

# Profit plague feeds omicron surge

By Marie Kelly

For two years, workers across the U.S. have made enormous sacrifices as government officials continuously put corporate economic interests above the general welfare and public good. Health care and other workers have fought back in the face of government malfeasance and for-profit exploitation. Workers have resisted through hundreds, if not thousands, of spontaneous and organized walkouts and strikes to protest unsafe working conditions.

Health care workers are acutely aware of how the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in the U.S. has pushed hospital systems to the breaking point. Federal agencies, which were set up to regulate safety standards and provide guidance based on scientific evidence, have failed to protect these essential workers from the capitalist, profit-driven health care model.

## OSHA, do your job!

National Nurses United (NNU) and a coalition of other labor unions filed a lawsuit Jan. 5 to force the



Nurses picket at St. Vincent Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, March 8, 2021. In December they won all demands in the longest nurses' strike in state history.

federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration to do its job in protecting workers during the pandemic. (tinyurl.com/y3eds6n7) OSHA failed its mandate to

keep workers safe on the job, when the agency withdrew its emergency temporary standard (ETS) specific to hospital workers during the pandemic in December 2021. In fact, only after pressure from NNU did OSHA finally issue the ETS in June 2021.

The ETS requirements were a comprehensive list of measures to protect workers, including effective personal protective equipment, adequate ventilation, and other procedures geared to limiting viral transmission. The list guaranteed basic health care workers' rights such as paid sick time, time off to get the vaccine and the option for contagious workers to work remotely if possible or receive paid time off.

The lawsuit against OSHA calls for the retention and enforcement of the agency's emergency temporary standard and the adoption of a permanent standard for health care occupational exposure to COVID-19 within 30 days. In addition to the NNU, the lawsuit coalition includes the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, the New York State Nurses Association, the American Federation of Teachers and the AFL-CIO.

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# Enslavement, prisons — and the vote

## Martin Luther King Jr. Day statement Prisoners Solidarity Committee of Workers World Party

What does voting mean to an incarcerated person? As we honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in 2022, we consider this question within the context of the struggle for the right to self-determination for the most oppressed members of our class — particularly those who are incarcerated en masse within a system akin to modern-day enslavement.

From a jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama, in April 1963, Dr. King wrote an open letter excoriating those who place demands on oppressed people who assert their democratic right to vote. He wrote that the "great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate, who is more devoted to order than to justice, who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice." King rightfully viewed these moderates as apologists for fascist reactionaries.

Four years later, Dr. King's April 4, 1967, "Beyond Vietnam" speech at Riverside Church in New York City forecast an even more radical evolution — from the right to vote to a worldwide view — when he linked the

struggle for economic equality at home with the struggle against the U.S. war on Vietnam.

King spoke of how the U.S. government had violated the principle of self-determination for the Vietnamese people at the cost of growing poverty at home. He stated: "The security we profess to seek in foreign adventures we



Rev. Ralph Abernathy, left, and Dr. King, were arrested as they led a demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama, April 12, 1963. King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' was written during his incarceration.

will lose in our decaying cities. The bombs in Viet Nam explode at home: They destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America." His speech was condemned by both the Washington Post and New York Times.

It was this evolving political shift that ultimately marked Dr. King for assassination by the U.S. government, which he famously referred to as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today."

## Dr. King's legacy

Remembering Dr. King's political evolution challenges us today to consider the right to vote in relation to the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It includes this language, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." (Emphasis added)

For those who find themselves in prisons convicted of a crime, they are literally treated as less than a whole human, as an enslaved person, not too far off from the days when enslaved people were considered three-fifths of a person when counted in U.S. populations for representation — but were not allowed to vote.

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WW COMMENTARY

What’s next after Ahmaud Arbery’s killers held ‘accountable’?

By Dianne Mathiowetz

Judge Timothy Walmsley delivered sentences to the convicted murderers of Ahmaud Arbery on Jan. 7. The 25-year-old Black man was chased and trapped by the pickup truck-driving, shotgun-wielding father and son team of Gregory and Travis McMichael and their neighbor, William “Roddie” Bryan, on Feb. 23, 2020, in Satilla Shores, adjacent to Brunswick, Georgia.

A jury of Glynn County residents found the trio of racist vigilantes guilty of multiple felonies on Nov. 24, following a trial watched by millions on television. The jury — 11 white members and one Black man — were unanimous in their verdict that Arbery was an innocent victim of a heinous crime that merited the most severe punishment.

Georgia law mandates that a felony murder conviction receive a life sentence; and that after serving 30 years, there may or may not be the possibility of parole.

Before announcing his decision, Judge Walmsley spoke at some length on the terror Arbery must have felt as he tried to outrun and evade his armed pursuers.

At one point the judge underscored this by remaining silent for 60 seconds, then saying that was just one-fifth of the time Ahmaud was running to save his life. He said he saw no evidence of remorse from the McMichaels, who are seen on the infamous tape turning their backs and walking away from the dying, bleeding Arbery.

After finishing his opening remarks, Walmsley pronounced the McMichaels would be sentenced to life without opportunity for parole after 30 years, but that William “Roddie” Bryan would have that possibility. Bryan joined the chase and made the video. Although he was unarmed, he used his truck five times to block Ahmaud’s escape.

Travis McMichael is 35; his father Gregory is 66, and Bryan is 52. All three men are scheduled to be tried on federal hate crimes Feb. 7; and if convicted, they could face additional life terms in prison.



Ahmaud Arbery and his mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones

Another public figure, Jackie Johnson, former Glynn County District Attorney, is facing trial this spring. Gregory McMichael, a past county police officer and a recently retired investigator in Johnson’s office, admitted calling Johnson for “advice” after killing Arbery. She is alleged to have then told the Glynn County police not to arrest the three men. Johnson has been charged with “obstructing justice” and “showing favor” to her former employee.

Civil litigation is pending against the McMichaels, Bryan and various police and prosecutorial officials, brought by Arbery’s mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones.

While Arbery’s mother, father, family and friends expressed a sense of relief and satisfaction that his killers

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Join us in the fight for socialism!

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 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. □

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

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# Sidney Poitier: A brilliant ‘force of nature’ on, off the screen

By Monica Moorehead

After the heartbreaking news of Sidney Poitier’s death at 94 on Jan. 6, unparalleled adjectives have been used — from the most famous to ordinary film lovers — to describe his towering legacy and talent as trailblazing, regal, inspiring, noble and more. His career as an actor and director spanned 70 years.

Poitier was presented an honorary Academy Award in 2002 “for his extraordinary performances and unique presence on the screen and for representing the motion picture industry with dignity, style and intelligence throughout the world.”

Black actors like Oscar winners Denzel Washington, Halle Berry, Morgan Freeman and Louis Gossett Jr. and lesser known actors have said they might not have become the actors they are today if not for Sidney Poitier paving the way.

Poitier once stated, “I made films when the only other Black on the lot was the shoeshine boy — as was the case at Metro [Goldwyn Mayer]. I was the lone guy in town.” (hollywoodreporter.com, Jan. 7)

When Black director Spike Lee paid homage to Sidney Poitier on CNN commentator Don Lemon’s Jan. 7 show, he described the actor’s impact on U.S. society as comparable to Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis.

What were the parallels between this actor and these two athletes? Jackie Robinson, who played for the Brooklyn Dodgers, was the first Black player to break the color barrier in the then all-white Major League Baseball in 1947 and was seen as a precursor to the Civil Rights Movement.

Joe Louis, aka the “Brown Bomber,” while not the first Black heavyweight champion — that was Jack Johnson from 1908-1915 — gained worldwide popularity, especially in the Black community, when he regained his heavyweight crown in 1938 after knocking out a German boxer, Max Schmeling, who symbolized the rise of Nazism before World War II.

So while Poitier was not historically the first African American actor, female or male, in Hollywood, he was the first major Black actor to consistently play characters that were not racially insensitive or stereotypical. These were the only roles offered by predominantly white studios before Poitier’s major breakout role in the 1950 film, “No Way Out,” where he played a doctor terrorized by a white racist, played by Richard Widmark. Even the great Paul Robeson was forced to play some stereotypical movie roles during the 1930s.

When Poitier was accused by some Black actors of playing sanitized characters like doctors, teachers and other professionals which were acceptable to the tastes of white audiences, he replied he felt it was important to remain true to himself and to bring dignity to any character he decided to play, being conscious of the racist degradations facing Black people, including actors, in previous eras.

In a 1967 New York Times interview, Poitier said of his acceptance of certain roles: “It’s a choice, a clear choice. If the fabric of the society were different, I would scream to high heaven to play villains and to deal with different images of Negro life that would be more dimensional. But I’ll be damned if I do that at this stage of the game.” (Washington Post, Jan. 7) In fact, in his autobiography,

Malcolm X praised Poitier for his positive screen image.

## Career parallel with Civil Rights struggle

Sidney Poitier was lucky to be alive, since he was born three months prematurely to tomato-farming Bahamian parents while they were visiting Miami. He was raised on Cat Island in the Bahamas, but he returned to Miami as a teenager. He then traveled to New York City, hoping to become an actor.

At the time, in the mid-1940s, he could barely read a script until a Jewish worker assisted him with reading from a newspaper every night while Poitier worked as a dishwasher. He joined the American Negro Theater after leaving the Army in 1947. There he met young legendary actors and future activists, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis and lifelong friend, Harry Belafonte.

During the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, Poitier became the first Black actor nominated for a best actor Oscar in 1959 for the 1958 film, “The Defiant Ones.”

He starred on Broadway in Black playwright Lorraine Hansberry’s award-winning play, “A Raisin in the Sun,” in 1961 and reprised his Tony-nominated role in the movie made of the play. Both take place in Chicago, with a Black family contemplating the consequences of moving to an all-white suburban neighborhood.

Even before the signing of the historic Civil Rights Act, Poitier became the first Black actor to win the best actor Oscar in 1964 for the 1963 film, “Lilies of the Field.”

Off-screen, Poitier along with Belafonte and other actors, Black, white and Latinx, were active in the Civil Rights struggle, whether marching with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Washington, D.C., Alabama and elsewhere or raising funds for the movement. Poitier participated in Resurrection City in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1968 following the assassination of Dr. King.

