GM 1937, Amazon 2021

By Martha Grevatt

Bessemer, Alabama, sitting on the outskirts of Birmingham and with a population of 26,500 — about 75% African American — has become a central focus for the entire class struggle.

There, at Amazon warehouse BHM1, thousands of workers are fighting for a union. Over Amazon’s strident objections, the National Labor Relations Board is conducting a union representation election by mail. From Feb. 8 until March 29, workers will mail in ballots indicating if they want representation by the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Workers Union, which is affiliated with United Food and Commercial Workers.

Not only is this African American majority workplace up against the world’s richest human, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, they are facing off with the second-largest company in the U.S. — and the ninth largest in the world. Amazon, including Amazon-owned Whole Foods, has 1.37 million workers in the U.S. alone. This does not count delivery drivers. Amazon has the highest market capitalization — based on stock value and number of outstanding shares — of any corporation anywhere.

Amazon brags on its web site that its workers make $15 an hour — a recent concession to the mass low-wage workers movement. Fight for $15 — and have health benefits. Bessemer has a poverty rate of 25%, and 19% of residents do not have health insurance. Alabama is one of 21 states that still have a minimum wage equal to or below the federal minimum of $7.25 an hour.

Given that, landing a job at Amazon could seem like a lucky break. But the pay is not enough to support a family. In 2021, $15 an hour doesn’t even come close to the value Amazon workers produce for CEO Bezos, whose wealth is expanding at a current rate of $2,537 per second! Working conditions, described as “back-breaking,” are unbearable. Cameras and spy software developed by Amazon itself are used to monitor worker productivity, bathroom breaks and any kind of “data relating to human movement, location and activity, bathroom breaks and any kind of ‘data relating to...”

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NFL union solidarity

By Monica Moorehead

Following the May 25, 2020, public murder of 46-year-old George Floyd by Minneapolis police, masses of people took to the streets for almost the entire summer from one coast to another in protest of not only what happened to him, but against racist police brutality and white-supremacist violence in general.

In late August following the heinous police shooting of 29-year-old Jacob Blake — who was hit by seven bullets in his back, leaving him paralyzed — women and men players in the National Basketball Association suspended games during the playoffs in protest. This protest spread to other sports organizations, including Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, the National Hockey League and college football players.

The 2,000 member-strong National Football League Players Association (NFLPA), inspired by these actions, took a bold step on Jan. 24 when it tweeted its support for 5,800 Amazon workers’ right to organize a union in Bessemer, Ala., outside of Birmingham.

The Amazon workers voted overwhelmingly to hold a union election beginning Feb. 8, with mail-in voting to have the company’s fierce anti-union campaign and in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is noteworthy that the NFLPA became the first significant union to come out in support of the Bessemer Amazon workers. The reason is that the NFL is a multibillion dollar industry, and football happens to be the most popular professional sport in the U.S. The NFL has 70% African American players, and...
Drug-induced homicide laws kill

By Princess Harmony

Almost everyone knows that the United States is home to the most destructive, most negative reaction to drugs and drug use — the so-called War on Drugs. But few know that factual evidence cannot carry a charge of drug-induced homicide, laws that would punish those who provide drugs that cause fatal overdoses.

Nobody who shares drugs thinks that their drugs will be the ones to kill someone. They do not intend to murder anyone. Yet they can be punished as though they were the root cause of said overdose death, rather than the drugs themselves.

In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, where the opioid epidemic has ravaged small towns as well as cities like Philadelphia and Camden, N.J., punishment under these laws hasn’t stopped overdose deaths. They actually could end up forcing more overdose deaths, as people flee out of fear of being arrested and charged.

As the opioid epidemic gets worse, these laws against “drug-induced homicide” get stricter and stricter. This forces people to make hard decisions that they would ordinarily not make.

An example of this happened outside Philadelphia, in Montgomery County. Joshua Benner and Ronald Shock bought drugs from Philadelphia’s “Needle Park,” McPherson Square. They were using drugs with their friend Ramon Morales when Morales lost consciousness and could not be revived by rumored means — that a cold water shower could wake someone up from an overdose. Both Benner and Shock believed they were doing all they could to try and revive Morales, but when it became obvious they couldn’t revive him, they dropped him in an area near a hospital.

Pennsylvania’s drug delivery that results in death. Its “Good Samaritan” drug laws — that shield users from being punished for people overdosing — do not shield people who have provided drugs that are overdosing. Benner and Shock were afraid of what could happen had they stayed with Morales or had they called the authorities. If the War on Drugs and its strict laws were eased, then Morales might still be alive today.

The drug warriors have sworn up and down that if the United States were to make its War on Drugs stricter, people would be deterred from using or buying drugs for themselves and others. But this is not the case. When dealers are arrested under these laws, all that happens is that new dealers take their place.

Despite 40 years of the War on Drugs, we are even worse off with our drug problem. There are numerous stories of people being charged for sharing drugs with friends and partners. There are also stories of racial bias in charging people for having delivered drugs to others.

Racist narrative targets Black people

In Maine, in response to the overdose crisis, former Gov. Paul Le Page accused “Black dealers” and “pushers” of being the main cause of the overdose crisis, and asked for even stricter laws to punish them. A politician openly called for the strictly punishing of Black people, despite the fact that Black people are not responsible for the drug problem. Prosecutors, politicians, and others who push this racist narrative have not acknowledged that their idea is flat out wrong.

What does work against drugs? Strategies against fatal drug misuse, like the distribution of Narcan and fentanyl test strips, plus the opening of safe injection sites help prevent drug overdoses and deaths. Studies have shown that strict War on Drugs policies do not help. Tens of thousands of people have died, and it’s unknown how many of those died due to people’s fear of getting help. But we do know that it makes an impact on whether or not a drug overdose patient gets help in time.

We must push back against laws that say that drug delivery resulting in fatal overdoses is a crime. We need to push for more healing and more justice-oriented laws that allow for people to get help for their friends, partners, loved ones, and even for strangers when they overdose. It would make such an important dent in the scourge that is drug abuse.

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

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

Drug-induced homicide laws kill

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 WW branch near you.

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

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An appreciation of The magnificent Cicely Tyson

By Monica Moorehead

Harriet Tubman in “A Woman Called Moses,” “The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman,” as Coretta Scott King in “King,” Rebecca in “Sounder” and the mother of Rosa Parks in “The Rosa Parks Story” — these are just some of the roles and movies that the great Cicely Tyson either portrayed or starred in during her illustrious 60-plus-year career. And even though she died at the age of 96 on Jan. 28, the news of her death was still a shock and a blow to the nervous system. Tyson was more than a great actor; she was a legend and a pioneer.

Whether on TV, the big screen or on Broadway, Cicely Tyson may have physically appeared petite, petite, but she carried along with the likes of the late Ruby Dee, was a towering force to be reckoned with when it came to portraying strong African American women characters, serious or not.

Her three Emmys, Tony, Peabody Award, Kennedy Center honor and honorary Academy Award for lifetime achievement and numerous other awards merely reflected her acting genius, but Tyson did not use acting accolades to measure her true worth as the kind of actor she aspired to be when she first joined the prestigious Actor’s Studio during the 1940s.

