



# Support grows for Alabama Amazon union

By Martha Grevatt

A people's movement against an anti-people corporation has intensified, backing the union drive at Amazon's Bessemer, Ala., warehouse. The courageous Southern union warriors are finally starting to get the support they need and deserve.

Some three dozen organizations loaned their names to a letter urging President Joe Biden to come out on the side of the Amazon workers fighting for a union. Biden had angered unionists and progressives for publicly taking a "neutral" stance on the representation election taking place now through March 29.

Signers included UNITE HERE and Flight Attendants (AFA-CWA) unions, Maine AFL-CIO, the National Employment Law Project and the Working Families Party.

Feeling the pressure, on Feb. 28 Biden came out against Amazon's union busting, affirming the right of every worker to choose union representation.

Solidarity has been growing since the Feb. 20 National Day of Solidarity. Renowned actor and activist Danny Glover stood outside the Bessemer facility Feb. 22, holding a sign that read "Remember Mail Your Yes Ballot." Glover waved, gave "thumbs up" and said, "Stay strong!" to the workers coming into and leaving work. His presence drew widespread media attention

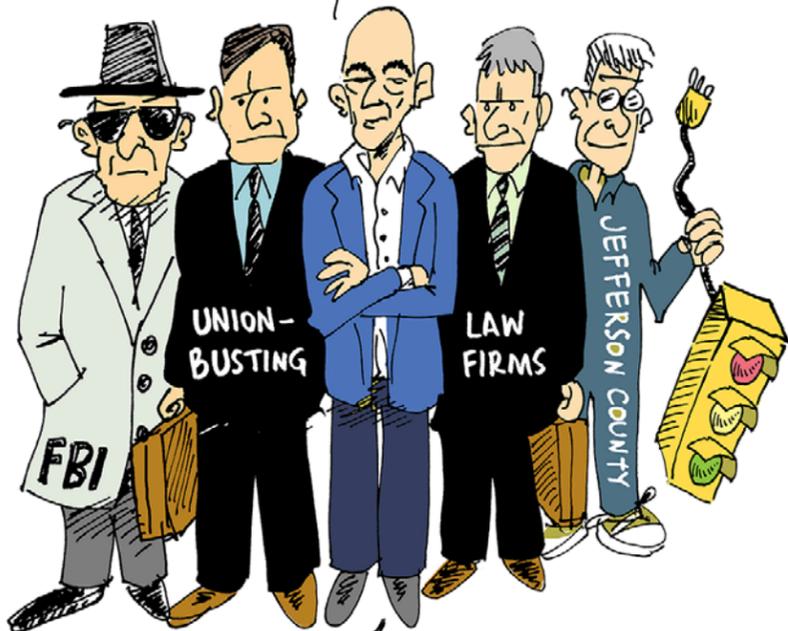
to the union effort.

"It's about justice," Glover said. "The union is about looking out for the welfare of workers and is willing to stand up and fight for justice ... It's just one step, among the many steps, that are being taken around the country, in the service of justice." (tinyurl.com/yd3xdv7h)

Glover, along with Representative Ilhan Omar, Senator Bernie Sanders and Georgia voting rights leader Stacey Abrams, is featured in a support video created by More Perfect Union. A letter to Amazon criticizing its union-busting campaign was signed by 13 U.S. senators. Birmingham, Ala., Mayor Randall Woodfin, Ohio Congressional

Continued on page 7

AMAZON OPPOSES THE UNION BECAUSE ...



WE DON'T WANT TO BRING IN AN OUTSIDE THIRD PARTY

MURRAY WORKERS WORLD PARTY

## Tell Biden Stop bombing Syria!

It has taken only 36 days in office for the Biden administration to show the world, through a bombing attack on Syria, that it is belligerent, aggressive and hell-bent on war. There was only a short respite from Trump's vile words and actions. Now we have to face Biden's vile deeds and resist them.

Even the excuse U.S. imperialism gave for bombing Syria was feeble. A rocket attack some weeks ago killed a mercenary in Iraq. Excuses like that open the door to new U.S. wars and interventions all over countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where Washington has replaced official U.S. troops with soldiers of fortune.

You might think the Biden administration had enough problems at home to keep it busy. The COVID-19 pandemic still rages despite the vaccines — whose distribution has been a disgrace. The Democratic-led Congress, which has still not passed the

pandemic relief bill, has already abandoned the \$15 per hour minimum wage.

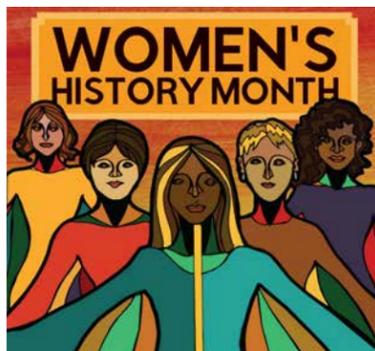
On top of this, the superfreeze of Texas — and of its millions of workers and poor people — has exposed once again the desperate need to rebuild the U.S. infrastructure. Not to mention the immediate need for emergency aid.

Even those who recognize the rotten

Continued on page 10

### WORKERS WORLD editorial

Mumia's latest health crisis	3
Decision: No fracking	3
Rubin Kanowitz, 1931-2021	6
Anti-war actions	10



Nadezhda Krupskaya: Bolshevik revolutionary  
 Cuban 'Red Rose'

8

Editorial  
 Raise the minimum wage! 10

**TEAR DOWN THE WALLS**

Angola Prison hunger strike  
 Black rage, new Reconstruction  
 COVID lockdown trauma  
 Palestine solidarity 4-5

# Buffalo demands mental health help, not death-by-cop

By Nigel Bouvart  
Buffalo, N.Y.

Activists demonstrated here Feb. 28 in solidarity with the family of Daniel Prude and the people of Rochester, N.Y., where police killed Prude while answering a mental health crisis call in March 2020.

The police response was to put a “spit bag” over Prude’s head and press his body and face into the pavement for several minutes. He stopped breathing and was sent by ambulance to a hospital. A week later he was declared brain dead and taken off life support. Coroners have ruled his death a homicide.

The Rochester Police Department attempted to cover up its crime, preventing the release of body cam footage of the incident until September 2020. The release generated weeks of protest, and Prude’s family vowed to sue the city over their loved one’s death. A grand jury declined to indict the cops who were responsible, prompting another round of protests.

At the Feb. 28 Buffalo demonstration, representatives of Queen City Worker’s Center, Justice for Migrant Families and Workers World Party spoke, drawing parallels with the cases of Troy Hodge in Niagara Falls and India Cummings in Buffalo. Both died in jail following their arrests



Buffalo, N.Y., City Hall, Feb. 28.

WW PHOTO: ARJAE RED

during mental health crisis calls. Speakers called for solidarity with political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, in view of his recent COVID-19 illness, and with prisoners at the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) detention center in nearby Batavia.

Speakers raised demands for the statewide passage of Daniel’s Law — named for Prude — which would form mental health units to respond to mental health crises instead of cops. The legislation would mandate that police stop the use of “bola wraps,” a restraint launched from a firearm which hooks into a person’s skin and lassos them. The Buffalo Police Department acquired this weapon in 2020, despite public outcry, and first used the bola wrap against a person during a mental health call this January. □

## MUNDO OBRERO WORKERS WORLD this week

### ◆ In the U.S.

- Support grows for Alabama Amazon union . . . . . 1
- Buffalo demands mental health help, not cops . . . 2
- Fracking banned in Delaware River Basin . . . . . 3
- Protest for Mumia, suffering COVID symptoms . . 3
- Solitary confinement abuse sparks hunger strike . 4
- Black rage: a new ‘reconstruction’ in the U.S. . . . 4
- Mental health effects of COVID lockdown . . . . . 5
- Rubin Kanowitz, 1931-2021 . . . . . 6
- Vilsack no friend of farmworkers or farmers . . . . 6
- The Bessemer front . . . . . 7
- Bessemer Amazon workers showing the way . . . . 7

### ◆ Around the world

- Nadezhda Krupskaya: revolutionary, educator . . 8
- Cuban ‘Red Rose’ wins journalism honor . . . . . 8
- Ecuador elections . . . . . 9
- Biden sends B-1 bombers to Norway . . . . . 9
- ‘No war drills on Korean Peninsula!’ . . . . . 10
- Colorado protest: ‘No war on Iran!’ . . . . . 10
- COVID vaccines = big business, political clout . . 11

### ◆ Editorial

- Tell Biden: Stop bombing Syria! . . . . . 1
- Raise the minimum wage to \$15—at least! . . . . . 10

### ◆ Noticias en Español

- ¡Deja de bombardear Siria! . . . . . 12
- Congelación de Texas . . . . . 12

## MUNDO OBRERO WORKERS WORLD

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

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

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

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

## Join us in the fight for socialism!

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

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

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

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

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# Fracking banned in Delaware River Basin

By Betsey Piette

In a historic ruling, the Delaware River Basin Commission voted Feb. 25 to permanently ban fracking (hydraulic fracturing) for natural gas in the Delaware River Watershed. This ruling formally affirms a drilling moratorium the DRBC imposed in 2010.

Representatives of the four states with waterways the Delaware River drains — Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Delaware — voted in favor of the ban. But the federal government representative from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers abstained, claiming more time was needed to coordinate with the Biden administration.

Executive Director Wenonah Hauter of Food & Water Watch, one of several groups who fought for the ban, criticized the federal abstention: “Grassroots activists stopped a plan to frack the Delaware River and never stopped fighting until today’s victory was assured. . . . Fracking is a threat to the Delaware River and everywhere else. Communities living with the harms of fracking have known for years that there is no way to make fracking safe.

“The White House chose political expediency today over protecting the drinking water of 15 million people. Biden should listen to communities and science and support a ban on fracking everywhere.” (foodandwaterwatch.org)

The DRBC ban prohibits fracking activity in areas of northeastern Pennsylvania and southern New York that sit atop natural gas deposits in the Marcellus Shale formation. Because New York State banned fracking in 2014, the ban only impacts Pennsylvania drilling. The Marcellus Shale does not extend into Delaware or New Jersey

## Water source for 15 million people

More than 15 million people, a population including New York City; Philadelphia and Trenton, N.J.; and Wilmington, Del., rely on the 13,539-square-mile Delaware River Basin for their drinking water. The protected area includes the Delaware Water Gap and the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River areas — parks that attracted three million visitors and generated \$130 million in economic activity in 2019, according to the National Parks Conservation Association.

Environmental and community activists have pressured the DRBC for over a decade to ban fracking in the area. Thousands of people signed petitions,



Protesters call for ban on fracking at Delaware River Basin Commission hearing Feb. 15, 2017.

wrote letters, demonstrated and spoke out at public hearings. This campaign expanded the broader struggle across the U.S. to ban fracking and to stop building dangerous pipelines to transport petroleum and natural gas extracted through fracking.

Fracking involves the high-pressure injection of water laden with salt and chemicals into multiple wells to fracture the bedrock and release natural gas from deep underground shale formations. Millions of gallons of water, drawn from nearby rivers, are used each time a well is fracked. The chemical compounds used contain heavy metals and toxins, including benzene and toluene. And the drilling process releases underground radioactive material and methane gas. (tinyurl.com/ydbtewm7)

People worry that fracking in the watershed area releases toxic and carcinogenic substances into the drinking water the river provides. Another major problem of fracking is disposal of contaminated wastewater and frequent wastewater spills.

In Pennsylvania’s fracking-prevalent areas, residents report contaminated water wells, flammable tap water and severe health issues including cancers. Since the rapid expansion of fracking in 2007-08, people have filed hundreds of lawsuits against the energy industry. Yet state regulations prohibit localities from restricting fracking and medical professionals from reporting illnesses that they suspect resulted from exposure to fracking chemicals.

The ban did not determine if the commission will allow treatment of wastewater from fracking outside the basin — or if water from the area could be used for fracking outside the basin. The

commission voted to create future rules on these issues.