## ‘They call me Mister Tibbs’

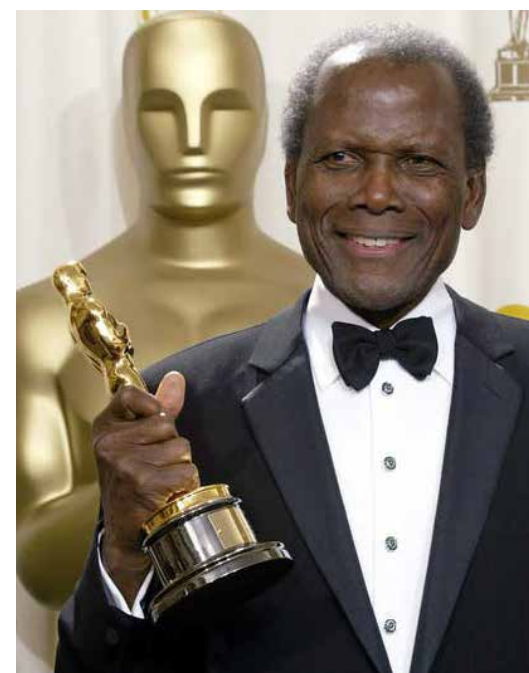
In 1967, he became a number one box office draw with three hit films: “To Sir With Love,” “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” and “In the Heat of the Night.”

While filming the latter movie, Poitier faced racism in Tennessee as recounted by the film’s director, Norman Jewison. Poitier did not want to film in Mississippi,

*While Poitier was not historically the first African American actor, female or male, in Hollywood, he was the first major Black actor to consistently play characters that were not racially insensitive or stereotypical.*



Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte attended the 1963 March on Washington.



Sidney Poitier received an honorary Oscar in 2002.

the setting of the film, due to the racism he and Belafonte had faced in the Deep South when encouraging Black people to register to vote. Poitier was forced to stay in a segregated hotel for four days of the film’s shooting. He slept with a gun under his pillow for protection following racist threats.

The most powerful scene in “In the Heat of the Night” is when Poitier’s character, Virgil Tibbs, a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, police officer, is slapped by a racist plantation owner, played by Larry Gates. Without hesitation, Tibbs slaps him back, while giving him a defiant stare. This reaction symbolized the period of heroic struggle for social equality in the Deep South and rebellion in the Northern cities against poverty and police brutality. Poitier demanded that what has become known as “the slap heard around the world” remain in the script, or he would not do the scene at all.

Jewison said about the scene, “As the film echoed the power of that moment around the world, I think Sidney represented the conflict between people in America.” (Hollywood Reporter)

In reaction to actor Rod Steiger’s character, a racist sheriff, calling Poitier’s character a racist slur, Poitier replies forcefully, “They call me Mister Tibbs.”

Poitier also portrayed the first Black U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and the South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela in TV movies.

## ‘His brilliance shone through’

Sidney Poitier has been described, and rightfully so, as a once-in-a-lifetime, singular talent. His brilliance shone through in spite of racism.

That the roles offered to him were limited still rings true for Black actors today in Hollywood. As the Black New York

Times critic Wesley Morris — who deemed Poitier the “greatest American movie star” — stated in his Jan. 7 appraisal: “Mr. Poitier achieved his greatness partially as a matter of ‘despite.’ He achieved all he did despite knowing what he couldn’t do.

“I mean, he could’ve done it — could’ve played Cool Hand Luke, could’ve been the Graduate, could’ve done ‘Bullitt,’ could have been Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. There are maybe a dozen roles, capstones, that nobody would have offered to Mr. Poitier because he Wouldn’t Have Been Right for the Part.” (New York Times)

The Oscar-winning actor Lee Grant, a co-star in “In the Heat of the Night,” described Poitier on her Twitter feed as a “force of nature” and “one of the most intelligent, beautiful and unstoppable human beings I’ve ever known. He made our world, and my life, better in ways we still may not entirely comprehend. Calling him a legend doesn’t do it justice. He was Sidney Poitier.” □

# What’s next after Arbery’s killers held ‘accountable’?

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will suffer the consequences of their criminal act, the reality is that their son, brother, friend, neighbor will never again be with them.

## Mass movement, video were decisive

Arbery’s mother’s unrelenting efforts to defend her son from the spurious allegations of his killers to justify their crime is in the tradition of Mamie Till-Mobley. The mother of 14-year-old Emmett Till, who was lynched in 1955, demanded an open casket viewing of her son’s disfigured, tortured body, in order to raise mass resistance to

racist violence.

Ahmaud Arbery’s death, like George Floyd’s, proved the importance of visual, video evidence today to help spark a mass movement.

The many activists across the country who marched to demand Black Lives Matter know for certain that a mass movement can make a difference in bringing about some semblance of justice for some victims — though not for all victims, known and unknown.

The people want and deserve more than a difference here and there from the constant reality of injustice, exploitation and oppression that permeates every institution, experience and moment of life in

racist capitalist society. Long-term, we can’t depend on the luck of the draw. A judge and a jury like that in the Ahmaud Arbery case adhered to the evidence, but the judge and jury did not do the same in the cases of Trayvon Martin, Anthony Huber or Joseph Rosenbaum — all murdered by vigilantism.

The politicization that occurs as a mass movement rises has to be deliberately nurtured and expanded to a class consciousness that recognizes the profit system, capitalism and imperialism as the root of all societal ills.

When that consciousness is widespread and sustained, it will lay the basis for people’s justice. □



# Starbucks workers walk out, demand safer conditions during COVID

By Arjae Red  
Buffalo, New York

Starbucks workers at the Elmwood Avenue location here, the first corporate-owned Starbucks in the U.S. to unionize, walked off the job Jan. 5 in protest of unsafe working conditions and understaffing.

COVID-19 is tearing through Starbucks stores; and while many workers have raised concerns over safety measures, the corporation has consistently ignored them. Starbucks has ignored requests to provide N-95 masks and at times has not allowed workers to enforce state mask mandates.

Multiple stores in Buffalo have had outbreaks causing many workers to become infected. Some workers, who were exposed but not experiencing symptoms, preferred to remain isolated until they could be tested, but they felt forced to work anyway, because they would not be paid to isolate.

Starbucks could pay all workers who are exposed to stay home, as they did in March 2020. But as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines loosened, Starbucks’ own protocol

followed in kind. Rather than living up to their stated principles and providing a safe work environment and allowing all workers who were exposed, regardless of vaccination status, to take paid time off to isolate, Starbucks continues to operate at a bare minimum as is required by law.

Starbucks’ policies, as well as current CDC standards, essentially force workers to choose between safety and paying their rent.

Starbucks claims their policy is not unique and that they are simply following the guidelines set by the government. However, based on the over 830,000 people who died from COVID-19 in the United States, the CDC guidelines and state COVID-19 policies were clearly insufficient, even before they were slashed back.

To contrast, China has less than 5,000 dead with a population of nearly a billion and a half people.

This highlights the root cause of the issue — that rampant capitalism is unable to handle crises like a pandemic as adequately as a predominantly socialist, planned economy can.

We know that huge corporations like Starbucks have a hand in shaping the



PHOTO: MORE PERFECT UNION

Unionized Starbucks workers at Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo walk out to protest pandemic work conditions.

policy around COVID-19. One example is how Delta Airlines requested the CDC shorten the isolation period from 10 days to five, just days before the CDC announced the change.

When corporations are allowed to shape health standards for the whole country,

profits are always put before safety, and workers are treated as disposable.

*The author is a contributor to Workers World newspaper and a union committee organizer with Starbucks Workers United in Buffalo.*

## U.S. working class On the edge of historic unionization drive?

By John Catalinotto

*This article was written for an international end-of-year collection and published in French and Spanish translations on [lapluma.net](http://lapluma.net) and [tlaxcala-int.blogspot.com](http://tlaxcala-int.blogspot.com).*

Workers at three Amazon locations have opened drives to form a union in this mammoth corporation that employs over 1 million workers in the U.S. alone. Workers at two Starbucks cafes in Buffalo, New York, have won union representation in a vote.

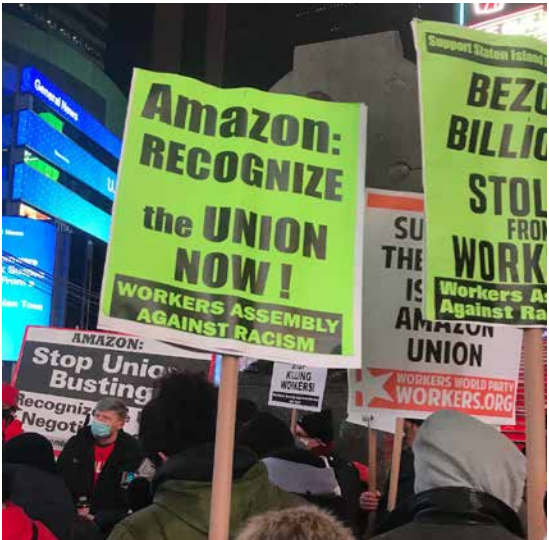
Amazon and pro-union supporters held protests in the U.S., Western Europe and Bangladesh on Nov. 26 — so-called Black Friday — at Amazon warehouses to demand workers’ rights and union rights. The actions focused on logistics workers in the U.S. and Europe and textile production workers in Bangladesh.

Other actions are planned for Jan. 12, birthday of the centibillionaire top boss of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, and for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. ([supportamazonworkers.org/jan12/](http://supportamazonworkers.org/jan12/))

This may seem like a small beginning. Still, it has already raised the hopes of millions of workers in the U.S. and thousands of union activists that something big is underway. It has raised the hopes of worker organizers of reversing the decline in union membership over the past 68 years.

Some voices, among communists and unionists, and among observers in the corporate media, have referenced the upsurge of the CIO industrial union in the 1930s and are asking if a new wave might be coming.

The New York Times and The Boston Globe, for example, have run feature articles on the Starbucks and Amazon organizing drives with big headlines and mentioned the 1930s. The Times normally confines labor news to the business section. Most articles are about strikes that were lost or splits between rank-and-file



WW PHOTO: TONY MURPHY

Times Square, New York City, Dec. 22, 2021.

workers and union leaders.

In the fall of 2021, unionized workers in the U.S. struck more often than they had for decades. In the big strikes at Kellogg’s cereal manufacturers and John Deere tractors and bulldozers, the striking workers forced their union leaders to continue strikes after they reached agreements with the bosses.

This rapid rise in the number of workers on strike follows decades of decline in union membership. There were heroic strikes, but almost all were lost by the unions.

### Decline of union membership

Following an expansion of unionization from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, nearly 35% of U.S. workers belonged to unions. Unions were especially strong in heavy industry: steel, coal, auto manufacturing, where they wrested better contracts from their world-dominant bosses.

The bosses and government struck at labor first with the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 that severely curtailed organizing and banned a number of effective strike tactics. The Cold War attack on communists forced the best political organizers out of the unions.

Then deindustrialization of the U.S. economy replaced workers with machines and moved industry to lower-wage regions using new production methods. The unionized workforce retired or were permanently laid off. The new jobs were often in service industries, logistics, health care and education.

The federal government waged an all-out attack on the air traffic controllers when they struck in 1980. This broke the PATCO strike, beginning a sharp downturn in union strength. While heroic strikes by rank-and-file workers took place in subsequent years, few led to victories.

