In the spirit of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Bessemer workers fight for justice

By Monica Moorehead

A historic union election concluded March 29 after 5,800 Amazon warehouse workers, over 80% of them African American, voted on whether to be represented by the Retail, Warehouse and Department Store Union in Bessemer, Ala., near Birmingham. It could take weeks or even months before the outcome of the vote becomes official.

If the majority vote is yes, this will be the first union of Amazon workers to be organized inside the U.S. But whether the Bessemer workers win or lose the election, their attempt to unionize within one of the largest privately owned corporations in the world will inevitably cause a domino effect in worker organizing, not only for 1 million Amazon workers to organize in the U.S., but for workers in other industries, be they full-time or part-time, to organize as well. (tinyurl.com/z436k92j)

What is happening in Bessemer is having tremendous international implications. On March 22, Amazon workers throughout Italy, organized by three unions, called a one-day strike that galvanized 30-40,000 workers and impacted Amazon's entire logistics chain in the country. And workers in Germany have called a four-day strike before April 4 at six Amazon sites to force the conglomerate to recognize collective-bargaining agreements.

An important impetus for the Bessemer Amazon workers, besides demanding better working conditions and pay, has been the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been reported that over 20,000 Amazon workers have contracted the virus due to unsafe working conditions inside the company's warehouse and distribution centers.

When a corporation like Amazon nets a profit of over $386 billion in 2020—an increase of 38% from the year before—and its CEO and founder Jeff Bezos is worth $186 billion, there is no excuse for any worker to be exposed to COVID in any Amazon plant, except for corporate capitalist greed and callous disregard for the workers' well-being.

Dr. King and the 1968 strike

April 4 will mark the 53rd anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Just days before he was shot on the balcony of his room at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn., King had supported the strike of 1,300 Black sanitation workers at the Memphis Department of Public Works, who were demanding safe working conditions and better pay. These workers made a slave wage of 65 cents an hour.

What precipitated the Feb. 12, 1968, strike was that two sanitation workers, Robert Walker and Echol Cole, were crushed to death Feb. 1 by a malfunctioning truck they were working on. The city refused to compensate the families for their avoidable deaths.

The strike might have been averted if the racist mayor of Memphis, Henry Loeb, had endorsed the resolution passed by the local city council recognizing the workers' right to be organized by AFSCME. Instead Loeb overruled the vote, which led to the strike. The Memphis police brutally attacked the strikers that Feb. 23.

Dr. King had hoped to announce a citywide work stoppage in March to include

Continued on page 4
Hundreds rally, march against racist violence

Hundreds of Clevelanders from the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, along with multinational allies, rallied in the Asia Town neighborhood March 28. Sponsors of the “Stop Asian hate” rally were the Cleveland chapter of the Organization of Chinese Americans, Ohio Progressive Asian Women’s Leadership, Asian Services in Action, Asian Pacific Islander Public Affairs and Asia Town Cleveland.

The rally was one of dozens held across the U.S. the weekend of March 27-28, some called by community groups and many by the Answer coalition, demanding an end to racially motivated attacks targeting Asians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Report by Martha Grevatt

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

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repression, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny, LGBTQ2S+ ever-greater profits. It means joblessness, increasing homelessness and trans people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

We are determined to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”

Join us in the fight for socialism!

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Marchers protest anti-Asian violence

By Betsy Piette
Philadelphia

Over 300 people gathered for a rally and march against anti-Asian violence and hatred March 25 at Vine Street Park in Philadelphia’s Chinatown. The grass-roots protest galvanized people from multiple Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in the region, along with a racially diverse crowd of supporters. The crowd was overwhelmingly young people.

Under the motto #PhillySolidarity, the event kicked off with a traditional lion dance with drumbeats and crashing cymbals. Speakers shared stories of anti-Asian racism they had personally experienced. They dressed in black to mourn the Atlanta shooting victims: Delaina Ashley Yaun, 33; Xiaojie Tan, 49; Daoyou Feng, 44; Yong Ae Yue, 63; Hyun Jung Grant, 62; Suncha Kim, 69; and Paul Andre Michels, 54.

Several women described being recipients of racist and misogynist verbal and physical attacks. Mel Lee, director of the Woori Center, who recited the names of the Atlanta victims to the crowd, described having flashbacks during news coverage of the shootings. “I have never felt so vulnerable and I do not feel safe in this country I call home.”

Many speakers called out for “breaking the silence” about the anti-Asian attacks that have become more prevalent over the last year from Pennsylvania and New Jersey to California. Several linked these demands to the broader upsurge against racism and police brutality that brought millions to the streets in 2020.

Some signs and face masks carried a picture of Xiao Zhen Xie, the 75-year-old Asian woman who fought back successfully to defend herself when she was punched by a man in San Francisco.

After the rally, demonstrators marched to City Hall, chanting “Enough is enough!” and “Hate is a virus” where protesters observed eight minutes of silence to honor the Atlanta shooting victims. Philadelphia is home to around 120,000 Asian residents. Vine Street Park pays tribute to neighboring Asian communities’ long resistance to gentrification. The “History of Chinatown” mural by Armando Ha., on the wall of a nearby building, was commissioned for Chinatown’s 125th anniversary in 1995. It depicts the early arrival of laundry workers in 1870 and subsequent history of Philadelphia Chinatown through the fight against “urban renewal” in the 1960s and ’70s. The mural marks the location where protestors—crying signs “Homes, not highways!”—stopped bulldozers from demolishing buildings to construct the Vine Street Expressway, which now runs below the park.

Marchers sing chants against anti-Asian violence.

A demonstration was held in New York City’s Chinatown March 25 to protest the mass firings of 180 restaurant workers when the Jing Fong restaurant closed. The workers are members of the 318 Restaurant Workers Union. The owners of the restaurant are the Chu family, bankers and landlords in Chinatown and the Lower East Side, Manhattan, N.Y.

— Report and photo by Toni Arenstein

UNAC says

‘No to U.S. war threats against China!’

This slightly edited statement was issued by the United National Anticapitalist Coalition March 24.