Born in East Harlem to working-class parents who emigrated from the Caribbean, Tyson’s mother kicked her out of the house when she made the decision to pursue an acting career. Very much influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, during the 1960s Tyson decided to take on acting roles which portrayed Black women in an anti-racist, non-stereotypical way. She was the first Black woman to wear an Afro for the 1963 TV series: “East Side/West Side.”

Tyson and other actors of color had to make hard decisions on which roles to reject and which to accept in order to make a living in an entertainment industry dominated by white male studio bosses and with very few screenwriters of color. But Tyson understood more than anyone that her principled sacrifice would limit her access to roles, many of which were one-dimensional and demeaning in their depiction of Black people.

Wanting to make a real impact

In an interview with Parade magazine in 1974, Tyson remarked: “We Black actresses have played so many prostitutes and drug addicts and housemaids, always negative. I won’t play that kind of characterless role anymore, even if I have to go back to starving.”

Following her brilliant Oscar-nominated role in “Sounder,” playing the spouse of a sharecropper sent to prison for ‘stealing’ food to feed his family during the Depression, Tyson, then 48 years old, had to wait two years for her next job. That job turned out to be the groundbreaking TV movie, “The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman,” which chronicled the life of a 110-year-old Black woman who began her life in slavery, saw her spouse lynched by the KKK and was active throughout the Civil Rights era.

The image of Tyson’s 110-year-old character defiantly drinking from a “whites-only” water fountain still remains one of the most stirring scenes ever filmed. It was a tour-de-force triumph that won Tyson the first Emmy for a Black actress in a leading dramatic role. An estimated 40 million people tuned in for her performance.

Tyson told Entertainment News Service in 1997, “I wait for roles — first, to be written for a woman, then, to be written for a Black woman. And then I have the audacity to be selective about the kinds of roles I play. I’ve really got three strikes against me. So, aren’t you amazed I’m still here?”

Revoke police license to kill disabled people!

By Edward Yudelovich

People with untreated mental illness are 16 times more likely to be killed during a police encounter than other civilians approached or stopped by law enforcement, according to a study released December 2015 by the Treatment Advocacy Center. Disability rights journalist David M. Perry, whose son has Down syndrome, documented in research for the Ruderman Family Foundation that as many as half of all people killed by police have a disability.

A disproportionate number are people of color. (tinyurl.com/y7hau3fu)

A disproportionate number are people of color. (tinyurl.com/y7hau3fu)


Parsa’s parents are suing Jefferson Parish Sheriff Joseph Lopinto, the deputies involved and the owners of the shopping center where the incident occurred, claiming violations of Eric’s and his parents’ constitutional rights, as well as violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Eric began to “experience a sudden sensory outburst” related to his autism, the lawsuit says, and began slapping himself and slapping and grabbing his father. An off-duty reserve deputy handcuffed Eric and sat on his back for the next seven minutes.

“Crucially, what the deputy should have done at that point, once things were calm and everything was fine, was they should have taken the weight off of Eric Parsa’s back,” said William Most, attorney for the family, during a news conference. “They should have rolled Eric Parsa onto his side to ensure that he could continue to breathe. But the deputies did not do so.”

Over the next several minutes, six more deputies arrived on the scene. One of them relieved the first deputy, getting on Eric’s back and, at one point, putting him in a choke hold, according to the lawsuit. Each of the deputies were aware Eric had special needs, the lawsuit says, but none intervened to move Eric onto his side into a “recovery position.”

“It wasn’t until his body had gone limp and he had urinated on himself that deputies rolled him into ‘recovery position,’” the lawsuit says. “By then it was too late.”

The Jefferson Parish Coroner’s Office classified the death as an accident.

Boston police killing

Brian Shea, a Boston member of the Disability Justice and Rights Caucus of Workers World Party related the story of Terence Coleman to Workers World. Coleman, a Black man diagnosed with schizophrenia, was killed by Boston police in 2016 after his mother called for an ambulance to take him to the hospital.

Police and prosecutors say he attacked emergency medical technicians with a large knife, but his mother — Hope Coleman who is suing the city — denies her son was armed or posed any danger.

Terrence Coleman, who had gone inside the apartment by the time EMTs arrived, became upset when he saw blue flashing lights and told them he didn’t want to go to the hospital — but the EMTs insisted he come with them and tried to grab him. The officers hurled through the door when they heard a scuffle and tackled and shot him. Supporters have renamed Peter’s Park in Boston “Terrence Coleman Park,” in his memory and honor.

Yudelovich is a Disability Justice and Rights Caucus activist with neurodivergent and auditory disabilities. The caucus can be contacted at djrwuswp@workers.org.

Cicely Tyson as Miss Jane Pittman.

As Rebecca in “Sounder.”

Cicely Tyson and Rosa Parks in 1984.

Eric Parsa, right, is seen with his mother, Donna Lou, center, and father, Daren Parsa.
Bay Area movement

‘Mass releases, not mass deaths!’

By Judy Greenspan
Oakland, Calif.

Jan. 31 — Today as a plane pulled a banner, “Newsmov: Free prisoners 2 stop Covid deaths,” through the sky over the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, protesters held signs against “State execution by COVID-19” and dropped banners from the bridge pedestrian path on the East Span. Simultaneously, a caravan of more than 200 cars — which started earlier at the Port of Oakland — drove onto the bridge. Advancing very slowly at 5 mph, lead cars fanned out to fill all five lanes of traffic, so that the caravan took at least an hour crossing the bridge.

The action challenged California Gov. Gavin Newsom to approve the mass release of prisoners during the pandemic. Newsom, a Democrat, has freed only a handful of people so far. Nearly 200 prisoners in the state have already died from COVID, and there have been over 47,425 confirmed infections in state prisons.

This bold demonstration was organized by a coalition led by No Justice Under Capitalism, with support from Critical Resistance, CUR/3 (Communites United for Reparative Youth Justice) and several other groups.

Before the car caravan left for the bridge, Courtney Morris with NJUC and other organizations from Newmorn to act. Participants, including KAGE Universal and Minster King X of California Prison Focus, read several messages of solidarity from activists incarcerated behind the walls of California’s prisons. KAGE Universal, while inside, helped broker an historic agreement to end hostilities between prisoner factions.

Allegro Taylor, the daughter of Hugo Pinell, spoke on the need to release aging prisoners, including several political prisoners at risk of death from COVID. Pinell, a member of the San Quentin Six, was murdered in 2015 at age 70, because guards “released” him into a yard filled with white racist prisoners after Pinell had been in solitary confinement for 45 years.

Nube Brown, managing editor of the San Francisco Bay View National Black Newspaper and a leader of CPF, called for immediate release of several prisoners who have been incarcerated for more than 30 years. She and others called for the end of the draconian sentence, Life Without Parole. A statewide campaign against LWOP, involving CPF, the California Coalition for Women Prisoners and others is building around the人大代表ative measures the respondents had put in place.

The judge knew there was an active outbreak here, as it was presented as evidence. She further stated that she recognized that I was at high risk for serious complications given my co-morbidities, but that my claims of deliberate indifference were unavailing! That is because, she said, they had done the best they could by giving out soap.

Court shields prison officials

Is the action or inaction of a party any more or less indifferent just because the Party is the Government? Is it more or less indifferent because the government is a government?