Deindustrialization accelerated after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the Chinese workforce to international capitalist employment. In effect, from the 1980s to 2000, the exploitable world workforce doubled from about 1.5 billion to 3 billion workers.

There was a vast army of surplus labor. Average wages decreased, as did union membership. Inequality expanded rapidly.

By 2020 unionized workers were only 10.8% of the workforce in the U.S. While the U.S. provides an extreme example, union membership fell by half or more in Japan, Europe and most imperialist countries.

### Striketober

The increase in strikes and organizing takes place as the fourth wave of COVID-19 is hitting especially hard in the Midwest and Northeast of the United States. The pandemic crisis taught workers in health care, education, retail and logistics that their work is “essential” — if they hadn’t known it before.

From August through November, a record 4.5 million workers quit their jobs each month, seeking higher wages and better conditions.

While COVID-19 slowed the overall economy, some companies mushroomed. Amazon, with a monopoly of internet sales, added 500,000 workers to

its U.S. workforce in 2021 — plus another 250,000 drivers and deliverers employed by subcontractors. Amazon now employs 1.3 million workers.

Amazon treats its warehouse workers like Marines in basic training. These abuses and overwork cause an enormously high turnover rate: 3% each week or about 150% each year. While this turnover requires constant hiring, management accepts it, because their brutal methods keep exploitation and profits high.

Amazon’s workforce is young; many are African American or Latinx. All are angry and more than ever aware of their class oppression. They are aware that their jobs fail to pay a living wage.

They are aware Amazon’s bosses — and those at Starbucks, Walmart and others — will break every rule to keep their companies from being unionized.

They are aware more than ever that those who dominate the U.S., but can’t control a virus, won’t stop the global climate crisis. They experienced an unprecedented wave of tornadoes that killed workers in an Illinois Amazon warehouse, who were forced to stay on the job in December or face discipline.

Amazon workers are aware that their big boss Bezos has used money he took from their labor to finance a joyride to the stratosphere.

The hope of organizers is that the small victories at Starbucks will lead to bigger ones at Amazon and spread through the U.S. working class faster than the pandemic. It’s a big step that hasn’t taken place yet, but one can’t be a worker organizer, let alone a revolutionary, without being an optimist.

This can impact the workers’ struggle worldwide. Jeff Bezos may wish he had stayed in the stratosphere.

*Much of the labor history and some of the economic data in this article is from ‘Low Wage Capitalism — Colossus With Feet of Clay’ by Fred Goldstein (World View Forum, 2008).*



# Profit plague feeds omicron surge

Continued from page 1

The lawsuit targets the U.S. Department of Labor, Labor Secretary Marty Walsh and OSHA's Assistant Secretary of Labor Douglas L. Parker.

## Pandemic runs wild

In the early days of the pandemic, government and hospital leaders handed out platitudes and pizza parties instead of proper PPE. No significant effective contact-tracing system was ever implemented. Testing was hard to come by and remains so today.

Over 3,600 health care workers died from COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic.

Once the vaccine provided some relief, social restrictions eased last summer; then schools opened in September, and President Joe Biden urged everyone to get back to work. However, the percentage of the population protected was never enough to offset the burden placed on workers still caring for critically ill COVID-19 patients.

When the delta variant spread through the country, there was legitimate concern that the vaccine would not be enough protection. Booster doses bought a few more months of partial immunity because the Biden administration could not afford the economy to backslide. Right-wing misinformation saw store clerks, flight attendants and restaurant workers struggling to get customers to wear masks indoors.

And then omicron hit.

The present-day situation is no less dire than in the pre-vaccine days of the pandemic. The omicron variant is hypertransmissible. It is responsible for more than 95% of current COVID-19 cases nationwide, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The U.S. hit a record of nearly 1.1 million new infections for one day on Jan. 3, according to data compiled by Johns

Hopkins University.

Case counts and deaths due to COVID-19 are as high or higher than two years ago in many states. "Omicron is causing a surge unlike anything we've seen, and at this rate our hospitals will fill up," Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear tweeted Jan. 4. According to Becker's Hospital Review, 16 states report critical staffing shortages at 25% of hospitals in their state, with 21 additional states expecting to be at that level soon.

## Profits over people

Now the CDC has issued new recommendations that trim the isolation period for asymptomatic health care workers with COVID-19 and no longer require exposed vaccinated workers to quarantine—a direct violation of standard infection control protocol.

Especially troubling is CDC's caveat that hospitals can use staffing shortages to justify limiting quarantine times even further. Zenei Triunfo-Cortez, RN, president of NNU, commented in Becker's Hospital Review: "Weakening COVID-19 guidance now, in the face of what could be the most devastating COVID-19 surge yet, will only result in further transmission, illness and death." ([tinyurl.com/5t495n8h](https://tinyurl.com/5t495n8h))

What could be the motivation for these government agencies to rescind much needed safety guidelines when the omicron surge is making life and work so dangerous?

Triunfo-Cortez pointed out that employers' arguments for reducing isolation time are focused on maintaining business operations and profits, "without regard for science or the health of employees and the public."

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a Jan. 9 interview on Fox News that the easing of restrictions was based on "ever-evolving science." However, it has been widely reported that the CDC was pressured to change the guidelines by Delta Airlines CEO Ed Bastian to prevent a



In Manhattan, a '7:00 p.m. cheer' went up Oct. 28, 2021, for the New York Professional Nurses Union, for their dedication during the pandemic.

PHOTO: NYPNU

negative impact to that airline's operations. Perhaps Dr. Walensky should indicate that she is referring to economic and not biological science, since the corporate bottom line is what is driving the CDC policy change.

We cannot rely on the CDC to steer us on a safe course out of the pandemic.

## Worker resistance the answer

As COVID-19 cases in children have risen dramatically in this latest surge—with Black and Brown children at higher risk—some teachers' unions are mobilizing to try to keep themselves and their students safe.

Pediatric hospitals are canceling elective procedures and adding critical care beds to accommodate children who become severely ill with COVID-19 or its long-term consequences. In January, the CDC reported alarming evidence that a sizable percentage of children under 18 years of age stricken with COVID-19 will develop diabetes.

Despite these troubling developments, many schools, especially in big cities, are not reverting back to remote learning. The Chicago Teachers Union voted Jan. 4 to

shift to remote instruction without the district's approval. As of Jan. 10, the CTU was still in walkout and encouraging members to refuse in-person teaching, despite extra pay being dangled as "incentive." Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, taking a hard line against the remote option, slammed the CTU.

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and the city's health department are both promoting more lax guidelines for in-person learning, falling in line with the CDC recommendations. But claims that remote learning is the cause of extreme stress for students seems like a poor excuse to put children, parents, teachers and other school workers at risk for a potentially life-threatening disease.

The stress on workers from the pandemic is real. But sending children back to classrooms amid a pandemic surge seems like another capitalist ploy to keep the profits up—at whatever the cost to workers and their families.

*Marie Kelly, an RN with 45 years experience, is an at-large member of National Nurses United.*

# Student workers win big on both coasts

By Martha Grevatt

After 10 weeks on the picket line, student workers at Columbia University are claiming victory. The members of Student Workers of Columbia-United Auto Workers Local 2110 voted to end their strike. They will spend the next two weeks discussing the details of their first contract with the university, before they vote on whether to accept it.

Local 2110 had spent the past three years negotiating with Columbia. It took strike action to win dental and vision benefits, improved health insurance and substantial pay increases. The union represents all students employed by the university—graduate and

undergraduate. This was their second strike.

Columbia has paid student workers so little that many have to live outside of New York City to afford rent. Others depend on Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program benefits, formerly known as food stamps. Hardships are particularly acute for those with dependent children.

Just as important, student workers won a clause mandating third-party arbitration in cases of harassment, discrimination and "power-based bullying." Amid widespread complaints of abuse by faculty and Columbia management, survivors will now not have to make their case directly to the university. An independent arbitrator will rule on their grievances.

This is of critical importance. As explained on SWC's web site, "The immense power faculty hold over us makes it easy for professors to sexually harass us and aggressively bully or penalize student workers who come from marginalized groups, such as people of color. In recent years, an instructor was sexually assaulted by a professor, and the University failed to hold him accountable." ([studentworkersofcolumbia.com](https://studentworkersofcolumbia.com))

## Recognition for 17,000 California researchers

Early in 2021, student researchers began the fight to win union recognition across the University of California system. Student Researchers United-UAW sought unionization to address issues such as discrimination, low pay and being paid late. The administration tried to divide the bargaining unit, saying the student instructors with fellowships or grants were not workers.

It took a strike threat to get UC system management to back down. Now the real fight begins: Like the Columbia student workers, they have to win their first contract.

SRU is committed to fighting for gender equity, parental leave, an end to sexual harassment and retaliation against those who complain, trans-inclusive health care and gender neutral bathrooms on campus.



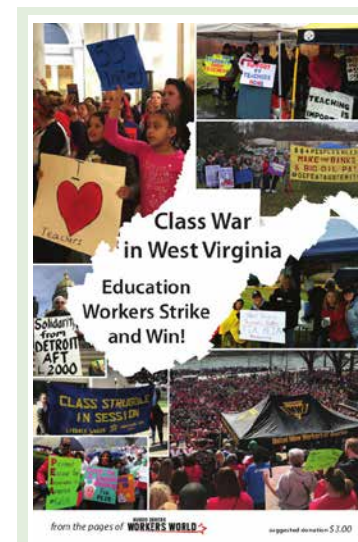
WW PHOTO: TONY MURPHY

Columbia University, New York City, Dec. 1, 2021.

COVID-19 safety is also a priority: "Student Researchers are working to improve our understanding of COVID-19, are helping to scale testing, or are the first workers returning to physical labs to continue other critically important research. But Student Researchers do not have an equal voice in determining lab safety policies. With a union, UC would have to negotiate with Student Researchers, like it has negotiated with Postdocs, Academic Researchers and Teaching Assistants over workplace safety and the effects of COVID-19." ([studentresearchersunited.org](https://studentresearchersunited.org))

Over 80,000 academic workers in the U.S. are represented by the UAW and many more by other unions. They share many of the same issues: inadequate pay and benefits and the prevalence of discrimination and abuse. Almost 60% of academic workers report experiencing harassment of some form.

From Harvard to Columbia to the University of California system, academic workers have joined and won in the union upsurge that began with "Striketober." □



Covers the events of 2018 strikes that sparked actions across the nation.

Available as a free PDF download at [workers.org/books](https://workers.org/books)



# Enslavement, prisons—and the vote

Continued from page 1

In many cases across the most incarcerated country in the world, known as the United States, this means imprisoned people are counted as part of the population wherever they are locked up, rather than in their communities of origin. But they are still unable to vote because of their convictions.