Representatives of the energy industry and politicians claiming to represent landowners who seek to lease land for drilling are challenging the commission’s decision. Some claim the action amounts to an illegal confiscation of owners’ mineral rights. The American Petroleum Institute Pennsylvania asserts that the DRBC’s decision “ignores a robust regulatory system and strict industry standards that ensure the environment, public health and local communities are protected.” (Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb. 25)

Historically the energy industry frequently ignored property owners’ mineral rights when fracking was involved. Often energy companies have claimed “mineral rights” to drill for gas and oil, even when property owners object. The companies have ignored well-documented pollution in waterways, including the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania.

Their “robust regulatory system and strict industry standards” are an illusion in Pennsylvania. Four years under the Trump administration have decimated federal environmental regulations.

## Job creation hype

The commission’s ruling occurred just as the energy industry is experiencing a glut in natural gas production. This glut began in 2012 and worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To offset overproduction, industry proponents pushed for converting natural gas into the production of plastics, but most of these efforts have been canceled or delayed. Yet in 2020, the Pennsylvania legislature passed another \$667 million tax credit to entice more petrochemical facilities. (DeSmogBlog, Feb. 11)

The promise of jobs and other financial benefits for local communities has long been used to promote fracking and for the construction of pipelines to bring fossil fuels to distribution centers. Yet a new report released by the Ohio River Valley Institute (ORVI) just two weeks before the DRBC ruling exposed the job-creation hype.

The ORVI studied 22 counties in West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio that comprised 90% of the Marcellus Shale natural gas production. The study found that counties with the most gas fracking production ended up with weaker job and economic growth than other parts of the region and the U.S. as a whole.

Jobs across the U.S. expanded by 10% between 2008 and 2019; yet in Ohio,

Pennsylvania and West Virginia, jobs only grew by 4%, even though the natural gas industry ran at full capacity. “More glaringly, the 22 gas-producing counties in those three states — ground zero for the drilling boom — only experienced 1.7% job growth.”

The ORVI report found that air,

water and noise pollution has negatively impacted the health and environment of residents. People had higher rates of asthma, skin rashes, heart failures, premature births and birth defects. In terms of job and population growth and share of national income, these regions fell behind the rest of the country.

While it costs a lot of money to frack one natural gas well, most of the income goes to the shareholders who invested in the process. Contrary to the claims of those who promote gas and oil fracking and pipeline construction, this is not a job-intensive industry.

The DRBC has set an example that must be extended throughout all regions impacted by fracking. Ban fracking now! □

**Counties with the most gas fracking production ended up with weaker job and economic growth than other parts of the region and the U.S. as a whole.**

# Protest demands freedom for Mumia, suffering COVID symptoms

By Betsey Piette

Political prisoner and Black journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal began experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, including difficulty breathing on Feb. 26. Hearing this news, his family and supporters called a protest. Less than 24 hours later, about 70 people turned up outside the office of Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner to call for Abu-Jamal’s immediate release.

MOVE organizer Pam Africa said prison officials deny Abu-Jamal has COVID, but that he believes the virus is the obvious explanation for his symptoms.

Speakers at the rally called for the release of Abu-Jamal and all incarcerated people older than 50, as well as those like Mumia who are “medically vulnerable.” Because the Pennsylvania Department of

Corrections denied Abu-Jamal vital hepatitis C treatment for years, he developed cirrhosis of the liver, which puts him at risk for liver cancer.

Supporters are urging Abu-Jamal receive treatment at a hospital or medical facility, noting that PA DOC’s response to incarcerated individuals with COVID is to

isolate them in solitary confinement.

Due to mismanagement of the virus crisis, prisoners in Pennsylvania are experiencing high rates of COVID. Exempt from mandatory testing, guards and other prison staff are suspected of being the source.

Abu-Jamal’s supporters emphasize that he is innocent and should be released for that reason as well. A current call-in campaign targets DA Krasner at (267) 456-1000, PA DOC Secretary John Wetzel at (717) 728-2573 and SCI Mahanoy Superintendent Bernadette Mason at (570) 773-2158 with the demands: Immediate hospitalization, not solitary confinement — release Mumia now!

On March 6 a virtual street meeting will focus on Mumia’s case. For more information, visit Mobilization4Mumia.com. (tinyurl.com/mxcsuu2v). □



Pam Africa speaking at Feb. 27 protest.

WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

## Angola Prison, La.

# Solitary confinement abuse sparks hunger strike

By Gloria Rubac

Incarcerated workers in Louisiana's notorious Angola Prison began a hunger strike early Feb. 17. The reason: Prison officials refused to release them back into the prison population after they served their sentence in solitary for a rule infraction.

Angola State Prison was the 18,000-acre Angola plantation before the Civil War, named after the African country from which many of the enslaved people in Louisiana were kidnapped. The plantation was worked then by enslaved Africans and now by imprisoned workers of African descent.



PHOTO: SAN FRANCISCO BAY VIEW

This scene of Black incarcerated workers being marched to work in the fields on the Louisiana plantation-now-prison at Angola by an armed white guard on horseback has been enacted daily for more than 100 years.

According to The Lens, an independent nonprofit news outlet for New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, the hunger strikers reported that in segregation, they are kept in their cells for over 23 hours a day and are only let out to shower. But even that hour, some said, has no guarantee.

"We gotta fight for a shower," striker Percy Hawthorne told The Lens. Hawthorne had been held in disciplinary segregation since early November for "defiance" and "aggravated disobedience," although his punishment was only supposed to be 10 days.

Another striker, Frederick Ross, told The Lens that for most of the time he was in disciplinary segregation, he was not allowed to purchase items from the canteen. "I have no property, no books, no television, no nothing."

Miguel told Workers World that he joined the hunger strike because "I was sentenced to 90 days of isolation confinement which resulted in me staying over four months. This was over 30 days more. I do not know if the inmates are currently on hunger strike but during this time, I was also on hunger strike for about three days."

A prisoner who needed to remain anonymous told Workers World that in 2020, he was in the same solitary tier where the hunger strike began. "After doing time in solitary, men are totally stressed out. There's no TV, no radios; showers are seldom, and maybe we get a phone call once a month. Mail is haphazard, with a letter from Baton Rouge sometimes taking a month to be delivered.

"The guards are lazy and hateful, so sometimes fires are set to get their attention. Prisoners get into fights. One guy stomped another's head, and he died on the tier. The stress is everywhere, but officials try to cover up the killings."

A 2019 report by the Vera Institute of Justice found that between January 2015 and November 2016, "on average, 17.4% of people incarcerated in Louisiana's state-operated prisons were housed in some form of segregated housing, which is approximately 3.9 times the estimated national average of 4.5%."

On June 11, 2010, the New York Times reported that "Angola is the largest maximum-security prison in the United States with 6,300 prisoners and 1,800 staff, including corrections officers, janitors, maintenance and wardens."

According to the ACLU of Louisiana, Louisiana has the highest rate of prison deaths per capita in the country. The state has more people serving life sentences without parole than Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas combined.

### Solitary Watch

Solitary Watch investigates, documents and disseminates information on the widespread use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons and jails. In 2019, this nonprofit national watchdog group published a report on solitary confinement in Louisiana, based on the largest survey ever taken by people held in solitary confinement. The report told "chilling stories of abuse, deprivation and soul-crushing loneliness."

According to solitarywatch.org, solitary confinement in Louisiana is "deeply rooted in the history of racial subjugation and captivity in the South, which begins with slavery and

stretches through convict leasing and Jim Crow to the modern era of mass incarceration."

Prisoner rights advocates with the Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition are slamming the department for failing to treat inmates humanely. "Having served 44 plus years in solitary confinement, I am fully aware of the brutality of solitary. Hunger strikes are brutal; so I know from personal experience how desperate these men must be to resort to this," said Albert Woodfox, a part of the Stop Solitary Coalition.

Woodfox was one of the Angola 3, three men wrongfully accused of murder held for decades in solitary at the prison. He was released from Angola in 2016 and has written a book, appropriately named "Solitary."

Contact Warden Nettles to demand the strikers be immediately released — phone (225) 655-4411. The strikers want guarantees in writing that they will be released from solitary and moved to appropriate and safe conditions.

While the issue that precipitated the hunger strike was not releasing men when their time was completed for rule violations, there are so many, many other crimes being committed against the incarcerated workers at Angola. Each of these crimes by the Louisiana Department of Corrections would more than justify a strike.

No one should have to go on a hunger strike to be treated justly. We demand: Immediately End Solitary Confinement! Tear Down the Prison Walls! Free Them All! □

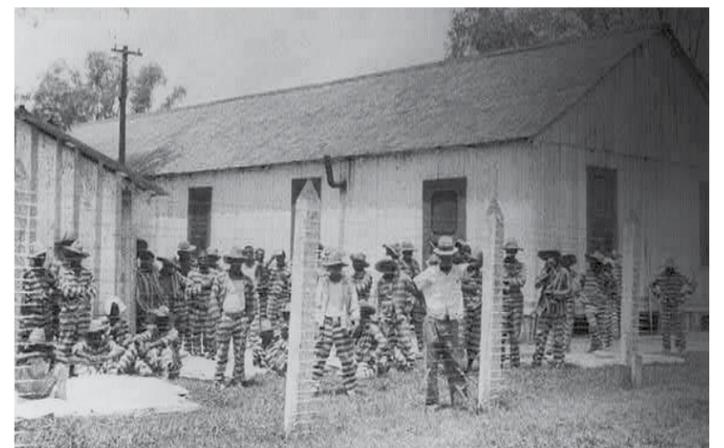


PHOTO: ALAN LOMAX

Prison compound no. 1, Angola, La. Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter) in the foreground, July 1934.

# Black rage: a new 'reconstruction' in the U.S.

By Wesley Massey

The following letter from an incarcerated worker at SCI Pine Grove was received by Workers World Feb. 24.

How do we make a paradigm shift to change how Blacks are viewed with pessimism, and on a good day cautious optimism? How do we change the culture in law enforcement that every Black man or woman is a perp ready to do harm? Ultimately how do we destroy this caste system of white superiority and white privilege?

How do we break free of a political party that since the time of Ulysses S. Grant has tried to undermine the equity Blacks sought in this country? And lastly, how do we come to understand that equality and equity are not synonymous?

The blood of slain Black men and women at the hands of modern-day lynchings call from the streets for justice! The voice of the oppressed, both Black and white, scream for equity and equality! Black and Brown men and women are the only people, [who] after being lynched, shot and killed, tortured and systematically oppressed, are told to

PEACEFULLY protest, while our enemies promote and use violence in the streets to further their agenda — most of the time behind a badge!

White superiority and racial oppression have taken new forms. No longer do they don white hoods and robes — they wear uniforms with badges; they wear black robes, and they wear business suits; and then they create systems and laws to shield themselves from scrutiny.

They don't hire us in key positions; they create laws that target our Black communities, use their badges to overpolice our neighborhoods, deny us loans and bury us in debt through high-interest loans and predatory lending practices. The most racist thing a Black person can hear is NO! — No, you can't have this loan. No, you can't have this job. No, your application to live in this apartment wasn't approved. We assumed with legislation, things like "redlining" went away, but all they did

was change the process!

Police in this country have weaponized skin color; the very color of our skin (Black and Brown) is the institution of fear that drives drastic measures to protect the white institution they've created.

### The new reconstruction

The new reconstruction in the U.S. needs to change the dynamic of pushing for equality to a driving force for minorities to have an equity stake in this country. Blacks spend one-and-a-half trillion dollars on goods, yet we have the smallest market share! Part of this is our lack of financial literacy, but a big part is being systematically pushed out from institutions such as big business and Wall Street, where we lack a serious presence to affect financial change in this country.



Wesley Massey

Ulysses S. Grant's Reconstruction Act — that was an attempt to provide Blacks in the South, who were newly freed, a form of equity starting with voting and running for political office. The

U.S. failed by not providing support and protection from the Ku Klux Klan for the voters in the South. Yet here we are in 2021, and we are still facing voter intimidation problems. Black and Brown people are tired of the double standard that exists in this country on every accord!

