federal workers are forced to work without pay, political appointees get paid whether or not they show up for work.

## War and espionage essential to ruling class

The administrators of this capitalist state aren't the only ones whose incomes are protected from the impact of the extended shutdown. In September 2018, legislation was passed to guarantee funding for a few select programs considered "essential" to the capitalist state.

This advance funding protected two key areas of state repression: the National Security Agency and the Department of Defense, which funds the military. Because 43,000 Coast Guard employees

fall under the Department of Homeland Security, and not Defense, they were not extended the same protection so they are not receiving paychecks.

Trump announced Jan. 17 that all U.S. diplomats and other State Department employees would be called back to work, as money had somehow been found to guarantee their salaries. Given recent stock market fluctuations, it appears that Trump wants to assure his friends on Wall Street that he can protect their overseas investments.

In the 2018 budget, and proposed again for 2019, the military brass received everything they wanted and more — \$700 billion in 2018 and \$716 billion this year. Contrary to Trump's recent claims, this increased funding is not going to raise GIs' pay. It is lining the pockets of top executives of weapons contractors like Boeing, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and more. This benefit for the rich comes on top of massive cuts in the tax rate for corporations.

## Assistance for food, housing, water called 'nonessential'

While programs like WIC programs, housing assistance, Indigenous people's health care, and protection of food and water are treated as "nonessential" services, spying on the entire civilian population is seen as "vital" to ruling-class

interests. The NSA, the U.S. government's surveillance tool, is also exempt from the shutdown. Wiretapping phones, collecting mega amounts of electronic communications personal data, and tracking the whereabouts of people through their cell phones are all seen as "vital" to the interests of protecting the capitalist class.

The budget of the U.S. government's other major spy network — the Central Intelligence Agency — is largely hidden from the public record, so it's not possible to know if any staff (other than janitors, etc.) are impacted by the shutdown. It is probably safe to guess that the answer is no.

## Shutdown = war on workers

In reality, Trump's government shutdown is a war on workers, and not just those employed by the federal government. Meeting the needs of the population for food security and safety, health care, education, housing, environmental protection and public safety are not considered "essential services" by the capitalist class.

To Trump and members of the bourgeois ruling class, the functions they value most, and have sustained funding for, are the tools of state repression, both domestic and international.

The shutdown lays bare the true reason for the existence of the capitalist state. □

# Reclaiming the radical legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Continued from page 2

The effort to restore affirmative action through ballot initiative I-1000 was summarized by former State Rep. Jesse Wineberry. He announced that 380,000 signatures had been gathered and approved to bring I-1000 before the legislature and the voters.

Some of the most blatant forms of discrimination allowed since the overthrow of affirmative action include the loss of \$3.5 billion in contract jobs for people of color and women. As part of community pushback, the march was preceded by a career opportunities fair, two dozen activism workshops and a rally.

A broad coalition of activists, workers, students and community members came out in Oakland, Calif., in the fifth annual event to "Reclaim the Radical Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." Organized by the Anti Police-Terror Project, the event's multiple actions commemorated the 10th anniversary of the police murder of Oscar Grant, a young Black man who died at the hands of Bay Area Rapid Transit police. Grant's murder sparked resistance to police terror in the entire Bay Area.

Beginning with a sunrise ceremony, the day included a militant march through downtown Oakland past the police department, city jail and court buildings. Led by a sound truck driven by APTP activists and supporters such as Third World Resistance, the march echoed with chants against white supremacy and racism. Speakers tied together



WW PHOTO: JUDY GREENSPAN

Oakland march was joined by Causa Justa, a migrant workers organization.

the fight against racism, the migrant rights movement and the growing struggle against gentrification in the city.

Later at Oscar Grant Plaza, people's assemblies were held on a multitude of resistance issues. Organizers

occupied the plaza for 10 hours to mark the anniversary of Grant's murder. □

Contributing to this article were Judy Greenspan, Martha Grevatt and Jim McMahan.



L.A. teachers’ strike

‘A struggle for the future of public education’

By Sue Davis

Some 30,000 Los Angeles public school teachers and professional staff in the country’s second largest school district went on strike Jan. 14, marching through the rain from City Hall to the Los Angeles Unified School District office a mile away. The rain did not dampen their spirit, their unity or their overwhelming support from the city’s diverse working-class communities, filled with many people of color, whom they serve.

For the first time in 30 years the teachers, majority women and mostly women of color, went out on strike. Represented by United Teachers Los Angeles, they had battled LAUSD for nearly two years without a contract, through months of bad-faith bargaining with many unfair labor practice charges.

The union calls the strike “a struggle to safeguard the future of public education.”

During 12-hour days beginning Jan. 17, UTLA has been negotiating with the LAUSD board to hammer out such issues as using the district’s \$1.9 billion unrestricted reserves to fund smaller class sizes; more nurses, counselors and librarians; more support for special, early, bilingual and adult education classes; and empowering parents and educators by strengthening Local School Leadership Councils.

While bargaining has been behind closed doors at City Hall, with Mayor Eric Garcetti mediating negotiations, the Jan. 19 L.A. Times leaked that LAUSD has already agreed to new hiring. That means the strike has already won some recognition of the union’s demand for fully staffed schools and smaller classes.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles County supervisors have agreed to find up to \$10 million to expand district nursing services for next year, and Gov. Gavin Newsom has agreed to use an increase in state tax

revenue to boost funding for education statewide.

Not only have teachers been walking picket lines in front of their schools as well as at City Hall, they have also prepared meals for their students. With donations from neighborhood grocers and union funding, they are making brown-bag lunches for students who depend on meals they receive at school.

In an act of solidarity, the National Football League Players Association sent

the district during the 2008 recession, according to a Jan. 19 article in The Nation. They responded by forming the Union Power caucus. Inspired by the successful 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike, the caucus has been working with CTU and other union reformers ever since.

UTLA’s strategy is based on what some unions refer to as “bargaining for the common good.” The Nation article explains: “[T]he idea of introducing demands in collective bargaining that

real estate. Charter schools in L.A. drain \$600 million annually from public education funding.

Ultimately the struggle in L.A. comes down to preserving public education with adequate funding and staffing for the masses of working and poor people. L.A. teachers are fighting against for-profit privatization — what a Jan. 10 article in Capital & Main calls “radical restructuring,” which seeks to aggressively dismantle traditional public education.

An arch advocate of radical restructuring, LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner was appointed to his post in May. He was hired based on his success in the capitalist financial world, despite lacking experience in education. While Beutner hasn’t yet revealed his plans for the district, he did hire Cami Anderson, who, as superintendent of Newark, N.J., schools, instituted a business plan called the “portfolio model,” which included closing neighborhood schools, replacing them with charters, and mass firings of teachers and principals.

The Capital & Main article points out that Anderson was driven out by a revolt of angry parents and wonders why Beutner and the LAUSD board think the portfolio model would work better in L.A. than in Newark.

“They don’t see the unchecked growth of largely unregulated charter schools as a problem, despite more and more evidence that charters discriminate against [students with disabilities], increase racial stratification and on the whole do not perform better than traditional schools. On the contrary, they view charter expansion as elemental to the future of the district.”

It’s way too soon to predict how this critical issue will play out in L.A. But having widespread community support for the teachers is a definite plus. □



PHOTOS: UTLA

L.A. teachers are walking picket lines in first strike in 30 years.

pizzas to teachers at several schools “so they could be sustained and continue to strike.” (CBSLA, Jan. 18) Local businesses have been delivering food to picket lines, including hot coffee, bagels and tacos.

In another Jan. 19 L.A. Times article, UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl told a rally that the strike has “stunned our naysayers.” Asking the crowd, “If you’re a boxer, do you know what you do?” He answered: “You double down and keep on punching.”

