



Texas freeze

Rich get richer, workers suffer

By Mirinda Crissman
Houston

An unprecedented winter storm hit Texas Feb. 15, bringing subfreezing temperatures. One week later, huge sections of the population are still without power, heat and/or water.

Across major cities—such as Houston, Austin and San Antonio—empty corporate skyscrapers remained lit, while millions of people were in the dark with no power or running water. It took a public outcry to make officials power down buildings not in use and divert energy to hospitals and firefighters.

People in Texas are not only struggling to recover from this freeze, but from previous hurricanes and floods caused by global warming that produces extreme precipitation at all temperatures. This is compounded further by the COVID crisis in one of the largest interlocking systems of prisons, jails and detention centers; Texas is second only to California.

Many people have frozen to death, and deaths are likely undercounted as more bodies will be found after the thaw. The Texas Tribune reported Feb. 18 that nearly half the state was experiencing water disruptions. Add boil-water notices to this, when many families could not access heat, and you'll understand what a struggle it has been to survive.

After months of high unemployment, record evictions and 500,000 virus deaths, we have a deregulated energy sector making record profits off our misery. Billionaire owner of the Dallas Cowboys — and noted benefactor of police — Jerry Jones saw his natural gas company,

Comstock Resources, Inc., score record profits. Comstock's Chief Financial Officer Roland Burns said, "This week is like hitting the jackpot with some of these incredible prices. Frankly, we were able to sell at super premium prices for a material amount of production." (Dallas Morning News, Feb. 17) Meanwhile, some Texans are reporting monthly electric bills as high as \$17,000. (NY Post, Feb. 19)

While the people suffered, Texas Senator Ted Cruz fled to Cancun, Mexico, to provide

his family with better living conditions. This, given his strong anti-migrant positions and legislative actions, is ironic to say the least. Ironic too is that Democrat Nancy Pelosi in September said of Cruz's party: "The country needs a strong Republican Party. It's done so much for our country." (MSNBC, Sept. 30, 2020)

Why the Texas grid failed

In a state long held hostage by oil and gas industry, the power grids failed

because of lack of regulation. Texas' secessionist inclinations have at least one modern outlet: the electric grid. There are three grids in the Lower 48 states: the Eastern Interconnection, the Western Interconnection — and Texas. The Texas grid is called ERCOT, and it is run by an agency of the same name — the Electric Reliability Council of Texas.

As reported by the Texas Tribune, Feb. 8, 2011: "In 1935, President Franklin

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Outside union-busting law firm Morgan Lewis, Philadelphia, Feb. 20.

WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

Solidarity with #BAmazon workers

By Betsey Piette

As Amazon workers in Bessemer, Ala., vote to unionize, they are gaining support. On Feb. 20, demonstrations took place in solidarity with BAmazon workers in 50+ U.S. cities in 30 states, including

several in the South.

The National Day of Solidarity with BAmazon was called by the Southern Workers Assembly, backed by the Support Alabama Amazon Union Campaign and many others. Demonstrations were encouraged at Amazon's warehouses, distribution centers and Whole Foods locations. Some protests targeted the union-busting Morgan Lewis law firm used by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos.

The majority Black workforce in Bessemer is challenging the world's

richest person, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, in their fight to be recognized by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). Bezos is so desperate to bust the union drive, he is illegally offering workers \$2,000 to \$3,000 "resignation bonuses."

Speaking in East New York, part of Brooklyn, N.Y., outside an Amazon fulfillment center, Omowale Clay from the December 12th Movement said: "A yes vote for the union will be a mighty blow

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March on Broadway to Jeff Bezos' luxury NYC apartment, Feb. 20.

WW PHOTO: TONI ARENSTEIN

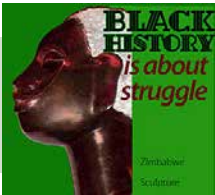


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For Mumia Abu Jamal

FREEDOM HAS NEVER BEEN SO CLOSE

A GLOBAL VIRTUAL STREET MEETING FOR MUMIA ABU-JAMAL



SATURDAY MARCH 6TH
2-4PM EST
RSVP: Shorturl.at/iown6


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Mobilization4Mumia, Campaign to Bring Mumia Home
International Concerned Friends and Family of Mumia Abu-Jamal

Join us Saturday, March 6, from 2-4 p.m. EST, for a Global Virtual Street Meeting for Mumia Abu-Jamal: FREEDOM HAS NEVER BEEN SO CLOSE.

Honor Black History Month! Support WW!

Workers World newspaper makes a big deal about Black History Month because racism pervades every aspect of life under capitalism. Every struggle — from fighting for living-wage jobs to ending police terror, from winning affordable housing to community-controlled schools — is rooted in the centuries-long battle to end this country’s most vicious history of racism. We are still dealing with the legacy of slavery — that heinous, violence-driven form of superexploitation that reemerged in a new form with the demise of Black Reconstruction.

That’s why every month, not just February, this newspaper chronicles the struggles of peoples of African descent and their allies to eradicate institutionalized, systemic white supremacy. A case in point is our continuing coverage of the movements to free political prisoners — like Mumia Abu-Jamal, Jalil Muntaqim, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, and Imam Jamil Al-Amin — and to honor the legacies of trail-blazing Black women such as Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks and Cicely Tyson.

WW bases our weekly coverage of the Black struggle here in the African diaspora and in Africa on breaking imperialist chains and the principle of self-determination. Oppressed nationalities have the right to fight to

end all forms of inequality and injustice — by any means necessary.

If you appreciate our coverage, it’s time to join the Workers World Supporter Program or renew your membership promptly. The program was established 44 years ago so readers could help WW publish anti-racist, working-class truth and build campaigns needed to fight for revolutionary change leading to socialism.

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Write checks (either monthly or once a year) to Workers World and mail them, with your name and address, to 147 W. 24th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10011. Put Supporter Program in the memo line. Or donate online at workers.org/donate/.

Know that we are grateful for your help in building Workers World! □

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Behind Texas prison walls: Hungry, cold and victims of inhumanity



By Gloria Rubac
Houston

On an average day in Texas, prisons are hellholes run by racist officials and a Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison board that won't request the legislature allocate money for proper maintenance. Every weather emergency in the state, from hurricanes to flooding to subfreezing weather, has proven time and again that prisons are not fit for human beings.

As documented — by incarcerated workers' contraband cell phone messages and photos to reporters, and by their approved phone calls home — the fact is that as Texas froze during the week of Feb. 21, so did prisoners.

Not only did they freeze, many were left with no water, as toilets backed up with a stench that was unbearable. They were left hungry, as unidentifiable cold food was served. Fingers and toes split open from frostbite. No commissary meant prisoners could not even buy bottled water, while nothing came out of faucets in a third to a half of all prisons.

As a very cold Nanon Williams explained when he phoned this reporter: "Our unit has huge windows. The freezing wind is blowing in, because panes are loose and some are missing. We are freezing. This prison is 112 years old and was falling apart before this latest disaster. We have no heat, no water, very little cold food. Dinner tonight was a piece of cornbread and some peanut butter. On the first freezing day, only 10 guards came to work.

There are almost 2,000 enslaved people at the Ramsey Unit and over 400 employees."

At this unit, incarcerated workers went through trash to find pieces of plastic to put over the missing windowpanes. They used stickers, stamps and anything they could find to get the plastic to stay up. It was a futile task. "Heat was off for almost four days. Only then did we get an extra blanket. Almost everyone has had COVID at Ramsey, and the respiratory problems are still here. Coughing can be heard all over the place," Williams reported.

These scenes played out in many, many Texas prisons: Men defecating in paper bags. Water dripping from melting icicles is collected to try to flush toilets. Fires being set for warmth. Every piece of clothing being worn.

'Cruel and unusual punishment'

There are several prison units near the Ramsey Unit that are well over 100 years old. The Vance Unit, originally called the Harlem Unit to house only Black and Latinx men, was built in 1885. The Clemens Unit was built in 1893. The Stringfellow Unit went up in 1908. These prisons, built to accommodate the racist convict-lease programs after the Civil War, likely have the same problems that the Ramsey Unit has.

Most of the older prisons are south of Houston, near the Gulf of Mexico and the Brazos River. They flood, and prisoners must be transferred to other units. But the prison system has not bought enough cots, so some men have to sleep on the floor wherever they wind up.



Snow-covered fields, Ramsey Unit prison unit, December 2004.

The prison system does not have enough blankets, enough water, enough heat, enough food. "Cruel and unusual" doesn't begin to describe the horror.

In a Feb. 19 Mother Jones article, Lauren Byrd-Moreno reported her spouse in the Clemens Unit has said that people had been going to the infirmary "with their feet split open" from frostbite. The article quoted Nicole J.: "Many of the inmates [at Clemens], my husband included, fear going to sleep, because they're afraid they're going to die in their sleep." She added, he had told her that corrections officers had done a "blanket check" on Feb. 18 — and took blankets

away from anyone with more than one. (tinyurl.com/59xym9z5)

Yet the Houston Chronicle reported a TDCJ spokesperson as saying all prisons had heat, and they "try to keep it" at 70° F. Anthony Graves — who was in prison for almost 20 years, got off death row and was released in 2010 — told the Chronicle, "Seventy degrees below zero, maybe."

David Kreger lived on the Wynne Unit in Huntsville, during the roughly two decades he spent behind bars. "There was times in the winter months on the cell blocks that the water would freeze in the toilets overnight," he told the Chronicle.

Death row was without water for days in the recent crisis, but a call to the Polunsky Unit resulted in a flippant response: "Yes, the water is out, but my water at home is out too." But when this person in the warden's office gets off work, she can buy water for her house, unlike the prisoners.

CBS Austin reported Feb. 17 that former Texas Gov. Rick Perry has said, "Texans would be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their business."

A message to Rick Perry: Go sit in a locked-down prison cell where you have no heat, and wind blows through the missing windowpanes; there's no water for washing hands, drinking, flushing toilets or showering — and the cold food is not easily identified. Until then shut your mouth!

A message to Texas: If you cannot house incarcerated workers without torture, then release them all! Now! □

Lisa Strawn interview **Part 2**

COVID inside: Release prisoners!



Lisa Strawn

The global pandemic has disproportionately impacted incarcerated people in the U.S. In California, during the early days of the pandemic, the transfer of prisoners into San Quentin sparked a massive outbreak of COVID that spread to over two-thirds of the prison population there, causing the death of 27 prisoners, including 12 on death row. While incarcerated, Lisa Strawn worked in the prison hospital at San Quentin and contracted COVID there. She was released into the community in July 2020 while still infected. Since then, she has continued her activism for mass releases and for the rights of LGBTQ+ prisoners. This is part 2 of an interview conducted with Strawn on Dec. 30, 2020, by Judy Greenspan, a member of the Prisoners Solidarity Committee of Workers World Party. Read part 1 at www.workers.org/2021/02/54541/.

Workers World: Could you talk about contracting COVID and the general pandemic outbreak that you experienced in San Quentin?