The Biden administration is intensifying its aggression against China. The Pentagon’s new Pacific Deterrence Initiative includes increasing U.S. military encirclement of China and deploying nuclear missiles previously banned by the U.S.-signed Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Recently President Biden met with leaders of Japan, India and Australia known as the “Quad,” a military and democratic, human rights and anti-racist forces treaty. This slightly edited statement was issued by the United National Anticapitalist Coalition March 24.

In contrast, the U.S. military has more than 20 times the number of foreign military bases as all other countries combined and has its military in 172 countries. The U.S. imperial arsenal includes mercenary armies, death squads, Special Operations assassination teams, drone murder, as well as deadly sanctions, blockades and embargoes against some 90 nations.

Biden’s focus on China

Biden is keeping the nearly $1 trillion in punitive tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on Chinese goods. In early March, Secretary of State Blinken made U.S. policy toward China absolutely clear, stating, “China is the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system, all the rules, values and relationships that make the world work the way we want it to, because it ultimately serves the interests and reflects the values of the American people.” (Emphasis added.)

In our view Blinken’s “we” refers solely to the interests of the U.S. corporate elite, not the people of the U.S.

The “international system” Blinken refers to is the one that established the U.S. after World War II with unquestioned military and economic superiority. The U.S. dollar was established as the world’s reserve currency. The U.S. corporate elite resent any challenge to their rule.

U.S. pivot to Asia

Today, the U.S. “pivot to Asia,” first established under the Obama administration, includes the presence of warships and massive military forces throughout the Asia Pacific region. China has not reciprocated in the Gulf of Mexico or with military forces encircling U.S. borders.

The U.S. threatens nuclear war

Recently the U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander, Adm. Philip Davidson, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that China is the only nation with the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to challenge the United States. He stated, “I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in fact, in the next six years.” Davidson continued, “We absolutely must be prepared to fight and win should [this economic] competition turn to conflict.” Davidson’s “fight and win” evinces an imperial threat of nuclear war. The U.S. and its British junior imperial partner are increasing their nuclear capabilities, while Biden pursues Trump’s Space Force, threatening to extend the arms race into space.

COVID-19 and U.S. sanctions

The COVID-19 crisis of this past year has been used to accelerate U.S. aggression toward China. China was able to employ decisive measures to contain and defeat the virus and return to economic growth. It has sent its vaccines to poorer countries along with other medical aid. In sharp contrast, the U.S. has failed to contain the virus. It has recorded more deaths and infections than any other country; its economy has not recovered. During the pandemic the U.S. has increased sanctions on countries that refuse to abide by Washington and Wall Street dictates. These have included increased sanctions on medicines and medical equipment. These facts have not been lost on the people of the world or people in the U.S.

The right of self-determination

UNAC supports the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, that is, to be free from military intervention and economic domination. This includes their right to seek and accept aid from other nations to help defend their sovereignty, as with Venezuela, Iran and Syria. It includes their right to be free from U.S. threats of war, regime change and intervention.

We demand: End U.S. aggression towards China! No to a new cold war! No militarization of space! Ban U.S. nuclear weapons! Money for jobs and health care, not war! End racist anti-Asian slander and attacks!

UNAC is a broad national anticapitalist organization with 160 affiliates in cities across the U.S. We are united in opposition to all U.S. wars against working people at home and abroad. While our affiliates have a broad range of views on the policies and practices of the government of other nations, we stand together in defense of their right to be free from U.S. domination.
By calvin deutschbein

Elon, N.C.

Two years after voting by a 2-to-1 margin to unionize, on March 4 the embattled Elon Faculty Union finally forced the greedy administrators of Elon University to the bargaining table. EFU is Local 32 of the Service Employees Union, Workers United Northern Region.

A victory for all of us

The faculty union represents hundreds of adjunct and contingent faculty, a powerful force in the growing body of educated workers on this rural campus near Greensboro, N.C. The university sits in one of the most reactionary regions of the U.S., home to unusually violent voter suppression and family-separation actions by local law enforcement. U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, one of the leading architects of the Trump campaign to disrupt the 2020 presidential election, is a trustee of the university and was awarded the Medal for "Entrepreneurial Leadership" in 2017.

But none of this was enough to overcome the power of a united working class. EFU’s victory came two days after a solidarity action by students of the BOLDly Elon Solidarity Collective, a group of student organizations demanding racial, social and economic justice at the university. On March 2 during "Elon Day," a major annual fundraiser, BSC staged protests around campus against the university’s union busting.

Facing a well-organized union and a campaign to withhold donations because of the union’s presence, the upsurge within the Elon community left university administrators with no choice but to bargain.

Education workers organize the South

By calvin deutschbein

Nov. 3, 1979, five of those organizers were killed in Greensboro by the Ku Klux Klan, the American Nazi Party and various federal and local law enforcement agencies. The dead included Sandra Neely Smith, a nurse and the former student body president of Bennett College—one of only two historically Black Colleges for women. Others killed were Dr. James Waller, Dr. Michael Nathan, William Evan Sampson and Cesar Cauce.

Every day of struggle for Black liberation and worker power in North Carolina since 1979 has taken place in the context of this horrific attack. Union victory at Elon University—including a now-unionized School of Law—to testify to the power of solidarity amid harsh conditions in North Carolina and throughout the South.

Organizing the South

Organizing educators is an uphill battle in a state where collective bargaining for public workers is still banned. Called "the Jim Crow law" by the North Carolina Public Service Commission, the law prohibits municipalities and the UNC System from bargaining with public workers for workers—"a threatening prospect to the anti-Black, anti-woman and anti-worker status quo.

A victory over systemic white supremacy

White supremacy—which pervades every aspect of life in the U.S.—can be especially sharp in private education. Many of the gains of the Civil Rights Movement won in the late 1960s and early 70s by the Bessemer Amazon workers’ right to unionize and community solidarity all limit the university’s discriminatory capacities and offer the promise of education by workers for workers—a threatening prospect to the anti-Black, anti-woman and anti-worker status quo.

Next steps

As the EFU prepares to negotiate at Elon, pressure has not let up. Elon dining and physical plant staff, alongside the BOLDly Elon Solidarity Collective, are now demanding hazard pay for campus workers. This recognizes that all workers—not just adjunct faculty—have shared interests against their greedy administration.