In March 2020 I petitioned the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania under U.S. Code §1983, complaining about constitutional violations of my substantive due process rights, subjecting me to cruel and unusual punishment. I stated deliberate indifference claims through staff not wearing masks, cross-contamination by officers who had tested positive, the housing of inmates who had tested negative, and allowing inmates from multiple housing units to congregate in one area. The list of their malfeasance goes on.

I requested immediate injunctive relief and a temporary restraining order — to be released to home confinement to allow for proper social distancing. I was granted a hearing in front of Judge Susan Paradise Baxter of Erie, Pa., to argue my reasons for the temporary restraining order. At the hearing, the court allowed respondents to testify about the mental preventive measures they put in place, such as handing out cloth masks and bars of soap.

I cross-examined each witness, and got them to admit the malfeasance mentioned earlier and various other egregious conduct, such as respondents requiring a negative test for staff to return to work. Ultimately, Judge Baxter denied the motion, stating that there was no deliberate indifference given the preventative measures the respondents had put in place.

The court shields prison officials despite the evidence. They have created an unholy trinity, one protecting the other. This is COVID-19. They have created an unholy trinity, one protecting the other.

Who is responsible for the lives that have been prevented? Who then is responsible for the lives that have been prevented? Who then is responsible for the lives that have been prevented? Who then is responsible for the lives that have been prevented?

The reality is nobody! The court has manifestly failed to hear my plight and my pleas for mercy!

The court’s stance of apathy and its shielding the prisons from constitutional scrutiny have created a barbaric result. Inmates have nowhere to turn, to avenue of redress, when the courts turn a blind eye and let nature take its course. Who then is responsible for the lives COVID-19 may take? It is now a game of chance every time you step out of your cell. Am I going to get infected today? If I do, I ask will I die from this? Could this have been prevented?

I was not sentenced to die in prison! Who can help me? The reality is nobody! Every branch of government has effectively shielded the other from any liability for inmate deaths and sickness related to COVID-19. They have created an unholy trinity, one protecting the other. This is “domestic terrorism,” torture by acquiescence. The courts have a duty to protect those who — by virtue of a court order — have been stripped of every means to protect themselves, those for whom society has already tolled the bell.

‘Cry out for us!’

Instead the courts have allowed inmates who are nonviolent and at low risk to languish in prison, as this deadly pandemic has spread in these tinderboxes called prisons. How will we look back and gauge what happened? I can assure you that there is no absolution for the bureaucratic indifference, barbarism and inhumane blind eye the court has taken. I’m asking the public to cry out, and to speak for those who can’t, by voice of having their voices silenced behind these fences and walls.

Unholy trinity

Courts, governors, legislators refuse to prevent COVID-19 deaths in prisons

By Wesley Massey

The writer is an incarcerated worker in Indiana, Pa.

COVID-19 has exposed the “cancel culture” in the American prison system in relation to how prisoners are treated like chattel. Prisons and their administrations have been given carte blanche authority to govern themselves on how they treat prisoners during this pandemic. This lack of oversight has proven to be barbaric, inhumane and heartless, as thousands of prisoners have become sick and hundreds of inmates have died.

So where do the inmates turn for help?

It’s a longstanding fact in this country that the government was created with a separation of powers clause. Our framers wanted to prevent the executive branch from becoming too powerful. As a result, they established three branches, and that should ensure that the other branch beyond their own.

When a prisoner is aggrieved, his only avenue is the court system. In March 2020 I petitioned the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania under U.S. Code §1983, stating that the government was created with a separation of powers clause. Our framers wanted to prevent the executive branch from becoming too powerful.

In a demand for prisoner release during the COVID-19 pandemic a car caravan occupies the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, Jan. 21.
Lockdown fuels suicide

By Miley Selena Fletcher

The following letter is from a transgen-
der incarcerated worker at SCI Forest.

On Jan. 6, an inmate nicknamed Brother Bernie (Bernie Shank), who was in his 60s and doing a life sentence, came out of his cell at State Correctional Institution (SCI) Forest on the second tier of the Residential Housing Unit/Special Needs Unit. Brother Bernie turned his back toward the block and began to bounce while hanging onto the railing. He then threw himself back, arms spread open to his sides, held his head back and hit the floor with amighty thud.

Three days later he passed away. The guard in the bubble came running out, but too late. No one can understand why he did this.

Brother Bernie was quiet, always giving kindly from his heart to many inmates. Never asking for anything back. He was always cheerful, in great spirits. Maybe COVID-19 and this lockdown, limiting us to 20 minutes out of cells per day, had something to do with his mental instability. I guess we will never know.

The administration here at SCI Forest said he was COVID-19 positive before he died. On Jan. 14 and 15, SCI Forest did COVID tests on the entire inmate population [4,300 people]. Over 850 inmates tested positive, including me. I was asymptomatic, meaning I have COVID-19, but I have no symptoms. [As of Jan. 22, 24 employees have tested positive.]

I’m talking about both inside and outside of the prison complex.

I truly believe that the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has looked at lockdowns as a way to control a lot of violence, chaos and mayhem, without taking into consideration the mental toll on peo-
ple like Brother Bernie. The possibility of something like this happening again is on everyone’s minds, and everyone is wondering what is nor-
mal routine now? 

Pennsylvania incarcerated worker speaks

Prisons during pandemic

By Joe Piette
Philadelphia

Since Nov. 1, 2020, more than 3,000 incarcerated workers and at least 1,200 guards and staff have tested pos-
itive for COVID-19 in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC). Since last March, at least 72 people behind DOC bars have died from the pandemic, the majority of those deaths since Nov.

On Dec. 21, Workers World reporter Joe Piette interviewed Bryant Arroyo, imprisoned at State Correctional Institute (SCI) Frackville, on what he’s experiencing during this massive COVID-19 outbreak. This is Part Two of that interview.

Medical mistrust

Workers World: So I know with the flu shot, many people refused to take that. For the COVID vaccine, will everyone take it or will there be a lot of resistance?

Bryant Arroyo: When they ini-
tially promoted the flu vaccine, they had stated that, if the population of prison-
iers would take it, they would put $5 onto your account. And you know, some guys inquired with me and, I said, the last time I checked the history of the PA DOC, they’ve really never paid anybody to take anything. That’s number one.

Number two, is that anytime that they do pay you an incentive, or a gift, if you will, from the Department of Corrections, or the government, it’s for an experiment. So a lot of people didn’t take it, regard-
less of the fact that there was a $5 incen-
tive. It sounded suspicious. It would have been hard off for them to say, we’re just doing the vaccines, whoever wants them, it’s available.

And it ain’t like a lot of people don’t know about the Philadelphia Experiment.

They were paying them and what have you.

That’s exactly what came to mind when I heard about it. [tinyurl.com/ywypqgy]

WW: So will it be different with the COVID vaccine?

BA: I’m thinking yes. And I’ll tell you why. We’ve been locked down for over eight, nine months. People are starv-
ing to get back to the day that they can say there’s some normalcy, and there’s more time allotted for activities, more movement, school programs, law library. Everybody is waiting for the vaccine. And privilege information for them to make copies for me, which is a total breach of attorney-client privilege, privacy of that letter goes out the window, even though they say well, we’re just going to photo-
copy it. I don’t know that.

