

On Mumia's birthday

Global event honors political prisoners

By Mirinda Crissman and
Judy Greenspan

From behind prison walls nearly 39 years, Mumia Abu-Jamal continues to educate, energize and unite prison abolitionists, former and current political prisoners, and the global activist community. On April 24, his 66th birthday, Abu-Jamal's story and legacy brought together a virtual gathering "U.S. Empire vs. Political Prisoners," committed to broadening this movement, not only to free Mumia and all political prisoners but to free us all.

An amazing array of speakers sent warm birthday greetings and spoke eloquently about their individual cases, community campaigns and the uphill battle to win justice for prisoners. Hosted on Commonnotions.org, the webinar was organized by Mobilization4Mumia, the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, the Free Mumia Coalition (NYC) and a broad array of organizers.

Moderator Johanna Fernandez, Baruch College (CUNY) professor and a coordinator of the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, opened the program with

the question, "What is a political prisoner?" This question and responses by the more than 30 speakers, cracked open a long-held secret of U.S. capitalist domination. Yes, there are political prisoners in the United States.

Other moderators included Betsey Piette, a managing editor of Workers World newspaper; Santiago Alvarez, a University of California, Santa Cruz student activist; and Mike Africa, Jr. from the MOVE organization.

Megan Malachi of Philly REAL (Racial, Economic and Legal) Justice talked about being born in 1981, the year Abu-Jamal was arrested and incarcerated. However, it was not until she was in high school that she attended a rally and found out the truth about who Mumia was.

Kathy Boudin, a former political prisoner who is now a professor of social work at Columbia University in New York City, talked about the blank look in her students' faces when she asked if there were political prisoners in the U.S. She realized that she had a lot of educating to do.

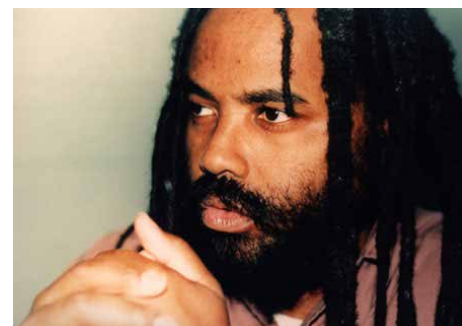
This extraordinary webinar exposed the serious situation faced by many political prisoners in the U.S. after decades of

incarceration. Currently at least two political prisoners have stage 4 cancer and are fighting for medical care and compassionate release.

Russell Shoatz III spoke about his father's condition. Russell Maroon Shoatz, a founding member of the Black Unity Council and a former member of the Philadelphia Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, is serving multiple life sentences. Incarcerated since 1970, he has recently undergone cancer surgery.

Former political prisoner and author Susan Rosenberg highlighted the case of Dr. Mutulu Shakur, a political prisoner who was just diagnosed with life-threatening bone marrow cancer and has launched a campaign for compassionate release. Shakur is a founder of the Republic of New Africa and a respected, well-known "people's" acupuncturist.

Jihad Abdulmumit, a former political prisoner and chairperson of the Jericho Movement, stated that this celebration of Mumia's birthday "should be a call to action." He reminded listeners that political prisoners are part of the history of our movement for freedom and liberation.



More on Mumia Abu-Jamal

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Abdulmumit stated, "It is not a matter of our innocence or guilt. It is a matter of supporting our freedom fighters and standing for our independence."

COVID-19 underscores urgency of prison abolition

Speakers from Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) addressed the urgency of releasing all elderly and immunocompromised people, especially during this coronavirus pandemic. Donna Robinson,

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May Day = Worker Power

Today, in 66 countries around the world, May Day — International Workers' Day — is an official paid holiday commemorated on May 1. But not in the United States.

While May Day originated here, the ruling class has done everything it can to eradicate any memory of this working-class holiday. As a result, International Workers' Day is officially ignored in the country where it was born.

However, it is commemorated around

editorial

the world as an important anniversary for the working-class movement. Socialists and com-

munists struggled the hardest to have it made an official holiday in many countries.

What are the origins of May Day, and why is it important to workers in this country?

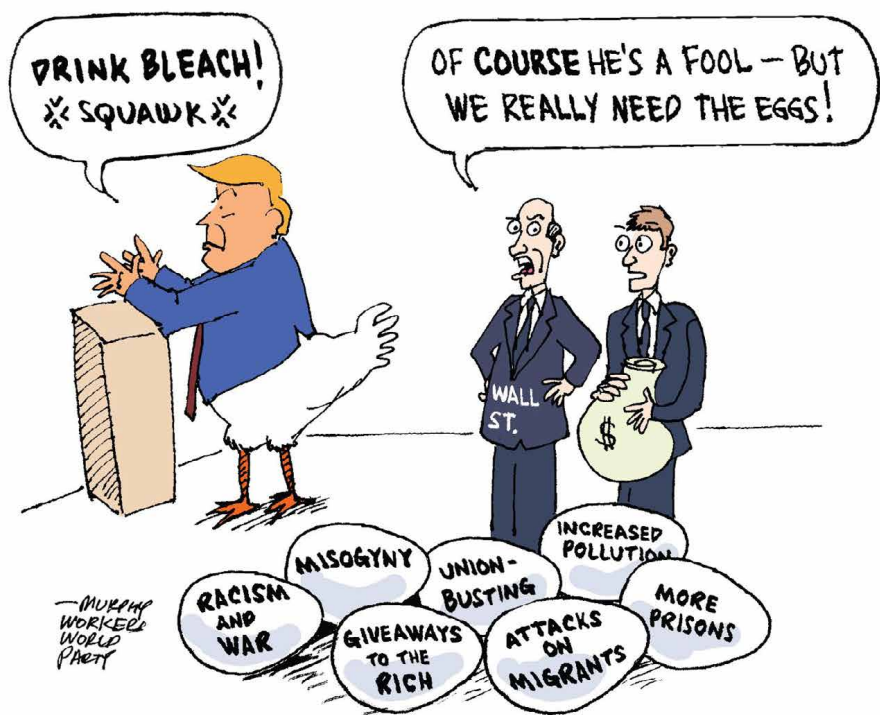
The roots of May Day as a time to honor the struggles of the working class began on May 1, 1886. Some 300,000 workers

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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, LGBTQ+ 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

Ohio

Car protest demands prisoner release

By Martha Grevatt
Columbus, Ohio

Over 100 cars, driven by people from all over Ohio, circled the state’s Department of Rehabilitation and Correction in Columbus, the capital, on April 24. From there, the car caravan went to the Statehouse to protest the dangerous conditions in state prisons. Marion and Pickaway correctional institutions have made national news as the country’s top two “hotspots.” Each has a COVID-19 infection rate of 80 percent among prisoners. That’s over 3,500 cases between the two prisons!

The Ohio Prisoners Justice League and Ohio Organizing Collaborative, caravan organizers, are demanding that Gov. Mike DeWine release 20,000 prisoners — 40 percent of those in state custody — before May 1. That number would encompass those whose sentences are almost over, those imprisoned for “nonviolent” offenses, elderly inmates and those with health conditions that make them more vulnerable to infection.

After reaching the Statehouse, a group of about 50 people staged a socially distant die-out on the lawn. A family



Ohio activists gather to encircle Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, then the Statehouse with a car caravan, April 24.



Social-distance “die out” in front of Ohio Statehouse to demand mass release of prisoners who face death from COVID-19, April 24.

with children held signs pleading for their father’s life. The slogan “20K by May” was chanted, written on signs and car windows, and worn on T-shirts and cloth face masks. Some signs read: “Prisoners’ Lives Matter!” Extremely popular was the slogan, which is the running theme of many prison protests: “Free them all!”

Seventeen prisoners have died from the virus in Ohio’s state prison system, which has an overcrowding rate of 130 percent. Another six prisoners died in the state’s only federal prison in Elkton. Without a massive and immediate prisoner release, the death toll will rise exponentially — imposing a death sentence on an untold number of prisoners.

Ohio has the sixth-largest prison system in the U.S., with 28 adult and three juvenile institutions holding about 50,000 prisoners. African Americans, only 13 percent of the state population, comprise 45 percent of the prison population. Mass incarceration is indeed “the new Jim Crow.”

Gov. DeWine has proposed to release a mere 100 prisoners, including rich white-collar criminals, such as Thomas Noe, convicted of laundering money for the 2004 George W. Bush presidential campaign and being involved in the corruption scandal known as “Coingate.” □

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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. □

Join us in the fight for socialism!

If you are interested in joining Workers World Party contact: 212.627.2994

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In the battle vs. COVID-19 and depression People with disabilities fight to be counted

By Edward Yudelovich

“When the able-bodied community gets the sniffles, we get pneumonia. ... The difficulties are multiplied ten-fold,” said Damien Gregory, an African-American wheelchair user with cerebral palsy. (“Coronavirus Strains Safety Net for People with Disabilities,” Wall Street Journal, April 19)

When asked about the numbers and statistics on how the COVID-19 coronavirus has affected people with disabilities, Susan Dooha, executive director of the Center for Independence of the Disabled New York (CIDNY), told the interviewer: “People with disabilities are not being counted!” (Metrofocus, PBS, April 16)

Dooha warned that people with disabilities are at higher risk for this pandemic due to the chronic conditions they face, the disparately more overcrowded facilities in which they live, their ages and the prevalence of living in poverty — all of which are dramatically increased for disabled people of color.

Miscounting people with disabilities is nothing new in U.S. history!

2020, the year of the pandemic, is also a U.S. census year. However, racist, ableist and sexist methods of miscounting have also been used as weapons against the oppressed. The original Constitution of the U.S. counted enslaved African Americans as three-fifths of a person. In the U.S. censuses from 1840 through 1890, people considered “mentally ill” or “mentally re****ed” were counted in those categories.

These data were used to facilitate forced institutionalization of people with emotional, mental, psychological and neurodivergent disabilities in prisons and asylums, as well as to perpetuate racist stereotypes with falsified statistics regarding African Americans and Indigenous peoples. (“A Disability History of the United States” by Kim E. Nielsen) It is significant that many of the people at the greatest risk for COVID-19 today in the U.S. are housed in nursing homes, so-called mental institutions and prisons.

The U.S. Immigration Act of 1882 also “miscounted” disabled people by prohibiting people from entering the U.S. if they were “unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge.” These restrictions on the right of a disabled person to immigrate to the U.S. were made even more restrictive in 1891, 1903, 1907 and 1924. All these draconian laws were also racist in excluding Asian, especially Chinese, and other peoples.

At Ellis Island in New York harbor during the peak years of U.S. immigration from 1870 to 1924, when potential immigrants were screened, interviewed and examined, U.S. officials marked those with any form of disability with a chalked letter on their backs containing a different code for each disability, so it would be easier to exclude them. “X” was the mark given to people with “possible mental illness” and “X” with a circle for “definite mental illness.” (“More than Passenger Lists: The Other Records at Ellis Island” by Rhonda McClure, Ancestry.com, March 2006) This reporter’s mother, aunts and uncles entered the U.S. after going through Ellis Island.

COVID-19 pandemic unleashes perfect storm of depression risks

Emotional, mental, psychological and neurodivergent disabilities is a category of disability profoundly impacted by this pandemic.

In an article titled “COVID-19 could lead to an epidemic of clinical depression, and the health care system isn’t ready for that, either,” clinical psychology scientists Jonathan Kanter and Katherine Manbeck at the University of Washington’s Center for the Science of Social Connection sounded the alarm: “Isolation, social distancing and extreme changes in daily life are hard now, but the United States also needs to be prepared for what may be an epidemic of clinical depression because of COVID-19. ... We do not wish to be the bearers of bad news. But this crisis, and our response to it, will have psychological consequences.” (conversation.com, April 1)

They elaborated on what they called a perfect storm of depression risks. They classified stress, loss, grief and

WW COMMENTARY



PHOTO: ANTIPSYCHIATRY.ORG

February 2000, California Network of Mental Health Clients protests outside State Capitol building against a bill to lengthen and expand criteria for involuntary inpatient psychiatric commitment — which would be a death sentence with today’s pandemic.

catastrophic financial difficulties as robust predictors of depression, warning that loneliness breeds depression. Kanter and Manbeck’s practice is in the state of Washington, the first U.S. COVID-19 epicenter.