Students have demanded the resignation of Police Chief Joseph LeMiere. He left his last job as campus cop top University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2019, after going along with neo-Nazis who attempted to disrupt a Jewish community event.

Throughout North Carolina communities, the working class continues to unite and challenge the white supremacist, sexist operations of university management. And as EFU’s organizing committee leader Anna Love has said, each victory is "a victory for all of us."

North Carolina is the only state in the U.S. where more workers are employed in education—the University of North Carolina system—than by Walmart.
Secretary of Labor, which side are you on?

By Steve Gillis

On March 23, after a bipartisan Senate backtrack, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh was confirmed as Biden’s new Secretary of Labor. Walsh — previously president of the Boston Building Trades Council — promised “a new era of cooperation between commerce and labor.”

For nearly 40 years, I have been an elected leader of the 1,000-member-strong Boston School Bus Drivers Union, United Steelworkers Local 8751, a predominantly immigrant union. During this time unions throughout the U.S. have seen declining membership and been put on the defensive, while the government and corporate break-ups unions beginning when President Reagan fired every striking air traffic controller in 1981.

Walsh’s confirmation as Labor Secretary leads me to ask the same question we posed directly to him in his mayoral office during life-or-death union struggles: Which side are you on?

During the first two years of Walsh’s mayoral administration — 2014 — and three other leaders of Local 8751 were fighting for our jobs after being fired by the private school bus management company, Paris-based Veolia/Transdev, in October 2013. It took us two years to force Walsh to “take a side” and settle with the union. His waffling occurred despite whispered promises in response to two years of rank-and-file pickets, mass solidarity actions, fighting off a police frame-up, election of the four fired leaders to the union’s top positions and finally a strike’s deadline.

On May 31, 2020, Local 8751 was running the sound system during the Black Lives Matter march to Boston Common following the police lynching of George Floyd, Walsh’s police department, assisted by forces of the state and federal government, fired chemical weapons, violently arrested scores of people and rioted for hours against over 20,000 mostly young and peaceful protestors.

During our last contract negotiations held in Walsh’s “Eagle Room,” Local 8751 demanded that the words “Indigenous Peoples Day” replace “Columbus Day” in our paid holiday calendar. While this is the pattern in every neighboring city, the Boston mayor refused, telling us “The people are not ready for that, yet.”

Walsh’s last mayoral act before departing to the Department of Labor was to order, under threat of termination, all union workers back into the Boston public schools — more than 10,000 teachers, bus drivers and monitors, custodians, food service workers and administrative staff. Walsh ignored strenuous objections from every union; meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic surged again in Boston’s oppressed communities.

Most of Local 8751’s members have now been forced to feel the skyrocketing rents in Boston as million-dollar condos rise on every corner. The Boston Globe reported that Boston’s Black families have an average net worth of just $8, compared to $250,000 for white families. (Dec. 12, 2017)

The struggle calls the question

Under the Trump years of police-state repression, giant monopolies of the high-tech capitalist system like Amazon and Uber/Lyft destroyed their competitors and spread like a virus. Now millions of gig workers and low-wage workers, especially in oppressed communities, depend on them both for employment and as consumers.

The struggle led by Black workers, facing off against police and corporate attacks across the country, has clarified another question: “Which side are you on?” So how will Walsh respond?

On March 30, the National Labor Relations Board began counting the union votes of nearly 6,000 predominantly Black workers at an Amazon distribution center in Bessemer, Ala., where close to half are women. But Walsh waffled about this attempt to form the first-ever U.S. union in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Bessemer. In a March 25 Washington Post interview, he said, “I’ve heard that organizing drive is going on. I look forward to seeing what the result of that is.” Even President Biden has spoken more strongly for the Bessemer workers.

Walsh had not one word to say about Amazon’s illegal tactics in Bessemer— captive audience meetings, Pinkerton-type lawyer interference, terminations of union advocates, propaganda in the bathrooms and the Unfair Labor Practice of “direct dealing” with employees threatened at home. These are blatant violations of long-established labor that Walsh is now sworn to uphold.

Catalyzed by the Retail, Warehouse and Department Store Union in Alabama, now the Teamsters, building trades and postal workers’ unions are talking of challenging Amazon — and have set their sights on Bessemer.

With new Black, Indigenous, people of color and women in leadership, labor councils coast to coast are reinvigorated.

Right now is the time for every workers’ organization to force the question on Walsh and company — perhaps our strategy should be to identify Walsh’s resource and with the most vigorous street and legal offensive actions we can muster, in solidarity with Black workers on the front line — “Which side are you on?”

Steve Gillis began driving a school bus in 1984; he has been a strike captain four times and arrested 13 times while representing the union. He is currently the financial secretary of Local 8751, having been elected to terms as president and vice president from 2003-2015.
We must free Mumia!

By Larry Holmes

These slightly edited comments were given during the March 18 Workers World Party webinar, “Mumia Abu-Jamal: The Only Treatment is His Freedom!”

A quarter of a century ago, in the summer of 1995, Mumia was facing an execution date. That date was Aug. 17, [the birthday of Black Nationalist leader, Marcus Garvey]. We had one mission — for the movement to stop the execution. And through mass mobilization, through a lot of unity and a lot of coordination, we helped stop that execution. We did it.

Since then, it’s been a long quarter of a century, almost 26 years. We have raised a bold, never ending, sometimes frustrating and disheartening struggle to free Mumia, our political prisoner in jail, who was almost killed fighting for the freedom of the Black nation.

Now we face a similar situation in my view as one we faced in 1995, when there was an execution date for Mumia on the calendar.

We have to get him out of prison, comrades, and it must be now! There can be no hesitations. There can be no waiting. His health is such that Mumia’s birthday, about a month from this weekend [April 24] will probably be his last if we do not free him.

That says it all; that explains the critical moment that we’re in. Mumia must not be left to die in a dungeon. It’s what the police want. It’s what the Fraternal Order of Police wants. It’s what the oppressor wants. They wanted to execute him; they didn’t get that [in 1995].