So this is what’s going on here. There’s a lot of cutting corners. And they’re just going through as if it was a meat process-
ing plant. Just full-blown production, every chicken is the same. Just keep it moving.

WW: There was a 38-year-old man named Cornelius Staine with a five-
year sentence at SCI Pine Grove who died of COVID a couple weeks age.

BA: So he didn’t get a real five-year sentence, he got a death sentence, which is a gross miscarriage and unconscion-
able aspect of what is going on within these facilities. Because there is no medication. A buddy of mine named Shawn Saunders commented that it is our Constitutional right to question and seek justice for oneself, and for all those that are similarly situated. He stated that at SCI Frackville on a daily basis, there is an imbalance and mismanagement on COVID quarantine operations; there is insufficient COVID aftercare for the many prisoners currently on the housing units that have become sick from COVID, such as untreated respiratory problems, chest pains, digestive problems, and constant body aches. And then there’s the continu-
ing surge of mental health deterioration among its overall prison population. So he’s saying basically, this is the new norm of pervasive injustices that must be chal-
lenged with the ultimate goal of replacing them with accountability, safety, healing, instead of punishment.

So you know, when you look at the big aspect of this, you have everybody looking at each other and saying, what do we do?

And the only thing that the medical department has stipulated is drink water and hopefully, you’ll get through the pro-
cess. The quarantine is lack of the draw, because if you don’t get to the BMU — the hospital with only eight beds available — then they have the satellite hospital and I don’t know if they have need that at all.

Back in November, the prison shared a video warning us that our water was con-
taminated and could compromise our health, but now, just weeks later, they want us to drink more water as a treat-
ment for COVID? It’s horrific.

On Jan. 5, a COVID test confirmed Arroyo was positive. His new cellmate Brian Muffley (QF-1534) was exposed for weeks but officials have refused to test him. Arroyo was sent to RHU, the restricted housing unit, where he is held for 23.5 hours per day in a cell without hot water, television, or electrical outlets.
Groundbreaking victory for Wash Supply workers

By Mahoma López, LWC, and Yuriana Sanchez, LWC Leader

On Jan. 29, the Laundromat Wash Supply workers scored a groundbreaking victory against their employer. For many years, the employees of Wash Supply have faced various working conditions at the workplace. The workers believed that the best tool they had to change the workplace was organizing and forming an independent labor association.

In New York City and other parts of the country, the retail laundromat industry is plagued by precarious working conditions. Laundromat industry employers have suffered from abuses by employers and the negligence of governmental institutions to investigate and enforce the existing laws that protect workers.

A pattern of violations have been underpaid and misclassified in this industry is wage theft. The report “Employers steal billions from workers’ paychecks each year,” by David Cooper and Teresa Kroeger, states that wage theft is “the failure to pay workers the full wages to which they are legally entitled.” According to Cooper and Kroeger, “Wage theft can take many forms, including but not limited to minimum wage violations, overtime violations, meal break violations, pay-stub, and illegal deductions or misclassification.

The report findings demonstrate the precarious conditions of low-wage jobs in the 10 most populous states where workers are most likely to be paid less than the minimum wage — in Florida 7.3%, Ohio 5.2% and New York 5.0%. These workers suffering minimum wage violations have been underpaid an average of $64 each week, which means that a year-round worker is losing $3,300 per year and receiving only $10,500 in annual wages, according to Cooper and Kroeger.

One in five workers underpaid

In 2018, the Laundry Workers Center launched a “Report on working conditions in the retail laundromat industry” that examines the working conditions of retail laundromat workers in NYC. A finding of the report was that “one in five workers were paid $10.00 per hour or less: a likely violation of New York's minimum wage requirements.”

Another finding was that “more than half of workers were subjected to harassment in the workplace, ranging from racial slurs and insults to threats and intimidation.” In 2019, Wash Supply employees approached the Laundry Workers Center. Their goal at the beginning was to communicate that our employer was stealing our wages. LWC conducted an investigation and found indeed that our wages were stolen.

At that time, Mahoma López, the lead organizer and co-executive director, explained to us that the organization does not focus just on the violation of wage theft. As co-director and lead organizer of the Laundry Workers Center, it is critical to articulate the organization’s vision, which is to empower low-wage workers and organize them in the workplace to make real changes in the workplace and their communities. We believe that those who suffer exploitation in their workplaces must learn how to organize and educate on issues beyond their workplace.

Workers began to build political consciousness and imagine their power as working class. When they realized what power they had, they decided that the best way to ensure workplace changes was to organize and form a workers’ association.

Critical for workers to become organizers

As the lead organizer of the campaign and co-executive director of the Laundry Workers Center, Lopez understood that it was critical for the workers to become organizers by learning a critical set of organizing skills. My personal experience as a leader of the Hot and Crusty Campaign in 2012 helped me understand that leaders need to become the strategists, the communicators, the tacticians, the agitators and political educators of their campaigns. Thus, when Wash Supply workers participated in the leadership institute, they learned how to develop strategies, tactics and how to run a campaign in their community and workplace.

Furthermore, they learned how essential it is to develop a profound analysis of workers’ political and economic consciousness and imagine their power as the working class. When they realized what power they had, they decided that the best way to ensure workplace changes was to organize and form a workers’ association.

Wash Supply represents the workers’ victory in 2021, the 10th year anniversary of the Laundry Workers Center’s vision, which is to empower low-wage workers and organize them in the workplace to make real changes in the workplace and their communities. We believe that those who suffer exploitation in their workplaces must learn how to organize and educate on issues beyond their workplaces.

In synthesis, the workers’ victory in Wash Supply represents the workers’ will to win better working conditions and end exploitation in the workplace. It represents the necessity of building political consciousness in the working class to realize its power and move from oppression to liberation.

Finally, the workers have built a network of solidarity with different partners of the social justice movement such as the Solidarity Center, Workers Assembly Against Racism, the Internationalist Workers Association of the social justice movement such as the Solidarity Center, Workers Assembly Against Racism, the Internationalist Workers Association.

As Michael Foster, a poultry worker in Bessemer and RWDHSO organizer told Amazon workers: “[T]hey are part of a movement that is world-wide. I want them to know that we are important, and we do matter.” (NY Times, Jan. 29.)

NFL union solidarity with Amazon workers

Continued from page 1

the Bessemer workers are majority Black in a state with some of the lowest wages and union representation in the country.

Black Lives Matter!

Besides fighting for better wages, better benefits and better protection for the workers during the pandemic, this vote was built around the political theme “Black Lives Matter” — as the Bessemer workers are facing a heightened level of racist threats and taunts organized with support from their houses during this union drive. The vote reflects the ongoing legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King’s fight to link civil rights with workers’ rights.

The @AmazonUnion site posted videos on Twitter of NFLPA representatives expressing solidarity with their union drive. JC Titter, a center for the Cleveland Browns and president of the NFLPA, stated: “Everyone deserves to have a voice, and we’re proud that you’ve even considered taking the step to unionize. Remember this union stands behind you and is inspired by your actions.” (Jan. 23.)

Michael Thomas, a safety for the Houston Texans commented: “Our union supports y’all. I applaud y’all for trying to unionize, and I understand how important it is to try to make a decision, and it’s such a difficult time during a pandemic. But understand we’re part of a union, and our job is to protect our workers.”