Struggle of public schools vs. charters

Caputo-Pearl and other current union leaders became determined to revitalize the UTLA after mass layoffs destabilized

benefit the community as a whole, not just the union’s membership ... has been a way not just to revitalize stagnant unions but to reinvigorate interest in the public sector as a whole. It also means that when teachers take to the streets, they have parents willing not just to join them, but to take risks of their own.”

The major issue that continues to loom at the bargaining table—not just in L.A. but for school districts all across the country over the last decade—is the lucrative, profit-driven charter school industry. Charter schools not only leach millions of dollars out of public education funding but also commandeer huge amounts of square footage in taxpayer-funded, school-building

Oakland teachers ready to strike

By Judy Greenspan  
Oakland, Calif.

Jan. 20 — As a large banner was hoisted today on the walls of the union headquarters, President Keith Brown of the Oakland Education Association announced a strike vote will take place from Jan. 29 to Feb. 1. The banner read: “Oakland teachers ready to strike!”

On Jan. 18, hundreds of Oakland teachers took their contract fight to the streets to demand that the school district bargain fairly and meet the demands of teachers, students and the community. Their “sick-out” was a one-day wildcat strike action — not authorized by the Oakland Education Association — boldly taken by high school and middle school

teachers despite threats from district heads of retaliation and no pay.

Teachers and students from all over Oakland rallied early in the morning at Oakland Technical High School. A large contingent came from East Oakland schools. After picketing for an hour, the demonstrators — led by Fremont High School, one of the schools on the district’s closure list — took off for the school district office in downtown Oakland. Many passing cars honked their horns in solidarity, showing community support for Oakland teachers is high.

The march ended in front of Oakland Unified School District headquarters. Teachers and students began a strong picket line there that spilled over into the street, and a speak-out and teach-in of

students and teachers was held in front of the district building.

Kehinde Salter, a teacher at Fremont, asked, “Do you know what’s supposed to be a right in this country? Public education!” She went on to criticize the privatization of education and the refusal of the system to adequately fund public schools. Teachers from more than a dozen schools addressed the crowd, describing their poorly funded schools and deteriorating working conditions.

While the rally was going on, students began taping signs and post-its on the doors of the district offices. Students and community members pounded on drums, chanting, “We are Oakland, stop the school closures” and “The people, united, will never be defeated.” Others chalked slogans on the sidewalk in front of the building.

Their demands mirrored the bargaining points of the OEA. Teachers in Oakland earn at least \$11,000 less than teachers in other Bay Area school districts. Lower wages are forcing many teachers to leave Oakland and move to other areas where they can afford to live. Contract demands include smaller class sizes, more school nurses and a smaller students-to-counselor ratio.

The wildcat action also protested district plans to close 24 public schools — most of them in the flatlands of

East Oakland. No schools are targeted to close in the more privileged Oakland hills.

Teachers and students stage sick-out

Teachers at Roots International Academy, a public middle school, recently received notice that their school would be closed in June and both students and teachers would be consolidated with another school. This was done without consultation with the teachers, students or neighboring community.

Roots is a neighborhood school. Roots teachers and students participated in today’s sick-out. Students testified about how their teachers have supported them and helped them be successful. Roots teachers invited everyone to protest at the Jan. 23 school board meeting when the school closure will be under discussion.

The sick-out was an indication of the tremendous energy and potential of teacher and student activism against attacks on public education. After the sick-out, hundreds of teachers, students and community members, led by local artists, made signs and banners at the OEA headquarters. The messages from this weekend are “Keep teachers in Oakland” and “Oakland teachers are ready to strike.” □

Greenspan is an Oakland middle school teacher and OEA member who participated in the Jan. 18 sick-out.



WW PHOTO: JUDY GREENSPAN

Oakland teachers fight for higher pay and better working conditions.



# Hundreds rally outside auto show to save jobs

By Martha Grevatt  
Detroit

Detroit’s well-heeled had to pass through a gauntlet of hundreds of protesters this year to get to the annual black-tie event known as the North American International Auto Show. Before it opens to the public, the show hosts a “charity preview.” Billed as “the hottest night this winter,” it allows attendees to get a sneak peek at the latest new vehicles — if they can afford the \$400 ticket.

The demonstration on Jan. 18, called by the Detroit Coalition for a Green New Deal, came together in response to General Motors’ announcement of plant closings in the U.S. and Canada.

In addition to demanding that the plants in the states of Michigan, Ohio and Maryland as well as in Ontario, Canada, not be shuttered, the coalition is demanding “green jobs.” Protest organizers advocate the use of “eminent domain” to seize the Detroit Hamtramck Assembly Plant (DHAM), not only to save jobs but to combat climate change by building green products such as solar panels, wind turbines, and buses and trains for mass transit.

GM plans to discontinue its greenest vehicle, the electric hybrid Volt, built at DHAM, in favor of highly profitable trucks and sport utility vehicles.

The coalition, initiated by Democratic Socialists of America, also included Autoworker Caravan, a rank-and-file autoworker organization that has demonstrated outside the auto show on many occasions. Over two dozen organizations endorsed the action. Congressperson Rashida Tlaib spoke at the rally.

Both the United Auto Workers union and Canada’s UNIFOR were

invited to participate in the protest, but declined. The UAW held a candlelight vigil a block away from the show prior to the coalition rally. Many autoworkers and community supporters attended the vigil and then marched as a group to the auto show. Chanting “GM got bailed out, we got sold out,” they massed right outside the doors to the show at one point.

A global contingent of GM workers from Brazil and Canada joined Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers from Metro Detroit and elsewhere. The retirees’ chapter of UNIFOR Local 222, which represents a GM plant in Oshawa, Ont., that faces closing, sent a bus to the rally. Many angry workers rode the bus with the retirees.

Members of CSP Conlutas, one of the GM workers’ unions in Brazil, also came to Detroit to attend the protest and various meetings. This union has militantly and successfully fought mass layoffs.

The same day as the protest, Oshawa GM workers drove around their plant and stopped trucks from getting in and out for two hours. A day earlier UNIFOR members at Inteva, a lower-wage parts firm that supplies the Oshawa plant and DHAM, held a one-day walkout to protest the closings.

Workers are not going to let GM destroy their livelihoods without a fight. □



WW PHOTO: MARTHA GREVATT

Brazilian autoworkers join protest outside Detroit event.

# A slice of Hell: Working at Villa Italian Kitchen

By Mike Kühlenbeck  
Des Moines, Iowa

The first taste of Hell in my working life was in the fall of 2012 when I was hired as a part-time dishwasher and cook at Villa Italian Kitchen in the Merle Hay Mall food court.

Villa opened its first location in New York City in 1964 before expanding into a national franchise. For years the restaurant had been a hot spot in the mall, but Merle Hay had fallen on hard times.

Retail suffered after the financial meltdown of 2008, and the prevalence of online shopping continues to damage retail. This has led to store closings, layoffs and fewer customers. Mall employees were expected to work more for less and with a smile.

By age 23, I had graduated college with a journalism degree and student loan debt. Job openings in my field were scarce, and I needed work. A couple of my friends working at Villa helped me secure an interview with the manager and I was hired the same day.

I was grateful, at first. As a former customer, it did seem strange that the restaurant rarely kept the same staff for more than a month. Not long after I started, I realized why they didn’t stick around.

## Entering ‘Hell’s Kitchen’

The kitchen was hardly built for efficiency, let alone safety.

The cramped kitchen would overheat from the pizza ovens displayed out front and old stoves hidden in the back. A massive steel table, a giant freezer, electronic dough mixers, overpacked cupboards and two large sinks leaking water made it difficult to move around.

Supplies were stored on a large space above the freezer. The only way to reach these items was to climb a rickety ladder with rusted wheels. I always feared using the ladder in case the bottom steps gave out or I lost my balance, potentially causing me to hit the floor or crash onto a hot stove.