When we peacefully protest or rebel for that matter, we are met with a police force that is unparalleled! People are shot and killed; people have black bags put over their heads and [are] whisked away as if this were Nazi Germany!

Yet a predominately white mob can storm an institution of democracy, with the intent to do harm to its occupants, and destroy property with little-to-no opposition — and in all reality when history is written, it may be hailed as a patriotic act!

Are Black and Brown people mad? You are damn right we are! We are tired of waiting around for bureaucratic change that is never going to come, empty promises of justice! Lies about equality, smoke and mirrors about institutions of change! The blood of OUR people calls from the ground [upon] which they have been slain. Rage cries out from these prison walls for change! □

# Mental health effects of COVID lockdown in prison: Interview from inside SCI Albion

By Joe Piette

*Part 1 of a telephone interview with Demetrius Grant, imprisoned at SCI Albion near Erie, Pa., was conducted by Joe Piette for Workers World newspaper on Feb. 16.*

**Demetrius Grant:** We're going to be covering the issue of COVID-19 today, as to how it impacts prisoners' mental health. About a week ago, a sergeant told me a prisoner killed himself, and another one tried to kill himself. He said that was the thirteenth episode in the last month. How many more of these incidents are going on — not only in this institution, but in other institutions — because they're not giving prisoners proper mental health care and treatment?

**Workers World:** I was doing research earlier this morning, and the latest statistics I could find are from 2019. There were 23 suicides in Pennsylvania that year, and that was the most ever. That's a number that had been increasing in Pennsylvania, before COVID. (Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb. 20)

## Prison officials hide suicides

**DJ:** I did research too and found the same thing about suicides rising dramatically across the country. The Department of Corrections (DOC) is refusing to give the numbers of who committed suicide. I found a case called *Bowling vs. Office of Open Records* out of Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court, Appellate Jurisdiction. (findlaw.com, Feb. 5)

It says under the right-to-know law that it is remedial legislation designed to promote access to governmental information, in order to prohibit secrets about public officials' actions and to make them accountable for them. Exceptions from their actions must be narrowly construed. What it's basically saying is that under this act's terms, the DOC can't refuse to disclose this information if it's requested. (tinyurl.com/y7xb5uej)

**WW:** The article I read said prison administrators hide the suicides, calling them accidents, or they give excuses other than suicide because they don't want to open up criticism of the way they run their prisons. (shadowproof.com, Nov. 16, 2020)

**DJ:** I found out that as a private citizen, you can go to the Attorney General's office. It oversees administrative agencies like the state DOC, and there you can request an investigation under these terms. The DOC needs to be scrutinized more closely about their falsified information, when it should reveal to the public what's really going on. The state Inspector General has an obligation under the Pennsylvania Constitution to conduct an investigation.

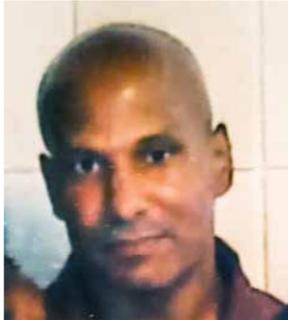
**WW:** Can you describe what is going on during the pandemic lockdown that is pushing people to kill themselves?

## Pandemic lockdowns

**DJ:** You have no sense of when this is going to end. We've been under this situation since March 2020, so every time you make inquiries about when it is going to end, the answer is that it looks like this is going to happen for the foreseeable future. Guys who have preexisting mental health problems are being locked in their

cells and only coming out for 45 minutes every other day. I've only been out to the yard once since November. I was only just able to go to the law library for the first time since last year.

People feel an utter sense of hopelessness for being locked down in this unbearable situation, in these small cells with another human being they don't even get along with. And their movements are limited. They can't contact their families. They can't fight their legal cases. They can't keep up with themselves physically. It has a profound influence on your psyche. I wake up during the night having panic attacks, which I also have during the day, because I feel like I'll never get out of this cell.



Demetrius Grant

It comes to the point when a person loses hope and feels their situation is

never going to get better. They feel they can't cope with it for long periods of time without DOC intervention to correct it. But it seems to the DOC that the institution is fine and dandy with the way things are going. They have absolute control over people.

## Cruelty of ban on in-person visits

**WW:** And there are no in-person visits from their loved ones?

**DJ:** Captain Skinner told us about a month ago, in-person visits are never coming back. He claimed the introduction of drugs coming into the institution dropped by 20%, so that's their justification for not allowing people to physically touch their kids, their mothers, their kin.

Those decisions have a dramatic effect on people. DOC experts know this, but they are turning a blind eye to this, because it's part of their long-term program. They're not looking at the danger they're causing to the prisoners, whom they have a duty to care for and protect.

**WW:** The thing is that the end of in-person visits only dropped drugs by 20%. That means 80% of the drugs are still coming in, and they must come from the guards.

**DJ:** They know this, but just as they hide the numbers about the suicide rate,

they know about the drugs too. They know the numbers, but it's not in their plans.

I have an article about when they put together their plans in 2018. It's about the guards being exposed to these drugs, resulting in the switching of the mail, so now it comes through Florida. All the people who claimed they were exposed to this, when the DOC refused to say what the hospital reports revealed, didn't match what the guards were saying. So once again they keep using these fake incidents to justify what they're doing, which is having a profound effect on the health, welfare and safety of the prison population.

**WW:** It's not just Pennsylvania. It's going on in Texas, California and other states. The suicide rates are increasing. I can't find any state that has released these statistics from 2020 during the pandemic.

## Lawsuit protests horrific conditions

**DJ:** No doubt. If you're like any human being and put in a cage constantly, and if you don't have any family or friends to lean on, and you're confined in isolation, you're in a dire situation. You can't get more isolated than that. I found a case started by the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania against the state's DOC Secretary John Wetzel about prisoners being held in horrific conditions due to an unconstitutional process that takes no account of mental illness, but in fact exacerbates it.

When prisoners are locked in extremely small cells for at least 23 hours-a-day including holidays, the lights are on in their cells all the time. They are denied adequate mental health care and are prohibited from working, participating in any rehabilitative programs or attending religious services.

The DOC's mistreatment of every prisoner violates their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the U.S. Constitution. Prisoners have physical contact with only one other human being — their assigned cell mate — who may be psychotic or violent, which may be injurious to their mental health in solitary confinement.

The Pennsylvania American Civil Liberties Union said on March 11, 2013:

"Prolonged isolation exacerbates the symptoms of mental illness. As a result, often prisoners with mental illness refuse to leave their cells for the limited recreation time or for medical treatment.

"Others experience sleeplessness, hallucinations and paranoia. Still others engage in head banging, injure themselves by cutting or attempted hanging and sometimes are successful in suicide attempts. Frequently, these symptoms are regarded as prison rule infractions, which prison officials punish with still more time in the Restricted Housing Units (RHU)." (tinyurl.com/aw7zw5v6)

The result is a Dickensian nightmare in which prisoners with mental illness are trapped in an endless cycle of isolation and punishment, which further worsens their mental health and deprives them of adequate treatment and the ability to qualify for parole.

This is the information contained in the settlement agreement compiled by Angus Love, the ACLU, the Prison Project, the Disability Rights Network, David Rudovsky and many other attorneys. The agreement with the DOC settled the lawsuit on Jan. 5, 2015. (tinyurl.com/2v96dh3m)

But they're not holding to this agreement anymore. Mental health is considered a disability. So this is even more compelling, because mental health problems are being created that should be qualified as a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. That's the reason this lawsuit was filed, and it's even more compelling today.

**WW:** So what they're doing with the severe restrictions violates the ADA?

**DJ:** Yes. And they violate the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments, because the restrictions are exacerbating problems — not only with dudes who have mental illnesses, but also creating problems for people who haven't had them until now. Being locked up in those cells long-term is having a profound long-term effect on people, not only while in prison, but it will affect them making parole. Prisoners can be put in the RHU for rule infractions, when officials know they are suffering from mental health problems which will be long-term. □

**FREEDOM FOR PALESTINIAN STUDENTS!**

*Hundreds of Palestinian university and high school students are jailed by the Israeli occupation. Their organizations are banned and their activities repressed. Palestinian students need freedom and solidarity!*

**JOIN THE CAMPAIGN: FREEPALESTINIANSTUDENTS.ORG**

**Hundreds of Palestinian students** are routinely detained by the Israeli occupation, especially those who are part of student organizations involved with campus political life. At Bir Zeit University alone, approximately **74 students were detained by occupation soldiers during the 2019-2020 academic year.** They are among nearly **5,000 Palestinian political prisoners** jailed by Israel. The work of student organizing, from holding book fairs to organizing events and participating in student elections, is criminalized by the Israeli occupation.

Palestinian students have been seized by Israeli occupation forces and abducted for their participation in the student movement **in their homes, at their workplaces and on their campuses.**

Once arrested, Palestinian students are routinely subjected to **torture under interrogation** — subjected to stress positions and stretched out over chairs, suspended from walls and forced to stand on tiptoe, deprived of sleep, cuffed and pressured on injured limbs, and beaten.

Palestinian students may be sent to administrative detention — imprisonment without charge or trial, indefinitely renewable in six-month periods. Palestinians routinely spend years **jailed with no charges, no trial** and no real challenge to the deprivation of their rights. They may be brought before Israeli military courts, which **convict over 99% of the Palestinians charged** there.

## JOIN THE CAMPAIGN OF ACTION

- **Boycott, divest from and sanction Israel, including Israeli academic institutions,** which are fully complicit in the systematic deprivation of Palestinian rights.
- **End all military and economic aid, military transactions, joint projects and direct funding** to the Israeli occupation regime by our governments.
- **Challenge "normalization" programs that aim to legitimize Israeli occupation** — this is an attempt to legitimize the criminalization of Palestinian students.
- **Organize to build direct links of solidarity with Palestinian students and the Palestinian student movement.**

**GET INVOLVED: FREEPALESTINIANSTUDENTS.ORG**

## 'Rubin never lost a case'

# Rubin Kanowitz, 1931-2021

By John Catalinotto

Some younger Workers World Party members met Rubin Kanowitz for the first time when he was a communist elder, still confronting cops on recent demonstrations chanting, "Black Lives Matter." Older ones knew him from when he first joined the party in 1965. All grieved as they learned he died this Jan. 26 at the age of 89.

We knew this bad news was likely once we heard that Rubin and his spouse Joyce Kanowitz, also a party member for 56 years, were hospitalized after testing positive for COVID-19. Joyce survived. Rubin returned to his home and died with loved ones present, within restrictions the pandemic has imposed.

Most stays for hospitalized COVID-19 patients are horribly lonely. Rubin's ever-present optimism and open solidarity with all the essential caregivers and housekeeping staff won friends and led to one wonderful moment: A Filipina nurse, who is a leader in the BAYAN USA movement, recognized him as a WWP militant and made his day by singing "The Internationale" for him. Working-class internationalism lives.

Like almost any WWP comrade with 50-plus years of party work, Rubin wrote articles, made political talks and took part in thousands of street demonstrations, rallies, political meetings, fundraising socials, headquarters cleanups and childcare sessions — to some of the children, he was a favorite uncle. And birthday parties! Rubin was at all of them, as he



Rubin, with Joyce Kanowitz.

WW PHOTO: BRENDA RYAN

treasured the morale of individual comrades as much as he hated the crimes of the ruling class.

That he managed to stay active in the streets until he was nearly 90 is further proof that revolutionaries never retire from their real profession. If they're lucky, they can leave the "day job." Rubin had been an economist.

### Work Fairness in the 1990s

In the mid-1990s, Rubin took on a new political task. WWP First Secretary Larry Holmes said this about Rubin's activities in that period:

"President Bill Clinton pushed through a reactionary welfare reform bill in 1996. The reform bill placed limits on how long workers could receive welfare and forced millions of poor workers, mostly women, to work for their small welfare payments, which was tantamount to being forced to work for subminimum wages. These were workfare workers.

"Rubin helped to organize Work Fairness, an organization of workfare

workers. The "reform" forced these workers to go to hearings before an administrative judge. The hearing aimed to find an excuse to discontinue their benefit payments. Rubin would accompany the workers, acting as their lawyer.