The entire union movement, especially the national leadership of the AFL-CIO, should not only heed Thomas’ words, but more importantly should put into practice what he expressed — that every worker should be part of a union to show that an injury to one worker is an injury to all workers.

To take on a behemoth like Amazon, the Bessemer warehouse workers are attempting to do, will take the backing and political solidarity of all workers, whether employed or unemployed, full-time or part-time — to lay the basis for helping empower the global working class to fight against profit-driven corporations like Amazon.

As Michael Foster, a poultry worker in Bessemer and RWDHSO organizer told Amazon workers: “[T]hey are part of a movement that is world-wide. I want them to know that we are important, and we do matter.” (NY Times, Jan. 29.)
Capitalist greed kills six Georgia poultry workers

Dianne Mathiowetz
Atlanta, Ga.

Jan. 31 — Prior to Jan. 28, most of us were likely unaware of the death-rendering results of exposure to liquid nitrogen, including the low-wage workers at Foundation Food Group in Gainesville, Ga. It is used in food processing plants across the country to rapidly freeze products for shipping.

And on Jan. 28, at 12:25 p.m., the odorless, colorless vapor is released in a confined space to flash freeze whatever it touches. In sufficient quantities, it can reduce the amount of oxygen in the air and cause asphyxiation.

A little after 10 a.m. on Jan. 28, calls began coming into the Hall County, Ga., 911 emergency phone number. Workers were collapsing, unable to breathe or suff ering from freezer burns. A liquid nitrogen tank had ruptured.

When emergency crews arrived, they found 130 panicked workers outside the building. Several were in medical distress. The survivors described a thick fog that obscured their vision and impacted their breathing. There were reports that supervisors had been told of a problem with the liquid nitrogen lines the day before, on Jan. 27, but they told the workers they needed to make production and to keep working.

Workers' safety comes last

Five workers were dead at the scene, and one died in the hospital. Five of the six who died were Latinos. At least 10 to 12 more people, including four firefighters, were taken to area hospitals. As of this writing, while some of those stricken have been released, including the emergency personnel, at least three workers are still in critical condition.

Georgia leads the country in the poultry processing and processing industries. Gainesville and its surrounding area — located about 60 miles northeast of Atlanta — is considered the "poultry capital of the world." Besides the giant corporations that have plants in the state, there are a lot of small businesses like Foundation Food Group, a company formed from a recent merger between Prime-Pak Foods Inc. and Victory Processing Inc. The business has four facilities in Gainesville.

It should be noted that Prime-Pak was fined several times in recent years by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for using unsafe equipment, amputation injuries in two workers' fingers and defects in eye protection.

The plant's workers process raw chicken into chicken tenders, nuggets and individual cuts used by restaurants and food service operations, partially cook them and then freeze them for later use.

Industry's mega-profits come first

This low-wage, repetitive, fatiguing work in Georgia's $41 billion poultry industry is largely done by immigrants, documented or undocumented, and people of color, many of them women. The industry is largely nonunion, and abuses of all kinds, from stolen wages to sexual and racial harassment, can occur without consequences.

in addition, the COVID-19 rates in the Gainesville area—located about 60 miles northeast of Atlanta—are high in Bessemer.

In 1937, there were over 500 sit-downs and other strikes involving workers in steel, meatpacking and other industries. But it would not be easy to get GM to do what it swore it would never do: recognize a union. It took a 44-day occupation of GM plants in Flint, Mich., to force the company's hand.

Feb. 11 marks the 84th anniversary of the victory in the famous Flint sit-down Strike. In 1937, there were over 500 sit-downs and other strikes involving workers in steel, meatpacking and other plants, along with retail, hotels and the public sector. After the Flint workers won, the CIO unions grew exponentially, bringing into the labor movement industrial workers whom the conservative, craft-based American Federation of Labor had written off.

Among the workers not welcome in the AFL were the Black steelworkers of Bessemer. It took the Communist Party-led Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union to organize the mills in the Deep South. Black southern steelworkers were an important part of labor history in the 1930s. Even today union consciousness is high in Bessemer.

So union organizers have launched a grassroots propaganda website, "Do it without dues," aimed at getting Bessemer workers to vote against union representation. There is fear and intimidation; a majority-yes vote is not guaranteed.

Once union representation is won, the battle has just begun. Next comes the fight to win a decent contract. A strike might be necessary, and union supporters might be fired. Amazon could threaten to close the warehouse, as Walmart has done when stores were organized.

The drive to organize Amazon is comparable in importance to wresting the first union contract from GM in 1937. Tactically there are differences between a secret ballot election and a strike, whether an outside picket or an occupation. But the class essence is the same: labor vs. capital.

Thus the struggle begs the question raised in the famous union song: Which side are you on?

What is most needed is mass, global solidarity. None of us is very far from an Amazon warehouse or a Whole Foods store where we can put up a solidarity picket line. A Feb. 6 support rally is planned in Bessemer.

The stakes in the current battle could not be higher — with ramifications for Amazon workers everywhere and ultimately for the global working class. Amazon BM4 workers need to know that the international working class has their back. That will tip the scales and help them win against the richest centi-billionaire in human history.
Immigrant/refugee rights: It's now or never, Joe

By Teresa Gutierrez

Since the beginning of the most recent war on immigrants—which took shape starting in 2006 with the hypercriminalization of undocumented workers—the U.S. Congress has repeatedly talked of passing legislation labeled “Comprehensive Immigration Reform” only to right some of those wrongs.

We are long past “reforms,” however. Conditions during the past 15 years for documented, undocumented and refugee workers, not only in the U.S. but around the globe, have been dismal—which is an understatement. The time is now to bring workers out of the shadows, out of the detention centers and out of the countless deportable migrant tent cities around the world and grant workers immediate full, legal, human and workers’ rights.

The condition of migrant workers is a crisis against humanity. Relief and aid must support the movement “tomorrow.”

Global working-class issue

According to the U.N., “more people than ever live in a country other than the one in which they were born. In 2010, the number of migrants globally reached an estimated 272 million. … The number of globally forcibly displaced people topped 26 million refugees, 3.5 million internally displaced persons.” (tinyurl.com/hhssqafe)

It was not just in the U.S. that a white supremacist right-wing xenophobe used immigration to whip up a nativist base. Both Trump and right-wing leaders in Europe used the age-old tactic of divide and conquer the global working class.

It is no surprise that immigrant allies and organizations in the U.S. organized in record numbers to ensure Donald Trump was voted out of office. Their work helped to oust one of the most bloodthirsty, ideologically-driven, racist, xenophobic, authoritarian leaders ever. This can be considered a win for the global working class.

Many people of color and progressive organizations around the world had lost the election. This outcome came as a surprise when you consider the following news.

On Jan. 30, the Associated Press reported that at least 19 migrants were found shot and burned to death in Mexico near the U.S. border. The migrants appeared to be mainly Guatemalan and Mexican. “The bodies were found Jan. 22 piled in a burned-out truck on a dirt road in the northern border state of Tamaulipas. The truck had 113 bullet impacts.”

This kind of atrocity is the tip of the iceberg of crimes that occur against migrants and refugees as they try to make their way into developed countries.