This reporter has experience with depression. I was misdiagnosed with schizophrenia in 1975 and was improperly medicated for five years. Finally, a psychiatrist corrected the diagnosis, after first encouraging me to visit the library and study for myself what was then called manic depressive disorder (now called bipolar). My psychiatrist and I collaborated to match my symptoms more closely to manic depression in order to prove the first diagnosis wrong. This psychiatrist gradually weaned me off extremely addictive psychotropic medications which had caused serious side effects, including drowsiness, disorientation, uncontrollable shaking, inability to sleep and unusual and dangerous sensitivity to heat.

In 1993, my 83-year-old mother was medicated against her will with some of these same antipsychotic drugs. After she refused to take her meds, a relative and a psychiatrist

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Abortion access threatened during pandemic

By Sue Davis

“These anti-choice governors have created a health crisis within a health crisis,” Julie Burkhart told the April 16 Los Angeles Times. She is the founder and CEO of Trust Women, which runs nonprofit health care clinics in Wichita, Kan., and Oklahoma City, Okla.

Burkhart was referring to governors in eight Southern and Midwestern states — Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Ohio and Iowa — who took it upon themselves to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a chance to ban abortions. They contend that since abortions are “elective” procedures and not “essential” medical care, scarce personal protective equipment should not be used to provide them.

In addition, a total of 18 states, including Kentucky, Utah, West Virginia, Alaska, Arkansas and Indiana, signed a friend of the court brief supporting the Texas ban.

The bans were swiftly opposed by the Center for Reproductive Rights, along with the American Civil Liberties Union, the Planned Parenthood Federation and the Lawyering Project, among others. National medical organizations weighed in as well, attesting that abortion is time-sensitive, necessary care for women and gender

nonconforming people as part of comprehensive reproductive medical care.

The abortion bans have been aptly labeled “political opportunism.” Nancy Northup, president and CEO of CRR, commented: “These emergency abortion bans are an abuse of power and part of an ongoing effort to use sham justifications to shut down clinics and make an end run around Roe v. Wade.” (Roe v. Wade is the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in 1973.)

Northup added: “These same states have tried to ban abortion access for years; no one should be fooled that this is warranted by the current crisis. We will use every legal means to ensure that abortion care remains available during this critical time.”

After legal skirmishes, most appeal courts put the bans on indefinite hold by granting temporary restraining orders. Although the far-right 5th Circuit Court of Appeals backed Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s executive order a second time on April 20, Abbott backed down completely on April 22 after his anti-choice bias was overruled by a left-leaning judge.

COVID-19 complicates abortion care

When asked how COVID-19 is affecting abortion services, Trust Women’s Burkhart answered, “We do not have enough staff, we do not have enough doctors, we do not have enough days in the week.” She noted that women traveled hundreds of miles from Texas to the Wichita clinic during the ban.

Joan Lamunyon Sanford, executive director of New Mexico Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, told the Los Angeles Times that the number of women traveling from Texas doubled by mid-April. She added, “Two weeks ago a 19-year-old arrived on a Greyhound bus from Louisiana, more than 900 miles away.”

But many workers have been unable to travel to use clinic services, particularly Black, Brown and Indigenous people in low-paying “essential” jobs who couldn’t afford to miss several days work — or couldn’t scratch together enough money to pay for child care, transportation, food and motel in addition to the cost of a procedure.

The Los Angeles Times interviewed Dr. Angela Marchin

in Aurora, Colo., who said, “The pandemic is making these decisions even more complicated for people.” She cited a mother of two whose morning-after pill had failed; she was seeking a clinical abortion because two previous pregnancies had injured abdominal muscles and required surgery costing \$10,000.

Social distancing to stop the spread of COVID-19 has required clinics to space out appointments, reducing available time for patients. Preliminary interviews with patients are now conducted via Skype or by phone. Dr. Erin King, who runs the Hope Clinic for Women in Granite City, Ill., stated that only one patient at a time is in the building. Patients only see one or two staff members for a limited time, whether to get medication, have an ultrasound or the actual procedure, followed by recovery. “There’s just less availability for patients,” she said. (Rewire.News, April 21)

“A lot of our patients have lost their jobs and aren’t working right now or have children home from school. It’s very difficult for them to get to us ... from a travel standpoint, from a childcare standpoint and from a financial standpoint.” Dr. King noted that many patients are applying for funding from local abortion funds, part of the National Network for Abortion Funds (abortionfunds.org).

“We’re also decreasing the price for patients,” King added. “We just want them to be able to be seen and not have to worry financially because the unemployment rate is astronomical. It’s hit communities around us very hard.”

What hasn’t ended is that many clinics are still being relentlessly, physically hounded by anti-abortion zealots, many of whom do not observe social distancing and menace patients by standing close to entrances and blatantly coughing on them. The National Abortion Federation has started a fund to help clinics hire outside security guards to stop aggressive “Right-to-Life” haters. (Rewire.News, April 15)

Limiting access to abortion is one of the many life-altering, life-threatening effects of COVID-19. As right-wing forces push their agenda while the pandemic rages, this is a powerful reminder that the demand for universal, comprehensive, free health care for all must always include the reproductive justice goal of accessible, safe abortion. □



In Texas, the Trust. Respect. Access. coalition was formed by 14 organizations in 2019 to push back against the anti-abortion ordinances by working with local activists to speak out.

Health care workers resist bigots and bosses

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

Antiscientific and right-wing attacks have intensified against efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. — with the U.S. president recklessly recommending bogus “treatments” and fascists protesting social distancing.

During an April 23 press conference, President Trump actually suggested treating COVID-19 by injecting people with household disinfectants or giving them internally in some way. Such a “cure” would very likely be lethal.

In the 18 hours after Trump’s remark, calls to New York City Poison Control seeking help for exposure to such chemicals — like bleach and Lysol — had almost tripled compared to a year ago. (nbcnewyork.com, April 25)

The same week as these killer remarks, protesters across the country — some waving Confederate and Nazi flags — denounced measures to control the spread of the virus recommended by health experts. Organizing and funding for the protests came from white supremacist, neofascist and armed militia groups like the Proud Boys, religious fundamentalists and right-wing, billionaire-funded groups such as the Koch and Coors Foundations. On April 17, Trump encouraged the right-wing protests in an inflammatory series of tweets. (tinyurl.com/yc8pzym7)

In response, health care workers are fighting back — for themselves as workers and for people in their care. Throughout March and April, there have been many militant health care worker protests throughout the U.S. for protective gear and safer working conditions.

Frontline health workers confront the bigots ...

In multiple states within the last week, nurses and other health care workers have physically confronted antisience right-wingers in the streets.

At the **Denver, Colo.**, Capitol building on April 19, health care workers from local hospitals, wearing green scrubs and protective masks, stood in the streets to block a car and truck caravan of reactionary



Denver, April 19.

PHOTO: ALYSON MCCLARAN

protesters. The right-wingers — in town to denounce the state’s “stay at home” order — screamed antiworker and anticommunist epithets, with one car aggressively bumping against a health care worker.

In **Harrisburg, Pa.**, half a dozen medical workers from across the state came to the Capitol building on April 20 armed with science and signs. They were there to oppose “ReOpen PA” protesters, most of whom were not wearing protective masks. Some were armed with guns. Katrina Rectenwald, a registered nurse from a Pittsburgh hospital, said people were not understanding the risk: “People come into our hospitals and we can’t even do CPR because we don’t have appropriate PPE [personal protective equipment]. People are dying because we don’t have the correct equipment.” (tinyurl.com/yqc4qyrt)

In **Phoenix** a group of nurses and physician assistants stood in front of the Capitol building on April 24 to oppose a “Patriots’ Day Rally” claiming, among other things, that the virus is a hoax. Intensive care unit nurse Lauren Leander, who has volunteered to work full-time with virus patients, said: “Our main message was that we wanted healthcare workers’ voices to be heard louder than misinformation and fear.” (cnn.com, April 24)

... Union organizing confronts the crisis

The coronavirus is infecting medical workers at a much higher rate than is being publicly revealed, as an April 17 article in the Los Angeles Times emphasized. Steve Trossman, public affairs director of Service Employees-United Healthcare Workers West, commented: “Because hospitals are



Phoenix, Ariz., April 24.

not being forthcoming with information on their employees, I am sure there are clusters that nobody even knows about.” SEIU-UHW represents nearly 100,000 health care workers. (tinyurl.com/ybmsbctt)

National Nurses United, the largest nurses’ union in the U.S., protested April 21 with a contingent of nurses gathered outside the White House in **Washington, D.C.** Wearing face masks and adhering to social distancing guidelines, they read aloud the names of 50 health care workers dead from COVID-19. One nurse said: “We are here because our colleagues are dying. I think that right now people think of us as heroes, but we’re feeling like martyrs. We’re feeling like we’re being left on the battlefield with nothing.” (tinyurl.com/ybgt06bs)

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has so far refused the NNU appeal to enact an emergency temporary standard to ensure that all health care workers have the PPE needed to do essential jobs safely.

In **Philadelphia**, nearly 130 workers at St. Monica Center for Rehabilitation and Healthcare voted on April 24 to authorize a strike for May 4. The unionized workers, represented by District1199C, were acting in response to management’s total failure to address health and safety concerns of staff and patients.

Union Vice President Elyse Ford reported that a 27-year veteran nurse has been hospitalized with the virus and is in intensive care. Fifteen percent of staff have tested positive or are awaiting results. (Inquirer.com, April 24)

Residents who have tested positive for the coronavirus are not being

separated from patients who have not. Sixteen residents have died of COVID-19 at the 180-bed nursing home. Eight more patients have been hospitalized.

Union leader Ford stressed: “It’s not that we want to strike, but at some point the employer has to realize that he has to be fair to our members.”

The nursing staff is especially concerned that proper PPE is not available for all facility workers. Nurses have N95 masks, but dietary, custodial, laundry and environmental service workers do not. Nurses reported that management told them they would have to start wearing trash bags as PPE.

Staffing ratios are also a concern. There should be two nurses and at least five assistants for 60 residents, but with many staffers out sick it is now common to have only two nursing assistants. While the union was able to win hazard pay for nurses, management has not extended that benefit to lower-paid service workers.

Technically the strike is in response to management’s failure to bargain. After three bargaining sessions in March, owner Charles-Edouard Gros stopped responding. Workers have been without a contract since April 1.

Gros is the CEO of the New York-based Center Management Group. After buying the facility and three other nursing homes from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 2014, Gros cut staffing and took on sicker patients.

These measures made St. Monica one of the most profitable nursing homes in the region. In 2018, federal regulators cited Gros’ four facilities 14 times for harming patients.

Betsey Piette contributed to this article.



Harrisburg, Pa., April 20.

On the picket line

By Sue Davis

New sexual harassment suit against McDonald’s

Jamelia Fairley and Ashley Reddick, who worked for several years at McDonald’s in Sanford, Fla., filed a class-action lawsuit against the company alleging a widespread pattern of sexual harassment of 5,000 women workers at the company’s 100 stores throughout the state. In addition to \$500 million in damages, their ultimate goal is to fundamentally change the way McDonald’s handles sexual harassment at all of its 14,000 stores across the country. The suit, which specifically demands “effective worker-centered antiharassment policies and procedures and training” for both lower- and upper-level McDonald’s managers, is backed by Fight For \$15 and the Time’s Up Legal Defense Fund.

Because all McDonald’s stores in the state of Florida are owned by the company, this suit strips the global fast food giant of a legal shield that it has used to stop other suits in the past. Because 9 out of 10 McDonald’s are franchises, the parent company has always claimed it is not responsible for labor violations in those stores.

Even though the Trump Department of Labor restored the anti-worker definition of “joint employers” on Jan. 12 (Workers World, Jan. 23), in Florida the company is solely responsible for working conditions in all its stores.

Both women, who were trying to provide for their families while earning peanuts, were harassed by co-workers and clients alike. When both complained, managers retaliated by cutting their hours, and eventually Reddick was fired. Allynn Umel, organizing director for Fight For \$15, compared McDonald’s failure to protect workers and stop sexual harassment on the job with the lack of safety protections for workers during the pandemic. (In These Times, April 13) To support this struggle, sign the petition at metoomcdonalds.org.