Lisa Strawn: From the beginning, when people were starting to get sick in May, it was really bad ... It was the scariest time because you just didn't know who was going to be next, whose name they were calling out. There were so many alarms, "man down" constantly, all day. The first time I tested, I actually tested with the workers, because I worked in the hospital. I worked up on the floor where a lot of the people from death row were, with medical issues ... I tested on June 16, and that test came back negative. Then it was the very next week, June 22, me and my cellie, he was making something to eat. And it was weird. I couldn't smell anything. And then when I went to eat, I couldn't taste it. But I didn't say anything. June 22 is when they started testing North Block ... that's when people really started falling out. It was unbelievable. They started moving people 20, 30, 40 at a time in a day, moving them to other units. Trying to get them out of there. [There were] so many people, they couldn't move anybody else. There was nowhere to put them. And people were still getting sick ... They hadn't even tested West Block yet. They had so many people they were moving. It was literally 500! The 27th of June was the

day that they moved the last group of people out of there because they couldn't move anybody else ...

My doctor, Dr. Beatty, he was up on the tier a lot. I asked him [about my retest]. He came back the next day, and he said, "You have COVID." And I'm like, "Well, I already know that!" You know, because of the symptoms. And this was like some 12 days later that I was told ... At this time, you still had staff who weren't wearing their masks, they didn't care. But it was mandatory for us ... They just didn't care. So it went, within a matter of eight days, it went from 10 to 588 ... When they started announcing deaths, people were dying in death row.

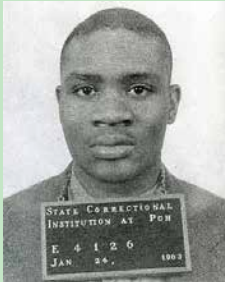
WW: Why do you think there should be mass releases of prisoners?

LS: This is what I was gonna say about these releases ... So I'm a prime example of how it works. I didn't have a violent case, but I still did 25 years straight. I was in prison a long time. [Releases] are doable. I know so many people just at the prisons I've been at, [who] can be released. Out of almost 6,000 people that could be released, they released, what — 58 people? That's insane. Right? They need to speed up these [parole] board days. Especially [if] people have gotten COVID, you need to let them go. That's trauma. That's PTSD. You let them go. □

Joseph Ligon, 'Juvenile Lifer' is free after 68 years

Joseph Ligon was released from prison in February, after spending 68 years behind bars — after a conviction in 1953 for a homicide he did not commit. Originally from Alabama, he was the son of sharecroppers. He could barely read or write when he was arrested in Philadelphia, at 15 years old, and sentenced to life in prison. Now 83, Ligon, who was sentenced during the Jim Crow era, has become the longest-held juvenile lifer. Thousands of youth have faced a similar fate to Ligon's. Pennsylvania has the highest number of "Juvenile Lifers" in the world.

— Ted Kelly



Joseph Ligon in 1963



Joseph Ligon at 83

UAW in crisis

Class collaboration, corruption and the right to vote

By Martha Grevatt

The top echelons of the United Auto Workers have been rocked by an embarrassing corruption scandal that a five-year federal investigation exposed. Two former International presidents, other members of the International Executive Board and key union staff have been tried and sentenced for bribe-taking, embezzlement of members’ dues money and accepting kickbacks from vendors. Top Chrysler executives have also been sent to prison.

All of the International Executive Board and staff people are members of the Administration Caucus, which has maintained near-total control of the UAW for 70-plus years. The caucus had its roots in right-wing efforts in the late 1940s and early 1950s to purge UAW leaders who belonged to the Communist Party or the Socialist Workers Party.

The membership does not elect the IEB; the board is elected by delegates to the Constitutional Convention every four years. Delegates are often strong-armed into voting for handpicked candidates. The last time an outsider was elected to the IEB — Regional Director Jerry Tucker out of St. Louis — was 1986. Director Tucker was outspoken against the concession bargaining that has alienated rank-and-file autoworkers from their union leadership.

Now a federal judge has just approved a consent decree that International President Rory Gamble and U.S. Attorney Matthew Schneider reached to end the federal corruption probe. The decree subjects the union to six years of oversight by a federal monitor appointed by the judge. However, the monitor will be selected from



UAW members strike GM, 2019. Corruption at the top threatens autoworkers hard-fought gains.

three names chosen by the UAW.

Attorney Schneider could have insisted on electing the IEB directly — the “one member, one vote” which union reformers have long promoted, and what the federal government had ordered for the Teamsters union to address its widespread corruption and racketeering. Direct elections would give the rank and file a mechanism to hold their leadership accountable.

Instead the membership will have to vote on whether or not to switch to direct elections. The IEB will be lobbying, pressuring and “educating” — as President Gamble put it — the rank and file to keep things as they are.

One member, one vote and class-struggle unionism

Federal investigators have been unable to show any evidence of malfeasance on the part of President Gamble.

Some meaningful steps have been taken to control corruption since former President Gary Jones was removed. But the Administration Caucus is still firmly in charge — and still in a “partnership” with the auto bosses.

Many autoworkers, including this writer, watched the news conference where Gamble and Schneider announced the agreement. The two appeared rather chummy! The decree is more favorable to the IEB than might be expected from Schneider — a Trump appointee and no friend of organized labor.

It would appear that, from a ruling-class perspective, the class collaborationist leadership at the helm of the UAW is preferable to real rank-and-file democracy.

Direct elections could lead to a struggle for rectification within the union, one that could rebuild it from the inside out in sync with its early history as a militant vanguard.

That points to the potential of a mass, grassroots campaign to convince members to vote in favor of one member, one vote. Changing how top leaders are elected is not a panacea, given the entrenched bureaucracy, corruption, nepotism and cronyism.

But it is time to clean house at Solidarity House, as the union headquarters is called. A movement in favor of direct elections can build the foundation to bring back class-struggle unionism.

Martha Grevatt is a retired UAW Chrysler worker who served on the executive board of UAW Local 869 and represented the local at the union’s 2018 Constitutional Convention.

Texas freeze: Rich get richer, workers suffer

Continued from page 1

D. Roosevelt signed the Federal Power Act, which charged the Federal Power Commission with overseeing interstate electricity sales. By not crossing state lines, Texas utilities avoided being subjected to federal rules. Freedom from federal regulation was a cherished goal — more so because Texas had no regulation until the 1970s.”

Texas Governor Gregg Abbott peddled false claims on Fox News that renewable energy sources like wind were to blame; he later had to walk back those false claims off the air. (Yahoo News, Feb. 17) Gov. Abbott’s lies still live in the minds of millions, despite evidence that it was nonrenewable energy sources and deregulation to blame for the blackout.

ERCOT’s Senior Director Dan Woodfin cited “frozen instruments at natural gas, coal and even nuclear facilities, as well as limited supplies of natural gas. Natural gas pressure in particular is one reason power is coming back slower than expected.” (Bloomberg, Feb. 15) Chris Tomlinson reported for the Houston Chronicle Feb. 18, “Texas electricity generators did not want to spend the money to build resilient equipment because it cut into their profits.”

The compounding crises of capital in Texas illustrate that organizing economies around profits for a few, rather than what is necessary to sustain human life, comes at the violent expense of oppressed peoples.

Climate, sanctions and colonization

Empty grocery shelves during the freeze were compared to the situation in Venezuela. Not mentioned is that as many as 40,000 Venezuelans have died because it is one of 39 countries sanctioned by the U.S., which makes it nearly impossible for many to access food and medicine. (SanctionsKill.org) The same entities starving people abroad are willing to let us starve at home.

The combined factors of national oppression and climate crisis produced the catastrophic disasters from hurricanes Maria in Puerto Rico and Katrina in Louisiana.

Scholar Daniel Immerwahr explains: “[In September 2017] ... Hurricane Maria slammed into Puerto Rico, taking out the island’s power grid, water system and communications. It also exposed the parlous state of affairs in the United States’ largest remaining colony. Although Luis Muñoz Marín’s strategy of using tax loopholes to draw mainland corporations to the island had dramatically improved Puerto Rico’s economy in the 1950s and for decades after, Congress removed those loopholes in the 1990s, triggering corporate flight, economic collapse and an exodus of employable Puerto Ricans to the mainland. By the time Maria struck, more than 60% of the island’s remaining inhabitants were on Medicare or Medicaid. Because the federal government funds those programs less generously in Puerto Rico than on the mainland, the commonwealth found itself accruing unsustainable debt to pay its bills.

“The hurricane turned crisis into catastrophe. Puerto Ricans were knocked back a century as they made do without phones or electricity. Doctors were forced to perform surgeries by flashlight, city dwellers to search desperately for clean water. Hurricane Maria struck at nearly the same time as two other storms hit the mainland, Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Hurricane Irma (which first struck the U.S. Virgin Islands) in Florida. The difference in response was palpable. Though Puerto Ricans were far more likely to die from storm damage, they saw fewer federal personnel, markedly less media coverage and only a fraction of the charitable giving.” (Immerwahr, “How to Hide an Empire,” Macmillan, 2019)

Hurricane Katrina showed the capitalist state disregard people of oppressed nationalities, especially Black and Brown people. Many Katrina evacuees ended up

in Houston’s Astrodome, facing infectious diseases from being tightly packed in. We saw organized abandonment go hand-in-hand with the organized violence of police and white supremacists, while the media gave justification by overreporting “looting.”

Incarcerated people were not evacuated; they were left to contend with flooded cells and floating fecal matter without relief. There is a reoccurring practice across the U.S. South to leave people in prison during disasters. Texas prisons around the Brazos River flood often; those inside are left to deal with the conditions.

Capitalism creates unnatural catastrophes

Mutual aid networks in Texas were in motion long before this crisis froze the state. These networks are able to redistribute funds and supplies quicker than local and state governments, although many groups are operating at or over capacity. They are keeping people alive, while the capitalist state has left people to die.

All the government lacks is the will to quickly act — because their real function is to serve profit.

In Cuba, where the working class successfully seized the means of production in 1959, response to climate events like hurricanes is marked by preparedness and prevention of suffering.

According to Gail Reed — executive editor of the MEDICC Review, a peer-reviewed journal about health and medicine in Latin American, Caribbean and other developing countries, and a journalist who has spent more than three decades in Cuba — the Cuban Government gives local communities seven days to prepare for the worst as a hurricane approaches. Cubans practice preparedness drilling often, in



Houston skyline glows, while millions suffer without heat or water amidst preventable power outages, Feb. 15.

every province, city, town and village.

“These constant drills are coupled with an integrated response from local fire departments, health, transportation and other vital public services. Above all, Cuba places tremendous emphasis on educating the population to keep communities and families, particularly the most vulnerable, safe.” (Telesur, Aug. 28, 2017)

Cuba, despite being under U.S. economic blockade for decades, offered to send 1,500 medical professionals to help the people of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Former President George W. Bush quickly rejected the offer, letting people suffer.

We will continue to see the organized abandonment of workers and oppressed peoples in future crises. With last year having produced the greatest number of tropical storms on record in a single season, we on the Gulf Coast know it’s not a matter of if, but when the next catastrophic climate disaster strikes.

Both the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S. are servants of capital. They have time and again demonstrated they will leave us and the Global South for dead, so capitalists can chase another dollar. So we are called to meet their top-down organized violence with bottom-up organization that prioritizes people over profits. □

Police keep hungry people from food in dumpster

By Joshua Hanks
Portland, Ore.

As a massive winter storm swept across the U.S. last week, knocking out power from Oregon to Texas to the East Coast, millions of people found themselves in a desperate situation: no electricity, no water, no transportation and life-threatening cold — all in the midst of a global pandemic.

Over 300,000 people in the Portland metro area alone lost power in Oregon’s largest power failure in decades. Grocery stores without electricity began throwing out refrigerated and frozen foods, and at a Kroger-owned Fred Meyer store in Northeast Portland, nearby residents began retrieving discarded food from a large dumpster outside.