In a camp in Lesbos, Greece, hundreds of refugees stand close to one another as “thousands of food parcels, as ‘less than we are in five are wearing a face mask’ despite the deadly pandemic sweeping the globe. Said one Camerounian woman refugee: “We are like inside an overcrowded chicken farm. We are lumped together during food distribution; it’s impossible to have one meter of distance between us.” (InfoMigrants, Sept. 16, 2020)

Were it not for a heroic African American health care worker, Dawn Wooten, it would not be known that migrant women were being forcibly sterilized in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention in Irwin County, Ga. O’Rouke Varela reported that she had not even been properly anesthetized. (Workers World, Sept. 23, 2020)

End of an era?

Will the administration of Democrat Joe Biden usher in a wave of victories for the dreams of millions of the undocumented in the U.S.?

The hard-working, greatly committed and courageous BIPOC community will not be duped again. They know Trump’s replacement will not forget scenes of people in Kenya out in the streets in celebration or meeting a woman in Harlem who had campaigned years before for the right to citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants living . . . [here].

The condition of migrant workers is a crisis against humanity. Relief and aid must support the movement “tomorrow.” We cannot go on like this.

In fact, the legislation Biden sent Congress DOES offer a pathway to “citizenship”—but would take almost 8 years and has many requirements and fees.

Haven’t the undocumented and their families faced enough? Haven’t they been terrorized by vigilantes at the border, ICE and police agents around every corner, a relentless war on immigrants— which took shape under both Republican and Democratic administrations.” (tinyurl.com/cy3gzgg28)

A key leader of the Dreamers movement, Kenji Kitahara, wrote in the New York Times, “The first version of the Dream Act, which would have given young people like me a path to citizenship, was introduced in 2001. But nearly 20 years on, our futures still hang in the balance. Comprehensive immigration reform . . . has failed to pass under both Republican and Democratic administrations.”

Since Biden’s election, the movement “has taken various actions on immigration, including fortifying DACA. He also sent Congress the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021, which would offer a pathway to citizenship to the millions of undocumented immigrants living . . . [here]. The plan has been hailed as bold, but undocumented people have been here before. We can’t go on like this.”

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There is a reckoning taking place. Immigrants and allies are not just hopeful. They are mobilizing and stepping up their tactics in each phase of the struggle for their rights.

If justice does not happen now, what will this movement do next to demand what has already been earned a hundred times over? It’s now or never, Joe.”

Prisionero de Pennsylvania en crisis de COVID—Los guardias eran los transmisores

Por Miley Selena Fletcher

SCI Forest, Marienville, Pennsylvania

Desde que Works World recibió esta carta, el Departamento de Correcciones de Pennsylvania ha confirmado casi 7,000 casos de COVID-19 entre los prisioneros y más de 2,500 entre el personal, que no están sujetos a pruebas obligatorias. Muchos prisioneros que reportan síntomas de COVID-19 han sido colocados en unidades de vivienda restringidas, tachadas de “el aislamiento”. Los presos que se enfrentan a la tortura psicológica del confinamiento, que ha colapsado la capacidad de los servicios médicos, con poca probabilidad de informar cuando están enfermos, lo que permite una marcha de la muerte.

Los informes de muertes por COVID en las cárceles de Pennsylvania varían ampliamente, de 49 a más de 65. Es difícil de confirmar ya que el PA DOC solo dará a conocer el nombre de la primera persona encarcelada que muere en cada prisión. En muchos casos, ni siquiera se notifica a los familiares de la familia. La siguiente es una carta de una mujer trans encarcelada.

Durante ocho meses, el Bosque de la Institución Correccional Estatal (SCI), donde estoy encarcelada, no tuvo ningún caso de COVID-19. La administración de la institución no informó estamos infectadas por los números cero. Pero a principios de diciembre del 2020, el virus golpeó a SCI Forest. Muchos de nosotros no fueron informados de la infección por el virus. Después de que me senté y revisé cómo pudo haber sucedido, la realidad se instaló. A pesar de nuestro estado de aislamiento para controlar la infección, no se tomó en cuenta el aislamiento para controlar la infección.

Algunos esperaron tres días. ¿Sabes lo que me irrita que se nos hayan dado estas respuestas? ¿Qué tan estás seguro de informar cuando yo estaba enferma? ¿En qué momento se instaló la realidad? ¿Qué tan frustrada se siente la gente?

Si un preso va y se enfrenta a la celda de alguien, se nos da mala conducta por un área no autorizada. Una vez que eso sucede, el prisionero recibe reclamaciones de celda. ¿Dónde está eso justificado? Ahora los prisioneros están siendo confinados con más restricciones. No estamos en este bloque forzoso, lleno de restricciones, si nos hubieran traído el virus.

La Junta de Libertad Condicional y Libertad bajo palabra de Pennsylvania incluso les está dando a los presos “visita” en sus feas mínimas, sin liberarlos. Están dando a los prisioneros uno o dos años, lo que los obliga a permanecer en la cárcel. Vamos a muchos prisioneros decir: “Es más seguro en la cárcel que salir a la calle en este momento.” Y no me irrita que no se hayan dado estas restricciones transmitidas por el Secretario de Estado. El plan ha sido baleado como muy fuerte. ¿Qué tan fría y se siente la gente?

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End in white neighborhoods, some up to showing the connection to racism. They police. son downtown would be assaulted. And fascist elements organized thousands is this rise happening right now? we’re seeing now across the world? Why view the entire panel discussion, go to youtube.be/do_NDKTvow.

Ted Kelly: What are the root causes of these neo-fascist insurgencies that we have seen in the 1920s in Germany, that we’ve seen in recent years in Boston, that we’re seeing now across the world? Why is this rising happening right now?

Ed Childs: Yeah, I’ve seen this in the 70s, I’ve seen it in other countries. In 1974, when they were going to integrate the Boston school system, these same fascist elements organized thousands of people. The superintendent before school opened, they headed two demonstrations of 20,000 people in Boston itself. They marched downtown, and any Black per- son downtown would be assaulted. And the assaults would be supervised by the police. There was an actual fascist movement, showing the connection to racism. They also had demonstrations every week-end in white neighborhoods, some up to 7,000 people, but most around 1,000, which is a lot for Boston. There were the same elements of people—a lot of police, a lot of lawyers, petty bourgeois, larger landlords and store owners. But a lot of workers also, who were not so much leaders, but were suckerized in to get 20,000 people into Boston.

So we’ve seen this fascist movement here before. We’ve dealt with it before. And we’ve defeated it before.

Ted: That’s right. Fascism is the sleighhammer that the capitalists wield to smash the working class. So to fight fascism is to fight the person wielding the sledgehammer.

Ed: At the time, there was an economic decline. The Civil Rights Movement had won the right to integrate schools in Boston, the last major city in the country to do so. The racist movement had a hold on Boston like no other city. And they mobilized huge.

My job in the movement at the time was actually to infiltrate that movement. One thing that I had to notice was its appeal to the white workers. How were they brought in? Because otherwise the racists couldn’t have had a movement. They needed 20,000 people on the street, because they knew the Civil Rights Movement could also muster people. So the racists did it kind of like Trump did it now— xenophobia, extreme rac- ism. They would say that “they’re gonna start stealing your jobs, you don’t have a job because of this, you don’t have a job of that, you could have bet- ter education than that.” These were all stated or implied. Now, the problem with that approach is that they only can do that in a vacuum, because if there’s opposition, they’re in trouble.