Reform needed for H-2A farm workers visa program

A new report released April 9 by Centro de los Derechos del Migrante (CDM), a migrant workers’ rights organization in the U.S. and Mexico, documents extensive labor abuses in the U.S. H-2A visa program. “Ripe for Reform: Abuse of Agricultural Workers in the H-2A Visa Program” is based on in-depth interviews with 100 workers across Mexico who came to the U.S. on these visas in the last four years. The program was expanded in 2019 for a record 256,667 workers. All surveyed workers experienced at least one serious legal violation, and 94 percent experienced three or more.

The study documents discrimination, sexual harassment, wage theft and health and safety violations by employers with little or no way for workers to report violations and gain redress. The report exposes that the abuse of H-2A workers is not the product of a few “bad

apple” employers. Rather, the program offers workers virtually no bargaining power, so they are vulnerable to abuse. The economically coercive practices inherent in the system make it difficult for workers to protect themselves. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program’s systemic flaws exacerbate workers’ vulnerability to the virus.

Descended from early 20th century U.S. agricultural labor practices, the H-2A program’s shortcomings combine the historical exclusion of farmworkers from federal labor protections, rooted in racist Jim Crow policies, with lax federal oversight and worker coercion. The report argues that “without reform, the number of workers suffering abuse will only get larger, and already anemic government oversight will prove even less effective.” The report recommends legislative and regulatory changes to improve the program, as well as a totally revamped model to prioritize the human rights of H-2A workers and their families and elevate labor standards for all workers. (Workday Minnesota, April 10)

Wis. Carpenters strike against increased mandatory overtime

The 350 members of Carpenters Local 1733 went on strike after their contract at Masonite Architecture in Marshfield, Wis., expired March 31, because the company demanded a mandatory third weekend of overtime a month. The workers “do not want to give up all their weekends to work. Bottom line,” Greg Coenen, Local 1733 business representative, told waow.com on April 8. But when the company finally changed mandatory overtime to three six-hour Saturdays a month, the workers, who make doors, agreed to go back to work on April 13. □

Prison house of oppressed peoples

By Monica Moorehead

Based on a talk given during an April 9 Workers World Party national webinar: “Free them all! COVID-19 and racist mass incarceration.”

Mass incarceration is nothing new to the U.S. This brutal policy of social control of workers—especially the white supremacist oppression of people of color—harkens back to the days following slavery, with the Black Codes in the Deep South before the radical Black Reconstruction era.

Freed Black people, especially men demonized as “dangerous” and “menacing,” were forced into semi-enslaved working conditions to be super-exploited by former white planters.

Michelle Alexander’s groundbreaking 2010 book, “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” challenged the myth of the colorblind society ushered in by the Barack Obama presidency.

That historic election did not change the second-class social status of the Black population, U.S.-born or migrants. In fact, there were more im/migrants deported during the Obama administration than during the Republican-led administration before he became the first Black president.

Here is an excerpted description on page 28 of Alexander’s book: “Most white people believed African Americans lacked the proper motivation to work, prompting the provisional Southern legislatures to adopt the notorious black codes.

“As explained by historian William Cohen, ‘the main purpose of the codes was to control the freedmen, and the question of how to handle convicted black law breakers was very much at the center of the

control issue. Nine southern states adopted vagrancy laws—which essentially made it a criminal offense not to work and were applied selectively to blacks—and eight of those states enacted convict laws allowing for the hiring out of county prisoners to plantation owners and private companies.

“Prisoners were forced to work for little to no pay. One vagrancy act specifically provided that ‘all free negroes and mulattos over the age of eighteen’ must have written proof of a job at the beginning of every year. Those found with no lawful employment were deemed vagrants and convicted. Clearly, the purpose of the black codes in general and the vagrancy laws in particular was to establish another system of forced labor.

“In W.E.B. DuBois’s words: ‘The Codes spoke for themselves. ... No open-minded student can read them without being convinced they meant nothing more nor less than slavery in daily toil.’”

Modern-day prison house of nations

Czarist Russia was once known as the prison house of nations due to the severe subjugation of at least 100 colonized nationalities. These nations won full political and legal rights with the creation of the Soviet Union.

The U.S. has its own version of a prison house of nations. The legacy of the Black Codes is very much alive with 2.3 million people incarcerated. The U.S. still has the largest prison population globally.

In 2016, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that 35 percent of state prisoners were white, 38 percent were Black and 21 percent were Latinx. These are genocidal-like numbers, considering that only 12 percent of the general U.S. population

then was Black. Four years later, these conditions have not changed much.

The incarceration rate for Indigenous people, however, is the worst in the U.S. In 2015, Indigenous people were incarcerated at a rate 38 percent higher than the national average, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Indigenous men were incarcerated at four times the rate of white men, and Indigenous women at six times the rate of white women, according to the Lakota People’s Law Project.

What makes these statistics even more devastating is that according to the 2010 U.S. Census, the number of Indigenous people was estimated to be between 2.5 and 6 million—less than 2 percent of the U.S. population.

Special oppression of women and transgender prisoners

The intersection of race and gender-oppressed people inside prisons receives very little attention. Of the 2.3 million prisoners in the U.S., 200,000 are women who were mainly convicted for nonviolent offenses. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, Black women represent 30 percent of all incarcerated women in the U.S., while they represent 13 percent of the general population of women.

And Latinx women represent 16 percent of incarcerated women, but are 11 percent of all women in the U.S. Imprisoned women are often coerced into having sex with guards—which is, in reality, rape—in exchange for basic necessities like toiletries and feminine hygiene products.

Over the past 40 years, the “female” prison population has increased by an astounding 700 percent. Nearly 30 percent of incarcerated women globally are



Women and oppressed gender prisoners.

in the U.S. (PBS, Nov. 28, 2018)

A February report from NBC News stated that, based on data from 45 states and Washington, D.C., an estimated 5,000 transgender people are being held in state prisons. Only 15 of those states confirmed that they house prisoners according to their gender identities. Being misgendered puts prisoners at a higher risk of being humiliated and sexually assaulted by brutal guards and other prisoners.

A 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey stated that imprisoned transgender people are 10 times as likely to be sexually assaulted by fellow inmates and five times as likely to be sexually assaulted by prison staff.

Similar to society as a whole, women and other gender-oppressed prisoners face systemic violence based on who they are, especially if they are people of color.

The coronavirus has pulled the cover off the scandalous, inhumane conditions that have existed in the prisons for decades. Prisoners cannot escape the threat of testing positive or even dying from the virus, since social distancing isn’t an option in small cells and since prisons provide very poor health care and a bad diet.

The demand to free all prisoners should be a priority, not only because of the coronavirus, but because the archaic capitalist system and its prisons are incapable of fulfilling people’s fundamental needs. □

Pandemic used as proxy to privatize USPS

By Dave Welsh

U.S. Postal Service workers, like health care workers, go to work every day risking exposure to the COVID-19 virus. Over 900 USPS employees have tested positive for COVID-19, and over 40 have died. On Workers’ Memorial Day, April 28, postal workers in Des Moines, Iowa; Portland, Ore.; and Seattle plan vigils to highlight the dangers these frontline workers face.

Trillions of dollars have been announced to combat the pandemic, but the 600,000 vulnerable U.S. postal workers who sort and deliver the mail have been omitted—despite being the public’s favorite government workers, according to a 2019 Gallup Poll.

Postmaster General Megan Brennan told the House Oversight and Reform Committee on April 9 that if the USPS didn’t get relief, it would run out of money by September.

“Trump made it clear he would not approve the so-called stimulus package ... if there was any relief for the U.S. Postal Service,” said Chuck Zlatkin, legislative director of New York Metro Postal Union. “Trump has no idea how many people depend upon the USPS to get medications that keep them alive or keep them from excruciating pain. The answer is that it delivers 1.2 billion prescriptions annually.

“Most people don’t realize the Postal Service receives no taxpayer money. It supports itself on the sale of stamps

and other services. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the economy and with it the income of the Postal Service.” (Consortium News, April 23)

The American Postal Workers Union issued this statement on its website in April: “Postal workers are keeping our country moving and the U.S. economy working for us during this time of crisis—getting prescriptions delivered to people sheltering in place, making e-commerce possible and keeping families connected. It is the emergency distribution system when our country is in crisis.

“But at this unprecedented time, that work is under threat. The Coronavirus shutdown is plummeting postal revenues while increasing costs. The Postal Service could run out of money by the end of the

summer, and the Trump administration is trying to leverage the crisis to sacrifice our public Postal Service at the altar of private profit.

“The loss of the USPS would shatter our response to the Coronavirus pandemic, hit already weakened businesses and ravage communities. Our public Postal Service needs all American leaders—Democrats and Republicans alike—to provide urgent and ongoing financial support from the federal government during this public health and economic crisis.”

Supporters can sign a solidarity statement at apwu.org.

Welsh is a retired letter carrier and member of the National Association of Letter Carriers.

People with disabilities fight to be counted

Continued from page 3

signed her into Hillside Psychiatric Hospital Strauss Cottage, where she was held for three weeks until she would agree to take her meds and comply with an Elder Care plan of seven days a week home care, for which my father would have to pay. My mother was forced to wear an ankle bracelet so she wouldn’t run away. When I visited her, a Jewish friend of hers, a Nazi Holocaust survivor, was being given electric shock treatment for her nightmares about the Nazi concentration camps. My mother died two years later.

In 1990, the Supreme Court ruled that prisoners, who are disproportionately people of color, do not have the same rights as nonprisoners to refuse antipsychotic medications. Many now fear that they will

be involuntarily forced to take unproven medications for COVID-19, which can be a death sentence—especially for those with cardiovascular and respiratory afflictions.

This reporter recognizes that people with and without disabilities have been helped by the treatment of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. But the capitalist system, which puts profits before people, encourages and promotes abuse of patients and discourages nurturing, scientifically sound patient care.

In 1981, when I first identified myself as a person with an emotional disability, I joined with comrade Betsy Gimbel in Workers World Party’s People with Disabilities Caucus at the All Peoples Congress in Detroit. The APC was the grandparent of today’s Peoples Power Assemblies. Betsy had been secretary of the

great civil rights group Disabled in Action and helped lead the fight for wheelchair lifts on New York City buses. Betsy stressed that the most important thing about people with disabilities is our abilities.

I have traveled with scooter-user Mary Kaessinger in her struggles to navigate the 80 percent inaccessible New York subway system, when several people had to lift her and her scooter into a subway car because it is not at the same level as the platform. Sometimes she had to change her route and travel long distances to find a station with an elevator. She often enlightened me with the remark: “Welcome to my world.”

COVID-19 has now “welcomed” the entire world to what disabled people have endured and known in our bones for centuries.

All disabilities can be considered to constitute a rainbow in which the independent struggle of each disabled person for equal access, justice and health care enhances the overall struggles of all peoples with disabilities and of all the world’s workers and oppressed. Just as a pebble at the top of a snowcapped mountain can grow to be a huge boulder, we can create a world where everyone is counted and can contribute according to their abilities and receive according to their needs.

Edward Yudelovich, a Workers World Party People with Disabilities Caucus organizer with emotional and hearing loss disabilities, dedicates this article to the memory of Rosemary Neidenberg, whose encouragement helped fuel his activism for the past half century. □

Press Conference for Mumia Abu-Jamal on his 66th birthday

By Workers World Philadelphia bureau

A global audience was able to view a virtual press conference on April 23 focused on journalist and Pennsylvania political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and why he should be immediately released from prison. Speakers from the U.S. and around the world participated.

The press conference launched four days of virtual events celebrating Abu-Jamal’s 66th birthday, including a teach-in, “U.S. Empire v. Political Prisoners,” on April 24; a virtual dance party, “Mumia Libre,” on April 25; and a 24-hour, “Poetry in Motion,” reading from Abu-Jamal’s writings from noon to noon April 26-27. Links for all events can be found at Mobilization4Mumia.com.

Opening the press conference, Pam Africa, of International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, began the 90-minute YouTube event (youtu.be/m4WzmXD1rIi) with an appreciation of the

A message to my supporters

This slightly edited April 24 commentary by political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal to his supporters on his 66th birthday is available at prisonradio.org/media/audio/mumia.

Brothers, sisters, comrades, friends, people — I salute all of you because, although you think I don’t, I see, and sense, and feel a lot of what you do. And what you do is nothing short of marvelous.