Look at it this way. How can we possibly free these comrades, if we cannot free Mumia now, when his life is at risk behind those bars? The chances of him dying in prison are 100 times greater than if we can free him. And he may have an opportunity to have a little bit of what’s left of his natural life. We’ve got to make it clear.

This is the moment to everybody who is responsible — politicians, governors, prosecutors, the Democratic Party — that if Mumia dies in prison, if you allow him to die in a dungeon, then this will be an unforgivable insult to the Black freedom movement. And anyone who is complicit in this, you will share this blame, this responsibility and consequences, and you will take them to your grave.

If we reach out to others, we must get them to understand this—that Mumia will walk out of that prison, or, if necessary, he rolled out in a wheelchair free, and not die behind bars. That’s our revolutionary mission. At the moment, I can’t think of anything more important than that.

Mumia: more than a political prisoner

The struggle to free Mumia is in one way or another linked to consciousness about all the other political prisoners, because of his unique status as an international political prisoner in the struggle against white supremacy, racism, capitalism and imperialism in this country. This is how he’s known all around the world.

A little more than 20 years ago, I was privileged to share the stage with the late Ossie Davis, the actor, along with his partner, Ruby Dee. Ossie Davis told a large crowd of thousands of people in Madison Square Garden Theater in May of 2000, the millennium, that it was the mission of young radicals to free Mumia. A lot of those young people he was speaking to then are now middle age.

We have to make some sacrifices, sacrifices that I will make, to make this happen.

‘By any means necessary’

Now, comrades, we have to do whatever is necessary, as Malcolm said, “by any means necessary,” to wake up the movement. A lot of good people, a lot of good leaders have come to Mumia’s support over the years, but they’re busy. They may not know about Mumia’s health.

In this era of social media, we are bombarded with information. So we have to somehow blow away all that information that many of the forces around the world are bombarded with, to make it clear to them that right now we face another life-and-death moment.

We especially must wake up the Black movement. And I’m talking about all the wings of the Black movement — the militant Black Liberation fighters of every generation from Black Lives Matter to those of us who are the veterans of the struggles of many decades ago, when we had the Black Panthers and all the other forces that led us to where we are now. This includes the ministers, the civil rights forces, the leaders — many of whom are still alive. We’ve got to get them on board and make them realize that we all got to realize that this is the time to act.

If we get the seriousness of what we’re doing — and it’s all important business in the revolutionary struggle — to make some sacrifices now. Because it’s an old cliché, but it was never truer: For Mumia, it’s now or never.
Death penalty abolished in former Confederate state

By Gloria Rubac
Houston

On March 24, I heard the news that Virginia had just abolished its death penalty. I smiled and let out a whoop and holler, thinking that this racist, terrorist system must be coming to an end if a Southern, former Confederate state could abolish it. My gloom was gone.

The capital of the Confederacy was a city in Virginia — Richmond. And now one of the legacies of slavery, legal lynching, has been outlawed in Virginia.

“The symbolic value of a legislature sitting in the former capital of the Confederacy dismantling this tool of racial oppression cannot be overstated,” said Robert Dunham, the director of the Death Penalty Information Center. (tinyurl.com/2k63fydu)

Virginia’s death penalty, like other states in the South, “has deep roots in slavery, lynching and Jim Crow segregation. Virginia explicitly provided different penalties for white people and its enslaved population,” he continued.

50 years of abolition work

I have been a prison abolitionist since the 1970s and a death penalty abolitionist since I stood outside Texas’ death house on Dec. 7, 1982, when Texas carried out its first execution in the so-called “modern” era of a Black man named Charlie Brooks.

The more I visit prisoners, the more I learn about capital punishment, the more I sit in courtrooms and see the parades of poor people, particularly Black and Brown people, taking plea deals, the clearer it is that this whole criminal injustice system must be abolished.

It has been proven time and again that racism and the death penalty work hand in glove. In fact, police in the U.S. South came about as a result of the slave patrols.

Prisons in the South came about after the Civil War and Reconstruction to incarcerate poor people so that they could be leased out to plantation and business owners, who needed workers to harvest their crops or dig in their mines.

Don’t ever let anyone tell you that the lynchings after the Civil War, during the high times of the Ku Klux Klan, weren’t connected to legal executions in the prisons. As the title of a book on Texas history, “The Rope, the Chair and the Needle,” lays out, there was a direct development of capital punishment from illegal and legal lynchings to today’s practice of executions in the South.

In late summer 1923, a bill was passed in Texas that changed the method of executions from hangings in individual counties to using the new electric chair in one central place, a move the legalization of the electric chair in Texas, Feb. 8, 1924, five African American men were electrocuted in Huntsville. Five men and all were Black.

I have found their graves at the prison cemetery in Huntsville, and I visit them every so often. One man has always stuck in my mind, because his name was George Washington. I think about his momma, and how she named him after the first U.S. president, and how she probably had high hopes for her baby. He did make history, but surely not what his momma had in mind. He became part of this group of five Black men who met the modern device of the electric chair for the first time in Texas history.

After 413 years, Virginia makes history

March 24, outside the correctional center in Virginia — where 101 people have been killed by the state, recent times — Gov. Ralph Northam signed a bill that ended the death penalty in that state. It was a move sooner than expected even by people who have long been fighting to abolish the practice.

In 1991, the founders of Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty took the first steps toward ending state-sponsored killing.

VFA commented on the bill: “Virginia’s use of the death penalty dates back over 400 years — to 1608, when Jamestown settlers carried out the first recorded execution in the then-European colonies. In the centuries since, amid periods of slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow segregation, Virginia has executed hundreds of dreads of people. Since 1976, Virginia has executed 113 people, a higher percentage of death row inmates than any other U.S. state, and the highest number of state executions second only to Texas. After 434 years, after 1,390 executions, it is over.”

Texas prison activist speaks on abolition

In a phone call with Texas prison activist Birgit Williams, he told Workers World, “I was on death row for over a decade and only got out because I was arrested for a crime I did not commit. So, I still sit here in prison, an innocent man, but no longer facing execution. I applaud the state of Virginia. It certainly signifies change, especially for the South. “At the same time, I fear that Texas may hold on to their views even stronger now,” said Williams. “Texas took pride in seeing the Union. They take pride in being tough on crime. Their old weapons of war like the death penalty are well-oiled machines used against people of color and poor people. Texas was the last state to allow phone calls from prison, the last state to stop executing kids. I hope others will follow Virginia, but I know Texas takes pride in keeping their old racist system intact.”