Fred Meyer management claims they normally donate food to charities, but icy road conditions prevented food pantries from safely reaching the store. They claimed the discarded food posed a food safety risk — despite the temperature outside being colder than the inside of a cooler — and barred access to the food.

Citing fear of a “physical confrontation” as a result of management’s decision to deny dumpster food to hungry residents, the store called the police. Many of those present in the crowd were regular Fred Meyer customers who simply needed food and had no other option than to try and retrieve it from the dumpster.

The Oregonian newspaper reported Feb. 18 that “a dozen officers arrived at the scene. One officer wasn’t wearing a mask and refused to put one on until a supervisor arrived.” Police then began to threaten the crowd, which fluctuated between 15 and 50 people, with arrest, even threatening to arrest a journalist with a visible press



Portland police guard a dumpster of discarded food from hungry residents without electricity Feb. 16.

badge who arrived to document the situation.

This kind of aggressive, inhumane behavior from police isn’t surprising, especially after last summer’s gigantic protests against racist police brutality were met with massive police repression. The same tactics used to disperse anti-racist protesters were used against hungry residents seeking food from a dumpster.

Capitalist ‘order’

Police said they were at the store to “restore order.” And in a way they were right: “Order” under capitalism looks like big corporations throwing away food during a disaster instead of giving it to people in need. Capitalist “order” means the rich grow richer during a pandemic, while millions fall into poverty, and hundreds of thousands perish. It means constant warfare, immigrant

concentration camps and racist police terror.

“Order” apparently does not look like meeting the people’s needs by any means necessary during an emergency, but rather protecting private property, even if it’s bound for a landfill and will never be sold for a profit. In Texas, electricity was kept on in downtown areas, heating empty office towers, while neighborhood after neighborhood was plunged into darkness and cold. Pictures of glowing downtowns surrounded by seas of darkness quickly made their way around the internet, prompting outrage and anger.

The scene that played out in Northeast Portland is one we’re repeatedly told doesn’t happen here. Mainstream media will gleefully show pictures of food shortages in countries like Venezuela, which are under crushing U.S. sanctions, but even the highly sensationalized reports there never show Venezuelan police guarding dumpsters and threatening mass arrests for anyone attempting to take discarded food.

Vietnam, which U.S. media and government agencies denigrate as an “authoritarian” regime that does not respect human rights, set up rice-dispensing ATMs during the beginning of the pandemic, where anyone could get free rice. Vietnam mounted a successful response to COVID-19, and the country has avoided food insecurity.

If this story from Portland played out in Socialist China, Cuba or any other “enemy” of the U.S., it would be cited as definitive proof of their failure. It would be front-page news, and we would hear speeches from elected officials about the need for “humanitarian intervention.”

The U.S., despite having the world’s largest economy and military, still fails to meet people’s basic needs — to such a degree that people will confront cops to get food from dumpsters. □

COVID crisis reduces U.S. life expectancy

By G. Dunkel

The number of deaths due to COVID-19 in the United States is now over 500,000.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. life expectancy dropped by a full year from the first six months of 2019 to the first six months of 2020. This is the biggest drop in life expectancy since World War II. The number of U.S. deaths due to COVID is now higher than the number of U.S. deaths on the battlefields of World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Iraq combined.

When life expectancy dropped by a few months in 2018, mainly due to opioid overdose deaths in poorer rural communities, it drew a tremendous amount of media attention. This is a much bigger drop, indicating that conditions have seriously worsened and that this pandemic has not been handled correctly.

The gaps along racial lines, which were narrowing before 2020, have widened. For whites, life expectancy fell by about eight months, while African Americans lost 2.7 years and Latinx nearly 2 years. For African-American and Latinx men, the drop was even higher.

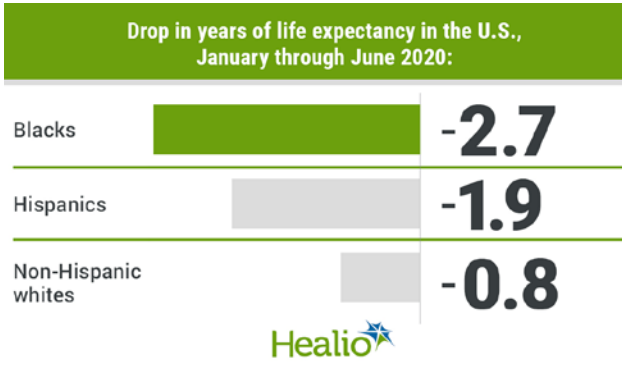
Dr. Reed Tuckson, founder of the “Black Coalition Against COVID-19,” spoke about these “racial disparities” on PBS NewsHour Feb. 18. He stressed that oppressed communities are filled with essential workers doing jobs, like driving a bus, that can’t be done from home. More often than not, African Americans live in

crowded, multigenerational family housing, which makes social distancing less possible. Finally, many members of these communities suffer from preexisting chronic health issues.

Public health, according to Tuckson, is the place that all these factors converge. To overcome this pandemic it is necessary to get at “these structural racism issues, these social determinants of health.”

Tuckson is a former commissioner of public health in Washington, D.C., and a member of the board of directors of a major hospital corporation. What was striking about his presentation on PBS was how he acknowledged the pain and suffering this pandemic has caused so many families and individuals. Children have lost parents, and families have lost their elders, who strain to get out their last words over cell phones or through the windows of old-age homes. Or they die alone with no loved ones to ease their passing.

In New York City, during a spike in the pandemic, morgues and funeral homes filled up, and bodies had to be stored in refrigerated trucks.



“Capitalism on a ventilator,” a new anthology from the International Action Center and the China U.S. Solidarity Network, has a detailed, careful analysis of the root causes of the disastrous response in the U.S. It pushes back against the racist anti-China campaign in the media.

Tweet: @dunkel_greg

Workers strike for \$15 hourly wage in 15 cities

By Kathy Durkin

“Fight for \$15!” This chant rang out in 15 cities around the U.S. on Feb. 16, when fast food workers walked off the job to pressure their bosses, local and state legislatures and Congress to increase the hourly minimum wage. Not only did workers at McDonald’s, Burger King and Wendy’s strike, but home care and nursing home workers joined them to voice their demands for a livable wage.

Workers struck in Charleston, S.C.; Chicago; Flint and Detroit, Mich.; Raleigh and Durham, N.C.; Houston; Miami, Orlando and Tampa, Fla.; Milwaukee; St. Louis; and Oakland, Sacramento and San Jose, Calif.

The fight for a \$15 hourly wage began in 2012 among low-wage workers in the fast food and giant retail industries, where corporate owners rake in billions of dollars in yearly earnings. And where CEOs receive financial compensation often worth 1,000 to 2,000 times the salaries of those who do the actual work that garners company profits.

Even during the pandemic, these corporations are amassing megaprofits, while many longtime workers earn \$10 an hour or less. These “essential

workers” who have reported to their workplaces during the pandemic deserve hazard pay — not only \$15 an hour, but more!

The Biden-Harris “COVID-19 relief plan” includes a \$15-per-hour federal minimum wage, but with incremental increases, so that the needed pay increase would not be reached until 2025. But even this proposal faces right-wing opposition. It is uncertain whether the final \$1.9 trillion package will include the minimum wage hike.

Workers need these funds now, not later! With the high cost of living, those who are employed, or the jobless who will be hired, many carrying huge debts, urgently need this long-overdue raise. Some 47% of essential workers are paid under \$15 an hour; many of their families’ incomes fall below the poverty line. A livable wage and a guaranteed livable income are essential.

The working-class movement should demand the \$15 minimum wage for farmworkers and migrants, as well as the 11 million undocumented workers who are denied unemployment and pandemic relief benefits, medical care and food stamps. Superexploited incarcerated workers, who earn a pittance while enriching corporate coffers, should receive this pay too. □



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.

The book’s table of contents and list of authors, along with four chapters, are available at wp.me/p4Yme1-404

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CAPITALISM on a VENTILATOR
The Impact of COVID-19 in China & the U.S.

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Edited by Sara Flounders & Lee Siu Hin
A Project of the International Action Center & China U.S. Solidarity Network

50+ ACTIONS
FEB. 20

SOLIDARITY WITH #BAMAZON WORKERS

Continued from page 1

against Amazon. A win in Bessemer will be a shot in the arm to organized labor, which will be heard around the world!”

In **Boston**, 100 community leaders, students, gig and grocery workers, teachers, librarians and school bus drivers picketed Jamaica Plain’s Whole Foods, where angry neighborhood demonstrations opposed the corporation’s hostile, racist takeover of a Latinx grocer a decade ago.

Kristin Turgeon of Workers World Party and the tuba-led, 10-piece Boston Area Brigade of Activist Musicians fired up the crowd with Florence Reece’s

“Which Side Are You On?” The crowd shouted, “We’re on the Workers’ Side!” Amazon Prime drivers, bus drivers and others passing by blared horns. Picketers filled the Whole Foods’ entrance to express their disgust with Bezos’ greed and their enthusiasm for Alabama’s history making BAmazon workers.

John Buonopane, International Steelworkers (USW), and Bishop Filipe Teixeira kicked off a powerful program, organized by the Boston School Bus Drivers Union. Speakers included Jamie Wallace, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU); Felipe Martinez, Boston Independent Drivers Guild; Munim Khan, a leader of Rideshare “Bill of Rights”; and Andira Alves, a former Amazon worker with Party for Socialism and Liberation; plus speakers representing WWP, Pride at Work, MA Coalition for Safety and Health, UNITE HERE Local 26 and Dorchester for Peace & Justice.

New York City: Demonstrators rallied in **Manhattan**’s Union Square near Whole Foods, then marched against Broadway traffic 12 blocks to Jeff Bezos’ posh apartment. Workers Assembly Against Racism organizer Joan Hwang stated: “Black workers in Alabama are making history right now! They are taking on the world’s biggest corporate monster.”

The favorite chant at Bezos’ residence was: “How do you spell liar? B-E-Z-O-S! How do you spell capitalist? B-E-Z-O-S! How do you spell parasite? B-E-Z-O-S!” On the march people chanted: “Down with Bezos’ greed! A union is what Amazon workers need!” “Overworked and underpaid, Amazon workers are unafraid” — and other chants including many in Spanish.

The youthful, militant crowd of around 175 people included Chris Silvera, Sec.-Treas. of Teamsters Local 808; Eliana Jaramillo from the Street Vendors Project; Terrea Mitchell from Peoples’ Power Assembly-NYC; Lorraine Liriano from A Call to Action on Puerto Rico; and members of WAAR, the Laundry Workers Center, UAW, Veterans for Peace, Congress of Essential Workers, Gabriela, PSL and WWP.

Philadelphia: Accompanied by an 8-foot Jeff Bezos puppet labeled “Union-buster in chief,” 100 people gathered outside Morgan Lewis, Amazon’s union-busting law firm. The rally began with a picket line and spirited chants led by Ted Kelly from WWP and Megan Murray, a former Whole Foods worker fired for organizing.

Monica Robinson, a leader in the

Coalition of Labor Union Women stated: “Every worker has the right to a union.” She suggested Amazon’s “Time off Tasks” — punitive measures, used to control workers — be renamed “Terrible Operating Tactics.”

Workers from the Philadelphia Museum of Arts, the University of the Arts and a U.S. Post Office retiree all described fighting Morgan Lewis’ attempts to crush their union drives or efforts to strengthen existing union contracts. Members of Teamsters Local 623, PASNAP and Philadelphia Teachers Federation spoke.