The first time I burned my hand during a busy lunch service, I grabbed the first aid kit with my good hand from its place on the wall next to the sink. I opened it only to discover it was empty, with the exception of a few bandage scraps.

Above the first aid kit was a sign depicting a stick figure falling backward. It was a mocking reminder of how bosses blame workers if they are injured on the job, calling them “careless,” meanwhile ignoring the dangerous conditions and the breakneck pace demanded of kitchen workers.

The top reasons for youth worker injury and illness, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, are unsafe equipment, inadequate safety training, inadequate supervision, pressure to work faster and stressful conditions.

As defined by OSHA, workplace hazards

Continued on page 8

# On the picket line

By Alex Bolchi and Sue Davis

## Farmworker walkout stops pay cut

The 1,800 mostly Latinx farmworkers who pick Halo mandarin oranges and clementines for the Wonderful Fruit Company in Kern County, Calif., have successfully forced the bosses to retract a pay cut — which would have reduced their earnings from \$53 a bin to \$48. On Friday, Jan. 11, these contract workers walked off the job. They showed up on Monday to protest at the Halo plant in Delano. (Los Angeles Times, Jan. 14)

Workers won by spreading word of their protest on social media and also inviting the United Farm Workers to join the picket. After four days, the company agreed to restore the higher pay rate. UFW leader Armando Elenes noted: “This is another example of how when farm workers organize together to defend themselves, we win!” Before ending the strike, the workers announced that they “stand in solidarity with the United Teachers of L.A. and their strike for a fair union contract.”

## General Mills workers vote union

The 520 sanitation, production and maintenance workers at the General Mills cereal plant in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, voted Jan. 9 to join the Department Store Union (RWDSU) Local 110 after they realized the company was whittling away their benefits and using temp agencies to exploit cheaper labor. Having the company cut the number of workers’ absences from five to three days a year pushed them to organize. (Minnesota Star Tribune, Jan. 10)

In a Local 110 statement, General Mills worker Tim Sarver said, “I’m proud to say I’m now part of the RWDSU and I know everyone who works alongside me knows that representation from the union will change our future here. It’s about time General Mills workers had a real seat at the table with the company and we’re ready to get to work on a fair contract.” The RWDSU, with 100,000 members nationwide, is affiliated with the Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and represents workers at a nearby Quaker Oats plant.

## Florida McDonald’s workers strike for safe working conditions

After a New Year’s Eve attack on a McDonald’s cashier in St. Petersburg, cashiers, cooks and custodians there and in Tampa and Orlando restaurants held a wildcat strike on Jan. 8, in partnership with Fight for \$15 and Black Lives Matter. They demanded store security protocols, protection for workers and a voice for the mostly Black and Brown women workforce. Gail Rogers, a Tampa worker who helped organize the walkout, told WFLA-TV, “I’m going on strike because at McDonald’s we’re subjected to all types of behavior that has no place at work — from physical attacks and armed robberies, to sexual harassment, to racial discrimination. We won’t back down until McDonald’s takes responsibility for protecting all workers on the job.” (Newsweek, Jan. 8)

## NYC area car washers collect stolen wages

Some 88 car wash workers, including immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nigeria, Mali and El Salvador, will receive as much as \$90,000 in back pay as part of a more than \$5 million wage theft settlement with the owner of four car washes in Manhattan, the Bronx and Elizabeth, N.J. The men worked outside with chemicals and water under brutal conditions in all kinds of weather, with no meal or rest breaks, for \$4 to \$5 an hour — well below the minimum wage. The settlement covers employment from 2007 through 2014, when court-appointed trustees were put in place to manage the car washes and pay a legal wage. (amny.com, Dec. 20)

## Frontier pilots fight for, win five-year contract

After almost three years of contentious negotiations, Frontier Airlines and its pilots, represented by the Air Line Pilots Association, signed a five-year working agreement on Jan. 10, which went into effect Jan. 16. The contract includes an average 53 percent across-the-board pay increase, along with a \$75 million ratification bonus. “Frontier pilot compensation now reflects the pilot market,” said Tracy Smith, chair of ALPA’s Frontier Master Executive Council. “Our new contract retains superior work rules, scheduling flexibility and improves our retirement, benefits and job security.” □

# Life imprisonment — for profit — is the crime

Continued from page 4

a “two-strike” policy where individuals who are caught passing contraband face the indefinite suspension of their visitation rights. The third-party mailing system could likewise have been imposed in specific cases of misconduct, Arroyo says.

“I don’t need to tell you what the threat of no visits means for lifers,” says Arroyo, who speaks often of his inexhaustible love for his daughter, Genesis Hernandez, whom he had to “raise from between the bars.”

“There are times I think nobody’s paying attention except her. But whenever there is a moment that, for whatever reason, you feel alone or abandoned or trapped in an uncomfortable situation, you are given a reminder of the people God has given you.”

The sound of his daughter’s laughter, Arroyo says, always gives him that reminder.

**End prison slavery — aka ‘life without parole’**

Arroyo’s newest campaign is dedicated to freeing all lifers from prisons. State Sen. Sharif Street and State House Rep. Jason Dawkins have recently proposed

bills, SB942 and HB135, respectively, that would eliminate “life without parole” sentencing in Pennsylvania, thereby enabling thousands of inmates, including Arroyo, the ability to appeal for parole. While Arroyo is represented by the Innocence Project and is on a mission to clear his name, he is meanwhile dedicated to making sure no one is sentenced to death by life in prison.

"Twenty-five birthdays, 25 Christmases, 25 New Year's Eves. Twenty-five of a lot of things. If there's somebody who could say, 'Woe is me,' I'd say I'm pretty qualified." Instead, Arroyo is intent on freeing himself and freeing everyone subject to the form of modern slavery called mass incarceration.

“For that reason, I am calling on everyone to contact their local leaders and representatives to support SB942 and HB135. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment. I want better for everyone else because I want better for myself.”

Arroyo also expressed solidarity and support for Philadelphia rapper Meek Mill, who was recently a victim of the “capricious and arbitrary” U.S. justice system. Mill was released on “extraordinary relief” after his arresting officer’s history of rampant abuse and evidence

tampering was revealed. Since then, Mill has voiced support for prison reform movements. Arroyo says this is the perfect campaign for Mill and other prominent musicians and activists to join.

“Meek, it’s time to put your money where your mouth is.”

Meanwhile, Arroyo continues to try to support his fellow inmates and be a good father behind bars. In the 25 years since he was unjustly incarcerated, Bryant has become a grandfather. He tells stories of how he had to meet his daughter behind a bulletproof window for five years before her 18th birthday — obvious retaliation against the Arroyo family because of his advocacy for other prisoners.

He relates how photos of him and his daughter would sometimes be confiscated by male prison guards. A disgusted but faultlessly calm Arroyo once retorted to guards: “I’m not going to tell her why you’re taking the photos away. You tell her why.” An abashed guard returned the photos.

Arroyo also decries the sexist treatment of female visitors who are forced to remove their bras and undergarments in order to pass through security checkpoints. “It’s cruel. It’s unusual. It’s perverted,” Arroyo says.

“No matter glass, concrete or steel. Nothing can hold back my love for my daughter and her children. I conquered. We conquered.”

Shortly before our last meeting, Arroyo’s cell was shaken down by prison guards. Among other property they arbitrarily confiscated, corrections officers took down the photos and inspirational posters he’d hung on the walls. His last cellmate was transferred to a different facility and no one has replaced him yet. It’s the first time Arroyo has been alone in a cell for over 25 years.