In Huntsville, Texas, there are seven prison units run by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The population of that town, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is 45,941. According to TDCJ’s unit directory these prisons — the Byrd Unit, the Ellis Unit, the Estelle Unit, the Goree Unit, the Holliday Unit, the Huntsville Unit and the Wynne Unit — have a combined total capacity to imprison 13,719 human beings; 13,719 is 29.9% of 45,941. (tinyurl.com/TDCJunitdirectory)

Imagine up to 30% of a population being counted in a census that determines how many resources are allocated to a given town for its elected representatives to spend. But that 30% is unable to have

any say in who gets to spend that money or how. In many cases, these people are not from the towns they are imprisoned in — they have been ripped from their own communities and denied a voice in the so-called “democracy” where they live.

### Black voters criminalized, disenfranchised

This voting disenfranchisement disproportionately affects Black, Latinx and Indigenous people as they are incarcerated at rates much higher than their share of the population. In Texas this has been true since the TDCJ was founded as the Texas Department of Corrections, as well as earlier under the system of convict leasing — often described as worse than slavery. (workers.org/2019/10/43909/)

Huntsville is also where the state of Texas has executed 573 people since 1982 — more than the next six states in the U.S. combined — and is a case study in why the racist, anti-poor and ableist death penalty needs to be abolished. (deathpenaltyinfo.org)

A 2019 study from Villanova University

found that in Pennsylvania, where 40,000 people are currently incarcerated in state prisons, “[i]f prisoners were counted in their home districts during legislative map-drawing, the average Black Pennsylvanian would gain 353 new voters in their district; the average white person would lose 59, and an additional eight districts would be eliminated due to being either too big or too small.”

In that state, activists and reform advocates were able to force a major concession in 2021 when the Pennsylvania State Senate voted to end prison gerrymandering. Instead state prisoners now count as residents of the counties they lived in prior to incarceration. However, the state’s Legislative Reapportionment Commission later backtracked and said that this decision would not apply to those serving life sentences or sentenced to remain in prison until the next census — in 2030. That means that roughly one in four Pennsylvania prisoners still will not be counted as part of their home district. (WHYY, Sept. 21, 2021)

New York state Democrats put forward a similar initiative to prevent prison gerrymandering as a ballot proposal in November 2021. It was defeated along with other reforms including same-day voter registration and expanding absentee ballot access.

### Injustice in county jails

While persons convicted of a crime are typically housed in prisons and are legally ineligible to vote, as in Texas, most of the people in county jails are locked up awaiting trial and are eligible to vote — but have no means to get to the polls.

Harris County Jail in Houston, Texas, is the third largest jail in the country. Like many jails around the country, upwards of 70% of the people inside are being detained pretrial and have not been convicted of anything. (Prison Policy Initiative, March 24, 2020, tinyurl.com/PretrialDetentioninJails)

Harris County Jail piloted a program

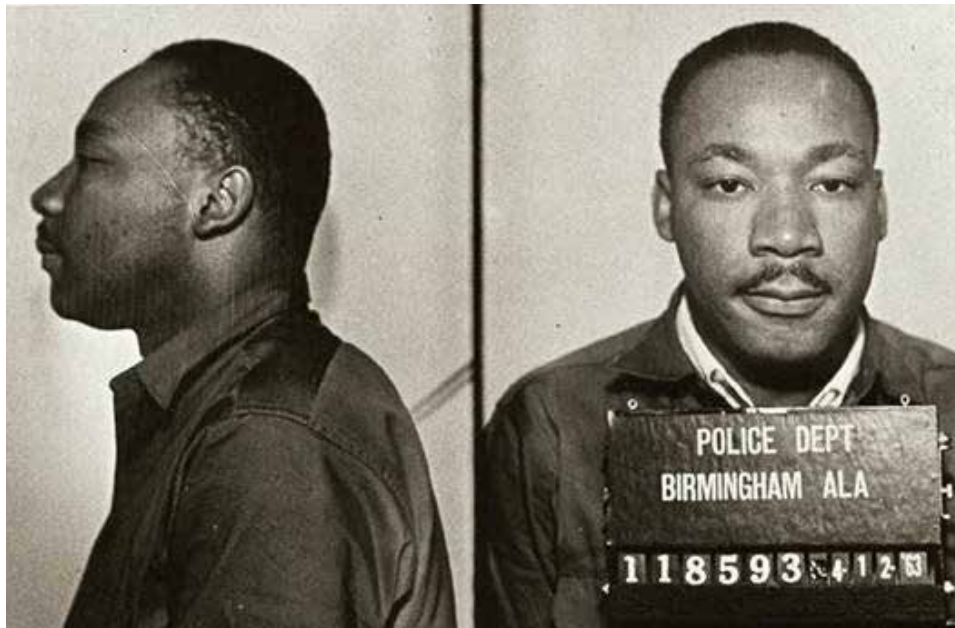
to allow people arrested on or after Oct. 22, 2021, to vote in the November 2021 elections from a polling site located inside the jail. Volunteers from Project Orange, a group that helps register incarcerated voters, worked within the jail to help people arrested before that date to register for absentee ballots. Harris County Jail was the first jail in Texas to allow this to happen; a program was modeled somewhat on a pilot effort at Cook County Jail in Chicago in 2020.

These programs are rare, and while it is a leap forward to give incarcerated people access to their right to the vote, it is still a fundamental injustice that many of them find themselves trapped in jail due to their inability to pay bail bond while awaiting trial.

### Beyond the vote — abolition!

More radical and deeper measures are needed. End the Exception, part of a movement to change the Thirteenth Amendment language, says: “In the last three years, three states have abolished slavery in their state constitutions. In 2018, Colorado became the first state since Rhode Island — the only state to have fully abolished slavery prior to the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment — to end the exception and abolish slavery. Following in its footsteps, Utah and Nebraska also led successful campaigns to abolish slavery in 2020. In all three states, the ballot initiatives were the result of unanimous, bipartisan legislative votes.”

Abolition of the afterlife of enslavement is the goal, and we aim to leave no member of our collective class — the working class — behind. □



Dr. Martin Luther King wrote ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’ — a germinal text of the Civil Rights Movement — while being held in solitary confinement, initially making notes in the margins of a newspaper. This is his police booking photograph in that 1963 arrest.



## Letters from incarcerated readers

# ‘A glimpse into my struggle’

Dear Workers World,  
I ran across an ad you all wrote about Russell Maroon Shoatz, and I became interested in finding out more about your organization and the things you all do. Please put me on your mailing list and send me any publications and resources you have for prisoners.

Thanks in advance,  
**Laderic M., Charleston, Missouri**

Dear Workers World,  
I have recently been introduced to the Workers World newspaper by a couple of inmates here, and I really love reading the columns and cover stories in your paper. I hope to someday be able to join Workers World Party and add to some of the stories/columns in your paper with some of my experiences from behind these walls. I do not have much money at this time to be able to afford a subscription of the Workers World newspaper, but I would like to know if you could please donate a subscription to me at this time until I am able to afford to purchase one from your organization. Please continue your great work, and I thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Respectfully addressed,  
**Edmund C., Frackville, Pennsylvania**

Greetings and blessings! I’ve heard superb things about your publication, but my eyes have yet to have the opportunity to devour your food for thought. Please let me know how I can go about receiving this “food.” I recently soaked up Vol. 46, No. 11 issue of the San Francisco Bay View, and this issue featured an article about Russell Maroon Shoatz. They reference you as the original author of the article. Powerful stuff.

On another note, I just wanted to take out a few more moments of your time to give you a glimpse into my struggle. My name is Troy and I am a 37-year-old Black man (going to turn 38 on Dec. 15) who has spent years in captivity for crimes that I’m actually innocent of. To add to my misfortune, I have been isolated in solitary confinement for the past 16 years (and counting). I have been confined under the brutal status of Administrative Segregation (Ad-Seg). I am presently in a supposed “step-down” program, but the conditions are still isolated. I’m told this is a nine-month program that has to be completed, even though I just completed a nine-month supposed “step-down” program at Attica’s solitary confinement unit. Upon arrival to Mid State, I was told that I have to start the “step-down” process all over again.

You can view pieces written by me at betweenthebars.org and listen to interviews with me and others on the PrisonsKill Podcast. Me and all of my comrades at Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) and Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC) and PrisonsKill support your movement. Salute!

Peace n’ blessings,  
**Comrade Troy, Marcy, New York**

I submit this correspondence to your office in an effort to “check-in” with your organization to let you know that I have been periodically receiving your newspaper.

I want to thank you for keeping me abreast of what is happening internationally as well as here at home. I greatly appreciate your service, and I always look forward to receiving your newspaper. Especially during the COVID-19 quarantine phase of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections where correctional staff fail to social distance and wear their masks. The vaccine was a blessing, and I am presently trying to obtain a booster to the J&J vaccine that they administered to me in May of 2021.

The correctional staff continue to not wear masks, and many refuse to get

vaccinated, so a booster would be imperative to at the very least ensure that I am not hospitalized for their negligence and/or ignorance.

In solidarity from a modern day slave,  
**Louie V., Benner Township, Pennsylvania**

Dear Workers World,  
I hope this finds you well. I am a prison inmate in the state of Georgia. I am writing on behalf of myself and some others here at my facility. We would like to be added to your mailing list to receive your newspaper.

Thank you!  
**James M., Jaysn M., Jackie N., Bradley H., Kenneth H., Stacy M., Garden City, Georgia**

**Thank you all for writing to us. Workers World provides free subscriptions upon request to anyone who is currently incarcerated. We love to hear from our comrades inside and look forward to hearing from you and printing your submissions in Tear Down the Walls!**  
— Ted Kelly, co-editor

Continued on page 7



## 40 years unjustly incarcerated

# Mumia petitions for new trial

By Betsey Piette  
Philadelphia

Attorneys for imprisoned journalist and veteran Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal filed a petition Jan. 4 for a Post-Conviction Relief Appeal (PCRA), based on evidence found in six case file boxes they were first able to review in January 2019. The boxes were discovered in a remote storage room in the Philadelphia District Attorney's office in late December 2018.

The uncovered evidence reveals a pattern of prosecutorial misconduct and abuse of authority, including bribery of the state's two key witnesses — a violation of Brady v. Maryland, and racist exclusion in jury selection — a violation of the landmark Supreme Court ruling Batson v. Kentucky.

Abu-Jamal was arrested and charged with the murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner on Dec. 9, 1981. The prosecution's star witness during Abu-Jamal's 1982 trial was taxicab driver Robert Chobert, on probation for arson and driving with a suspended chauffeur's license.

Chobert claimed he pulled up behind Faulkner's police car and witnessed the killing. Pictures of the crime scene taken by press photographer Pedro Polakoff, 10 minutes after the shooting, showed an empty space where Chobert alleged he parked his cab.

