

Wave of resistance

Workers fight bosses for their lives

By Sue Davis and Martha Grevatt

All over the country, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, workers are fighting for and winning safer working conditions, the right to stay home and income protection. They are both unionized and nonunionized and work in a range of occupations.

Below is a small sample of the scores of worker actions taking place around the country. (Read the full report online at workers.org/2020/03/47342/. More coverage next week.)

As we are writing, workers at **Amazon-owned Whole Foods** are waging a nationwide sickout March 31 over unsafe conditions. **Instacart “Shoppers”** struck March 30. A national **rent strike** began April 1.

Worker anger has been building for

APRIL 1

KEEP YOUR RENT

A national rent strike began April 1. Coverage in the next issue and at workers.org.

months at **Amazon**. **Warehouse workers** at the DCH1 warehouse in **Chicago** began demanding paid time off (PTO) in January after reading in the employee handbook that everyone working 20 hours or more a week was entitled to it. The company tried to claim only full-time workers could collect PTO. Most of the workers at DCH1 are Black and Latinx. When they met with the company, “They talked to us like stupid workers who can’t read.” (Amazonians United) The workers’ group, DCH1 Amazonians United, distributed leaflets and wore buttons that read “Amazonians United for PTO.” Strike talk was part of the conversation.

The campaign for PTO picked up steam when the COVID-19 crisis hit, and Amazonians also began demanding protections to prevent the spread of COVID-19. On March 20, the company issued a memo informing all Amazon workers — not just workers at DCH1 — they were eligible for PTO.

With Amazon sales surging globally and warehouse workers in Spain and Italy testing positive for COVID-19, more than 1,500 workers around the world signed a petition March 17 calling for stronger workplace safety measures and paid sick leave. Workers at an Amazon facility in Queens, N.Y., shut it down March 18 after a worker tested positive. (Washington Post, March 18)



Amazonians United from Chicago warehouse meet with other Amazon workers from around the world before social distancing restrictions.

On March 30 Amazon workers in Staten Island, N.Y., walked off the job there after seven workers fell sick from COVID-19. The organizer was fired. The 4,500 workers in the warehouse say Amazon mishandled its response to the pandemic and want the entire facility closed for two weeks so it can be thoroughly disinfected and sanitized. The workers want pay during this time, as well as retroactively for those who stayed home in fear for their health and safety. (wuwf.org, March 30)

Under the banner “We won!” on March 20, the **Coalition for a Trader Joe’s Union** announced a victory through a petition seeking “special bonus pool” for all the company’s employees. The concession was time and a half pay in recognition of the hazards workers face by keeping stores open in the midst of the pandemic.

The coalition is still seeking paid sick leave for workers at high risk of infection, paid family leave for workers with children at home from school but no access to child care and the right to wear gloves when working cash registers. Workers complain of still being sent home without pay for refusing to work registers without gloves.

On March 27, members of Teamsters Local 667 held a wildcat strike after

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With entrenched racism

HBCUs hard hit by coronavirus

By Arielle Robinson

The Philadelphia Tribune ran a March 26 article exposing how the lesser-resourced Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States will take a harder hit than rich, predominantly white institutions (PWIs) during closures due to COVID-19.

These realities cannot be separated from the old saying: “When America catches a cold, African Americans catch the flu,” in the centuries-old struggle against white supremacy, including in the area of education.



Multiple professors were interviewed by Conversation U.S. — a panel of academic experts — and gave their perspectives on varying aspects of the current health crisis facing the HBCUs.

A professor at Rutgers University, Marybeth Gasman, pointed out that smaller HBCUs have few information technology specialists, and therefore, with the demand for students to work online from their homes, remote-learning situations will prove more difficult for students.

Furthermore, since three-fourths of HBCU students, coming from

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Global struggle against COVID-19

SOCIALIST DEMANDS FOR THE COVID-19 CRISIS

1. Free healthcare for all

2. Nationalize the healthcare system under community control. Build emergency hospitals

3. Full pay, benefits and guaranteed income for all

4. Food, housing, medical supplies, & utilities including internet for all

5. Suspend rent, evictions, mortgages, utility shutoffs & ALL debt

6. Prioritize resources for communities of color, migrants, LGBTQ2+ people, seniors, youth, people with disabilities

7. Empty prisons & detention centers. Shut down ICE. End racist attacks

8. Community control. No cops, military

9. \$2 trillion to workers, not the banks

10. End U.S. wars, sanctions, and environmental destruction

WORKERS WORLD PARTY

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Oakland

School Board cuts educational services, not school cops

By Judy Greenspan

March 4 — Tonight the Oakland School Board made a decision to cut more than \$20 million from student services and clerical staff, but refused to make any cuts in the Oakland School Police force. A last minute amendment by Director Rosann Torres to lay off one-half of the school police department failed by a close 4-3 vote.

This vote came late in the night after a spirited rally outside and inside the board meeting, bringing together almost 10 years of organizing by the Black Organizing Project, involving Oakland teachers, families, clergy, students and community members.

Outside the board meeting where there were over 150 people, Jessica Black, organizing director of BOP, recalled the legacy of Black community activism in Oakland. “We are going in as part of a history of Black folks, our ancestors, who have been fighting this fight for years . . . who have said enough is enough. We don’t want to wait; we want police eliminated from schools, and those funds repurposed to things that are actually going to benefit children.”

Inside, at least 50 people made public comments at the meeting that had only one agenda item — massive cuts in student services. Speaker after speaker appealed to the board to instead end the school-to-prison pipeline by defunding the Oakland School Police force.

The Oakland Unified School District is the only system in the 18 districts that make up Alameda County with its own police force. According to OUSD data, Black students make up 26 percent of the school population, but 76 percent of students arrested.

In September 2019, BOP presented a “People’s Plan for Police-Free Schools” to the school board, calling for the elimination of the Oakland School Police Department by 2020. The plan included restructuring campus safety personnel as peacekeepers; reinvesting the \$2.3 million police

budget into school mental and behavioral health and special education staff; and establishing community oversight of campus safety personnel, along with community policing. BOP has linked this campaign to the overall struggle of teachers, parents and students for economic and racial justice in Oakland. (tinyurl.com/rhfgfkg)

In a BOP statement released after the vote was lost, the group thanked the community for coming together and speaking out at the board meeting. BOP also stated, “For us, [it] was a vivid example of how the school board is more interested in policing Black and Brown students than in protecting them and making courageous decisions to cut harmful policing departments and punitive discipline practices.

“This is bigger than a campaign or an organization; it is a united front and together we have taken intentional steps in creating Black Sanctuary in Oakland schools. WE are so close!” According to BOP, their racial justice plan received more support than ever from both the community and the board at that meeting.

The Black Organizing Project is continuing its campaign to lay off the police and restore the cuts to student services. Check out blackorganizingproject.org and #EliminateSchoolPolice on Twitter.

In another Oakland solidarity action, the activist Oakland Education Association recently passed a strong anti-imperialist, anti-sanctions resolution. See www.workers.org/2020/03/46703/.



Organizer Jessica Black speaks at the Oakland school rally, March 4.

WW PHOTO: JUDY GREENSPAN



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, LGBTQ2+ 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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Im/migrants and COVID-19

Free them all now!

By Teresa Gutierrez

When the demands of the progressive and revolutionary movements concur with the demands of those deep within the mainstream of the system, you know things are changing. Who would have thought a few months ago that prosecutors, judges, district attorneys and doctors would be echoing the same demands of activists and families of the incarcerated? But that is exactly what is happening.

Well, almost.

On March 23, a joint statement from elected prosecutors dealing with the COVID-19 crisis and people in custody pointed out what many activists had already said: COVID-19 will hit particularly hard those behind the walls.

The statement read: “There are 2.3 million adults and children locked up in the U.S. in various systems of confinement, including state and federal prisons, local jails, youth correctional facilities, and immigration detention centers. Far more cycle in and out of jail on a daily basis; there are 10.6 million jail admissions every year.”

The judicial system, thoroughly racist, particularly targets Black and Brown people as well as those who do not have documents to be in the U.S.

Indeed, capital can cross any border it wants, but a farmworker cannot!

At the beginning of the health care pandemic, immigrant and prison abolitionist activists immediately pointed out that conditions in prisons and detention centers were ripe for the coronavirus to take hold and spread. In fact, the hated Trump administration is facing growing calls to not only free the detained but to close all immigration courts.

According to NPR, “Immigration and Customs Enforcement reported for the first time this week that one of its workers has the virus that causes COVID-19.” (March 21)

In one prison in Massachusetts this led detained migrants to go on a heroic hunger strike.

NPR reports that more than 3,000 physicians signed a letter urging ICE to release detainees. One of those, Ranit Mishori said, “The window of opportunity is rapidly, rapidly closing because I think we need to let them out before they become sick.” (March 21)

Detention: a death sentence

Migrants in detention are fleeing unprecedented catastrophic conditions back home. These conditions were created by U.S. imperialism: climate change and economic and foreign policies that benefit Wall Street and the Pentagon are what force workers to flee. As migrant activists have said, “We are here because you were there.”

Nearly half of the immigrants detained by ICE have been accused of no crime other than civil immigration violations, and many might not have been held under previous administrations.

The statements from elected prosecutors and physicians called for the immediate release of some of the prisoners in order to prevent a “catastrophe.”

And that is where activists and mainstream officials depart. Activists are demanding free them all and free them



Overcrowded tent encampment in Matamoros, Mexico, on the banks of the Rio Grande, near Brownsville, Texas.

now!

Who can trust the justice system under this sick system to determine who should be released and who should stay? The only fair answer is to free them all now, not just people determined to be “safer” — as prosecutors are saying.

To not do that today is imposing yet another fascistlike sentence on those behind bars: “Get sick from COVID-19 and possibly die; the government doesn’t give a damn.”

Conditions for prisoners before COVID-19 were already deplorable. Basic items like soap or items for good hygiene are hard to come by. Medical services mirror conditions of the 1800s.

For migrants it is the same — with the exception that they are far from their homeland, to boot.

Just like in regular prison, detained migrants have died while in custody, many of them children who die from easily preventable diseases such as the common flu.

Despite the fact that today fewer people are apprehended at the border, the American Civil Liberties Union points out that immigration detention has reached record proportions.

Fascist Trump seizes the moment

As the COVID-19 crisis develops, fascist elements in Washington are using the crisis to tighten control over society.

With regards to immigration, Trump used COVID-19 to close the border. (New York Times, March 20) No longer would migrants without documents who could easily fulfill the requirements for amnesty be allowed to come in. They would no longer be taken into detention, but would immediately be sent home or would be forced to stay in Mexico.

Terrifyingly, unaccompanied children will be exempt from that and will be taken and sent to detention. We must sadly ask: Will they ever be seen or heard from again?

Since the beginning of his presidency, Trump had wanted to do all this, but the courts had blocked him in order to respect the right of due process. That right is no longer being respected.

COVID-19 has not only exposed the weaknesses of a capitalist for-profit health care system. It exposes the weaknesses of capitalism itself.

What must be done for migrants and all those detained? We must be clear: No matter what “crime” was committed by those incarcerated — if one was committed at all — it is substantially more criminal to willingly let detained human beings get sick.

Social distancing was the first line of defense for the masses. Opening up the detention centers and prisons is now the first line of defense for those detained.

Free them all now! □

Georgia ICE detainees stage hunger strike over COVID-19

By Arielle Robinson
Atlanta

In a March 26 press release Project South revealed that Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees at the Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Ga., went on a hunger strike to bring attention to COVID-19-related issues in the jail.

Georgia community organizers became aware of the March 24 hunger strike in which about 350 prisoners in Stewart participated. The goal was to raise awareness that they are inhumanely caged in an ICE facility while coronavirus spreads in jails, prisons and ICE detention facilities across the country.

About 2,000 people are detained at Stewart Detention Center, with 62 immigrants sharing each housing area.

“We’re just waiting to get infected!!” Ventura Quintanar-Rico, 32, of Mexico told the undocumented Latinx rights group Siembra NC. “They’re not taking the most basic coronavirus precautions here. If one of us gets infected, all of us will. We are not able to stay 6 feet apart from each other, we share space with 62 people. We don’t want to die here and it usually takes 3 to 4 days to get medical attention.”

Even before the U.S. outbreak of coronavirus, detainees in Stewart had difficulty accessing medicines they needed. A man with diabetes told activists he has been asking the detention center for his medication all week, with no luck.

Detainees report asking for doctors when they are sick and having appointments delayed for up to three days. The nearest hospital to Stewart is in Cuthbert, Ga., over 20 miles away.

Detainees must eat from shared plates. Up to 200 are squeezed together when it is time to eat. Stewart detainees are also

reporting that employees do not take basic sanitary precautions, such as using gloves or hand sanitizer when entering and leaving the facility.

Stewart detainees say officers asked them to ration one roll of toilet paper each for two weeks, claiming nearby stores do not have enough toilet paper and other supplies.

On top of the previous issues, many detainees have preexisting conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 if there were to be an outbreak.

‘We don’t care if you get sick’

Siembra NC reported that in meetings held between ICE officials and about 62 detained immigrants on March 24, an ICE officer allegedly explicitly said: “We don’t care if you get sick. We don’t care if you eat or don’t. It’s not my problem ... isn’t going to change anything.”

Project South reported that over 40 new detained immigrants were brought into Stewart each day last week, and while their temperatures are taken, they are not tested for COVID-19. CoreCivic, the owner and operator of the private Stewart prison, claimed it had purchased testing kits for COVID-19, according to Project South.

Prisons and detention centers around Georgia are already reporting outbreaks and deaths from COVID-19. Lee State Prison reported six people testing positive for COVID-19, with one death. Thirteen men are in medical isolation for flu-like symptoms, with two awaiting COVID-19 test results, according to the March 27 Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Inmates and guards at other state prisons and county jails are reported to have COVID-19. Two inmates at Atlanta’s federal prison have tested positive for the coronavirus. □

HBCUs hard hit by coronavirus

Continued from page 1

working-class families with lower incomes, are eligible for Pell Grants, these same students may not have access to Wi-Fi or laptops. This was also a concern of Gasman. For remote learning to work successfully, students must have access to laptops and reliable Wi-Fi. Some HBCUs are lending students laptops.

A professor from Howard University, Ivory A. Toldson, echoed the concerns about technology, saying many HBCU professors do not have adequate technology to be able to quickly move classes online. Again, some students may not have quality internet connections.

HBCUs have smaller endowments than other institutions across the U.S. As a result, many HBCUs rely on tuition from students and less on scholarships. If students are unable to access laptops or Wi-Fi, they may drop a class, leading to the university having less money than it already had.

Toldson commented that the interruptions to fundraising efforts, closed dorms and lost money from bookstores and dining halls, which all institutions are facing, will hit HBCUs particularly hard, since they had less money to begin with.

Additionally, an HBCU with financial issues may lead to them losing their accreditation status. Without this status, it is “nearly impossible” to recruit students.

Some HBCUs are in debt, which is one of the reasons these institutions may be building new dorms for students. With students having to leave the dorms, it is

harder for certain HBCUs to pay off debt, as they are losing money as students find off-campus housing.

With less government resources available to them, HBCUs lack rainy day funds, and after the COVID-19 crisis is through, some may even risk closing.

HBCUs also lack philanthropic funding, with PWIs receiving \$2.94 billion in donations in 2019 versus \$43 million for HBCUs, according to Gregory Price, University of New Orleans economics professor.

Systemically, Black families make much less money than white families on average and find it more difficult to give back to their HBCUs.

HBCUs that cannot financially withstand the decline in enrollment and lack needed infrastructure, including empty leadership positions, may be at risk of declining and eventually closing.

An example of an HBCU closing was St. Paul’s College in Virginia in 2013. St. Paul’s faced declines in enrollment and lost revenue.

Price pointed out that multiple HBCUs have been placed on probation by regional accreditors for being financially unstable. The COVID-19 crisis may worsen the status of these HBCUs.

To deal with the situation of underfunded HBCUs, some of the professors call on the federal government for financial assistance. One proposal is for a coronavirus stimulus package that includes providing \$1,000 for every HBCU student, among other resources. Emergency relief for revenue loss for HBCUs was also among the proposals. □

Caravan protests demand ‘Decarcerate now!’

By Joe Piette

A broad coalition of prison abolition activists took to Philadelphia’s streets in over 120 cars—most with just one occupant—to demand officials massively decarcerate jails, prisons and detention centers in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. Four separate car caravans—decorated with signs and banners—circled City Hall, the Criminal Justice Center, Gov. Tom Wolf’s Philadelphia office and the federal court building near the Liberty Bell.

Sarah Morris with the #No215Jail Coalition stated: “It is completely unacceptable that elected officials have not taken sufficient steps to release people in Philadelphia’s prisons, jails, and detention centers.” Morris, who also represents the Youth Art and Self Empowerment Project, continued: “Their inaction is putting thousands of incarcerated people,

workers and their family members at extreme and unnecessary risk. We took to the streets today to say we are not going to let Pennsylvania leave our incarcerated loved ones behind.”