More abolition in the South?

What the news in Virginia signifies is that the number of states abolishing the death penalty in the U.S. continues. Twenty-three states have now enacted abolition, and three more have moratoria on executions. That is 26 states, a majority of the 50 states.

But even more important, it means that the Southern states, where most executions have been carried out, can change. The former Confederate states have been taking down statues and monuments honoring the Confederacy. Now one of the largest companies in the world, Amazon, has almost 5,000 majority Black workers in Bessemer, Ala., fighting to join a union.

The days of Southern states executing its people could be heading to an end. The days of nonunion shops proliferating in the South may be coming to an end.

Change is inevitable, and change is coming. There is always light at the end of a tunnel, including in the South! ☪

COVID crisis exposes prison profiteers

By Cindy Lou Miller

“If you want to understand any problem in America, you need to focus on workers. Because no problem in America suffers from that problem.” – Dr. Amos Wilson.

One of the main rules of caution about avoiding COVID-19 has been social distancing, which has proven to be impossible in crammed jails and double-celled prisons. The guards have brought the virus in from the outside world.

Prison abolitionists across the country have been frustrated by the miniscule release rate of incarcerated people. Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf promised the release of 1,800, but only released 159. Bruce Norris was paroled from SCI Phoenix in December 2020 after serving 45 years. His commutation papers sat unsigned on Wolf’s desk for a week. While waiting, Norris contracted COVID-19 and died.

Protest marches, car caravans, vigils, legislative visits, Zoom meetings, phone ramps and letter writing campaigns have been held, raising that release is the answer to stem the prison spread of COVID — all to little avail. Food Not Bombs Solidarity, a group of activists inspired by the research of an incarcerated member, held a demonstration outside Aramark headquarters in Philadelphia. They demanded exposing and naming some of the corporations the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections contracts to provide the services used by incarcerated people might help up the ante. Aramark is the shameful company that provides shoddy meals consisting of low-grade, poorly prepared “food” for 90 cents a portion. Aramark also contracts with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention camps, hospitals and colleges. For workers at Aramark, average pay is $11 per hr. The multibillion dollar company has been sued many times in the last 20 years — all over the country.

The Company Store

To supplement the lousy quality and limited portions of Aramark meals, incarcerated workers, with wages as low as 19 cents an hour, are forced to use the prison commissary. This harkens back to the sharecroppers and coal miners who were forced to use the “company store.”

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Five years since Cáceres’ murder
U.S. collaborates with Honduras’ coup regime

By Ted Kelly

It has been five years since the assassination of Berta Cáceres — an environmental activist from the Lenca people, a founder and leader of the Council of Indigenous and Popular Organizations of Honduras. Though some of her killers have been identified and convicted, the governments and corporations that hired and trained them remain unpunished.

They murdered Cáceres during a campaign to stop the construction of a hydroelectric dam funded by a corporation called Desarrollos Energéticos SA (Desa). Desa’s security chief was among the seven men convicted for her assassination. This killer, a former Honduran army lieutenant, along with one of his co-conspirators, received U.S. military training.

At the time of the killers’ arrest, the Guardian reported that the Cáceres hit was “an extrajudicial killing planned by military intelligence specialists linked to the country’s U.S.-trained special forces.”

“The those who were captured and convicted were the weakest people within the criminal structure that attacked my mom,” Cáceres’ daughter, Laura Zúñiga Cáceres, said last year. (Democracy Now, Jan. 27, 2020)

Workers World reported on Dec. 4, 2018: “The close relationship among international finance capital, the Honduran military and local companies keeps wages and costs low and enables a transfer of the ‘savings’ back to Europe and the U.S. as profit. Local oligarchs and foreign bankers get rich, while the working masses are forced to pay outrageous per-minute prices.”

The high cost of contact

Incarcerated persons and their families are forced to pay outrageous per-minute prices for phone calls. All items must come from the commissaries, notorious for highly inflated prices. In many states prison commissaries are owned by companies. Keefe Group and Oasis Management Systems are two used in many Pennsylvania prisons and jails. These private companies often pay a portion of their profits back to the host prison.

It they lack the funds, they must rely on family members — meaning that families are forced to subsidize the prison system.

COVID crisis exposes prison profiteers

Continued from page 7

In August 2018, the PA DOC falsely claimed that drugs were being sent through the mail. In a no-bid contract, DOC Secretary John Wetzel immediately hired Smart Communications to handle mail. Letters and cards are now sent to the company’s processing facility in Florida, where they are photocopied. The people they were intended for are sent copies, while the original letter is on record. Smart Communications is paid $4 million a year to maintain a searchable database called MailGuard, which not only tracks incarcerated people but their friends, family and anyone sending them mail. (tinyurl.com/3gyskshb)

Pennsylvania incarcerated workers are also charged an average of 25 cents per email by Global Tele Link, whose transmission and delivery times are measured in days. Tablets to send email were purchased at the commissaries at pumped-up prices. All emails are recorded.

Pennsylvania prisons have used the COVID-19 pandemic to eliminate in-person contact visits. They initially provided free Zoom visits. However, since Zoom would not record the calls, the DOC switched to Polycom, which records all visits.

Death by medical neglect

Notorious for their shoddy services, Wellpath and Corizon — who visit the facilities only once a week — are responsible for most of the medical neglect. Doctors and nurses — who visit the facilities only once or twice a week — are mandated to spend a certain amount of time with a patient, who is charged $5 per visit. Aspirin is usually the prescribed medical remedy at 10 for an additional $5.

Many medical personnel have refused to believe the cries for help or offer treatment to incarcerated people. When it is offered it is usually substandard. It is no coincidence that many of our elders and political prisoners suffer from cancer.