What this movement has become over these many years is nothing short of miraculous. I thank you all. I thank you for the fight that we’ve been a part of. We are not done. We still have work to do because the system is still fighting. Because the system by its very nature has never been fair, has never been human, has never been what it claims to be.

But we, in our fight, in our struggle, we can make change, but only if we fight together, all of us, every one of us. When we fight, we win. So, let us fight together.

Never forget the love I have for each and every one of you for the remarkable work you have done and we have done together. So, let’s get together. Let’s make it happen.

I love you all. On the Move. Long live John Africa. Long live freedom, and down with this rotten-ass system.

From imprisoned nation, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal.

unwavering, almost four-decades-long movement to free Abu-Jamal, imprisoned when he was just 27 years old.

Santiago Alvarez, University of California, Santa Cruz student calling in from San Francisco, recounted hearing the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections’ “sick and wicked” false claim on April 15 that Abu-Jamal was being hospitalized with COVID-19. Within minutes supporters flooded the institution with calls, resulting in a call from Abu-Jamal himself that he was fine. Alvarez said, “While it was a big scare, it was also a reminder of the urgency of how vulnerable Mumia is and how we need to get him out immediately.”

Temple University professor and well-respected Philadelphia journalist Linn Washington Jr. provided an overview of the police, prosecutorial and judicial biases that unjustly convicted Abu-Jamal and sentenced him to death.

Strong show of international solidarity

Michael Schiffman, an investigative author joining from Germany, described how photos taken by freelance photographer Peter Polakoff at the 1981 crime scene as police arrived prove that prosecution witnesses lied about significant aspects of the case against Abu-Jamal. He also described some of the 30 years of solidarity work by German groups in support of Abu-Jamal.

Mireille Fanon-Mendes-France, via video from Paris, congratulated Abu-Jamal on his 66th birthday. The Fanon Foundation director condemned capitalism not only for mass incarceration of Black and Brown and poor people, but also for its inability to prevent the tens of thousands of deaths from the coronavirus. In capitalist countries, those most affected by COVID19 are poor people, migrants and incarcerated people. She ended her talk hoping that “Next year we want to celebrate your birthday with you, freed from the colonial yoke of prisons.”

Dr. Suzanne Ross spoke on the long history of international support for Abu-Jamal “from Germany, France, Denmark, South Africa, Brazil and many other countries.”

Sharon Cabusao-Silva, from the Organization of Families of Political Prisoners in the Philippines and a longtime member of Gabriela Women’s Alliance,



Philippines, called in to say: “We need to prioritize the release of political prisoners, especially the sick, elderly and pregnant women. ... We have a common struggle — here in the Philippines and with our friends there in the U.S. — to have our political prisoners freed at this time of the epidemic.”

Community activists demand: ‘Free Mumia’

Janine Africa spoke on the movement that brought her and six other MOVE 9 members home after four decades in prison. “Never give up. We were told for over 40 years that we would never get out. But we sit here today as proof of the power of the people.”

Razakhan Shaheed, from Nation Time, spoke about supporting jail-house lawyers like Abu-Jamal who work to get other prisoners out. Gregory Muhammad, Nation of Islam student research coordinator, described meeting Abu-Jamal in the solitary confinement unit (B Block) at State Correctional Institution-Huntington in 1982. He also described the work that The Nation of Islam has done inside and outside of prisons to free incarcerated people, including political prisoners.

Blak Rapp Madusa, international hip-hop “activist” out of Pennsylvania, described working to bail out 97 people from jail, including nine Black mothers and caregivers, and trying to free vulnerable populations, including mothers and caregivers, from the dangers of COVID-19. Dignity Act Now Philly is also providing resources — access to shelter, food, clothing and testing for COVID-19 — after people are released.

Charles Barron, New York State Assemblyman, gave an account of his own battle with COVID-19 and ended with a fiery call to revolution: “The real problem is not just that we have bad diets and need to eat better, or that we need to exercise more—we have to fight with every breath to dismantle and destroy this predatory capitalist system!”

Organizer Sophia Williams, from the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, chaired the event.

Co-sponsors of the weekend of activities included International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal; Mobilization4Mumia; the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home; Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC); Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition, Bay Area; Mobilization to Free Mumia (Bay Area); and Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal. □

A Delaware prisoner’s plea for PPE

This letter is from a prisoner at James T. Vaughn Correctional Center in New Castle County, Delaware.

Two prisoners have died from COVID-19 in the Vaughn facility, and a combined 30 more have tested positive for the virus there and at a neighboring Sussex Community Corrections Center. On April 25, the administration finally announced that they would distribute masks to the 2,100 people housed at both facilities — nearly a full month since the first confirmed cases. (tinyurl.com/ybbagh8r)

In 2017, prisoners led an uprising at Vaughn. According to Isaiah McCoy, a former inmate there, the prisoners had exhausted all nonviolent means to protest the “inhumane” conditions at the facility. (tinyurl.com/ycuh46cc)

To: D.O.C. Warden and Commissioner et al.:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic virus,

population. So we can minimize and/or prevent the spread of the virus.

Here in [redacted] building [minimum security] where I am housed, no masks exist, no hand sanitizers, other than our own soap which is not antibacterial. A small amount of bleach is given to the tier workers to wipe the doorknobs off, but that’s it. Not enough to clean the walls, the floor, or the bathrooms.

This is a serious matter and needs to be addressed now before it gets out of control. Otherwise the quarantine area will overflow with countless patients or victims of the deadly virus.

This is a serious medical issue and social distancing in a prison setting is difficult to maintain, particularly for those in dormitories and double cells. So for others to get sick is inevitable. It’s important for you to issue a call for masks, sanitizing material, etc., for all buildings!

[name hidden]
April 11, 2020
James T. Vaughn Correctional Center

Is Workers World essential to you? Then invest in it now!

COVID-19 has exposed everything wrong with capitalism:

- No national planning for universal free, quality health care.
- No provisions to support families from cradle to grave.
- No guaranteed high standard of living for all people.
- Institutionalized racism, sexism, LGBTQ2+ bigotry.
- Class system rigged in favor of profits for the 1%.
- Billions for the Pentagon, cutbacks for people’s welfare, including food and housing.

Workers World provides the theoretical and organizational ammunition needed to crush this inhumane system and create one that supports the working class and all oppressed people — revolutionary socialism. If the need for that becomes clearer every day during this devastating pandemic — where

everyone is being called upon to show solidarity and form a united front — then please consider putting your money where it will really help achieve that goal.

We established the Workers World Supporter Program 43 years ago so readers could help promote working-class truth needed for revolutionary change. Members receive a year’s subscription to WW, a monthly letter about timely issues and five free subscriptions to give others for a donation of \$75, \$100, \$300 or much more if you can. If you prefer, donate monthly, just so it adds up to a minimum of \$75 a year.

Write checks to Workers World and mail them, with your name and address, to 147 W. 24th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10011. Or donate online at workers.org/donate/. It’s easy to set up monthly deductions. We are grateful for your help in building Workers World — for today and for a socialist future! □

PA prisoners tortured for protesting racist policies

By Ted Kelly

Eric McGill was locked up in Lebanon County Correctional Facility in Lebanon, Pa., on Jan. 19, 2019. For 15 months now he has been held there, not because he has been convicted of a crime, but because he cannot afford the preposterous \$1 million bail the judge set.

And during his entire pre-trial incarceration, McGill, a 27-year-old Black man, has been held in solitary confinement (SHU) because he refuses to cut off his dreadlocks.

Lebanon County prison authorities deny that he is being held in solitary confinement, which is regarded as torture by the United Nations. They claim he is simply placed in a “secure housing unit” that is no different from the general population — despite the fact that they specifically placed him in the SHU to punish him for refusing to submit to the racist demand that he get rid of his “locs,” a hair-style worn by people of African and Indigenous nations across the world.

Matthew Feldman of the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project told Workers World that those held in Lebanon County SHU are let outside their cells for a maximum of one hour a day, between midnight and 2 a.m. That’s also the only time McGill is allowed to use the phone.

Five days a week, McGill gets one hour outside in the dead of night. On the other two days, he gets about five minutes outside. As long as it’s not raining or snowing, prisoners get the option of outdoor recreation or rec time for an hour. If they choose not to take it, they get 20 minutes of indoor time. If outdoor rec is cancelled completely, they get a full hour of indoor rec.

They’re allowed one half-hour visit per week. No books or photographs from the outside are permitted.

McGill has had a cellmate for most of the 15 months.

They take all meals in their cell. Their toilet has no lid or cover, and if you flush the toilet twice within five minutes, it locks for an hour. The cell lights are kept on almost all day, sometimes 24 hours, with constant illumination even when prisoners are trying to sleep.

These are the conditions that Lebanon County authorities say are not “punishment” and do not constitute solitary confinement. The prison’s own handbook says typical punishment for engaging in a physical fight is 30 to 120 days in solitary.

These were the conditions McGill and others in the SHU faced even before the pandemic caused widespread death row-style lockdowns in prisons across the country.

Even in the racist bourgeois legal system, someone like McGill is supposed to be presumed innocent at this point, having not been convicted of a crime. “It is a legal fiction that people detained pretrial can’t be punished. I don’t know how you can claim what is happening to him isn’t punishment,” said Feldman.

Dreadlocks have a cultural and religiously significant meaning for the

Rastafari movement to which McGill belongs. It is clear that he is being tortured for his religious and cultural beliefs.

McGill was told by multiple staff, including in writing, that the reason he is in solitary is because he refuses to cut his hair. Feldman says at least two other Black men are now being held in solitary because they too refuse to cut their dreads.

Violation of civil rights

Eric McGill wrote to the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, a nonprofit legal aid organization that represents people incarcerated in any institution — the only statewide legal aid organization doing this kind of work.

The PILP provides free legal services for civil matters, mostly civil rights violations. Two other

men have since filed their own Pro Se lawsuits and are being represented by PILP.

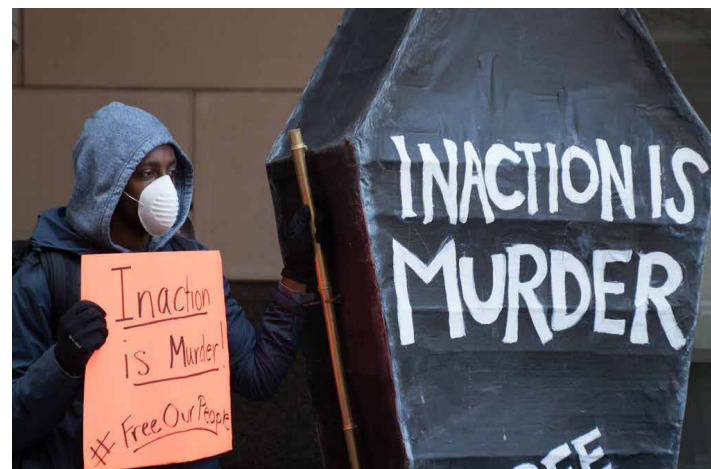
These men are suing on the grounds that their detention is a violation of a federal law, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), which was supposed to ensure religious liberty rights to incarcerated people and to prevent jails and prisons from imposing arbitrary burdens on people.

They claim it is also a violation of the 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, that defines national citizenship and forbids states to restrict the basic rights of citizens or other people.

Even Pennsylvania state prisoners and those in federal detention are allowed dreadlocks. Lebanon County claims that contraband could be hidden in them and that “locs” are “unsanitary.” Long straight or curly hair is accepted, as long as it’s tied back.

Criminalizing wearing dreadlocks is a symptom of the racist, genocidal nature of mass incarceration. To destroy the ability of a person to practice their religious and cultural beliefs is itself a form of genocide.

The district judge is currently slow-walking this case. Workers World demands the immediate release of Eric McGill and the other two claimants. During the pandemic current crisis, we must fight especially hard to demand: Tear Down the Walls! Free Them All! □



WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

Car caravan demonstrators make a stop outside Criminal Justice Center in Philadelphia demanding release of prisoners, April 15.

On Mumia's birthday

Global event honors political prisoners

Continued from page 1

whose daughter is serving a life sentence in New York, said, “They have reduced [the prisoners] to digging their graves, producing coffins, and making hand sanitizer that they cannot even use.” RAPP organizer and former political prisoner Laura Whitehorn added, “We have to work to save the lives of aging prisoners and political prisoners during this virus.” RAPP, along with a broad coalition of groups, is conducting a campaign to free them all.