Pam Africa, with MOVE, pointed to the vital role Amazon workers play globally. Letters from two incarcerated workers in solidarity with Bessemer were read. The event was endorsed by a number of labor and community groups. Spiral Q donated the Bezos puppet.

In **Durham, N.C.**, 50 workers and community members gathered at RDU5 Amazon Fulfillment Center to leaflet workers during shift change. Several participated in a caravan of cars, decorated with pro-union signs and honking horns, that circled the parking lot. Southern Workers Assembly leaflets were distributed. Fearful of their presence, Amazon changed workers’ shift times to avoid their receiving information on the union efforts.

Organized by the Durham Workers Assembly, the event was endorsed by the National Domestic Workers Alliance — We Dream in Black, Raise Up/Fight for \$15 and a Union, Durham Association of Educators, Bull City Democratic Socialists (DSA) and Smash Racism Raleigh.

Atlanta: The newly formed ATL Amazon Workers Solidarity Network in cooperation with the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council organized an event in a busy shopping area in support of the BAmazon union drive. Over 70 union workers, youth and social justice activists lined the sidewalk on heavily trafficked Ponce de Leon Ave. NE, chanting demands for workers’ rights and denouncing Amazon’s working conditions and repressive anti-union policies.

The sound of honking horns from approving passing motorists could be heard in Whole Foods in the adjacent mall. The event ended with a march into the mall past Whole Foods to ensure workers knew which side they were



Durham, N.C.

WW PHOTO: DANTE STROBINO



Raleigh, N.C.

WW PHOTO: RALEIGH WORKERS ASSEMBLY



Atlanta

PHOTO: JOHN ARTHUR BROWN

on — the union side.

Participating labor leaders and organizations included Edgar Fields, Southern Council of RWDSU; Eric Richardson, CBTU Metro Atlanta Chapter; Verdailla Turner, president of the Georgia Federation of Teachers; and activists representing DSA, WWP and several community organizations.

Buffalo, N.Y.: Members of WWP, the Queen City Workers’ Center, Young Democratic Socialists (YDSA), Erie County Green Party and People’s Party of WNY stood up to the ruling class and an icy winter wind in support of BAmazon’s national day of solidarity. They rallied, raised a banner and handed out flyers outside Whole Foods-Amherst. Flyers about the fight to save the people’s post office and fire the USPS Board of Governors were distributed.



Brooklyn, N.Y.

PHOTO: OMOWALE CLAY



Boston

WW PHOTO: MAUREEN SKEHAN



Manhattan, N.Y.

PHOTO: PEOPLE’S VIDEO NETWORK



North Haven, Conn.



Philadelphia

WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE



Buffalo, N.Y.

WW PHOTO: HADLEY WILLOW



Cleveland

WW PHOTO: SUSAN SCHNUR

SOLIDARITY WITH #BAMAZON WORKERS



Columbia, S.C.



Orlando, Fla.



New Orleans, La.



Houston WWP PHOTO: GLORIA RUBAC

In **Cleveland** — devastated by deindustrialization — over 30 people marched then rallied at the soon-to-open Amazon Hub. Built atop the bones of Midland Steel Corporation, a former union shop, the Bezos world of high-tech, low-wage work is engulfing the entire county, with over 7,000 workers at two Amazon Fulfillment Centers, Whole Foods and two Amazon Hubs.

Speakers at the rally included Camilo Jose Villa, SEIU Local 1; Akshai Singh, Democratic Socialist and Public Transit organizer; and Martha Grevatt, UAW Local 869 and a national organizer with Support Alabama Amazon Workers.

Houston: Drivers honked horns and waved for hours, as activists gathered outside Whole Foods near a busy intersection.

Bay View National Black Newspaper and a leader of California Prison Focus, compared the campaign for justice and a living wage by predominantly Black Alabama Amazon workers with the struggle of incarcerated workers fighting the same racist system. Two statements from incarcerated workers supporting the Bessemer union drive were read. Speakers included Kim Garcia of Gabriela and teacher Nick Parker, a member of the Oakland Education Association.

Portland, Ore.: Outside the Amazon Fulfillment Center, nearly 100 demonstrators from over 10 unions and community groups rallied in support of Amazon workers who were fired here for trying to organize a union. The massive facility located outside Portland employs 2,000

Continued from page 6

Youth chanted “Amazon workers, Yes! Bezos, No!” Drummers kept up the beat. The dynamic action was a strong show of solidarity with the BAmazon workers.

“I support the workers’ rights to unionize and earn fair wages and treatment. When we all work together in solidarity, we win victories,” exclaimed Frances Dee. “Overworked and underpaid workers deserve our support,” said Caleb Granger.

A member of the Austin Federation of Teachers who drove to Houston said: “As a union member, I feel strongly that all workers must support the Amazon workers.” Recent Morehouse College graduate Trey Legall said: “This union will be historic, the first for mainly Black Amazon workers in the deep South. We stand with the workers in Alabama; we will fight for them, and we will build a workers world!”

Bay Area: Chanting “Union busting is disgusting,” over 80 people rallied at Whole Foods in **Oakland** to support the Amazon workers union drive. Participants included labor unionists, incarcerated workers, rank-and-file workers, international solidarity activists and groups fighting on behalf of the unhoused against gentrification.

Trent Willis, President of Local 10, International Longshore and Warehouse Union, expressed his union’s strong solidarity with Bessemer workers, who are organizing a union against all odds. ILWU Local 10 has a long history of fighting racism, war and gentrification.

Nube Brown, managing editor of the San Francisco Bay View National Black Newspaper and a leader of California Prison Focus, compared the campaign for justice and a living wage by predominantly Black Alabama Amazon workers with the struggle of incarcerated workers fighting the same racist system. Two statements from incarcerated workers supporting the Bessemer union drive were read. Speakers included Kim Garcia of Gabriela and teacher Nick Parker, a member of the Oakland Education Association.

Portland, Ore.: Outside the Amazon Fulfillment Center, nearly 100 demonstrators from over 10 unions and community groups rallied in support of Amazon workers who were fired here for trying to organize a union. The massive facility located outside Portland employs 2,000

workers. Amazon workers described the dangerous, dehumanizing working conditions they face. A main organizer for the event, Brian Denning, one of those fired by Amazon, spoke and led chants supporting the power of the Bessemer Alabama Amazon workers’ fight.

The event was organized by the Portland Amazon Workers Solidarity Campaign. Philippine groups Gabriela, Migrante PDX and Anakbayan came in support of the many Asian workers at the plant. The Unemployed Workers Council PDX, Workers World, Jobs with Justice, DSA and Sunrise, a new national youth group fighting for climate change and union solidarity, attended.

Seattle is Amazon’s corporate headquarters, with over 75,000 workers in 55 tall buildings in the city center and 25 suburban warehouses. Year-round protests over the extreme gentrification crisis caused by Amazon’s takeover of this vast amount of real estate are widening to include solidarity for the union organizing drive at Bessemer. Two protests were held here Feb. 20.

A protest of 200 union supporters started at the Washington Multi-Family Association, a huge pro-landlord lobbying group. Called by DSA and supported by UNITE HERE Local 8, the rally included Amazon Employees for Climate Justice — tech workers in solidarity with the Bessemer workers. Demands include rent control, a ban on evictions and cancellation of back rent. The demonstrators marched to an Amazon warehouse along a high visibility route where passing drivers continuously honked support.

A second solidarity protest involved a car caravan, bike brigade and rally that surrounded the block around the Spheres Amazon headquarters. It was called by Socialist Alternative, Tax Amazon and Seattle Councilmember Kshama Sawant, who condemned Democratic Party leaders for trying to take away an affordable housing initiative she had helped win that taxed Amazon and other rich corporations to fund housing and Green New Deal programs. (tinyurl.com/ya896fjh) Savant declared, “The workers of Seattle are rooting for you at Bessemer.”

Learn more about these actions at [Supportamazonworkers.org](https://supportamazonworkers.org). Maureen Skehan, Tony Murphy, Dante Strobino, Dianne Mathiowetz, Hadley Willow, Susan Schnur, Gloria Rubac, Judy Greenspan, Lyn Neeley and Jim McMahan contributed to this article.



Oakland, Calif.

WW PHOTO: JUDY GREENSPAN



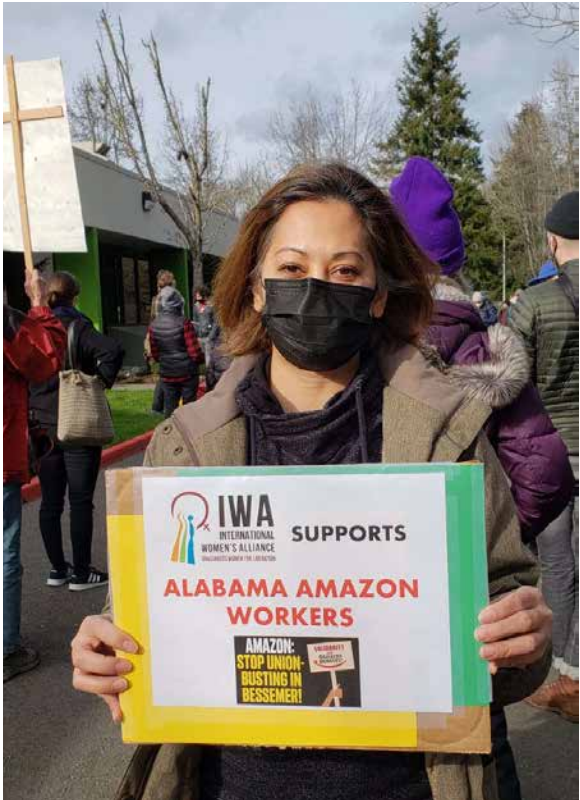
Los Angeles

PHOTO: L.A. WORKERS ASSEMBLY



Portland, Ore.

WW PHOTO: JOHNNIE LEWIS



Seattle



Huntsville, Ala.



Grand Rapids, Mich.

PHOTO: FIGHTBACK NEWS

Alexei Navalny

Why is Biden supporting a Russian fascist?

By Sara Flounders

At the very time Democrats in Congress were attempting to impeach Trump for the Jan. 6 fascist rampage, President Joe Biden expressed support for a Russian political leader allied with a gang comparable to the Proud Boys. In his first contact with Russia’s President Vladimir Putin as U.S. president, Biden immediately pressed for the release of anti-Putin candidate Alexei Navalny.

Navalny’s notorious record is well-known in Russia. U.S. and German officials, who describe him as a dissident journalist, investigative blogger or anti-corruption activist, are being deceptive.

Why not Assange or Mumia?

There has been an international campaign for the release of a far more prominent investigative journalist from Australia — Julian Assange. Assange exposed U.S. government corruption, surveillance and war crimes. Biden could have sent an encouraging human rights message by dropping U.S. demands for the extradition of Assange.

There is a 40-year campaign for the release of another investigative journalist, an acclaimed Black author who exposed racist police brutality in Philadelphia — Mumia Abu-Jamal. If Biden called for his release, it could send a message to the Black Lives Matter movement that the U.S. is addressing systemic racism. Instead, he has focused his “human rights” attention on a right-wing Russian national chauvinist!

The difference is that Assange and Abu-Jamal challenged the power of the U.S. ruling class. Navalny embraces it.

