

Haiti: Struggle intensifies

By G. Dunkel

Tens of thousands of Haitians took to the streets of Port-au-Prince on Feb. 7 in numerous very militant and angry demonstrations demanding that President Jovenel Moïse follow the constitution and leave office on Feb. 7, when his term expires. Protesters want an end to corruption and an accounting of the more than \$2 billion that Moïse and his cronies stole.

The U.S. State Department made it clear that while it agreed that Moïse has another year in office as president, the U.S. wants him to organize a few elections. He hasn't taken the steps needed to do so. This led to the terms of almost all

the members of parliament, mayors and other elected officials expiring, forcing them out of office.

A general strike called by the Collective of Haitian Unions for the Respect of the Constitution of 1987 (COSHARCO), held Feb. 1 and 2, was exceptionally effective. The cops estimated that 90% of the economic activity of Port-au-Prince was shut down; videos show high school students playing soccer on the main boulevards of Haiti's capital.

Twitter reports from some of Haiti's other major cities show that the strike was well respected outside the capital.

Videos on France 24 and Al-Jazeera show how angry and tenacious the protests have been. In one incident, the crowd was burning a U.S. flag when a patrol of cops showed up. There was a face-off in which the demonstrators backed away but didn't disperse, some hiding in alleys and yards. The cops decided to leave, but first directed live fire into the crowd as they piled onto their trucks.

In another video, a protester with a bloodstained bandage on one arm and a club in the



Haitian people confront the military.

other hand explained that he was going to stay in the streets until Moïse respected the constitution and revealed where the money was.

In a third incident, protesters caught a bodyguard for one of Moïse's ministers, who had been trying to infiltrate a march and get close to one of the opposition's local leaders. The bodyguard managed to get away, but the local leader charged that the PHTK (Parti haïtien tèt kale), the governing party, was running an assassination program.

The opposition is charging that the Moïse regime is behind armed gangs which have attacked whole neighborhoods that don't support the government, burning houses, looting, stealing, kidnapping and killing.

A number of protest demonstrations supporting the opposition have occurred in the Haitian diaspora, especially around

Miami and in Quebec. They have pointed out that Moïse is doing what Trump attempted: trying to stay in power.

Moïse had 23 people arrested on Feb. 7, including a police inspector and a supreme court judge, charging they were planning to kill him and carry out a coup.

The opposition parties take the position — supported by the U.N. — that Haiti can solve its problems through elections. On the other hand, many popular organizations in Haiti, like Kolektif Anakawona, Batay Ouvriye, and MOLEGHAF (Mouvement de Liberté, d'Égalité des Haïtiens pour la Fraternité, led by David Oxygène), have denounced the reliance on elections.

These groups reject the intervention of the U.S. and the NGOs in Haiti. Oxygène characterized the current conflict as a struggle for position, meaning electoral office, rather than a class struggle for power. He called instead for system change. □


FEB 20

NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

Join the campaign to support Amazon workers in Bessemer, AL with a solidarity action in YOUR CITY!

EVERY WORKER HAS THE RIGHT TO A UNION

SIGN THE PETITION supportamazonworkers.org






Amazon warehouse workers in Bessemer, Ala., are in a historic organizing drive for union representation by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. They received significant support at a Feb. 6 rally. Workers World Party comrades (pictured) joined participants ranging from nurses to miners, traveling from in-state and from Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts and Tennessee. Union solidarity for the majority Black workforce came from the Boston Teamsters, the Atlanta Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Atlanta Labor Council, Communication Workers, Electrical Workers (IBEW) and United Auto Workers. The president of the Alabama AFL-CIO addressed the rally. More on page 4.

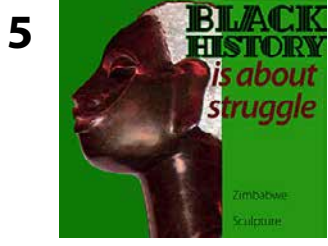
Bessemer, Ala.

TEAR DOWN THE WALLS



'Progressive' prosecutors?
Brutal attack in Alabama
No real change under Biden 6-7

A salute to
Rosa Parks
Harry Haywood
Ben Fletcher



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Portland nurses demand COVID-19 protection

By Lyn Neeley

Nurses and other health care workers, along with community members, demonstrated in front of Providence Portland Medical Center on Feb. 5, demanding COVID-19 protection and better working conditions. The rally was one day after Providence gave the COVID-19 vaccine — meant for people most at risk — to certain large donors and board members.

Gabriel Erbs, organizer for the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA), told this reporter: “Providence is a multibillion-dollar corporation and one of Oregon’s largest employers. If it’s not held accountable for protecting workers, no one will be. ONA nurses are being told to use their own paid time off if they are mandated to quarantine and stay home from work. That’s wrong and unsafe for nurses and patients.”

ONA accused Providence of refusing to meet industry-standard COVID-19 safety measures to protect nurses



Portland nurses rally, Feb. 5.

WW PHOTO: LYN NEELEY



WW PHOTO: LYN NEELEY

Portland nurses rally Feb. 5, displaying ‘commitment cards’ calling for a ‘COVID-19 Bill of Rights.’

and other staff, patients and the community. The union had gathered 1,500 commitment cards signed by fellow nurses, which were strung together and held by protesters. Halfway through the rally, a group marched across the facility to deliver the cards to Providence executives.

ONA is calling for Providence to adopt the COVID-19 Bill of Rights which demands protection for state health care workers. The bill is based on the American Nurses Association’s “Nursing Code of Ethics” (2015). The Code calls for safe staffing, appropriate PPE, access to timely COVID-19 testing, prompt exposure notification, safety for caregivers, paid time off and compensation for COVID-19 illness and childcare support to continue working through the pandemic. □



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

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repression, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny, LGBTQ2S+ oppression and mistreatment of people with disabilities. It means joblessness, increasing homelessness and impoverishment and lack of hope for the future. No social problems can be solved under capitalism.

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

Join us in the fight for socialism!

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

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

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

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

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WW COMMENTARY

Reparations, health care and the pandemic

By Monica Moorehead

The late John Conyers — U.S. Representative from Michigan and a member of the Congressional Black Caucus — introduced bill HR 40 back in 1989, titled “Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act.”

Conyers said, “African slaves were not compensated for their labor. More unclear, however, is what the effects and remnants of this relationship have had on African Americans and our nation from the time of emancipation through today. I chose the number of the bill, 40, as a symbol of the 40 acres and a mule that the United States initially promised freed slaves.” (Marxism, Reparations and the Black Freedom Struggle,” 2007, p. 20)

Conyers cited a number of objectives of the bill—including setting up a commission that “would then make recommendations to Congress on appropriate remedies to redress the harm inflicted on living African Americans.” This dormant bill was updated and reintroduced in January by Congressional Black Caucus members due to the upsurge of the Black Lives Matter struggle after the public lynching of George Floyd in May 2020.

Some concrete remedies through reparations were raised in a 2002 class action lawsuit brought by two Black activist lawyers, Deadria Farmer-Paellmann and Roger Wareham. They sued multimillion-dollar corporations based in New York and New Jersey that had profited historically from the heinous slave trade.

The lawyers argued that the amount of unpaid wages stolen from enslaved African workers amounted to over \$1 trillion at that date. The lawsuit demanded that descendants of enslaved Africans should be compensated with a collective fund to cover the costs of housing, health care and education, given the inequalities imposed by institutionalized racism since the end of slavery.

Racism and the pandemic

The need for reparations for equal health care for African Americans is being put on full, blatant display by the raging coronavirus pandemic. It is no secret that African Americans, along with other people of color, have been dying in hugely disproportionate numbers compared to white people. The killing discrepancy is especially acute in large cities like Detroit, Chicago, New York, Milwaukee and Los Angeles.

According to Uché Blackstock, an emergency physician and founder and chief executive of Advancing Health Equity, and Oni Blackstock, a primary care and HIV physician and founder and executive director of Health Justice, African Americans are dying from the pandemic at the rate of 1 in 735 people, compared to



New York City protest, Feb. 3.

WW PHOTO: SARA FLOUNDERS

whites at a rate of 1 in 1,030. (Washington Post, Feb. 1)

These two physicians of color have demanded that the CDC prioritize vaccination of African Americans by actively seeking them out by nationality and ethnicity. In other words, use affirmative action methods to guarantee that African Americans have full access to the vaccine by going to where the people live and work, rather than expecting them to go outside their communities. This is especially necessary if mass transportation is limited — and nonexistent in the case of rural communities. In contrast, whites reportedly have more easily traveled to oppressed communities to get the vaccines.

This outreach could be done with a massive leaflet campaign in communities where internet access is limited. Vaccines could be made available in community centers, churches, schools and mobile vaccination units organized by authorized organizations and individuals trusted by the community.

The vaccines should be prioritized for incarcerated workers, who are disproportionately Black, unable to social distance and denied masks while being caged in an environment lacking quality health care, food and exercise.

Genocidal treatment

The inequality of death during the pandemic reflects the fact that lack of adequate health care for Black people is not an isolated occurrence but has been a generational inequality. On June 3, a study was released by University

of Michigan Medicine researchers on health disparities between Black and white patients tied to white supremacy within class society: “From inadequate access to fresh food and clean water, to screening in early stages of disease or the inability to rent an apartment because of discriminatory housing practices, these long-standing systemic inequities for some Black Americans can have long-lasting effects on health.” (healthblog.uofmhealth.org)

Some of their findings included: Black people have higher rates of obesity, heart disease and hypertension. Black men have a 2.5 times higher rate of prostate cancer mortality. The lack of doctors of color means lack of medical visits. Nearly half of all Black, Latinx and Indigenous women had a lapse of insurance coverage between pre-conception and after delivering their babies, compared to approximately a fourth of white women. There has been a huge jump in later-stage colon cancer among young African Americans due to a lack of early testing and diagnosis. Black people are more likely than white people to develop dementia as they age, due to the impact of high blood pressure on cognition, memory and executive function.

The National Poll on Healthy Aging indicated food insecurity disparities — by age, health status, race, ethnicity and education — have been potentially worsened by the pandemic. “Access to nutritious food and health status are closely linked, yet this poll reveals major disparities in that access,” says Preeti Malani, M.D., the poll’s director. “Even as we focus on preventing the spread of coronavirus, we must also ensure that older adults can get food that aligns with any health conditions they have, so we don’t exacerbate diabetes, hypertension, digestive disorders and other conditions further.” (healthagingpoll.org)

The reality is that health care is worsening across the board for the entire working class as the pandemic exacerbates unemployment, hunger, threats of evictions and more. Building solidarity within the working class to fight off these assaults — brought on by a worsening capitalist economic crisis — is the way forward.

But this can only happen when systemic racism is challenged and fought against tooth and nail, and side by side with the most oppressed who have been denied as a community any basic right, such as health care.

Racism is a poisonous venom that the ruling class — driven to hold on to their profits — uses to weaken and divide the entire working class. The struggle for reparations is more valid today than ever — and especially during this pandemic. The right to reparations, including health care, is a worker’s issue!