When Mumia Abu-Jamal contracted hepatitis C, SCI Mahanoy prison refused to administer the treatment until they were informed that the DOC has the capability to do so. Poor quality food, air and water caused MOVE 9 member Delbert Africa to contract cancer. Released in January 2020 after 42 years, his treatment had been so terribly botched that it could not be reversed. He died 6 months later. Many political prisoners have died mysteriously in prison or soon after their release. We call this death by medical neglect.

By contracting with outside companies, the DOC insures itself against litigation and grievances. If sued, they simply refer the matter to said corporation, who usually has plenty of funds and lawyers on staff. Also, much of this info is hidden — these corporations are protected by non-disclosure clauses in their contracts. The DOC and its profits from kickbacks contained in some of these contracts.

We challenge and call out these profiteers who drain resources from our incarcerated loved ones and their families. We call out the systemic racism built into the “injustice” system. We are still building our campaign and deciding next moves, but putting out information about these leeches is a strong first step.

Miller is a prison abolitionist and organizer with Food Not Bombs Solidarity and Mobilization4Mumia.

Food Not Bombs Solidarity launches campaign against prison profiteers outside Aramark in Philadelphia, March 15.

Berta Cáceres

One year before Obama turned the reins over to Donald Trump, March 2, 2016, a squad of U.S.-trained, corporate killers-for-hire assassinated Berta Cáceres.

But there is now mounting pressure to stop U.S. collaboration with the coup government. Five U.S. Congressional representatives have proposed the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, which if passed would purportedly cut off U.S. funding sources for Honduran security forces, “unless the Honduran government investigates and prosecutes blatant human rights violations by their police and military forces.” (tinyurl.com/jirc3oy)

It is unclear if this act would curb the violence committed against workers and Indigenous communities or whether it would only serve as a form of sanctions to further starve and terrorize the Honduran people. And it is unclear if the Biden administration would comply with the act even if it did pass Congress.

Now Secretary of State Antony Blinken was Vice President Biden’s National Security Advisor from 2009 to 2013, during which time the U.S. gave the coup government over $350 million in aid.

Current President Juan Orlando Hernández, a deeply unpopular figure inside Honduras who has faced tremendous backlash from the working class, is the subject of an ongoing corruption investigation due to his collaboration with drug traffickers. Still, President Biden has so far retained friendly ties with Hernández. ☐
Megan Rapinoe: soccer star, political activist
By Lyn Neeley

March 21 — Megan Rapinoe’s captivating autobiography, “One Life,” traces how her upbringing and lifelong joy of playing soccer led to stardom and political activism.

Rapinoe has used her superstar status to advance the fight of women and the oppressed. In 2012 she joined the handful of professional athletes who are out lesbians. In 2016 she took a knee during the national anthem protesting police brutality and systemic racism. Now Rapinoe is fighting for equal pay for women.

Rapinoe is co-captain of the U.S. Women’s National Soccer Team (USWNT) and has been essential to their winning record: four Women’s World Cup titles, four Olympic gold medals and eight Concacaf (Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football) Gold Cups. In 2018 she became the fourth woman to be named Sports Illustrated’s Women of the Year. In 2019 she won the Golden Cup for best player and the Golden Boot award for best scorer at the Fédération Internationale de Football Association tournament.

Rapinoe began reading about gay rights and the law in 2011. During that time her skill on the soccer field was making her a household name. She started asking herself, “why was she not out? And none of her gay teammates out?” She told her lesbian soccer friend Ali Krieger, “There are young kids who are too scared to be themselves, or if we keep hiding, it doesn’t make it normal to be in a lesbian relationship.”

In 2012 Rapinoe came out publicly in an interview with Elle magazine. “I feel like sports in general are still homophobic, in the sense that not a lot of people are out,” she said. “People want — they need — to see that there are people like me playing soccer for the good of U.S. sports.”

On taking a knee

With the LGBTQ2S+ movement a jumping off point for her politicization, she said that in 2015, “In the wake of Ferguson, I read every piece on racial injustice that came out in the press.”

As she was growing up, how white supremacists razed the Black towns of Tulsa and Rosewood, she realized that, “For Black Americans there have never been gains without sacrifices.”

Working with members of the USWNT, Rapinoe has been a leader in fighting for equal pay. In March 2019 USWNT filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation for pay discrimination. In May 2020 a federal judge dismissed the claim, but the team plans to appeal.

On March 24, National Equal Pay Day, President Joe Biden invited Rapinoe to testify for the need to close gender-based pay gaps. Rapinoe told the press, “I know there are millions of people who are marginalized by gender in the workplace and the same thing in their jobs.” And in her prepared statement, she wrote: “The women’s national team has won four World Cup championships and four Olympic gold medals on behalf of our country. Yet despite all this, we are still paid less than men — for each trophy, each win, each tie, each time we play.”

Despite the fact that the men’s national soccer team has never won a World Cup title, and the USWNT has won four, men players make over four times what women players make in salary. A woman’s minimum in 2019 was $16,638 compared to men’s $70,230. (tinyurl.com/4j679tss)

Women’s basketball

NCAA exposed for sexist practices

By Monica Moorehead

March Madness is underway — an annual two-and-a-half week tournament that seeds 68 men’s basketball teams belonging to National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I. Culminating in the Final Four and a championship game April 3-5, the men’s tournament will likely generate about $850 million, mainly through TV and cable revenue.

Not even the pandemic has altered this huge abundance of sports riches, despite the lack of large crowds of fans packing sports arenas to see their favorite teams play.

The astounding amount of revenue will go into the coffers of the NCAA to cover scholarships and athletic programs. Not one player will be financially compensated for their skills and popularity with fans.

March Madness also exists for women’s NCAA basketball with 64 teams within the same time frame as the men’s teams. That Final Four playoff and a championship game will happen April 2-4. But the women’s tournament is expected to bring in only $42 million in revenue from TV and cable rights. This alone shows a dramatic gap that exists between what the networks pay to show the women’s and men’s events.

What is on paper is one thing, but any equal funding between women’s and men’s sports programs has a long way to go.

The huge gap was brought home when a University of Oregon player, Sedona Prince, posted a March 18 Twitter video showing the lack of exercise equipment for women basketball players in the San Antonio, Texas, facilities where their Final Four games are played. The video showed there was only one set of barbells sitting in a large empty weight room.