"Rubin never lost a case."

Some of Rubin's day jobs were on Wall Street. As you might imagine, it was an unpleasant environment for a professional revolutionary. He was in the midst of the very people whose class rule he yearned to overthrow.

Like all of human history, our lives too are filled with contradictions, including our jobs. Contradictory benefits of a Wall Street job are that: (1) you learn what the class enemy is like up close; (2) you see their weak points; and (3) you are able to help fund the organization to fight them, in this case WWP. Rubin did all three, and he and Joyce were generous to their party as well as their family, friends and comrades.

They were especially supportive of the Black Liberation struggle. Even before we in WWP met him, Rubin was active in the Civil Rights Movement. Later, in the mid-to-late 1960s, Rubin and Joyce hosted fundraising socials at their apartment near Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn. One such social was for the Deacons for Defense and Justice, which organized armed self-defense of Black communities in the Deep South.

Rubin's connection to WWP began in January 1965, when the women of that Brooklyn neighborhood, including his spouse Joyce, made sandwiches to support a struggle for Black community control of the schools. Then President Lyndon Johnson escalated the Vietnam War, which accelerated everyone's political development. Before long, they and others of their Brooklyn neighbors had joined the Party.

Perhaps the real influence setting Rubin's lifetime course was his childhood in Brooklyn's East New York neighborhood in the 1930s and 1940s, which he often talked about. He may have worked some years on Wall Street, but his roots in that community's immigrant proletariat nourished him. And he never strayed. One might say he came full circle.

As comrade Shelley Ettinger wrote, Rubin "had the Party's back, was all in for the Party and for the struggle, at all times. He was an anti-racist, anti-Zionist, working-class, old, communist, Jewish comrade. He gave it his all.

"Rubin Kanowitz, presente!" □



New York, March 24, 2012.

WW PHOTO: BRENDA RYAN

## Biden pick for Secretary of Agriculture

# Vilsack no friend of farmworkers or farmers

By Ted Kelly

President Joe Biden nominated former Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack to head the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a job he held for the entire Obama administration from 2009 to 2017. Vilsack testified before the Senate on Feb. 2 — Groundhog Day — and was confirmed a few weeks later.

Vilsack's eight-year tenure was disastrous for Black farmers. Workers World reported Feb. 12: "Since 1920, over a million Black families have lost their farms (Guardian Aug. 15, 2019), and they now constitute less than 2% of all farm owners. A 2019 Center for American Progress study found the USDA 'has a long and well-documented

history of discrimination against Black farmers. The unequal administration of government farm support programs, crucial to protecting farmers from an inherently risky enterprise, has had a profound impact on rural communities of color."

The NAACP and other civil rights organizations strongly opposed the nomination of Vilsack over his treatment of Black farmers, as well as his quick and unceremonious

firing of Shirley Sherrod, the first Black Director of Rural Development in Georgia for the USDA, in July 2010. Sherrod had been the target of right-wing attacks. (tinyurl.com/yahmt8o6)

Rod Bradshaw, a 67-year-old Black farm owner in Kansas, told the Associated Press: "We have already seen what Vilsack is going to do. We don't have a prayer if he gets in there." Bill McGill, 76 years old, lost the small second-generation farm that he inherited from his parents in Bakersfield, Calif., when the same USDA agent he approached for a loan put the land up for sale. "I don't get attached to hardly nothing any more," he told the Feb. 24 Guardian.

In 1997, Timothy Pigford became a plaintiff in a federal class action lawsuit filed by Black farmers against the Clinton administration's USDA Secretary Dan Glickman. In *Pigford v. Glickman*, federal courts concurred with claims of systemic racial discrimination, but it was not until 2007 that the Pigford Claims Remedy Act allowed Black farmers to apply for reparations. The first paltry settlement payments were not disbursed until 2013.

WW reported in 2016: "Because the settlement took decades to resolve, many

farmers died waiting for justice. Of the 18,000 claims approved, 4,000 to 5,000 are estate claims." (tinyurl.com/33y8ua35)

The consolidation of farmland into fewer private holdings has cost thousands of agricultural workers their jobs. The decline of agricultural commodity prices has become so dire that farmworkers (along with fishing and forestry workers) commit suicide at the highest rate of any sector of the working class — 6.5 times that of the average population. And small farmers are heavily impacted and at risk. In 2018, the dairy company Agri-Mark included a list of suicide hotlines when it mailed farmers checks for their products.

### Food safety threatened

Vilsack eliminated multiple food safety regulations, including the Microbiological Data Program, which monitored foodborne pathogens. As a result, incidents of salmonella infections have steadily increased since 2012, when he eliminated the MDP.

He removed genetically modified organism labeling standards and expedited the process for approving GMO products developed by chemical corporations like Monsanto. In 2019, Monsanto was ordered to pay \$80 million in damages to California residents who had developed cancer from exposure to glyphosate-based herbicides in the company's Roundup weed spray.

Vilsack defended the beef industry's use of the ammonia-treated additive known as

"pink slime." In 2012, Vilsack said there was "no question" of the product's safety, despite Canada and the European Union banning the use of ammonia gas to sterilize food. (Mother Jones, April 2, 2012)

Rather than bolster worker protections and stabilize the volatile agricultural sector through central planning, the capitalist state's only response to falling commodity prices is international economic aggression. This was one of the primary purposes of Trump's "U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement," a rebranding of NAFTA, which was praised by big agribusiness.

During the Feb. 2 Senate hearing, Vilsack announced he would prioritize "foreign market access" in Southeast Asia and Africa. "Certainly our competitors are doing that," he added, a clear reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative, which has been empowering nations to construct their own agricultural infrastructure.

During the four years of the Trump administration, Vilsack collected a \$1 million annual salary as CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council, a role that is now filled by former DuPont executive Krysta Harden, Vilsack's former deputy secretary at the USDA between 2013 and 2016.

In January 2020, Vilsack won the lottery in Iowa, where he had served two terms as governor from 1999-2007, and pocketed the \$150,000 winnings. Clearly, his sympathies are not with superexploited agricultural workers or struggling small farmers, especially Black farmers. □

**Rather than bolster worker protections and stabilize the volatile agricultural sector through central planning, the capitalist state's only response to falling commodity prices is international economic aggression.**

# The Bessemer front in the international class struggle

By Christian Noakes

Bessemer, Ala., is now the site of a historic labor struggle between the Amazon warehouse workers there and the \$1.7 trillion international capitalist monopoly corporation. About 80% of the warehouse workers are African American, and almost half are women.

In March 2020, Amazon opened up the BHM1 fulfillment center in this predominantly Black working-class city that sits on the west edge of Birmingham, Ala. Within two months, the workers began to push for union representation by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). The workers dubbed themselves “BAmazon Union.”

If successful, the Alabama workers will have established the first union in the U.S. within behemoth Amazon.

The workers were spurred by brutally harsh working conditions, the threat of demotion or termination for not meeting ever-increasing quotas and management’s refusal to take measures to adequately protect workers from COVID-19.

According to Michael “Big Mike” Foster, a key union organizer and poultry plant worker, “We didn’t just show up at Amazon. The workers from Amazon called us. Because they have been crying out with their voices, and Amazon has ignored them the whole time. So we got together with the group, and we put a plan together to come out here and help these people.” (facebook.com/SupportAmazonWorkers)

## Union drive accelerates

By last November, over 2,000 workers had signed cards and a petition to call for union recognition. Then RWDSU successfully petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to schedule a vote. For an NLRB election to be set, at least 30% of workers at a location have to sign a non-binding union card — a goal which was well surpassed.

The NLRB agreed to a mail-in vote in accordance with social distancing safety. Amazon then appealed that decision and pressed for an in-person vote — a ploy to suppress voter turn-out. The NLRB denied Amazon’s appeal. The workers began voting on Feb. 8 and have until March 29 to return their ballots. Vote counting is scheduled to start the following day.

The possibility of a Bessemer union victory is heightened by Amazon’s

vulnerability to organized labor action during the COVID pandemic. Unlike manufacturing, which can be moved out of Alabama or even overseas, Amazon needs its merchandise warehoused near customers for “last mile delivery.” Amazon can’t stockpile packages and wait out a strike or protest — that would upend its “instant shipping” promise.

Increased pandemic online shopping makes warehouse workers more essential than ever — and gives these workers more weight and incentive to organize.

## Battle for freedom in Alabama

Alabama — particularly the Birmingham-Bessemer area — has a centuries-old tradition of Black-led organizing against enslavement, racist land seizures, Jim Crow racism, prison-convict labor, segregation laws and Ku Klux Klan violence. Within living memory of the Amazon workers and their families is their starkly dedicated struggle against white-supremacist assassinations and bombings of Black churches and homes during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

And despite the Jim Crow, Taft Hartley Act, and right-to-work laws in Alabama, the state has a militant tradition of worker organizing, especially Black workers. From 1928 to 1951, the Communist Party successfully organized throughout Alabama from the Sharecroppers Union to the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers union, which was majority Black. (Workers World, “Lessons of ‘The Hammer and the Hoe,’” Dec. 21, 2017)

There are parallels between the Bessemer struggle and the fierce class battle of the 1930s against the world’s then-largest corporation: General Motors. GM’s assembly lines were not that different from Amazon’s; GM’s notorious speedup — when management ran auto assembly lines faster to increase production — became a standard corporate management tactic to more heavily exploit workers.

The victory at GM inspired more union struggles and victories in a range



PHOTO: PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION FOR PROGRESS  
People's Organization for Progress rally outside Whole Foods, Newark, N.J., Feb. 27.

of industries. The historic Flint Sit-down Strike by workers — a 44-day occupation of Michigan plants — won the first union contract from GM in 1937. (Workers World, “GM 1937, Amazon 2021: Which side are you on?” Feb. 2)

## Amazon attacks worker organizing

Today the BAmazon workers in Bessemer are going up against the second-largest company in the U.S. and the ninth-largest in the world. Including Amazon-owned Whole Foods, the company currently employs 1.37 million workers in the U.S., not counting delivery drivers.

Amazon has the highest market capitalization — based on stock value and number of outstanding shares — of any corporation anywhere. To keep its stock prices and profits astronomical, Amazon must keep its workers from unionizing, wherever and however it can.

In Bessemer, Amazon is running an aggressive campaign of lies and intimidation. Management posts anti-union material throughout the warehouse and sends texts threatening to close if unionized.

A company website is rife with misinformation, stating: “An authorization card or online form is legally binding and may obligate you to pay monthly dues immediately from your paycheck. There are no free trials.”

That statement is a lie. Neither the cards nor the online forms are legally binding. The Taft-Hartley Act was originally passed to break up union organizing in the South, and workers in “right-to-work” states like Alabama are therefore neither obligated to join a union nor pay dues if they work in a unionized shop.

The company has sent emails to BAmazon workers offering to pay \$2,000 or more if they will resign their jobs — a tactic that may be an illegal bribe under federal law. (paydayreport.com, Feb. 21) And there have even been reports that Amazon had traffic lights “mistimed” to keep organizers from talking to workers driving in and out during shift changes. (tinyurl.com/y9z0gdem)

Amazon has relied on the notoriously anti-union law firm Morgan Lewis to attack worker organizing. Morgan Lewis has fought other Amazon unionization attempts and defended the company against worker lawsuits over inadequate pandemic precautions and racist discrimination. The law firm writes that it aims to “identify risks and develop strategies and solutions to help employers avoid litigation and other employee disputes, including those that involve unions or organizing campaigns.” (tinyurl.com/j24bz85b)

## Solidarity campaign

Amazon has spared no expense in fighting unionization at one warehouse. That reflects the capitalist need to hold absolute power to exploit workers. Amazon’s union-busting campaign shows the company knows the potential impact beyond Bessemer.

Workers in European countries have been organizing — and striking — at Amazon units for several years. In 2018, workers — represented in Germany by the Ver.di service workers’ union, in Spain by UNI Global Union and in Britain by GMB — walked out or struck on Amazon Prime Days in July 16-17, 2020, and “Black Friday” in November.