“It feels foreign and awkward. It’s weird, being alone,” Arroyo says. He prides himself on never having been thrown in the hole (solitary confinement), even after a quarter of a century. He has a monk’s calmness and the decades-long foresight of what Mumia calls a “long-distance revolutionary.” Being alone, he thinks about solitary confinement and the effect it has on prisoners.

“My wall is barren now. And I don’t have any tape to put the stuff back up. But that’s okay. Because I’m getting out of here, too. Slowly but surely.”

**Free Bryant Arroyo!**  
**Free Mumia!**  
**Free em’ all!** □

# A slice of Hell: Working at Villa Italian Kitchen

Continued from page 7

for food service workers include hot cooking equipment, sharp objects, heavy lifting, slippery floors and electricity. My coworkers and I were exposed to these hazards on a daily basis.

**Starvation wages**

The hourly wage was \$7.50, just 25 cents above the state minimum. Even back then it was not enough to support someone, especially when they’re only permitted to work part time.

My uniform was red with a black collar, a Villa emblem and the words, “Made Fresh Daily” printed on the shirt. During my interview, the manager said the cost of my uniform would come out of my paycheck, so I “wouldn’t have to worry about” paying for it.

Far from being a favor, I discovered this was illegal under Iowa Code 91A.5. According to the Iowa Division of Labor: “Deducting the purchase price of uniforms from an employee’s paycheck is not allowed if the uniform identifies the business through a logo or company colors.”

I frequently had to stay after work, off

the clock without pay, to clean the kitchen and prep the dough for the next day when the previous shift was unable to do it. This unpaid work, along with the uniform fee, was wage theft — the illegal pocketing of payment owed to me.

In 2012, the Iowa Policy Project released the document titled “Wage Theft in Iowa.” This report described rampant wage theft in industries such as food service, causing “low-wage Iowa workers to miss out on an estimated \$600 million in wages each year.”

After two weeks of minimal training sessions and hard labor in the sweltering kitchen, I was handed my first paycheck. It came to a little over \$75. Things went downhill from there.

**Recipe for misery**

Despite being a “part time” employee, this job consumed my life. I never knew what my schedule was until the last minute.

Sometimes I would wake up after a few hours sleep to a phone message from my boss, leaving little time to get to work. There were times when I was “accidentally” scheduled and was told to go home. If there weren’t enough customers, I was

dismissed early to “offset labor costs.”

It was customary to work three days in a row and have the next four days off. On better nights I worked from 5 p.m. until we closed at 9 and earned \$30 before taxes. On bad days, I would take off my apron and leave after working only two hours for a mere \$15.

The other restaurants in the food court ran on similar schedules—erratic, randomly assigned and seldom repeated. For me, the constant stress and lack of sleep led to physical and mental health problems.

A 2017 Mental Health America survey ranked food service among the “unhealthiest” work environments. Many of the workers surveyed said their job negatively impacted their personal relationships and they were burdened by “a constant fear of losing their jobs” and engaged in “unhealthy behaviors to cope with workplace stress.”

Exhaustion, social alienation, poor diet and miserable pay are a recipe for depression. After two months I realized this was no way to pay my student loan debt or my bills, so I quit.

The way Villa treated me and my coworkers was not unique but the norm for the restaurant business.

**Ongoing fight for \$15**

Villa at Merle Hay Mall has since closed, leaving only three locations in Iowa. The experience did not benefit me as an employee; it did educate me as a worker-journalist.

It turns out that I was not alone—millions of my fellow workers share these grievances.

The same year I worked at Villa, the Fight for \$15 campaign was launched in New York City before going nationwide. Workers are uniting across various sectors to secure a living wage, the right to join a union, safer working conditions, benefits and dignity on the job.

Skeptics have long said that “organizing the food service industry can’t be done” or “hourly wages of \$15 or higher are unrealistic.” Food service workers are proving the skeptics wrong. The Fight for \$15 movement is only getting stronger.

Thanks to these ongoing efforts, over 5.3 million workers in 19 states and 21 cities will see an increase in the minimum wage this year. Nonunion workers are organizing and more people are joining this struggle every day.

Workers are hungry for revolutionary change. □

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# Massive strikes grip Tunisia, Morocco

By G. Dunkel

Around 700,000 Tunisian workers — public employees and workers in state-owned companies — carried out a one-day general strike on Jan. 17. They want a raise that keeps up with inflation and an end to the meddling of the International Monetary Fund.

In Morocco, 150,000 municipal employees joined civil servants working for the district and other local government institutions in observing a 24-hour strike to protest what they called “catastrophic” working conditions. Negotiations between the local governments and the unions representing the workers had broken down.

In Tunisia, the strike was called by the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the largest and most powerful trade union confederation in the country. In Morocco, the strike was called by the Moroccan Workers’ Union (UMT), the Democratic Confederation of Labor, the Democratic Federation of Labor and the General Union of Moroccan Workers.

Abdennacer Jamal el-Khabbouli, deputy secretary-general of the Democratic

Organization of Local Municipalities, said dialogue with the government had been strained since 2007.

“Many agreements reached with the government in 2007 have not been implemented,” he said.

UMT said in a statement that the strike was a “protest against the targeting of trade union freedoms, the right to organize trade unions, the delay in social dialogue and the infringement on workers’ rights.” (Al Jazeera, Jan. 18) All the unions involved in the strike asserted that workers need a substantial raise, even though inflation is only 1.5 percent, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The union alliance in Morocco underlined its demands: “Despite the appeals launched by the unions, the minister of the interior has remained resistant to the demands of the working class.”

In Tunisia, the UGTT held a number of militant rallies, even in remote cities on the edge of the Sahara. Rail, bus and air traffic stopped while schools, ports, hospitals, government offices and state media were affected.

The IMF, which advanced Tunisia a \$2.8 billion loan in December 2016, has



Striking public workers in Tunis jam the streets during 24-hour strike.

been putting pressure on the Tunisian government to tighten spending on public service workers, which accounts for 15.5 percent of government outlays. According to the IMF, this is one of the highest levels in the world.

Sami Tahri, deputy secretary-general

of the UGTT, said the government is under the dictates of the IMF and has chosen the difficult solution of confrontation with public servants. He proposed that the UGTT should directly negotiate with the IMF. (Tunisie Numerique, Jan. 19) □

# Free Ahmad Sa’adat & all Palestinian prisoners!

By G. Dunkel

As one of the events opening the International Week of Action to Free Ahmad Sa’adat and all Palestinian prisoners, a protest was organized here on Jan. 15 under the famous arch in Washington Square Park. It was called by Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network.

The crowd chanted, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!” and other slogans in support of justice for Palestine. A number of left parties and organizations, including Workers World Party, joined the demonstration, carrying signs and banners in support of the Palestinian struggle. Activists distributed flyers about Palestine and Palestinian prisoners to passersby, including information about the case of Ahmad Sa’adat, the imprisoned general secretary of the Popular



PHOTO: BUD KOROTZER/DESERTPEACE

Support demonstration at arch in Washington Square Park.

Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Sa’adat was arrested 17 years ago by the Palestinian Authority in the context of “security cooperation” with the Israelis.

In 2006, he was seized from a Palestinian Authority prison in Jericho, where he was being held under U.S. and British guards, and brought before an Israeli military

court. There he was sentenced to 30 years in prison for leading a prohibited organization and “incitement.”

The PFLP is a major organization in Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. From behind bars, Sa’adat has been a leader in both the Palestinian prisoners’ movement and the Palestinian national liberation movement. He stands alongside nearly 6,000 fellow Palestinian political prisoners as a symbol of internationalist resistance to capitalism, racism, apartheid and colonization.