City officials admit there are two confirmed cases of COVID-19 in their jail population. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections announced their first confirmed positive COVID diagnosis in the state system. Immigration and Customs Enforcement also revealed it has a confirmed case in custody.

After first targeting four separate sites, the 120 vehicles converged on City Hall. For half an hour, after circling around the building, with drivers honking horns, cars then blocked several lanes on the north side of the building.

Police, at the order of Philadelphia’s new Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw, responded by placing \$76 “double parked”

tickets on each vehicle’s windshield. None of the officers involved, including Outlaw, wore protective gloves or observed social distancing, essentially putting anyone receiving these tickets at risk.

Drivers silenced their horns so that demands could be read by two activists standing on top of a car. Protesters want Mayor Jim Kenney to release pretrial people, grant parole, lift detainers, end cash bail and prioritize the release for youth, elderly people and people who are medically vulnerable.

They want Philadelphia’s First Judicial District Court of Pennsylvania to immediately implement a process to allow mass release of people incarcerated in the city’s jails and juvenile detention centers.

They also call on Gov. Wolf to release

people in state prisons by expediting parole processes, releasing elderly and medically vulnerable people, and taking other common sense measures. They demanded Wolf stop ICE from unlawfully detaining immigrants—including children—at the Berks County Detention Center.

The #No215Jail Coalition includes Abolitionist Law Center, ACLU-PA, Amistad Law Project, Black Alliance for Peace, Black and Brown Workers Co-op, Black Lives Matter Philly, Decarcerate PA, Frontline Dads, Just Leadership, LILAC, Movement Alliance Project, Philadelphia Bail Fund, Philadelphia Community Bail Fund, Reclaim Philadelphia, ShutDownBerks, Social Worker Action Network, Working Educators, Youth Art & Self-Empowerment Project. □



Philly police target protesters while wearing no protective equipment. PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

‘Things Fall Apart’

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

The great African writer, Chinua Achebe, I believe, wrote a novel about the ravages of colonialism, which bore the title “Things Fall Apart.”

He borrowed the title from the famed Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, who wrote “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold, mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

We see, outside our doors, our windows, a world we did not know, that now exists.

A silent, unseen disease gives vent to massive unease and unleashes unprecedented fear.

Political leaders pose and preen, saying little of substance, and even less of sense.

But in every utterance comes a fevered

subtext — “Praise me! Praise me! Praise me!”

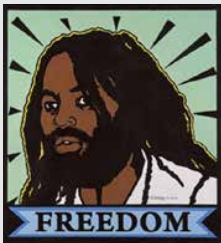
While dozens and then hundreds die daily, and thousands, tens of thousands fall ill. Trillions of dollars dry up like fruit fallen from a tree, they fall rotten — unusable, gone like the wind.

Politicians fill the air with words, but no solution is in sight.

Several weeks ago, a pandemic came to visit the world’s richest countries, and things fall apart.

From imprisoned nation, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Transcribed from a March 27, 2020, audio recording on prisonradio.org.



Caught in COVID-19 crosshairs NYC public sector workers fight back

By a New York City public sector worker

The direct responsibility of Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration for dangerously reducing the size of work stations used by city public sector workers was exposed last year in an article by Katie Honan. (“New York City Shrinks Cubicles as Municipal Workforce Rises,” Wall Street Journal, July 7, 2019)

It revealed: “New York City has millions of square feet of office space to accommodate its more than 305,000 municipal employees — and a space-saving initiative aiming to cut the size of cubicles and make even more room for thousands of new workers.

“To make room for more workers, the city’s Department of Citywide Administrative Services changed its space standards, cutting workstation sizes from 6 feet by 8 feet or 6 feet by 10 feet to a standard 6 feet by 6 feet, city officials said.

This makes it very difficult for workers to maintain the six-foot distance apart at all times.

A city employee, who was ordered to work despite the city shutdown, complained to this reporter that it took municipal unions two weeks to successfully force Steven Banks, of the city’s huge Human Resources Administration (HRA), to rescind his order that had banned HRA workers from wearing masks. This worker also said that an African-American female administrative worker, a shop steward in his union and of the Queens community

who worked at Elmhurst Hospital, died March 30 of COVID-19.

In addition, city government “is falling far short of the state’s edict that 75 percent of nonessential workers telecommute, prompting fears from union officials that scores of city workers are being needlessly exposed to the coronavirus.” (Daily News, March 19)

Henry Garrido, executive director of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees District Council 37, the union representing nearly 150,000 city workers, said: “There appears to be a lot of institutional resistance to working from home.” Garrido cited as an example a city administrative bulletin that says workers who have “had close contact” (less than 6 feet for more than a few minutes) with someone who’s tested positive for coronavirus “can keep working.”

One veteran worker at the Department of Social Services who suffers from high blood pressure and diminished kidney function told the Daily News that when he requested to work from home, citing advanced age and pre-existing conditions that put him at greater risk, his boss denied the request, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Chief newspaper of March 30 featured an article titled “Layoffs a Possibility in City and State Due to Virus’s Economic Toll.” New York Mayor Bill de Blasio has ordered agency heads to come up with a combined \$1.3 billion in budget cuts. According to The Chief, “One of those

victims [of covid-19], Harry Nespoli, sanitation workers’ union president and chair of the NYC public sector workers coalition in the Municipal Labor Committee, after saying his condition was improving, complained, ‘It’s not right what they’re doing to New York City.’ ”

Sanitation workers at risk

Sometimes city sanitation workers who finish their routes early but have not been adequately provided with masks and gloves are forced to linger in dilapidated, undersized garages and locker rooms where it’s impossible to accommodate six-foot social distancing.

This is in violation of the Teamster union contract, which stipulates: “The Employer and the Union shall conduct periodic inspection of all facilities which house Employees in order to ensure that all such facilities are adequately maintained and provide sanitary working conditions. Where deficiencies are found and/or repair necessary, the Employer will take steps to make such repairs immediately. Since there is a large backlog of needed repairs ... if the repairs cannot be made or funds are not available, and the conditions at the location are such that they constitute a hazard to the life, health, or safety of Employees, the Employer will take immediate steps to transfer all Employees to a more suitable location.”

The New York City government is also in violation of the 1970 Occupational

Health and Safety Act which, like the sanitation workers’ contract, guarantees the right to a workplace that doesn’t make workers injured or ill.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration also requires employers to provide a workplace free of recognized hazards.

Without struggle, there is no progress

After six transit workers had already died of COVID-19, John Samuelson, president of the Transport Workers Union, told Channel 5 on March 29: “There was a dispute about masks. The MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority] said masks were inappropriate for transit workers to wear. It took weeks and threats to the MTA to get masks. Our workers still don’t have gloves. This subway system is the greatest spreader of this disease. Whatever equipment we need better be there. We are not going to be used as cannon fodder.”

TWU Local 100 also forced the MTA to allow people to ride the buses for free, using the side exits/entrances to provide safer social distancing and protect both passengers and bus drivers. People with mobility disabilities can still board as usual.

The MTA would do well to heed Samuelson’s warning. TWU 100 has hit the bricks with great strikes in 1966, 1980 and 2005 in defiance of New York State’s anti-labor Taylor Law, which deems

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Asian Americans speak out against Trump’s racism

By **Betsey Piette**

In response to widespread reports of anti-Asian racism, harassment and violence, Asian Americans United Philadelphia hosted a zoom gathering on March 26 in solidarity with Asian-American communities.

The event highlighted a “Collective Statement Against Anti-Asian Bias and the Targeting of Any Community,” which people were urged to sign. While criticizing the Trump administration for spearheading the current rise in anti-Asian bias, the document emphasized: “This is not the first time our communities have been targeted to divert attention from the real crisis at hand: the lack of healthcare for all, a guaranteed annual income, access to education, food, and all the rights that should be guaranteed to every person in communities around the world.”

Signers pledged to “stand together across different communities — Black, Brown, Indigenous, white and more — against anti-Asian bias, harassment and violence as well as the targeting of the poor and working class, people with disabilities, immigrant and refugee, non-English proficient, LGBTQ [people] and those in incarceration and detention.”

Signers further pledged: “The current administration has promoted

hateful rhetoric directed at Latinx, African, Caribbean and Middle Eastern community members. ... We will not be used to blame for the failings of our current system.”

Groups on the call included Asian Americans United, the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia, CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations), Modero & Company (a group promoting traditional Indonesian culture), VietLead, Victim Witness Services of South Philadelphia, the Woori Center serving the city’s Korean community, and representatives from City Council. The Philadelphia region has nearly 25 different Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities.

Rob Buscher, with the Japanese American Citizens League and professor of Asian American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, recounted the U.S. history of anti-Asian bias. Repression began in the mid-1800s against Chinese immigrant workers, followed by organized discrimination and violence against Japanese, Filipinos and later Koreans.

Mounting anti-Asian incidents

White supremacists in the U.S. — building on a foundation of genocide against Indigenous people and the enslavement of Africans — used anti-Asian bias to pit working people against each other as the union

movement accelerated in the late 1800s.

Sinta Storms of Modero described recent hateful acts in Philadelphia. At a Center City Wawa convenience store, a customer first asked an Asian cashier where she was from, then deliberately moved to a different register. Passengers on a bus yelled “Corona, corona” at an Asian woman until the driver made them stop. Storms also raised the difficulty immigrants face applying for unemployment benefits during the pandemic, especially if they are undocumented.

Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia staffer Sarun Chan detailed calls the group has received from people of all ages. “Many are simply afraid to leave home because they might be attacked or discriminated against. They believe the city is just sweeping reports of attacks under the rug. ... Concerns run from online racist rhetoric to physical attacks. In Virginia, an Asian family living in a neighborhood for over 15 years reported bullets shot through their window.”

‘The ground is moving beneath our feet’

Asian Americans United’s Wei Chen described Chinese Americans being physically and verbally attacked. “They are afraid to wear masks [that] offer some sense of protection. To not wear them is stressful because of health concerns, but

people aren’t out of fear of being attacked.”

Executive Director of VietLead Nancy Nguyen stated: “We live in a white supremacist, anti-Black, heteropatriarchal, capitalist system — this is true for much of the world due to globalization — but it was perfected in the United States.

“We are living through a moment where these systems are being struggled over. There was a myriad of efforts over the last decade — the Black Lives Matter movement, Occupy’s 99%, the #MeToo movement and more. As we speak, Congress is passing a \$2.2 trillion relief package. What was impossible just a few months ago is about to be written law.

“The Trump administration tries to divert our attention and move the target from their backs to ours. But we are agents of history. We have critical roles in the AAPI community to lead our people through what lies ahead. ... Our will and fight to end anti-Asian violence must be as strong as our will and fight and solidarity work needed to end white supremacy and anti-Blackness — because the system does not serve any of us

“The ground is moving beneath our feet — this is our country — and every generation we are bolder, braver and have more capacities, tools and strategies to do the damn thing.” □

Standing Rock win in court after years of perseverance

By **Alison Cagle**

March 25 — This is a statement from Earthjustice attorneys for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe on the recent legal victory against the DAPL permit to route the pipeline under the Missouri River, which was granted by the Trump administration.

A federal judge struck down permits for the Dakota Access Pipeline, even after COVID-19 precautions led to an unconventional day in court.

For the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, there has never been any question of backing down from the fight to protect their homeland from the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Every year since 2016, the Tribal council has voted unanimously to continue legal challenges to the pipeline, which shuttles 600,000 barrels of crude oil a day within a mile upstream from the Standing Rock reservation. An oil spill into the nearby Missouri River would destroy the Tribe’s way of life. Earthjustice has represented the Tribe in its litigation.

On March 25, the Tribe gained a significant victory after a federal court struck down a permit to route the pipeline under the Missouri River, finding that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers failed to consider the health and environmental impacts to the Tribe in the event of an oil spill. The court ordered the Corps to complete a full environmental review, and it also asked each side to weigh in on whether the pipeline should be shut down in the meantime.

The legal victory vindicates the Standing Rock Sioux’s perseverance. After the Tribe’s initial stand inspired global solidarity and a halt to the pipeline’s construction, the early wins were tragically reversed by the Trump administration, the oil started flowing, and the struggle shifted to the courts. The Tribe stood their ground through four years of legal fight and counting.

“After years of commitment to defending our water and earth, we welcome this news of a significant legal win,” says Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chairman Mike Faith. “It’s humbling to see how actions we took four years ago to defend our ancestral homeland continue to inspire national conversations about how our choices ultimately affect this planet. Perhaps in the wake of this court ruling the federal government will begin to catch on, too, starting by actually listening to us when we voice our concerns.”

Last week’s hearing took place despite unprecedented hurdles, as traveling to D.C. became too dangerous amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Seattle-based Earthjustice attorney Jan Hasselman cancelled his flights and hotels — including a side trip to visit his mother in D.C. — and requested to hold the hearing via teleconference.

Yet heedless of the public health risk, Dakota Access’s

lawyers, who are based in D.C., vehemently pushed back.

“They didn’t really have any good reasons,” says Hasselman. “It was incredibly tone-deaf to demand an in-person hearing in the middle of a public health crisis. But the court handled it very fairly. Nobody was at a disadvantage.”

On the day of the hearing, Hasselman delivered his case via phone, arguing that the Army Corps never fully assessed the imminent danger to the Tribe should the pipeline rupture. Despite not being able to read the courtroom or see the judge’s body language, Hasselman found ways to make the virtual accommodation work: Surrounded by fact sheets and regulatory citations taped to the wall of his home office, Hasselman had everything he needed to answer the judge’s questions.

The Tribe has persisted in challenging DAPL through the ups and downs of court victories and setbacks. In December 2016, the Obama administration put the pipeline on hold — only to have President Trump reverse that order on his second day in office. Even after a federal judge in late 2017 ordered the Army Corps to take into account the Tribe’s criticisms, construction continued. The Army Corps ignored that judge’s instructions.

The massive 2016 gathering of Tribes and allies defending Standing Rock Sioux territory from DAPL captured the world’s attention and attracted international media coverage. It helped give rise to a global movement of Indigenous resistance to fossil-fuel infrastructure projects.

The March 25 court ruling could be the beginning of the end for the pipeline. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is now preparing to argue that DAPL should be shut down while the Army Corps completes its review.

“This validates everything the Tribe has been saying all along about the risk of oil spills to the people of Standing Rock,” says Hasselman. “The Obama administration had it right when it moved to deny the permits in 2016, and this is the second time the court has ruled that the government ran afoul of environmental laws when it permitted this pipeline. We will continue to see this through until DAPL has finally been shut down.” (tinyurl.com/t3uph9d) □

Trump attacks Mashpee Wampanoag lands during pandemic crisis

March 27, 2020 — This is a statement from the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe on Trump’s attempted theft of Mashpee Wampanoag lands.

Message from the Chair: We will take action to prevent the loss of our land

At 4:00 p.m. today — on the very day that the United States has reached a record 100,000 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and our Tribe is desperately struggling with responding to this devastating pandemic — the Bureau of Indian Affairs informed me that the Secretary of the Interior has ordered that our reservation be disestablished and that our land be taken out of trust. Not since the termination era of the mid-twentieth century has a Secretary taken action to disestablish a reservation.

Today’s action was cruel, and it was unnecessary. The Secretary is under no court order to take our land out of trust. He is fully aware that litigation to uphold our status as a tribe eligible for the benefits of the Indian Reorganization Act is ongoing.

It begs the question, what is driving our federal trustee’s crusade against our reservation?

Regardless of the answer, we the People of the First Light have lived here since before there was a Secretary of the Interior, since before there was a State of Massachusetts, since before the Pilgrims arrived 400 years ago. We have survived, we will continue to survive. These are our lands, these are the lands of our ancestors, and these will be the lands of our grandchildren. This administration has come and it will go. But we will be here, always. And we will not rest until we are treated equally with other federally recognized tribes and the status of our reservation is confirmed.

I will continue to provide updates on this important issue in the coming days, as we take action to prevent the loss of our trust status.

Kutâputunumuw;
Chairman Cedric Cromwell
Qaqeemasq (Running Bear)
(tinyurl.com/r5o4zwg) □

Lakota People’s Law Project requests messages of solidarity

Send a message of solidarity to Standing Rock after the [Standing Rock Sioux] Tribe’s big court Dakota Access Pipeline win. Federal permits for DAPL have been revoked!

Thank you for all you are doing to aid this struggle. The Tribe will now submit legal briefs in an effort to stop the flow of oil.

See tinyurl.com/rhu9edg and follow the prompts to send a solidarity message to Standing Rock.

For more on the Standing Rock struggle see Stephanie Tromblay, “Women defend Standing Rock and Indigenous Sovereignty.” (tinyurl.com/vze6k5w)

When will the government checks come?