Prince then put up a video revealing the wealth of elaborate equipment that male players have at their disposal in Indianapolis, where they will be playing their Final Four games. The elaborately outfitted weight room was twice the size of where the women were expected to work out.

Prince also posted a video showing the food the women received — soggy vegetables and unrecognizable meat — compared to the gourmet food provided for their male counterparts in buffet style, including lobster, beef fillets, grilled asparagus and more.

Demands for fair treatment

Prince’s posts created a firestorm of outrage and condemnation of the NCAA hierarchy’s sexism. Mark Emmert, the president of the NCAA whose salary is $5 million annually with added perks, was forced to apologize.

Emmert had to acknowledge that there were “different methods” for COVID testing for the men and women basketball players in their controlled “bubble environments.” A New York Times article pointed out: “The method in use at the men’s event in Indiana is called a polymerase chain reaction test, or a P.C.R. test, which is considered the gold standard of virus testing. It is highly sensitive and almost always detects infections. The method for the women’s tournament in Texas is a rapid antigen test, which is cheaper and generally provides quicker results but is less sensitive and more likely to yield false negatives.” (March 19)

Some immediate changes were made to right some of thewrongs, like providing more equipment for the women players. But according to the players and their supporters, they plan to call for an investigation to help bring about more permanent solutions before March Madness begins again in 2022.

To add to the list of grievances against the exploitative NCAA system, a number of male and female players are wearing #NotNCAAProperty shirts. These express their dissatisfaction at NCAA rules that do not allow them to profit off their likenesses being used — whether their faces or their jerseys numbers — on the sports merchandise which brings millions of dollars into the NCAA coffers.

Equal pay for women

Stark differences documented between equipment in women’s and men’s weight rooms during March Madness 2021.
Smash Georgia’s anti-voting law

The Republican Party-dominated state government has pushed through a bill making Georgia the first state to pass a broad anti-voting law. This law drags voting protection for African Americans back to the racist norms before the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Losing the national presidential vote and two Senate seats underscored the Georgia Republicans into supporting Black voters. Other states have similar laws in the works.

Resistance has begun. There is already talk of moving baseball’s All-Star Game out of Atlanta this summer. A mass movement like the one that won the 1965 law can still reverse this racist offensive and broaden voting and other civil rights.

While its sponsors deny the racist content of the Georgia law, it’s easy to demonstrate this by going through the law point by point. We'd rather first thank a Georgia law, it’s easy to demonstrate this by going other civil rights.

Other states have similar laws in the works.

Suez Canal

Capitalist greed confronts physics — and loses

By G. Dunkel

The Ever Given, a Panamanian-flagged, Taiwan-operated, Japan–owned, German-managed, Indian–crewed Ultra Large Container Vessel (ULCV), blocked the Suez Canal in the early morning of March 23. Each day the canal was closed cost $10 billion in international trade.

The only alternative route between Europe (and the East Coast of the United States) and East Asia is around the Cape of Good Hope. That route is 15,000 miles longer and requires two weeks to a month extra travel time, depending on the speed of the vessel. As of March 27, 269 vessels were still waiting to go through the canal, including 15 carrying livestock, where the concern was providing food and water.

The crisis in the Suez, an artery through which over 15% of the world’s trade flows, has been major news, covered in the New York Times, BBC World News, Fox News, NBC News, ABC News, Reuters, the Sydney Morning Dispatch, Le Monde and CNN and many other sources.

This level of coverage means the capit- talists are stressing out.

ULCVs were developed on an enormous scale to save labor costs and increase prof- its. So to move all 18,000 of the 20-foot containers currently on the Ever Given by truck would require at least 8,000 truck drivers. To move them all by rail, a train would have to be 70 miles long.

After the ULCVs were developed, a whole infrastructure of ports and water- ways had to be created because of their size — mostly with public money. For example, the Panama Canal, which uses locks, required extensive renovation work. Ship crews, tugboat crews, dock workers, crane operators — all needed retraining for this new class of vessels. While the costs were public, the profits were mainly private.

‘Bigger, better’ vs. the elements

The Ever Given is 1,312 feet long (about as long as the Empire State Building is high) and 194 feet wide. When fully loaded with containers, it weighs in at 240,000 tons. The top of the contain- ers can be 150 feet (12 stories) above the water line. Bigger ships are under consideration!

The Ever Given, aground in the Suez Canal, March 23.

Given the tremendous area of the Ever Given exposed to wind, even with skillful handling it is not surprising there was an accident when the wind was blowing hard and visibility was low.

In the March 27 Captain.com blog, Captain George Livingstone, who is a San Francisco bar pilot, says, “When incidents occur at sea, the focus will be on human error, even if there are underlying funda- mental flaws in concept or design.” His post makes it clear that the development of these ULCVs was done without much regard to the crew, safety or making these vessels easier to operate. (tinyurl.com/ eyeddjd)

The Ever Given had a crew of only 25 people, and since running a ship is a 24-hour, seven day operation, only 8 to 12 crew members would handle the vessel at any one time. This is a “human error” accident waiting to happen.

The drive to reduce labor costs — which is a capitalist’s way of saying reduce the number of workers to a minimum while squeezing out maximum “productivity” — leads to catastrophic situations.

Meanwhile, the whole debate in the press over the blockade of the Suez Canal, raising the issues of “supply chains” and “just-in-time inventory,” reflects the bourgeois view that providing safety or producing “excess” inventory is a waste of money. Already the spot prices for petroleum products are gyrating, along with the prices of toilet paper and other essentials.

Now the wealthy are losing big money, but it is workers who are working long hours doing the dangerous job of unblocking the Suez Canal.

Is Workers World essential to you? Then support it now!

COVID-19 has exposed everything wrong with capitalism in the U.S.: • No national system provides free health care for all. • Inadequate access to care— including vaccines, for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, in/migrant and poor communities, result in their high rates of COVID-caused illness and death. • No provisions to support workers and their families with childcare, housing or other necessities. • No guaranteed jobs or livable income. The pandemic downturn hurt 25 million workers and their families; overall there are still job losses. • No mandatory paid sick time or bene- fits for essential workers. • Lack of sufficient nutritious food; hunger is widespread.