So we organized the opposition. They had a 20,000-person demonstration, they were organizing in the neighbor- hoods—so too do we. And we ended up with 25,000 to 30,000 people, led by the Black community, showing huge unity— with the main issue being “We say NO to racism!” This implied to everybody that the approach is unity, and we’re gonna fight for all goals under unity.

Who made up the other side? The same as those who made up the Capitol attack on Jan. 6. The police— I’d say when they had 20,000 people on the street, at least 1,000 were police and law enforcement. We had junior lawyers, law- yers, priests and a lot of petty bourgeois. Then they suckerized in a lot of workers, who had no place to go. In their igno- rance, they went to the fascist movement. Well, when we had 25,000 to 30,000 people on the street, there was a place for them to go. We went into the diehard racist areas 5:30 in the morning and leaf- leted. We did have security, but we knew we needed to reach the workers in that community. And who’s out at 5:30, Me the workers? And same in the subway. We did that, and it was some of our best recruiting. At 5:30 in the morning we recruited a lot of those workers who were in the racist areas to come join with us.

We had the 1974 march—it was very strong, and the police actually attacked it.

And we pushed the police back. And there hasn’t been one demonstration in Boston, to this day, of a large fascist movement. We stopped that in its tracks.

Ted: We have seen living examples of the alive fascist movement on Jan. 6 in Washington, D.C. And we’ve been talking about the need for the anti-fascist movement. I want to say something that recently happened in our union, Unite Here Local 26 in Boston. In July 2020, two of our Black members were brutal- ized by the police in Lynn, a city out- side of Boston. We organized a group of 500 people, 100 union members and 400 community organizers and people in Lynn. We had a very militant march to police headquarters in town, where the police forces were mobilized. And we won! We got the charges dropped on our union members, we got a couple of police fired.

But the important thing that hap- pened was that the people in Lynn loved it. And afterwards, when we had orga- nizing drives in some of the hotels, it turned out some of the workers lived in Lynn, and had seen what Local 26 could do. They joined in. They had seen the struggle against racism being picked up by the local, they saw the union was very strong. These militant issues help build a coalition.

I think everybody talks about how we have to have a coalition. But you’re not going to have a coalition if you don’t fight against all the issues.


Veteran union organizer ‘We neutralized the fascists’


Ed Childs, Boston School Bus Drivers Union

In October, 2013, the rank-and-file members of the Boston School Bus Drivers Union, United Steelworkers Local 8751, made a historic stand against the unfair and illegal practices of Veolia Transportation. On July 1, Veolia had taken over managing Boston school transportation from First Student. Grievances were piling up so fast that sixteen Unfair Labor Practices had to be filed before the school year started in September.

Against Veolia’s Transdev, a powerhouse of privat- ization, just how did the Boston School Bus Drivers Union finally win after a 27-month struggle? That is a powerfully important question for today’s labor move- ment, which has suffered so many setbacks, and for all working class and oppressed people. This pamphlet contains a selection of articles from Workers World newspaper written in the heat of the battle and concludes with excerpts from a post-victory conversation on “harvesting the lessons,” is an attempt to provide the answers.

Download from: www.workers.org/books

Boston School Bus Union Victory
Demonizing China

By Deirdre Griswold

China is now the world’s biggest market for automobiles, accounting for a third of global car sales. “It is bigger than the American and Japanese auto markets combined,” wrote John D. Yang of Volkswagen both sell more cars through joint ventures in China than in their home markets.” (NY Times Business Section, Jan. 30)

That shouldn’t be surprising. China is the world’s most populous country. Just a generation ago, however, it was still very poor. Not forgotten are the days when people and goods were transported by human-drawn rickshaws. But today, China is a highly developed country that needs modern means of transportation.

And what kind of cars will the Chinese be driving? Not gas-guzzling, polluting cars. Electric cars, made in China, are now starting to overtake diesel and gasoline autos in both production and consumer purchases, thanks to large government subsidies of the electric car industry. And Beijing has announced that, by 2035, all vehicles sold in China must be powered by “new energy,” with at least half of them electric.

This has important implications for imperialist countries like the U.S. It helped lead General Motors to announce on Jan. 28 that it plans to eliminate the production of gasoline and diesel cars by 2035. “When it comes to global automakers’ electric vehicle plans, all roads lead back to Beijing,” admitted Michael Dunne, a former president of GM’s Indonesia operations.

In a little over a decade, China’s production of electric cars soared from just 2,100 in 2008 to 931,000 in 2020. This was the result of a conscious policy on the part of the government to subsidize production in order to combat pollution and global warming.

In addition to producing and importing electric vehicles, China has become “the leading maker of big battery packs for electric cars, producing considerably more than the rest of the world combined,” says the Times. “Chinese companies dominate the world’s production of electric motors.”

According to the World Bank, China’s poverty rate fell from more than 80% in 1981 to 12% in 2010 — the steepest decline in the world. That’s hundreds of millions of people liberated from extreme want. Had it not been for the success of the great Chinese Revolution in overthrowing both imperialist and domestic oppressors, the country would today be mired in poverty and underdevelopment for the vast majority. One need only look at India, Pakistan, Mexico, Nigeria and other large countries still shackled to the world capitalist system to see what toll this takes on billions of people.

Poor countries are the ones most impacted by climate-driven disasters, which China’s green initiatives will help reduce. What this shows is not just the power of technology to change the world, but the power of a revolution to change how that technology is used. ☐

Electric cars and China

Another great leap forward

By Deirdre Griswold

China leads the world in electric vehicle production.

Capitalism on a Ventilator

The impact of COVID-19 in China & the U.S.

"What one learns from Capitalism on a Ventilator is that the economic and human cost of the pandemic was far from inevitable. An entire section of the book is devoted to China’s solidarity with the rest of the world in the fight against COVID-19. After four months of difficult struggle, China successfully contained the pandemic and immediately diverted masks, testing kits, medical personnel, ventilators and other forms of assistance to countries across Latin America, the Middle East and Africa. The U.S. received generous donations of medical equipment from China during the first wave of the pandemic. China was also the first country to declare that its COVID-19 vaccine would be a public good."

— Danny Haiphong in a review for Black Agenda Report

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The struggle continues: Indian protesters resist state terror

By Tania Siddiqui

In September 2020, India’s Parliament passed three “farm bills” intended to crush India’s workers. To serve capitalist interests, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leader of the fascist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), lent his support to the bills depriving farms of current protections. He also contributed greed to further encroach on India’s agricultural sector.