A well-known racist

Navalny is not a political unknown. For many years he has been in the limelight, in the media, on video and in the streets in fascist mobilizations that call for expelling all non-Russian peoples from Russia. Navalny was a driving force in the annual anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant “Russian March” in Moscow. Its central themes are “Take Back Russia,” “Russia for Russians” and “Stop Feeding the Caucasus” — the latter a demand to end federal subsidies to poorer, less-developed, largely Muslim regions of Russia.

The Russian March rallies were gatherings of Nazi elements, monarchists and religious Orthodox groups. On display were swastikas, Confederate flags, religious insignia and calls for “white revenge.” These ultranationalist rallies were countered most years by left-wing demonstrations led by Russian Anti-Fascist Front, progressive street activists and young communists.

Navalny is the organizer of the “Movement Against Illegal Immigrants” and “Great Russia,” and he has called for the breakup of Russia. He has demanded the expulsion of all peoples from the Caucasus and Asia, whether they are citizens living in what is still part of the Russian Federation or are from surrounding Central Asian republics, which were severed after the Soviet Union collapsed. On video Navalny has whipped up sectarian violence by labeling people of the Caucasus “rotten teeth, to be extracted” and “cockroaches that must be exterminated.”

Navalny calls for aggressive privatization of more Russian industries, cuts in public spending, total freedom for businesses and a dramatic reversal of social guarantees that still remain from the Soviet Union. Navalny boasts that if he were president, there would be very friendly relations with the U.S. and the European Union.

Anti-corruption activist?

Navalny has been arrested numerous times on corruption and embezzlement charges, coming from former collaborators. Many charges are based on his looting of organizations he himself formed. But this has not stopped Russian oligarchs and Western agencies from funding his Anti-Corruption Foundation or aiding him in maintaining offices and staff in 43 cities across the country. It has not stopped the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy from providing \$5 million funding for Navalny and other phony anti-corruption campaigns.

But as with Bolsonaro in Brazil or Trump in the U.S., his reactionary views are masked as a campaign against corruption.

Of course there is corruption in Russia. Capitalism, an economic system based on the theft of human labor and the private expropriation of public resources, is by its very nature corrupt.

So-called anti-corruption campaigns can have appeal to people enraged at the system’s glaring inequality. But, intentionally, such campaigns have no program for the masses beyond replacing the current politicians in office.

Now Navalny has tried to refashion himself by opposing new pension regulations that raise the retirement age. This is a completely opportunist reversal of the position he and his Party of Progress held for years: to raise the retirement age and liquidate the government pension fund.

The proposed increase in the retirement age, from 60 to 65 years for men by 2028 and from 55 to 63 years for women by 2034, was

met with outrage across Russia; it took major protests to force a retreat on some aspects of the plan. Russia’s retirees — old enough to remember pension guarantees under the Soviet Union — are not likely to be fooled by Navalny’s phony about-face on pensions.

Free market neoliberalism

All of Navalny’s ugly history is glossed over by the Western corporate media. He is consistently called a “liberal” dissident. This implies he is progressive.

“Liberal” has a very different meaning in Russia than it has on the U.S. political spectrum. It does not mean a vague call for increased social programs, greater inclusion or liberalizing reactionary laws on abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

Being a liberal in Russia means supporting “liberalization,” i.e., neoliberal policies and free market economics. A more accurate term is market liberals, who advocate greater freedom for capitalist markets. Liberalization means an “opening up” of trade and an easing of government regulations that restrict profiteering by corporations.

When financial publications in Russia, the U.S. and European Union applaud Navalny as being the “best hope for the liberalization of Russia,” they are looking for a return to the open looting of industry and resources by Western capitalists during the Boris Yeltsin years of 1991-2000.

The Yeltsin years and free markets

The forced dismantling of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991, under President Boris Yeltsin, was a break with a planned socialist economy and total state ownership of industry. The introduction of a capitalist market economy led to the looting of almost every sector of the economy, especially manufacturing, energy and banking. State farms were broken up without a plan, and government subsidies to industries and agriculture were cut. Price controls ended. In two years, more than 15,000 firms were transferred from the state to private hands.

A surge of U.S., German and other European Union capital into Russia — to buy up public assets and resources at bargain-basement prices — led to a chaotic free-for-all, followed by economic depression, hyperinflation and mass unemployment. The national health system and social programs were all but eliminated; life expectancy plummeted and infant mortality soared.

This “liberalization” — economic shock therapy for the masses — has been called the most cataclysmic economic collapse in peacetime of an industrialized country.

At the same time, a small handful of business oligarchs, tycoons and outright pirates became billionaires and moved as much of their stolen wealth to Western banks and offshore accounts as they could. None of this stolen

wealth was reinvested in modernizing Russian industry.

Sectarian wars broke out in Chechnya, Georgia and Azerbaijan, all driven by competition for control of now-privatized resources.

Yeltsin was completely compliant with U.S. and European capitalist demands. As the Soviet Union collapsed as a world power, the same brutal “free market” unfolded across Eastern Europe. The U.S.-commanded NATO military alliance expanded through Eastern Europe in the 1990s — this reconquest of a vast region was a ruthless process.

Russia ended its trade and military alliances with East European countries, the DPRK, Cuba and developing countries in West Asia and Africa. This allowed a surge of U.S. wars of recolonization in the Arab and Muslim world, including Iraq and Afghanistan, along with the war that forcibly dismantled Yugoslavia.

Sanctions on Russia

A wave of mass anger and a second impeachment attempt for corruption led to Yeltsin’s sudden resignation on Dec. 31, 1999, in exchange for immunity. This left Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as acting president.

Putin did not reverse capitalist ownership in Russia. Nor did he knit the Soviet Union back together. But he did begin to reorganize Russian industry, impose controls on Western capitalists’ open looting and renationalize some essential industries. Hyperinflation was reined in.

Russia’s economy today is smaller than Brazil’s. Raw materials in oil, gas, minerals, grains and lumber are its primary exports. Russia’s industrial capacity is gutted; it is no longer the superpower of 30 years ago.

But imperialists are never satisfied. They want it all.

In 2014, during the Obama/Biden Administration, the U.S. financed a fascist coup in Ukraine, formerly part of the Soviet Union. This brought about the first resistance to 15 years of U.S./NATO expansion. Putin supported the uprising against fascism in the heavily industrialized Lugansk and Donetsk regions of eastern Ukraine. He blocked NATO seizure of the Crimea, the location of Sevastopol Naval Base and Russia’s only warm water port.

For this resistance — to prevent Russia’s total disintegration as a country — the U.S. and the EU imposed a series of economic sanctions on Russia. The hope of Wall Street was that the resulting economic dislocation and inflation would pressure the oligarchs to push Putin out.

Further sanctions were imposed when Russia came to Syria’s aid in 2015. Russia intervened after four years of U.S. regime-change operations — the financing of tens of thousands of mercenary forces and coordinated bombing that displaced 25% of Syria’s people.

To Washington’s ire, Russia’s military industries are part of national defense and were never privatized. Russian diplomacy and arms sales provide some protection against aggressive U.S. operations from Iran to Venezuela. Closer trade agreements with China have helped Russia get around the strangling web of sanctions.

Russian oligarchs, whose obscene wealth is housed in Western banks, are threatened by all this. They are looking for new relations with imperialism. Growing alliances of Russia with China and the former Soviet Republics are not in their interests.

This is Navalny’s base.

Navalny has little support in Russia. After an alleged poisoning by Putin forces last fall, his approval rating peaked at 20%. One poll now shows only 2% favor him as a candidate! But Navalny is dangerous because he has powerful supporters in the West and among Russian oligarchs.

Progressives should not be tricked into supporting this pro-fascist neoliberal. □

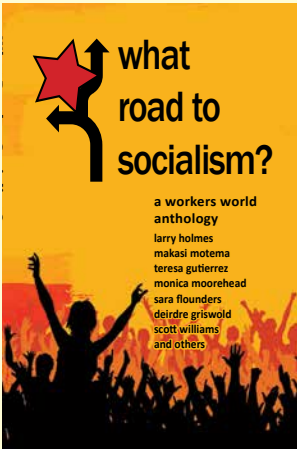
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COVID-19 vaccine patents — private property vs. public health

By Betsey Piette

Among the many controversies surrounding vital COVID-19 vaccines, the issue of patent bans gets far less attention than how vaccines are being distributed or who is able to receive them. Yet the patent laws protecting intellectual property (IP) in the U.S. and European Union give the world’s wealthiest countries unfair advantage over economically developing countries in accessing vaccines.

Production of coronavirus vaccines is concentrated in the hands of a small number of patent holders, who have monopolized production, based on profit-protecting IP rights. Countries with deep pockets — the U.S., Canada, Britain, Norway, as well as the EU, have purchased over 80% of the available supplies of vaccines from companies like Moderna, Pfizer and AstraZeneca.

These same Big Pharma monopolies have used their patents to legally block production of vaccines by companies in other countries. Pfizer’s patent has blocked companies in India from developing alternative versions of its vaccine. And Pfizer sued SK Bioscience in South Korea, after the company developed a pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, forcing it to close production.

AstraZeneca has vaccine manufacturing agreements with companies in India and Brazil, but they come with hefty price tags. Access to REGN-COV2, Regeneron’s COVID-19 monoclonal antibody treatment, could reach many more people if licensing exclusions did not block transfers of scientific information.

In October 2020, South Africa, India and several other countries called on the World Trade Organization to suspend IP rights on COVID-19 vaccine patents.

Citing the emergency situation created by the pandemic, they called for lifting IP protections that obstruct access to, and impact affordability of, lifesaving vaccines and other medicines.

There is no shortage of COVID-19 vaccine projects globally. According to the World Health Organization, out of 214 potential vaccines being developed in the world, 52 are in clinical trials; 13 are in advanced testing phases; and seven are approved for emergency or limited use. Lifting the patent bans would allow more companies to start production sooner.

Global call to suspend IP patents

Russia, India and China have developed effective COVID-19 vaccines that meet standards for emergency use, and they are distributing them to neighboring and economically developing countries. Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine has been made available to Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, Palestine and Hungary. The United Arab Emirates has received vaccines from Sinopharm in China and has approved Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine.

Cuba has two effective vaccines — Soberana (Sovereign) 1 and 2 — which are close to completing trial phases. However, U.S. sanctions have made it difficult for the socialist country to get funding to expand production and global distribution. To counter this problem, Cuba is negotiating with Iran, another country suffering from U.S. sanctions, to produce the vaccine.

Production costs, including specialized equipment and cold storage, can run into billions of dollars. Companies may be reluctant to face the risk of costly investment in production, only to face legal challenges from Big Pharma over patent rights.

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) launched a social media campaign to support the effort to lift patent bans in December 2020. Calling for governments to “put lives over profits” and warning against “pharma profiteering,” the call urged support for “#NoCovidMonopolies.”

Ignoring the devastating impact of the coronavirus, the pharmaceutical industry and the wealthiest countries oppose even temporarily lifting the patent ban. They claim this would stifle innovation. What they really mean is stifle profits.

Leonard Schleifer and George Yancopoulos, the billionaires who head the pharmaceutical giant Regeneron, have a combined wealth of \$4 billion. Although they have a reputation for producing drugs at a breakneck pace, neither of them did the actual work to produce REGN-COV2, as they acknowledge in a company statement opposing lifting the IP patents.