By G. Dunkel
New York

Almost every media outlet in the United States carried the news: 3.28 million claims for unemployment insurance (UI) were made the week ending March 21. This figure is the highest since the Department of Labor began reporting such figures in 1967.

The 281,000 claims for UI the previous week were the lowest in the past 50 years.

In New York City, which now accounts for roughly 5 percent of global COVID-19 cases, there has been a 1,000-percent increase in unemployment claims from the second week of March to the third. According to the New York Post, 2.7 million people accessed New York State’s website during the week ending March 21 and 1.7 million calls were recorded.

It is left up to the states to handle unemployment claims. In state after state, there were reports of online servers collapsing due to the flood of calls and telephone lines going down. California officials believe that tens of thousands of

claims were not processed.

Most states basically demand that the initial claim be made online through the internet and then completed through a telephone interview with an agent before a check is cut.

The \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, CARES Act, signed into law on March 27, promises enhanced unemployment benefits — \$600 a week on top of the state payment, with extended weeks of coverage. It also promises to include “informal” workers. Unless the states’ bureaucracy processes and accepts a claim, however, workers won’t find these benefits available.

The number of claims filed and reported is definitely lower than the real number of workers laid off. The rules establishing how unemployment insurance is going to be paid to gig workers, part-time workers, tipped workers — those who have been excluded from traditional unemployment compensation — have yet to be established. And, of course, undocumented, agricultural and domestic workers who have lost their jobs

will be denied aid.

Since laid-off workers will need the money to put food on the table and other essentials, they will be unable to pay many other bills by April 1 when monthly bills arrive.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has publicly promised that the \$1,200 payments established by CARES to each adult U.S. citizen and \$500 to each dependent child will be made in three weeks. This is an ambitious goal. The Trump regime’s record up to now is of being far behind what is needed.

These payments could only be processed in three weeks for unemployed and other workers who included information on their 2018 or 2019 tax returns that allowed the government to directly deposit funds into their bank accounts. But 6.5 percent of all U.S. families, according to a 2017 study by the Federal Deposit Insurance Commission, don’t have a bank account. A full 25 percent are “underbanked,” meaning the financial institutions they use, such as credit unions, don’t offer all the services of a full-service bank. To deliver funds for

these families, the government will have to cut a check.

The families paid by check will all be poor, disproportionately Black and Latinx, with many headed by single mothers, who live paycheck to paycheck. Some 53 percent of American households have no savings accounts available for an emergency. Of that group, 61 percent can make ends meet for no longer than two months with the cash they have on hand.

Janet Holtzblatt of the Tax Policy Center, a Washington think tank devoted to studying the IRS, estimates that it will be at least two months for any checks to be cut in the best of circumstances. If the coronavirus starts to sicken more of the federal workforce issuing the checks, even that estimate looks optimistic.

Unemployment insurance was won in the 1930s by a broad, progressive struggle by the working class, led by communists and socialists. The pandemic makes it obvious that this struggle must be broadened to demand that the government ensure everyone gets food, housing, medical supplies and utilities. □

Workers fight bosses for their lives

Continued from page 1

learning a coworker had tested positive for COVID-19. They said most of them are afraid to touch anything in the massive **Kroger warehouse in Memphis**. Kroger is the country’s largest grocery chain but refuses to offer hazard pay, which Safeway, Giant Eagle and other chains have been paying.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced a “stay at home” order on March 22 that went into effect at midnight the next day. All “nonessential” businesses were ordered closed. The order, however, deemed housing construction “essential,” meaning construction of new, expensive condos in areas being gentrified would continue.

Construction workers in Cleveland were being forced to continue working without proper sanitation, on jobs where “social distancing” was impossible. The workers, who argued that their work is in no way essential and they should not have to work under unsafe conditions, had been told by officials in Cleveland’s building trades unions that if they took a voluntary layoff they could not collect unemployment benefits.

On March 23, workers reported to work as usual at a construction project in a Cleveland neighborhood undergoing a second wave of gentrification. Unwilling to continue working unsafely, the union electricians walked off the job, while union plumbers began a sit-down. Before morning’s end, and after workers met with construction company management and union leadership, the workers won the right to take voluntary layoffs and collect unemployment.

Public workers strike for safety

Detroit bus drivers refused to drive March 17 without safety precautions. Driver Schetrone Collier summarized the workers’ concerns: “(The CDC) already said not more than 10 people in a setting. I carry 75 people at a time — on a bus yesterday standing up around me. No hand sanitizer, no gloves from the department.” (clickondetroit.com, March 17)

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 26 backed up the drivers and the work stoppage won all their demands. With bus fares suspended during the pandemic, drivers have minimal interaction with

riders who must use the rear door to enter and exit (exceptions for wheelchair users) and not sit near the driver. After portable toilets with hand sanitizers were set up, more cleaning staff was hired and bus cleaning protocols were established. Drivers are given gloves and disinfectant wipes at the beginning of each shift and masks “upon request whenever available.” (Labor Notes, March 18)

Bus drivers in Birmingham, Ala., refused to work on March 23 due to pandemic-related safety concerns. They demanded masks and changes in line with social distancing standards. Now all 20 buses will only allow 15 to 19 passengers to board depending on bus size. Each bus has blocked off seats to allow social distancing for passengers and drivers. Suspending fares allows passengers to use the rear door, except for passengers in wheelchairs. (wvtm13.com, March 23)

When over 100 **Pittsburgh sanitation workers** arrived for their 5 a.m. shift on March 25 to find the doors locked, they panicked and refused to work. They had just learned that a coworker had to be quarantined due to the coronavirus. So they rallied for nearly two hours outside the Bureau of Environmental Services, accusing the department of not alerting workers to the potential coronavirus exposure and demanding better sanitary protections.

The workers want masks, better gloves, an additional pair of boots and hazard pay in case they’re injured on the job. The gloves they’re given don’t even protect their hands; most workers have been buying surgical gloves since COVID-19 began. (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 25)

Workers said they’re really understaffed, with two people on trucks when they’re supposed to have a third helper during pickups. “All they care about is picking up the garbage. They don’t even care about our health.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 25)

On March 20 several dozen **sewer maintenance workers in Cleveland**, who service 39 communities in Cuyahoga County, walked off the job. They raised safety concerns about being able to maintain safe distance between co-workers and the risk of infection when they go into people’s homes.

Perdue workers walk out over sanitation, for extra pay

Close to 50 workers walked out of a Perdue Farms plant in Kathleen, Ga., on March 23, after production workers had come in close contact with people who tested positive for COVID-19. Perdue Farms agreed to do a “deep cleaning” of the plant every two hours and offered four weeks of paid leave to workers who get sick with COVID-19. (ucommblog, March 25)

Fast food fightback

In **Portland, Ore.**, on March 23, the Burgerville Workers Union at the 92nd Avenue location walked out for one day. Their demands were: Two-week severance pay for laid-off workers; \$2-an-hour hazard pay; two weeks paid sick leave for ill workers; enhanced food prep area sanitation; and the maintenance of recommended “social distancing” protocols in work areas. When management refused their demands, all union members walked out, shutting down operations.

Two weeks prior, the restaurant chain, with 40 stores in the Pacific Northwest and North Carolina, laid off 70 percent of its workers, closing its dining rooms. Keeping its carry-out food service open, the remaining workers were forced to work in close proximity to each other. The chain hadn’t responded by March 30.

On March 20, **McDonald’s workers in Los Angeles and San Jose, Calif.**, walked off to protest the lack of soap, gloves and any training to protect themselves from COVID-19, as well as shortened hours — essentially a pay cut for these low-wage workers. On March 27, workers walked out at McDonald’s in **Durham, N.C.**, demanding safe working conditions, the right to refuse to work unsafely, hazard pay for those still working and “pandemic pay” for those not working.

Every sector of the working class is resisting!

Nurses at Jacobi Medical Center in the **Bronx, N.Y.**, staged a protest outside the hospital, demanding protective equipment. Standing six feet apart, they held signs reading, “Healthcare before Profits,” “Respect Public Healthcare



Nurses at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx protest lack of basic protective equipment, March 28.

Nurses” and “We Risk our Lives to Save Yours #ppenow.” They have been told to use the same N95 mask for five days in a row. (New York Post, March 28)

“We’re all at risk if we lack the supplies we desperately need,” registered nurse Kelly Cabrera said. “It’s a pandemic. If we get sick, our community gets sick. We are all people and our patients deserve better.” (New York Post, March 28)

In a March 17 press release the **United Farm Workers union** reported: “The United Farm Workers has sent an open letter to all agricultural employers and organizations urging them to take ‘proactive steps to ensure the safety of farm workers, protect buyers and safeguard consumers.’ Those steps include extending ‘state-required sick pay to 40 hours or more,’ removing ‘caps on accruing sick pay,’ ending the 90-day wait period many employers require before workers can claim sick time and ceasing to ask them for letters from doctors when field laborers use sick leave.”

Others walking out or threatening walkouts include **dockworkers, ship-builders** and **call center workers** in various cities.

This is just a harbinger of things to come. If Trump thought workers were going to passively adhere to a directive to go back to work “by Easter,” he gave that up. At the rate the pandemic is spreading, it’s doubtful if the workers will go back on April 30.

Grevatt, trustee of UAW Local 869, retired last year from FCA after 31 years. Sue Davis is a member of UAW Local 1981, National Writers Union. Betsey Piette contributed to this article, as did Johnnie Lewis, retired journey person meatcutter, UFCW Local 400.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT:

Global struggle against COVID-19

World impact of coronavirus— including peoples' resistance

By Mirinda Crissman

As of April 4, the World Health Organization reports that thus far there are upwards of 1.05 million confirmed cases of coronavirus and over of 57,000 confirmed deaths, worldwide. These numbers likely reflect underreporting.

Although current socioeconomic systems seek to push the most vulnerable people further into the margins, this era has seen great solidarity and rejection of capitalist, colonial and imperial responses to the COVID-19 crises.

People are stepping up to help one another — to help ourselves.

Prisons, even on a good day, are deadly and provide conditions for the swift spread of any disease. Conditions in Italy, one of the countries hardest hit by the virus, have sparked a wave of prison uprisings. Prisoners in Salerno were the first to rise up in early March, followed by inmates at Poggioreale in Naples on March 8. Roughly 900 prisoners ripped out electrical cables and water pipes, tearing up four entire sections of Poggioreale. (msn.com, March 9)

That same day saw uprisings in prisons in Alexandria, Foggia, Frosinone, Modena, Palermo, Pavia and Vercelli. By March 9, that spirit had spread and there was unrest in 22 other prisons, including major facilities such as Rebibbia in Rome and San Vittore in Milan. At least 6,000 inmates revolted around Italy, citing abysmal overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, and the lack of visits from family and friends to help keep prisoners connected to the outside world. (Corriere della Sera, March 10)

In Rio de Janeiro, quarantined Brazilians protested far-right President Jair Bolsonaro from their windows and balconies with their voices and pots and pans. Bolsonaro had been seen March 15 encouraging and mingling with his supporters despite medical advice to stay indoors after being exposed to coronavirus during a trip to the United States. (theguardian.com, March 25)

Since taking office in January 2019, Bolsonaro has carried out attacks on Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian people, human rights, the arts and the Amazon Rainforest. The balcony protests are happening even in richer neighborhoods that voted in favor of Bolsonaro. Many take this as a sign of shifting class consciousness.

Hawai'i saw car convoy protests on March 22. Many signs demanded that tourists who came to quarantine on the island fly home. Dozens of tourists brought the virus with them, and many more, in panic, bought much needed supplies. "Hawai'i is no. 1 in the U.S. for most multigenerational families living under the one roof. We are so vulnerable to rapid spread," tweeted Khara Jabola-Carolus on March 16. (Hawai'i News Now)

Hawai'i, like many other tourist-heavy areas, even saw a massive influx of rental properties return to the market because of the profits to be made off tourists using Airbnb. Rather than focus on the health of its Indigenous

populations in the midst of this pandemic, Janice Okubo, a spokesperson for the Hawai'i Department of Health, worries that a "stigma [is] developing against visitors in Hawai'i."

On March 24 at 8 p.m. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a total lockdown for three weeks to go into effect that midnight. Many were unable to prepare for the coming weeks due to the timing of the announcement and the closing of shops. The country's roughly 100 million transient migrant workers face increasing food scarcity. (theatlantic.com, March 25)

One of Europe's largest informal migrant camps in Moria, Greece, has 20,000 people living in an area designed to house no more than 3,000 on an island that has six intensive care beds. Volunteers there are aware of the conditions ripe for spread of the disease and are working to raise awareness and improve hygiene. They were able to establish new food lines to prevent people from having to stand in long queues. (theguardian.com, March 21)

At Vathy Camp in Samos, the Movement on the Ground, a Dutch nongovernmental organization, hung hand sanitizer dispensers from trees. Mah-roof Sahffi of Kitrinosis Healthcare says 80 percent of her consultations are for respiratory infections, from migrants needing to spend so much time around the fires they use to keep themselves warm. Sahffi worries these complications leave the migrants at higher risk for contracting COVID-19.

French President Emmanuel Macron announced school and university closures, cancellations of major sporting events, curtailing of public transit and closure of tourist attractions on March 12. Yet Macron had decided to go ahead with upcoming March 15 elections while also limiting public gatherings to less than 100 people. Yellow Vest protesters defied Macron's restrictions in Paris on March 14, marking 70 consecutive Saturdays in the streets. They have had many criticisms of Macron's government, including his push for pension "reform." (France 24.com, Reuters.com, March 16)

United Nations ambassadors from China, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran, Nicaragua, Syria and Venezuela banded together in solidarity to urge U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres to lift the sanctions imposed on these countries and others. Sanctions kill those affected and are a detriment to the entire planet's health. (foreignpolicy.com, March 24)

On March 24, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, urged humanitarian exemptions



Family members fight cops after prisoners rebel in Rebibbia prison, Rome, March 9.

to sanctions be authorized for essential medical equipment and supplies. "The populations in these countries are in no way responsible for the policies being targeted by sanctions, and to varying degrees have already been living in a precarious situation for prolonged periods."

This has always been true of the people impacted by mostly U.S.-imposed sanctions in over a third of the world, not just in the face of a virus that respects no borders. Cruelty has always been the point of sanctions, as even Bachelet admitted.

Despite harsh sanctions, China and Cuba have been sending doctors, medicine and supplies across the world in the face of this pandemic. They consistently demonstrate international solidarity with oppressed people.

Solidarity not charity!

While conditions during this pandemic remain dire and will continue to worsen, people's resolve to help one another survive remains strong. Mutual aid groups provide for and protect the vulnerable, including the elderly, incarcerated, undocumented and unhoused.

As Big Door Brigade, the Seattle-based activist collective, explains, "Mutual aid is when people get together to meet each other's basic survival needs with a shared understanding that the systems we live under are not going to meet our needs. ... Mutual aid projects are a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government, but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable." (bigdoorbrigade.com, March 16)

Mutual aid aims at solidarity, not charity. Charity is the social service delivery strategy in the U.S. where aid from the rich comes in the form of crumbs with strings attached. Charity often blames the poor and vulnerable for their conditions, while upholding the systems that put them there in the first place.

Janelle Walter of Tacoma Mutual Aid Collective explains, "Mutual aid is community. Relying on each other builds trust and capacity. It removes the need for paternalistic approaches to aid, like we see with non-profits and other state programs." Building trust and capacity to solve problems and meet immediate needs are some of the most important social relations we need to get ourselves through this moment and prepare us for the coming crises ahead. (mutualaidhub.org)

Some of the most prominent examples of mutual aid in United States history were introduced by the Black Panther Party—from free breakfast programs to health programs that included acupuncture treatment for drug addictions. Sex workers have built extensive mutual aid networks and often contribute directly to those around them.

Direct, material aid and analysis around shared conditions, combined with mass resistance in whatever forms conditions allow, are things that create a movement. This moment — and every moment — calls on each of us to look to our neighbors and provide what we can, where we can. □

Venezuela needs solidarity now more than ever

By Michael Otto
Ibarra, Ecuador

Worldwide demands for an immediate end to the criminal sanctions and economic blockades that impact Cuba, Iran, Venezuela and Syria have gone unheeded, just as the so-called international community also continues to ignore Gaza during the COVID-19 crisis. In fact, the U.S. is currently blockading ships carrying food and medicine to Venezuela and trucks carrying medicines to Iran.

Venezuela's government led by President Nicolás Maduro initiated legal proceedings against the U.S.

government on Feb. 13 at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands. The country's Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza said the action was aimed at Washington's "unilateral coercive measures" — sanctions — which he described as a "crime against humanity" and a "weapon of mass destruction."

One year to the day after a series of cyberattacks were launched against the Venezuelan power grid, a fire in the main storage center of the National Electoral Council on March 7 destroyed 49,000 voting machines. A right-wing group claimed responsibility for the latest act of terror.