### Coerced state witnesses

Testifying again in Abu-Jamal's initial 1995 PCRA hearing, Chobert admitted he was offered a deal by the District Attorney to reinstate his suspended license. A key piece of evidence found in the boxes shows he was offered more.

Abu-Jamal was convicted July 3, 1982. In a letter postmarked Aug. 6, 1982, Chobert wrote Joseph McGill, the sole trial prosecutor, stating: "I have been calling you to find out about the money own (sic) to me. So here is a letter finding out about the money." He wrote, "Do you need me to sign anything? How long will it take to get it?"

The prosecution's other principal witness was Cynthia White, who had 38 prior arrests and five open cases pending at the time of the trial. White was the

only witness who claimed to have seen all the events and to identify Abu-Jamal as the shooter. However, no other prosecution or defense witnesses reported seeing White at the scene, where she claimed to have been.

At the time of the trial, White was serving a prison sentence in Massachusetts. The prosecutor claimed she had been offered no incentives to testify and no promises were made to her offering leniency in her outstanding cases. However, evidence disclosed for the first time in January 2019 contained memoranda and letters revealing that McGill's office repeatedly intervened to direct and monitor the outstanding charges against White, whose



Demonstrators protest Pennsylvania Supreme Court trial delay, Philadelphia, Feb. 28, 2020.

WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

remaining cases were dismissed for "lack of prosecution."

### Racism in jury selection

The files disclosed in January 2019 contained powerful, new evidence that McGill tracked Black jurors by prominently placing the letter "B" next to their names. McGill had used most of his 20 peremptory challenges to eliminate Black and younger jurors — those most likely to oppose the death penalty.

Abu-Jamal's attorneys call for the court to vacate his conviction and order a new trial or, in the alternative, provide an

quit before being vaccinated!"

My question is this: Why do other employees in other professions and workplaces have a mandate that they have to be vaccinated by a certain date, but correction officers in Pennsylvania are not required to be vaccinated? Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf should have placed a mandate on the PA DOC employees to be vaccinated or lose their jobs. Why hasn't that been done?

Prisoners' lives matter too!  
**Miley Fletcher, Benner Township, Pennsylvania**



People rally to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, Philadelphia, July 3, 2021.

WW PHOTO: JOE PIETTE

opportunity for discovery and schedule an evidentiary hearing based on the evidence disclosed in January 2019.

### Justice delayed is justice denied

Abu-Jamal's current appellate case, first filed in August 2016 and heard in a courtroom April 24, 2017, was based on the 2016 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, Williams v. Pennsylvania. This case found due process was violated when former Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Ronald Castille participated in the consideration of Terrance Williams' appeal in a capital post-conviction case.

Progressive attorney Larry Krasner took office January 2018 as Philadelphia's District Attorney. Many had hoped Krasner would release Abu-Jamal, but he continued to uphold the frameup.

Common Pleas Court Judge Leon Tucker awarded Abu-Jamal the right to reopen his PCRA appeals Dec. 24, 2018. Four days later, Krasner reported the discovery of the six file boxes. Krasner appealed Tucker's ruling, later relenting after public criticism.

Abu-Jamal's attorneys Judith Ritter and Sam Spital filed four PCRA petitions with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court

in September 2019. They petitioned to send the case back to Philadelphia Courts of Common Pleas, based on the new evidence discovered in the six file boxes.

Then on Feb. 24, 2020, four justices on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court granted an extremely rare King's Bench Petition from Faulkner's widow, backed by the Fraternal Order of Police, to move jurisdiction over Abu-Jamal's appeals away from Krasner's office. The FOP criticized Krasner for not being aggressive enough in opposing Tucker.

In a split decision, the state court had denied the FOP petition in December 2020. Krasner finally responded to Abu-Jamal's PCRA appeals on Feb. 3, 2021, and on March 17 the appeals proceeded to the Pennsylvania Superior Court, which denied Abu-Jamal's case on Oct. 26. Abu-Jamal's attorneys opted not to appeal the superior court ruling and instead filed for an evidentiary hearing with the lower court.

Krasner won reelection in November 2021, despite the FOP's blatant attempts to unseat him. During his tenure his office has exonerated over 20 people facing life in prison. Most of these cases were similar to Abu-Jamal's, including police and prosecutors manipulating witnesses and hiding evidence from defense lawyers that would have resulted in not-guilty verdicts.

Abu-Jamal has been unjustly imprisoned for 40 years. His current appeal has been prolonged for five years. Abu-Jamal's health has declined, suffering from cirrhosis of the liver from untreated hepatitis C, COVID-19, and diagnosed with congestive heart disease in March 2021 that required open-heart surgery. DA Krasner and Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf both have the authority to release Abu-Jamal or grant him a new trial.

To further delay justice for an innocent man is to deny justice. □

## Letters from incarcerated readers

# 'A glimpse into my struggle'

Continued from page 6

Only 41% of guards and staff are vaccinated at SCI Forest. But we're told to get vaccinated, or we'll be locked down on a block that the unvaccinated would be placed with restrictions such as you can't go to school programs, parole hearings, no visits and no phone time. But there is no restriction on guards or staff! And going to programs, we're subjected to sitting in a room with nonvaccinated staff members who are running programs. When I asked guards, they stated, "I'd

## WORKERS WORLD ISN'T OUR NEWSPAPER. IT'S YOURS.

**We want to hear from you, our subscribers behind the walls. Write to us and let us know you're submitting a letter for *Tear Down the Walls!* and we'll publish as many statements from incarcerated workers as we can.**

**Do you consider yourself an "incarcerated worker"?  
Do you think it's time we stopped using the term "prisoner"?  
Do you have grievances or organizing actions you'd like to report on?**

**Write us. Let us know. Because this is your newspaper.**

**ATTN: TEAR DOWN THE WALLS!**

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# Queer people and the U.S. communist movement, 1969-1979

By Princess Harmony

In 1966, one of the first transgender-led rebellions occurred in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco. The Compton’s Cafeteria Riot served as the prelude to the founding of the modern queer movement.

Three years later, on June 28, 1969, there was another rebellion — at New York City’s Stonewall Inn.

The New York Police Department’s morals squad hadn’t gotten its customary bribe to lay off of this gathering place for LGBTQ+ people and raided the bar. Cops forced their way in and attacked everyone they saw. Gay men, lesbians, transgender people (then sometimes called “transvestites”) and cisgender heterosexual leftist radicals were in the bar and surrounding area and fought with all their might against the oppressive police apparatus. (For a detailed account of the rebellion, see Leslie Feinberg, “Lavender and Red,” parts 63-71, workers.org/books2016/.)

The rebellious queers displayed a bravery not expected by the straight world of the time and, over the course of that night, more and more people came to fight the cops, some taking direct blows from club-wielding cops, yet never surrendering.

Two transgender women, Black trans woman Marsha P. Johnson — she said the P stood for “Pay It No Mind” — and Latinx trans woman Sylvia Rivera were among the leading comrades in the rebellion, whose leadership was primarily people of color. (For more: “Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt and Queer Antagonist Struggle,” tinyurl.com/3wbtuxs9)

The police, overconfident in their abilities to terrorize queer and oppressed people, were pushed back! Not just by the people in the bar, but by people who gathered from the streets to fight back. Radical cisgender allies came out to run support. Homeless people, some straight, came to support also.

Queer people celebrated the defeat of the police, as Stonewall served as the first Pride event. Unfortunately, the Mattachine Society — which had once been a radical left, gay group — defended the status quo, actually joining police efforts to stop the protests. (“Lavender and Red,” part 70)

The most oppressed people continued to protest for days, while more privileged queer people downplayed the fightback of Stonewall and looked down upon the rebellion.

## Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries

In 1970, the radical group STAR — Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries — was born out of an occupation at New York University. From the statement marking STAR’s founding came its key principle: “If you want gay power, then you’re going to have to fight for it. And you’re going to have to fight until you win.” (“Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries,” page 18)

STAR was not specifically a Marxist group, but it’s accurate to say it was a radical socialist and revolutionary grouping, in action if not in name. STAR activists housed and fed queer kids and transgender kids who had nothing and nobody else to rely upon.

Marsha P. Johnson saw the necessity to connect the struggles of all oppressed people. An important statement from her was: “History isn’t something you look

back at and say it was inevitable; it happens because people make decisions that are sometimes very impulsive and of the moment, but those moments are cumulative realities.” (tinyurl.com/mr2ncw73)

Sylvia Rivera saw the need for the struggle against racist oppression and for the trans struggle, women’s struggle and gay struggle to be combined: “We were all involved in different struggles, including myself and many other transgender people. But in these struggles, in the Civil Rights movement, in the war movement, in the women’s movement, we were still outcasts. The only reason they tolerated the transgender community in some of these movements was because we were gung ho; we were frontliners. We didn’t take no shit from nobody.” (“Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries,” page 32)

Both Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were more than just revolutionizing for queer people. They were involved in the movement to liberate Black and Puerto Rican people. Sylvia was involved in the Young Lords Party, a revolutionary group that fought to liberate the bodies and minds of Puerto Ricans. (tinyurl.com/3an4xwzfz).

The special political aspect of STAR was that it was aligned with groups like the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party, two Marxist-Leninist groups tied to Black and Puerto Rican liberation. (“Lavender and Red,” part 71)

In fact, Black Panther Huey P. Newton spoke of the need of queer people’s liberation. He said, “We know that homosexuality is a fact that exists, and we must understand it in its purest form: that is, a person should have the freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants.” (tinyurl.com/237yvbcx)

Newton was correct in his analysis: Queer people need freedom, and queer liberation must be part of other forms of liberation.

## Workers World Party leads

Huey P. Newton was not the only Marxist-Leninist to see the necessity of queer liberation. One of the founders of Workers World Party, chief theoretician and chairperson Sam Marcy took up the defense of drag queens and transgender people as having existed even before capitalism took hold. He defended queer members of Workers World, when others mocked them. He truly cared for the queer members of the proletariat.

WWP’s youth wing during the Vietnam War — Youth Against War and Fascism — also took up the question of queer people. YAWF had a gay and lesbian caucus founded in 1971 that would eventually evolve and become the LGBTQ+ caucus of the WWP. (“Lavender and Red,” part 80)

Marcy himself, always on the cutting edge, here using the language of the earlier era, said: “Our party, which bases itself on Marxism-Leninism, looks to the early model of the Soviet Union as the embodiment of what our own political position should be in relation to the



WW PHOTO

Youth Against War and Fascism, a mass organization sponsored by Workers World Party, participated in the 1974 Pride march in New York City.

struggle of gay people. Our first, most elementary and fundamental duty, as well as objective on this question, is to completely eliminate and abolish all forms of persecution and oppression of gay people. It must also fight against all ideological, political and social manifestations of gay oppression, which may be reflected in our own ranks.” (“Lavender and Red,” part 80)

In the U.S. communist movement, only Workers World Party — from its time as a tendency within the Socialist Workers Party to its foundation as an independent Marxist-Leninist party in 1959 — fully embraced queerness.