Regeneron’s representative said: “Manufacturing antibody medicines is incredibly complex and transferring the technology takes many months, as well as significant resources and skill. Unfortunately, it is not as simple as putting a recipe on the internet and committing to not sue other companies during the pandemic.” (thelancet.com, Dec. 5, 2020)

The same article quotes Yuanqiong Hu, Senior Legal and Policy Advisor at the MSF Access Campaign, who stresses that putting the recipe online “would be a welcome first step.”

The monopolization of science

Patent laws in the U.S. and EU enforce a monopoly on production of goods and services. But in a global pandemic, they can lead to a chaotic and uneven



production and distribution system of vital supplies like COVID-19 vaccines and medicines and personal protective equipment for health care workers.

The initial reasons given for designing patent laws were to encourage and protect individual inventors. But as capitalism developed, large corporate interests replaced individual creators as the beneficiaries. Most companies require their employees to sign over their innovative ideas to them. In this way, big corporations secure most of the resulting profits.

The concept of IP is simply the newest device for the accumulation of wealth and power and the oppression of the masses by corporate elites like the Regeneron CEOs. In the development of any vaccines, the actual work is done by researchers, technicians, chemists and lab assistants, with equipment produced by factory workers, in buildings maintained by custodial staff. And many more workers carry out production and distribution. Thousands of volunteers serve as guinea pigs to test the vaccines’ efficacy.

COVID-19 vaccines and medications are lifesaving necessities. The pharmaceutical corporations’ grip on their production and distribution proves that the intellectual property patent system does not work. It was not designed to deal with pandemics or many other vital human needs. The patent system that limits access to human necessities is an indictment of capitalism, which always puts profits before human needs. □

Pensacola State College faculty demand protection

By Devin Cole
Occupied Muscogee Creek Land

On Feb. 16, over 30 drivers circled the Pensacola State College-Warrington Campus buildings for half an hour, laying on their horns. Signs saying “High Risk” and “Betrayal” were taped to their vehicles. This action was led by the Pensacola State College Faculty Association, a chapter of the United Faculty of Florida (UFF). The faculty was protesting the inhumane conditions they have been subjected to by the PSC administration, who have done virtually nothing to protect them from COVID-19 exposure — after unilaterally forcing them to teach classes in person.

About 70% of PSC faculty are union members, and many of them were on the car caravan, which circled the campus during a tour of the school given to the Board of

Trustees by the college administration. The timing was intentional — to force the school administrators and PSC Board of Trustees to see that faculty members are fed up with the negligence of their health.

Union member Alex Ledgerwood explained that the administration, when approached by faculty with contract language saying they do not work in unsafe conditions, proceeded to change the definition of “unsafe conditions” to only mean “problems with the air conditioning and chemical leaks,” not COVID. This blatant attack means faculty have had to teach classes with little to no protection. PSC said classrooms would be cleaned daily; no cleaning has taken place. PSC said air filters would be changed regularly, but few have been changed; and faculty have still not received a list of locations where they have actually been changed!

Faculty requested accommodations that follow CDC guidelines and were promptly denied this by the administration.

Educators continually neglected in Florida

Throughout the entire pandemic, the question of whether or not educators and school workers are “essential workers” has been a long, unnecessary debate. Educators and school workers are absolutely essential workers, but during this pandemic they have been subjected to mistreatment and neglect that has claimed the lives of at least 530 of them.

Few places exemplify this neglect more than Florida, where Governor and Trump-loyalist Ron DeSantis has all but ignored pleas and demands of school workers. DeSantis stated that teachers would not be receiving the COVID-19 vaccine right away, claiming it is because he is prioritizing “seniors first.” The real problem is that Florida does not have nearly enough vaccines, and the entire vaccination process is being mismanaged by state government. DeSantis has ultimately left the decision of virtual vs.

in-person instruction to each individual state college and university. Many have gone virtual, but one that has not is Pensacola State College, a community college in Pensacola and Milton. PSC opened in 1948 and became the first institute of higher learning in Pensacola; it currently has at least 7,000 students in several locations around Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Originally PSC was known as Pensacola Junior College and offered only associate degrees, but changed its name to Pensacola State College in 2010 after it began offering bachelor’s degrees.

PSC has gained the reputation of being a potential superspreader site for COVID, due to refusing to let faculty teach remotely unless they go through a strenuous Americans with Disabilities Act process. Ledgerwood commented that very few faculty members have received ADA accommodations to allow them to teach from home.

At the beginning of the pandemic, PSC administration and faculty were at the table together, trying to negotiate safety procedures for faculty and students. Now the administration has completely shut out the faculty, making decisions without consulting them, which has led to a total breakdown of communication. The union is demanding the administration resume negotiations for safe conditions to reduce the chance of COVID-19 infection.

UFF president Karen Morian said: “We are hoping that faculty receives the protection that they deserve. We are hoping that this opens up a line of communication with the Board of Trustees. The faculty is tired of being shut out, being neglected and being condescended to. The administration is not listening to us, so we are bringing it to them.”

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.



Car protest by Pensacola State College faculty demanding COVID safety, Feb. 16.

Bessemer, Alabama: The whole world is watching

An injury to one is an injury to all. This famous labor slogan, popularized by the Industrial Workers of the World over a century ago, is more meaningful today than ever. But it has a double meaning for workers at Amazon, where the workplace injury rate is exceptionally high due to the backbreaking, fast-paced work.

Their pain is felt by “all,” as in the slogan—the working class and oppressed of the world—who are watching with rapt attention the struggle for union representation in Bessemer, Ala. Warehouse workers, a huge majority of them Black and almost half of them women, are voting by mail in a National Labor Relations Board-supervised election running from Feb. 8 to March 29. The outcome, which could lead

to the first unionized Amazon facility in the U.S., will be announced after all the ballots are counted.

Every class-conscious worker is rooting for the union: the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. The courageous workers in the Deep South, taking on the hated double-centibillionaire Jeff Bezos, are fighting for all of us. Alabama’s Black poultry plant workers, who are represented by RWDSU, have taken on a range of the organizing tasks.

This is labor vs. capital in its truest, rawest expression.

We are inspired!

And with very little advanced preparation, there were over 50 actions on Feb. 20, a national day of solidarity called by the Southern Workers Assembly and

backed by the Support Alabama Amazon Union Campaign and others. These actions brought together a diverse group of progressive forces: union leaders, Black Lives Matter activists, housing advocates, migrants, young and veteran socialists, and current and former Amazon workers—many of whom have no history of working together. Bitter cold—unseasonably cold conditions in the South—could not put a chill on solidarity.

From the video message posted in January by the National Football League Players Association to the handwritten letters sent by incarcerated workers, statements of support represent a cross section of the working class. The class unity around the Bessemer struggle must—and will—expand even more between now and

March 29.

This historic union drive did not unfold in a vacuum. The context for it is the mass movement that emerged this past year for economic justice and against racism. As the pandemic took its toll, workers waged hundreds of job actions demanding a safe workplace. The Black Lives Matter upsurge in response to the police lynching of George Floyd has been called the biggest civil rights movement in U.S. history.

Bessemer is a continuation of this radical trend.

Movements are not linear; they have their ebb and flow. But the tide today is rising and lifting all boats. Every worker must grab an oar and help row this essential class struggle to victory. □



On the picket line

By Marie Kelly

McDonald’s workers win settlement

In Los Angeles, between April and August 2020, workers at a McDonald’s complained about inadequate protection from COVID, including lack of social distancing and forcible exposure to customers who refused to wear masks. Following strikes to protest these unsafe working conditions, McDonald’s management retaliated by firing several workers.

On the fired workers’ behalf, Service Employees Union Local 721 filed a letter with the California Labor Commissioner’s Retaliation Complaint Investigation Unit. The Labor Commission’s judgment requires McDonald’s to pay more than \$125,900 in lost wages and retaliation penalties and orders that management offer the workers their jobs back.

Maine hospital union busting

The MaineHealth health care corporation has come under attack by the governor of the state and the Maine State Nurses Association—for providing COVID vaccine to out-of-state members of the Reliant Labor Consultants firm, hired to bust a union organizing drive by nurses at Maine Medical Center in Portland.

This is a direct violation of the state policy on vaccine distribution. It demonstrates the callousness of corporate health care. Hiring union-busting firms is an attempt to deny nurses the right to organize and to have a voice in their working conditions and the delivery of patient care.

Additionally, MaineHealth administered the COVID vaccine to these individuals, when so many elderly and immunocompromised state residents are on waiting lists, caught in the nightmare of the COVID vaccine rollout.

Janel Crowley, an RN in the neonatal intensive care unit at Maine Medical Center says nurses are “working to form a union to give them more of a say in the high-level decisions affecting them and

their patients. This is pretty much all patient-driven. We saw gaps in the care that our patients were able to receive because of policies. That’s why we’re trying to get this seat at the table, to really deal with the people who make the decisions that have no real direct line to the bedside.” (tinyurl.com/gxgt7y9k)

Black women workers lead strike, ‘mean business’

The Atlanta Washerwomen Strike, that erupted less than twenty-five years after the 13th amendment’s ratification, is a fine historic example of the unity and strength of Black women workers.

By 1881, the promise of Reconstruction for the Black population of the Southern U.S. had been replaced by the racist, violent legal system: the Black Codes. Despite this oppressive environment, 20 Black laundresses in Atlanta formed a trade union called The Washing Society.

Many households during this time hired out the backbreaking task of laundering and ironing their clothes. Black women were 98% of those workers. The job required making soap and starch, hauling water, and standing hours at laundry tubs scrubbing clothes or using hot irons to press out wrinkles. The Washing Society demanded higher wages and autonomy over their working conditions. They began a door-to-door campaign and held rallies to recruit more laundresses. Their membership eventually grew to 3,000.

In July of 1881, the city laundresses went on strike, causing havoc in Atlanta households. The local businesses, politicians and press came down hard on Society members. Several were arrested for disorderly conduct. But the Society’s letter to Atlanta Mayor Jim English demonstrated their fearless determination. That August, the Society won all their demands and opened the door for wage increases for Atlanta domestic workers, cooks, hotel workers and nurses.

The letter reads in part: “The members of our society are determined to stand to our pledge and make extra charges for washing, and we have agreed and are willing to pay \$25 or \$50 for licenses as a protection, so we can control the washing for the city. We can afford to pay these licenses and will do it before we will be defeated, and then we will have full control of the city’s washing at our own prices, as the city has control of our husbands’ work at their prices. Don’t forget this. We mean business this week or no washing.” (tinyurl.com/1a5px7r). □

India

Rail roko protest and growing state-sanctioned terror

By Tania Siddiqi

Samyukta Kisan Morcha, the farmer unions’ umbrella body, launched a rail roko protest to halt train transit in many parts of India for four hours on Feb. 18. This action is the farmers’ latest attempt to push India’s national government to repeal three “farm bills” intended to appease corporate cravings. (tinyurl.com/7mrkk9da)

Bhajan Singh, district president of Karntikari Kisan Union-Gurdaspur, told The Wire that the purpose of the protest was to counter the government’s narrative that demonstrations were happening in only two provinces: Punjab and Haryana. Moreover, Singh said, protesting on the nationwide network of railway tracks would demonstrate that the uprising is happening all over the country. (The Wire, Feb. 18)

Indeed, demonstrators participated in train stoppages in many parts of the country. During the action, protesters showered passengers with flowers and offered them tea.



Women in India block train tracks in solidarity with farmers.