There was a sense of great urgency but also strong optimism throughout the program. Several former political prisoners recognized and thanked Abu-Jamal for his early advocacy about their cases through his writing and radio podcasts. Everyone agreed that now was the moment to fight for Mumia’s freedom and for all of the long-held political prisoners.

Recently released MOVE 9 member Janet Africa said, “They told us we wasn’t getting out of jail, ever. We got out after 41 years. They’re saying Mumia is not getting out of jail. Use the example of MOVE. We got out because of the people, because of the support that people have behind them and have behind where we are now. We’re saying don’t stop that pressure. Don’t stop forcing these people to answer for everything they do.” Other MOVE family

participants in the program included Mike Africa Jr. and Pam Africa.

Former political prisoner Sekou Odinga called on all groups supporting political prisoners to unite the power of the people behind one banner “Demanding the release of all political prisoners.”

Indian author and activist Vijay Prashad addressed the impact of COVID-19 in creating a “great lockdown, leaving 3 billion workers, 81 percent of the world’s population, without enough work to survive ... while prisons are turned into death camps.” Prashad contrasted the failure of Trump and other bourgeois leaders who demonstrate “mass incompetence” with socialist leaders who have responded to COVID-19 with science and humanity. “A powerful line has been drawn between the bourgeoisie and socialists.”

Freedom for Palestinian prisoners

Nancy Mansour, founder of Existence in Resistance, spoke on the cruelty in Israeli prisons before and during the pandemic. She read a letter to Mumia from a family friend, who has been imprisoned by Israeli occupiers for 30 years: “We as Palestinian prisoners, share with you and all the political prisoners the same goals and aspirations which are freedom and our essential right to resist racism and oppression that we face as Indigenous

people in Palestine and as oppressed people all over the world.”

Author and activist Susan Abulhawa, founder of Playgrounds for Palestine, touched on the similarities between the prison systems in the U.S. and Israel. “In addition to the well-known cooperation and training between U.S. police and Israeli occupation military forces, Israel through its lobbies in the U.S. helps to push through domestic legislation that helps to fill our prisons and subvert civil rights here. ... Whether in Palestine or the U.S., it’s all part of the same imperial white supremacist fabric.”

Teresa Gutierrez, national coordinator of FIRE (Fight for Im/migrants and Refugees Everywhere) began with a special shout-out to all health care workers. She talked about the history of the im/migrant rights movement and the influence of the Black Liberation movement. Gutierrez said that with Mumia’s writings on the migrant struggle and U.S. imperialism in Latin America, it was very easy for migrants to understand the connections between his case and the broader struggle. What both the migrant struggle and the struggle of political prisoners have in common is “the tenacity and the inspiration that these sisters and brothers and family are giving us every single day.”

Marc Lamont Hill, author and an

activist, eloquently added, “Anyone who dares speak out against this empire ends up in a cage. ... So we call for the release of all political prisoners right now, because it is the right thing to do. And we also make a bolder call, a more radical call, and that is the abolition of prison itself. We must move into a moment that no longer uses the prison as the resolution to our social contradictions. The prison must no longer be a resolution to harm that is done.”

The program also included worker activists Chris Smalls, fired for demanding personal protective equipment at Amazon, 1199SEIU vice president Estela Vasquez; Fred Hampton, Jr., son of assassinated Black Panther member Fred Hampton; Benjamin Ramos Rasado with Pro Libertad; former prisoner Sekou Odinga; and Angela Davis.

The final speaker was Kevin Rashid Johnson, a political prisoner incarcerated in Virginia and a brilliant analyst. Johnson said, “We must up the ante in the fight against the injustice of mass incarceration. We must also develop new alliances and methods of struggle.” He ended by calling upon everyone to build a unified movement to free the political prisoners.

Links to the full program, as well as the other events celebrating Abu-Jamal’s 66th birthday, can be found on Mobilization4Mumia.com. □

COVID-19 and basic facts of Marxist economics

By Deirdre Griswold

The stock market crashed in March but partly recovered after the Federal Reserve Bank lowered the interest rate for borrowing. Then it crashed again. Companies are going bankrupt. The price of oil has dropped to its lowest level in decades. All are signs of drastically decreased economic activity right now.

But what does that really mean? It isn't just that people aren't buying as much stuff when they're forced to stay home in this pandemic. Much more importantly, it means that far fewer workers are producing new value.

And that's the key to what is happening to the capitalist economy now. When workers aren't working, no new value is being created. The way the capitalist markets work, however, is that they anticipate more and more growth as workers go to work every day and create new value while being exploited by the bosses. When that's not happening, there's a big crisis.

Marxist economics is crucial to understanding what is behind the economic catastrophe accompanying the COVID-19 crisis. So here's a very brief summary of some of the basics of Marxism.

Everything that is exchanged (usually for money), which we can't just get

for free, like plucking a dandelion, has to have two kinds of value. One is use value. The other is exchange value.

Use value vs. exchange value

The water we drink is probably one of the most valuable things we consume every day. Without it we would die. So the use value of water is enormous.

But it is also very cheap, meaning it has a very low exchange value. As vital as water is for life, it will never cost as much as champagne, for example — which is nice, but we can survive without it!

So why is water cheap? In simplified terms, its price is low in relation to other things we buy (called commodities) because little labor is involved in making it available. That's why it has a low exchange value.

Way back when the reservoirs in this country were first built, along with the aqueducts leading from them, quite a bit of labor went into providing water. But now oceans of water are flowing to cities and towns in many sections of the country with little human labor expended in the process. So water, in most areas, is a minor expense.

What's not so cheap, of course, are the bottles of specialty waters from Fiji or some other distant source that are sold in stores all over. This water costs

money, not because it might be better, but because of the labor it takes to locate sources, transport the water, bottle and market it.

You can probably think of lots of other commodities that have a high use value but a low exchange value. Flour, for example, the main ingredient in bread — called the staff of life. Pencils. Writing paper.

Other commodities may have limited use value, like binoculars you keep in your closet and barely use, but a much higher exchange value. They're very costly compared to water.

So what is exchange value and how is it measured?

Human labor is the key

Exchange value is how much a commodity costs in relation to other commodities. And that is the key to measuring it: The exchange value of a commodity comes from how much human labor is incorporated into it. Let's say it again: It is human labor — workers working — that creates all exchange value.

This is basic to Marxism, but is either ignored or downplayed by most bourgeois economists.

The more labor it takes to produce something, the more exchange value it will have. Exchange value isn't the only factor determining price, of course. Prices can fluctuate according to supply and demand. But they fluctuate around a basic ingredient: how much labor it took to produce the commodity. No matter

how much the market may be glutted with cars, for example, even an old, battered car will never sell for the same price as a loaf of bread.

Unemployment and the economic crisis

So, to come back to the current and growing economic crisis, Fortune magazine wrote on April 16: "Another 5.2 million Americans filed initial unemployment claims in the week ending April 11. That brings the total unemployment claims over the past four weeks to 22 million." As of April 24, that figure has risen to 26 million.

These millions of workers have either lost their jobs or are housebound because of the virus — and therefore are not creating new value.

It's the obvious explanation for the growing crisis of the economy — but not one you're likely to read about in the newspapers or hear about on radio and television. The corporate media will report on unemployment as the result of the economic crisis, not the cause. But that is putting the cart before the horse.

To repeat, human labor — workers working — is the creator of all exchange value.

And right now, tens of millions of workers are quarantined or staying home under shelter-in-place orders. They are "essential workers" needed for the creation of new values, but are unable to do their jobs.

As a result, the capitalist economy is going into crisis mode. □

It is human labor — workers working — that creates all exchange value.

Longterm impact of historic oil price plunge

By Betsey Piette

For the first time in history, on April 20 the price of U.S. oil fell to minus \$38 per barrel. This was an almost \$100 drop per barrel from January 2020 when oil was \$60 per barrel.

On April 21, oil prices fell even further, sinking U.S. stocks to their worst loss since April 1. Treasury yields also fell, further increasing market concerns. The negative price drop impacts futures contracts on oil due to be delivered in May. "Treasury yield" is the interest percentage of return on investment in the U.S. government's debt obligation. "Futures contracts" refers to the price of oil delivered on a later date.

The glut, particularly in crude oil, is so serious that traders are finding themselves with oil reserves, no place to put them, and few buyers. Adding to the expense, after oil has been pumped from the ground, it needs to be stored in anticipation of future sales. Storage facilities could hit maximum capacity within three weeks. The alternative, shutting down oil production, risks damaging expensive drilling equipment.

What is behind oil's drastic drop in price, how long will that last, and what does this historic moment reveal about capitalist overproduction?

Giving oil away?

With very few people driving or flying, and with factories shut down, it is anticipated that the global demand for oil will fall to levels last seen in the mid-1990s. Currently the anticipated price of U.S. oil to be delivered in June and July fell to \$11.57 per barrel. After President Trump made new war

threats against Iran on April 22, the futures price jumped to \$13.78.

But if the price actually stays negative, oil producers will be faced with the dilemma of either giving oil away or paying someone to take it.

In a socialist world, producers would distribute oil to countries most in need. In 2005, for example, when IMF-debt-ridden Argentina faced a fuel shortage, socialist-leaning, oil-producing Venezuela — facing its own shortage of milk and dairy products — arranged a commodity exchange.

The drop in oil prices should mean that people in the U.S. and other capitalist countries could pay less to heat their homes or fill up their cars. But do not expect anything like that to happen under profit-driven capitalism.

With an uncertain future for global production in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, this transfer of wealth from oil-producing countries to oil-consuming countries could be an economic and political factor for some time to come.

Why the drop in oil price?

Much of the blame for this crisis has been placed on the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the impact of overproduction of natural gas and oil from hydraulic fracturing (fracking)



was felt long before the pandemic hit. Even before the coronavirus struck, a global oil glut, due to overproduction, was impacting investment markets.

In early March, OPEC and Russia agreed to lower the oil price per barrel. Both entities enjoy low production costs that make this possible. OPEC announced it would also reduce production. OPEC member Saudi Arabia saw a possible advantage as lower prices were likely to hurt shale oil production in the U.S., now a major oil-export competitor.

Russia, already hard hit by U.S. sanctions, announced it would keep production at current levels because it needs the revenue. With production impacted by U.S. sanctions, Russia had no incentive to carry the burden of U.S. energy debt.

Recently over 12 of the top oil-producing countries have agreed to limit production to between 10 million to 15 million barrels per day, beginning in May. Yet even that was not enough to stop the historic price plunge.

'Sea change in economic outlook'

Much of the oil and natural gas produced in the U.S. depends on fracking shale formations. The U.S. production cost per barrel is considerably higher than in the major oil- and gas-producing competitors. For well over a decade U.S. shale oil and gas relied on two factors — steady investments from oil company giants,

banks and investment firms, and a growing global market demand for U.S. oil and gas. The U.S. also uses sanctions against major oil exporters like Venezuela, Iran and Russia to boost its market advantage.

From inception, fracking has relied on deep-pocket investors willing to bet on future sales. But to cover the cost of investments from shale gas and oil production required a return of at least \$48 per barrel. By contrast, current oil production costs in Saudi Arabia are around \$2.80 a barrel.

In April, U.S. energy giant Halliburton, a major shale oil producer, reported a \$1.1 billion first quarter 2020 loss. It has drastically reduced production costs, laid off hundreds and furloughed thousands of workers. It expects a further decline in revenue and profitability for the rest of 2020.

Chris Rupkey, chief financial economist at MUFG Union Bank, has declared: "The oil market is trading as if we're in a new Great Depression and demand is not going to come back for not months, but years. There has been a sea change in the economic outlook." (New York Post, April 20)

However, some oil-consuming countries may benefit from this oil price crisis. For decades, oil importers have paid exporters \$60 to \$70 per barrel or more. Currently, because of the lack of demand, oil prices have been \$27 to \$30 per barrel.

So even though oil usage has dropped recently in China and India due to COVID-19 quarantine restrictions, the oil glut price crisis could mean billions in annual savings for India and China.