Continued on page 3

Kerala mobilizes against pandemic

By Joshua Hanks

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected almost every region of the world. The speed at which it spreads and the relentlessness of the infection rate make it difficult to contain and dangerous to leave unabated. Some wealthy Western capitalist countries in Europe and North America have had limited success in containing the virus, their hospital systems becoming rapidly overwhelmed as death tolls mount. Yet there are places with less developed economies than the Western capitalist countries that have nonetheless been able to mitigate and even contain the virus to a much better degree.

China, Cuba, Vietnam and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea have all managed to bring the virus under control through innovative, swift, highly organized responses. So has India’s Kerala state, situated on the country’s southwestern coast.

What Kerala, Cuba, China, Vietnam and the DPRK all have in common is leadership by communist and workers’ parties that prioritize the needs of the people, including public health.

Since 1957 Kerala has been led by various leftist movements, including the Left Democratic Front since 2016. The LDF is a coalition of several communist and socialist parties centered around the Communist Party of India (Marxist) — CPI(M) — with over a million members.

The CPI(M) was formed out of a split from the older Communist Party of India in 1964 due to ideological differences primarily emanating from the Sino-Soviet split, which affected communist parties the world over. The CPI, however, is a member of the governing LDF and works constructively with the CPI(M) to achieve the common aims of socialism.

Over the decades, Kerala’s leftist movements and governments have transformed the state and greatly improved the lives of its 35 million people. It has India’s highest literacy rate (93.9 percent),

highest life expectancy (77 years) and highest Human Development Index score (0.712 in 2015). (HDI is a statistical composite index of education, life expectancy and per capita income indicators.)

Kerala: mass movements lead the way

In Michael Parenti’s book, “Blackshirts and Reds: Rational Fascism and the Overthrow of Communism,” he wrote: “Consider Kerala, a state in India where the actions of popular organizations and mass movements have won important victories over the last forty years against politico-economic oppression, generating a level of social development considerably better than that found in most of the Third World, and accomplished without outside investment. Though Kerala has no special sources of wealth, it has had decades of communist organizing and political struggle that reached and moved large numbers of people and breathed life into the state’s democracy.”

Kerala has emphasized spending on health care, with the number of government hospital beds (1.05 per 1,000) being close to twice the national average of .55 per 1,000. India’s private hospitals are far too expensive for the majority of the population and cannot meaningfully contribute to treating all those suffering from the disease, so the burden falls on state-run hospitals.

From 2006 to 2011, Kerala overhauled its health care system, modernizing and expanding it to meet the needs of its population. During that same period, Western countries slashed health care funding as part of deep austerity measures in the wake of the 2008 global recession.

The work done over previous decades has prepared Kerala to confront the novel coronavirus pandemic. The government created the slogan “Break the Chain” as part of a mass education campaign that encourages people to limit infection through proper isolation, social distancing, quarantines and sanitizing.

Kerala has tested more people than any other state in India. Its health authorities use the data from testing to thoroughly trace the contacts of infected individuals and the locations where they have been. The resulting data are used to generate maps that are widely distributed on social media and by a government app to the public, swiftly informing them of places where they were potentially exposed to the virus.

The Democratic Youth Federation of India, an independent organization that acts as the mass organization for the CPI(M)’s youth wing, has begun to produce hand sanitizer. Some of the 4.5 million members of the Kudumbashree women’s cooperative are producing masks. The mass organizations of the CPI(M) have directed their energy to cleaning and disinfecting public areas, while the Centre of Indian Trade unions, the largest trade union federation in Kerala, has taken on the work of sanitizing public areas.

Quarantine centers reduce overcrowding

These mass campaigns not only reduce the spread of the virus, they also help educate the public at large. The government took over vacant buildings to use as quarantine centers for those who cannot safely quarantine at home due to crowded living conditions or other issues. Everyone in the quarantine centers receives free food and treatment, unlike in the U.S. where treatment can cost thousands of dollars, thus discouraging many from seeking testing and treatment and therefore exacerbating the spread of the virus.

Kerala’s government has also set up call centers staffed with mental health professionals who field calls from those distressed and overwhelmed by the situation. So far they’ve conducted over 23,000 sessions.

While the response of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s right-wing Hindu nationalist government has been lackluster at best, Kerala’s Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, a politburo member of the CPI(M), announced a \$270 million relief package that shores up funding for the public health care system. The fund also includes loans to families through the Kudumbashree women’s cooperative, free food grains such as millet or rice, two months of pension



Flags of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) by the roadside in India’s Kerala state.

payments for the elderly, higher payments for a rural employment program, and canteens that prepare and distribute subsidized meals. Payments for utilities like power and water and interest on debts have been suspended.

The global neoliberal capitalists have spent decades attacking “big government” that prioritizes public well-being over private profits, denouncing countries from Venezuela to China to Vietnam as “authoritarian” and lauding militaristic imperialist powers such as the U.S. as paragons of freedom and “democracy.”

The COVID-19 pandemic is exposing which systems are most capable of protecting human lives, especially the lives of the most vulnerable. This flies in the face of the narrative promoted by Western corporate media and governments which cast the “free market” as uniquely efficient and productive: the only mechanism capable of meeting society’s needs. Massive shortages of essential medical supplies in Western countries seriously undermine capitalism’s claims to legitimacy.

States and countries with proactive, communist-led governments, despite being less economically developed than the Western capitalist powers—which have enriched themselves through centuries of colonialism and imperialism—are able to mobilize the masses to achieve social goals. They cultivate social solidarity and a sense of shared interests and responsibilities that allows them to confront disasters in a way that capitalist governments, despite their massive resources, cannot replicate. □

‘National security,’ Iran and the virus

By Deirdre Griswold

On Feb. 10, Donald Trump sent Congress a budget request for the coming fiscal year that included \$740.5 billion for “national security.”

This huge amount — three-quarters of a trillion dollars! — ignored the COVID-19 epidemic that was already growing around the globe.

As of April 4, the U.S. has become the country with the highest number of confirmed cases in the world — more than 310,000, and climbing rapidly.

So what is the government planning to do with all that money allocated to the Pentagon and other institutions that supposedly protect us?

Doesn’t the rapid increase in infected people here qualify as a threat to “national security”? Instead of lavishing huge resources on the military, shouldn’t the U.S. be using the money to help people here — and around the world — combat the virus?

But that’s not what’s happening. Just the opposite.

Many in the government and the

Pentagon see the deadly virus as an “opportunity” to take even more aggressive action against countries that have not bowed down to the dictates of the U.S. imperialist ruling class.

Some of what they’re debating leaked out in an article by Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, datelined Washington, in the March 28 New York Times: “Some top officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Robert C. O’Brien, national security adviser, have been pushing for aggressive new action against Iran and its proxy forces — and see an opportunity to try to destroy Iranian-backed militia groups in Iraq, as leaders in Iran are distracted by the pandemic crisis in their country.”

Iran has suffered almost half as many deaths from the coronavirus as the U.S., although it has only one-fourth the population. Yes, Iran must now certainly be “distracted” by the need to care for the tens of thousands of Iranians infected. It must be “distracted” by the pressing need to protect the people from more suffering during this unprecedented global pandemic.

Iran has done nothing to hurt the

people of the United States. How on earth can picking a fight with Iran, and maybe even going to war with it, serve the “national interests” of the people here?

Sanctions killing Iran

This U.S. debate about taking “aggressive new action against Iran” is happening at a time when “sweeping U.S. sanctions are hampering Iranian efforts to import medicine and other medical supplies to confront one of the largest coronavirus outbreaks in the world.” (Washington Post, March 29) The previously robust health care system in Iran has already been drastically damaged by many years of U.S. sanctions.

The Times article adds: “The debate is happening as top Pentagon officials and senior commanders worldwide are also expressing growing concerns about coronavirus cases expanding rapidly in the ranks, potentially threatening the military’s ability to field combat-ready troops.”

Their “concern” is not about the well-being of the young people in the U.S. who have taken what often looks to be their only ticket out of poverty and joblessness.



Chinese medical workers have traveled to support Iran during the pandemic. Grassroots efforts include the Red Cross Society of China donating COVID-19 testing kits and other medical supplies to the Red Crescent Society of Iran.

Pompeo and others in the administration are willing to send these soldiers to their deaths in a war over oil and profits.

Do these politicians really care about the health of these military servicepeople — other than begrudging what it would cost to replace them if they get sick and die from the virus?

The U.S. ruling class has treated Iran as an enemy ever since a popular revolution in 1979 liberated its rich oilfields from control by U.S. and British companies. But Iran is not the enemy of workers here in the U.S. Our enemy is at home. □

Editorial from Zimbabwe praises U.N. call to end sanctions

The Herald, Zimbabwe's largest newspaper in Harare, the capital, published the following editorial on March 27 commenting on the COVID-19 pandemic and sanctions.

With the coronavirus pandemic escalating every second and reaching unprecedented levels globally, it is no time to play political games with people's lives.

The big brother mentality on the global political arena will not help us find socioeconomic solutions to the threats we are witnessing globally.

As Zimbabwe, a country that has paid a heavy price because of sanctions imposed by Britain, the U.S. and its Western allies, we gladly welcome an appeal which was issued this week [March 24] by the United Nations (U.N.) Secretary-General António Guterres calling for the lifting of sanctions on the country.

Guterres is right by urging powerful countries that have imposed punitive sanctions on Zimbabwe, Iran, North Korea, Cuba and other countries to lay aside their hate and other destabilizing measures in support of the bigger battle against Covid-19, "the common enemy that is now threatening all of humankind."

The removal of the crippling sanctions will no doubt give the affected countries room to implement measures at many touchpoints at very short notice to save lives.

Covid-19 came as a shock to an unprepared world. It is scary, challenging and demanding.

This is not the time to play with people's lives. Humanity matters regardless of race, creed, class, power, political ideology or other socioeconomic considerations.

Global polarization will not help humanity. Zimbabwe, Africa and the world need solidarity more than ever to help support the vulnerable in our midst.

Sanctions are a huge barrier for Zimbabwe and other sanctions-hit countries to access essential medical supplies required to fight the pandemic.

Our health care system is fragile and the continued existence of sanctions has severe implications on

Zimbabwe's health emergency preparedness and response strategies.

Guterres aptly sums it: "This is the time for solidarity, not exclusion. ... Let us remember that we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world."

We commend Guterres for speaking out against sanctions.

The world right now has very few revolutionary firebrands of earlier times and extraordinary political figures that can speak for the downtrodden and the oppressed Global South. And, when influential figures speak out boldly against sanctions, it is encouraging and it gives the affected countries some hope.

The continued imposition of sanctions by Britain, the U.S. and its allies is essentially irresponsible, particularly now when Covid-19 is killing people at a rate unseen in over a century.

More than 472,000 people around the world have been diagnosed with Covid-19, according to data collected by Johns Hopkins University. More than 114,000 have recovered, while more than 21,000 people have died. The figures are soaring every second.

It's a vicious virus that knows [no] nationality or ethnicity, or other differences between people. It attacks everyone and relentlessly — rich or poor.

We all know that it is the most vulnerable — women and children, people with disabilities, the marginalized, displaced and refugees — who pay the highest price when sanctions are imposed on other weaker countries.

It brings untold hardships, devastating losses and the collapse of the health care delivery system when epidemics such as Covid-19 attack us.

The U.N. has just launched an appeal for \$2 billion in international humanitarian aid to help poorer countries tackle the coronavirus pandemic.



PHOTO: MONICA MOOREHEAD

African Liberation Day march in Washington, D.C., May 25, 2019.

And any attempts to prevent countries such as Zimbabwe and Iran to access the assistance will be grossly inhuman and uncalled for.

There is no justification for the continued existence of sanctions by the U.S., Britain and its Western allies on Zimbabwe.

All that the sanctions have done for the past decade or so has been to cause suffering for innocent people. Sanctions have now come to be abused as a tool to subject weaker nations to the whims of powerful countries.

We all are seeing the pain and misery brought by sanctions imposed by the U.S. on Iran, North Korea and Cuba. Sanctions have hit Zimbabwe in all sectors hard.

They have massively hit our manufacturing, commodities, agriculture, trade and finance, social services with consequences for all aspects of ordinary life.

Sanctions are counterproductive and will not help solve the pressing problems in Zimbabwe.

If anything, lifting them will help bring Zimbabwe back to the family of nations and put it firmly on the path to recovery and growth. □

Venezuela needs solidarity now more than ever

Continued from page 1

The people of Venezuela have weathered a perfect storm of crises since President Barack Obama declared in March 2015 that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was a "threat to U.S. national security." In every scenario and in every case, the international media blame Maduro's government for the disasters that continually plague the country, while ignoring the damage caused by U.S. sanctions.

Like hungry vultures, the mass media are focused on the "frightening prospects" of the weaknesses in Venezuela's health care system and infrastructure as this Washington Post opinion piece reported on March 19: "Hospitals in the United States and other developed countries worry they may not have enough respirators or intensive care beds to cope with the severely ill. But in Venezuela, according to one survey, more than 30 percent of hospitals lack power and water, and 80 percent lack basic supplies or qualified medical staff."

Poor people in the so-called "developed countries" are fearful about COVID-19, while the veiled propagandists in the corporate media conceal the humanitarian and preventive approach to health care that will enable Venezuela, with the aid of China and Cuba, to serve all the people and to battle the pandemic.

Sanctions' deadly impact on Venezuelans

Various expert reports and articles have analyzed the impact of the U.S. intervention against Venezuela. In the month following the cyberterror, Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs of the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) published their report in April 2019, which was titled "Economic sanctions as collective punishment: the case of Venezuela."

The CEPR report said: "The sanctions reduced the public's caloric intake, increased disease and mortality (for both adults and infants), and displaced millions of Venezuelans who fled the country as a result of the worsening economic depression and hyperinflation. They exacerbated Venezuela's economic crisis and made it nearly impossible to stabilize the economy, contributing further to excess deaths. All of these impacts disproportionately harmed the poorest and most vulnerable Venezuelans."

The report continued: "We find that the sanctions have inflicted, and increasingly inflict, very serious harm to human life and health, including an estimate of over 40,000 deaths from 2017 – 2018; and that these

sanctions would fit the definition of collective punishment of the civilian population as described in both the Geneva and Hague international conventions, to which the U.S. is a signatory."

The CEPR report was punctuated by a comment Associated Press reporter Matthew Lee elicited from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at a Washington press briefing on March 11, 2019, during the week that Venezuela was disabled by the electrical blackout. Pompeo said: "The circle is tightening, the humanitarian crisis is increasing by the hour. I talked with our senior person on the ground there in Venezuela last night, at 7:00 or 8:00 last night. You can see the increasing pain and suffering."

IMF denies loan to fight COVID-19

The New York Times reported on March 17 that the International Monetary Fund "quickly rejected a surprise request Tuesday by Venezuela for an emergency \$5 billion loan to fight the new coronavirus, which threatens to push its already battered economy over the edge. An IMF spokesperson said the request can't be considered because there was no clarity among its 189 member states on who it recognizes as Venezuela's rightful leader: Nicolás Maduro or [self-appointed] Juan Guaidó, the U.S.-backed head of congress."

The Times quoted the IMF statement: "Unfortunately, the Fund is not in a position to consider this request. As we have mentioned before, IMF engagement with member countries is predicated on official government recognition by the international community, as reflected in the IMF's membership. ... There is no clarity on recognition at this time."

In an official statement on March 18, Foreign Minister Arreaza commented: "\$5 billion is equivalent to the money blocked by the U.S., U.K., Portugal and elsewhere for two years. With that money, our health and food systems could have been strengthened." (tinyurl.com/rwzm3wo)

Concrete solidarity with Venezuela

Socialist Cuba, the nation whose name is synonymous with international solidarity, received travelers with COVID-19 from the cruise ship Braemar and sent a medical team that included Dr. Luis Herrera, the scientist who developed Interferon Alpha-2B, to aid the people of Venezuela at the onset of COVID-19.

Thanks to China, Venezuela has 4 million test kits and millions of doses of Cuban medicines to combat COVID-19.

In a passionate article published in the Asia Times on

March 19, Vijay Prashad and Paola Espada expressed solidarity with Venezuela: "It is important to underline the fact that the IMF made this denial at a time when the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 had begun to spread in Venezuela." Noting that the IMF lists the Venezuelan foreign minister on its website, Prashad and Espada went on: "The United Nations continues to recognize the Venezuelan government. That should be the official standard for the IMF to make its determination. But it is not. It is taking dictation from the U.S. government."

Prashad and Espada wrote further: "On Monday [March 16], the chief of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, wrote a blog post on the Fund's website; it represents the kind of generosity necessary in the midst of a global pandemic. 'The IMF stands ready to mobilize its \$1 trillion lending capacity to help our membership,' she wrote. The day before Georgieva made this public statement, the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry sent a letter to the IMF asking for funds to finance the government's 'detection and response systems' for its efforts against Covid-19."