What happens at Bessemer has global implications. The stakes in the current battle could not be higher — for Amazon workers everywhere and ultimately for the worldwide working class. This fight is a fight of the international proletariat.

What is most needed now is mass global solidarity with the Bessemer workers of Amazon BHM1. On Feb. 20, a U.S. campaign generated over 50 simultaneous solidarity actions. More actions are underway throughout March.

For solidarity actions, see [supportamazonworkers.org](http://supportamazonworkers.org). Other contributors to this article were John Catalinotto, Martha Grevatt and Minnie Bruce Pratt.

## Bessemer Amazon workers: ‘They are showing the way’

The following remarks were given by Joan Hwang (she/they), an organizer with the Workers Assembly Against Racism, at a Feb. 20 rally in New York City, in solidarity with Amazon workers organizing a union drive in Bessemer, Ala. Hwang is also an urban farmer.

We are out here today in the capital of capitalism, the belly of the beast, New York City, in spite of the many serious challenges we are faced with. Or maybe because of them. These are intensely difficult times we are living in. The end days of capitalism are not pretty or easy.

Right now millions of people across this country are suffering — left without power, heat, shelter, water — in the richest nation in the history of the world. Of course, this is disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities who have always borne the brunt of the crises wrought by capitalism: our Black, Brown, Indigenous, homeless and incarcerated family. It’s clearer now than ever before that we’re living under a state incapable of providing its people anything but violence and war.

And yet, in the midst of the pain and trauma, we find reason for hope in this historic union organizing drive.

Now, I believe that the workers in Bessemer are in it

to win it. And when they do, it will be a triumphant day

for workers everywhere. But it’s bigger than just winning the vote. The fact that they have undertaken this struggle, have come this far along, and continue every day to battle against this behemoth — arguably the most powerful transnational corporation in the world and the face of modern capitalism — is a feat in and of itself.

This month is Black History Month, and Black workers in Alabama are making history right NOW, taking on the world’s biggest corporate monster. In keeping with history, the overlooked and undervalued but indispensable leadership of Black women is the force driving this critical struggle forward.

All workers have so much to learn from Black history about hundreds of years of resistance. We can support resistance TODAY by supporting the Bessemer Amazon workers! They are showing the way, and we must follow their lead. If these most oppressed workers, against all odds in the deepest anti-union atmosphere, can organize, because it is what must be done, we have no excuse not to do the same. □



Joan Hwang.

WWW PHOTO: G. DUNKEL

## Support grows for Alabama Amazon union

Continued from page 1

candidate Nina Turner and actor and activist Susan Sarandon tweeted their support. Turner plans to attend a solidarity rally outside a Cleveland Whole Foods March 13.

## Labor solidarity expands

The 1.6 million-strong AFSCME issued a solidarity statement Feb. 23 declaring, “It’s time for Amazon workers to have a voice on the job.”

On Feb. 26, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Tina Fey, Shaka King and over 1,760 members of the Writers Guild of America East and WGA West signed a public statement urging Amazon workers to “Vote Union Yes.” Over 30 of the signers have produced films and programs for Amazon Prime.

Southern Workers Assembly, Workers Assembly Against Racism, Democratic Socialists of America, Our Revolution and People’s Organization for Progress, along with the newly formed Support Alabama Amazon Union campaign, are among the groups that continue to organize demonstrations outside sites for Amazon, Whole Foods and Amazon’s union-busting law firm Morgan Lewis.

Support Alabama Amazon Union has called for a “virtual week of action” March 1-5, culminating in a zoom organizing meeting March 6 to build for an International Day of Action March 20. For more info visit [supportamazonworkers.org](http://supportamazonworkers.org). □

# Nadezhda Krupskaya: Bolshevik revolutionary, educator

By Devin Cole

Feb. 14 is the birth date of Nadezhda Krupskaya — Bolshevik revolutionary, educator and library advocate. Although born to a formerly aristocratic family, her family had descended into poverty, which led her to study Marxism. She joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903.

In 1905, Krupskaya became Secretary of the Central Committee of the RSDLP's Bolshevik wing, which later became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, after the split in 1917 with the nonrevolutionary Mensheviks.

In the early days of the Soviet Union, Krupskaya took charge of the Adult Education Division of the new educational system, which revolutionized education in the world's first socialist republic.

In 1924, as a member of the CPSU Central Committee, Krupskaya used her platform to advocate greater gains for women workers and to promote the Soviet educational system. From 1927 to 1939, she served as the country's Deputy Minister of Education, and she was the Deputy Education Commissar from 1929 to 1939.

Later in life, Krupskaya turned her attention to the libraries of the Soviet Union. Prior to the revolution, they had been exclusive club-like settings where only the educated and literate were permitted entry. After the revolution, this inequity did not disappear right away.

Krupskaya began a complete overhaul of all libraries in the country, through literacy campaigns and collaboration between libraries to serve the public. This included assessing people's needs and learning what they wanted to read.

Then it involved obtaining books relevant to what was wanted or needed for either studying or reading for pleasure.

Krupskaya revolutionized the practice of training librarians. She opened the first "library seminaries" in the Soviet Union, where practicing librarians taught and trained new librarians in the skills of their profession. This allowed many more people to not only become librarians, but to develop into revolutionary librarians.

To Krupskaya, librarians and educators were the facilitators of the revolution and would be the experts in explaining literature, literacy and writing skills to the people, so they could better understand and preserve the Soviet Union's socialist values.

Krupskaya met Vladimir Lenin at a Marxist reading group in 1894. They married in 1898, while exiled in Siberia, and remained together until Lenin's death in 1924.



Nadezhda Krupskaya

Nadezhda Krupskaya died in 1939 at the age of 70. She was a dedicated Communist, revolutionary and educator until the end of her life. □

## Cuban 'Red Rose' wins journalism honor

By Rubén G. Abelenda

*This slightly edited article was published in Resumen-english.org.*

Feb. 27 — It was José Martí who said "Honor for those who deserve honor" — but he could never have imagined that the highest distinction awarded to journalists in Cuba would bear his name — [an award established] after the triumph of the revolution on the Caribbean island on Jan. 1, 1959.

In 2021, this prestigious prize of recognition has been awarded to our colleague Rosa Miriam Elizalde, whom I had the good fortune to meet in 2003 in Madrid, and with whom it was a privilege to share work in various capitals, including Havana, in the years that followed.

I will never forget when, in December of that year, on the Spanish island of Lanzarote, she interviewed the famous Portuguese writer, novelist, poet, journalist and playwright Jose Saramago. With her pen, Elizalde put an end to one of the many media campaigns against Cuba that have been repeated to denigrate the Revolution.

Nor can I forget that the "Cuban Red Rose" — as a dear friend from Madrid, a member of the same social communications profession, christened her — worked tirelessly, did not sleep, ate little, and wrote non-stop, rocking in front of her computer, as she continues to do to this day.

She is also the one who inspired another journalist of Spanish origin to dedicate part of his time to writing articles in favor of Cuba and the Great Homeland.

Admired for her professionalism, her modesty and her kindness, the "Cuban Red Rose" is one of the pioneers, if not the first, to encourage and make many people understand the need to use social networks in defense of our Caribbean nation and the just causes of Our America and the world.

In that battle she has given her all, and in fact became one of the most knowledgeable in our country about the internet and social networks, a kind of think tank from which we should all drink her knowledge, in order to face the worst of the unconventional wars waged against our country — for which the island is now very well prepared.

We must not fail to mention Elizalde's loyalty and affection for Fidel Castro, her familiarity, her constant concern for her daughter and her nearest and dearest, and her culinary specialty, a pumpkin cream that I also had the opportunity to try on several occasions when we visited her.

From African lands, I am compelled to write these lines to congratulate the Cuban "Red Rose" for having been awarded the José Martí 2021 National Journalism Prize for Life's Work. Undoubtedly it is worth saying the phrase of Martí: "Honor for those who deserve honor."

*Rubén G. Abelenda is a journalist and the Cuban Ambassador to Gambia.*



Rosa Miriam Elizalde

PHOTO: ISMAEL FRANCISCO

## Women's History Month! Build Workers World!

As Marxists, we strive not just to honor history, but to make it — to promote change that puts workers and oppressed peoples first and to recognize their leadership.

Today, Black women and their male co-workers, 80% of the workforce, are fighting for unionization at Amazon's warehouse in Bessemer, Ala. If they win, it would be the first union drive to score a victory against this corporate behemoth. Their struggle is inspiring workers everywhere.

Women make up two-thirds of the 20 million workers who are paid \$10.10 per hour or less; half are women of color. The gender pay gap exists, with African American, Latinx, Indigenous and immigrant women earning the lowest salaries. It's no wonder that they are leading the "Fight for \$15" hourly wage and a union movement!

During the pandemic, nurses and other health care workers, especially women, have organized — even gone on strike — to demand adequate staffing, safe working conditions and protective equipment. Teachers and other essential workers have pressed their demands, too.

To honor women workers, the 1910 International Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen declared March 8 to be International Working Women's Day. On that date in 1908, 15,000 women immigrant garment workers and socialists marched for better working conditions. Congress proclaimed

March as Women's History Month in 1987. People of all genders mark IWWD worldwide.

Socialists have long recognized struggle as the only way to improve women's lives. Like the

Black Lives Matter movement, started by women and LGBTQ+ activists, which boldly fights racism and police violence. Like the McDonald's workers who led a 10-city walkout to protest sexual abuse, boosted by the #MeToo Movement.

Workers World expresses solidarity with women who are exploited on the job, those subjected to racism, misogyny, bigotry, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia. We demand the release of im/migrant women and children from ICE detention and family reunification. We support gender-nonconforming and trans people, who constantly risk physical attack.

If you appreciate WW's extensive coverage of women's struggles, join the WW Supporter Program. For donations of \$75, \$100, \$300 — or more if you can, members receive a year's subscription to WW, a regular letter about timely issues and one, two or three free subscriptions (respectively), for friends. Supporters can receive the "What Road to Socialism?" book upon request. (Or read it at [workers.org/books](http://workers.org/books))

Write checks to Workers World and mail them (monthly or annually), with your name and address, to 147 W. 24th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10011. Or sign up at [workers.org/donate/](http://workers.org/donate/) to make monthly deductions.

We appreciate your help in building Workers World! □



Jan. 20, 2018, Women's March.

Join the International Working Women's Day Coalition

**WOMEN & GENDER-OPPRESSED WORKERS RISE UP: THE REAL PANDEMIC IS CAPITALISM**

WATCH FOR SYMPTOMS: THE CURE IS GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AND RESISTANCE

- COVID-19
- Systemic Racism
- Poverty
- Evictions
- Union-Busting
- Joblessness
- Hunger
- Militarism
- Domestic violence
- Environmental disasters

This list does not include all possible symptoms of Capitalism

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## Ecuador elections

# Calm before the storm: World watches drama unfold

By Michael Otto  
Ibarra, Ecuador

Feb. 19 — Almost 10 million voters, a record 81% of those eligible, went to the polls Feb. 7, despite the pandemic, to choose among 16 candidates in Ecuador's presidential elections. The two top vote-getters will compete in the April 11 runoff elections. No candidate received enough votes to win in the first round.

Three center-left parties got 70% of the votes.

Andrés Arauz, representing a continuation of the movement led by former President Rafael Correa, came in first place with 32.7% of the vote. Arauz is a former minister in the government of Correa running for the progressive Union for Hope-Central Democratic Party (UNES-CD).

Lawyer Dr. Yaku Pérez came in third with an unprecedented 19.4% of the vote for his Patchakutik party (PK), which represents the Indigenous Movement and demonstrates mass support for the goals of the uprising.

Entrepreneur Xavier Hervas, the TikTok candidate, was the biggest election surprise, capturing many of the youth. He came in fourth with 15.7% of the vote for the Izquierda Democrática (ID), which identifies as a social-democratic party.

More than 1.2 million null and blank votes reflect massive uncertainty and frustration of people who can't find a candidate they trust.