With an uncertain future for global production in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, this transfer of wealth from oil-producing countries to oil-consuming countries could be an economic and political factor for some time to come. □

COVID-19 devastates Indigenous communities

By Eno Flurry

This article is written in the colonized lands of the Comanche, as well as the Tonkawa Nations — now the state of Texas. Workers World supports the right to self-determination of, and promotes full solidarity with, Indigenous struggles.

While Black and Latinx households are twice as likely as white households to lack indoor plumbing, Indigenous households are 19 times more likely than white people to not have indoor plumbing or access to clean water at their residence, especially in the Four Corners of the Southwest. (tinyurl.com/yao3b9jh) For the Diné or Navajo Nation which covers parts of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Arizona, much of the groundwater has been contaminated by 521 abandoned uranium mines and is undrinkable. For many in the Navajo Nation, it is the closest, most available water and is given to the animals to drink — the same animals that they will one day eat. (tinyurl.com/reqy657)

Just this alone — the lack of access to clean water on a daily basis — is enough to exacerbate other issues, such as illnesses including cancer. Four Indigenous researchers found in a new study that the rate of COVID-19 cases per 1,000 people on a reservation is more than four times higher than in the United States as a whole. (Indian Country Today, April 25) And many Diné homes also lack electricity.

While the Native population only comprises 6 percent of the total population of New Mexico, Gov. Michelle Grisham reported April 12 that 25 percent of the state’s COVID-19 cases were Indigenous people, including the Diné and several Puebloan nations. While some of the discrepancy is due to higher rates of testing by the Diné /Navajo Nation compared to that in neighboring states, that alone cannot explain the fact that the rate of infection on the Navajo reservation is 19 times that in the state of Arizona. As of April 26, the number of cases in the Navajo Nation had reached 1,716, with 59 deaths. (Navajo Times, April 27)

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer self-isolated after exposure to a COVID-19-positive health care worker in the course of their work. They initiated a 57-hour curfew over Easter weekend, which excluded essential workers and has



PHOTO: DESERET NEWS

From Indian Country Today: “My feet hurt,’ says Denise Begaye, an X-ray technician with the Monument Valley Health Center, as she sits on a curb and takes a break from COVID-19 testing outside of the center in Oljato-Monument Valley, San Juan County on Thursday, April 16, 2020.”

been extended for every weekend until early May.

Pine Ridge Reservation is another severe case where they have closed their borders to tourists and other non-members of that Native nation driving through it. This is in South Dakota where Gov. Kristi Noem still refuses to issue a shutdown order, despite the huge COVID breakout at the Sioux Falls, S.D., Smithfield pork factory.

Nick Estes, Ph.D., a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, noted that “COVID-19 is taking its toll on Indian Country — not because Indigenous people are more susceptible to the virus for cultural reasons (as reported by some media outlets), but because of a chronic lack of underfunding of our healthcare services and, you know, genocidal colonialism.” This is nothing more than a modern version of colonial white supremacy.

Diné molecular biologist Wilfred Denetclaw said possible reasons for the high COVID death rate in the Navajo Nation include the need for many people to travel to hot spots such as Albuquerque “to buy what they need, and then they bring the virus back.”

Circumpolar Inuit communities in Alaska, who are dealing with unsafe drinking water and lack of sewage infrastructure, face a threat of COVID-19

infections similar to that of the Navajo Nation. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation estimates that more than 3,300 rural homes occupied year-round do not have potable water. All this is due to the ongoing neglect of Indigenous communities and their health and safety by the federal government.

Another issue faced by Indigenous Nations is a housing crisis. While we are told to practice social distancing by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention and other agencies, in many Native communities this is simply an impossible task. A report from Wyoming Public Radio about the Wind River Reservation shows overcrowded, multigenerational households, as many share homes with their relatives, just as many other poor families do.

An additional crisis affecting some of the Native reservations is the closure of one of the few sources of tribal income — casinos. A Harvard research team has estimated that upwards of nearly \$50 billion in annual wages and benefits have been lost due to closures of gaming and nongaming enterprises that many reservations rely on for income to meet their needs.

This mass layoff of Native workers is leading to loss of insurance coverage, where that exists, in addition to the vastly underfunded Indian Health Service, and the growth of debt in areas in and outside of the reservations. These casino-generated funds are used for what would normally be funded by state or local governments: law enforcement, public safety, social services and educational support. So let’s break down what the tribal governments stand to lose: According to the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, \$127 billion in national output; 1.1 million jobs, with 915,000 workers who are non-Native, while 211,000 are Native; \$49.5 billion in worker income; \$12.5 billion in Tribal government revenue; \$9.4 billion in state and local tax revenue; and \$15.9 billion in federal tax revenue.

These numbers represent the razor’s edge on which Native nations in the occupied U.S. are constantly balancing in their struggle against the neglect and violence of the U.S. government.

And all this reminds us of the importance of the struggles for clean water, such as the recent struggle at Standing Rock against the Dakota Access Pipeline and the struggle in Flint, Mich. How can you have good health care if you do not have clean water? □

U.S. uses ‘drug’ lies to menace Venezuela

By Raymond Tyler

During a time when thousands are dying every day in the United States of COVID-19 and resources are dwindling, the United States has found the resources and money to plant “anti-drug” Navy ships off the Venezuelan coast and threaten that country’s leaders with arrest. The Pentagon ordered Navy ships there to display power during yet another attempt to get U.S.-appointed leader, Juan Guaidó, to replace President Nicolás Maduro in office. To top that off, the U.S. put a \$15 million bounty on Maduro.

U.S. accusations that Venezuelan

leaders are involved in drug trafficking come with no evidence and are blatant hypocrisy.

Colombia, a subservient ally of the United States and a neighboring country of Venezuela, produces and ships the largest supply of cocaine around the world. (tinyurl.com/wzkec6g) The amount of drugs allegedly shipped in the accusation of Venezuelan drug trafficking doesn’t come close to that number.

COVID-19 took the mask off the United States for-profit health model, exposing a grotesque reality: The U.S. government cares more about supremacy and profit than protecting its people. Despite being

the wealthiest nation in history, the U.S. has the highest confirmed death toll from COVID-19.

The remarkably high death toll arises from inherent flaws and contradictions in the capitalist system. The COVID-19 battle plays second fiddle to the protection of capital.

The United States may be the wealthiest country in history, but the wealth that it extracts from U.S. workers is only a portion of that wealth. Much of the wealth and the corporate profits come through the extraction of resources and labor from other parts of the world.

The extraction of these resources is nonconsensual. Large portions of Latin America, Africa, Asia and even Europe have U.S. troops present or nearby; and they have to bow to U.S. economic power because of military and economic coercion. Nations that don’t submit to the financial model and the dominance of the U.S. dollar are cut off from the world economy and trade via U.S. sanctions and attempted military coups.

Countries under U.S. attack

Countries that are working to build socialism and separate themselves from the international capitalist system are under constant attack. Sanctions prevent these countries from getting medical supplies and equipment as well as other necessities, and they sabotage the countries’ economic growth and manufacture discontent. The current attack is focused against Venezuela.

Right now, when the United States can’t provide adequate health care for its population, Washington gave Guaidó \$80 million in “Liberation Funds” that are supposed to be distributed to Venezuelan health care workers. However, 17 percent of that money is to go to something called “the defense and strengthening of the national legislative power and the social protection of

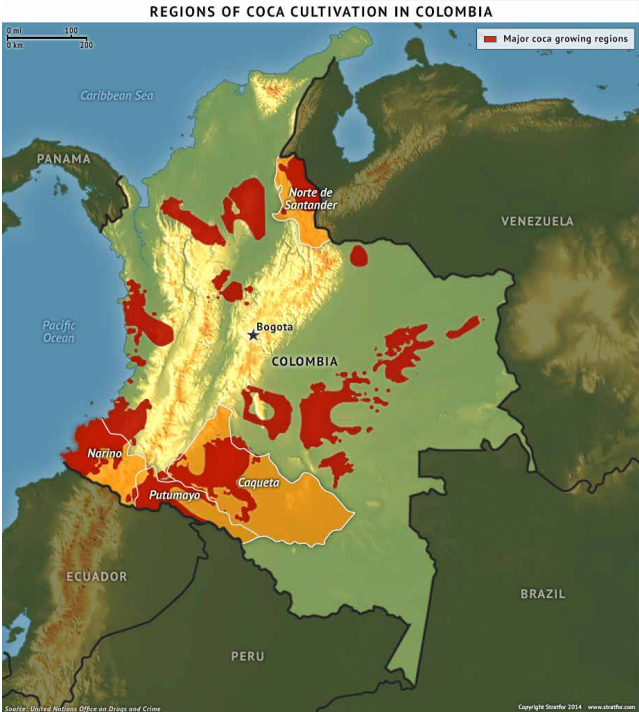
its members” — a program that seeks to overthrow the democratically elected government of Venezuela.

The United States has seized frozen assets of Venezuela and given them to Juan Guaidó. (venezuelanalysis.com, April 23) Despite the money pumped into the U.S.-Guaidó-attempted coup starting in January 2019, the majority of Venezuela’s population still supports Maduro and the Bolivarian Revolution.

These steps—the anti-drug Navy ships, the seizure of Venezuela’s frozen assets and the program to give some of that money to health care workers via Guaidó—are all attempts by Washington to seize Venezuela’s oil deposits. Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution had used the money from oil profits to build thousands of hospitals and schools and uplift the overall living standards of working and poor people.

Acquiring Venezuelan oil would be a victory for U.S. big business.

For revolutionary Venezuela’s transgressions against U.S. capitalism, the country has been sanctioned, attacked and threatened with invasion. Special interest think tanks and media have falsely claimed that Venezuela doesn’t have “proper elections.” In reality, the only problem with Venezuela’s election is the people’s choice goes against U.S. interests. □



May Day = Worker Power

Continued from page 1

across the United States walked off their jobs demanding an eight-hour day. In that era, a “normal” workday could be 10 or even 12 hours long, with no overtime pay. Within days of these walkouts, police killed several workers on strike at the McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago. That led to a huge protest rally in Haymarket Square on May 4. In the middle of the rally, a bomb was thrown into the crowd, killing several workers and police. Police then broke up the rally and arrested many of the workers. It was clearly a frameup. Why would these workers bomb their own rally? One of those arrested for the bombing and later hanged, August Spies, was a rally speaker who was actually sitting on the platform at the time the bomb was thrown. Nevertheless, eight workers were convicted of the crime and five sentenced

to death: August Spies, George Engel, Adolph Fisher, Albert Parsons and Louis Lingg. Four were hanged on Nov. 11, 1887; Lingg died in jail the night before. Mass pressure finally won the exoneration of the other three. These arrests and executions took place during a time of heavy repression against immigrants. Four of the five sentenced to death had come from Germany. Politically, the eight were anarchists. This terrible injustice perpetrated against the rising labor movement in the U.S. led activists at a meeting in 1889, when there were widespread socialist movements around the world, to designate May 1 as International Workers’ Day. That outraged the ruling class in this country. So in place of May Day, the U.S. government in 1894 set up Labor Day as a holiday in September. While people of course enjoy getting this paid day off, Labor Day has none of the history of

working-class struggle that is incorporated in May Day. May Day was reignited in the U.S. 120 years later in 2006, when millions of immigrants, the vast majority from Latin America, carried out a countrywide general strike. They were protesting the racist, anti-immigrant Sensenbrenner bill that intensified anti-immigrant repression, including the expulsion of between 2 and 3 million immigrants during the subsequent Barack Obama administration. Of course, no holiday can make up for the crimes committed against workers every day of the year. Now, in the midst of the coronavirus epidemic, when so many millions are unable to work as the economy shuts down, it is imperative to demand that every person receive financial support from the government, along with health care, food, housing and more, sufficient to meet their needs. We can’t gather in huge demonstrations

to broadcast these demands. But we can, for example, use every modern tool of communication to demand that Immigration and Customs Enforcement and migrant detention centers be shut down now—and stay closed beyond the pandemic. Activists in many cities are protesting from their cars around a range of key working-class issues, including health and safety in the context of COVID-19. Others are holding “virtual” protests. Solidarity with prisoners and migrants, among the most oppressed and exploited sectors of the working class, is a strong theme. Show your solidarity for workers’ struggles on International Workers’ Day. Join a caravan or action near you or virtually join with others to plan for working-class struggle. Visit peoplespowerassemblies.org to find an action near you. To register for Workers World Party’s Workers Assembly webinar: tinyurl.com/y9nccq56. □

The jobless crisis and im/migrants

By Kathy Durkin

It’s not just COVID-19 that’s racing like wildfire across the U.S. It’s unemployment. The number of newly jobless workers has climbed to an astounding 26 million. That is due to coronavirus-related layoffs or furloughs caused by business closures or contractions. Added to the number of already unemployed people, the total is 33 million, the highest number since 1934 during the Great Depression. That means one in five workers is out of work! Job losses have particularly impacted low-income, service sector, young, disabled, immigrant and women workers. African-American and Latinx workers are being disproportionately hard hit. Already existing inequities and oppression have intensified. Some 26 million claims for unemployment benefits have been filed since March 15. On March 27, Congress enacted the CARES Act, a \$2.2 trillion coronavirus stimulus package. It allocated a one-time \$1,200 “stimulus” check for most adults, with \$500 more per child. A weekly federal payment of \$600 was added to state unemployment benefits through July 31, and “gig” workers were deemed eligible. The financial benefits are not, however, quickly getting to workers who desperately need them. Lines at food banks are growing. Many people who need stimulus funds the most are still waiting for them. Stumbling blocks throughout the process are preventing millions from applying for or getting unemployment checks. By design, many states have made it difficult for the jobless to get benefits.