More state repression

As the rail roko protest proceeded, activists were arrested in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana. (Business Today, Feb. 19) However, the protesters were able to successfully complete the demonstration. While the people continue to build the movement in India, it is important to assess the growing state-sanctioned terror within and beyond India’s borders.

After the farmers’ successful Republic Day action, Rihanna, Barbadian singer, actor and business owner, tweeted an article about the uprising with the caption: “[W]hy aren’t we talking about this?!” It heightened international attention to the farmers’ struggle. (NBC, Feb. 4)

India’s elite, who work in the service of the right-wing ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), were quick to respond with racialized and gendered attacks against her. (tinyurl.com/4q6cw5g) As mentioned in a Workers World article posted Aug. 17, 2020, anti-Black racism is rampant in South Asian communities, and some of their members have contributed to reproducing harmful stereotypes that target Black women. (tinyurl.com/1ae6d42k)

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut tweeted degrading smears about Rihanna. Thus, she reaffirms BJP’s and its followers’ commitment to using fascist, racialized and gendered violence to try to quash the farmers’ movement.

Pro-farmer activist Disha Ravi arrested

Within India’s borders, the state is using a colonial-era draconian “sedition” law to criminalize organizers who are in solidarity with the farmers’ uprising. On Feb. 13, 22-year-old climate activist Disha Ravi was taken into custody for allegedly assisting in creating and distributing a “toolkit” supporting the ongoing protests. (Teen Vogue, Feb. 20)

While the tool kit mirrors other resources used to raise awareness about the farmers’ struggle, the government alleges Ravi has ties to separatist groups and was attempting to promote rebellion against the country.

This is not the first time India’s government has used the criminal punishment system to silence dissenters. At the height of the Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests, the state kidnapped and caged prominent student activists Sharjeel Imam, Meeran Haider and many others, to disenfranchise the youth and deter them from joining in the struggle against xenophobia and police terror, reported WW on Sept. 2, 2020. (workers.org/2020/09/51020/)

While celebrating each of the farmers’ wins and their push towards self-determination, it is crucial to recognize the state’s attempt to shatter the youths’ imaginative efforts towards achieving revolution.

Free them all!

In a talk to the movement, Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton said: “The revolution has always been in the hands of the young. The young always inherit the revolution.” (tinyurl.com/19ukwmse)

To ensure that we radically transform our current conditions into an inclusive and sustainable future, we must protect the youth and support their commitment to the struggle. Let us show deep solidarity with Disha Ravi, Sharjeel Imam, Meeran Haider and every dissenter who is imprisoned for daring to struggle against oppressive and barbaric forces.

Tear down the walls! Free them all! □

A book review

‘Black Freedom Fighters in Steel’

By Marie Kelly

Ruth Needleman’s “Black Freedom Fighters in Steel: The Struggle for Democratic Unionism,” tells of five Black union activists who took on the steel industry of Indiana’s Calumet Region along Lake Michigan at Youngstown Sheet and Tube, Inland Steel and U.S. Steel. (Cornell University Press, 2003)

Needleman’s rich narrative contains interviews with the five, which span the post-World War I period up to today. They are part of a much larger group of Black steelworker union activists, who won victories for all steelworkers while lifting up Black workers to a position of strength and power within their union.

George Kimbley, a WWI veteran, spent the war in France’s trenches. Afterwards, although originally from Kentucky, he migrated to Indiana. He describes the tin mill’s hellish conditions and the unsteady work during the 1920s recessions up through the 1930s Great Depression. He attended community events promoting Black pride led by Marcus Garvey.

Kimbley was the first Black worker to sign a union card at the mill. He recruited other Black workers to join the union, and he became the first appointed Black staff member of the Steelworkers Organizing Committee in 1938, which later became the Steelworkers Union (USW).

Bill Young describes working in the Inland Steel mill as “enslavement.” No

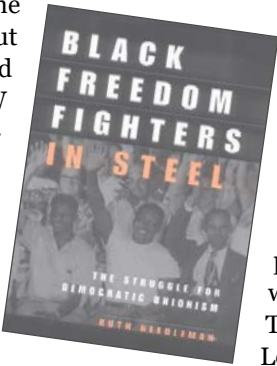
worker protections existed when he arrived. He remembers stories about the cruelty suffered by his enslaved grandparents. Young joined USW Local 1010, known for its leftist militancy. Workers organized other workers, and Young carried union cards with him, always ready to give them to other workers.

Young recalls the Memorial Day Massacre in Chicago in 1937, when police attacked striking unionized steelworkers amassed outside the Republic Steel plant, killing 10 workers. He became the first Black chairperson of a steel union local grievance committee. During the “Red Scare,” he denounced the ouster of another organizer, a known Communist.

John Howard’s father was a steelworker. His dreams of attending college were dashed because of racism, so he followed his father into the mills. He struggled through the Depression years, when Black workers were more likely to be “first laid-off and last rehired.” He describes his community activism fighting workers’ evictions. He rose to the rank of USW Local 1014 vice president and held that position from 1945 to 1954.

Eureka Club: plantwide Black caucus

Curtis Strong was raised to have a low tolerance for discrimination. He grew up in Mississippi and migrated to Gary, Ind., where he worked in the steel

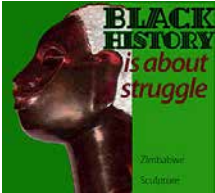


mill. Knowing the USW wasn’t doing enough for Black steelworkers, Strong and his mentor, Arthur Adams, a Marxist, advocated for a Black-led organization that would share power with allies in the white-dominated union. They formed the Sentinel League which grew into the Eureka Club, a plantwide Black caucus. They staged wildcat strikes and walkouts to win rights.

Jonathan Comer fought discrimination within the armed forces during World War II. Migrating from Alabama, he found work at Youngstown Steel. As a member of the “Big 5,” the Black union activist coalition, Comer learned how the union could be forced to win concessions that benefited Black steelworkers. He became the first Black worker to be elected as a steel union local president.

A chapter is devoted to each union activist based on the author’s interviews, and Needleman provides historical context. She relates their personal stories to the broader union movement in an engaging way, without detracting from each person’s accomplishments.

One section describes a roundtable discussion with Comer, Strong and three contemporary Black steel union activists, including Josephine Brooks and Mary



Elgin. The women’s presence speaks to the strength of the women’s caucus formed in the 1970s under the leadership of activists like Ola Kennedy. It is now known as Women of Steel.

Black workers’ leadership

The unionists commiserate about the steel industry’s decline and how it has taken the teeth out of the union. All agree union leaders must be held accountable to the rank and file and that younger workers must be educated about the struggle against capitalist oppression. They also stressed that Black workers within the union must retain their strength through a separate caucus.

Needleman’s last chapter is a historical overview of Black steelworkers’ struggles against the companies’ segregated hiring practices. It hails the victories Black union activists won for all steelworkers. Everyone seeking a deeper understanding of these struggles should read this book.

A wonderful companion to it is Workers World Party founding member Vince Copeland’s publication: “Blast Furnace Brothers.” It is a tale of solidarity of Black and white workers at Bethlehem Steel in Lackawanna County, Pa., told in such a way that readers feel like they are listening to him tell the story. Copeland’s description of the Black-led walkout by the entire workforce is well worth the read. □

Montgomery Bus Boycott, Bessemer, prisiones

Lucha de clases, antes y ahora

continuación de la página 12

El Dr. King y la Sra. Parks pueden haber sido los rostros más reconocibles del boicot, pero su éxito radica en el movimiento de masas dinámico y sostenido de la comunidad negra, especialmente las mujeres negras. Los organizadores animaron a las personas que tenían automóviles, incluidos los padres de este escritor, a recoger y dejar a los trabajadores sin automóvil, muchos de los cuales eran trabajadores domésticos, en lugares designados en toda la ciudad. Muchos caminaron millas hacia y desde el trabajo, incluso en vecindarios de blancos.

Esta organización de base no sólo derotó el edicto de transporte segregado en la antigua capital de la Confederación el 21 de diciembre de 1956, fue el primer plano del Movimiento de Derechos Civiles moderno en todo el Sur Profundo, con manifestaciones masivas, marchas y sentadas, cierres y más en medio de la violencia policial y del KKK.

El boicot de autobuses fue un precursor del movimiento Black Lives Matter actual, fusionando los derechos civiles y los derechos de los trabajadores.

De Montgomery a Bessemer

Como escribió este escritor en 2000, “No hay lucha dentro de un vacío; ninguna lucha está aislada de las leyes generales de la naturaleza y la sociedad. [Para] entender completamente la lucha de los negros o la experiencia de los negros en los Estados Unidos y su estado actual, tenemos que ver su desarrollo en relación con la lucha de clases en general. La lucha negra en este país tiene muchas lecciones valiosas para nosotros como trabajadores, como progresistas y como

revolucionarios”. (“¿Qué es una nación?” De “A Voice from Harper’s Ferry”, consulte tinyurl.com/yxrc35c9)

Una de esas valiosas lecciones que se derivan del boicot de autobuses se está llevando a cabo nuevamente en Bessemer, Alabama, a solo 15 millas de la antigua ciudad siderúrgica de Birmingham. Con una población de menos de 30.000 habitantes, la ciudad ha ganado repentinamente la atención nacional e incluso internacional, porque un grupo de trabajadores negros en su mayoría se encuentra en medio de una histórica campaña de organización sindical contra Amazon, posiblemente la corporación global más poderosa de los EE.UU. y quizás el mundo.

El 8 de febrero, estos trabajadores del almacén comenzaron una votación por correo sobre la representación, con el respaldo del Sindicato de Minoristas, Mayoristas y Grandes Tiendas (RWDSU), en respuesta a las horribles condiciones laborales de Amazon, la falta de protección contra COVID, los bajos salarios y racismo de la gerencia blanca. Y el 80% de estos trabajadores son afroamericanos, y el 43% son mujeres negras.

A pesar de que los trabajadores en este almacén del sur suman alrededor de solo 5.800 de un total de 935.000 trabajadores de Amazon en los EE.UU., su lucha por un sindicato tendrá un efecto dominó sin precedentes, no solo para los trabajadores en Alabama,-- solo el 8% está sindicalizado-- sino para toda la clase trabajadora mundial.

Alabama es uno de los 27 estados con leyes de “derecho al trabajo” de Taft-Hartley. Esto significa que afiliarse a un sindicato no es un requisito previo para conseguir un trabajo; Las “supuestas” tiendas abiertas fracturan

deliberadamente la solidaridad sindical. Los trabajadores quedan entonces a merced de jefes racistas y sexistas sin ninguna protección contra el abuso en virtud de un convenio colectivo.

La lucha por sindicalizarse en Bessemer tiene implicaciones globales, porque Amazon es una corporación con un valor cercano al billón de dólares, cuyos tentáculos sedientos de ganancias se extienden por varios continentes. Amazon representa el capitalismo monopolista moderno 2.0, mientras que en la década de 1950, durante el boicot de autobuses, las tiendas familiares junto a las de Woolworth eran la columna vertebral de la economía.

Los trabajadores necesitan solidaridad, en todas partes

Otra lucha importante que tuvo lugar en paralelo a la lucha de Bessemer fue la huelga del 1 al 31 de enero de trabajadores encarcelados en todo el sistema penitenciario del Departamento de Correcciones de Alabama. Esta huelga de trabajo y “Apagón económico de 30 días” fue liderada por el Movimiento de Alabama Libre.