Ex-banker Guillermo Lasso, considered "co-governor" of the country with incumbent and extremely unpopular President Lenín Moreno, got only 19.7%, a distant second place and a virtual tie with Pérez to participate in the runoff.

Lasso's identification with Moreno resulted in an avalanche against his party CREO (Creating Opportunities) and the Social Christian Party (PSC). These two normally competing right-wing parties united to back Lasso in an attempt to maintain their grip as the power brokers

in Ecuador. Moreno himself got only 1.5% of the vote, an electoral disaster.

The heavy hammer that nailed neoliberal right-wing governance was the anger, pain and frustration of millions of people who had participated in or supported the Indigenous-led Great Uprising of October 2019. That social explosion against the International Monetary Fund austerity package shut the country down for 11 days.

Washington was behind the Moreno government and backed its vicious and brutal repression of the October 2019 uprising.

During the last 12 months of the pandemic, Moreno used the crisis as both an opportunity and a political shield. Knowing that the people would not go into the streets as they did during October, he satisfied the IMF demands for billions in loan repayments and enacted neoliberal laws, which only magnified the harm caused by the crisis. The traitor goes down in history as Ecuador's worst president. Unemployment, hunger and death stalk the land.

A million workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, and more than 35,000 people died above the annual average due to COVID-19. Education and health care cuts and unemployment mean untold misery for the poorest Ecuadorians. The youth of Ecuador, and especially Indigenous and Black youth, are facing a very bleak future indeed.

### Role of U.S., Venezuela

Moreno met recently in Washington, D.C., with Luis Almagro, general secretary of the Organization of American States (OAS). Almagro was a key player in the 2019 coup against Bolivia and the unconventional U.S. war on Venezuela. Moreno invited U.S. police and military to advise the forces of state repression, and he upgraded the airport in the Galápagos Islands for the imperialists to use at their discretion against Venezuela. Now Lasso has dirtied the election process by baiting Venezuela.

Pérez's supporters see him as a militant water defender, a champion of Indigenous territorial and cultural rights.

Others have a different opinion. The victorious Bolivian President Luis Arce, for example, whose landslide victory reversed Bolivia's coup, refused to invite Pérez to the inauguration in Bolivia. The truth is that Pérez and Patchakutik had collaborated with the Moreno government until just before the October uprising.

Arce did invite Arauz and Indigenous leader Jaime Vargas Vargas, President of the Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE), to come to his inaugural ceremony, and they both attended Nov. 8, 2020.

Arauz promises to restore Ecuadorian sovereignty and rebuild the regional integration that the U.S. and the Latin American pro-imperialist oligarchy opposes. He has friendly relations with leaders in Cuba, Venezuela and several progressive governments in the hemisphere.

It may be said that Arauz needs to begin the process of unification now in order to win the second round, facing a formidable right-wing power structure, assuming Lasso remains his opponent. Lasso's second-place finish, however, is still being protested by Pérez and a large part of the Indigenous movement. Washington prefers Lasso, but will use all its weapons against Arauz.

### The National Assembly

The Indigenous-based Patchakutik Party will be a force in the next government, and debate will return to the National Assembly. Two-thirds of the future parliament will be formed by the three center-left parties. Arauz's

party, the UNES-CD, won 46 seats for the Progressives; Yaku Pérez and his Plurinational Unit (PK) have 26 seats; Social Democracy (ID) has 17 seats.

Banker Guillermo Lasso and his allies have only 12 seats, while the party of Moreno got none. The right wing took a big hit.

The new president and the new Assembly will need to cooperate to deal

with the failed state, an economy in recession, unemployment and the crisis surrounding the provision of COVID-19 vaccines. Taxing the rich and halting the drain of resources into tax havens are progressive issues. The decriminalization of protest, extractivism, the rights of the LGBTIQ+ population, the right to abortion, restoration of labor protections and the right of unions to bargain collectively, the expansion of human rights, free trade agreements and mining concessions will all be debated.

International interference: The Colombian regime of Iván Duque, a cat's-paw of U.S. imperialism, is working with regional media and the Moreno forces to produce fake news that discredits Arauz and his UNES-CD party in the weeks leading up to the April 11 final elections.

There are unresolved differences between the CONAIE Indigenous movement and the Indigenous candidate Yaku Pérez. However, those differences have not resulted in a pact between CONAIE and Arauz's UNES-CD.

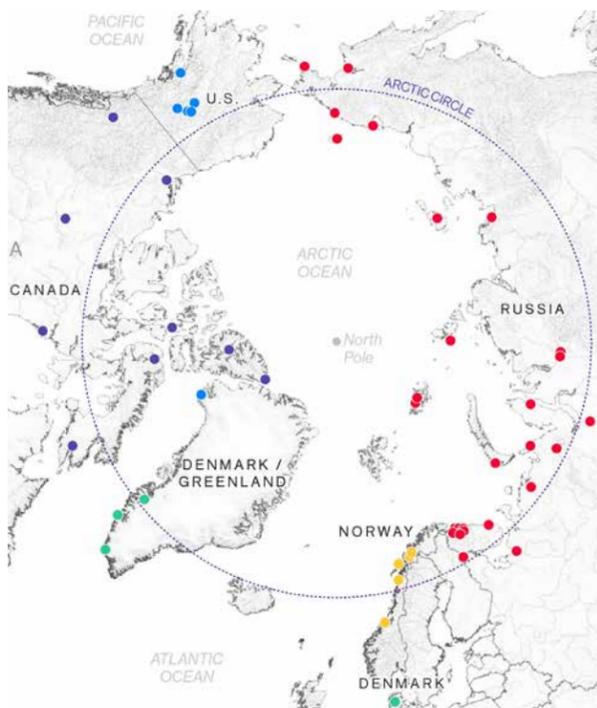
If Andrés Arauz as president wants to build an alliance with the Indigenous movement in the interest of the well-being of most Ecuadorians, he will have to confront powerful forces within his own party. Those are the forces that depend on the extraction of wealth from Indigenous areas. □

**Washington was behind the Moreno government and backed its vicious and brutal repression of the October 2019 uprising.**

## Biden sends B-1 bombers to Norway, threatens Russia

By Ted Kelly

The U.S. Air Force announced during February that it is sending four B-1 bombers and at least 200 personnel to Orland Air Base on the central coast of Norway. Pentagon officials made no secret of the fact that the



Military bases on or near the now navigable Arctic Sea.

deployment is meant as a threat to Russia, which is well within range of U.S. airstrikes.

According to a Feb. 2 article in Forbes, "Missile-armed B-1s could pose a serious threat to Russia's Northern Fleet. In staging the bombers from Norway, the United States obviously intends to make that threat perfectly clear." The B-1 can carry 24 missiles to strike ships at sea.

This escalation of tensions sends a message both to Russia and to Washington's NATO allies that control over the Arctic Circle will be of paramount importance to U.S. imperialism under President Joe Biden.

Washington and its NATO allies are revealing their goal: to prevent Russia from developing from a regional capitalist power into a full-blown imperialist rival. U.S. naval vessels routinely patrol the edges of Russian territorial waters to provoke confrontations.

In one such encounter earlier this year in the Black Sea, when a Russian fighter jet flew close to a U.S. naval destroyer, the U.S. Navy tweeted that it has the U.S. Sixth Fleet there to provide "freedom of movement within international waters for all nations in the Black Sea."

In reality, U.S. projection of its military power aims to establish U.S. imperialism's domination of the seas, restricting freedom of movement for U.S. opponents and hegemony over its imperialist rivals.

### Domination of the Arctic

The deployment to Norway of B-1 bombers also prevents Russia from competing for the rich natural resources beneath the Arctic and from freely using the Arctic Sea for trade.

The Biden administration thereby continues the policies

of the prior administration, but more effectively. Donald Trump maneuvered to control the Arctic's riches by offering to purchase Greenland from its former colonial overlord, Denmark. Though also a NATO member, Denmark's government rejected Trump's farcical offer. The Norwegian government, however, accepted Biden's deployment.

Apart from uranium, rare earth metals, and gold, the northern polar region is also estimated to contain 25 percent of the world's entire untapped fossil fuel supply. Due to climate change, Arctic sea ice is receding rapidly, making these previously unreachable resources ripe for exploitation and creating new waterways in previously unnavigable parts of the Arctic Sea.

While Norway's capitalist government — Norway is part of the NATO military alliance — accepted the U.S. imposition of the bombers, the Red Party, a revolutionary socialist organization founded in Norway in 2007, objected in a televised debate between its spokesperson, Member of Parliament Bjoernar Moxnes, and Norway's defense minister.

"Our main argument," the Red Party wrote in an email to Workers World, "is that placing B-1 bombers here endangers the security of Norway, instead of strengthening it. It also violates this country's policy not to allow foreign offensive weapons and troops to be placed in Norway for an extended period when not in wartime.

"The placement of B-1 bombers accelerates the process of making Norway a U.S. aircraft carrier in the Arctic region and destabilizes peace in our area. We have also criticized the former decisions to place armaments and U.S. soldiers for longer periods on the soil of Norway." □

**WORKERS WORLD** ✨ *editorials*

# Raise the minimum wage to \$15 — at least!

A \$15-per-hour minimum wage cannot be included in the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill proposed by Congressional Democrats. So ruled the Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth McDonough, on Feb. 25. This unelected official called it “irrelevant to budget legislation.”

This edict is a brutal blow to millions of struggling workers.

Nevertheless, the House of Representatives passed the bill 219 to 212 on Feb. 27 with the minimum wage increase intact. It will now move to the Senate — but most likely without the hourly pay raise, because of the parliamentarian’s ruling.

All Republicans in the House and Senate, plus two conservative Democratic senators, oppose this wage hike. So, despite the Democratic Party wielding a majority in the Senate, it might not have passed there, even if it were included in the relief bill. Behind the scenes are powerful corporate moguls and Wall Street financiers who are vehemently opposed to this minimum wage increase.

There are procedural means to circumvent or override the parliamentarian’s ruling, which have been used in the past by Democratic and Republican administrations, but the Biden White House has apparently decided to abide by McDonough’s decision and not challenge it. “He respects the parliamentarian’s decision and the Senate’s process,” said White House press secretary Jen Psaki. (CNN, Feb. 25)

Sen. Bernie Sanders and other Congress members proposed a Plan B: to tax corporations that don’t pay their workers at least \$15 per hour. But top Democrats put the kibosh on this idea, reported the Feb. 28 Washington Post. This failure to act extends an emergency for low-wage workers!

## Disaster for millions

Two-thirds of workers report they have been living paycheck to paycheck since COVID-19 hit U.S. shores. Nearly half were in that predicament even prior to the pandemic. This is due to extremely low wages, combined with the exorbitant costs of housing and other necessities.

Many families are one paycheck away

from economic ruin, and face a crisis every month when bills come due. Millions of workers must toil at two or more jobs to make ends meet, and have to turn to government programs or community food pantries to feed their families.

The woefully inadequate federal minimum hourly wage of \$7.25 has not risen since 2009, while the cost of living has skyrocketed. If the minimum wage had kept pace with inflation, it would now be \$12 per hour. A full-time worker earning the current minimum wage cannot pay rent in most areas of the country.

The original relief bill would have raised that minimum wage to \$15, but in increments, not reaching \$15 until 2025. Meanwhile, so many workers are living in crisis. They need these funds now! And more! An hourly pay rate of \$20 or \$25 would really make a dent in families’ bills.

However, even the proposed increase would benefit many workers. The Economic Policy Institute says that it would aid 32 million workers; 60 percent of essential and front-line workers would be helped. One-third of African Americans and one-fourth of Latinx workers would get a raise. About 25 percent of those who would gain are women workers of color.

Due to systemic racism and sexism, oppressed workers are severely underpaid. Women comprise two-thirds of the 20 million workers who are paid \$10.10 per hour or less, reports the National Women’s Law Center. Half are women of color. The gender pay gap is widest for African American, Latinx, Indigenous and im/migrant women, who are paid the lowest salaries.