Benefits delayed or denied!

Only 14.6 percent of eligible New York workers have successfully filed for benefits; the figure is 23.6 percent in Michigan and 17 percent in Florida. Only 10 states have approved benefits for previously ineligible gig workers, even though the stimulus bill provided for them. Glitches and denials are rampant. (New York Times, April 25) Once again, the people of Puerto Rico, whom the Trump administration denied necessary aid after hurricanes ravaged the islands — and who pay taxes — are owed these payments by Washington. Yet, San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz has reported that as of April 25 no one there has received a stimulus payment, while 130,000 applications for unemployment benefits and some for food stamps have gone unanswered. The stimulus bill was a bonanza for corporations, which got \$500 billion, but millions of hardworking undocumented workers got nothing. These indispensable workers from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and elsewhere pay taxes. They are working in homes, grocery stores, factories, farms and hospitals during this pandemic. Yet, they are barred from obtaining unemployment benefits, stimulus checks, food stamps and government health coverage, including for coronavirus testing and treatment. The United Farm Workers explains: “\$9.5 billion [of the stimulus package] is going to the agricultural sector, [but] it’s not clear if any of those funds will support



Farm worker wearing bandana over face

farmworkers taking risks [laboring in the fields] to put food on our tables. At least 50 percent are undocumented, so they won’t get the relief payments. Even their citizen children are left out. They are told they are ‘essential’ workers, but are not receiving ‘essential’ benefits.” They are now saddled with costly child care, grocery and transportation expenses. The union stresses the government should pay them hazard pay! (ufw.org, March 30)

Left out of New Deal labor laws

Farmworkers and domestic workers have historically been excluded from basic legal protections. The New Deal’s National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which recognized unionization and basic labor rights excluded agricultural and domestic workers, many of them African

American and Latinx. Jim Crow policies prevailed, promoted by racist Southern politicians. Three years later, farmworkers and domestic workers were excluded from the Fair Labor Standard Act’s minimum wage and overtime pay provisions. States enacted similar policies. Of the 3 million domestic workers, 90 percent are women, overwhelmingly Black, Latinx and im/migrants. Due to entrenched reactionary federal and state governmental policies, these workers have endured low pay, miserable working conditions without benefits, sexual assaults and bigotry. Laws barring workplace racist discrimination and sexual harassment do not cover them. Due to struggle and advocacy, nine states and Seattle enacted a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights that prohibits racial discrimination and sexual misconduct on the job. But 41 states do not guarantee workplace civil rights protections. A national Domestic Bill of Rights Act has been submitted to Congress, backed by the National Domestic Workers Alliance. The CARES Act grants domestic workers both unemployment and stimulus checks, provided they have Social Security numbers and file income tax returns. However, those who are undocumented, though laid off due to the pandemic, are ineligible for CARES benefits, severance, sick pay and health coverage. They have no legal protections. A lawsuit has been filed against the xenophobic Trump administration for denying stimulus payments to the 1.2 million people married to taxpaying undocumented immigrants. Fund all workers’ needs, not billionaires! □

Lenin: Thinker and fighter

April 22, 2020, marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Vladimir Lenin, leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution. This successful socialist revolution was led by the Bolshevik Party, which Lenin had built during the previous 14 years. In establishing a workers’ state, also known as a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” Lenin and the Bolsheviks were continuing the political work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the founders of communism. The new workers’ state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, was based on human needs, not capitalist profits. Health care, food, education, employment and equality for oppressed nationalities, women and LGBTQ2+ people were basic human rights codified by law. Today Marxism-Leninism is synonymous with the revolutionary school of socialist thought. Essential readings include Lenin’s “Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism” and “The State and Revolution,” along with his writings on the national question. Workers World Party, founded in 1959, is unequivocally Marxist-Leninist. Writings on Lenin’s contributions



Lenin speaks to workers, delivering the famous April Theses, 1917.

by founding WWP members Sam Marcy and Vince Copeland can be read at tinyurl.com/jw8mm6v and workers.org/book/lenin-thinker-fighter, respectively.

— Report by Martha Grevatt

Laos keeps coronavirus under control

By Joshua Hanks

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic, referred to as the Lao PDR or Laos, has not recorded an increase in COVID-19 cases in 13 consecutive days as of April 25. The number of confirmed cases in the southeast Asian country is holding steady at just 19. Sixteen cases were confirmed in the capital Vientiane, while three were found in Luang Prabang. Seven people have recovered, reports Khaosan Pathet Lao (KPL), the news agency of the governing Lao People’s Revolutionary Party.

A designated hospital in Vientiane, Mittaphab Hospital (Hospital 150), has treated all cases in the capital city, reducing the spread of infections in the hospital system.

Laos announced its first cases on March 24, nearly a week after the government introduced such social distancing measures as closing all schools and many shops, closing all border checkpoints, and suspending the issuance of tourist visas for at least 30 days.

Immunizations for children are still being carried out, as disrupting them could cause outbreaks of other diseases such as highly contagious measles. Dr. Panome Sayamoungkhoun, director of the Ministry of Health’s National Immunization Programme, stated: “Every infant and every child in the Lao PDR has the right to a healthy start to life that vaccines bring. Even though COVID-19 has arrived in our country, diseases such as measles, pertussis, diphtheria and many other vaccine-preventable diseases have not gone away. These diseases can still damage or even kill our children unless we vaccinate them.”

Dr. Howard Sobel, the acting World Health Organization representative to

the Lao PDR, said, “I’d like to commend the Lao Ministry of Health, the National Immunization Programme, and frontline health workers for continuing to provide lifesaving vaccines in these difficult circumstances.”

Extra care is being taken to ensure the safety of continued immunizations. “To ensure the safety of health care workers and communities from COVID-19 infection during immunization services, social distancing, hand hygiene and utilization of protective equipment has been followed strictly,” said an April 25 article from KPL.

Despite a legacy of a vicious imperialist war, Laos today has managed to score an important public health victory, while the country that sought to totally destroy it, the U.S., has more total COVID-19 cases and deaths than any other country in the world.

Socialist priority: Health of the people

The success of the Lao PDR in containing the disease draws in part from the experiences of its neighbors and fellow communist-led countries, Vietnam and China. Vietnam, with a population of 95 million, has had no confirmed deaths from the disease and only 270 cases. China, where the initial outbreak was first detected, has successfully halted the

increase in confirmed new cases and its economy is already returning to normal.

These three countries, while having less developed economies than Western countries, have nonetheless been able to prioritize public health needs and prevent the virus from killing the most vulnerable people. Through mass mobilizations of medical workers, party members and soldiers, they were able to quickly coordinate planned, successful responses to the worst pandemic in over a century.

Despite a legacy of vicious imperialist war, Laos today has managed to score an important public health victory, while the country that sought to totally destroy it, the U.S., has more total COVID-19 cases and deaths than any other country in the world.

Recovering from U.S. war

Laos, like Vietnam, suffered greatly under French rule until 1954 and then endured a brutal U.S. war of aggression until 1975. That ended in communist victories, establishing the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Laos has been described as the most heavily bombed country on Earth, with the U.S. having dropped nearly a ton of bombs for every person then living there.

From 1964 to 1973, as part of the “secret war” against Laos, the U.S. dropped 2 million tons of bombs on the country, almost equal to the 2.1 million tons the U.S. used in all of Asia and Europe during World War II. An estimated 80 million bombs remain unexploded in Laos, making agriculture impossible in many areas and killing dozens of Laotians every year.

At the end of the war, the Laotian economy and society were devastated, bombed back to a pre-industrial state. The residual effects of the war still create many

challenges for the country’s economic recovery and development, but China and Vietnam have both worked with the Lao PDR to promote its development.

In 2016 China and Laos jointly began work on the 257-mile Vientiane – Boten Railway. Set for completion next year, its trains will reach speeds of up to 160 kilometers an hour and will connect Laos to China’s vast rail network. A major part of the project includes clearing undetonated bombs along the line’s route, providing benefits beyond more efficient transportation.

The new railway will also eventually form a route to Thailand and terminate in Singapore as part of a single railway network connecting all the countries of southeast Asia.

Socialist solidarity

Vietnam has long been the largest partner of the Lao PDR, and the COVID-19 pandemic reaffirms the deep solidarity between the two countries. On April 21 the Vietnam-Laos Friendship Association announced through the Lao embassy that it will be donating medical supplies to Laos, including 500 protective suits and 18,500 face masks—including 17,500 medical masks and 1,000 antibacterial cloth masks.

Vice President of the Vietnam-Laos Friendship Association Nguyen Manh Hung said: “The gifts, despite being small, deeply reflected the sentiments of the Vietnam-Laos Friendship Association members toward the Lao people, contributing to promoting the special solidarity between the two nations and affirming their commitment to holding hands to overcome difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.” (en.nhandan.org.vn, April 21) □

The U.S. aims at Greenland, targets the Arctic

By G. Dunkel and Paddy Colligan

The United States, even in the midst of a pandemic, doesn’t want to relax its imperialist exploits in the Arctic.

Global warming is proceeding more rapidly in the Arctic than in any other region of the world. As it proceeds, resources, until recently buried under hundreds of feet of ice, have become available. Shipping lanes are opening up from East Asia to Europe or the east coast of North America that cut the length of the trip by 3,000 miles.

Greenland, the world’s largest island, straddles the Arctic Circle and has, beyond 10 percent of the world’s fresh water bound up in the deep glaciers that cover it, huge deposits of sand and gravel growing from its melting glaciers.

These deposits can be cheaply transported to the construction industry of the European Union. Greenland has rare

earth elements that China is willing to develop. Prospectors are looking for iron ore, lead, zinc, diamonds, gold, uranium and oil, but currently there is only one large-scale mine operating.

Greenland has limited home rule under Danish control; Greenlanders have a parliament, but Denmark controls foreign relations, defense and economic development. The United States couldn’t simply declare it was sending a new ambassador to Greenland — along with \$12.1 million. Instead it needed the agreement of the Danish government, which allowed the U.S. to set up its new consulate in a “Danish military facility,” according to the April 24 Financial Times.

The consulate will be moved to Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, when travel restrictions are lifted.

The United States has had military bases in Greenland since 1942. The bases’ purpose was to block the Germans, who

were then occupying Denmark, from establishing outposts in Greenland. Thule, which is now a U.S. Space Force base, is the only U.S. base left from those days.

While Denmark has been officially a nonnuclear member of NATO, the U.S. has based nuclear weapons at Thule. In 1968, a B52 crashed and burned near Thule. It had been carrying nuclear weapons, which ruptured and burned. One of the weapons has never been recovered.

U.S. military vs. Indigenous sovereignty

Camp Century is a much more relevant and dangerous example of how the United States uses Greenland. Between 1953 and 1967, the U.S. Army built a series of secret bases around Thule as precursors of a larger ballistic missile complex.