Tweet the writer at: @mmashcat

Capitalists consolidate control over U.S. farmland

By Ted Kelly

The amount of farmland in the United States has been in steady decline for most of the 21st century. While roughly 40% of the country’s land area remains devoted to agriculture, 14 million acres of farmland were lost to ecological devastation or development between 2012 and 2017. (American Farmland Trust) At least 2 million additional acres have been lost every year since then. (U.S. Department of Agriculture)

And farms are closing at an alarming rate, with 5,800 closures in 2018 alone. Black farm owners have been hit the hardest. Since 1920, over a million Black families have lost their farms (Guardian Aug. 15, 2019), and they now constitute less than 2% of all farm owners. A 2019 Center for American Progress study found the USDA “has a long and well-documented history of discrimination against Black farmers. The unequal administration of government farm support programs, crucial to protecting farmers from an inherently risky enterprise, has had a profound impact on rural communities of color.”

Yet despite the fact that both the number of farms and the overall acreage of farmland is plummeting, the average farm

size is actually on the rise. How could this be? It’s because of the consolidation of ownership into fewer private holdings. It appears that the billionaires are snatching up farmland as fast as they can.

This year, it was revealed that the largest private owner of farm-assessed property in the U.S. is now Bill Gates. According to the Land Report, Gates owns 243,000 acres of farmland in Louisiana, Arkansas, Nebraska and Arizona, as well as smaller holdings in 14 other states.

The other biggest private landholders in the U.S. include the Offutt agricultural dynasty — whose patriarch Ron Offutt is the richest man in North Dakota — with 190,000 acres; Stewart and Lynda Resnick, billionaire owners of Fiji water, Halo oranges and POM juices, with 190,000 acres; reactionary Cuban sugar plantation barons Alfonso and José Fanjul, with 160,000 acres; and the J.G. Boswell Company, with 150,000 acres.

Average farm size, according to the USDA, is 444 acres. These five landholders own approximately 933,000 acres of U.S. farmland. By comparison, Manhattan island is less than 15,000 acres. The consolidation of farmland ownership is an alarming development

with repercussions for the entire working class, especially with the implications of the capitalist state’s deadly negligence around the COVID crisis.

Need to defeat capitalism

Nearly a half million agricultural workers have contracted COVID-19, but according to the National Center for Farmworker Health, “this figure likely underestimates the number greatly, since it excludes contracted and temporary labor. No comprehensive national or industry-wide testing or reporting of positive COVID cases among agricultural workers is being systematically conducted.”

Despite the fact that 95% of farms are owned by white people, most farmworkers are Black and Brown, with 75% of farmworkers born in other countries. Black farmers have faced long-term discrimination from the USDA in allocating loans, disaster payments and assistance. Half of all farmworkers do not have legal permanent residence in the U.S. (National Agricultural Worker Study, 2019)

It must be recognized first and foremost that all land in the American continents was stolen from Indigenous people by European colonizers.



IMAGE: MODERNFARMER.COM

Capitalist development and settler colonialism have always led to ecological destruction. A century ago, the U.S. faced a massive pandemic. A decade later, it faced one of its worst ongoing natural disasters—the Dust Bowl, which devastated parts of six states in the southern Great Plains. (tinyurl.com/y2x66697) That period of unnatural dust storms, which were caused by the banks forcing farmers to practices that damaged the soil, led to famine, respiratory illness, a mass exodus west to California and water shortages. This, in combination with the 1929 financial crisis, defined the suffering of the Great Depression.

Unless the working class rises up to defeat capitalism and imperialism once and for all, a new era of untold devastation and misery will fall upon us. □

Solidarity with Alabama Amazon workers!

All out for Feb. 20 National Day of Solidarity!

By Martha Grevatt

Southern workers: We got your back! Organize the South!

The Southern Workers Assembly has gotten behind the Amazon workers, calling for a National Day of Solidarity Feb. 20.

“All eyes are on Bessemer, Alabama, and the struggle to win the first U.S. union at Amazon—one of the largest and richest corporations in the world—that warehouse workers are waging,” the SWA posted on its website Feb. 4.

“We are Southern workers, active in building organization at our jobs and across the South. We salute you and send our solidarity to the critical fight that you are leading, showing the way for all workers.”

The statement added quotes from a number of SWA constituents.

From Dominic Harris, Charlotte, N.C., water department worker, President Charlotte City Workers Union, chapter of Electrical Workers (UE) Local 150: “Amazon shows their fear because you got them on the ropes. The company wouldn’t be doing everything they are doing right now, if they weren’t scared of the workers having power. They are spending more money on the campaign to bust the union than if they just paid the workers. If we stick together, through collective action and collective bargaining, we can make things happen. From Charlotte we can see you fighting for what you deserve. You have our respect and admiration. Keep going strong.”

From Jamila Allen, N.C. Raise Up/Fight for \$15 and a Union: “To our brothers and sisters who are leading the way by unionizing your Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Ala.: We stand with you. We see you. You are doing what needs to be done. Thank you! Here in Durham, N.C., fast-food workers and grocery store workers are organizing to build our power. We know that forming unions will be the game changer for us inside these low-wage jobs. Your fight is our fight, and we’re watching you with hope and solidarity. Stay strong!”

From Leonard Riley, 45-year-member, International Longshoremen Association Local 1422, Charleston, S.C.: “Becoming a part of a unionized workforce is among the best things I’ve done in my entire life. Amazon has its CEO, its attorneys, its



Board of Directors to protect its rights. Who protects the rights of Amazon workers? Amazon organization’s goal is to enhance the Company’s success in any way possible; whereas, the union only exists to advocate and fight for the workers’ benefits and rights. It’s been my work experience that a union contract is better than any promise.”

From Chris Hollis, Leader in Valley Protein Blue Collar Workers Organizing Committee, UE, at VP poultry plant in Fayetteville, N.C.: “We are in a war of the working class. I know sometimes it feels

like we are out here alone, but we are in this together. In our own campaign, we had folks that dropped off. But we are enduring to the end and are gonna win. It is powerful to see what you have endured organizing at Amazon; you are so close to victory. Education and knowledge is power, which is key to winning this blue-collar war. Fear only comes from those that don’t know their rights and don’t get involved with their rights. If we stay the course until the end, we will be victorious, because we are standing on the right side of history. One day, we will look back and ask ourselves: ‘During this global pandemic, what did you do to make a change in the lives of others?’ Continue to press forward!”

From Susan Fischer, Float pool RN, Mission Hospital, Asheville, N.C., National Nurses United: “I was one of the first nurses to start organizing a union at Mission Hospital in Asheville, N.C. Organizing the union was a challenging but incredibly rewarding experience. Having a union has given us a collective voice to stand up for ourselves and



Communication Workers (CWA) members support Amazon union drive, Bessemer, Ala., Feb. 6.

our patients. We now get to sit across the table from management and bargain for better working conditions. The union nurses in Asheville, N.C., stand with you. Vote yes!”

From Greg Roddy, President, ATU Local 725, Birmingham, Ala.: “Although it may seem hard right now, if you stick together you can win! The bosses may confuse you about the benefits of the union. But once you get it, you’ll be very thankful. The major benefit comes in your ability to negotiate over salary, benefits, pension and so much more.”

San Francisco Letter Carriers solidarity resolution

Meanwhile, solidarity is growing around the country. This resolution was adopted Feb. 3, 2021, by unanimous vote of Golden Gate Branch 214, National Assn. of Letter Carriers, San Francisco, Calif., at their monthly membership meeting.



Whereas, 5,800 workers at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Ala., are fighting for a union. They will be voting Feb. 8 to March 29, 2021, on whether to have union representation by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union [RWDSU-UFCW], in an NLRB-supervised election;

Whereas, this important labor struggle pits this majority African American work force in Bessemer, Ala., against the anti-union Amazon, second-largest private company in the U.S.; and

Whereas, the Southern Workers Assembly has set Saturday, Feb. 20, 2021, as a day of solidarity with the Amazon workers in Bessemer and their fight for a union;

Therefore be it Resolved, that Golden Gate Branch 214 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, based in San Francisco, Calif., join in solidarity with other labor and community organizations in supporting the Amazon workers union drive in Alabama by encouraging solidarity actions during the spring of 2021, for example on Feb. 20 at Amazon facilities or related Whole Foods Markets.

For more on solidarity actions:
supportamazonworkers.org/
facebook.com/SupportAmazonWorkers



Ohio auto parts workers move to unionize

Workers at the Borger auto parts plant in Norwalk, Ohio, have experienced sexual harassment, racism and safety problems. Wages and pay increases are “merit-based,” which in practice means they are inconsistent and based on favoritism. Pay is lower than other comparable businesses in this deindustrialized part of the country.

Borger is an international company; workers in Borger’s German plant are unionized. A majority of the 170 workers at the plant signed union cards to join Workers United (part of Service Employees, SEIU) and demanded management recognize their union.

When union representatives collect signed cards from a majority of a bargaining unit (the grouping of workers seeking union representation), they can ask management to voluntarily recognize the union. This is referred to as a “demand for recognition,” or “card check,” and bypasses petitioning the National Labor Relations Board to conduct a secret ballot election. Borger bosses refused to recognize the union by card check.

This was unfortunate but not surprising, given the bosses’ utter disregard for their employees. Workers charge that women only get promoted if they enter into a personal relationship with a supervisor. One worker who lost a finger due to faulty machinery was mocked by management — while he waited for medical assistance.

When management denied the union recognition, the workers walked out. The strike began Jan. 21 and ended Jan. 30, when workers returned to the job without making any concessions.

They plan to petition for a union authorization election with the NLRB. One of three things happens when the NLRB receives a request for election petition: 1) there is an election; 2) the NLRB dismisses the petition because it is not proper; or 3) the union withdraws the petition — usually because the union believes it will lose the representation election.

Solidarity with Borger workers and support for their ongoing labor struggle will help them win.

Teachers unions defy return to unsafe classrooms

Teachers unions across the country are mobilizing to protect their members, as many school districts call for the return to in-class learning. This comes after leaks from a CDC statement that reports a low risk to contracting COVID in school. The statement doesn’t take into account the higher contagion risk of the new COVID variant strains, the crumbling ventilation and infrastructure of urban schools — or the vaccine distribution debacle.

Philadelphia Federation of Teachers President Jerry Jordan is calling for teachers to defy the school district’s

order to return to the physical classroom. Jordan said, “There is absolutely no reason, other than sheer cruelty, to bring members into unsafe buildings Monday.” (Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb. 5)

In Chicago, the situation has developed into a contentious battle between the Chicago Teachers Union and Mayor Lori Lightfoot. The mayor, who ran as a “progressive,” has repeatedly misrepresented the negotiations with the union and threatened teachers with harsh disciplinary action if they don’t return to the classroom. The standoff escalated when pre-K and special education teachers were ordered back into schools Jan. 4. Many refused to work in person, and dozens were deemed absent without leave, locked out of their Chicago Public Schools remote-teaching platforms and denied pay.

Before the much larger second wave of kindergarten through eighth grade students was due to start in-person classes Feb. 1, union members formalized the remote-only tactic as a collective labor action, which meant that if teachers were locked out on a large scale, they would go on strike. The mayor had to succumb to the union members’ solidarity, pushing back the timeline to force teachers back in the building. Within the Chicago school system, 80% of families are in favor of continuing remote learning until it is deemed safe to return to in-person learning.

The CTU and CPS reached a tentative agreement Feb. 7, averting a strike. In a major win for the union, no teacher will be forced back to an in-person classroom without being offered the COVID vaccine. The city also conceded on the issue of accommodations for staff who ask to continue working from home because they live with a medically vulnerable household member.