On Jan. 24, Khaled Barakat, the international coordinator of the Campaign to Free Ahmad Sa’adat, will be speaking at a forum and discussion about the campaign hosted by the International Action Center and Workers World Party. The forum will be held at 147 West 24th St. in Manhattan and starts at 6:30 p.m. □

# Appeal for Iranian journalist held in U.S.

By Taryn Fivek

On Jan. 13, U.S.-born journalist Marzieh Hashemi was arrested at St. Louis Airport while on her way to visit a sick family member in Denver. Hashemi, an African-American Muslim, has not been charged with a crime.

Yet she was transported from St. Louis to Washington, D.C., in chains, stripped of her clothing, given only a tee shirt to wear, and offered pork meals in a disgusting effort by her kidnappers to humiliate and degrade her. Meanwhile, the U.S. government served subpoenas to her children, who live in the United States, to appear before a grand jury.

The FBI claims she is being held as a material witness for a criminal case and is not charged with anything. This means that she can be held indefinitely.

It is no unusual thing for a Black woman, or any Muslim woman for that matter, to be treated in such a disgusting and criminal way by the so-called U.S. justice system. Some advocates voice legitimate concern that Hashemi’s work

on the Black Lives Matter movement is what earmarked her for state repression. It is also likely that her kidnapping and detention are part of the ongoing effort by the U.S. to crack down on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Marzieh Hashemi was studying at the University of Louisiana when she came into contact with international students supporting the Iranian Revolution of 1979. That revolution overthrew the U.S.-backed torturer Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and ushered in an era of self-determination for the Iranian people. After marrying an Iranian, she migrated to Iran to work as a journalist.

She is best known as an anchor for PressTV, an international Iranian news syndicate. Her stories prominently featured the Black Lives Matter struggle, letting the world know about the Black community’s own struggle for self-determination. Born and raised in New Orleans, Hashemi was no stranger to white supremacy and racism, and sought to expose these crimes at every opportunity.

The fact that the U.S. is holding several Iranian citizens captive as bargaining chips against the Iranian government is not new. However, this is the first time they have kidnapped and held a U.S.-born citizen in relation to the Trump regime’s crackdown on the Islamic Republic.

In addition to the U.S. insistence that the Canadian government turn over Meng Wanzhou, the CFO of Chinese company Huawei — allegedly because she violated the genocidal U.S. sanctions against oil-rich Iran — this seems to indicate aggressive maneuvering and a possible ramping-up of hostilities against Iran, one of the strongest bulwarks against U.S. imperialism in the Middle East, Central Asia and worldwide.

We join with the rest of the world’s working class and oppressed in demanding the



Marzieh Hashemi.

immediate release of Marzieh Hashemi. Online petitions can be found at both [change.org/p/united-nations-join-saif-ali-to-release-marzieh-hashemi-it-s-not-an-individual-issue-but-humanitarian/](https://change.org/p/united-nations-join-saif-ali-to-release-marzieh-hashemi-it-s-not-an-individual-issue-but-humanitarian/) and <http://tinyurl.com/y7cbcf44>

We urge readers to sign them. Let’s not stop until Marzieh is free! Hands off Marzieh, her family, and the Islamic Republic of Iran! □



# WORKERS WORLD

## editorial

### Who's really to blame

It is no exaggeration to say that the capitalist class in the U.S. has, for well more than a century, worked hard to instill fear and hatred of immigrants in order to divert attention from the real problems it creates for those not born with a silver spoon in their mouth.

In the early years of industrialization, when the working class was first organizing unions to fight for better pay and working conditions, the powers that be targeted immigrant workers for ferocious repression. The Haymarket martyrs — four workers framed up and executed in Chicago in the 1880s for deaths at a police-inspired riot during a massive rally for the 8-hour day — were all immigrants. Another notorious case involved Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italian immigrants who were executed in 1927 after a notorious frameup trial in Boston.

Trump's ranting against immigrants, to the point of shutting down the government in his effort to get Congress to fund his \$5.7 billion wall, follows in this long, sordid tradition. This vicious bigot is holding hostage both government workers and the services they provide.

Yet even more painfully victimized by this ruling-class campaign are the migrants themselves, and especially their children. The news finally leaked out that small, vulnerable children were being snatched away from their parents at the border and held practically incommunicado for long periods. This has aroused great sympathy in the hearts of many in this country and led to countless protests and demonstrations to reunite them with their parents. The most recent reports reveal the government has not kept track of these children and doesn't even know how many are still separated. Such disregard for families is a crime against humanity.

The billionaires who own this country do everything they can to direct public anger away from the fact that their class is responsible for the growing misery workers face here. The disgustingly super-rich badly need scapegoats and have made immigrants their target — even though the percentage of recent immigrants in the population is at one of its lowest levels ever.

It should never be forgotten that everyone here who is not Indigenous or Black is descended from immigrants. Black people were dragged here in chains, but most of the rest came willingly, looking for a better life.

That better life, however, is increasingly at risk as capitalism replaces labor with machines. What workers here need to know is that it is the profit system itself that is the cause of such great instability and growing misery today. That's what is taking their jobs — not immigrants.

The irony is that the new technology now pushing workers onto the scrapheap could be used to make life better for everyone. An end to back-breaking labor? Great! An end to repetitive, mindless jobs? Terrific! The ability to produce food, clothing and shelter in abundance? Wonderful!

But not under capitalism. For every new robot or computer-driven machine, more workers lose their skilled jobs. With the spread of advanced technology comes the deskilling of more and more workers, the rise of the gig economy and a new kind of poverty based on part-time, temporary, low-paid work that won't cover rent, food and transportation for one person, let alone a family.

The early victims of anti-immigrant hostility in this country were often workers from Europe who were "infected" with ideas of a better society based on sharing instead of exploitation. Many of today's immigrants, too, come with a history of organizing and fighting the bosses in the countries they left. Some of the best organizers of low-paid workers here have been immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.

You can be sure that the bosses who put Trump in power know that. And while they often cringe at his outlandish behavior, they're grateful for his anti-immigrant rhetoric which is aimed at disorienting workers here who have every reason to fight these super-rich parasites. □



**Yellow Vest demonstrators in France keep fighting austerity.**

## Where are leaders of the left in the current struggles in France?

By Rémy Herrera  
Paris

Dec. 28 — Many Yellow Vests say it over and over again: They have no leaders, and they don't want them. Spontaneity has its virtues, and its charms, certainly, but also its limits and its illusions — carrying the most terrible dangers. Contemporary history has shown this time and again, from the German Spartakist Revolution of 1918-19 to the uprisings of the "Arab Spring" in 2011.

If any popular uprising is to lead to concrete social progress, what it needs — in addition to the energy, determination and courage of the people — is unity, coordinated by a partisan fighting organization with a political program.

However, the least we can say is that in today's France, during a generalized rebellion, the divisions among progressive forces are extreme and sustained by the often more personal than political quarrels among its leaders. This is a tragic division of the French left, which completely weakens it. Adding to that paradox is that this situation exists at the very moment when a popular consensus is building to reject not only neoliberal policies, but also President Emmanuel Macron himself.

### 'France Unbowed'

The leader best placed in the internal battle on the left is probably Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the current head of France Unbowed (France Insoumise). Mélenchon had a significant accomplishment when he won nearly 20 percent of the votes cast in the first round of the presidential elections in April 2017. That was barely four points less than Macron, the candidate who was allowed to move into the presidential Elysée Palace.

The Communist Party, despite some tenacious dissension, chose to rally to Mélenchon's flag. In fact, he only lacked votes of his "old friends" to come in first. These were, ironically, the Socialists on the one hand (whose candidate Benoît Hamon obtained 6 percent of the vote), and the Trotskyists — Nathalie Arthaud of Lutte Ouvrière who got 1 percent and Philippe Poutou of the New Anti-Capitalist Party who got 0.6 percent.