Unfortunately, the pro-queer stance of Workers World Party was not the norm in the decade after the Stonewall Rebellion within the U.S. communist movement. Left tendencies were still adhering to the Stalinist deviation from Leninism of treating queerness as a form of bourgeois decadence in the age of decaying capitalism, like the backward 1974 pronouncement on LGBTQ+ identity and life as “... an individual response to the intensification of the contradictions brought about by decaying imperialism . . . a response to the contradiction between men and women which is rooted in male-supremacist institutions and male-chauvinist ideology.” (tinyurl.com/4hc3kedh)

The attitude of much of the U.S. communist movement in the decade after the Stonewall Rebellion could be summed up in this reactionary statement: “Homosexuality is a form of social sickness, a form of social perversion. It is a form of bourgeois ideology, which appeals especially to the petty bourgeoisie because of its appearance as sexual freedom.” (Workers Viewpoint Organization, tinyurl.com/3jfx8762)

To combat this theoretical and oppressive error within U.S. communist currents, a Workers World Party comrade, Bob McCubbin, worked with founding members Vince Copeland, Dorothy Ballan and other members to formulate a Marxist analysis of what was then called the “gay question.” After collective research and discussion of the history and present oppression of queer people, this work resulted in the 1976 book “The Gay Question: A Marxist Appraisal,” later reissued as “The Roots of Gay and Lesbian Oppression: A Marxist View.”

From 1969-1979 and beyond, Workers World Party’s stance on queer people has been the same: We are members of the proletariat; we are oppressed; and we are revolutionary. □

# In Cuba, how La Güinera made room for more gender

*This lightly edited excerpt is from part 105 of Leslie Feinberg’s “Lavender and Red” series on the interconnections between LGBTQ+ lives and socialism. The 120-part series appeared in Workers World from 2004-2008. The sections on Cuba are available in “Rainbow Solidarity in Defense of Cuba,” available in free PDF download at workers.org/book.*



By Leslie Feinberg

“Butterflies on the Scaffold” (“Mariposas en el andamio”), a 1996 documentary, offered a profoundly thoughtful and moving account of how in the 1970s, Cuban women construction workers literally made

room for cross-dressing performance art in the workers’ cafeterias in their neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana, called La Güinera.

The word “butterfly” (“mariposa”) refers to male-bodied Cubans whose femininity is either a part or the whole of their gender expression.

The film was directed by Margaret Gilpin and Luis Felipe Bernaza. Gilpin reported that the preliminary cut had to be shown 11 times at the Havana Film Festival in December 1995 to accommodate the crowds.

“Butterflies on the Scaffold” came out at the same time that a contingent of gay transgender Cubans were asked to lead the massive May Day march in Havana that year. Two U.S. queer-focused activist delegations were

invited to join them in the procession — one from Bay Area Queers for Cuba, the other from New York’s Center for Cuban Studies.

For 10 to 15 years after the 1959 revolution, La Güinera had remained undeveloped. Then, documentary footage explained: “Squatters came from the provinces and formed an association. They said, we’ll build your house today and mine tomorrow.” Women made up 70% of the construction brigades.

## ‘We saw the show, and we liked it’

Marisela, a young woman of African descent on the construction staff, recalled that cross-dressing performance artists “had a show in a private house. They invited the girls from the [workers’] dining room. We

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# The inferno industry and PG&E

By Danny O'Brien

Jan. 8 — In the first week of 2022, California fire officials finally placed the blame for the massive Dixie Fire that raged in northern California from the end of last July through the end of October.

The fire, larger than Rhode Island, burned over 950,000 acres across five counties, destroyed the towns of Greenville and Canyon Dam, killed one firefighter and spread poisoned air as far as Colorado.

The culprit? A faulty Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) power line.

At the present moment, more than 30,000 PG&E customers of Sierra, Placer and El Dorado Counties in California have been without power since Dec. 27 following a winter storm. People are not expected to have power fully restored until Jan. 11 — a full two weeks without power! For those without access to another form of adequate heat and alternative food storage methods, this presents grave and dangerous circumstances.

To add to the list of PG&E's harmful actions to people, a lawsuit against the company was filed in recent weeks by Emanuel Lankford, a Black employee, alleging discriminatory and retaliatory practices against his job mobility and security.

Lankford, who has worked as a PG&E substation supervisor for more than 15 years, said in a Jan. 5 interview: "It's been one thing after another: being overlooked for promotions, being retaliated against for speaking up. ... I interviewed for the manager position ... it was not awarded to me. It instead went to a white female who has no substation experience." ([tinyurl.com/2fd369xp](https://tinyurl.com/2fd369xp))

Another Black PG&E employee, Cynthia Farr, filed a lawsuit for discrimination in October 2021. Farr was fired in retaliation for making discrimination claims against the company, and she was disciplined for reaching out to an electrical industry union regarding her treatment. The racist discrimination and harassment against Farr, documented as far back as 2017, hit an extreme in 2018, when Farr was ordered to remain in the open while the



Dixie Fire in the Indian Falls, California, neighborhood, July 24, 2021.

rest of the staff was sent to hide behind bulletproof glass during the threat of an active shooter.

## Capitalist crimes

Corporate misconduct is not news, and PG&E is no stranger to being unmasked for such misconduct. But the scope of its misconduct is absolutely monumental.

This misconduct carries adverse effects plaguing all of northern California and putting much of the rest of the West Coast at risk. We must continually make the link that it is corporations driving climate disasters forward.

Plenty can be said in theory about the evils that corporations enact by way of exploitation and expansion. But looking at such a company as this California behemoth, concrete evil can be seen in more visible ways, like the large-scale destruction of land in massive acreages — and of lives in the hundreds.

This new streak of transgressions from the utility giant represents momentum carried forward from its past. PG&E's highlights of the last decade are nothing short of pure horror. In San Bruno, California, in 2010, a company gas pipeline exploded, killing eight and injuring dozens more. The Butte Fire of September 2015, starting in Amador County, California, was caused by one of its power lines, and killed two people.

The company was blamed for the

electrical malfunction that caused the Oakland Ghost Ship warehouse fire in December 2016, which killed 36 people. PG&E's power lines were again at fault for 13 of the fires in northern California in October 2017, when 250 fires killed 44 people.

The recent catastrophic Dixie Fire — which PG&E was found culpable for — was the second largest in California's history. The utility company was also guilty of the state's worst: The 2018 Camp Fire, California's deadliest and most destructive fire, killed 85 people and displaced 90% of the population of the town of Paradise, nearly completely destroying it and three other towns — Concow, Magalia and Butte Creek Canyon.

The cause? Again, a faulty PG&E power line.

After all these atrocities, in recent weeks PG&E has announced it is raising its utility rates by over 9%. The company has put out the following public relations reason: to help fund wildfire prevention and grid safety.

But it is precisely the company's unsafe practices and total negligence that have

caused the bulk of the decade's most devastating California wildfires. It is the company, with its enormous resource pool of capital, that needs to shoulder the cost and duty of maintenance and repair, not its customers.

## More than a slap on wrist needed

Admonishing Pacific Gas & Electric does not satisfy its crimes. Fining them a hundred million dollars or so for each fire is a slap on the wrist for a company worth \$97.8 billion in assets.

The given solution has been posited many times to the company: Bury the power lines. The company has made many empty promises to act to this effect and has slowly started the process of burying some lines, but it does not prioritize the project and refuses to repair and maintain equipment in the meantime.

The reason: Burying lines is a costly endeavor; and despite its utmost necessity, it is more profitable for the corporation to refuse or delay, than for it to see a dip in its short-term profits.

Such a mindset would require redistribution and collective ownership.

PG&E is an excellent example of the sheer danger involved in allowing a private entity to control the resources that should belong to the people. An electrical company should be safe, up-to-date and reliable, regardless of profitability. Its workers would agree, and its customers would agree. Two-thirds of the utility's constituency would be in agreement, but capitalists depend for their existence on the profit element.

For them it's a worthy sacrifice to raze entire towns, leave people stranded without power, devalue their skilled Black employees to continue to squeeze cheap labor out of them and scorch whole forests to the ground — as long as that means capitalist profits will ride high in the short term. □

**Corporate misconduct is not news, and PG&E is no stranger to being unmasked for such misconduct. But the scope of its misconduct is absolutely monumental.**

# In Cuba, how La Güinera made room for more gender

Continued from page 8

went, we saw the group, the show, and we liked it."

One drag artist spoke from his home, the site of performances. "We used sheets for fabric, no sequins, nothing. The dressing room was in the bedroom, and we acted here. When the show moved to the backyard, we used this as our dressing room. The public brought their own chairs. Marisela even brought a sofa! In the short time we worked in my backyard, this was the headquarters, the cradle of cross-dressing in Havana. Hundreds of drag queens came through here who never thought they would do this work."

The local security chief, on camera with his young daughter, expressed a backward view: "Personally, I don't think these things should increase. On the contrary, I think they should diminish. Children go there and see a person who is a man in normal life, or who goes around as a man, and later they see him dressed as a woman. That child will want to experiment, and that's not what I want to see."

"Also, they charged admission for the parties they gave at home." In fact, noted one party participant, the funds at one

event were collected for the troops of the territorial militia — for the defense of Cuba.

The security police chief called off the drag shows. But in a workers' state, that's not the end of the story!

## In a workers' state, a place is created

Marisela explained, "After the police stopped the parties, there was no place for them to perform. In solidarity I began to collect protest letters and petitions. The only option was Fifi. To bring them here so everyone could see them. I was convinced they were good."

Marisela was referring to the lead organizer of La Güinera's construction brigade effort — Josefina Bocourt Díaz, affectionately known as "Fifi."

The woman whose co-workers and neighbors call her "Fifi" is a Cuban of African descent. As a child before the revolution, she had to start work at the age of 9. She explained, "I was one of the 70,000 maids that Cuba had before 1959. I couldn't enjoy much of my childhood. Now I've had the opportunity to work on the development of La Güinera, and I feel like a new woman."

She narrated how her consciousness

about transgender and homosexuality changed qualitatively, while in a position of social leadership.

Fifi remembered, "Marisela and the others came to see me. 'We want them in the cabaret. If you haven't seen them, you can't object.'

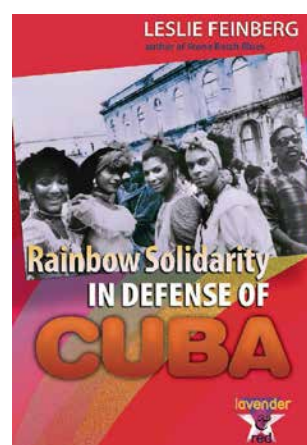
"At first I rebelled," Fifi said, recalling her arguments: "I'm an older woman. I wasn't accustomed to running around with this 'class of people.' I said, 'No, keep them away. I don't want to hear about people who run around with a double façade.' ... I said, 'No, please, I can't be around you guys. I wouldn't be doing my

duty to society. I'm too old for this stuff. I've never been involved in these things.'"