The agreement will next be reviewed by union leadership and then go to a vote by the rank and file. □

Harry Haywood, Black Bolshevik

By Devin Cole

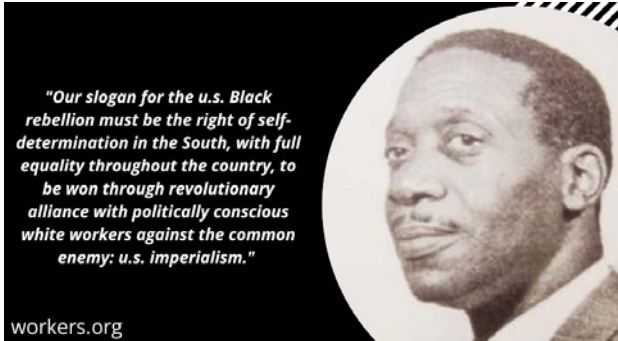
February 4 was the birthday of Black Communist Harry Haywood, one of the great Marxist-Leninist thinkers, leaders and revolutionaries of the 20th century. Although Haywood was born over 100 years ago and has been deceased for over 30 years, his contributions to Marxism-Leninism and the struggle for Black Liberation and self-determination remain central in the fight for revolutionary socialism.

Haywood, a leader of the Communist Party (CPUSA) and member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), developed and popularized the theoretical concept known as the Black Belt thesis, which explains that Black people in the U.S. make up an entire nation that is nationally oppressed by capitalism and U.S. imperialism.

Although enslaved Africans forced into bondage in the U.S. were from different places with different cultures, Haywood argued that their multicentury experience of slavery forged them into a distinct people bound together by their economic super-exploitation in the development of the Deep South — geographically defined by Haywood as south from Virginia and Washington, D.C., and west to Texas.

V.I. Lenin, leader of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet Union until his death in 1924, recognized African Americans as a distinct, oppressed nationality. In 1920, he wrote that there is a “clear distinction between the oppressed, dependent and subject nations and the oppressing, exploiting and sovereign nations.” (Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International)

The abrupt and violent end to Reconstruction — which had provided a 12-year period of some relief for Black workers following the end of chattel slavery and the Civil War — resulted in the construction of Jim Crow laws tying Black workers to the land again in new forms of slavery — prison and agrarian work. The former exists to this day in the prison-industrial complex. The era of



Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers and their revolt against white supremacy and capitalism-imperialism is heavily documented in Robin D.G. Kelley’s groundbreaking book, “Hammer & Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression.”

Haywood, viewing Reconstruction as an unfinished bourgeois democratic revolution in the South, saw the end of Reconstruction through the Compromise of 1877 as a betrayal by the bourgeoisie, which plunged Black workers back into super-exploitation. This led to decades of heightened reaction, including the founding of the KKK, the “separate but equal” legal doctrine and Jim Crow segregation.

Haywood connected this repression to the rise of U.S. imperialism at the end of the 19th century. He tied it to the oppression and super-exploitation of landless Black workers in the South, who still worked the land they and their families had worked while enslaved.

A lifelong advocate for Black liberation

Haywood, from the 1920s until his death in 1985, advocated for the self-determination of all Black people — an oppressed nation within the U.S. — and full liberation from capitalism-imperialism, up to and including the right to separate from the U.S. Haywood theorized that the struggle for Black Liberation would come from the “national territory” of Black people — the

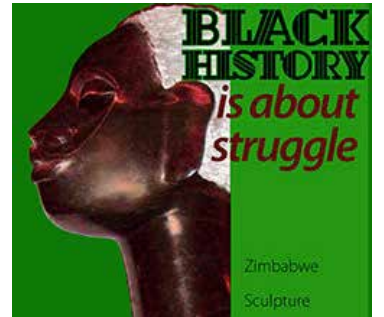
Deep South.

The Black Belt thesis, presented by Harry Haywood to the Soviet Union and the CPSU, was adopted at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International in 1928, under Joseph Stalin’s leadership. However, it was less than popular in the U.S. and earned Haywood the contempt of many of his “comrades” in the CPUSA, who viewed racism simply as a moral problem and not as a problem of economic and political oppression. Though Haywood became a leader in the CPUSA for some time until his expulsion in the late 1950s, his position on the Black Question was routinely criticized for many years while he remained in that party.

Today Harry Haywood’s thesis still resounds with history: that Black people are an oppressed nation within the U.S. Currently, there are uprisings at prisons all across the state of Alabama and disruptions of the prison-industrial complex in surrounding Southern states, led by incarcerated Black workers such as those in the Free Alabama Movement and the Alabama Resistance Movement. But this struggle is carried out as well by incarcerated and paroled workers in California, Pennsylvania and across the country.

The majority-Black Amazon warehouse workers in Bessemer, Ala., are now fighting for a union, which would be the first ever Amazon union in the U.S. There is no doubt that if this union drive wins, it would have a ripple effect, with Amazon workers unionizing country-wide and worldwide, tearing a hole through the seemingly impenetrable armor of Amazon.

Black workers are still fighting for their liberation and self-determination in an era of capitalism at its most chaotic free fall yet. Harry Haywood’s words — and the struggles of Black liberation and self-determination — truly live on. □



On the anniversary of her birth Remembering Rosa Parks

By Monica Moorehead

When I was three years old in 1955, my parents lived in Montgomery, Ala. They attended Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where they heard the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preach every Sunday. That church would eventually become an historic organizing center for one of the most important struggles of the 20th century when a tired, but brave African American seamstress refused to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus on Dec. 1, 1955.

Under Jim Crow laws, any white person could demand that a Black person sit in the back of a bus if they were occupying seats in the front.

The seamstress’s name was Rosa Parks, who was also a secretary for the local NAACP. Her arrest helped to ignite a powerful mass movement in Montgomery. Dr. King may have been the face of this movement but make no mistake, the organizational backbone of this struggle was mainly led by Black women.

Black people organized a grass-roots boycott against riding segregated buses that lasted exactly one year. Black people who had cars, like my parents, volunteered to drive carless Black people to work early in the morning and pick them up from work in the late afternoon/early evening. The boycott was successful in not only defeating the segregated bus ordinance but helping to launch the decades-long Civil Rights Movement.

Rosa Parks was born Feb. 4, 1913, and died Oct. 24, 2005. Even before taking her heroic stance



Rosa Parks at the time of her arrest, 1955.

in Montgomery, Parks helped to launch a national campaign to bring about attention and justice for the late Recy Taylor, a Black woman abducted and sexually assaulted by six white men in Henry County, Ala., in 1944. None of these white supremacists were ever charged with this unspeakable atrocity.

Rosa Parks was also a trailblazer for the modern-day Black Lives Matter movement, when she and her spouse, Raymond Parks, joined the worldwide campaign to free the Scottsboro Brothers, who were nine Alabama Black youth wrongfully accused of raping two white women in 1931.

For all of her sacrifices to the struggle as a Black woman, Rosa Parks rightfully earned the title “mother of the Civil Rights Movement.”

Tweet the writer at: @mmashcat

Ben Fletcher, militant labor leader

By Marie Kelly

One of the greatest labor leaders of the tumultuous period of the early 20th century was a Black man from Philadelphia named Ben Fletcher. In the forward from the biography by Peter Cole, “Ben Fletcher: The Life and Times of a Black Wobbly,” labor historian Robin D. G. Kelley describes Fletcher as a “radical pragmatist in that he paid attention to context, emphasized solidarity, and approached the work in an improvisatory and flexible manner — all without ever losing sight of the long-term goal: the emancipation of the working class from capital.”

Born in 1890, Fletcher grew up near the Delaware River docks where he eventually worked. Fletcher joined the Industrial Workers of the World around 1910 and became a leader of the new IWW Local 8 in 1913, steering the dockworkers local throughout the 1920s.

The local was born after a successful two-week strike by 4,000 dock workers. Local 8 was successful in abolishing unfair hiring practices and establishing a union hiring hall. Cole wrote, Local 8 “forced corporations in Philadelphia to deal with a union in which the great majority of members were African Americans and European immigrants. And they did it without ever signing a contract, instead enforcing

their demands based upon the ever-present threat of a strike.”

Fletcher was a gifted public speaker. Letters about his speaking tour in the 1920s describe that at “several meetings about 1,500 have listened, spellbound ...”; and Fletcher was the “only one I ever heard who cut right through to the bone of capitalist pretensions to being an everlasting ruling class, with a concrete constructive working-class union argument.” (Labor Notes, Dec. 17, 2020)

As Fletcher wrote, “While I do not countenance against the working class striking at the ballot box, I am firmly convinced that foremost and historical mission of labor is to organize as a class, industrially.” He advocated for a multiracial union movement, arguing: “No genuine attempt by Organized Labor to wrest any worthwhile and lasting concessions from the Employing Class can succeed as long as Organized Labor for the most part is indifferent and in opposition to the fate of Negro Labor.” (Labor Notes, Dec. 17, 2020)

Fletcher was a target of U.S. state repression of the IWW during World War I; the government labeled the IWW “a vicious, treasonable and criminal conspiracy” and tried to crush it. Many Wobblies were arrested. Fletcher, the only Black defendant, served several years in prison, after which he returned to Philadelphia to



Ben Fletcher

continue organizing with Local 8. (Labor Notes, Dec. 17, 2020)

Local 8 was one-third African Americans, one-third Irish and Irish Americans and one-third other European immigrants. Fletcher built the local in accordance with IWW’s commitment to interracial unionism, explaining that bosses benefitted by keeping Black and white workers fighting each other.

When the bosses hired nonmembers or fired any Wobblies, workers quit working. The IWW became a force to be reckoned with on the docks, raising wages and improving working conditions and putting an end to segregated work gangs. All union committees and activities were racially integrated.

Unfortunately Fletcher’s labor activism was cut short by a stroke in 1933; he died in 1949. Ben Fletcher left behind a powerful legacy of militant, anti-racist unionism. □

‘Progressive’ prosecutors put thousands of lives at risk

By Ted Kelly
Philadelphia

The novel coronavirus has claimed an unlikely victim in the United States: the Sixth Amendment. The right to a “speedy trial” is in critical condition.

Philadelphia’s county jail population has risen to 4,500 and is growing steadily. Half of those behind bars have “detainers,” meaning they aren’t eligible for bail, often due to prior convictions. Philly courts have a backlog that has surpassed 13,000 cases.

Thousands of cases on that backlog are scheduled for a hearing in “Room 200” of Philly’s “criminal justice” building in Center City, a courtroom that does not exist. Room 200 is used as a technical work-around to “schedule” hearings that will not take place.

By last December, there were already more than 800 cases of coronavirus in Philly jails. This COVID outbreak led courts to completely suspend all in-person hearings indefinitely.

The city’s Defenders Association petitioned the Pennsylvania Supreme Court to address this crisis, arguing that “Because nearly all court hearings and trials have either stopped or slowed to a trickle, each petitioner, and hundreds of others like them, have been unable to contest the basis of their confinement.”

Meanwhile, District Attorney Larry Krasner is seeking reelection this year. However, progressives who campaigned for him in 2017 have lambasted him for betraying campaign promises for criminal justice reform and for his relentless attempts to block justice for Mumia

Abu-Jamal. At the same time, the right wing, including outgoing U.S. Attorney William McSwain and the Fraternal Order of Police, accuses Krasner of not prosecuting enough people nor pushing for harsh enough sentences.