Most people who are paid the minimum wage are adults, and many of them remain in low-wage jobs throughout their working lives. (New York Times, Feb. 26) That makes a higher federal wage a necessity — or millions of workers simply cannot meet the burgeoning costs of life’s necessities.

The demand for the federal minimum wage hike is supported by two-thirds of the U.S. population, especially Black, Latinx, Indigenous, women and young workers. That’s why the slogan “Fight for \$15” resonates so loudly from coast to coast. The struggle continues! □

# Tell Biden: Stop bombing Syria!

*Continued from page 1*

role of the Republican Party, with and without Trump — in carrying out an aggressive assault on the working class in the United States — surely must see that the Biden administration is also their enemy.

Biden has employed less hateful rhetoric. His is a more inclusive administration. But he serves the same superrich ruling class that presidents of both parties have served throughout their history.

This has been especially true regarding foreign policy. After hearing Secretary of State Anthony Blinken’s speeches, it was apparent that the new Democratic administration planned a continuation of the same aggressive policies that characterized the Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. And that Donald Trump carried

out in his own fashion.

Now the Biden-Blinken gang has followed through on Blinken’s words. First Biden ordered U.S. B-1 bombers to Norwegian air bases, threatening Russia. And on Feb. 25, Secretary of “Defense” Lloyd Austin announced that the U.S. had bombed targets in Syria near the border with Iraq.

Antiwar forces inside the U.S. must step up to meet this new threat from the Biden administration. It’s time to measure the new president by his own actions, not by contrasting him with his predecessor (who set a pretty low bar!). It’s time to see him as a representative of the billionaire ruling class, in all its variations, and as such an enemy of the working class.

Emergency relief for the people of Texas! No money for bombing Syria!

Pass the \$15 minimum wage! □

# ‘No war drills on Korean Peninsula!’



Philadelphia Korea Peace Now Grassroots Network activists hold signs, Feb. 21.

Annual U.S.-ROK (Republic of Korea) combined military exercises are costly and a major obstacle to achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula. And it’s a provocative threat against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Korea solidarity groups in the U.S. have begun a “Global Relay Rally,” in which activists from city to city photograph

individuals holding signs such as “No More War Drills,” sharing the resulting graphics widely on social media.

Supporters are also being urged to sign a petition to urge the Biden administration to suspend these war drills. See [tiny.cc/koreapeace](http://tiny.cc/koreapeace).

— Story and photo by Joe Piette

## Colorado protest

# ‘No war on Iran!’

By Viviana Weinstein  
Denver

Students for a Democratic Society, Jewish Voice for Peace and the Denver Peace Council held a demonstration Feb. 20 at the state Capitol, in cooperation with the national call to prevent Washington from instigating a war against Iran. Threats the U.S. warships would move into the Gulf near Iran have increased fears of a new war.

Last year, U.S. operatives assassinated Iranian scientists, and a U.S. rocket killed Iranian General Qassim Soleimani, a leader respected for heading the fight against ISIS. The new U.S. administration has ordered more troops to Iraq and Syria, which threatens Iran.

Washington’s history of intervening in Iran includes overturning Iran’s elected government in 1953 and placing Shah Reza Pahlavi in power. After the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Tehran government retook control of its oil. In the hope of returning Iran to colonial domination, the U.S. government has instituted harsh sanctions during the pandemic, causing death

and suffering among Iranian people.

U.S. sanctions prevent Iran’s government from trading oil for food and medicine that its people need. After the Trump administration pulled the U.S. out of the accord that dropped sanctions in return for allowing inspections, Tehran has no confidence in agreements with the U.S. They ask that sanctions be lifted as a show of good faith.

The antiwar movement must continue pressure on the Biden administration to end the sanctions. It should expose and loudly oppose U.S. military threats. □



Solidarity with Iran. Feb. 20, Denver.

PHOTO: VIVIANA WEINSTEIN

# COVID vaccines = big business, political clout

By Manuel Raposo

Manuel Raposo is editor of *jornalmudardevida.net* in Portugal, where this article was published Feb. 14. Translation by John Catalinotto.

It has often been said that so-called “natural” disasters, including unforeseeable catastrophes, lay bare the weaknesses of the societies they strike. The health, social and economic crisis the coronavirus triggered is an example of this. An aggravating factor is that it has long been predicted that the spread of a virus similar in character was likely to occur.

But this crisis has exposed another aspect of today’s societies — the cutthroat competition among the world’s major capitalist powers in the race for vaccines, both for the colossal profits flowing to pharmaceutical companies and for geostrategic advantages.

Under present circumstances, all the abuses of imperialist capitalism take on dimensions of inhumanity and violence that normally are only found during open warfare.

Since the outbreak of the health crisis, even in the countries considered to be the most developed, what has become clear is the inadequacy of public health systems (due to undervaluing and underfunding), as well as the inability of private health services to respond to the emergency. The political power’s neglect of public health was evident in its disregard for the predictions that an epidemic outbreak was likely to occur.

The last few months have added another novelty: unbridled competition over vaccines. Earlier, a considerable number of countries agreed on a partnership called COVAX, under the aegis of the World Health Organization. Brimming with good intentions, COVAX was supposed to support research and production of vaccines and then their distribution on an equal footing around the world. Despite these plans, competition took over as soon as the first vaccines were discovered.

## Early cooperation aided Big Pharma

The COVAX agreement was useful to the big capitalist pharmaceutical companies, as it provided for the exchange of scientific data that in turn accelerated the design of vaccines. Gigantic government funding, made with people’s tax money, helped the pharmaceuticals.

But any agreement or promise of equal treatment became a dead letter once the vaccines became a reality: The usual criterion — business as usual — prevailed. If anyone thought that public funding would defend the public interest, they were quickly disillusioned.

At the same time, the most powerful states are vying for vaccines for a different reason: to ensure economic supremacy over their competitors. Whichever national state is quickest to shake off the pandemic and return to economic “normalcy” can hope to gain decisive advantages.

This is what leads, for example, the U.S., to a veritable hoarding of vaccines to the detriment of the rest of the world — ultimately penalizing poorer countries in particular. Britain has done the same with vaccines produced on its territory, undermining the vaccination plans of the European Union.

The EU’s disregard for Russian and Chinese vaccines is a clear result of a policy aimed at benefiting the pharmaceutical companies of “Western allies.” But even this has not prevented the EU — after having advanced millions of euros to the pharmaceutical companies — from being put on the back burner, trailing the moves of Boris Johnson, Donald Trump and now Joe Biden.

The proven inability of the major pharmaceutical companies to produce the necessary quantity of vaccine should logically lead them to decentralize production to different countries. But working against this good sense solution is the narrow interest of these companies to make as much profit as possible — which happens when they sell finished products and when the products are in short supply.

The health emergency ought to justify the abolition of patents and to encourage large-scale production, free of all fees, by all qualified laboratories in the world. But this does not happen because it clashes, once again, with the private interests of the pharmaceutical giants, centered so far in two countries: the United States and Britain.

## Monstrous global inequities

The monstrous nature of all this gains even more relevance in the face of data released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

In 2020 in the poorest countries, an additional 100 million people were relegated to a situation of extreme poverty. During 2021, the same will happen to another 150 million. Some 270 million people have been pushed to the brink of starvation. (OECD, “Global Crisis, Unequal Problems”)

While in the higher-income countries, social protection measures to cope with the pandemic amounted to \$695 per person, in the poorest countries only \$4 per capita were allocated.

The rich countries have raised \$14 trillion to support their economies, but have refused to forgive the debts of African countries, which amount to \$100 billion, or 1/140th of the former amount.

Inequalities with long-term effects are also

accentuated. In poor countries an average of 16 weeks of school was lost, while in rich countries 6 weeks were lost.

Discrimination in vaccine distribution is another aspect of this war. So far, 94% of the vaccines have been delivered to the wealthiest countries (with about 20% of the world’s population), and 10 of those countries received 55%.

The nearly 100 poorest countries, with 80% of the world’s population, should (according to the COVAX plan for 2021) receive two billion doses of vaccines, via \$5 billion in funding — but only \$2 billion has been raised for this purpose. Even if the plan were followed, at most only 20% of the population in these countries could expect to be vaccinated; while in self-funded countries, 50% of the population can be vaccinated in the near future. At the current

rate, in the best case it won’t be until 2024 that the populations of the poorest countries can all expect to be vaccinated. (Diário de Notícias, Feb. 11)

## ‘Vaccine diplomacy’

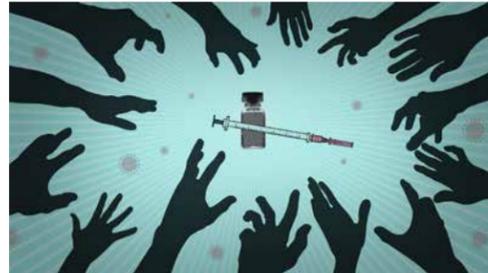
The Economist magazine, for its part, confirms these facts and adds some interesting statements. “Vaccine diplomacy” will determine which countries will have access to vaccines in the coming months.

Production represents the biggest obstacle, “as many developed countries have pre-ordered more doses than they need.” The orders under the COVAX agreement will take time to reach poor countries, “especially if delays in the production for and delivery to richer countries push back delivery dates for poorer nations.” (Economist, Jan. 27)

It is impossible to hide these facts: The private interests of the pharmaceutical companies, chasing maximum profit, converges with the interests of the major capitalist powers in managing the course of the pandemic in the interest of achieving hegemony. The imperialist countries are using the vaccine shortage as a weapon to obtain advantages for themselves and in disputes between them. Under no circumstances would world capitalism soften its stance and grant poor countries what it has so far never granted them: debt forgiveness, bailout money or equal treatment — because that is the condition for keeping them dependent.

All the capital that the imperialist world decides to apply in the fight against the pandemic goes through a rigorous profit-and-loss calculation, like any business investment. Whoever dies, dies. □

**If anyone thought that public funding would defend the public interest, they were quickly disillusioned.**



Capitalism weaponizes the COVID-19 vaccines.

**MUNDO OBRERO**   
editorial

## Digamosle a Biden: ¡Deja de bombardear Siria!

La administración de Biden solo tardó 36 días en el cargo para mostrar al mundo, a través de un bombardeo en Siria, que es beligerante, agresivo y empeñado en la guerra. Solo hubo un breve respiro de las viles palabras y acciones de Trump. Ahora tenemos que enfrentar los viles actos de Biden y resistirlos.

Incluso la excusa que dio el imperialismo estadounidense para bombardear a Siria fue débil. Un ataque con cohetes hace algunas semanas mató a un mercenario en Irak. Excusas como esa abren la puerta a nuevas guerras e intervenciones estadounidenses en todos los países de Asia, África y América Latina, donde Washington ha reemplazado a las tropas oficiales estadounidenses con soldados de fortuna.

Podría pensar que la administración de Biden tuvo suficientes problemas en casa para mantenerla ocupada. La pandemia de COVID-19 aún continúa a pesar de las vacunas, cuya distribución ha sido una vergüenza. El Congreso liderado por los demócratas, que aún no ha aprobado el proyecto de ley de ayuda pandémica, ya abandonó el salario mínimo de \$15 por hora.

Además de esto, el super congelamiento de Texas, y de sus millones de trabajadores y personas pobres, ha puesto de manifiesto una vez más la desesperada necesidad de reconstruir la infraestructura de Estados Unidos. Sin mencionar la necesidad inmediata de ayuda de emergencia.

Incluso aquellos que reconocen el papel podrido del Partido Republicano, con y sin Trump, al llevar a cabo un agresivo asalto a la clase trabajadora en Estados Unidos, seguramente deben ver que la administración Biden también es su enemigo.

Biden ha empleado una retórica menos odiosa. La suya es una administración más inclusiva. Pero sirve a la misma clase gobernante super rica a la que han servido los presidentes de ambos partidos a lo largo de su historia.