But Marisela persisted. She said, "Fifi, I saw a show. Fifi, they should start at once here in the workers' cafeteria."

One drag performer said of Fifi, "She opened a cabaret in the workers' cafeteria and brought us into it. She made us face the 'herds' of public we were afraid to face. She reassured us. She said, 'Do it; face them; you'll see. Nothing will happen.'"

Another performer added, "Fifi should be honored by us. She'll always be close to our hearts for the wonderful way she treated us." □



## Rainbow Solidarity in DEFENSE of CUBA

By Leslie Feinberg,  
author of *Stone Butch Blues*

This ground-breaking book is a compilation of 25 articles about same-sex love and sex/gender variance in Cuba's pre- and post-revolutionary history.

Available, along with complete Lavender & Red series, as free download at [workers.org/books](https://workers.org/books)



# One year after fascist attack Capital and the Capitol

January 6, 2021. This date is etched in our collective psyche as the day a violent, white-supremacist, misogynist mob — instigated by then-President and still bigot-in-chief Donald Trump — invaded the U.S. Capitol building in an attempt to overturn the results of the Nov. 3, 2020, presidential election.

This brazen act was carried out with the backing of 147 Senators and Representatives. Those in the Trump wing of the Republican Party, once deemed “extremists” or “fringe elements,” now dictate that party’s policy. The Liz Cheney types are demonized as traitors for clinging to what was once “mainstream” conservatism.

The fascist wing of the ruling class, and the disaffected middle-class people used as cannon fodder, were pushed back following January 6, 2021. Embarrassed corporate funders soon cut off donations to ultraright politicians. “There are some members [of Congress] who, by their actions, will have forfeited the support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Period. Full stop,” said Neil Bradley, executive vice president and chief policy officer for the big business consortium. ([tinyurl.com/5xh432nu](https://tinyurl.com/5xh432nu))

But this did not last long. Within two months the Chamber reversed its position, opening the financial spigot to the very legislators who voted against accepting the election of President Joe Biden. Boeing, Pfizer, General Motors, Ford Motor Company, AT&T and UPS and over 700 other companies gave close to \$18 million to the reelection campaigns of 143 of these politicians in the past year. Trade groups including the Chamber donated \$7.67 million to political groups affiliated with the lawmakers who voted to overturn the election and their PACs, and businesses that had pledged to stop donations have since given almost \$2.4 million to their campaigns and political action committees.

Trent Perrotto, a spokesperson for the defense contractor Lockheed Martin, explained his company’s practice of putting profits over principles: “Our employee PAC program continues to observe longstanding principles of nonpartisan political engagement in support of our business interests.” The company gave \$145,000 to 72 members of the “sedition caucus.” (New York Times, Jan. 6)

Apparently the “business interests” of over 700 large corporations direct them to curry favor with the most vile, Klanlike elements of society.

### Fascism, democracy and capitalism

Why is it even legal for corporations to fund these ultraright insurrectionists?

The old adage goes “possession is nine-tenths of the law.” Maybe it’s not mathematically exactly that. But the possessing class has the power to spend “its money” — really the surplus value created by the working class — as it sees fit.

The capitalist class and the state have always maintained a relationship with the fascist right, from the KKK to the Proud Boys.

As Workers World Party founding member and late Chairperson Sam Marcy wrote in “The Klan and the Government” in 1983, “Even in the so-called best of times, the capitalist government not only tolerates terrorist organizations like the Klan, but once the class struggle of the workers and oppressed people takes on the character of a genuine mass upsurge, the capitalist government is more likely than ever to encourage and promote the likes of the Klan and other mediums of repression.”

Support by part of the ruling class for Marjorie Taylor Greene, Josh Hawley and their ilk is not occurring in a vacuum. The Black Lives Matter upsurge of 2020 and the strike wave of the past few months have shaken their confidence. Some of them worry whether a Democratic

administration can contain the class struggle within peaceful, legal, nonthreatening channels.

Capitalism is an inherently violent system of global exploitation. This is a fundamental truth, even under a parliamentary democracy such as exists in the imperialist U.S., Western Europe or Japan. The entire history of the U.S. is one of brutal white supremacy, from the theft of Indigenous lands to the enslavement of Africans to the lynchings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice and countless others.

This is true regardless of who gets elected to office and what their strategy is to protect the profit system — more repression or more concessions to the working class. Just look at how the liberal politicians and media are gushing with praise for Liz Cheney, a militarist who favors cutting food assistance programs to funnel even more dollars to the Pentagon!

Fascism, historically, represents the annihilation of any organized expression of working-class and oppressed people’s power — first and foremost the unions. The danger is a built-in feature of capitalist class rule. The

United Auto Workers strike Ford for union recognition, 1941. Henry Ford was openly allied with Hitler. Today, Ford funds ultraright candidates for political office.



Democrats, beholden to the ruling class, cannot be relied on to defeat it.

But the working class can defeat fascism. Some activists are now advocating a “united front against fascism.” In November 2020, when it appeared possible that Trump would not leave the White House when his term in office ended, calls emerged for a general strike to “defend democracy.”

Class struggle is the best medicine to the MAGA goons’ poison.

Ultimately it will take a working-class revolution that overthrows capitalist rule altogether to end the fascist threat once and for all.

Yes — another world is possible! □

*“The Klan & Government: Foes or Allies?” by Sam Marcy is available in free PDF download at [workers.org/books](https://workers.org/books).*

## U.S.—hands off Kazakhstan!

Just days before urgent talks between Russia and the United States in Geneva, Switzerland, began Jan. 10, a wide-

spread outbreak of fighting in the Central Asian country of Kazakhstan — including burning the presidential palace — resulted in Russia sending troops to that country to guard strategic buildings. The Jan. 10 talks involve Ukraine and Russia’s demand that NATO’s aggressive expansion toward its borders cease and be reversed.

Along with Russia and Kazakhstan, other former Soviet republics — Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — are joined in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) alliance that pledges mutual defense against foreign intervention.

U.S. and British spokespeople immediately exploited the events to expand their ongoing anti-Russia propaganda campaign, warning Russia against intervention in Kazakhstan. The charges completely ignored that the Pentagon had just ended 20 years of occupying Afghanistan while waging wars of intervention in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Somalia.

Using the pretext of a “war on terror,” Washington has spent \$5.5 trillion on these wars, according to the Brown University Costs of War group.

WW refuses to ignore this recent history of imperialist war-making. We call for countering U.S. propaganda. One should expect anything out of Washington and in the corporate media regarding Kazakhstan to be distorted or outright lies.

The fighting in Kazakhstan, which involved large numbers of people across a vast country and caused much destruction, erupted following a sharp hike in the price of automobile fuel that was understandably unpopular. The government retreated from the price hike, but the demonstrators attacked government buildings, burned cars and seized the airport. Both demonstrators and security forces were killed.

We don’t know all the forces, internal and/or foreign, involved in the upheaval in Kazakhstan. A Kazakh

banker and former minister, currently exiled in Britain, claimed to speak for those who revolted. We await



explicit charges from the Kazakh government and from CSTO.

But there is much we do know.

The landlocked Kazakhstan has the ninth largest land area in the world, as big as all of Western Europe with long borders with Russia and China. Its extensive territory holds vast mineral resources, including uranium, natural gas and oil reserves. It is home to 19 million people, including more than 3 million of Russian heritage.

The biggest single exploiters of Kazakhstan’s energy resources are U.S.-based monopolies, including Chevron and ExxonMobil, much more than Russia or China. Washington has had a working relationship with the government. The U.S. has no ambassador in Kazakhstan now, but it has many contacts.

Kazakhstan was where China’s president first announced the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, and it is part of that plan. Washington has constantly used diplomatic and economic pressure to sabotage China’s initiative.

In 2013-14, the U.S. aided anti-Russian forces in Ukraine, including openly racist and fascist elements, in staging a coup against the Ukrainian president and bringing in the current anti-Russian regime, destabilizing the region. The U.S. debacle in Afghanistan proved Washington is incapable of controlling events; it is, however, capable of causing misery.

U.S. and European Union imperialism have no right to butt into Kazakhstan. Through NATO, the U.S. and E.U. militaries have already pushed armed forces toward Russia’s borders, absorbing former Soviet allies and even former Soviet republics into the U.S.-led military alliance. The Pentagon has placed nuclear-capable missiles and bomber bases in Europe a half hour from Russian targets.

We demand no U.S. intervention in Kazakhstan, withdrawal of NATO from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics and the dissolution of the NATO aggressive military alliance. □

## On the ground with workers in Nicaragua

By Arjae Red

I have arrived here safely in Nicaragua, with my comrade Carlos Splitstoser, as part of a U.S. delegation to observe the inauguration of President Daniel Ortega. We are here to see with our own eyes the progress of the Sandinista Revolution and to counter the imperialist narrative that the FSLN government is an “authoritarian regime.”

On our first day, Jan. 8, we were welcomed with open arms by the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC Nicaragua), and we had the opportunity to connect with union organizers and learn about the ongoing constant

process of education amongst the people. We learned how the unions have had a major impact amongst agricultural workers and about the role they’ve played in raising the standards of living and improving working conditions. This meeting highlighted the importance of workers to fight, not only to improve their conditions and raise pay, but for control and ownership over their workplaces.

Nicaragua has achieved nearly complete self-sufficiency in feeding its people, with around 95% of the food being grown here and only around 5% imported. This is something I am particularly excited about, because all the food they’ve fed me so far has been delicious and so fresh!



Delegation of U.S. Labor Against Racism and War in Nicaragua, Jan. 8.

It’s so important for people in the United States to be against U.S. imperialism and sanctions. Solidarity with the people of Nicaragua! □



# Sudanese Communist Party spokesperson ‘Organizing the masses’

The following are edited excerpts from an interview with an official spokesperson of the Sudanese Communist Party, Dr. Fathi al-Fadl, published in January in the International (English-language) section of the Turkish e-zine Kaldıraç (The Lever). Al-Fadl discusses current preparations for launching a general strike.

A mass movement in spring 2019 in Sudan, located south of Egypt in north-east Africa, defeated the 30-year military dictatorship of Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, but was unable to permanently oust the military. (workers.org/2019/04/41952)

In Oct. 25, 2021, the military carried out a coup, arresting the president and civilian members of the cabinet. A determined resistance has developed against this coup, with the SCP playing a vital role.