Now Krasner’s office regularly asks judges to set bail at \$999,999. He’s demanded similar million-dollar bail amounts for half of all cases that come through his office, according to the Defender’s Association. It goes without saying that oppressed people targeted by the police in Philadelphia, the poorest big city in the U.S., cannot afford to post even 10% of that amount.

It saves the district attorney’s office a great deal of resources not to be required to assign lawyers to jury trials to prove a defendant’s guilt. And with so few cases being scheduled during the pandemic, Krasner is presumably looking for ways to bolster his crime-fighting bona fides for his reelection campaign later this year. So after torturing workers in festering, virus-ridden jails for months and months on end, Krasner then offers them plea bargains — whether they’re innocent or not.

‘They kind of broke me’

So far in 2021, Krasner’s office has signed 350 pleas in just 30 days.

Phil Ingram, 31, who has been held in jail since May 2020, was arrested for allegedly participating in “looting” during the George Floyd protests. Despite declaring his innocence, he’s now seriously considering taking a plea deal.

“At this point, they kind of broke me,”

he told reporters. “I just want to get out of here.” (Philadelphia Inquirer, Jan. 28)

Kalief Browder was a child when he was arrested and held for two years in solitary confinement at Rikers Island, N.Y., without trial. Browder killed himself in 2015 at the age of 22, just two years after his release.

Malik Neal, executive director of the Philadelphia Bail Fund, wrote: “Courts are supposed to set cash bail only to ensure that people return to court for their hearings. But in Philadelphia, the poorest big city in America, it’s often impossible for people to pay the 10% of their bail needed to secure their freedom. They risk losing their jobs, their housing, their custody of children and, with the pandemic, their lives.” (New York Times, Feb. 4)

San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin has gone farther than Krasner and likely has genuine reform as his goal, rather than careerism. Boudin is the son of long-term political prisoners; his mother served 22 years and his father remains in prison. But even Boudin’s bail-reform policy, wrote Colin Doyle, “reveals how tough-on-crime norms limit the contemporary vision of progressive prosecution. Boudin’s office will continue the practice of assessing risk to justify incarcerating legally innocent



people for their future crimes. It has defended this approach with unproven appeals to public safety and predictive accuracy, that in a prior era of bail reform would have been seen as an intrusion on fundamental civil rights.” (The Appeal, Jan. 30, 2020)

Especially after last summer’s uprisings for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Walter Wallace Jr. and all victims of white supremacy, the working class understands that this system cannot be reformed. Concessions are no longer enough. The workers, on both sides of the prison walls, demand abolition.

Consider the thousands of workers who are currently incarcerated, not on the basis of guilt or innocence, but for political expediency. Shouldn’t these workers be considered political prisoners?

Free all political prisoners! □



WW PHOTO: JOE PITTE

Car caravan demands ‘free our people’ on April 10, 2020 in Philadelphia.

Alabama prison attack on incarcerated workers

By Devin Cole
Occupied Muscogee Creek Land

Events in this report happened on the next to last day of a month-long strike and “economic black-out” of Alabama state prisons, led by incarcerated workers and called by the Free Alabama Movement. For more on the strike, see Workers World, Dec. 4, 2020.

On the morning of Jan. 30, Alabama correctional officers and sergeants beat and critically injured two incarcerated workers, one of whom was having a mental health crisis, and injured a third. A fourth was beaten by a CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) squad.

Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) is now attempting to cover up the brutality these four Black men were subjected to and that all incarcerated persons in Alabama experience regularly.

Ephan Moore was having a mental health crisis in his cell in the early morning hours that day. Eyewitnesses report seeing one officer strike Moore on the top of his head with “an ax-like object.” (tinyurl.com/39lrlpvj) After Moore was rendered unconscious by this brute force, four or five officers continued beating him.

Robert Earl Council, known as Kinetik Justice, attempted to intervene and pleaded with the officers to stop beating Moore. As Kinetik walked away from the guards and back to his cell, a guard sergeant tracked him and struck him in

the back of the head. Then guards beat Kinetik and, after he was unconscious, dragged him from his cell by his feet. Graphic evidence of this assault was captured on video by another incarcerated person and posted on Youtube



and Facebook. Facebook has repeatedly removed the video, which was reposted several times.

Guards also beat Derrol Shaw, causing minor injuries. After the attack on Moore and Kinetik occurred, all of Donaldson Correctional Facility, as well as every other prison in Alabama, went on lockdown. The CERT squad was called in, and it was at that point that another incarcerated person, Wilbert Smith, was beaten.

He was taken away by the CERT squad and his whereabouts are still unknown.

Kinetik was airlifted to the University of Alabama-Birmingham trauma unit where, to add insult to injury, his family was refused entry. Eyewitnesses report that the trauma unit was heavily guarded by armed cops.

A group of students from Alabama Students Against Prisons mobilized outside of UAB to demand UAB and ADOC allow Kinetik’s parents to see him, but to no avail.

As of Feb. 1, reports have confirmed that both Kinetik and Ephan Moore are alive, but in critical condition. Kinetik’s skull was cracked in three different places and he has three broken ribs. In an outrageous move, he has been moved back to an ADOC infirmary, which will not provide proper medical care. It has been confirmed that Moore was struck three times with a meat cleaver by one of the guards; he has had two surgeries since the attack.

ADOC has already gone to work, not by firing the officers and charging them with attempted murder, but by sweeping this brutality under the rug and outright lying to the public. A phone zap to Donaldson Correctional Facility revealed that prison officials are telling the public and the

media that “nothing is wrong except that two guards were stabbed.” No mention of four incarcerated people brutally beaten – two nearly beaten to death, and a third still unaccounted for.

Prison abolitionists are putting pressure on ADOC to fire the officers involved as well as the wardens of Donaldson Correctional Facility. They are appealing for support of the following demands for justice for the Donaldson 4:

1. Return Kinetik to the hospital and allow him and Ephan Moore to remain there.
2. Inform the public where Wilbert Smith is and confirm his status.
3. Meet with the Civil Rights Division of DOJ.
4. Fire the wardens and all officers involved.
5. Allow victims to meet with attorneys and families, and release photos of injuries.

For the petition from the Free Alabama Movement calling for the immediate investigation, termination, and charging of the officers responsible for these brutal attacks: tinyurl.com/3bd4d2bv.

Devin Cole is a transgender Marxist organizer and writer. They are the president of Strive (Socialist Trans Initiative), a transgender advocacy organization in northwest Florida, and a member of the Workers World Party – Central Gulf Coast (Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi) branch.

Biden's 'prison reform': Smoke and mirrors

By Betsey Piette

In an executive order signed Jan. 26 as part of his “racial equity” plan, President Joe Biden ordered the U.S. Attorney General and the Department of Justice not to renew contracts with privately owned and operated-for-profit prisons and federal detention facilities.

What is the impact of Biden's mandate? Currently there are over 152,000 incarcerated workers held in federal prisons. His order affects roughly 14,000 of those imprisoned in privately run federal facilities, less than 10% of the total federal prison population.

The president's order does not suspend any existing for-profit private prison contracts, which could take years to expire, nor will it affect contracts private prisons hold with state or local entities. It does not reduce the federal prison population, but simply transfers incarcerated workers from private to public penal facilities.

Significantly, immigrant detainees are not covered by Biden's directive. Over 80% of detained immigrants are currently held in private for-profit prisons — a practice begun under the Obama administration and greatly expanded under Trump's presidency.

While hailed by some as an important “first step” toward prison reform, the truth is that Biden's order barely begins to scratch the surface of mass incarceration. A study released by the Prison Policy Institute on March 24, 2020, reiterated an already established fact: The U.S. locks up more people than any other country. Some 698 of every 100,000 residents are incarcerated; that totals 2.3 million people.

Of those detained in U.S. prisons last March, over 1.29 million were locked up in 1,833 state prisons; 631,000 were held in 3,134 local jails; and 226,000 were imprisoned in 110 federal facilities. Others were confined in 1,772 juvenile facilities. Immigrants were incarcerated in 218 detention centers.

The study found that over 74% of those held in local jails had not even been convicted of any crime!



Alabama Students Against Prisons demonstrate against state plans to construct three new private prisons, Dec. 30, 2020, Birmingham, Ala.

several criminal justice reforms beyond ending the use of private prisons. They include eliminating solitary confinement, improving prison conditions, reducing the incarcerated population and ending the federal death penalty.

Biden's order, which included his prison-reform policy, merely paid lip service to the victims of police murder, including George Floyd. And it does nothing to end the system of corporate profiteering off the backs of incarcerated workers.

Like many of Biden's executive orders, his “prison reform” policy

amounts to putting a Band-Aid on a cancer. It does not challenge police brutality, repressive criminal justice policies or the false convictions that have resulted in the mass incarceration of 2.3 million people — a majority of them Black, Latinx, Indigenous and other people of color. This presidential directive is essentially nothing but smoke and mirrors. □

Band-Aid on a cancer

Since the 1800s, the U.S. has contracted privately run prisons. Today, they have grown to be a billion-dollar industry, led by CoreCivic and GEO Group, two of the biggest private prison companies. Yet only 8.1% of incarcerated workers were held in private prisons in 2019.

The Biden-Harris campaign promised

White House won't help prisoners

By Judy Greenspan

The following are remarks from a Workers World Party webinar on Jan. 21.

It's actually been a very painful time for those of us who are involved in supporting incarcerated workers. And people behind the walls are incarcerated workers, and they're part of our working class. They're part of our fightback. They were part of our fight against Trump, and they will be part of our fightback against the Biden administration and the capitalist system right now.

In California, almost 200 prisoners have died from COVID behind the walls. In some prisons, over half of the incarcerated population is infected with COVID. Joe Biden, unfortunately, is not going to be the president who signs an executive order ordering states and the federal government to do mass releases. This has been the demand from families, but we're not going to get that relief from Biden or Kamala Harris.

President Biden is the man who is responsible for the growth of the prison-industrial complex. He authored the laws that put hundreds of thousands of poor Black and Brown people in prison. Oftentimes when he was authoring these laws, he would write a law that was even



more stringent than what the Republicans would propose. And he was one of the loudest cheerleaders who demanded to

set up the disparity in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine. This literally filled the prisons. He authored legislation that poured billions of dollars into the building of prisons.

James Baldwin said, “I can't really say, because I see what you do.” Because of the incredible power of the Black struggle and the struggle against police terror and police lynchings, the Democrats have had to sort of soft-pedal this legacy.

Harris was actually infamous for not speaking out against the murders of young Black people in California. Harris is known as a “supercop,” because she started out as a prosecutor. As a prosecutor, she ordered the death penalty. Her office denied transgender prisoners the right to gender-affirming surgery.

This was while she was attorney general in California, living in San Francisco, where you have such a vibrant LGBTQ2S+ community. As attorney general, she even refused to release prisoners who were championed by the Innocence Project.

You have somebody who wrote the Crime Bill, filled the prisons, and then you have somebody who was a super prosecutor. So the prison abolitionist movement and incarcerated workers are very worried about what this means in terms of justice for incarcerated workers.

There's a parallel between the corporations that built the prisons and the corporations that are now managing the ICE detention centers. There's a very serious criminal organization called GEO Group, which owns private prisons around the country and halfway houses, which are semi-lockdown units that have the heaviest violations of human rights abuses in California and around the U.S.