The two writers explained: "In the letter, President Nicolás Maduro wrote that his government was 'taking different preventive measures and following through strict and exhaustive controls to protect the Venezuelan people.' These measures required funding, which is why the government was 'turning to your honorable organization to request its evaluation about the possibility of authorizing Venezuela a financing line of \$5 billion from the Rapid Financing Instrument emergency fund.'"

Argentinian Marxist shows outrage

From Argentina, political analyst Atilio Boron expressed outrage in Resumen Latinoamericano on March 20: "The famous 'international community' mentioned in order to harass Venezuela for the likes of Trump, Piñera, Duque, Lenin Moreno and others of their ilk is a crude fiction like Juan Guaidó, which does not even number 50 countries." He said the IMF rejection of Venezuela's request "plunges it into the sewers of history." (tinyurl.com/upyv5nb)

COVID-19 will pass into history with all the other great plagues that the world has endured. To honor its victims, its survivors in the working class must respond to the crisis by mobilizing against the greatest threat to life on earth that humanity has ever confronted: the global system of capitalism.

In this time of crisis we must act in solidarity with Venezuela! □

China’s socialist planning and COVID-19

By Sara Flounders

The global COVID-19 viral pandemic has exposed in the sharpest light the contradiction between a globalized world economy and a still existing but archaic capitalist system based on the private expropriation of wealth and resources.

The relentless drive to reap a profit from every type of human interaction now stands exposed as the greatest danger to the people of the whole planet.

At the same time, China is sending enormous amounts of assistance to countries desperate for medical and personal protective equipment. These massive solidarity shipments demonstrate the superiority of China’s basic socialist planning.

China is sending by air, rail and sea needed medical equipment to 89 countries around the world. This includes test kits, face masks, protective clothing, goggles, forehead thermometers and ventilators.

Chinese medical workers and planeloads of essential supplies have already been sent to 28 countries in Asia, 26 in Africa, 16 in Europe, 10 in the South Pacific and nine in the Americas. This assistance is China’s most intensive and wide-ranging emergency humanitarian operation since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949. (China Daily, March 26)

22 airlifts of medical supplies from China

By contrast the United States, still the largest and richest economy in the world, is overwhelmed by a complete lack of planning and even the capacity to mobilize the population for their own survival. Reported COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. now exceed those in China, even though China has almost four times the population and was the first country hit with this new disease. (worldometers.info/coronavirus, April 2)

U.S. for-profit health corporations and government agencies at every level are now turning to China to order essential supplies. This follows two months of racist ridicule, political attacks and rejecting offers of assistance from both China and the World Health Organization.

Totally frustrated with the inability of any arm of the U.S. government to solve these essential supply problems, governors, mayors, charitable organizations, nonprofit and sister-city groups, and major health complexes have each started making their own trade deals with Chinese corporations to get emergency shipments of supplies.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency stepped in and ordered 22 airlifts of supplies from China — but set up their distribution through profit-taking private sector networks. On March 29, a commercial aircraft carrying 80 tons of medical supplies arrived in New York from China. It delivered 130,000 N95 masks, 1.8 million face masks and gowns, 10 million gloves and thousands of thermometers for distribution in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Similar flights to Chicago and Cleveland were planned for the next two days. (New York Times, March 29)

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo says the state, which is now the epicenter for the coronavirus, is in urgent need of 40,000 ventilators. Unfortunately, ventilators were unavailable. European corporations had already bought up the entire inventory of the largest Chinese ventilator producer.

European Union also overwhelmed

The coronavirus has overwhelmed not only the United States, the center of international finance capital. Other highly developed imperialist countries, including Italy, Spain, Germany, France and Britain, are staggering under its impact.

They were also unable to respond effectively. In order to revive their capitalist corporations and banks after the 2008 global capitalist crash, the European Union had imposed years of austerity and cutbacks in social programs on member countries. after the 2008 global capitalist crash. Now the EU is refusing to share assistance, even with its member countries.

None of these imperialist countries is offering anything to the rest of the world as this extreme medical crisis spreads to over 190 countries.

Less than an hour of Pentagon spending

With great fanfare, the U.S. government pledged \$62 million from the U.S. Agency for International Development to address the pandemic. This is less than what the Pentagon spends in an hour. The enormous \$746 billion Pentagon budget — much of which is a subsidy to oil and military corporations — consumes roughly



PHOTO: CHINA DAILY

Some 130 tons of protected gear donated by China, unloaded in Austria, bound for Italy.

\$2 billion a day or \$80 million an hour.

While offering no real assistance to any country, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blasted China and the countries that accept China’s aid, claiming: “The Chinese Communist Party poses a substantial threat to our health and way of life, as the ‘Wuhan virus’ clearly has demonstrated.” (Los Angeles Times, March 29) The Trump administration has also used the hardships of this global crisis to tighten sanctions and increase threats on Iran and Venezuela.

China’s ‘Health Silk Road’

The coronavirus is arriving in many countries that have already suffered humanitarian crises caused by U.S. wars and sanctions, as well as natural disasters and climate change. So China is setting up what it calls a Health Silk Road. Skilled Chinese medical teams have begun arriving in a growing number of countries, including Iran, Iraq, Italy, Serbia, Venezuela, Pakistan and Cambodia.

On March 11, as the COVID-19 virus abated in China, immediate assistance was also promised to countries in Africa. Equipment alone cannot overcome the health crises in countries lacking a national health care system. However, the 20,000 test kits, 100,000 masks, 1,000 protective suits to be delivered to each African country will have a big impact.

On March 22, a Chinese medical team arrived in Serbia with its first shipment of 16 tons. The European Union had denied any assistance to Serbia, citing U.S.-imposed sanctions.

On March 27, 130 tons of protective gear from China bound for Italy were unloaded in Vienna.

The China-Europe Express, a train line opened more than a decade ago, links 48 Chinese cities with Europe. On March 28 the first freight train to leave China after two months of lockdown departed from Wuhan. Its 19 cars were loaded with locally manufactured medical supplies.

Wuhan had been China’s hardest-hit city by the COVID-19 virus. Now it has a great deal of expertise and newly manufactured medical equipment to offer the world. Reuters reports that a shipment of a million masks and gloves from China arrived in France on March 22.

China develops diagnostic and treatment plans

China’s National Health Commission has compiled an invaluable set of diagnostic and treatment plans. It is sharing them, as well as other technical documents, with 180 countries and more than 10 international and regional organizations.

The commission has also conducted in-depth exchanges with the international community, holding about 30 video conferences on technical issues regarding the coronavirus with more than 100 countries and regions.

One such video conference with the World Health Organization, held on March 12, shared China’s experiences with representatives from 77 countries and seven international organizations. It was viewed online by more than 100,000 people.

Profit system creates disaster

In this global economy, why have offers of essential testing equipment and medical supplies from China, and even from the World Health Organization, been rejected by the Trump administration?

It’s not only because of growing U.S. hostility to China’s stunning level of development. Nor is it driven only by right-wing ideologues.

Medical care exists for profit. Free or inexpensive test kits and medical supplies threaten the capitalist drive to profit out of every human transaction. Pharmaceutical, medical and insurance companies are the most profitable corporations in the U.S. today. Along with oil and so-called defense corporations, they dominate finance capital.

During the crucial two months when these vital supplies could have been quickly ordered or manufactured and stockpiled, there was not yet a strong enough profit incentive to produce them. Medical facilities in the U.S. operate on a lean ship-to-order basis.

The unplanned and competitive nature of capitalist production distorts all social interaction. Wild speculation and bubbles of quick profit are the norm.

As the crisis became obvious to millions, anything assumed to be in possible short supply was immediately hoarded for speculation. This has led to life-threatening shortages of hand sanitizers, face masks, essential foods and even toilet paper.

Who will pay and who will profit is the fundamental question in all capitalist relations. What is most needed — to fulfill people’s needs — is not part of the calculation.

As early as January, the Trump administration’s own medical experts identified a probable shortage of ventilators as a critical problem. Yet “both the White House and the Federal Emergency Management Agency struggled to define what was needed, who would pay for it and how to solve the problem of supply chains.” (“Alliance with industry does Trump no good in quest for ventilators,” New York Times, March 20)

Knowing that nothing was actually happening to solve any of these problems, Trump continued to make assurances: “We are going to have plenty.”

Many media reports have confirmed that the lack of testing kits arose from the manufacturers’ insistence on exclusive contracts with guaranteed profits. Follow-through and distribution plans were also totally lacking. Even how to keep a count of test results was not worked out in advance.

No planning for the population’s needs, along with chaotic planning for what is profitable, has created a crisis in every hospital in the U.S. Private and public hospitals, competing city, state and federal agencies, local and national charities are now in bidding wars for existing supplies.

Socialist planning is the answer

How was China able to control the virus? How is it now able to begin providing massive assistance to other countries on a global scale?

Clearly, socialist planning and large-scale collective ownership of major industries, including the medical industry, have been decisive.

Even in small developing countries, socialist planning frees up the economy to meet domestic need and even make major contributions to other countries trapped by U.S. economic domination and archaic social relations.

Look at Cuba. A country of only 11 million people, it sends more doctors to developing countries than does the World Health Organization. Cuba has also developed and freely shared with the world a medication that aids in treating those who test positive for COVID-19: Interferon Alfa-2B.

Up to now the U.S. government has not only barred the use of medications from Cuba, it has actually threatened countries that accept them. But as the death toll mounts in the U.S., demands for treatments and medical equipment may force changes in seemingly set-in-stone policies.

China has struggled to overcome past underdevelopment by balancing different forms of central planning, local collective ownership, capitalist incentives and shared ownership with Western corporations and banks. At the same time, the Communist Party has maintained broad political and economic control. It has guided national development plans and controlled what imperialist corporations can and cannot do in China.

China is still a developing country emerging from 200 years of colonial looting and underdevelopment. But it has maintained steady development since its 1949 Communist revolution overturned archaic property relations and imperialist domination. That revolution 70 years ago has made all the difference in this global pandemic. □

Solidarity with low-wage worker fightback

By Steve Gillis

Tens of millions of workers in the U.S. — over 90 percent in the private sector — have no union. Under current anti-worker laws, our siblings who drive for Uber/Lyft aren’t even considered workers and are ineligible for meager unemployment insurance payments. Drivers and other gig workers are being told that some small fraction of them might be eligible for a token check sometime at the end of April — which wouldn’t cover half a month’s rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Boston.

In Massachusetts, Local 8751 has joined Uber and Lyft drivers organizing as @DriveBIDG (the Boston Independent Drivers’ Guild), @RideshareDriversUnite and @RidersDriversUnited to demand gig drivers be recognized as workers, with rights to guaranteed pay from their billionaire app employers and survival benefits from local governments.

Drivers are discussing creative rolling actions and have launched the petition, “Massachusetts: Demand Coronavirus Relief for Uber and Lyft Drivers!” at tinyurl.com/sjtqdnk.

BIDG became a leading voice in the

Sanders movement. The thousands of multinational, multi-age, multigender drivers have seen their gig pay hammered in recent months while Wall Street lavished billions on app owners during initial public offerings of stock. These owners can and do “deactivate” drivers at whim, silencing dissent at the click of a “terminate” icon.

Legally considered “independent contractors” who must pay for their own health insurance, employer Social Security taxes, vehicles, maintenance, insurance, gas and tolls, etc., gig drivers loved the socialist-identified Sanders movement demands for Medicare for All, gig worker and union rights, and freedom from crushing student, medical and consumer debt. They enthusiastically packed Sanders rallies, cheering calls for a “revolution.”

Drivers are thoroughly discussing the attempted crushing of their movement by the Democratic and Republican parties and their paid-for media. Drivers have decided it’s a good time to continue to fight.

‘Power concedes nothing without a demand’

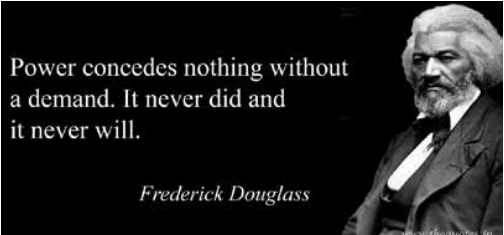
Now is the time to raise demands for workers’ needs, health, sustenance and

rights! While our bosses and the racist, fascist-minded, warmongering Wall Street-pandering Trump government are willing to spend \$1 trillion per day to try to stave off total collapse of their international banking system, they don’t have squat to offer the workers.

They are in embarrassing, criminally negligent disarray and disunity and are scrambling, unable to stop the inevitable momentum of the collapse of their global capitalist system of anarchic overproduction for profit and shortages of vital human needs.

With the simultaneous emergency health and economic crises constantly changing the landscape of the class struggle here in the belly of the beast and internationally, bold worker-based demands today, backed by planned, creative, courageous and militant actions tomorrow, are already changing the balance of power in the workplace and in the street.

Our bosses, their governments and police agencies will try to take advantage of the crises to continue their relentless drive to smash our unions and the modest gains that generations have won. Conditions now inspire us to flip the



usual ruling-class script and aim straight for workers’ power over our own health and economic well-being.

The lessons taught by one of U.S. history’s greatest labor leaders, Frederick Douglass, for workers of chattel and wage-slavery conditions alike, are as urgent today as in 1857: “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

Gillis is the financial secretary of United Steelworkers Local 8751, the Boston School Bus Drivers Union.

Gilead Sciences eyes COVID-19 cash cow

By Betsey Piette

As jobs are lost during the COVID-19 crisis, an overwhelming majority of workers and oppressed people in the U.S. have been worrying about paying bills and feeding their families. At the same time, a major U.S. pharmaceutical company is poised to turn this suffering into a cash cow to boost corporate profits.

On March 23, using the 1983 Orphan Drug Act, the Food and Drug Administration promised pharmaceutical giant Gilead Sciences marketing rights for seven years for its antiviral drug remdesivir, seen as a possible treatment for the coronavirus.

In using the rare orphan-drug status, the FDA granted this \$22.5 billion corporation exclusive rights to profit from remdesivir production, while enjoying tax credits for research and development costs. Remdesivir had already received \$79 million in U.S. government funding related to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Africa.

Hours before the announcement, Gilead told the New York Times that “overwhelming demand” left it unable to fulfill requests for emergency access to remdesivir. After the FDA designation, Gilead’s stock price immediately shot up.

The orphan-drug designation was meant to spur drug companies to develop treatments for rare illnesses — those that impact less than 200,000 people. Fewer than 10 percent of rare-disease

treatments get FDA approval. In 2018, the average price of developing an orphan drug was \$98,000, compared to \$5,000 for drugs without the designation.

The number of COVID-19 cases worldwide today is approaching 1 million.

While other companies are developing generic forms of remdesivir, the orphan-drug status would give Gilead sole access to U.S. markets, and patients would be prohibited from buying lower-priced generics.

Granting special status to Gilead may have been in reaction to the March 13 announcement that Cuba’s BioCubaFarma Business Group’s antiviral recombinant Interferon Alfa 2-B (IFNrec) has been successfully used in China to cope with COVID-19 in its early stages. (tinyurl.com/ur4sa4n) IFNrec was developed 40 years ago to treat AIDS.

Price-gouging history

Under intense public pressure, Gilead backed down. On March 25, the company announced it would ask the FDA to rescind the orphan-drug designation. But it can still raise the price and exclude people from this much-needed medicine.

Given Gilead’s history of over-pricing specialty drugs developed with government funds, it remains to be seen if this special status waiver will hold. There is also a question whether Joe Grogan, a former Gilead lobbyist now serving on Trump’s coronavirus task force, had a

role in securing its “orphan” status.

In 2013, Gilead won FDA approval for a new antiviral drug, Sovaldi, with a 90 percent cure rate for hepatitis C, after acquiring the drug by taking over its developer, Pharmasset. Then Gilead raised the price to \$1,000 per pill or \$84,000 for a 12-week course. Few could afford it.

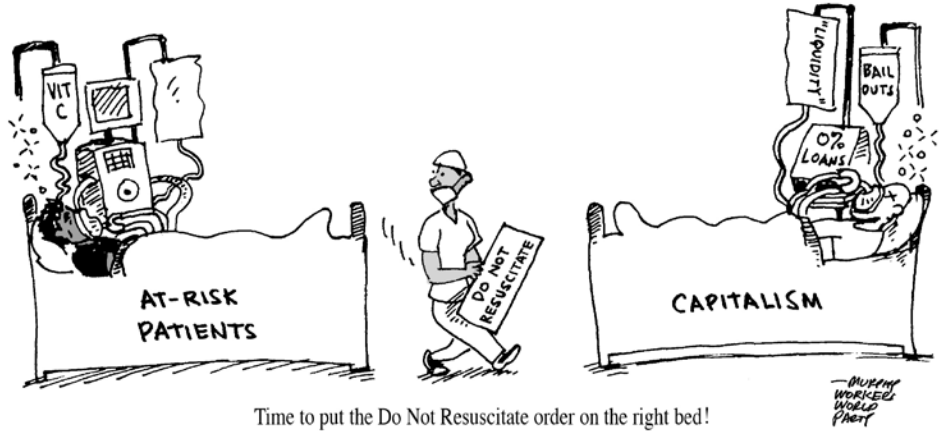
Shortly after procuring Sovaldi, Gilead introduced its successor, Harvoni, at \$94,500 per treatment course. In some countries, generic versions of these drugs cost less than \$1,000 for an entire course of treatment. In the 21 months after introducing the drugs, Gilead’s U.S. sales revenues soared to over \$20 billion.