With this electoral defeat swallowed and painfully digested, Mélenchon was quick to seize the opportunity provided by the emergence of the Yellow Vests mobilization. It is true that he had a great need to regain his popularity, seriously tainted by a series of legal charges related in particular to his campaign accounts, which the corporate media enjoyed publicizing. Also an internal struggle affected the leadership of his own movement, causing the resignation of several lieutenants. As a result, after some hesitation, as early as November he posted on social networks his support for the Yellow Vests and his intention to march among them — but "discreetly."

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's political role has been, in recent years, eminently positive for the collective French left. And even beyond. His real talents as a public speaker have brought crowds together,

re-inspired them, set them in motion, given them hope and instilled in them once again the idea that progressive change for the country is not only necessary, but above all possible.

Correctly, and better than anybody else, he has formulated, systematized and radicalized criticism of "the system."

Finally, he has talked again about internationalism, especially with regard to struggles in Latin America. In these particularly difficult times, it is fortunate for the French left that a politician like him has been around.

However, do not forget that Jean-Luc Mélenchon for more than 32 years was a member — general counselor, senator, minister! — of a Socialist Party that betrayed absolutely everything that could be betrayed regarding the hopes of leftist people. Moreover, his deeds chained the country to an ultra-capitalist European Union — hidebound, pro-NATO, anti-democratic and hell-bent to destroy national sovereignty and the remaining social gains of the working class.

The exaggerated anti-communism of some of his close collaborators reminds us that for a time he was active in the International Communist Organization, a Trotskyist shock group that gave France such "remarkable" men as a Lionel Jospin — a Socialist Prime Minister who privatized as much as the right had done before him — or a Jean-Christophe Cambadélis — the ex-right arm of the "lamentable" Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

As he himself likes to repeat, Mélenchon's model remains François Mitterrand — former president of the republic (1981-95) who was decorated in his youth with a special award from Marshal Pétain, head of the Vichy puppet regime under German occupation during World War II. Mitterrand is remembered as the one who introduced neoliberal conservatism in France, on a par with Margaret Thatcher in Britain or Ronald Reagan in the U.S.

This "unpleasant chore" of neoliberalism was implemented from 1983 onward by Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, a "socialist." When he became minister of foreign affairs 30 years later, Fabius agitated to go to war against Syria! And it is "comrade Fabius" whom Mélenchon chose to support as the Socialist Party candidate in the 2007 presidential elections.

We understand that there is very little risk of seeing Mélenchon as the head of France Unbowed leading a possible break with capitalism. He is the politician who in 1992 called for a "yes" vote on the Maastricht Treaty, establishing the European Union, because he thought he saw it as "the beginning of a citizens' Europe." You can make some mistakes in life, but if you do it almost all the time, it sticks.

### French Communist Party and others

As the heir to a long history of heroic anti-fascist and anti-colonialist resistance, the French Communist Party (PCF) retains a significant militant rank and file and still manages, to the best of its ability, several municipalities with popular and complicated sociological profiles.

But the erosion of its current leadership, which is largely reformist and whose strategy is narrowly restricted to the electoral arena, has led the PCF on the most flattened and dull path, tailing the social democrats and replacing class struggle with the "struggle for posts."

Once "at the vanguard of the proletariat," the PCF is now under the control of leaders without convictions. They follow the lead of social democrats who are themselves completely rudderless and who have become, for the most part, the worst neoliberals.

The myriad of tiny parties that are authentically communist and that revolve around the PCF — and against its leadership — are torn between being "for" or "against" Yellow Vests. In other words, their various positions on the ongoing mobilizations go unnoticed.

The leaders of the Trotskyist parties — singularly numerous in France — are for their part surrounded by rivalries and sectarianism that border on ridicule, dividing them deeply and distancing them ever further from the prospect of any political responsibility, even local. Not to mention their lack of internationalist positions.

What about the environmentalists? Led by fervent neoliberals, grossly masked (such as Nicolas Hulot, who was Macron's minister until September 2018, or the unspeakable Daniel Cohn-Bendit), they still have not understood that the most fundamental cause of the devastation suffered by the environment is found in the capitalist system itself. Do they need more time?

*Continued on page 11*



# Where are leaders of the left in the current struggles in France?

*Continued from page 10*

Finally, the leaders of anarchist movements remain locked in the contradictions between useful activism (during the occupation movements last spring, in particular) and an extraordinarily confused, if not counter-productive, program of action.

The people who are the foundations of these various progressive forces are therefore, so to speak, left to their own devices. And invited by their respective leadership to maintain mistrust between all of them — even hate. Of course, this is totally absurd and suicidal.

This sad observation is all the more terrible because entire sections of the impoverished French population are no longer represented by any of these left-wing organizations.

**The ‘new poor’**

For instance, the "new poor," as they are called, are immensely numerous, hit by unemployment and precariousness. They are small family farmers crippled with debt, isolated, desperate; young people in the suburbs, idle, ghettoized, abandoned by everyone except the police, drug traffickers and the rich Salafists [reactionary promoters of sectarian conflict]. This has happened even though these young people are most probably the safest bulwark against racism in the country and had already risen up during the 2005-07 rebellions.

Also among the new poor are immigrant families, left on the margins of society; homeless, without a roof or a right; "untouchables," dehumanized; wandering ghosts, with faces distorted by the poverty we could see everywhere, if anyone looked.

And many others still. Are these a lumpenproletariat? These are above all the millions of French people whose lives have been sacrificed on the altar of modern capitalism.

How could the leaders of our left parties give up fighting also for them? What happened in our ranks to convince us to give up so much?

Faced with the lamentable spectacle offered by this fragmented, nebulous left, the French bourgeoisie has adopted a velvet-glove approach, at least for the time being.

**The right — and the far right**

The bourgeois right has certainly imploded. The component that we will call "centrist" — in the French case today, the Socialist Party — has sold its soul for more than three decades (including the presidency of Mitterrand) by converting to the dogmas of neoliberalism and aligning itself in a combat position behind NATO's armies.

As for the other component of the right, which we call

"traditional" — currently represented by the Republicans — it has liquidated (with Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency) its old interventionist and nationalist ideals to wallow at the feet of globalized high finance and U.S. warrior hegemony.

From the inevitable decay of these two distorted components — the "false left" that was President François Hollande's Socialist Party and the "new right" of Sarkozy — with their interchangeable world views and programs, their synthesis logically emerged: the "Macron fiction." That is, the ideal of the impossible bourgeois renewal.

The extreme right has always been the guard dog of capitalism. Every bourgeois ruling class in power nourishes this bull mastiff with xenophobia, harsh criticism, and keeps it firmly on a leash.

Will Macron be forced to release that dog against the French people in revolt when the time comes? The capitalist class did this elsewhere a thousand times in the 20th century.

**The French left and the Yellow Vests**

The dark picture of the French left that is being drawn here will not win clicks of friendship, smileys and thumbs up. No doubt about it.

Unfortunately, this view is also likely to be shared by a number of Yellow Vests, as well as by the distressed cohort of comrades who, out of disgust or exhaustion, have stopped being militants and instead have blended into the invisibility of the approximately 50 percent of the French people who prefer to abstain from voting in elections.

This inventory is not intended to offend, let alone demoralize. It should instead remind us of the need to overcome divisions and unite progressives in the service of people who are struggling and showing the way. It aims to understand the rage that is driving people today and the reasons for their rejection of parties of the left.

The inadequacies of the progressive forces alone, however obvious they may be, cannot explain, of course, the underlying reasons for the French rebellion — far from it. A complete change of system is required.

On the left, however, few people say it very clearly: An exit from destructive capitalism is what is needed.

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that Yellow Vests — and large parts of the union rank and file with them — struggle alone. They mistrust even left-wing politicians.

Left-wing forces have no program to exit from capitalism — or even from the euro! No surprise then that the demands of the Yellow Vests are heterogeneous. They go in all directions: lower all taxes, but restore the wealth tax; lower employer charges, increase state financial assistance to companies, but develop the welfare state;

upgrade pensions, but standardize the different pension systems (as the government wants!); remove the Senate — as if the problem were [only] there! — but count blank votes in elections.