So we have a lot of things we need to work on, besides the fact that incarcerated people have no access to health care. □

Philadelphia teachers defy return to classroom order

By Betsey Piette
Philadelphia

Thousands of Philadelphia public school teachers defied an order from school Superintendent William Hite Jr. to return to their classrooms Feb. 8 for the first time since schools became fully virtual in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Across the city, educators demonstrated outside closed public school buildings. (tinyurl.com/y2962287) Despite bitter cold, several teachers set up “classrooms” outside individual schools as well as the district headquarters.

Around 200 teachers and supporters, organized by WE (Working Educators of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers), rallied outside the Philadelphia Board of

Education later in the afternoon. They were supported by members of AFSCME DC 33 Local 427 (Sanitation), BMWED-IBT Local 3012 (Railroad Workers) and Teamsters Local 623 (UPS workers). On Feb. 6, Philadelphia Federation of Teachers President Jerry Jordan told members to ignore the district's order to show up for class on Monday. Later Hite rescinded the order and promised no teachers would be penalized.

Of primary concern was the lack of adequate ventilation in buildings, including several that had problems with mold prior to March 2020. The district's “solution” was to use window fans to ventilate classrooms that lack a ventilation system. Many protesters at the rally carried portable window fans to mock this offensive plan. □



Teachers and supporters rally outside Philadelphia school district building to protest order to return to unsafe classrooms on Feb. 8.

WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

GameStop buying scramble

No ‘investor revolution’

By Ben Carroll

Over the last two weeks, blaring headlines and memes alike have proclaimed the opening of a new front expressing mass outrage at Wall Street — and in the most unlikely place: the stock market.

“The war on Wall Street: GameStop sparks revolution with retail investors” announced Forbes magazine. “GameStop’s Reddit revolution echoes Occupy Wall Street crusade” Bloomberg’s Wealth Report declared. Tesla’s Elon Musk, who competes daily with Amazon’s Jeff Bezos for the title of richest person in the world, has attempted to position himself at the helm of this supposed popular revolt.

To be sure, mass anger at obscene, ever-expanding wealth and the predatory nature of Wall Street speculators and multibillion-dollar hedge funds lies at the core of recent events on the stock market — and the satisfaction many felt watching them unfold.

But have these events fundamentally impacted the wealth and power of the ruling elite?

Beginning in mid-January, people outside of finance capital circles began using the popular social media site Reddit to coordinate buying stock of GameStop, a video game store. GameStop was chosen because it, among other retail businesses like movie theater company AMC, had become the target of Wall Street hedge funds like Melvin Capital and Citron Capital.

They were “shorting” the stock and stood to make millions from its continued decline. A “short” is essentially a gamble that the value of a stock will decline. If it does, the hedge fund or other entity that shorted the stock rakes in big money, but if it increases in value, they lose money.

Many on the Reddit forum cited the pain of job losses, foreclosures and other hardships they and their families endured during the 2008 capitalist crisis as motivating their desire to inflict financial loss on the big firms behind the stock market’s rampant speculation. Their intervention did temporarily help push GameStop’s stock up by more than 14,000% — spelling multibillion-dollar losses for the big hedge funds shorting the stock.

‘Robinhood’ app protects the rich

As the value of GameStop’s stock rose, the popular investing app “Robinhood” restricted its users’ ability to buy GameStop stock. This move earned the ire of many who saw the action for what it was — the rich protecting the rich.

Robinhood, a free app, makes its money by selling user data — including buying activity — to Citadel Securities, another hedge fund. Robinhood recently installed a glass barrier at the entrance to their California headquarters, as people driven to financial ruin after trading on the app began showing up to confront the company.

So who really came out on top?

Melvin Capital, one of the targets of the Reddit users’ GameStop buying spree, lost 53% of its value in January. It would seem that regular people had dealt a major setback to the financial elite. However, Melvin was quickly bailed out by other billionaires and hedge funds — including Citadel Securities, which came to the rescue to the tune of \$2 billion.

For all the hedge funds like Melvin that lost money shorting GameStop’s stock, many others cashed in on the bubble. BlackRock — a firm that manages some \$8 trillion in assets, dwarfing the economies of most of the world’s countries — made out, earning an estimated \$2.4 billion. (Reuters, Jan. 27)

Now GameStop’s stock has fallen significantly, wiping out billions of dollars of value and creating huge losses for people who sunk money into company stock when it was skyrocketing.

Financial speculation central to capitalist production

If nothing more, the GameStop bubble reemphasized what has become even more starkly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic and social crises: Capitalism is an entirely irrational system, and the stock market has little connection to most people’s economic reality.

Since the pandemic began in the U.S. nearly one year ago, tens of millions of workers have lost their jobs, been evicted from their homes, gone hungry or lost loved ones due to inadequacies in the for-profit health care system.

Meanwhile, Wall Street stocks have soared to record highs. The wealth of billionaires in this country has increased by \$1 trillion since the start of the pandemic,



In 2011 Occupy Wall Street was a real revolt. The mad scramble to buy up GameStop stock was something much less.

If nothing more, the GameStop bubble reemphasized what has become even more starkly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic and social crises: Capitalism is an entirely irrational system, and the stock market has little connection to most people’s economic reality.

and 56 new billionaires have joined the elite club. Their collective wealth sits at around \$4 trillion — a sum that is double the combined wealth of the poorest 165 million U.S. workers. (NBC, Dec. 30, 2020)

Congress — Democrats and Republicans alike — has wrung its hands over the most meager assistance for workers and oppressed, which has done little to stop the pain and suffering so many are experiencing. But they’ve been happy to hand over huge sums of cash to the big corporations, the banks and the Pentagon.

The Federal Reserve and central banks around the world have flooded the economy with trillions of dollars of cash and credit, slashing interest rates to stave off a financial crash likely to be the most disastrous in capitalism’s history.

Because capitalism is a system based on the private ownership of the means of production, these trillions have not been used to create or protect jobs, raise income or improve workers’ lives in any meaningful way in the midst of the pandemic. Instead, it’s been hoarded at the top, used by the rich to speculate on stocks at cheap prices and to prop up so-called “zombie” companies — corporations that earn minimal or zero profit and keep borrowing money just to stay afloat. In many cases, zombie corporations are unable to pay back the interest on the money they continually borrow; by some estimates they constitute about 20% of the economy.

Fictitious capital

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called financial assets like stocks and bonds “fictitious capital.” As opposed to real capital — capital which can be reinvested into the means of production — fictitious capital is a claim on some portion of the future profits of a corporation, thus “the capital-value of such paper is ... wholly illusory.” The big corporations sell stock to raise funds for investment to more efficiently exploit labor power. A key feature of capitalism is that these companies must continually expand or risk being gobbled up by their competitors. (Capital Vol. III, Chapter 29)

By nearly every measure, the financial speculation that is central to the operation of the capitalist economy and the detachment of the stock market from the real economy is reaching a point never seen before.

The Buffet Indicator measures the value of the stock market in relation to the GDP. As of Jan. 28, the total value of the stock market was estimated to be around \$47 trillion, while the U.S. GDP sat at around \$21 trillion. This indicator shows that, historically, the total value of the stock market is generally 120% of GDP. Currently, that ratio sits around 218%, surpassing the record for the stock-to-GDP ratio set during the dot-com bubble and ensuing recession in the late 1990s to early 2000s.

Other similar indices also demonstrate that the current bubble in stocks compares only to that preceding the dot-com bust and the 1929 crash that ushered in the Great Depression. In other words, stock prices today are wildly inflated and in no way reflect the value of the wealth the working class is actually producing.

It’s not a question of if, but when this bubble will bust. The billionaires will look to manage their crisis by further attacking workers and the most oppressed with punishing austerity, mass layoffs, wage cuts and social service cutbacks.

While the actions by the people who banded together to go after Wall Street hedge funds were certainly righteous, they’re no substitute for building fighting organizations and preparing for class struggle. That is most needed, today and in the immediate future, in the face of the deepening and irresolvable crisis of the capitalist system. □

Petition to the new U.S. administration

End economic sanctions in the face of the global pandemic

Sanctions Kill is asking everyone to sign its new petition to the Biden administration and Congress. To sign, go to sanctionskill.org/petition.

We write to you because we are deeply concerned about the impact of U.S. sanctions on many countries that are suffering the dire consequences of COVID-19.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and global economic crash challenge all humanity. Scientific and technological cooperation and global solidarity are desperate needs. Instead, the Trump Administration escalated economic warfare (“sanctions”) against many countries around the globe.

We ask you to begin a new era in U.S. relations with the world by lifting all U.S. economic sanctions.

U.S. economic sanctions impact one-third of the world’s population in 39 countries.

These sanctions block shipments and purchases of essential medicines, testing equipment, PPE, vaccines and even basic food. Sanctions also cause chronic

shortages of basic necessities, economic dislocation, chaotic hyperinflation, artificial famines, disease and poverty, leading to tens of thousands of deaths. It is always the poorest and the weakest — infants, children, the chronically ill and the elderly — who suffer the worst impact of sanctions.

Sanctions are illegal. They are a violation of international law and the United Nations Charter. They are a crime against humanity used, like military intervention, to topple popular governments and movements.

The United States uses its military and economic dominance to pressure governments, institutions and corporations to end all normal trade relations with targeted nations, lest they risk asset seizures and even military action.

The first step toward change must be an end to the U.S. policies of economic war. We urge you to end these illegal sanctions on all countries immediately and to reset the U.S. relations with the world. □

SANCTIONS
KILL



Behind Biden’s Yemen announcement

Bait and switch

By Sara Flounders

Feb. 7 — President Joe Biden seemed to announce an end to Washington’s complete support for Saudi Arabia’s war on Yemen last week, reversing Trump’s and even the Obama/Biden administration’s public policy. He called the war a “humanitarian and strategic catastrophe.”

In his first presidential foreign policy speech on Feb. 4, Biden said, “We are ending all [U.S.] support for offensive operations in the war in Yemen, including relevant arms sales.” (whitehouse.gov) But he quickly added that Washington will continue to help Saudi Arabia to “defend its sovereignty and territory,” including selling the Saudis massive new high-tech weapons, for “defensive” purposes.

On Jan. 25, over 300 antiwar and humanitarian organizations worldwide called for an end to the Saudi war and highlighted the Western countries’ role as enablers of Saudi crimes in Yemen. “The war is only possible because Western countries — and the United States and Britain in particular — continue to arm Saudi Arabia and provide military, political and logistical support for the war ... The Western powers are active participants and have the power to stop the world’s most acute human crisis.” (actionnetwork.org)

What does Biden’s announcement mean for Yemen and for other countries in the Pentagon’s crosshairs, who are struggling to survive U.S. economic strangulation via sanctions?

Biden seems anxious to change the perception of the U.S. role in the war in Yemen and disguise Washington’s strategy of using the reactionary Saudi monarchy to counter and attack the Iranian government. A look behind this maneuvering should ensure that no section of the antiwar movement, despite enthusiastic media and congressional applause, is taken in by Biden’s announcement.

Washington led the war

According to the Feb. 5 New York Times, “When Saudi F-15 warplanes took off from an air base in southern Saudi Arabia for a bombing run over Yemen, it was not just a plane and bombs that were American. American mechanics serviced the jet and carried out repairs on the ground. American technicians upgraded the targeting software and other classified technology, which Saudis were not allowed to touch. The pilot was likely to have been trained by the United States Air Force.

“At a flight operations room in the capital, Riyadh, Saudi commanders sat near American military officials who provided intelligence and tactical advice, mainly aimed at stopping the Saudis from killing Yemeni civilians.”