In December 2015, an 18-month federal investigation of Gilead concluded that Gilead had set the price of Sovaldi as high as the market would bear, so that

it could charge even more for Harvoni. Research and development costs were not a factor.

Gilead’s price speculation resulted in heavy burdens for Medicare, Medicaid and the Bureau of Prisons, which were all limited by federal law in negotiating for lower drug costs. The result severely restricted access to the drugs for hep-C patients, whose lives depended on the new treatment.

The study determined that even though Gilead knew its exorbitant prices would deny treatment to millions and create serious financial burdens for Medicare and Medicaid, the company still went ahead. While shedding light on Gilead’s greed, the federal investigation offered no concrete action to stop it. □



Time to put the Do Not Resuscitate order on the right bed!

NYC public sector workers fight back

Continued from page 4

illegal all strikes by public sector workers.

In New York, when sanitation workers were ordered earlier this month to service a quarantined yeshiva where students had tested positive for the coronavirus, they refused, even after being offered masks.

Sanitation workers have a rich history of fighting for their safety. Their work is among the most dangerous of occupations. Many become disabled for life,

others are killed doing their job of collecting garbage, clearing and plowing snow, and making our communities cleaner and healthier.

In 1968, two days after a New York sanitation workers’ strike ended, the predominantly African-American sanitation workers in Memphis, Tenn., also walked out. The union on the ground was AFSCME Local 1733. This was the famous “I Am a Man” strike, which the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was supporting

when he was assassinated.

Earlier, two African-American sanitation workers, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, had been crushed to death in one of the city’s outdated trucks. Memphis had no facilities for Black workers to wash up, change clothes or get out of the rain. Cole and Walker had been sheltering from the rain inside the truck’s barrel when its compacting mechanism malfunctioned. The truck hadn’t been repaired because the city wouldn’t spend money on safety for these

workers. It took almost 50 years for their families to receive their pension benefits.

During the two years after the New York City and Memphis strikes, sanitation workers in Baltimore, Washington, Charlotte, Atlanta, Miami and Corpus Christi all went out on strike.

Labor needs to employ Frederick Douglass’ great rallying cry, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress,” and stop the bosses from using this pandemic to avoid accountability for our safety. □

WW COMMENTARY

March 21: A significant date in working-class history

By Jason Cohen

March 21 is a profound day in the history of workers’ struggles against colonialism and imperialism. On that day, two major acts of brutality were committed against the working class: One was in Puerto Rico in 1937, and is known as the Ponce Massacre. The other attack, notoriously known as the Sharpeville Massacre, occurred in 1960 in South Africa.

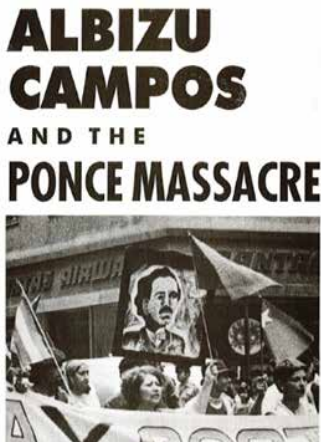
These two events were profound in many ways, which will be discussed in this article. But the main point, on the one hand, is that both massacres raised the political consciousness of the masses in Puerto Rico and South Africa, which had wide-ranging effects on the struggles for liberation.

On the other hand, this day is also notable because on March 21, 1990, Namibia was recognized as an independent nation by the international community. That was the date of the victory of the liberation struggle that had fought against the white supremacist neocolonial regime in Namibia. After decades of fighting the apartheid regime, the masses, led by the vanguard party, the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO), liberated their nation.

U.S. imperialist terror in Ponce

The Ponce Massacre claimed the lives of 19 civilians and injured over 200 in the violent foray. The massacre occurred as the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party held a peaceful march in Ponce to celebrate the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico and to protest the unlawful detention of their heroic leader Pedro Albizu Campos. Then Gov. Blanton Winship, a stooge who was hand-picked by the U.S. government, ordered police to open fire on the marchers and bystanders.

Winship fought in the Spanish-American War, which resulted in the transfer of colonies, including Puerto Rico, from Spain to the U.S. Where there is one stooge, others follow. One such example was Francis Riggs, a member of Winship’s administration. Riggs was chief of police when the Ponce Massacre was perpetrated. It’s no surprise that Riggs ordered his



men to fire upon peaceful civilians since he had worked with the brutal dictator, Anastasio Somoza, in Nicaragua.

Knowing this, it is no surprise that any demonstration by Puerto Rican nationalists would be dealt with by force. To make matters worse, after the Ponce Massacre, not one member of the police force faced punishment. In fact, Gov. Winship remained in office for another two years before the capitalists believed he was too much of a liability to keep in office.

An outcome of the Ponce Massacre was that an unsuccessful assassination attempt was made against Winship in 1938. More importantly, the eyes of Puerto Ricans were opened throughout the island. This was the most blatant example of state terrorism until then. Instead of being dissuaded, the fire within the collective soul of Puerto Ricans burned brighter than ever. This fire continues to burn today, and will never be dampened.

From Ponce to Jayuya to Vieques, the capitalists have mowed us down, but our resolve is absolute!

White supremacist murders in Sharpeville

This same resolve could be seen among the powerful masses of occupied South Africa. In the face of a brutal white supremacist regime, thousands of African people congregated in front of the police station in Sharpeville on March 21, 1960. This demonstration was organized in opposition to the passage of draconian “pass laws” that required African people to obtain an “internal passport” to travel from place to place in their own homeland. This law was just one of many that created a de jure apartheid system not unlike that in the U.S. South during the Jim Crow Era.

Not surprisingly, the white supremacist regime ordered the police to open fire on the peaceful protesters, resulting in 69 deaths and hundreds of injuries. This brutal repression took the lives of women, men and at least 10 children. As people began to run for their lives, the police continued to fire at them, hitting many in the back, causing some to be permanently paralyzed.

This massacre released a wave of righteous rage across South Africa. Workers went

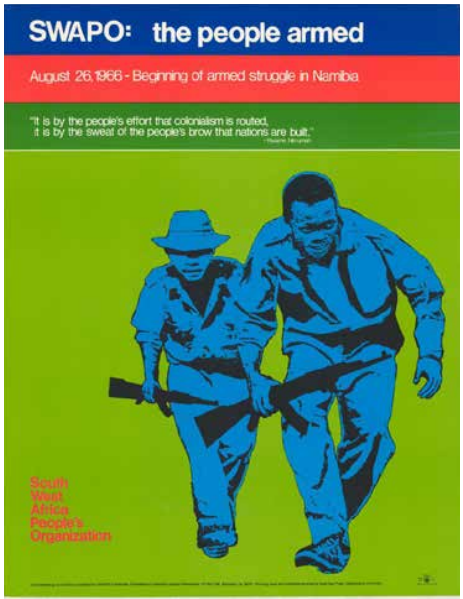
on strike, and thousands of people mobilized throughout the country, causing great alarm and enormous economic damage to the capitalist class. The regime in power called a “state of emergency” on March 30 and began arresting everyone whom they considered an anti-apartheid activist. State officials outlawed the Pan-Africanist Congress and the African National Congress.

This horrific event opened up a new era of struggle that eventually led to the downfall of the apartheid state, as the PAC created the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (POQO) and the ANC created Umkhonto we Sizwe. Both were military wings of their respective parties, which conducted guerilla warfare against the racist government. In the aftermath of both the Ponce Massacre and the Sharpeville Massacre — in the face of brutal repression — the resolve of the working class was, and continues to be, absolute until they realize their goal of liberation.

Namibia breaks the yoke of colonialism

When describing the enemy of the Namibian people, Sam Nujoma, the leader of SWAPO, wrote: “The social order which the Namibian people are fighting to overthrow is a product of a century of brutal colonial oppression and exploitation.” (Preface to book, “Let Us Die Fighting” by Horst Drechsler, 1966)

On March 21, 1990, the people of Namibia declared complete victory and broke the yoke of apartheid. Their struggle



for national liberation originated in the 1880s when the Germans declared “South West Africa” a protectorate. As Drechsler, famed historian from the German Democratic Republic, wrote in his stunning account cited above, the creation of the German colony during the period from 1884-1903 ultimately

led to the dispossession of cattle and land from the two dominant Indigenous groups: the Nama and Herero peoples.

It was this economic dispossession which united these two groups and began the first concentrated anticolonial revolts against the German colonialists. From 1904 until 1907, the Germans orchestrated a holocaust to exterminate the Indigenous Nama and Herero peoples, intending to fully stop any plans about or attempts to overthrow their colonial rule.

But the will of the Namibian people never broke! They continued the struggle against racism and capitalism. And, in 1990, the historical struggle for national sovereignty was realized.

In the struggle for Namibian liberation, one cannot ignore one of the most important examples of proletarian internationalism. Alongside the SWAPO guerrillas were soldiers and military advisers from the socialist Republic of Cuba. Unlike the U.S. Army, which is only sent to nations in the Global South to bring death, destruction and profits to their capitalist overlords, the Cuban Army fought against the racists because they knew that if their brothers and sisters in Namibia were not free, then no member of the working class was free.

Therefore, we must realize two things: One is that the will of the multinational working class will inevitably lead to liberation from capitalism as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels noted in their timeless book “The Communist Manifesto,” written in 1848. Referring to the working class, they wrote, “What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers.” The second is that international solidarity is a necessity, especially for revolutionaries residing in the U.S., the belly of the imperialist beast.

One may wonder why this article is composed of these three seemingly different events which occurred decades apart. The reason is that each one was a notch in the history of the working-class struggle.

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Prisoners, workers vs. pandemic profiteers

By Jim McMahan
Seattle

Worker actions and organizing to save lives during the coronavirus pandemic have run into conflict with the capitalists’ efforts to make all the profits they can during this crisis.

More than 300 imprisoned immigrants have joined a mass hunger strike in Tacoma, Wash., protesting a coronavirus epidemic that is spreading within the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC). The prison is run for profit by the GEO Group under Immigration and Customs Enforcement control.

La Resistencia, a local prisoner solidarity organization, reports that detainees are now striking in six other detention prisons in Georgia, Florida and Louisiana.

This is the 20th hunger strike for justice, and maybe the largest, to take place in the Tacoma prison in recent years. The prisoners contacted La Resistencia, which is holding motorcade support actions for them on March 30 and 31.

The prisoners said in a press release: “We want to be released because, in here, there’s no protection from the virus. We are on a hunger strike because we know it’s not true that we will receive medical care in the NWDC.”

The strike is indefinite, with plans to continue until the following demands are met: 1) Provide humanitarian visas for those inside. 2) Reunite those inside with their families. 3) Stop all deportation and immigration proceedings until the pandemic has concluded.

Prisoners in detention centers, along

with those in other state and federal prisons, are standing up against any “final solution” in these concentration camps. Even the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has described detention centers like the NWDC as “tinderboxes” where a spark can set off a terrible and rapid spread of disease among those detained.

Boeing workers force company shutdown

Boeing finally shut down all its Washington state plants after a Machinists union (IAMAW) shop steward died from COVID-19 on March 22. The South Everett plant where the shop steward worked had most of the 25 coronavirus cases at Boeing’s local facilities. The South Everett plant, with 36,000 workers, was not shut down until “anger at management had

grown to a near mutinous pitch,” according to the March 23 Seattle Times.

The Boeing shutdown is for two weeks, but could be longer. The workers are to receive two weeks pay.

Machinists at Boeing had been complaining for some time about the lack of cleaning and sanitizing in the plants. A South Everett worker said, “I have not seen a single employee clean inside of an airplane, where the majority of employees spend their day working in confined spaces in groups of up to eight people.”

Boeing is slated to receive a multi-billion dollar chunk of the \$2.2 trillion bailout plan just passed by Congress. As a “national security” contractor, Boeing is resistant to shutdowns and favored by Wall Street, but it can be forced to bend under working-class pressure. □

WW COMMENTARY

Mass organizing to win revolutionary socialism

By Makasi Motema

Revolutionary change is coming. As the ravenous capitalist class continues their ruthless plundering of labor value from working people, societal contradictions race toward a breaking point.

The younger generation in particular is being driven into intolerable economic insecurity. People of color, always a target of ruling class oppression, are increasingly terrorized and brutalized by law enforcement at the border and in the inner cities. Those who have struggled against gender violence, including trans violence, have endured a withering backlash from reactionaries waging legal battles against bodily autonomy in the courts.

But all oppression breeds resistance. Over the last decade, political mobilizations have surged in a way not seen in generations. The working class is determined to fight. Nothing less than the fate of the biosphere hangs in the balance of our current class struggle. The oppressed masses of this country and the world have made clear that should defeat be their fate, they will not endure it quietly. Ours is a fight for survival, and we shall not back down.

Given the pivotal nature of the current period, what is the role of a Marxist-Leninist party? Has the time finally come for a political vanguard to step forward and lead the masses into struggle against our capitalist masters? If the time is not now, then when?

For a communist party, correctly diagnosing the current political conditions and the changing character of those conditions is of the utmost importance. The political consciousness of the masses has accelerated dramatically in the past ten years, and such an acceleration calls for an equally dramatic adaptation in strategy.

From the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, to the start of the Occupy movement in 2011, socialism in all its various incarnations was in decline. The expansion of communist parties and the political organization of the masses were stifled by a Western anticommunist consensus. The neoliberal elite gloated that we had reached “the end of history,” insinuating in Marxist terms that the class struggle had finally come to an end — with capitalists the victor.

Those communist and left-wing organizations of the period that were prudent understood the importance of survival. In such a hostile political environment, what was of utmost importance was maintaining ideological integrity and continuing a tradition of principled political agitation. To take the offensive when you are weak and your opponent is strong is to court disaster. But there is a vital corollary to that rule: If you fail to seize an opportunity once it materializes, you plant the seeds of your own destruction.

The explosion of social movements in the last decade presents a tremendous opportunity. The ruling class has shown its weaknesses and the working class is growing in strength. The time for strategic defense has come to a close. The working-class masses, and those who would seek to organize them, must take up the offense. That is the role of the vanguard party.

The state

The belief that capitalism is irredeemable and socialism is our only solution is spreading widely.

But the means by which the capitalist ruling class should be hurled from power is hotly debated. In a period of ideological disharmony, the voice of Marxist-Leninists should ring out as clearly as a bell when it denounces and rejects

right-wing opportunism.

The current farcical election process is all the evidence we need to support our analysis of the state. Bernie Sanders, the democratic-socialist (who sounds so eerily like a social-democrat), in his attempt to secure modest- though-life-saving reforms to our health care industry, has triggered an all-out effort on the part of the Democratic National Committee to stop his nomination. The Wall Street paymasters who deliver the DNC’s marching orders have demanded that the party rally around a more pliant servant of the ruling class.

Socialism can never be achieved through a political process which is funded and controlled by the capitalist ruling class. To imagine any outcome but the resounding defeat of the working

the Bolsheviks who used workers’ councils to drive the radicalization of the Russian proletariat in a largely peasant-populated country. In factories all over Petrograd, workers organized into political bodies to debate and determine their political and economic fate. This went beyond unionizing. Workers’ councils, even without the sanction of the bourgeois government, decided matters of life and death, war and peace. They were a government and a state unto themselves — a workers’ state that fought for the interests of their class.

This pattern held through the revolutions in China, Vietnam, Korea, Cuba and many other nations. The political bod-



forgiveness.” (tinyurl.com/ssxk3vg)

This is the power of a highly organized mass base. But this power can only be achieved if the long-term work of deep organizing is the fundamental objective. This

type of base building is difficult and time consuming, but there is no other path to socialist revolution. To turn away from building a mass base is to concede victory to the ruling class.

Building our base

The project of building a mass political base in the U.S., where none currently exists, is daunting. But given the need and the rapidly accelerating class contradictions, the creation of such a mass movement is more likely than not. If Marxist-Leninists do not dive into this process, then our politics will not be represented. Our unique perspective — on the importance of anti-imperialism, the importance of connecting and supporting every struggle, the importance of international solidarity — is vital in combating the liberal strains in the left which seek to divide the working class or promote a national chauvinist vision of socialism.

In order to challenge the capitalist class, we must unite workers in the most vital economic sectors with those workers who are most oppressed. We must do this both to threaten the functioning of the capitalist economy and to show solidarity with the workers who are often the most radicalized.