On Nov. 26, 2020, in response to the government’s terror targeting the masses, workers launched a 250-million-strong, one-day general strike. In solidarity with fellow workers, thousands of Punjabi farmers were present at the rally. As demonstrators made their way to the capital, they were met with intense state-sponsored violence. Police placed barricades throughout the city, used tear gas and beat protesters to prevent them from entering Delhi. (The Wire, Jan. 26)

However, the farmers successfully breached the blockades and scaled the historic Red Fort, one of the sites where R-Day’s events were set to take place. Once within the Fort’s parameters, protesters hoisted the farmers’ union flag, the Indian flag and the Nishan Sahib (a flag of religious significance to Sikhs communities). The events at the Fort demonstrated an assertion of identity — a refusal to allow the state to disappear the people. As expected, the oppressor’s response came in the form of both physical and structural violence. On the day of the monumental rally, police shot and murdered Navreet Singh, then tried to cover up his homicidal act by telling reporters Singh’s death was due to his tractor toppling over. Police and BJP supporters attempted to forcibly remove protesters from their protest sites and at Singh’s border. (The Wire, Jan. 30)

At the Singhu border, BJP supporters brutally attacked members of Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, a union that was present at the tractor protest. To choke any expression of discontent and to prevent people from joining their fellow workers, India’s government suspended numerous protest sites on Delhi’s borders — including the Tikri, Ghazipur and Singhu borders — to demand the government repeal the anti-farmer laws. (Workers World, Dec. 1, 2020)

In maintaining their uncompromising principles and to put pressure on the oppressors, farmers launched another march to Delhi on Jan. 26, India’s Republic Day. An estimated 20,000 tractors along with tens of thousands of farmers were present at the rally. As demonstrators made their way to the capital, they were met with intense state-sponsored violence. Police placed barricades throughout the city, used tear gas and beat protesters to prevent them from entering Delhi. (The Wire, Jan. 26)

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At the Singhu border, BJP supporters brutally attacked members of Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, a union that was present at the tractor protest. To choke any expression of discontent and to prevent people from joining their fellow workers, India’s government suspended numerous protest sites on Delhi’s borders — including the Tikri, Ghazipur and Singhu borders — to demand the government repeal the anti-farmer laws. (Workers World, Dec. 1, 2020)

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By Carlos Lopes Pereira

The author writes regularly on African events for the Portuguese Communist Party. This article was published in the PCT newspaper Avante on Jan. 28, 2020.

There have been further protests in Mali against the presence of French troops in the Sahel.

On Jan. 20, the Malian authorities dispersed “several hundred people” in Bamako who, defying the ban on gatherings because of the health crisis, expressed their opposition to the presence of the “anti-jihadist” force sent by Paris to Mali.

According to reports from Agence France Presse and other sources, police and soldiers had deployed tear-gas grenades to disperse the demonstrators, on foot and on motorcycles, concentrated on Independence Square in the capital. A number of French troops were reportedly leaving from different neighborhoods to participate in the demonstration in the square, where demonstrations are usually held, were stopped by police roadblocks.

In the face of police action, a spokesperson for the promoters of the protest declared that the demonstrators had been suspended and will “reorganize” itself.

He reported three lightly wounded and at least three arrests.

The Malian authorities declared that they were intervening militar-ily in Mali since 2013. Currently France has 5,100 soldiers in the Sahel, as part of Operation Barkhane, which operates with land and air forces, primarily in Mali but also in Niger and Burkina Faso. Operation Barkhane’s headquarters are located in N’Djamena, the capital of Chad.

In Mali, notes KT France, the presence of the French expationary corps in the region regularly arouses expressions of intern et violence at protest sites, in declarations of personalities and demonstrations in Bamako. France’s intervention in Mali has had U.S. logistical and intelligence support. Instability increased enormously in the Sahel region following the U.S.-NATO imperialist overthrow of the Libyan government in late 2011—WW

Several supporters of the recent protests are members of the National Transitional Council, a legislative body, created after the Aug. 18, 2020 coup d’état, whose military leaders promised to hand over power to civilians after 18 months. The coup perpetrators have pledged to continue military cooperation with France, but there are reports that some sectors, including the armed forces, are in favor of opening talks with insurgent groups.

On the ground, however, terrorist attacks against Malian and French troops continue, causing casualties among military and civilian personnel. Later this week, the Malian army confirmed that a double attack by “extremists” in the central region of the country caused the deaths of 6 soldiers and about 30 insurgents.

The actions took place simultaneously in Mondoro and Bougkal, near the border with Burkina Faso. The targets were a barracks of Malian troops in Mondoro and a combined G5-Sahel barracks with troops from Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad in Boulkessi.

These events come at a time when French President Emmanuel Macron is signaling that Paris will soon “adjust” its “military effort” in the Sahel by downsizing the troops of Operation Barkhane—a way of pressuring other European countries to engage even more in the Mali war. Mali is where more than 1,000 European Union military “instructors” are already involved, and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Mission for the Stabilization of Mali (MINUSMA) has been stationed for years, with around 14,000 soldiers and police.
Para combatir el fascismo

‘La educación política es crucial para la gente’

Por Tania Siddiqi

Extractos tomados del seminario web del 14 de enero, “Los trabajadores, el fascismo y cómo derrotar al fascismo y al racismo”, patrocinado por Workers World Party/Partido Mundo Obrero. Para ver el panel de discusión completo (en inglés), vaya a youtu.be/d9_NDIKT0vw.

Tania Siddiqi: Creo que es realmente importante que gente como esta, la gente toma nota de ciertas conversaciones que están teniendo lugar, no sólo en sus redes o fuera de sus redes. Y es realmente importante que la gente preste atención a su propia respuesta a lo ocurrido en el Capitólio. Aunque creo que es algo que tal vez todos los paneles vienen a su mente porque se me ha presentado mucho el nivel de violencia de la supremacía blanca que se manifestó. Y luego la respuesta fue “Bueno, vamos a seguir haciendo lo que se está haciendo”.

Estoy en la escuela de derecho—y creo que, en realidad, el punto de mira, principalmente por la gente preste atención a su propia respuesta a lo ocurrido en el Capitólio el 6 de enero.

Tania Siddiqi: Creo que es realmente importante que la gente entienda que unirse a una organización también proporcionará esos materiales, ¿verdad? Para entender la posición de Estados Unidos como nación imperialista, bueno, ¿qué significa eso? Mirar eso desde una perspectiva histórica, y trazar líneas para entender cómo y por qué es que se ha multiplicado en apoyo de Donald Trump. Históricamente, estos movimientos fascistas, incluyendo el nacional fascismo en Alemania durante la Gran Depresión, tuvieron que disfrazarse de “nacional-soviéticos”, mientras culparan al pue-blo judío de todos los crímenes del capitalismo.

Racismo, recesión y el deseo de golpe por Trump

El capitalismo es un sistema económico inherentemente inestable, sujeto a crisis cíclicas de sobreproducción. El término “sobreproducción” no tiene nada que ver con la producción de más bienes de los que el mercado puede tener. Y cuando los mercados y las ganancias caen, se llama recesión. Si permanecen abajo durante mucho tiempo, es una depresión.

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El capitalismo, como el sistema capitalista, depende de la obtención de beneficios. La gran parte del capitalismo es inestable, sujeto a crisis, recurrentes de crisis económica. En términos de clase, su base está en la pequeña burguesía—los autónomos o propietarios de pequeños negocios condenados a ser reemplazados por grandes cadenas, pero cuya desaparición no ha sido acelerada por el virus. La recesión actual, al borde de una depresión, debe tenerse en cuenta al analizar el violento movimiento de derecha que se ha multiplicado en apoyo de Donald Trump. Históricamente, estos movimientos han buscado a los demagogos en períodos de crisis económica.

En términos de clase, su base está en la pequeña burguesía, pero ven a las figuras de las grandes empresas como Trump y sus aliados como una especie de salvadores. Trump es un demagogo que encarna los intereses de los grandes empresarios.

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