- Institutionalized racism, sexism, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ/+ bigotry, ableism, Police brutality con- tinues unabated. 
- Incarcerated people are kept in pris- ons where COVID-19 is rampant. 
- Class system rigged in favor of the 1%. Billionaires’ wealth increased by $1.3 trillion since the pandemic began. 
- Congress allocates $500 billion for the Pentagon, while government pro- grams providing for human needs are insufficient or nonexistent.

Workers World provides the theore- ical and organizational ammunition needed to crush this inhumane system and create one that supports the working class and oppressed people: socialism. The need for that becomes clearer every day during this dev- astating pandemic, when everyone has been called upon to show solidarity and form a united front. Please consider putting your money where it really helps: 1. man in the tower.

We established the Workers World Suppor- ter Program 44 years ago, so readers could promote the working-class truth needed for rev- olutionary change. Members receive a year’s subscription to WW, a regular let- ter about timely issues and one, two or three (respectively) free subscriptions for friends for a donation of $75, $100, $300 — or more. We can receive a copy of the book: “What Road to Socialism?” upon request. (Or read it at workers.org/books.)

During the pandemic, arti- cles are posted daily at workers. org. Printed copies are mailed out once a month. Weekly printed issues will resume as soon as the crisis lifts. Write monthly or annual checks to Workers World. Mail them to Workers World, with your name and address, to 147 W. 24th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10011. Or donate online at workers.org/donate.

We are grateful for your help in build- ing Workers World!
Paris Commune
Icon of workers' revolution for 150 years

By John Catalinotto

An uprising on Paris on March 18, 1871, toward the end of the Franco-Prussian War, burst open the structure of a centralized capitalist society. The 72-day social explosion in what would become the capital of the French Empire became the iconic blueprint for workers' revolution.

Lessons of the Paris Commune, established 46 years earlier, laid the groundwork for the 1917 Russian Revolution, an event that marked the 20th-century class-struggle struggle.

After the 1870 French revolution executed and deposed the French monarchy, opening the road to political power for the capitalist class, France often set the pace for social conflict and social change in Europe. Uprisings took place in 1830 and 1848 that kept advancing the demands of the poor, led by the working class.

The Commune lasted only 72 days, but they were great days, which left the door open to the People’s Republic of China in 1919, the 20th century’s first workers’ revolution. For anyone seriously interested in a now socialist world, the experience of the Commune showed that it was possible to install social, political and economic systems that were an improvement on the capitalist model.

For anyone seriously interested in a revolution that frees the downtrodden and oppressed, these two works are indispensable. And they are based on the living experience of the Paris Commune.

El costo de la guerra de clases de COVID

Continúa de la página 12

Turn the Guns Around
Mutinies, Soldier Revolts & Revolutions

by John Catalinotto

"If schools in the United States really want to impart historical truth, John Catalinotto’s Turn the Guns Around would be required reading. He tells the true story of this epoch. Few participants know more about the massive GI rebellion against the Vietnam War, the anti-war veterans’ movement or the history of soldier revolts from the Paris Commune to the Portuguese coup."

—Pvt. Larry Holmes

GI resistor and organizer for the American Servicemen’s Union 1972-74

Available at online booksellers

Trump, costaría casi tanto como todos los cheques de estímulo juntos. Estas medidas dieron beneficios inmensa- mente superior a las de las corporaciones y a un puñado de ultrarricos.

A lo largo de la pandemia de coronavirus, la mayor preocupación de la mayoría de los trabajadores sin empleo no ha sido el aumento del número de muertos, sino la caída de sus resultados.

Los sindicalistas apuestan a apoyar a los trabajadores en el mercado de valores y se beneficiarán de las exenciones fiscales que les otorgan los políticos leoncitos. Pero sin trabajadores en el trabajo, que produzcan más riqueza para los jefes de lo que éstos les pagan en salarios, su sistema de beneficios empieza a desmoronarse.

En el capitalismo, el trabajo es la fuente de toda la riqueza. La presión para que los trabajadores vuelvan a trabajar es lo que motiva a los políticos pro-capitalistas a tirar la cadena de COVID al viento y aprobar sólo medidas mínimas de alivio económico.

Los trabajadores necesitan que se les gare den unos ingresos mensuales dignos, que se les proteja contra las desa- luciones y que tengan un acceso adecuado a la alimentación y a la atención sanitaria, para que no se vean obligados a trabajar en condiciones inseguras durante la pandemia de COVID-19 sólo para sobrevivir. Esto es lo que tienen los trabajadores en los países socialistas.

Catalinotto is author of “Turn the Guns Around: Mutinies, Soldier Revolts and Revolutions,” which contains a chapter on the Paris Commune. The works by Marx and Lenin mentioned in the article are available free online.
El 18 de marzo, el presidente estadounidense Joe Biden llamó “asesino” al presidente ruso Vladimir Putin. Dado que nadie ha retirado este insulto, suponemos que no fue una metáfora de pata de Biden. Por el contrario, indica un aumento de la hostilidad de Estados Unidos hacia Rusia, al igual que las recientes conversaciones en Alaska mostraron un conflicto en desarrollo con China Popular. Tanto Rusia como China, al igual que Estados Unidos, son potencias nucleares.

La primera pregunta que plantea este insulto es: ¿Es Biden un asesino? Revisamos el historial de Biden en importantes decisiones de política exterior en este siglo, que tenían que ver con los desastres causados por esta desastrosa guerra contra Libia.

Ya, con sólo 36 días de gobierno del propio Biden, éste autorizó el ataque aéreo a Siria. Independientemente de lo que opinen Biden sobre ese tipo de decisiones, ha demostrado que está dispuesto a matar. Biden hizo una campaña dura y frecuente para convertirse en presidente. Ser presidente de Estados Unidos significa ser el jefe ejecutivo del imperialismo mundial. Es la persona con la autoridad legal para dirigir el Pentágono, el Departamento de Estado, la CIA y otros centros más sombríos de la política exterior estadounidense para supervisar la explotación de la humanidad en interés de un relativo puñado de multimillonarios.

Ser un asesino no es parte de la descripción del trabajo. (3)