Como trabajadores encarcelados, protestaron contra algunas de las mismas condiciones planteadas por los trabajadores de Bessemer: superexplotación, racismo, brutalidad física, condiciones de trabajo horribles exacerbadas por la pandemia, incluida la falta de máscaras, la falta de distanciamiento social y alimentos saludables, y más. El ADOC ha sido considerado por muchos como el sistema penitenciario más violento del país. (Lea “Prisiones de Alabama: ¡EN HUELGA!” En tinyurl.com/y458aakr)

En Alabama, los negros constituyen el 28% de los residentes del estado, pero



Jennifer Bates, una empleada de las instalaciones de Bessemer Amazon, ha estado ayudando a organizar la campaña sindical.

el 43% de las personas en la cárcel y el 54% de las personas en prisión. (al.com) Realmente no hay una diferencia fundamental entre el racismo y la explotación que enfrentan los trabajadores de Bessemer Amazon y los trabajadores encarcelados de Alabama, excepto por la restricción física que impide que los trabajadores encarcelados salgan de sus celdas. Como exige el Comité de Solidaridad con Prisioneros del Partido Mundial de los Trabajadores, “¡Libérenlos a todos!”

Al igual que la lucha en Montgomery hace más de 65 años, los trabajadores de Bessemer Amazon y los trabajadores encarcelados en Alabama también cuentan con la solidaridad de toda la clase entre los organizados y los no organizados, no solo para ganar las batallas inmediatas que enfrentan directamente, sino para extender su lucha. para ganar los derechos de millones de trabajadores en todo el mundo. Estas luchas son el verdadero significado de lo que trata la Historia Negra.

La escritora nació en Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Tweet @MoniFromHome.



Caminando por el camino de Powder Plant Road hasta el almacén de Amazon en Bessemer, Alabama, donde la fuerza laboral de mayoría negra está llevando a cabo una campaña sindical.

Solidaridad con lxs trabajadorxs de Amazon

Por Scott Michael

La solidaridad con la lucha de más de 5,800 trabajadores de Amazon en Bessemer, Alabama, para sindicalizarse continúa creciendo, siguiendo el liderazgo heroico de esta fuerza laboral de mayoría negra que lucha por la justicia en el trabajo.

El 12 de febrero, la campaña Support Alabama Amazon Union recientemente iniciada reunió a organizadores en Bessemer y más de 300 activistas solidarios, incluidos trabajadores de Amazon de muchos lugares. En una dinámica reunión de organización titulada “¿Cómo podemos apoyar al Sindicato de Trabajadores de Bessemer Alabama?”, líderes de sindicatos y miembros de base, simpatizantes de la comunidad e incluso un miembro del Congreso de los EE. UU. discutieron esta lucha crítica e hicieron planes para el 20 de febrero. Día de Solidaridad con los trabajadores de Bessemer Amazon.

Dominic Harris, presidente de la sección de trabajadores de la ciudad de Charlotte de United Electrical Workers (UE) Local 150, presidió esta reunión histórica junto con Martha Grevatt, editora gerente de Workers World, miembro fundador de la junta directiva de Pride At Work y ex miembro de la junta ejecutiva de United Auto Workers Local 869.

Cómo comenzó la campaña sindical

La reunión comenzó con Josh Brewer, organizador principal de la campaña #BAmazon Union con el sindicato de minoristas, mayoristas y grandes almacenes, quien habló sobre cómo comenzó la campaña y lo que significaba para los trabajadores de Bessemer.

“Comenzamos el 20 de octubre, bueno, realmente comenzamos el verano pasado. Un grupo de trabajadores se puso en contacto con nosotros y tenía algunas preocupaciones. Básicamente, hubo algunas preocupaciones más genéricas en cuanto a salarios, beneficios y tratamiento. Pero también hubo algunas preocupaciones alarmantes cuando comenzamos a hablar sobre la capacidad de usar el baño, cuando comenzamos a hablar de ser castigados por tener COVID, no que les dieran su pago de COVID. La gerencia y los recursos humanos simplemente ignoraban sus gritos o sus quejas...”

“Esta campaña es tan importante como la gente cree que es. Estos trabajadores son maltratados tanto como usted escucha. Esta es una campaña muy real. Es una gran pelea en la que estamos... Amazon ha tenido dos meses de tiempo para tener reuniones cautivas con estos trabajadores en contra de su voluntad y para usar esta información y la capacidad de tergiversar esa información de [consultores profesionales antisindicales] por la que están pagando \$3,000 por día”.

Michael “Big Mike” Foster, otro organizador principal crítico de RWDSU, brindó más información sobre la campaña: “No solo aparecimos en Amazon. Los trabajadores de Amazon nos llamaron, porque han estado gritando con sus voces, y Amazon los ha ignorado todo el tiempo. Así que nos reunimos con el grupo y elaboramos un plan para venir aquí y ayudar a esta gente. Y se ha convertido en cosas asombrosas...”

“Tenemos un dicho en RWDSU de que queremos que nuestra gente no solo tenga

un salario mínimo, sino un salario digno, porque estamos cansados de pagar las facturas por aquí. También queremos poder disfrutar un poco de la vida. Queremos poder tomarnos unas vacaciones en lugares sencillos como la ciudad de Panamá, Florida, de vez en cuando. Creo que todo el mundo merece poder disfrutar de un poco de dinero, y no solo pagar el alquiler cada mes o apenas poder pagar la compra todos los meses. Eso no es suficiente”.

Solidaridad entre los trabajadores del Sur

Dante Strobino, un organizador de la Asamblea de Trabajadores del Sur, una red de docenas de organizaciones sindicales y comunitarias del Sur, discutió por qué la SWA inició la convocatoria para los Días de Acción Nacional del 20 de febrero en solidaridad con Bessemer.

“Con 55 a 60% de toda la gente negra viviendo en el sur - en Bessemer City, 85% trabajadores negros - sabemos que esta ha sido una región que históricamente ha estado desorganizada. Y los trabajadores organizados deben aprovechar esta oportunidad para finalmente derrotar las leyes antisindicales del derecho al trabajo, las prohibiciones de Jim Crow sobre la negociación colectiva como enfrentamos en Carolina del Norte.

“Pero ver a los trabajadores avícolas como Brother Big Mike y otros que están apoyando a estos trabajadores, que usted está sindicalizado y ayuda a apoyar a otros en esta importante corporación a sindicalizarse, demuestra que esta iniciativa de base va a salir victoriosa. Confiamos en que va a ganar esta votación sindical.

Montgomery Bus Boycott, Bessemer, prisiones Lucha de clases, antes y ahora

Por Monica Moorehead

Cincuenta años después del final de la Guerra Civil de los Estados Unidos, y durante el apogeo de los horribles linchamientos de personas negras en el sur profundo por el terror del KKK, la Asociación para el Estudio de la Vida e Historia de los Negros (ASNLH) fue fundada en 1915 por el Dr. Carter Woodson y el Rev. Jesse E. Moorland para investigar y promover las contribuciones individuales de los afrodescendientes, tanto dentro de los Estados Unidos como en toda la diáspora africana.

La ASNLH lanzó una “Semana de la Historia Negra” nacional en febrero de 1926. Cincuenta años después, en 1976, debido a la influencia del Movimiento de Derechos Civiles, esta “Semana” se convirtió oficialmente en el Mes de la Historia Negra en los Estados Unidos.

Incluso antes de 1926, la difícil situación de los negros como nación oprimida dentro de los Estados Unidos llamó la atención internacional de socialistas y comunistas.

Vladimir Lenin, el líder de la Revolución Rusa, escribió en 1917: “En los Estados Unidos, los pueblos negros e indígenas representan solo el 11,1%. Deberían ser clasificados como una nación oprimida, porque la igualdad ganada en la Guerra Civil de 1861-65 y garantizada por la Constitución de la república fue en muchos aspectos cada vez más restringida en las principales áreas negras (el Sur) en relación con la

Pero lo ganes o no, sabemos que es solo una etapa en esta lucha y en la construcción y mantenimiento de la organización de base para actuar como un sindicato y seguir luchando.

“Hemos estado construyendo estas asambleas de trabajadores locales para reunir a activistas de trabajadores, sindicatos, comunidades, para organizar a otros no organizados. Y lo está haciendo, está mostrando lo que puede hacer una asamblea de trabajadores, reuniendo a trabajadores organizados para organizar a otros trabajadores no organizados. En particular, sabemos que los trabajadores negros más oprimidos siempre van a liderar, históricamente han liderado esto”.

Raíces profundas de lucha

Monica Moorehead, editora gerente de WW y editora del libro de 2007, “Marxismo, reparaciones y la lucha por la libertad negra”, habló sobre el significado histórico de esta campaña sindical. “El 12 de febrero es el 43º aniversario de la huelga de los trabajadores sanitarios de Memphis, cuando los trabajadores sanitarios negros abandonaron el trabajo exigiendo igualdad de justicia en comparación con los blancos en las áreas de salarios más altos, mejores condiciones laborales e igualdad desde hace mucho tiempo. Dos meses después, obtuvieron importantes concesiones. El Dr. Martin Luther King fue asesinado en Memphis, lo que ayudó a atraer la atención nacional e internacional a esta lucha tan importante.

“Ahora, avancemos rápidamente a lo que está sucediendo en Bessemer con otro

desarrollo histórico que también es mayoritariamente afroamericano y casi la mitad son mujeres. Y esa es la campaña sindical para organizar el almacén de Amazon.

“Como mujer negra cuyas raíces son profundas en suelo de Alabama, estoy aquí para prometer mi solidaridad con el derecho de los trabajadores de Bessemer a sindicalizarse, porque no solo luchan por sus derechos, sino por los derechos de millones de trabajadores en todo el mundo. Y todo el mundo estará mirando”.

Acciones a partir del 20 de febrero

Los comentarios vinieron de Chris Smalls, un ex trabajador de Amazon despedido por liderar una huelga de trabajadores de Staten Island Amazon en protesta por las condiciones laborales de COVID-19, y de Megan Murray, ex empleada de Whole Foods y organizadora de la campaña Whole Worker en Filadelfia. Hablaron de las tácticas abusivas de la administración de Amazon y la necesidad de apoyar a los trabajadores de Bessemer.

Esta electrizante reunión de organización muestra cuán profunda es la solidaridad con los trabajadores de Bessemer Amazon y cómo el trabajo y la comunidad pueden trabajar juntos para convertir las campañas sindicales en movimientos de masas. La reunión terminó con más de dos docenas de informes sobre las acciones de solidaridad del 20 de febrero, que han crecido hasta incluir más de 45 ciudades.

Para obtener una lista completa de acciones y participar, visite supportamazonworkers.org.”



Los boicoteadores de autobuses, sin importar su edad o habilidad, caminaron millas hasta su trabajo en Montgomery, febrero de 1956.

principalmente en los “logros” pasados de los negros individuales y no en el impacto de los movimientos de masas liderados por negros en las luchas actuales por la liberación nacional y la plena igualdad.

Tome el histórico boicot de autobuses de Montgomery. A los historiadores burgueses les gusta retratar a Rosa Parks como una costurera negra aislada, que por casualidad se negó a ceder su asiento a un hombre blanco en un autobús segregado el 1 de diciembre de 1955.

La verdad es que la suya fue una acción planificada por parte de la NAACP local, de la cual la Sra. Parks era secretaria. Antes de que la iglesia, donde un joven reverendo Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. era el pastor, se convirtiera en un centro principal de organización de boicots, había habido discusiones durante mucho tiempo sobre la organización de un boicot de autobuses.

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