Esto ha sido especialmente cierto con respecto a la política exterior. Después de escuchar los discursos del secretario de Estado Anthony Blinken, fue evidente que la nueva administración demócrata planeaba una continuación de las mismas políticas agresivas que

caracterizaron a las administraciones de Bill Clinton, George W. Bush y Barack Obama. Y que Donald Trump llevó a cabo a su manera.

Ahora, la pandilla Biden-Blinken ha cumplido las palabras de Blinken. Primero Biden ordenó bombardeos B-1 estadounidenses a bases aéreas noruegas, amenazando a Rusia. Y el 25 de febrero, el secretario de “Defensa” Lloyd Austin anunció que Estados Unidos había bombardeado objetivos en Siria cerca de la frontera con Irak.

Las fuerzas anti guerras dentro de los EE.UU. deben dar un paso al frente para enfrentar esta nueva amenaza de la administración Biden. Es hora de medir al nuevo presidente por sus propias acciones, no por contrastarlo con su predecesor (¡quien puso un listón bastante bajo!). Es hora de verlo como un representante de la clase dominante multimillonaria, en todas sus variantes, y como un enemigo de la clase trabajadora.

¡Ayuda de emergencia para la gente de Texas!  
¡No más dinero para bombardear a Siria!  
¡Que pasen el salario mínimo de \$15! □



El horizonte de Houston brilla, mientras millones sufren sin calefacción ni agua en medio de cortes de energía prevenibles. 15 de febrero.

## Congelación de Texas

# Los ricos, más ricos mientras obreros sufren

Por **Mirinda Crissman**  
Houston

Una tormenta invernal sin precedentes azotó a Texas el 15 de febrero y trajo temperaturas bajo cero. Una semana después, grandes sectores de la población siguen sin electricidad, calefacción y/o agua.

En las principales ciudades, como Houston, Austin y San Antonio, los rascacielos corporativos vacíos permanecieron iluminados, mientras que millones estaban en la oscuridad sin electricidad ni agua.

Fue necesaria la protesta pública para hacer que los funcionarios apagaran los edificios que no estaban en uso y desviaran energía a hospitales y bomberos.

Las personas en Texas no solo están luchando por recuperarse de esta congelación, sino también de huracanes e inundaciones anteriores causadas por el calentamiento global que produce precipitaciones extremas a todas las temperaturas. Esto se ve agravado por la crisis de COVID en uno de los mayores sistemas interconectados de prisiones, cárceles y centros de detención; Texas ocupa el segundo lugar después de California.

Muchas personas se han congelado hasta morir, y es probable que las muertes no se cuenten exactamente ya que se encontrarán más cuerpos después del deshielo. El Texas Tribune informó el 18 de febrero que casi la mitad del estado estaba experimentando interrupciones en el agua. Y a esto se le agrega avisos de hervir el agua, cuando muchas familias no pudieron acceder a la calefacción, y comprenderás lo difícil que ha sido sobrevivir.

Después de meses de alto desempleo, desalojos récord y 500.000 muertes por virus, tenemos un sector energético desregulado que obtiene beneficios récord de nuestra miseria. El multimillonario propietario de los Dallas Cowboys y destacado benefactor de la policía, Jerry Jones vio a su compañía de gas natural, Comstock Resources, Inc., obtener ganancias récord.

El director financiero de Comstock, Roland Burns, dijo: "Esta semana es como ganar el premio gordo con algunos de estos precios increíbles. Francamente, pudimos vender a precios súper premium por una cantidad importante de producción". (Dallas Morning News, 17 de febrero) Mientras tanto, algunos tejanos están reportando facturas de electricidad mensuales de hasta \$17.000. (NY Post, 19 de febrero)

Mientras la gente sufría, el senador de Texas Ted Cruz huyó a Cancún, México, para brindarle a su familia mejores condiciones de vida. Esto, dadas sus fuertes posiciones anti-inmigrantes y acciones legislativas, es irónico por decir lo menos. También es irónico que la demócrata Nancy Pelosi dijera en septiembre sobre el partido de Cruz: "El país necesita un Partido Republicano fuerte. Ha hecho mucho por nuestro país". (MSNBC, 30 de septiembre de 2020)

### Por qué falló la red eléctrica de Texas

En un estado que durante mucho tiempo ha sido rehén del petróleo y el gas, las redes eléctricas fallaron debido a la falta de regulación. Las inclinaciones secesionistas de Texas tienen al menos una salida moderna: la red eléctrica. Hay tres redes en los 48 estados inferiores: la Interconexión Oriental, la Interconexión Occidental y Texas. La red de Texas se llama ERCOT y

es administrada por una agencia del mismo nombre: el Consejo de Confiabilidad Eléctrica de Texas.

Según informó el Texas Tribune, el 8 de febrero de 2011: "En 1935, el presidente Franklin D. Roosevelt firmó la Ley Federal de Energía, que encargaba a la Comisión Federal de Energía la supervisión de las ventas de electricidad entre estados. Al no cruzar las fronteras estatales, los servicios públicos de Texas evitaron estar sujetos a las reglas federales. La libertad de la regulación federal era un objetivo preciado, más aún porque Texas no tuvo regulación hasta la década de 1970".

El gobernador de Texas, Gregg Abbott, difundió afirmaciones falsas en Fox News de que las fuentes de energía renovable como el viento eran las culpables; más tarde tuvo que cambiar esas afirmaciones falsas. (Yahoo News, 17 de febrero) Las mentiras de Abbott aún viven en la mente de millones, a pesar de la evidencia de que fueron las fuentes de energía no renovables y la desregulación las culpables del apagón.

El director general de ERCOT, Dan Woodfin, citó "instrumentos congelados en instalaciones de gas natural, carbón e incluso nucleares, así como suministros limitados de gas natural. La presión del gas natural en particular es una de las razones por las que la energía está regresando más lento de lo esperado." (Bloomberg, 15 de febrero) Chris Tomlinson informó para el Houston Chronicle el 18 de febrero: "Los generadores de electricidad de Texas no querían perder el tiempo para construir equipos resistentes porque recortan sus ganancias".

Las crisis agravantes del capital en Texas ilustran que organizar las economías en torno a las ganancias para unos pocos, en lugar de lo que es necesario para sustentar la vida humana, se produce a costa violenta de los pueblos oprimidos.

### Clima, sanciones y colonización

Los estantes de comestibles vacíos durante la congelación se compararon con la situación en Venezuela. No se menciona que hasta 40.000 venezolanos han muerto porque es uno de los 39 países sancionados por Estados Unidos, lo que hace que sea casi imposible para muchos acceder a alimentos y medicinas. (SanctionsKill.org) Las mismas entidades que matan de hambre a personas en el extranjero están dispuestas a dejarnos morir de hambre en casa.

Los factores combinados de opresión nacional y crisis climática produjeron los catastróficos desastres de los huracanes María en Puerto Rico y Katrina en Luisiana.

El académico Daniel Immerwahr explica: "[A fines de 2017] el huracán María azotó a Puerto Rico, destruyendo la red eléctrica, el sistema de agua y las comunicaciones de la isla. También expuso el lamentable estado de cosas en la colonia restante más grande de los Estados Unidos. Aunque la estrategia de Luis Muñoz Marín de utilizar las lagunas fiscales para atraer a las corporaciones continentales a la isla había mejorado drásticamente la economía de Puerto Rico en la década de 1950 y durante décadas después, el Congreso eliminó esas lagunas en la década de 1990, lo que provocó la fuga corporativa, el colapso económico y un éxodo de puertorriqueños empleable hacia el continente.

"Cuando María golpeó, más del 60% de los habitantes restantes de la isla tenían Medicare o Medicaid. Debido a que el gobierno federal financia esos programas de manera menos generosa en Puerto Rico que en el continente, el ELA se encontró acumulando una deuda insostenible para pagar sus facturas.

"El huracán convirtió la crisis en catástrofe. Los puertorriqueños se vieron obligados a retroceder un siglo porque se las arreglaron sin teléfonos ni electricidad. Los médicos se vieron obligados a realizar cirugías con linternas, los habitantes de la ciudad buscaban desesperadamente agua limpia.

"El huracán María golpeó casi al mismo tiempo que otras dos tormentas azotaron el continente, el huracán Harvey en Texas y el huracán Irma (que azotó por

primera vez las Islas Vírgenes de EE. UU.) en la Florida. La diferencia en la respuesta fue palpable. Aunque los puertorriqueños tenían muchas más probabilidades de morir por los daños causados por la tormenta, vieron menos personal federal, notablemente menos cobertura de los medios y solo una fracción de las donaciones caritativas". (Immerwahr, "Cómo ocultar un imperio", Macmillan, 2019)

El huracán Katrina mostró que el estado capitalista desprecia a las personas de nacionalidades oprimidas, especialmente a las personas de raza negra y morena. Muchos evacuados de Katrina terminaron en el Astrodome de Houston, enfrentando enfermedades infecciosas por estar muy apiñados. Vimos que el abandono organizado iba de la mano con la violencia organizada de la policía y los supremacistas blancos, mientras que los medios de comunicación lo justificaron al denunciar en exceso el "saqueo".

Las personas encarceladas no fueron evacuadas; se vieron obligados a lidiar con células inundadas y materia fecal flotante sin alivio. Existe una práctica recurrente en todo el sur de EE.UU. de dejar a las personas en prisión durante los desastres. Las prisiones de Texas alrededor del río Brazos se inundan con frecuencia; los de adentro deben lidiar con las condiciones.

### El capitalismo crea catástrofes antinaturales

Las redes de ayuda mutua en Texas estaban en movimiento mucho antes de que esta crisis congelara el estado. Estas redes pueden redistribuir fondos y suministros más rápido que los gobiernos locales y estatales, aunque muchos grupos están operando a su capacidad o por encima de ella. Mantienen a la gente viva, mientras que el estado capitalista ha dejado que la gente muera.

Todo lo que le falta al gobierno es la voluntad de actuar rápidamente, porque su función real es la de obtener ganancias.

En Cuba, donde la clase trabajadora se apoderó con éxito de los medios de producción en 1959, la respuesta a eventos climáticos como los huracanes está marcada por la preparación y la prevención del sufrimiento.

Según Gail Reed, editora ejecutiva de MEDICC Review, una revista sobre salud y medicina en América Latina, el Caribe y otros países en desarrollo, y periodista que ha pasado más de tres décadas en Cuba, el gobierno cubano brinda a las comunidades locales siete días para prepararse para lo peor a medida que se acerca un huracán.

Los cubanos practican ejercicios de preparación a menudo, en cada provincia, ciudad, pueblo y aldea. "Estos simulacros constantes se combinan con una respuesta integrada de los departamentos de bomberos locales, salud, transporte y otros servicios públicos vitales. Sobre todo, Cuba pone un gran énfasis en educar a la población para mantener seguras a las comunidades y familias, especialmente a las más vulnerables". (Telesur, 28 de agosto de 2017)

Cuba, a pesar de estar bajo el bloqueo económico de Estados Unidos durante décadas, se ofreció a enviar a 1.500 profesionales médicos para ayudar a la gente de Nueva Orleans tras el paso del huracán Katrina. El ex presidente George W. Bush rápidamente rechazó la oferta, dejando que la gente sufriera.

Continuaremos viendo el abandono organizado de trabajadores y pueblos oprimidos en futuras crisis. Dado que el año pasado produjo la mayor cantidad de tormentas tropicales registradas en una sola temporada, en la Costa del Golfo sabemos que no se trata de si, sino de cuándo ocurre el próximo desastre climático catastrófico.

Tanto el partido demócrata como el republicano en Estados Unidos son servidores del capital. Una y otra vez han demostrado que nos dejarán a nosotros y al Sur Global por muertos, para que los capitalistas puedan perseguir otro dólar. Por eso estamos llamados a enfrentar su violencia organizada de arriba hacia abajo con una organización de abajo hacia arriba que prioriza a las personas sobre las ganancias. □

### El capitalismo en un callejón sin salida



Fred Goldstein utiliza las leyes de la acumulación capitalista de Marx, y la tasa decreciente de ganancia, para demostrar por qué el capitalismo global ha llegado finalmente a un punto de inflexión.

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