Also, create assemblies of citizens deciding laws by direct democracy, but allow referendums of citizens' initiatives; increase salaries, but what about those of senior executives and leaders?; increase social spending, but reduce assistance; adopt a real policy to protect the environment, but abandon the carbon tax; reduce gas and electricity prices, but without nationalizing the energy sectors; abolish bank charges, but leave the dictatorial power of finance intact; regain national sovereignty, but remain in the European Union; etc., etc.

This perfect mess is mocked by the "experts" of the bourgeoisie, who have fun pointing out the too many blatant contradictions. What is important is elsewhere.

A point of no return seems to have been reached. Common sense has emerged from the dungeon where it was held in chains.

A people in Yellow Vests has risen; a liberated, democratic and extremely healthy slogan is invading television sets, demanding that the rules of the game be changed. Finally.

In 1789, the equally obvious scattering of the demands formulated in the "grievance books" by the peasants and sans-culottes — the people who produced the French Revolution — did not in any way contribute to curbing its inevitability.

Because in this anger that is rising and spreading all over France, here and there we are discussing ... revolution. On blocked traffic circles, on picket lines, on social networks, it is indeed revolution that we are talking about.

We are certainly a long way from that goal. Without sincere leaders of great stature, without an organized party, without a consistent program — and without theory, we should add — the great opening night of the revolution is certainly not tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the popular tabloids marvel at the exquisite taste of "the first lady," Brigitte [Marie-Claude Trogneux-Macron], including her Louis Vuitton dresses, trendy hairstyles and generous Presidential Palace receptions that make everyone "happy."

It seems like we're returning to the time of Queen Marie-Antoinette who — at the sight of the Parisian masses in front of the Palace of Versailles who were shouting that there was no bread left — yelled, "Let them eat cake!" □

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

# Venezuela gov’t beats back attempted coup

*Continued from page 1*

The posture of this administration makes it imperative for progressive forces inside the United States to defend the sovereignty of Venezuela and thus defend its legitimately elected government

Keep in mind that Venezuela’s National Assembly no longer exists. It was declared null and void for ignoring a court order to remove three legislators for voter fraud in 2016; it was then effectively relieved of its legislative responsibilities.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza tweeted on Jan. 16, “Venezuela demands respect for its democracy. While President Maduro calls for respectful dialogue with the U.S., Secretary Pompeo and other extremist spokesmen look to destabilize the country and incite violence. The Venezuelan people will defend its sovereignty and its constitution.”

To avoid being submerged by a snow-storm of imperialist propaganda vilifying

the Maduro government, it is important to keep in mind the following facts:

Venezuela is a target of world imperialism because it sits on the largest reserves of petroleum of any single country in the world.

The Bolivarian governments in Venezuela, first of Hugo Chávez and then of Maduro, are attempting to defend the country’s sovereignty and resources and use its wealth in the interests of the poor. Washington has long targeted these progressive regimes. It backed a coup in 2002 that collapsed after a mass movement led by women workers and sections of the patriotic military rescued then-President Chávez and restored him to power.

Maduro himself was elected by a large majority and is the legitimate president, under the Venezuelan constitution, until 2025.

None of this negates the problems faced by the Venezuelan economy, which has been under relentless attack from

imperialism since Chávez was first elected in 1998. Venezuela faces hyperinflation and shortages of goods, exacerbated by sabotage led by the oligarchy and the bourgeoisie and by economic sanctions imposed by imperialism.

In his annual talk, Maduro, a former bus driver, announced a fourfold increase in the minimum wage to attempt to counter galloping inflation.

**Communist Party defends gov’t**

The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), which has differences with the Maduro government over some parts of its domestic program, nevertheless made clear that it will mobilize working people in the cities and the countryside to defend the government against imperialism. In a Jan. 7 statement answering the Lima Group, the PCV wrote:

“The Political Bureau of the PCV repudiates and condemns the pro-imperialist and anti-democratic pronouncement

issued by the so-called ‘Lima Group,’ ... [whose position] corresponds to the plan for the recomposition of imperialist domination, advanced in Latin America and the Caribbean by the United States of America and its European allies, in the context of the sharpening of inter-capitalist and inter-imperialist contradictions for a new distribution of the world, its natural wealth and energy sources. ...

“To achieve this goal, they propose to bury the social, political and cultural conquests of the Bolivarian process and the advances achieved by the correct patriotic and anti-imperialist policy, led by President Hugo Chávez Frías. ...

“To go in reverse, in spite of the inconsistencies, errors and omissions present in the direction of the Bolivarian process, would be not to understand the historical moment and to lose sight of the main enemy: U.S. imperialism and its European allies.” □





# Crisis económica en desarrollo: ¿política, sistémica o ambas?

Por Deirdre Griswold

23 de diciembre — No hay duda de que el caos político en los EUA está contribuyendo al aumento del pánico en la bolsa de valores.

El cierre del gobierno por la exigencia de Trump de que el Congreso asigne \$5 mil millones para construir un muro en la frontera con México, no sólo es obsceno desde el punto de vista político, sino que también afecta a toda la economía.

Lo mismo ocurre con la creciente hostilidad hacia China, como se ve con la imposición de aranceles por parte de la administración Trump a cientos de miles de millones de dólares en productos chinos, que comenzó en abril pasado. Luego, China impuso una cantidad igual de aranceles a los productos estadounidenses, afectando particularmente a los agricultores en los Estados Unidos que producen soja y carne de cerdo. Los precios de la soja y la carne de cerdo estadounidense ya han bajado.

Pero estos choques a la economía que se han originado a partir de los edictos políticos de la administración de Trump no son toda la historia. Hay muchos indicios de que el caos en los mercados de valores refleja tendencias mucho más profundas en la economía capitalista.

## Mercados bursátiles y precios de mercancías

Las acciones estadounidenses acaban de terminar su peor semana desde agosto de 2011, cayendo un 17 por ciento desde sus máximos históricos.

Sin embargo, debajo de los altibajos de la bolsa de valores, se esconde una creciente evidencia de que la economía capitalista va camino a una "corrección", un desplome, del tipo que ocurrió en 2008 o algo aún peor.

El sitio web [tradingeconomics.com](http://tradingeconomics.com) proporciona tablas detalladas sobre los precios actuales y proyectados de las monedas, acciones, mercancías y bonos. Como se puede imaginar, reflejan los descensos en los precios que han ocurrido en muchas áreas de la economía en los últimos días, especialmente en el precio del petróleo.

Pero ¿qué pasa con la perspectiva a largo plazo?

Las proyecciones de precios para la mayoría de los productos generalmente no son más que suposiciones fundamentadas. Los giros de la bolsa de valores, que se basan en la dirección anticipada de la economía, muestran cuán volátiles pueden ser tales conjeturas.

Sin embargo, hay un indicador basado en algo más importante: el Baltic Dry Index (BDI). El precio de las acciones en el BDI se basa en el volumen de bienes que se enviarán durante el próximo año. Este es un punto de referencia que indica la dirección de la economía global.

“Debido a que la mayor parte de los productos secos a granel se compone de materiales que funcionan como insumos de materias primas para la producción de productos intermedios o terminados, como el concreto, la electricidad, el acero y los

alimentos, el índice también se considera un indicador económico eficiente del futuro crecimiento y producción económica. El BDI es considerado por algunas personas como un indicador económico importante porque predice la actividad económica futura". ([Tradingeconomics.com](http://Tradingeconomics.com))

Las acciones en el BDI cayeron un 3 por ciento el viernes 21 de diciembre. Se espera que disminuyan cada trimestre durante el próximo año, de los actuales \$1.279 por acción a \$939 en el tercer trimestre de 2019.