The U.S. was planning to deploy up to 600 medium-range ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads, constantly moving around on a railway cut into Greenland’s ice sheet. Project Iceworm was never completed, but left behind tons of waste — diesel fuel, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and low-level radioactive waste. Due to global warming, this waste is now being exposed. (Global Environmental Politics, February 2018, pgs. 33-51)

The \$12.1 million fund that the U.S. and Denmark are making such a fuss over is facing two challenges: how to develop Greenland’s mining and how to develop other profitable activities, particularly tourism.

Denmark is a small country with a colonial past that is part of the imperialist bloc. At various times, Denmark’s rulers controlled Iceland and the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic, the Virgin



WW PHOTO: PADDY COLLIGAN

Greenland’s international airport, near underdeveloped tourist facilities.

Islands in the Caribbean and parts of Ghana. The Danish government allocates to Greenland large, yearly block grants amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars. Danish bankers and corporations expect access to Greenland’s future profits.

Besides Denmark and the U.S., the Arctic Council consists of Canada, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Russia. Rising temperatures in the Arctic have fueled a rising anticipation of future profits and rising tension inside this council, reflecting competing interests.

Counterposed to the Arctic Council is the Inuit Circumpolar Council, formerly the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. It is a multinational nongovernmental organization representing the 180,000 Inuit peoples living in Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka, the eastern area of Siberia.

About 85 percent of the people living in Greenland are Indigenous people of Inuit ancestry. Some of them are demanding independence, but they all seek the education and economic development which respects their culture and environment. □

Pandemia y capitalismo están detrás del aumento del hambre en EE.UU.

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para cupones de alimentos.

La lucha de un pueblo ganó beneficios de cupones de alimentos en primer lugar. Eso es lo que se necesitará para que las personas obtengan lo que necesitan, ya sea alimentos, vivienda, atención médica, trabajos con un salario digno o condiciones de trabajo seguras.

La campaña, La Comida Es Un Derecho, nacida del Congreso de Todos los Pueblos, respaldado por el Workers World Party/

Partido Mundo Obrero, lanzó una lucha en 1982 para presionar al gobierno a abrir sus depósitos de alimentos “excedentes”. Demandó a la administración Reagan y organizó muchas protestas. Poco después de que ellos perdiera la demanda, este movimiento de base ganó la liberación de toneladas de alimentos.

En la Cuba socialista, la producción y distribución de alimentos están altamente organizadas. La comida nunca se desperdicia. Las necesidades de las personas siempre son lo primero en importancia. □



Colombia: Huelga de hambre en varias cárceles.

COVID-19 y hechos básicos de la economía marxista

Por Deirdre Griswold

El mercado de valores se desplomó en marzo, pero se recuperó en parte después de que el Banco de la Reserva Federal bajó la tasa de interés para los préstamos. Luego se estrelló de nuevo. Las empresas se están yendo a la quiebra. El precio del petróleo ha caído a su nivel más bajo en décadas.

Todos son signos de una drástica disminución de la actividad económica en este momento.

Pero, ¿qué significa esto realmente?

No es solo que las personas no compran tantas cosas cuando se ven obligadas a quedarse en casa en esta pandemia. Mucho más importante, significa que muchos menos trabajadores están produciendo un nuevo valor.

Y esa es la clave de lo que le está sucediendo a la economía capitalista ahora. Cuando los trabajadores no trabajan, no se crea ningún valor nuevo. Sin embargo, la forma en que funcionan los mercados capitalistas es que anticipan más y más crecimiento a medida que los trabajadores van a trabajar todos los días y crean un nuevo valor mientras son explotados por los patrones. Cuando eso no sucede, hay una gran crisis.

La economía marxista es crucial para comprender qué hay detrás de la catástrofe económica que acompaña a la crisis COVID-19. Así que aquí hay un resumen muy breve de algunos de los conceptos básicos del marxismo.

Todo lo que se intercambia (generalmente por dinero), que no podemos

obtener de forma gratuita, como arrancar un diente a un león, debe tener dos tipos de valor. Uno es el valor de uso. El otro es el valor de cambio.

Valor de uso y valor de cambio

El agua que bebemos es probablemente una de las cosas más valiosas que consumimos todos los días. Sin ella moriríamos. Entonces, el valor de uso del agua es enorme.

Pero también es muy barato, lo que significa que tiene un valor de cambio muy bajo. Por vital que sea el agua para la vida, nunca costará tanto como el champán, por ejemplo — lo cual es bueno, ¡pero podemos sobrevivir sin él!

Entonces, ¿por qué el agua es barata?

En términos simplificados, su precio es bajo en relación con otras cosas que compramos (llamadas productos básicos) porque se requiere poca mano de obra para que esté disponible. Por eso tiene un bajo valor de cambio.

Hace mucho tiempo, cuando se construyeron los embalses en este país, junto con los acueductos que conducían desde ellos, se requirió bastante trabajo para proporcionar agua. Pero ahora los océanos de agua fluyen a ciudades y pueblos en muchas secciones del país con poco trabajo humano gastado en el proceso. Entonces, el agua, en la mayoría de las áreas, es un gasto menor.

Lo que no es tan barato, por supuesto, son las botellas de aguas especiales de Fiji o alguna otra fuente distante que se venden en tiendas de todo el mundo. Esta

agua cuesta dinero, no porque sea mejor, sino por la mano de obra necesaria para localizar fuentes, transportar el agua, embotellarla y comercializarla.

Probablemente pueda pensar en muchos otros productos que tienen un alto valor de uso pero un bajo valor de cambio. La harina, por ejemplo, el ingrediente principal del pan, se llama personal de la vida. Lápices y papel para escribir.

Otros productos pueden tener un valor de uso limitado, como los binoculares que guarda en su armario y apenas usa, pero un valor de cambio mucho mayor. Son muy costosos en comparación con el agua.

Entonces, ¿qué es el valor de cambio y cómo se mide?

El trabajo humano es la clave

El valor de cambio es cuánto cuesta un producto en relación con otros productos. Y esa es la clave para medirlo: el valor de cambio de una mercancía proviene de la cantidad de trabajo humano que se incorpora a ella. Digámoslo de nuevo: es el trabajo humano, los trabajadores que trabajan, lo que crea todo el valor de cambio.

Esto es básico para el marxismo, pero es ignorado o minimizado por la mayoría de los economistas burgueses.

Cuanto más trabajo se necesita para producir algo, más valor de cambio tendrá. El valor de cambio no es el único factor que determina el precio, por supuesto. Los precios pueden fluctuar según la oferta y la demanda. Pero fluctúan en torno a un ingrediente básico: la cantidad de mano de obra necesaria para producir el producto. No importa cuánto se llene

el mercado de automóviles, por ejemplo, incluso un automóvil viejo y maltratado nunca se venderá por el mismo precio que una barra de pan.

El desempleo y la crisis económica.

Entonces, para volver a la actual y creciente crisis económica, la revista Fortune escribió el 16 de abril: “Otros 5,2 millones de estadounidenses presentaron reclamos iniciales de desempleo en la semana que terminó el 11 de abril. Eso eleva el total de reclamos de desempleo en las últimas cuatro semanas a 22 millones”. [El 23 de abril el total es a 26 millones.]

Estos millones de trabajadores han perdido sus empleos o están confinados a sus hogares debido al virus, y por lo tanto no están creando un nuevo valor.

Es la explicación obvia de la creciente crisis de la economía, pero no es probable que lea en los periódicos o escuche en la radio y la televisión. Los medios corporativos informarán sobre el desempleo como resultado de la crisis económica, no la causa. Pero eso es poner la carreta delante del caballo.

Para repetir, el trabajo humano, — los trabajadores que trabajan — es el creador de todo el valor de cambio.

Y en este momento, decenas de millones de trabajadores están en cuarentena o se quedan en casa bajo órdenes de refugio en el lugar. Son “trabajadores esenciales” necesarios para la creación de nuevos valores, pero no pueden hacer su trabajo.

Como resultado, la economía capitalista está entrando en crisis mode. □

WORKERS WORLD MUNDO OBRERO editorial

Los productores lecheros están vertiendo millones de galones de leche en las lagunas. Los productores agrícolas están volcando las verduras frescas al suelo. Se están destruyendo miles de millones de dólares en alimentos.

Esto está sucediendo mientras millones de personas hacen fila para llegar a los bancos de alimentos locales que no pueden satisfacer la enorme demanda, que es mayor debido a los despidos de 22 millones de trabajadores relacionados con el coronavirus.

¿Por qué es esto? La escasez de alimentos no existe en los Estados Unidos. De hecho, hay abundancia de alimentos. Pero muchos agricultores no pueden vender a los compradores habituales, como restaurantes, hoteles y escuelas, ya que muchos están cerrados debido a la pandemia. La red de distribución a esos clientes se ha volcado y miles de agricultores no pueden permitirse el lujo de transportar alimentos por todo el país.

Si no se compran alimentos, si no hay mercados, si no se pueden realizar ventas y obtener ganancias, los alimentos se destruyen, en lugar de donarse a los millones que los necesitan.

Bajo el capitalismo, la comida es una mercancía. Al igual que todos los productos

básicos, desde teléfonos celulares hasta automóviles, se produce para ser vendido con fines de lucro. Si los agricultores no pueden permitirse enviar alimentos, se desperdicia. Y si los trabajadores no pueden permitirse el lujo de comprar lo que se encuentra en los estantes de los supermercados, no lo hacen a menos que un banco de alimentos, una organización religiosa o comunitaria o un sindicato lo proporcionen. Así es como opera el capitalismo.

Si las tiendas están comprando menos alimentos porque sus clientes se quedan en casa debido a las advertencias pandémicas o no pueden darse el lujo de comprarlo, como es el caso de muchos trabajadores desempleados, los agricultores se deshacen de ellos. Cuando los restaurantes, que habitualmente compran la mitad de los productos agrícolas, no compran, se quedan sin cosechar, sin embalar, sin transportar y, por lo tanto, sin vender.

Hambre en el país más rico

La pandemia ha puesto de relieve la precariedad de la vida de los trabajadores en los Estados Unidos capitalistas, y ha intensificado la contradicción entre la producción y distribución de alimentos. Ha revelado el hambre y la desnutrición generalizadas que existían en el país más

rico del mundo incluso antes de la llegada de COVID-19, porque muchas personas no pueden pagar los alimentos. No se cultiva ni fabrica como servicio público. Bajo el capitalismo, producir y vender esta necesidad es un medio para un fin: las ganancias.

Antes de la pandemia, 37 millones de personas aquí estaban “insuficientes en alimentos”, un término elegante para hambrientos. Alrededor de ese número recibió beneficios inadecuados del Programa de Asistencia Nutricional Suplementaria. El año pasado, 40 millones de personas tuvieron que depender de bancos de alimentos y comedores populares. Los trabajadores de bajos salarios, las personas mayores y las personas con discapacidad dependen de esta asistencia.

Pero luego golpeó COVID-19: 22 millones de personas fueron despedidas, suspendidas o tuvieron recortes salariales. Alrededor del 59 por ciento de los trabajadores, desproporcionadamente negros y latinos, habían estado viviendo de un sueldo a otro. Ahora, muchos de los recién desempleados no pueden pagar alimentos para sus familias y han recurrido a los bancos de alimentos.

Las imágenes de las noticias mostraron a 10.000 personas en fila y esperando durante horas en un centro de

distribución de alimentos de San Antonio. Esta impactante escena se repite en todo el país todos los días, a medida que la demanda se dispara, en algunas ciudades en un 50 por ciento. Los operadores de bancos de alimentos rechazan renuenteemente a miles de familias necesitadas.

Mientras tanto, los bancos de alimentos ahora tienen que comprar gran parte de lo que solía ser donado, y a precios altos. Algunos están gastando millones de dólares para transportar cargas de camiones. Varios han tenido que cerrar justo cuando su ayuda se necesita desesperadamente.

Sin embargo, el gobierno federal debe comprar productos frescos de los agricultores y pagar para transportarlos a las despensas de alimentos o establecer centros de distribución. Podría contratar trabajadores desempleados para conducir los camiones y repartir los alimentos, pero de forma segura.

Dado que este es un país capitalista, los ricos y sus políticos se negarán a esto, ya que priorizan la obtención de ganancias, no las necesidades humanas. Incluso ahora con la crisis de desempleo, el Departamento de Agricultura de los Estados Unidos se negó a usar los poderes de desastre para ampliar la elegibilidad

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