So, in reality the U.S. military directly collaborated in the many horrendous massacres Saudi Arabia’s armed forces committed during its ongoing war in Yemen. Every bombing run used targeting software, intelligence and tactical advice, which the Saudis were not even allowed to “touch.”

The attacks included the publicized and universally condemned bombings of schools, school buses, hospitals, U.N. Aid Agencies and wedding parties. The bombing of Yemen’s civilian centers led to a cholera epidemic and famine.

Biden’s announcement of U.S. support for the war in Yemen positions U.S. imperialism for continuing the war with protracted rounds of “negotiations.” Taking part in these negotiations would be Washington’s client regime in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies who backed this criminal war all along.

Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution broke a major pillar of U.S. domination of the region, only Saudi Arabia and Israel remain to uphold U.S. corporate power. Despite differences in how to proceed, Biden has no intention in letting U.S. support for the brutal Saudi regime slip.

Yemen – a strategic crossroads

Saudi Arabia’s neighbor Yemen has a strategic location on the Bab el-Mandeb, the narrow strait linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Ships carrying fossil fuels must pass this choke point between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula to travel between the Persian/Arabian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal to the SUMED pipeline. (tinyurl.com/y5zlnutr)

Both Washington strategists and the totally corrupt Saudi royal family live in fear that a Yemeni government based on a popular nationalist movement could threaten

Bab el-Mandeb and their domination.

Despite six years of relentless bombing, use of antipersonnel bombs, U.S. naval blockade, economic sanctions and drone attacks, the U.S.-Saudi alliance has utterly failed to defeat the popularly based Ansarullah movement, also called the Houthis. As the Feb. 5 NY Times noted, “about 80% of Yemen’s population of 30 million people live in areas under Houthi control.”

The Ansarullah movement

The Ansarullah movement manages to administer a large area of Yemen, including the capital city, Sana’a and most population centers. The movement has grown and matured, from a radical uprising that began in northern Yemen against corruption, through numerous alliances, into a national insurrection demanding economic development and a democratic and nonsectarian government.

In the 1990s, a mass resistance movement for change arose in opposition to Saudi Arabia’s intentionally divisive, sectarian influence in the region. Yemen has both Sunni and Shia Muslim populations.

Ansarullah was led by a political, religious leader, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a member of Yemen’s Zaidi Shias, who make up about one-third of the population. Western forces named the movement after this leader, calling it the Houthis. Al-Houthi’s 2004 death did not lead to the movement’s defeat; his brother, Abdul Malik, remains a leader.

This radical uprising, originally based in the Shia Muslim community of Yemen, gained broad support from the Sunni Muslim population. People saw Ansarullah as a popularly based movement against corruption and feudal reaction.

In 2014, national anger erupted over an International Monetary Fund demand on the Yemeni government to implement an austerity plan and remove fuel subsidies, which raised the prices of food, water and mass transit. Mass protests overwhelmed the government in September 2014. The ranks of the military refused to act against the popular movement.

In January 2015, a shaky coalition government collapsed when faced with the popular demand for a new constitution. A Revolutionary Council was declared. Then a National Salvation Government was more firmly established.

In this period the two sides of the war in Yemen were formed. On one side, the Saudis, the monarchies and U.S. imperialism backed the unpopular regime headed by Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. In the U.S., British and European Union media, this grouping was called the “internationally recognized government.” The “Republic of Yemen Government” had its base in Saudi Arabia.

The ROYG is unable to govern any area of Yemen or hold any territory securely. Its rotating cabinet has had numerous splits, changes and assassinations. There have been divisions between northern Yemeni commanders and the South Yemen Southern Transitional Force, who hold the port of Aden and have shifted alliances back and forth. Fighters aligned with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Islamic State group, who have often received U.S. and Saudi support in Syria and Iraq, have now moved into areas of South Yemen.

In an effort to prop up and give legitimacy to the Hadi “government in exile,” multiparty negotiations were held in Stockholm, Sweden, and Geneva, Switzerland.

Arrogant miscalculations

On March 25, 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the beginning of military operations in Yemen to restore the overthrown Hadi government. The Saudi-U.S. strategists expected the operation to win quickly, lasting one month at most.

A war coalition of more than 10 countries was hastily cobbled together by Saudi Arabia with full U.S. support. It included the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan and Jordan.

Two years into the quagmire, this reactionary coalition of monarchies and military dictatorships completely collapsed amid competing interests, infighting, backing different forces in Yemen and suffering humiliating defeats. Country after country withdrew their military forces.



The war has turned into a disaster for Saudi Arabia and the U.S. They are hopelessly bogged down in an unwinnable war and faced with a dilemma.

Airstrikes alone are incapable of defeating the Ansarullah armed insurrectionary move-

ment. Sending ground troops into the north Yemeni highlands could lead to mutiny and collapse of the Saudi military. On the other hand, a complete Saudi withdrawal and victory of a radical uprising on the Saudi border could be a dangerous humiliation and highly contagious.

In September 2019, missiles struck Saudi Arabia’s eastern oil fields of Abqaiq and Khurais, disrupting nearly half of Saudi oil production. The resistance movement openly claimed responsibility. Saudi Arabia and Washington refuse to acknowledge Ansarullah’s capacity to strike such a devastating blow. Instead, they have accused Iran of carrying out the attacks.

And they blame Iran for supporting the Ansarullah insurrection, although Yemen is under complete naval blockade and has no common border with Iran.

Lessons of Syria and Afghanistan

During the Obama-Biden Administration, Washington played a similar role in Syria. In 2011, a small uprising instigated by Washington received immediate support.

There was great confidence that the Syrian government would not survive a month. A complete collapse was predicted. U.S. imperialist allies and corrupt Gulf monarchies signed on to an all-out effort to pull the Assad government down. Negotiations involving an appointed government in exile took place for years in London, Geneva, and Paris.

The Syrian people rallied to oppose this imperialist takeover. More than 100,000 well-armed and financed mercenary and reactionary fighters were imported into Syria. From 2014, U.S. bombardment and U.S. bases and U.S. sanctions have continued the efforts. During the entire war, Washington’s politicians and other imperialist forces have claimed they are seeking a peace accord.

In Afghanistan where U.S. war has ground on for 20 years, at every step the U.S. has promised a withdrawal — as soon as a stable government is in place or a negotiated peace agreement.

Washington’s involvement in negotiations has never meant an end to war. It is just another form of continuing the war.

Yemen’s Response to Biden

“We consider any move that does not end the siege and aggression against Yemen as just a formality and do not pay any attention to it,” Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of Yemen’s Supreme Political Council said in a post published on his official Twitter page early on Feb. 6.

“The U.S. decision to end its involvement [in the war] and command of the aggressor states is not enough. ... Washington’s allies must also commit themselves to compensate victims, enact a package of measures to guarantee the sovereignty of Yemen, recognize its independence and legitimate right to self-defense, and consider any military action either by Arab or foreign states as a criminal act.”

Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, another member of Yemen’s Supreme Political Council, told Al Mayadeen TV news on Feb. 5 that “The war in Yemen ends once all airstrikes stop and foreign forces leave the country. ... The United States may reduce its support for aggressor states without stopping it altogether.”

Saudi Arabia – new U.S. bases

U.S. Navy Capt. Bill Urban, a spokesman for Central Command, said U.S. evaluation of a Red Sea port in Saudi Arabia and an additional two airfields began following the 2019 missile attack against the state-owned Saudi Aramco oil processing facilities at Abqaiq, which was blamed on Iran.

Currently, some 2,500 American soldiers maintain fighter jets and Patriot missile batteries at Prince Sultan Air Base southeast of Riyadh. Saudi Arabia and the U.S. have continued joint military exercises in a show of force over the past six weeks.

Biden said the purpose of his Feb. 4 remarks was to “send a clear message to the world: America is back” and that Washington will continue to help Saudi Arabia defend its sovereignty and territory.

This may well mean far greater involvement, not less. □

Dangling the carrot

Maybe some thought that President Joe Biden was serious about doubling the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and doing it during the pandemic when workers were most in need. That was never his plan.

Republicans introduced an amendment seeking to prevent increasing the minimum wage under Biden’s \$1.9 trillion stimulus package Feb. 4. The Senate passed the amendment unanimously, which means Democrats voted for it.

Even Bernie Sanders, chair of the Senate Budget Committee, said, “It was never my intent to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour immediately during the pandemic.” Sanders proposes gradual increases over the next five years. (Business Insider, Feb. 6)

Feel the burn.

The last increase of the federal minimum wage was passed in 2007 and signed by George W. Bush. It raised the minimum from \$6.55 to \$7.25 an hour by 2009. There has been no increase from this pittance since. For tipped workers, disproportionately women of color, it’s even worse, with their federal minimum at \$2.13 an hour!

Had the 2009 minimum wage been indexed to the consumer price index, it would now be \$10.15 an hour. If indexed to increases in CEO pay, it should be \$23 an hour. (thebalance.com, Aug. 30, 2020)

Over the last few decades, workers’ purchasing power has drastically declined. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, millions of families in the U.S. were forced to choose between food on the table or a roof overhead.

Meanwhile, average salaries for politicians in federal and state legislatures, where minimum wages are determined, have dramatically increased over the same time

frame. As of 2020, over half of the members of Congress were millionaires. Salaries for congress members begin at \$174,000.

Living Wage Calculator estimates that one adult working full time (2,080 hours per year) would need to earn at least \$12.45 an hour to cover typical living expenses, which differ widely by city and state. With a child, one adult would need \$25.62 an hour. (tinyurl.com/1n1mjiiw)

Unemployment during the pandemic has drastically impacted workers’ ability to pay rents or mortgages. The stimulus bill signed in late December extended an earlier eviction moratorium only through Jan. 31. Biden’s proposed stimulus plan would extend the federal moratorium on evictions and foreclosures through Sept. 30, 2021, and allocate \$30 billion more for emergency assistance for households.

Multiple crises unaddressed by bill

None of the federal measures address how workers are supposed to pay back rent and mortgages when the moratoriums end.

Even before COVID-19 hit, minimum-wage workers did not earn enough to pay rents. Average studio apartment rent in the U.S. was \$534 a month. The current minimum wage leaves a worker with only \$377 for housing. (thebalance.com) By 2026, these numbers will be considerably higher.

Workers unable to pay for necessities in 2021 need that raise now. Stimulus checks barely make a dent. Biden and the Democrats hope that workers will forget about a wage increase and settle for another one-time stimulus check of \$1,400 per individual. Yet that’s still



PHOTO: PEOPLESDISPATCH.ORG

One of 300 Fight for \$15 demonstrations in the U.S. on May 1, 2019.

too little, too late.

Limiting relief to the federal checks, without forcing wages to go up, takes the burden off the corporations who continue to underpay their workers. These same corporations were the primary beneficiaries of Trump’s 2017 tax cuts. While keeping workers’ wages below poverty levels for decades, CEOs — in the top 1% — have seen their compensation increase by 940% since 1978. During the same period, a typical worker’s income has risen by only 12%. (Economic Policy Institute)

Biden’s stimulus plan is intended to keep workers pacified while throwing more money into the economy for a short-term fix. The promise of doubling the minimum wage is the carrot, dangled out there in hopes that the coronavirus pandemic will subside and the economy will improve.

This bill does not begin to replace the income of the 22 million workers, a majority women and/or people of color, who have lost jobs due to the pandemic.