Esta disminución anticipada en el envío global es un indicador mucho más confiable de hacia dónde se dirige la economía que el precio de otras acciones.

## Caen precios de productos básicos

Al mismo tiempo, los precios de los productos básicos como el petróleo también se han desplomado. El petróleo es particularmente sensible a las demandas generales de la actividad económica, ya que alimenta las necesidades comerciales e individuales.

Cuando la administración de los Estados Unidos impuso sanciones a Irán de manera unilateral, los productores de petróleo en los EUA estaban encantados. Steve Austin, de [oil-price.net](http://oil-price.net), escribió en agosto que "la pérdida de 2,7 millones de barriles diarios de Irán es un agujero enorme para los suministros mundiales de petróleo". Predijo que el precio del petróleo se elevaría a 150 dólares por barril.

Más recientemente, otros analistas predijeron que el crudo Brent, que se vendió a 85 dólares por barril en octubre, podría llegar a los 100 dólares. Todos deben estar mordiendo las uñas ahora. ¡El crudo Brent se está vendiendo a \$54 por barril! El WTI, otro índice de los precios del petróleo, ha caído de \$75 por barril a poco más de \$45.

Además, se espera que China compre poco o nada de petróleo crudo de los EUA en 2019, citando la "incertidumbre política" en sus relaciones con Washington. Los EUA ya mantienen un déficit récord de \$43 mil millones en su comercio con China, el cual ahora se espera que crezca aún más.

Los bajos precios del petróleo pueden acabar con el negocio del fracking en Estados Unidos. El petróleo fracturado, en el que la roca se fractura por medio de un líquido presurizado, cuesta casi \$50 por barril el producirlo, por lo que no es rentable a los precios actuales. Esta podría ser una buena noticia para los ambientalistas y los pueblos indígenas, ya que el fracking es también el método de extracción de petróleo más destructivo para el medio ambiente.

La gran lucha por el Dakota Access Pipeline hace dos años involucró el suministro de petróleo hacia el este desde los campos de fracking de Dakota del Norte. Cientos de manifestantes, invitadas/os por naciones indígenas a venir a proteger sus amenazadas fuentes de agua, fueron arrestadas/os y heridas/os cuando el gobierno federal envió a la Guardia Nacional y la policía local para reprimir

brutalmente a las/os manifestantes y destruir su campamento. Esta operación militar comenzó durante la administración de Obama y fue continuada por la pandilla Trump.

Además, se espera que las ventas de automóviles en los EUA el próximo año no lleguen a los 17 millones por primera vez en cuatro años. Todas estas cifras y proyecciones apuntan a tiempos más difíciles para las/os trabajadoras y pequeñas empresas en los Estados Unidos.

## Crisis capitalistas y sobreproducción

¿Qué es una crisis económica capitalista? ¿De dónde viene? ¿Pueden las medidas paliativas evitar que estos colapsos periódicos ocurran?

Tales preguntas han sido debatidas por generaciones. Los analistas burgueses liberales, a menudo llamados "keynesianos" por el economista británico John Maynard Keynes, insisten en que la política del gobierno puede prevenir tales crisis.

Su visión, llamada "teoría del subconsumo", sostiene que cuando a las/os trabajadoras no se les paga lo suficiente para comprar los productos que producen, ocurre una crisis. Abogan por salarios y beneficios más altos como una forma de evitar estos colapsos periódicos del sistema.

Esto parece ser un punto de vista pro trabajador/a, pero en realidad oculta un punto de vista pro capitalista, ya que argumenta que el capitalismo puede ser domesticado y reformado.

Karl Marx y sus colaboradores rechazaron esta opinión. Marx mostró que las crisis del capitalismo están integradas en el sistema. No provienen del subconsumo sino de la sobreproducción, y se repetirán mientras exista el capitalismo.

Marx argumentó que el subconsumo existía en anteriores sociedades de clases. Tanto bajo la esclavitud como en el feudalismo, las masas vivían en extrema pobreza, mientras que los ricos vivían en la opulencia. Las masas nunca ganaron lo suficiente para comprar todo lo que producían y necesitaban. Sin embargo, estas dos formas anteriores de opresión de clase, por brutales que fueran, no produjeron crisis recurrentes de producción.

Las crisis de sobreproducción son una característica únicamente capitalista.

Entonces, ¿qué es la sobreproducción? ¿Es solo producir más de lo que la gente necesita? De ningún modo. Y si bien significa producir más de lo que el público puede comprar, también significa mucho más que eso.

El sistema capitalista está impulsado por la necesidad de los propietarios de capital de capturar más mercado y, por lo tanto, ampliar su capacidad de producción. "Expandir o morir" se encuentra en el corazón de este sistema.

Los capitalistas deben aumentar sus ganancias, no solo para tener un estilo de vida más rico para ellos mismos, sino también para volver a incorporar en sus negocios los medios para expandir la producción y así desplazar a sus rivales. Es esta competencia por el mercado la que impulsa continuamente la expansión

hasta el punto en que se llega a la sobreproducción. Los capitalistas que pueden expandir su campo de explotación sobreviven; los que no pueden, deben morir.

Todos los capitalistas deben intentar hacerlo. Si bien pueden parecer un club de multimillonarios, en realidad son una manada de lobos que se atacan mutuamente incluso cuando se unen para degradar a las/os trabajadoras.

La Gran Depresión de la década de 1930 fue el resultado de una sobreproducción capitalista mundial. Esto llevó al colapso de los mercados de valores en todos los países capitalistas desarrollados. Eso significó el colapso de literalmente millones de empresas, corporaciones y bancos, que a su vez despidieron trabajadoras/es, produciendo desempleo y sufrimiento masivo. Los precios también cayeron, pero sin un ingreso, ¿quién podría disfrutar de los precios más bajos?

Cabe señalar que, de todos los países más grandes del mundo, solo la Unión Soviética, que había derrocado al capitalismo, escapó del caos de la Depresión. Con su economía planificada de propiedad estatal, el desarrollo industrial de la URSS de hecho se aceleró en la década de 1930.

¿Qué acabó con ese colapso general del capitalismo? La Segunda Guerra Mundial. La guerra más destructiva que el mundo ha visto. Y con ella llegó la destrucción de muchos de los medios de producción más antiguos, abriendo espacio para una nueva ronda de desarrollo capitalista, a costa de cientos de millones de vidas.

## La lucha venidera

Ya sea que llegue tarde o temprano, otra crisis capitalista es inevitable. El dolor y el sufrimiento que causará a la clase trabajadora, especialmente a los sectores más oprimidos, por necesidad abrirá muchas luchas nuevas y agregará ímpetu a los movimientos progresistas existentes.

El establecimiento político capitalista, particularmente el Partido Demócrata, intentará capturar y limitar estos movimientos, argumentando que las reformas pueden resolver el problema.

Por supuesto, las/os trabajadoras deben luchar por reformas importantes. Necesitan salarios más altos e ingresos garantizados ahora, no en un futuro. Necesitan atención médica asequible y escuelas eficaces. Se debe poner fin a la ofensiva racista que amenaza las vidas de las personas de color. Las/os inmigrantes necesitan encontrar un hogar seguro. Las mujeres y las personas LGBTQ2S necesitan que se supere la misoginia, la dominación machista y la violencia sexual.

Pero todas estas luchas reformistas no terminarán el problema básico.

Para eso, estos movimientos populares pueden y deberán convertirse en parte de la lucha para acabar con el capitalismo, que insta y propaga todo tipo de discriminación y opresión. Solo la revolución social para acabar con el capitalismo puede erradicar las crisis económicas y, al hacerlo, redirigir nuestras energías para satisfacer las necesidades de la humanidad y el planeta. □