In their eagerness to exploit as many people as possible, the capitalists have given us an abundance of workers to unite with. Workers in shipping and transportation must be organized so that any general strike we launch will have teeth. To reach the bulk of workers, we must organize in the health care, education, retail, restaurant and manufacturing sectors. To target the largest sector of the economy, real estate development, tenants must be organized. And to reach the most oppressed, we must organize gig workers, migrant workers and sex workers.

Uniting the working class will not be easy. But when faced with a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, the revolutionary always steps forward, never backward. Our knees may buckle under the heavy burden of our struggle, but this is a burden we may not shrug off. We must press on. Revolutionary determination will give us strength and our love of the people will set our direction. The challenge of organizing for a decade of revolutionary struggle stands before us. We have no choice but to accept.

But this power can only be achieved if we commit to the long-term work of deep organizing. □



Makasi Motema speaks at a New York City rally against pro-fascist coup in Bolivia, Nov. 16, 2019.

WW PHOTO: BRENDA RYAN

class in such a tightly controlled process is to engage in an exercise in self-delusion. The management of our society by the ruling class, which capitalists mockingly call a “democracy,” is nothing more and nothing less than a means of legitimizing the dictatorship of the wealthy. We need not help the ruling class gild their bloody crown.

Our energy is better spent elsewhere. The road to socialism lies through the masses. It is only through the organization of the masses into a political base that a socialist revolution can be won. This organizational process requires a vanguard party to set it in motion and maintain its momentum.

The development of the masses into a well-structured political body which increases in power until it is strong enough to challenge the capitalist state is the engine which has driven every successful socialist revolution. It is how Lenin defined “dual power” — two competing power structures — one controlled by the capitalists, the other driven by the masses competing for legitimacy and hegemony. This inherently unstable situation must result in revolutionary struggle and the decisive defeat of one party over the other. A failure to commit to this process is a failure to commit to our obligation as revolutionaries.

During the period of socialist contraction (1991-2011), the political consciousness of the masses could not support the development and expansion of a mass base. But conditions have changed, and we must change with them. Protest action — political agitation to intervene in the political debate — is now, and always will be, a vital part of the communist struggle. But it is not enough. The soil of the masses has grown fertile, and we are obligated to dig our roots ever deeper.

Bolivia and the Bolsheviks

The history of socialist revolutions is the history of political base building. Prior to the October Revolution, it was

ies of the oppressed masses expanded to include peasant farmers, students and any other group exploited by capitalism. But the central principle — of the oppressed classes taking it upon themselves to build a state of and for the oppressed — remained unchanged.

Even today, as a right-wing coup d’état washes over Bolivia, there is massive resistance from the predominantly Indigenous supporters of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS). How is it that impoverished people can survive against the withering and brutal violence of a racist coup regime? It is a direct result of the political organization of the masses. Evo Morales and the MAS party have built a solid political base. In the Chapare region of Bolivia, every neighborhood is organized into a union that is part of a larger network building up to the regional level.

These unions plan infrastructure projects, resolve land disputes and develop political strategy. And when the coup swept through Bolivia, it was the neighborhood unions that surrounded police stations and routed the police, sending coup sympathizers into a headlong flight. The police have not returned, and union leaders say they may only return if they “get on their knees and ask for

March 21: A significant date

Continued from page 8

Imperialism, colonialism and capitalism are interconnected because colonialism and imperialism are just two of the different forms of capitalism, depending on the era’s material conditions. But they both signify wealthy capitalist countries’ political domination and economic exploitation of poor, oppressed countries.

The history of our peoples, whether we are from Puerto Rico, South Africa or Namibia, is connected because we all have been stomped underfoot by the capitalist

machine. We, Puerto Ricans, are still struggling against U.S. colonialism. Although South Africa and Namibia may be independent, they are still in the midst of a class struggle, which will one day fully wipe away the inequalities and other vestiges of the brutal apartheid system.

In the end, we must learn from our ancestors’ struggles and fully realize that this capitalist monster can be defeated. The world may seem bleak at the moment, but there is no doubt that the working class will persevere, and capitalism will be smashed. □

Solidarity with frontline workers

According to the World Health Organization, as of March 31, the global numbers of the COVID-19 pandemic are close to 755,000 confirmed cases and over 36,500 deaths. The emphasis here is “confirmed,” which means that there are untold numbers of people, possibly millions, who are unaware that they are even mildly infected.

Johns Hopkins University reported on March 31 that the United States leads the world in confirmed COVID-19 cases — numbering over 163,000, more than Spain, Italy and China. These numbers are three times higher than the per capita rate of China. The U.S. death toll is over 3,000. And health officials are predicting that the worst is yet to come as those numbers grow exponentially.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who has been outspoken in countering Trump’s despicable handling of this crisis, stated on CNN’s “State of the Union” that upwards of 100,000 people or more in the U.S. could potentially die of COVID-19 in the coming weeks. (March 29)

One can only speculate how many lives could already have been saved if there was enough equipment, including ventilators, surgical masks, gloves, beds, etc., to deal with the surge of patients in the U.S.

Given the indeterminate length of this unprecedented crisis, Trump was forced to change his date of lifting a ban on social

distancing from April 12 to April 30 in hopes of reopening businesses as usual.

What’s ahead for workers?

With the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package recently passed by Congress, a large chunk of this money will go to keep large corporations afloat and smaller businesses less so. But what about the workers who are suffering the most from the impact of this pandemic, with layoffs, evictions, shut-offs, lack of medical care and more? Ninety percent of these workers are slated to get a one-time \$1,200 in April from the government, hardly enough to cover any bills. However, workers without direct deposit from the IRS will have to wait between 8 and 16 weeks for a check in the mail. And will these checks be extended into the months ahead?

The package also improves unemployment compensation and expands the group of eligible workers, but many workers will still not benefit. Others will be waiting some time for those checks to arrive, and in four months the expanded benefits will stop.

This emergency package does not prioritize the needs of workers, which literally border on life and death. Think about Macy’s announcement of layoffs of 135,000 retail workers and how this will impact them and their families.

And what about the status of “essential” workers, who do not have an option to

stay at home, such as sanitation workers, restaurant workers who prepare food for takeout and pickup deliveries, firefighters, etc.? Then there are first-responder workers in hospitals — EMS personnel, nurses, doctors, technicians, aides, orderlies, janitors, cooks, cafeteria workers and others — many of whom work without protective gear or have to use the same protective gear multiple times or are even wearing makeshift garbage bags to preserve their gowns, which they were forced to reuse.

A growing number of these health care workers, many working 90-hour work weeks, are themselves becoming infected with the coronavirus. Due to the shutdown of a number of New York hospitals over the past years, Manhattan’s Central Park now has an outdoor makeshift hospital constructed with 14 tents.

These are frontline workers who are not just verbally complaining about the terrible conditions they are working under, along with the lack of care for their patients, but they are in fighting, protest mode. These include nurses carrying signs reading, “Patients before profits” outside of Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx, N.Y., on March 28. Some nurses were wearing bandanas to cover their mouths in place of face masks.

While close to three-fourths of a trillion dollars is being sought for so-called national security — meaning the Pentagon — by the Trump administration, the COVID-19

crisis has exposed an already crumbling health care system that cannot begin to meet the needs of the masses. According to the New York Times, there is already a prediction that insurance companies will be raising their health care premiums by at least 40 percent in 2021, due to the increasing costs of hospital care. (March 28)

Amazon workers at the JFK8 fulfillment center in Queens plan a March 30 walkout to protest the lack of protective gear, in response to a fellow worker testing positive for COVID-19. Instacart workers, numbering 200,000, who do home-grocery deliveries, also plan a nationwide strike March 30 to protect their health. Whole Foods Market workers are staging a sick-out on March 31 to demand hazard pay and free COVID-19 testing. These work stoppages are just the first wave of struggles to come, and they will need the solidarity of all of us in creative ways, including social media, until the streets and other venues are open for mass protest.

Make no mistake — what is going on with this virus is a failure of the entire capitalist system that puts profits, private property, war and occupation before the needs of the people. But out of this crisis, workers are showing in a more conscious way that they are part of the global working class with the power to shut down production and the economy and help lay the basis to bring about a socialist transformation of society. □

For gender-oppressed people COVID-19 complicates health care services

By Sue Davis

How are women and other gender-oppressed people, especially those from 15 to 44 who are of child-bearing age, being affected by the coronavirus COVID-19?

All women and nonbinary people will be impacted in many ways — including reproductive health care and rights, work on the job and on “the second shift” in the home and as members of society.

It’s essential to remember that Black and Brown people are always the hardest hit by all kinds of disruptions in racist, sexist, anti-LGBTQ2+ class society — from nature’s hurricanes (think Hurricane Katrina) to human-made economic crashes (think 1929 and 2008) to pandemics (think 1918).

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there is no good news overall. But there are glimmers of hope and possibility.

Retired New York City midwife Ellen Catalinotto shared some good news with Workers World: “In a webinar held by the American College of Nurse Midwives on March 21 participants learned that as of now data from China shows the virus is not transmitted from a pregnant woman to her fetus and there is no evidence of the virus in breast milk.

“Many expectant parents are worried about giving birth in hospitals. They are concerned about risk of

infection as well as restrictions in who may accompany the laboring patient. There is increasing interest in delivering in birth centers or at home. However, only low-risk patients are eligible and there are relatively few places where these services are available.”

Telemedicine available for contraception ...

The role of telemedicine — online, remote medical care — offers many advantages for obtaining contraceptives. It keeps sick people from gathering, while protecting both patients and practitioners and is much less expensive.

A March 18 article by rewire.news detailed information about a number of telemedicine providers. Patients must fill out a questionnaire on a website or app and then receive a prescription after a doctor reviews the information.

Online sources include contraceptive provider PRJKT RUBY. The company, which prescribes and ships to 49 states (except North Carolina), “has seen a 10 percent increase in patients in recent days.” CMO Dan Snyder predicts that will continue. Pill Club, which ships to 50 states, but can only prescribe in 37, “reported a 30 percent increase in the past week in prescriptions referred to them from other pharmacies.”

Co-founded by a pediatrician at Stanford Medical School in California, Pandia Health, which presently prescribes in three states, but aims to partner with providers in 50, offers a virtual visit to a doctor for a prescription. Pandia Health Birth Control Fund offers financial assistance.

Planned Parenthood Direct, an app-based service in 37 states, advises patients to contact a local care center for financial help. Nurx, available in 37 states, also tests for sexually transmitted illnesses and will soon offer coronavirus testing and consultations for those who have been exposed and have symptoms.

... But not for abortion care

Medical abortion care, which involves taking two pills, is restricted in many states due to anti-choice bias and not strictly medical science. As Dr. Daniel Grossman, an abortion provider and professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of California, San Francisco, told rewire.news: “The effectiveness of medication abortions done by telemedicine is pretty much the same compared to having an in-person visit.”

At present pills for medical abortion are regulated by

the Food and Drug Administration under a so-called “Risk Evaluation Mitigation Strategy,” which prohibits mailing drugs to patients. An experimental study in 11 states involving in-home medical abortion consultations, run by the nonprofit group Gynuity, was set up in 2016 with special FDA approval. It has successfully provided remote abortions for 600 patients.

Under pressure from the pandemic, Dr. Grossman hopes the FDA will lift the REMS “at least temporarily,” as will states that currently ban telemedicine for medication abortions.

Trump cuts in public health ‘exacerbate’ pandemic

Probably the Trump administration’s worst attack on sexual and reproductive health and rights is the “domestic gag rule,” which went into effect last year on Aug. 19. The Trump revision of Title X regulations was that reproductive care and service providers at women’s health clinics could no longer offer referrals for abortion or provide abortions in the same facility. This has had a profound effect on 4 million poor Medicaid recipients, including women and gender-nonconforming people who are youth, people of color, those living in rural areas, survivors of domestic violence and/or those living with disabilities.

Guttmacher Institute’s latest statistics on March 11 show that the gag rule has reduced Title X funding by at least 46 percent after about 1,000 clinics left the network: “The Trump administration’s ongoing attempts to undermine the [Affordable Care Act] and reshape Medicaid to better fit its conservative ideology have put the entire U.S. health insurance system on shaky footing in ways that may hamper the COVID-19 response.”

The report continues: “And the administration’s broadly discriminatory and xenophobic policies — including policies targeting people with low incomes, people of color, LGBTQ+ people and immigrants — will heighten the challenges of combatting an epidemic for communities that are already marginalized.”

The report further warned that reproductive health care advocates “need to guard against the possibility that [anti-abortion forces] will seize the opportunity of COVID-19 to further restrict people’s fundamental rights and access to health care.”

That warning came true in late March, when four

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Activists demonstrate for reproductive rights for all gender-oppressed people in Mobile, Ala., May 31, 2019.

Boston IWWD

Shaheen Baghs of India: Women lead the struggle!

By Maureen Skehan
Boston

The socialist origins of International Working Women’s Day were celebrated March 7 by the Boston International Action Center and the local branch of Workers World Party. A powerful program saluted both the key role of student activists in the Sanders movement in the U.S. and the courageous women-led uprising in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi, India, against repression and anti-Muslim laws in that country.

Women freedom fighters, past and present

WWP youth activist and Team Solidarity singer Kristin Turgeon greeted the crowd with a trilogy of songs dedicated to women freedom fighters. She honored General Harriet Tubman, leader of the Underground Railroad, who struck countless blows against slavery and freed hundreds of enslaved African people; Puerto Rican Independence fighter Lolita Lebrón who opposed U.S. colonialism and was imprisoned for 25 years for her actions; and all working-class women. Turgeon closed her set with a rousing rendition of the “Union Maid” refrain: “I’m sticking to the union until the day I die.”

Turgeon then shared a brief history of IWWD, born through the life and death struggle of women garment workers in New York City in the early 1900s. She paid tribute to women in unions who are still militantly striking over a hundred years later for better pay, health care benefits, protection from sexual harassment and winning. She also saluted Indigenous women and Two-Spirited people on the front lines to protect their land, water and national sovereignty rights from murderous energy companies, polluters and perpetrators of violence.

Turgeon concluded: “This is a period of change for the entire working class worldwide. What better time than now to fight for housing, food, jobs, quality education and universal health care for all? The revolutionary struggles of women from India to Palestine and Africa to Latin America and Asia will hasten the changes we are fighting for here in the U.S. Let’s take this opportunity to build a strong and united socialist movement that can fight for the liberation of the entire working class and self-determination for all oppressed people!”

From Sanders campaign into socialist action

Akilah DeCoteau, a student at Northeastern University and organizer with Huskies for Bernie, shared why she became involved in the Sanders campaign: “I was attracted to Sanders’ message when he asked, ‘Why do we spend more than the next seven countries combined on the military? Why are we the only industrialized country that doesn’t guarantee health care to all its citizens?’ I wondered why, too!”

Decoteau continued: “Sanders stated it was time to get corporate influence out of politics, it was time for us to take on the military-industrial complex, the for-profit health care industry, and to start investing in people, instead of bailing out Wall Street. I couldn’t have agreed more!”

She continued, “Today, there are tens of thousands of

supporters like myself who have realized it is possible to rally, march and organize for the changes we need. Since the start of the campaign, I’ve been organizing with local socialist groups for the first time, and I will continue mobilizing with these organizations to fight for these issues. This presidential campaign has exposed how the government and media have failed us. More people are losing trust in the two-party system and we will see an exponential growth in leftist organizations. No matter what happens with the Sanders campaign, this is just the beginning! We will seize the moment!”

Shaheen Bagh: Women resist

After a panel of young women spoke, Padma and Pratyush came forward — members of the Boston Coalition whose goals are to work in solidarity with activists in South Asia on justice and peace. They gave a detailed account of events that birthed the Shaheen Bagh uprising in India, which has sparked mass resistance across the country and inspired women, working-class and justice-loving people everywhere.

The movement began on the evening of Dec. 15, 2019, when 15 to 20 women, many in hijabs, left their homes and took to the streets in their Muslim-majority neighborhood of Shaheen Bagh. They occupied a major highway that led north to India’s capital of New Delhi. Word quickly spread of their sit-down strike and more women joined. Many were mothers and grandmothers protesting for the first time.

What sparked their protest? News of a vicious attack by Indian police at the nearby Jamia Millia University, where students were beaten, tear-gassed and shot with live bullets. Scores were arrested and the school ransacked.

The students had been preparing for a march on the capital to protest repressive and discriminatory changes in India’s citizenship laws, specifically aimed at Muslims, passed by its Parliament on Dec. 11. The National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Population Register (NPR) were laws sponsored by the right-wing, Hindu-fundamentalist government of President Narendra Modi.

The shocking violence inflicted on students, combined with the passage of discriminatory citizenship laws, was the spark that lit the fuse of the Shaheen Bagh women’s righteous resistance.