Workers must fight for higher wages and not look to Biden or the Democratic Party to do it for them. History shows that the only time a living wage has been legislated was when struggles in the streets and the workplace forced it. □

Two new books on a people’s response to COVID-19 ‘Planète Malade’ and ‘Capitalism on a Ventilator’

By Paddy Colligan and G. Dunkel

COVID-19 is an evolving catastrophe for the world’s working class. You may think you have read all that can be said about the virus and can’t bear to read one more thing — even though you follow it closely every day. So it will surprise you to learn that there is significantly more to read.

Two new books are “Planète Malade” and “Capitalism on a Ventilator: The Impact of COVID-19 in China and the U.S.” Published in French and English, respectively, they include information and analysis that is missing from much of the big business media. They compare how capitalist and socialist countries have responded to the pandemic.

While these books come from different political traditions, what is striking is how frequently they agree. “Planète Malade” comes out of the anti-capitalist, socialist movements of Western Europe — France, Germany and Belgium being most prominent.

‘Capitalism on a Ventilator’

“Capitalism on a Ventilator” is an anthology of writings by more than 50 authors. They include Vijay Prashad (Tricontinental), Max Blumenthal (Greyzone), Margaret Kimberley (Black Agenda Report), Margaret Flowers (Green Party) and political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Its editors are Sara Flounders, director of the International Action Center, and Lee Siu Hin, director of the China-US Solidarity Network.

Flounders’ introduction begins: “The United States is reeling from a triple crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic that has inflicted over 4.4 million confirmed cases ... the most of any country in the world. Beyond this pain, suffering

and death, over a million workers a week have filed for unemployment [benefits] ever since April. ... [M]illions of people all over the country have marched and protested racism and systematic abuse of police power.”

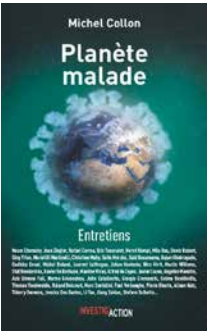
Updating the statistics cited by Flounders, as of Feb. 8 there have now been 27.6 million cases of COVID-19 and 475,000 deaths in the U.S. (Worldometer) Many epidemiologists say even these figures are significant undercounts.

Flounders calls out Republican and Democratic politicians in the U.S. for scapegoating China, the first country to identify COVID-19 among its population. Washington’s blaming China for the pandemic is in line with U.S. imperialism’s confrontational economic and diplomatic policies toward that country.

Articles in the “Ventilator” anthology emphasize the need to refute widespread anti-China and anti-Asia rhetoric. The writings discuss the political environment surrounding the pandemic, and examine how greed, hypocrisy, and incompetence fueled by racism have infected the woefully inadequate, horrific U.S. response.

Striking articles in the anthology explain how systemic racism in the U.S. intertwines with the pandemic. Black, Latinx and Indigenous communities have disproportionately suffered from illness and death. A piece by Abu-Jamal describes this spiraling disaster.

Essays explain how China warned the world about the virus even as Wuhan residents first fell ill. It shared scientific data and aided many countries with desperately needed medical supplies. Then Trump and the corporate media viciously blamed China for the pandemic. European governments viewed China’s swift, effective response with disdain.



‘Planète Malade’

Author Michel Collon, a member of the Belgian Workers Party, interviewed over 50 nurses, doctors, scientists, economists, ecologists and reporters from 16 different countries to produce two 400-page volumes, published on Sept. 1, 2020, called “Planète Malade.” Volume two contains more than 40 interviews. (The two volumes have not yet been translated into English.)

The book begins by asking two key questions: “With another strategy, would we have been able to save most of Covid’s victims, considerably diminish the general agony and quickly relaunch our economies? Why did some countries succeed while ours didn’t?”

In an interview with “Le Drapeau Rouge,” the Belgian Workers Party publication, Collon makes this point sharply. Europe and the United States have a combined population of around 700 million people and have suffered about 700,000 deaths. Seven countries in East Asia, including China and Vietnam, with a total of 1.52 billion people, have had around 7,000 deaths. Why has there been such a disparity in outcomes? What is especially striking is that this pandemic first spread in China.

Collon interviewed Aziz Salmone Fall, an academic and activist in Montreal. Fall describes a post-colonial Africa where people in many countries suffer from endemic health conditions, including malaria, due to hunger, bad water and impoverishment.

For decades, the imperialist International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, seeking to ensure corporate profits, ruthlessly forced African economies into austerity. This resulted in hollowed-out public health systems and governments unable to offer their people emergency economic support during the pandemic. Fighting COVID will burden the future, hampering development and even their response to ordinary public health needs.

Collon interviewed the eminent French mathematician

Continued on page 11

Capitalism on a Ventilator

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

A new anthology contrasting the effective Chinese response to COVID-19 with the disastrous response here in the U.S. It pushes back against the racist anti-China campaign in the media.

Order in print: tinyurl.com/CapVent-print.
Order ebook: tinyurl.com/CapVent-ebook.

Two new books on a people’s response to COVID-19

‘Planète Malade’ and ‘Capitalism on a Ventilator’

Continued from page 10

Laurent Lafforgue on the mathematics of coronavirus replication. His interview appears early in “Planète Malade,” and provides a critical tool to explain why the responses of most countries were doomed to fail, while a few countries were very successful in holding the pandemic at bay.

Lafforgue says that if one infected person infects just two other people in a week, by the second week these two people would infect at least two additional people. By the end of the tenth week, at least 1,024 people would be infected from the initial two people. Without quarantining or some method of interrupting the chain of transmission, this progression is inevitable and immutable because this coronavirus is spread through the air.

Lafforgue’s explanation is important to grasp. While it is not news to mathematicians and epidemiologists, it was apparently ignored by most political leaders who made, or failed to make, vital policy decisions in response to COVID.

Why a rapid response is necessary

This means in practice that the rapidity with which governments move to

control the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, determines the outcome. Several measures can be implemented immediately to interrupt transmission: wearing masks, social distancing, testing and tracing. But the most significant variable is how quickly governments act to impose controls to break the chain of human contact and transmission.

Once the existence of a dangerous contagious disease was known, government officials who failed to act were derelict in doing their jobs. They needed to act immediately. They should have been able to implement an emergency strategy, but instead did nothing and looked for scapegoats.

The delays meant that the number of infections and deaths increased exponentially. The U.S. and European countries dithered, bickered and pointed fingers. Weeks passed — and the inexorable pandemic described in Lafforgue's model has exacted a terrible human toll.

China on a ‘war footing’

But this was not the response everywhere. China took dramatic and ultimately effective global quarantine

measures. The government put the country on a war footing to combat the pandemic. Factories ramped up to increase the supply of needed supplies. Scientific labs immediately began to study the virus. Emergency facilities were built in record time.

The first COVID-19 outbreak had occurred in Wuhan, Hubei Province’s capital and a major transportation hub. Tens of thousands of health care workers aided the people of Wuhan and Hubei Province. The Chinese government imposed a 76-day lockdown on Wuhan, beginning Jan. 23, 2020, that had essential popular support. This action successfully interrupted transmission of the virus.

There have been 4,636 COVID deaths in China since the pandemic began, mostly in Hubei Province, which has 59 million residents. France, with over 65 million people, has so far had nearly 79,000 deaths.

Other countries in Asia, Oceania and elsewhere immediately took notice of China's measures. Vietnam, South Korea, the state of Kerala in India, Cuba, Australia and New Zealand moved quickly and decisively, to their considerable

benefit.

Only weeks after the virus was well-established did European countries and some North American countries reluctantly adopt some of the measures implemented by China early in the pandemic. But for many countries, and certainly for the U.S., it was already too late to get a grip on the galloping spread of the virus. The measures they implemented have been too little, too late, and too intermittent to have a decisive impact.

The result is the terrible toll in death and economic dislocation that has occurred in Europe and the U.S., which is by no means over. In the countries that acted quickly and focused on meeting their people’s needs, the ultimate toll has been far less. This follows the mathematical law explained so well in “Planète Malade.” Capitalist countries like New Zealand avoided major fatalities by using a combination of enforced isolation, quarantines, contact tracing and testing, and lockdowns.

Socialist countries like China, Vietnam and Cuba, whose governments are not obligated to preserve and protect capitalists’ profits, had no political obstacles and acted rapidly. Beside the public health measures all countries could have adopted, the socialist countries also had significant grassroots organizations that could mobilize popular support to provide aid to mitigate the pandemic’s impacts on people’s lives.

How to get the books

Both books have printed editions. Buying ebooks gets them to readers immediately.

“Planète malade” by Michel Collon. Two volumes in one eBook. Available in French only. Tome 1 : L’Enquête (1-431) and Tome 2 : Entretiens (1-395). Each volume has footnotes, bibliographic resources and an index. Publisher: InvestigAction.net. \$10.99 for ebook. See tinyurl.com/1xh61qgg.

“Capitalism on a Ventilator: The Impact of COVID-19 in China and the U.S.” Edited by Sara Flounders and Lee Siu Hin. A project of the International Action Center and the China US Solidarity Network. Order paperback for \$16 (plus shipping) at tinyurl.com/CapVent-print or order ebook from Kobo for \$12.99 at tinyurl.com/CapVent-ebook. □

Select COVID-19 cases and mortality rates

	# COVID cases	# COVID deaths	# deaths/million
Belgium	721,432	21,295	1,833
Britain	3,929,835	112,092	1,646
United States	27,494,757	472,920	1,424
Italy	2,625,098	91,003	1,506
France	3,317,333	8,794	1,206
Australia	28,848	909	35
South Korea	80,524	1,464	29
Cuba	32,011	233	21
New Zealand	2,315	25	5
China	89,681	4,636	3
Vietnam	1,981	35	0.4

* Figures from www.worldometers.info, Feb. 6, 2021

Imperio de EE.UU. libra guerra de 30 años contra Irak

Continúa de la página 12

reciben una excelente remuneración por ello: hasta 22.500 dólares al mes.

La influencia de Estados Unidos se enfrenta a nuevos retos

En el punto álgido de su fuerza, a mediados del siglo XX, el Partido Comunista Iraquí era el mayor de la región. Pero a pesar de ser el partido político que más tiempo lleva existiendo en el país, el partido fue severamente reprimido por el régimen baasista de Saddam Hussein.

Tras la ocupación estadounidense de 2003, el PCI recibió importantes críticas por participar en el régimen clientelar respaldado por Estados Unidos. En los últimos años, hay indicios de una nueva oposición, ya que los comunistas iraquíes han formado una coalición -con partidarios del clérigo chií Muqtada al-Sadr y el Partido del Movimiento Juvenil por el

Cambio, entre otros- que obtuvo más escaños que cualquier otra agrupación en las elecciones parlamentarias de 2018.

El 31 de diciembre de 2019, los manifestantes iraquíes asaltaron la fortaleza de la Embajada de Estados Unidos en respuesta a los ataques aéreos que destruyeron depósitos de armas pertenecientes a grupos de milicianos en Irak. La exitosa irrupción de los manifestantes en la embajada fue una tremenda muestra de coordinación y fuerza popular y fue una victoria simbólica que demostró un nuevo espíritu de resistencia contra la ocupación.

Días después, la banda de Trump ordenó un ataque con drones, matando al popular general iraní Qassem Soleimani y a un líder de la milicia iraquí en suelo iraquí. Soleimani fue una figura decisiva en la derrota de EE.UU. Millones de iraquíes e iraníes marcharon en protesta y salieron a la calle para conmemorar el

funeral de Soleimani.

Javad Zarif, ministro de Asuntos Exteriores de la República Islámica de Irán, dijo en una entrevista (publicada en Facebook) que el asesinato criminal de una figura tan respetada marcaba un punto de inflexión permanente para la presencia militar estadounidense en el país: “Estados Unidos tiene que despertar al hecho de que la gente de esta región está enfurecida, que la gente de esta región quiere que Estados Unidos se vaya”.

La China popular es otro importante aliado del pueblo iraquí a través de su Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta. Desde la pandemia del COVID-19, el precio del petróleo se desplomó y la economía iraquí se contrajo un 12%. La compañía petrolera estatal iraquí llegó este mes a un acuerdo de 2.000 millones de dólares para suministrar petróleo crudo a la compañía petrolera china ZenHua durante cinco años a un precio superior y permite al

Estado iraquí determinar la logística y el calendario del intercambio.

Solidaridad internacional

Un día, la lucha revolucionaria del pueblo iraquí por la autodeterminación nacional expulsará hasta el último soldado ocupante de Iraq. La clase obrera estadounidense tiene un papel que desempeñar en esta lucha librando nuestra propia lucha revolucionaria para hacer imposible que los capitalistas mantengan este proyecto colonial y para desarmar a la burguesía y dismantelar su maquinaria de guerra.

Sencillamente, la clase obrera estadounidense y el pueblo iraquí tienen un enemigo común en el régimen imperialista estadounidense. El mismo sistema cuya policía asesina a niños negros en las calles de Filadelfia envió a sus tropas a asesinar a niños iraquíes en Faluya, Basora, Mosul y Bagdad. □

Manifestantes apoyan a los huelguistas en Batavia, N.Y.

Por Arjae Red

En noviembre de 2020, los inmigrantes encarcelados en la cárcel del condado de Bergen, en Nueva Jersey, iniciaron una huelga de hambre para protestar por las condiciones sucias e inhumanas en las que estaban alojados. A los presos se les negaba el acceso al agua, la atención médica, la calefacción y los suministros de limpieza. El centro tenía una plaga de roedores con la que los presos se veían obligados a convivir. Y el personal del centro había bloqueado las ventanas, limitando el flujo de aire fresco.

La cárcel del condado de Bergen es utilizada por el Servicio de Inmigración y Control de Aduanas (ICE) para encarcelar a los inmigrantes detenidos.

El apoyo a la huelga de hambre creció en el condado de Bergen y sus alrededores, con un llamamiento a la liberación de los presos. En represalia por esta solidaridad, las autoridades penitenciarias dividieron a los huelguistas y trasladaron



FOTO WW: ARJAE RED

Manifestantes se reúnen frente a la valla de alambre de púas de la detención del ICE en Batavia, Nueva York, el 19 de enero.

a algunos a otras prisiones.

En lugar de detener la huelga de hambre, estos traslados hicieron que se extendiera a las instalaciones del ICE del condado de Essex y del condado de Hudson, en Nueva Jersey, y de Batavia, en Nueva York. Los huelguistas trasladados a Batavia fueron obligados a

permanecer en régimen de aislamiento. Aunque algunos presos han decidido poner fin a la huelga, muchos aún persisten, ya que el apoyo a los presos crece y se extiende por varios estados.

El traslado de los presos para poner fin a la huelga no sólo perjudica la salud mental y social de los presos, sino que también facilita la propagación del COVID-19 de una prisión a otra y a las comunidades circundantes. El virus golpea a los presos de forma especialmente brutal, debido a la falta de equipamiento sanitario, el entorno impuro y el hacinamiento.

En el norte del estado de Nueva York, Justice for Migrant Families, Rochester Rapid Response Network y Abolish ICE NY-NJ organizaron dos protestas a las que asistieron miembros del Workers World Party-Buffalo. El 14 de enero, los

manifestantes se reunieron frente a la oficina de campo del ICE en Buffalo, plantearon las demandas de los huelguistas y reprodujeron las voces de los encarcelados a través de un altavoz.

El 19 de enero se celebró otra manifestación en las instalaciones del ICE en Batavia (Nueva York). Manifestantes de Buffalo, Rochester y alrededores se reunieron para exigir la liberación de los huelguistas de hambre, la abolición del ICE y el cierre de los campos de inmigrantes.

Kawiye Jumale, activista local de los inmigrantes y miembro de la comunidad bantú somalí -cuyo propio hermano fue encerrado en las instalaciones del ICE de Batavia- habló sobre las injusticias del gobierno estadounidense contra los inmigrantes y los refugiados: “Vinimos aquí pensando que íbamos a tener una oportunidad para el ‘sueño americano’. . . El ‘sueño americano’ no existe. Vinimos aquí y estamos en el mismo entorno opresivo. Están ganando dinero a costa nuestra”. □

Imperio de EE.UU. libra guerra de 30 años contra Irak

Por Ted Kelly

Desde la perspectiva de los jóvenes del mundo, el imperialismo estadounidense ha estado librando una guerra contra Iraq durante toda su vida. Los niños iraquíes nacidos el mismo año del comienzo de la Guerra del Golfo, que deberían estar acercándose a sus 31 años, fueron asesinados por las sanciones o las bombas impuestas por Estados Unidos. Esta guerra de 30 años moldeó la conciencia política de toda una generación.

Las relaciones entre Estados Unidos e Irak desde 1990 no son las de dos estados vecinos que se disputan una frontera. Es una atrocidad continua que un imperio está cometiendo contra una nación oprimida. Es el proyecto de Washington para dominar Asia Occidental.

El ‘nuevo orden mundial’, el mismo colonialismo de siempre

Cuando la Unión Soviética se derumbó, también lo hizo el contrapeso que disuadía la invasión imperialista contra sus vecinos. Los estrategas estadounidenses aprovecharon esta oportunidad para reconquistar las antiguas colonias imperialistas. Su principal objetivo en Irak era controlar los recursos petrolíferos y establecer bases permanentes desde las que lanzar campañas militares en toda la región.

Washington sentó primero las bases instigando el caos y debilitando a los poderes soberanos locales. Para prolongar la amarga guerra entre Irán e Irak de 1980 a 1988, que cobró más de un millón de vidas, Estados Unidos envió armas y dinero en efectivo a ambos bandos.

Dos años después de que ese conflicto terminará en un punto muerto, Estados Unidos envió mensajes contradictorios a través de sus diplomáticos a Kuwait e Irak, aumentando las tensiones al tiempo que animaba al gobierno iraquí a invadir a su vecino del sur.

En cuanto las tropas iraquíes cruzaron la frontera, “la trampa saltó”, escribió

el analista militar Manilo Dinucci en Workers World/Mundo Obrero el 21 de enero. “Estados Unidos -que llevaba tiempo preparando la guerra, observando con satélites militares el despliegue de las fuerzas iraquíes e identificando los objetivos a atacar- formó una coalición internacional que envió al Golfo un gran ejército de 750.000 soldados bajo el mando del general estadounidense Norman Schwarzkopf”.

Esta movilización masiva y la devastadora campaña de bombardeos forjaron un nuevo punto de apoyo para Estados Unidos, colocando bases en Arabia Saudí, y, en palabras del presidente George H.W. Bush, “la crisis del Golfo pasará a la historia como el crisol del nuevo orden mundial.”

Durante la siguiente década, las sanciones y los bombardeos estadounidenses mataron a 1,5 millones de iraquíes, entre ellos 500.000 niños. Cuando se le preguntó sobre esta política genocida, la Secretaria de Estado Madeleine Albright dijo: “Creemos que el precio vale la pena”.

El gobierno de George W. Bush inventó el pretexto para la siguiente fase de reconquista y lanzó una invasión a gran escala. Washington afirmó falsamente que Saddam Hussein se había coordinado con los planificadores de los atentados del 11 de septiembre de 2001 contra el World Trade Center y el Pentágono y que, además, estaba almacenando armas químicas, las llamadas armas de destrucción masiva. Ambas afirmaciones eran falsas.

Estados Unidos comenzó a bombardear Bagdad el 19 de marzo de 2003, apuntando a los alrededores del Palacio Presidencial. Más de 200.000 soldados estadounidenses y británicos arrasaron el país, tomaron el Palacio, establecieron una “Zona Verde” de tres millas cuadradas en la capital y se prepararon para la ocupación permanente.

La ocupación militar estableció un régimen títere que privatizó las instituciones del Estado iraquí, incluidas la sanidad y

la educación. Disolvieron la Guardia Republicana iraquí. Eliminaron las instituciones que mantenían a los iraquíes empleados durante los doce años de sanciones.

De la noche a la mañana, miles de trabajadores perdieron su única forma de ingresos. Una política conocida como “des-basificación” encarceló a los miembros del partido Baas o los purgó de las instituciones estatales restantes, incluso a los que tenían trabajos no políticos que requerían la pertenencia al partido, como los profesores.

Diversas fuerzas de resistencia intentaron hacerse con el control de los recursos del país y mantener una apariencia de Estado soberano. Las tropas de ocupación estadounidenses las aplastaron con la fuerza bruta, encarcelaron a miles de trabajadores iraquíes y avivaron las divisiones entre los trabajadores por motivos étnicos y religiosos.

Los escuadrones de la muerte armados por Estados Unidos vagaban por las zonas que se resistían a la ocupación. Los soldados y mercenarios estadounidenses cometieron un número incalculable de atrocidades. Las fuerzas de ocupación utilizaron tanta munición de uranio empobrecido radiactivo, especialmente en la zona de Basora, que todavía hoy nacen niños con defectos de nacimiento mortales.

Otro millón de iraquíes murieron en los años posteriores a la invasión de 2003. Los capitalistas occidentales controlaban los campos petrolíferos de Iraq. Cientos de miles de soldados extranjeros patrullaban la nueva colonia.

Estados Unidos trasladó el cuartel general de la colonia de la “Zona Verde” a un complejo de embajadas recién construido, el mayor de la historia de la humanidad. La ocupación estadounidense había logrado erigir una enorme fortaleza militar más grande que el Vaticano, justo en



El Centro de Acción Internacional publicó este libro sobre el crimen de las sanciones de Estados Unidos a Irak.



Estados Unidos destruye Faluya, Irak, en 2004.

el corazón de Asia Occidental. En 2009, 16.000 soldados y personal diplomático trabajaban en la embajada de Estados Unidos en Bagdad.

En medio de este caos, surgió el llamado Estado Islámico (EI). La administración del presidente Barack Obama utilizó al EI como pretexto para reanudar los ataques aéreos regulares, al tiempo que dirigía tácitamente a los combatientes del EI hacia Siria en un intento de exacerbar la guerra civil que había instigado allí. Pero después de años de derramamiento de sangre, un esfuerzo de colaboración por parte de iraquíes, iraníes, Hezbolá y el ejército sirio finalmente venció a los Estados Unidos.

Aunque hay muchas menos tropas de ocupación que en el momento álgido, Estados Unidos sigue teniendo una fuerza de unos 2.500 soldados de combate en activo en Irak y 4.000 empleados en la fortaleza de la embajada estadounidense. El Departamento de Defensa emplea a más de 6.000 “contratistas de seguridad” además de los soldados de combate.

Estos contratistas son conocidos por cometer crímenes de guerra contra el pueblo de Irak y, como mercenarios,

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