Pratyush explained: “In addition to targeting Muslims, these citizenship initiatives are a mechanism for persecuting poor landless peasants and migratory workers as well. There are several hundred million people in India, who as migrant workers—especially Dalits [previously known as ‘untouchables’] and Indigenous—have no documents and [would] become ‘illegal’ and ‘stateless.’ Thus, they can be forced into detention centers for super-exploitation.”

Pratyush continued: “The idea of citizenship has colonial roots — now people living in South Asia for thousands of years are suddenly ‘illegal.’ In the northeastern state of Assam in India, where the National Register of Citizens was first implemented, the problem started with the forced migration of people during the British colonial occupation. This is a project of genocide in language and deed, with parallels to the historical violence and murder of im/migrants, communists and Jewish people.”

Padma opened her talk by thanking the IAC and WWP for their consistent anti-imperialist work and their many decades of solidarity with poor and oppressed peoples around the world. She went on to describe the difficult conditions faced by women in India where the maternal mortality rate is 174 women per 100,000 live births. Women are denied many basic rights, including access to maternity care and day care. A crime against women occurs every three minutes in India, with Dalit women facing even higher rates of violence. Living in a patriarchal country, most women have the added burden of no state or property papers in their own name.

Padma shared: “In the Shaheen Bagh [protests], women of all ages, from 9 to 90, have come together to resist the Indian government’s repressive citizenship laws. The majority of women are homemakers and seamstresses who do odd jobs to support their children and families. They have refused to go home, stating, ‘We eat, sleep and live on the road.’”

Padma emphasized: “Women are leading the fight to force the Modi government to repeal the CAA and NRC, which threaten the rights of the most vulnerable in society, including Muslims, poor women, oppressed castes and LGBTQ2+ people. People are now using the constitution and Indian flag to tell the fascists, ‘Don’t take away our rights given to us!’ People of Muslim faith who



Shaheen Bagh protest in India.

fought the British are refusing to be criminalized and marginalized. Popular chants at the Shaheen Bagh protests include: ‘Speak up, we are all one! Inquilab zindabad! Long live revolution! Long live love!’”

She continued: “Today there is growing unity among the people across religious and caste lines, with Dalits helping Muslims, while Kashmir is viewed as the Palestine of India. Bold and beautiful murals dedicated to the women of Shaheen Bagh evoke the struggles of women in South Africa and Palestine fighting racist apartheid settlers and passbook laws. The Chilean feminist anthem, ‘Un violador en tu camino/A rapist in your path,’ has been translated by women and LGBTQ2+ people in India who are performing the song at protests, making it clear that the patriarchy are the rapists and they are the people responsible for the extreme violence against women.”

‘Fighting spirit of women’

Padma also recognized the All India General Strike of 250 million workers on Jan. 8, the largest in world history, when workers pressed demands for increases in the minimum wage, unemployment and social security benefits. The strikers also demanded, “Repeal the CAA Now!”

On Feb. 23, as more and more women joined the protests, the Modi government orchestrated a bloody, anti-Muslim pogrom. Police, backed up by hundreds of armed men, entered Delhi, killing over 50 people and destroying thousands of homes, businesses, communal spaces and mosques.

Immediately after the violence, reminiscent of Kristallnacht (1938) and other Nazi pogroms against Jewish people in Germany, Modi met with visiting U.S. president Trump. As these fascist leaders patted each other on the back, they also signed new military deals aimed at encircling China.

The panelists showed video clips of the Shaheen Bagh protests and marches led by women, LGBTQ2+ people and youth in cities from Kolkata and Mumbai to London and Toronto. Pratyush shared a poem dedicated to the workers of India and women of Shaheen Bagh. A lively discussion ensued, including about three recent city council resolutions passed in Seattle, Albany, N.Y., and Cambridge, Mass., demanding repeal of the NRC, CAA and NPR. Plans to pursue a similar resolution from the Boston City Council were discussed.

Padma closed the meeting: “The many Shaheen Baghs in India are a testament to the fighting spirit of women largely of Muslim faith who have galvanized other communities to join them in demanding Modi’s government repeal the discriminatory CAA act. People from all walks of life who have joined these brave women are demanding the right to dignity, to security of life, and an end to caste-, gender- and religion-based violence. Long live the Shaheen Baghs! Long live workers’ unity! The struggle will continue!”

On March 24, the government lockdown of New Delhi to check COVID-19 was used as an excuse for the Modi government to send police to shut down Shaheen Bagh in the dawn hours and clear the site of all those who had been protesting the discriminatory citizenship laws for over 100 days. (hindu.com). □



The IWWD celebration in Boston, March 7. PHOTO: WWP BOSTON

COVID-19 complicates health care services

Continued from page 10

states — Ohio, Texas, Oklahoma and Mississippi — asserted that surgical abortions should be banned because they were “nonessential” medical procedures. All leading national medical organizations protested, defending the right to abortion. Eleven states — Colorado, Hawai’i, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and Washington — affirmed that abortion was an essential medical procedure, a necessary component of reproductive justice for all gender-oppressed people.

Though zealots in Congress tried to insinuate anti-abortion wording into the \$2.2 trillion rescue package, reproductive freedom advocates were able to scrub that out of the final bill. However, there is speculation that the Small Business Administration may not approve loans to women’s health clinics that provide abortions.

Part 2 of this topic will focus on women and gender-nonconforming people at work on the job and on “the second shift” at home and as members of society.



FOTO:RESUMEN LATINAMERICA

Los EE.UU. acusan Presidente Nicolás Maduro de ‘narcoterrorismo,’ pero el pueblo venezolano lo defiende.

Trabajadores de salud de Texas informan desde dentro de la pandemia

Por Workers World en Austin, Texas

Los siguientes son testimonios ligeramente editados sobre la respuesta del sistema de atención médica al coronavirus COVID-19 de varios trabajadores que actualmente tienen trabajos en el centro de Texas o han pasado sus vidas trabajando allí.

Médico de Emergencias en Austin, Texas

La respuesta de los hospitales del centro de Texas, hogares de ancianos y servicios de ambulancia ha sido hasta ahora lo que esperaba de la medicina basada en las ganancias. No se toman precauciones con los pacientes a menos que tengan un caso verificado de COVID-19. Para que se verifique un caso, un paciente debe pasar una serie estricta de preguntas y presentación de síntomas antes de considerar la prueba. Las personas que dan positivo para la influenza pero tienen tos persistente no toman precauciones. La suposición es que si tiene una [enfermedad], entonces no puede tener la otra.

Durante todo este tiempo, los trabajadores de atención médica pueden o no usar máscaras cuando están cerca del paciente. Las tiendas de triaje se instalan fuera de los hospitales, pero los trabajadores no usan protección fuera de los guantes estándar de nitrilo, y no hay forma de aislar a los pacientes mientras esperan ser atendidos.

Los trabajadores de la salud ya están sobrecargados de trabajo gracias al deseo de nuestros hospitales privados, hogares de ancianos y servicios de ambulancia para maximizar las ganancias [durante] COVID-19, y eso solo empeora el problema. En lugar de traer suficientes trabajadores para atender la afluencia de pacientes, se espera que trabajemos más rápido.

Los trabajadores de la salud, que incluyen limpiadores de instalaciones médicas, cocineros, encargados de registros y trabajadores de lavandería, no están siendo evaluados, y la falta de alimentos garantizados, vivienda y estabilidad de ingresos nos incentiva a ocultar los síntomas. Nos queda en gran medida hacer una auto-investigación sobre el virus. En mi trabajo como [Médico de Emergencias], el único entrenamiento que hemos recibido en COVID-19 es un video de 20 minutos publicado en línea que no es obligatorio.

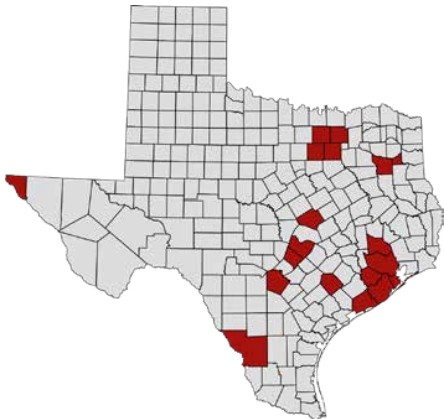
Necesitamos más personas en el trabajo; necesitamos un derecho a la vivienda, la alimentación y la atención médica; necesitamos educación sobre el virus; y, sobre todo, necesitamos que la especulación termine.

Escritura de un médico en una zona rural de Texas

La experiencia clínica aquí se puede resumir en una palabra: inadecuada. Eso es gracias a la falta de respuesta organizada, investigación y educación sobre COVID-19.

Hay poca o ninguna comprensión por parte de nadie en cualquier nivel de atención, desde los empleados hasta los médicos, sobre la naturaleza de esta epidemia o cómo es cuantificable o cualitativamente diferente a la influenza. Han fracasado constantemente en cada oportunidad de brindar a los pacientes orientación y expectativas adecuadas para el cuidado de los niños pequeños hasta los ancianos.

Es probable que algunas personas aquí



Casos confirmados de COVID-19 en Texas el 17 de marzo.

ya estén infectadas debido a la proximidad a varias ciudades grandes, y el período de incubación se pasa por alto durante el triaje de personas en riesgo de infección. Los síntomas pueden ocultarse por completo en niños pequeños y no se mantienen alejados de las poblaciones en riesgo. En el mejor de los casos, podemos esperar que llegemos tarde a la ola de la enfermedad cuando comprendamos las apuestas.

La gran población de jubilados y la actitud descortés de todos, excepto algunos valientes Cassandras, significa que nos estamos preparando para un momento difícil. [Cassandra era la hija de un dios griego dotado con el don de profecía pero destinado a no ser creído.]

Una ex enfermera del centro de Texas que vive en Alemania

Uno de los primeros casos de propagación comunitaria de COVID-19 fuera de China ocurrió en Alemania el 27 de enero. Sin embargo, no se sabía mucho sobre el brote en ese momento, y la gente no parecía preocupada. Lo que me sorprendió fue que la persona que transfirió el virus no tenía síntomas cuando interactuó con otros en la comunidad que luego se enfermaron. Me ha sorprendido la falta de un sentido de urgencia o voluntad de tomar en serio este coronavirus, incluso hoy en día, a medida que las fronteras de las principales naciones del mundo comienzan a cerrarse y los bloqueos entran en vigencia, y aún hay tantos defectos en toda la respuesta.

Las personas con síntomas aún no se están haciendo la prueba porque no han viajado a China, pero el virus ha sido global desde enero. La línea directa para que las personas llamen si creen que están infectadas en Berlín, Alemania, donde vivo ahora, no tiene una opción para ningún otro idioma que no sea alemán. Esta es una de las ciudades con mayor diversidad étnica en Europa, e incluso en una crisis requieren que solicite ayuda solo en su lengua materna.

Otra cuestión que veo como un problema importante desde el principio fue la falta de suministros de equipos de protección personal. Me mudé aquí desde el centro de Texas en octubre de 2019, donde trabajé como enfermera registrada durante casi 20 años. Mi último trabajo antes de salir de EE. UU. fue en recuperación quirúrgica. Similar a la sala de emergencias, este es un ambiente que requiere que haya bolsas de ventilación manual a cada lado de la cama. Después de que el huracán María devastó a Puerto Rico [creando una necesidad extrema de suministros médicos], no pudimos reemplazar estos equipos vitales, y muchos de ellos caducaron.

También hubo medicamentos y otros suministros que no pudimos reponer, y los fabricantes en los Estados Unidos tardaron meses en aumentar la producción, mientras que el gobierno de los Estados Unidos se negó a invertir en la reconstrucción de Puerto Rico. Fui testigo de lo rápido que nuestras operaciones podrían verse comprometidas, incluso detenerse sin el equipo necesario. Esto es exactamente lo que está sucediendo hoy en Italia, y me temo que es una señal de lo que vendrá para el resto del mundo que se centra más en maximizar las ganancias en lugar de salvar la vida de las personas.

Una enfermera que trabaja en el centro de Texas

Soy una enfermera registrada y trabajo en un centro de crisis psiquiátrica del centro de la ciudad. Más de la mitad de los pacientes que atendemos no tienen hogar. La organización para la que trabajo está impulsada por el trabajo social y hay pocas enfermeras licenciadas (RN). Tengo 75 años y, por lo tanto, soy miembro de una de las poblaciones vulnerables.

El liderazgo de la organización se ha paralizado por todo esto. El jueves pasado a mi supervisora, que tiene cáncer y está tomando medicamentos de quimioterapia, le dijeron que tenía que trabajar desde casa. Pero no le dieron una computadora portátil, así que regresó a trabajar al día siguiente. Luego, sus supervisores le dijeron que buscara cómo podría trabajar sin tener contacto directo con pacientes.

Se le ocurrió la idea de que podía usar su oficina y ver a los pacientes por telemed. He estado fuera del trabajo, pero tengo que volver a trabajar mañana. Mi supervisor me llamó hoy para decirme que la idea de Telemed fracasó porque el liderazgo no pudo encontrar una computadora portátil (otra vez!) Para que la use para conectarme a Telemed.

Me dieron la opción, y me animaron encarecidamente, a quedarme en casa, pero no quiero dejar a mis compañeros de trabajo con poco personal. Tal como está ahora, resulta que mi supervisor tiene una infección de las vías respiratorias superiores (ino, no la corona!), Así que usaré su oficina y haré los gráficos, el trabajo con la computadora y otras cosas que no requieren contacto con el paciente. Por ineptos que sean sus esfuerzos, el liderazgo parece preocupado por mi seguridad. O eso, o saben que he dado instrucciones a mis hijos adultos para demandar.

En cualquier caso, no veo el mismo nivel de preocupación por nuestra clientela por parte de mi liderazgo organizacional, por políticos locales o por el gobierno federal. El distanciamiento social y la buena higiene de las manos están a la orden del día. ¿Cómo haces eso si vives en un refugio lleno de gente y estás en la calle todo el día?

Un estudiante paramédico en Austin

Como técnico médico de emergencia y estudiante de paramédico, he sido testigo de primera mano del desmoronamiento de nuestra infraestructura de atención médica a raíz de COVID-19. Los sitios clínicos en los hospitales de todo el centro de Texas redujeron al mínimo la propagación inicial del virus y no pudieron implementar protocolos aumentados para el control de infecciones durante semanas

hasta que quedó muy claro que el alcance de esta pandemia ya no podía evitarse.

En un solo turno clínico de seis horas, cada paciente con el que tuve contacto en la sala de emergencias era un paciente con afecciones preexistentes, con signos y síntomas de neumonía, como tos y fiebre. Estos pacientes, que exhiben signos reveladores del virus, fueron abordados sin un mayor nivel de aislamiento dentro del entorno hospitalario.

En las últimas dos semanas, el sistema de Servicios Médicos de Emergencia basado en subsidios, en el que soy estudiante clínico, solo había comenzado conversaciones para asegurarse de que las máscaras N95 se ajustaran adecuadamente a los proveedores. El personal también discutió las preocupaciones sobre la falta de máscaras y la incapacidad de abastecerse de más a medida que la ola de esta pandemia creció lentamente a un aumento gradual.

El personal discutió continuamente los problemas con el despacho, pero con una falta de continuidad en términos de respuesta a casos potenciales del virus, algunas llamadas fueron respondidas con múltiples unidades, otras con tripulaciones individuales.

A partir del 13 de marzo, me informaron que mi educación clínica, así como todo el departamento de profesiones médicas de mi universidad, se habían suspendido indefinidamente debido al virus. A partir de ahora, no puedo pagar el registro estatal requerido para trabajar como EMT en el estado de Texas y debo quedar en segundo plano ya que no puedo unirme a mis colegas profesionales de la salud que continúan ahogándose en un sistema que hace poco para poner su bienestar, y mucho menos el del paciente, a la vanguardia.

Solo hoy, casi una semana después de las prácticas de distanciamiento social, escucho informes anecdóticos de personal médico y pacientes que reciben pruebas, en lugar de pruebas de detección, para COVID-19.

Conclusión

COVID-19 está enseñando a muchos que no tenemos más remedio que abandonar la medicina basada en las ganancias en favor de la evidencia y la planificación centralizada. Las reformas sugeridas por políticos como Bernie Sanders son un comienzo, pero no alcanzan lo que necesitamos. La eliminación completa del motivo de ganancias y el control completo de los trabajadores sobre la atención médica nos permitiría centrarnos en nuestra tarea más importante: la salud del paciente.

Los trabajadores de la salud que se enferman deben sentirse capaces y apoyados para actuar en interés de nuestros pacientes y tomarse un tiempo libre, incluida la auto cuarentena prolongada si nos infectamos con COVID-19. Necesitamos pruebas que estén disponibles para todos, especialmente para aquellos que nos preocupamos por la salud de los demás.

La riqueza que generamos los trabajadores debería ir hacia cosas que nos mantengan felices y saludables, no un absurdo presupuesto del Pentágono de \$700 mil millones u otro yate para los buitres capitalistas que se aprovechan de los enfermos y heridos. □