**Kaldıraç:** What forces are behind the Oct. 25 coup d’état?

**Dr. Fathi al-Fadl:** The security committee of the previous regime, which was established by an agreement reached in June 2019, formed part of the Sovereignty Council (SC). The Oct. 25 coup aimed to block the path of the growing resistance to the regime’s economic policies. It took place just when all expected that the presidency of the SC should be handed to the civilian component of the council.

**Kaldıraç:** How should we interpret the attitude of Prime Minister [Abdalla] Hamdok?

**al-Fadl:** Hamdok was appointed by the Forces for Freedom and Change. However, from the very beginning he began leaning toward the military component. We should also stress that Hamdok is an international civil servant of Western financial institutions. So, in a way, he was the link between the international community and the regime.

During his years at the helm of power, he introduced and implemented the full instructions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. ... The difference between him and the military junta is around the issues of handing over [Omar Hassan Ahmad] al-Bashir and his clique to the International Criminal Court and other issues related to crimes committed against the people in Darfur.

Hamdok is the stooge of the U.S., European Union and Western governments. He fulfilled his role in having Sudan completely under the control of the IMF and WB. Facing growing opposition to the Oct. 25 coup, the junta tried to use him to appease the opposition, as well as to avoid sanctions from the West. He signed an agreement with the leader of the coup, who was under the orders of the West.

Hamdok identified himself with the coup, losing the little credibility he had with small sections of the civil society. He failed in his mission to form a new government, resigned and left the country.

**Kaldıraç:** Did imperialist powers influence the processes that arose during and after the coup? How so?

**al-Fadl:** U.S. and EU imperialism, together with their clients in Sudan’s region, especially the Gulf states and Egypt, have used contradictory tactics in their attempts to impede and abort the radical changes demanded by the Sudanese people. U.S. imperialism created the scheme of “Soft Landing,” in an attempt to involve some opposition forces in cooperating with the regime and forming part of it in exchange for sharing power.

This U.S. scheme led to the UMMA Party and the Sudan Congress Party, as well as two armed groups, agreeing to

the project and engaging in talks with al-Bashir. However, beginning with the mass uprising in January 2018, and under pressure from people taking to the streets, these groups started to hesitate and were forced to join the mass upheaval.

Following the palace coup of April 11, 2019, staged by the generals, which removed al-Bashir again, these two parties accepted sharing power with the military. Hamdok was appointed prime minister. All these developments were realized in cooperation and intervention from U.S. imperialism.

However, the Sudan Communist Party — together with the Resistance Committees (RC) and Professional Alliance (PA) — which groups, together with the trade unions, managed to mobilize the masses and organized the largest mass demonstration since the beginning of the revolution. This development, which has clearly changed the grip of the generals on power, forced the ruling circles to stage a second coup Oct. 25. It was clearly an act supported by the U.S., EU and neighboring countries.

**Kaldıraç:** How would you describe the current stage of the resistance? How do you foresee it progressing?

**al-Fadl:** As far back as 2013, the SCP decided to try to organize the masses in a different form, taking into consideration that the Muslim Brotherhood has taken steps to dissolve trade unions, break the main public sector, destroy through privatization all productive industries, liquidate the railways and other major public transport companies and crack down on trade unionists, peasants and all progressive forces, including the SCP.

The new SCP tactic was based on organizing the masses at the workplace, residential areas and institutions of learning into Resistance Committees. These committees were supposed to play the basic role in creating a network between the different sectors of the society.

The presence of communist activists in the residential areas helped to develop this work. Accordingly, the communists, democrats and patriots in the workplace and schools and universities played a major role to attract professional lawyers, teachers, engineers, doctors, etc., to the opposition.

Special attention was given to the situation within the working class and the peasantry, both in the residential area and at work. These RCs were organized on a

national level on a horizontal basis. They have formed the backbone of the opposition movement till today.

The RCs together with the PA have led the struggle since 2018, and today they are at the forefront of the struggle to defeat the coup, overthrow the dictatorship and establish the complete civilian democratic rule. These organizations are the organized force within the broad alliance that is being established. The Resistance Committees represent the main block of the masses in the streets and play a major role in the confrontation against the security forces in the street battles.

**Kaldıraç:** The party offered a ground of unity for the resistance/opposition forces. Today, what point is this unity at?

**al-Fadl:** The SCP is adopting its tactics to develop the organized force that can have a leading role in the broad front. The RCs are composed of different social forces depending on the concentration of the population. While workers and peasants play their role in these committees, this is not the only way to organize these important two forces.

The SCP is building the workers’ front in the workplaces, as the peasants’ alliance does in the countryside. The SCP is trying to establish a national democratic front around which it can build a broad alliance.

Due to the reality of the situation described above, the SCP is working on two levels: building its organs of communications with the revolutionary masses; and at the same time, advancing the work on the broad front. It is a rather difficult task, but the SCP have decided to send Central Committee members to work with party branches on the ground levels. I can say the process is producing tangible results.

**Kaldıraç:** You are under a huge attack. How do the Sudanese people and revolutionaries provide their self-defense?

**al-Fadl:** Since the beginning of the current uprising, that is after the Oct. 25 coup, 53 people were shot dead, and over 2,300 wounded, some in critical condition. Hundreds are detained. Yes, we are under huge pressure. But the main weapon we have is the intensification of the mass peaceful protest actions. These include marches in the streets, strikes, sit-ins,



Revolutionary masses in Atbara, Sudan, Nov. 6, 2019.

protest meetings, petitions, etc. and building street barricades to impede and stop the movements of the security thugs.

The main aim of the current uprising is to win the overwhelming majority of the population, who for one reason or the other do not come out to the streets, but who will form a great weight in the battles to come, especially in the preparation for and the launching of the general political strike and reaching the implementation of the complete civil disobedience.

**Kaldıraç:** What line of action do you propose with the political strike?

**al-Fadl:** Be it in the streets, factories, offices, schools and countryside, all actions aim to prepare for launching the general strike. The mass protest movement, while united in its actions, is underway to establish the united central leadership of the whole, large and broad front. A revolutionary council is being built, composed of the representatives of the coordinating committees of the RC, the Professional Alliance and representatives of the workers and peasants. The SCP, through its presence in the different groups, plays its role.

**Kaldıraç:** At what stage do you think the Sudanese Revolution is?

**al-Fadl:** At the moment, talks are proceeding for reaching the Broad Front leadership, which may include women’s and other civil society organizations and political parties. The leadership of this body will facilitate the complete defeat of the present regime and the seizing of power by the hands of the people.

We have behind us the rich experience of toppling two dictatorial regimes in 1964 and 1985. On that, our people devising their tactics are making use of the positives and trying to avoid the negatives of the past.

*Al-Fadl asked the Turkish movement for international solidarity, a request which we assume also holds for anti-imperialist forces in the United States.*

## ¿Al borde de un nuevo empuje sindical?

Continúa de la página 12

En agosto, septiembre y octubre, un récord de más de cuatro millones de trabajadores abandonó sus puestos de trabajo cada mes, en busca de salarios más altos y mejores condiciones.

Aunque la COVID ralentizaba la economía en general, algunas empresas crecían. Amazon, con el monopolio de las ventas por Internet, añadió 500.000 trabajadores a su plantilla de USA en 2021, además de otros 250.000 conductores y repartidores empleados por subcontratistas. Amazon emplea ahora a 1,3 millones de trabajadores.

Amazon trata a sus trabajadores de almacén como si fueran marines en un entrenamiento básico. Estos abusos y el exceso de trabajo provocan una tasa de rotación enormemente alta: 3% cada semana o cerca del 150% cada año. Aunque esta rotación requiere una contratación

constante, la dirección la acepta porque sus brutales métodos mantienen altos la explotación y los beneficios.

Los trabajadores de Amazon son jóvenes, muchos son afroamericanos o latinos. Todos están enfadados y son más conscientes que nunca de su opresión de clase. Son conscientes de que estas empresas no pagan un salario digno.

Son conscientes de que los jefes de Amazon —y de Starbucks y Walmart y otros— romperán todas las reglas para evitar que sus empresas se sindicalicen.

Son conscientes, más que nunca, de que quienes dominan USA ni pueden controlar el virus, ni van a detener la crisis climática mundial. Son conscientes de que una ola de tornados sin precedentes mató a los trabajadores de un almacén de Amazon, que fueron obligados a permanecer en el trabajo en Illinois en diciembre o enfrentarse a represalias.

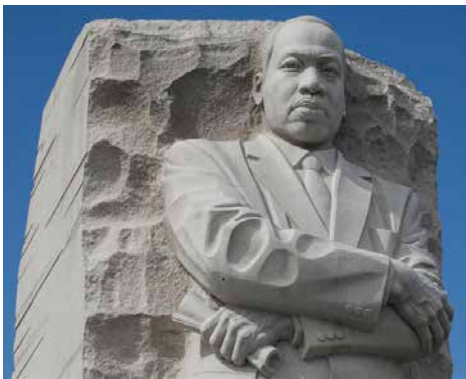
Son conscientes de que su gran patrón, Bezos, ha utilizado parte del dinero que se llevó de su trabajo para financiar un viaje de placer a la estratosfera.

La esperanza de los organizadores es que las pequeñas victorias en Starbucks conduzcan a otras mayores en Amazon y se extiendan por la clase trabajadora usamericana más rápido que la pandemia. Es un gran paso que aún no se ha dado, pero no se puede ser un organizador de trabajadores, y mucho menos un revolucionario, sin ser optimista.

Todo ello puede tener un impacto importante en la lucha de los trabajadores por todo el mundo. Es posible que Jeff Bezos desee seguir en la estratosfera.

*Gran parte de la historia laboral y los datos económicos proceden de ‘Low Wage Capitalism – Colossus With Feet of Clay’, de Fred Goldstein (World View Forum, 2008).*





Monumento en Washington al Martin Luther King, Jr., líder de la lucha contra la discriminación racial y líder del Movimiento de los Derechos Civiles.

# El legado del Dr. King: ‘Todo trabajo tiene dignidad’

El 17 de enero será el día festivo oficial en honor al nacimiento del reverendo Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., cuyo 93º cumpleaños es el 15 de enero. El tercer lunes de enero ha sido el día festivo oficial de King para muchos trabajadores desde enero de 1986, después de muchos años de presión masiva ejercida sobre el gobierno de Estados Unidos.

Muchos expertos burgueses utilizan este día festivo para cooptar el papel histórico del Dr. King, principalmente como el principal símbolo no violento del masivo Movimiento por los Derechos Civiles, lo que ciertamente tiene algo de verdad. Sin embargo, su legado fue mucho más, especialmente en lo que respecta a los derechos de los trabajadores.

Su mensaje no debe limitarse a su famoso discurso “Tengo un sueño”, pronunciado en el Lincoln Memorial tras la Marcha sobre Washington de 1963, en la que participaron 250.000 personas. En esa marcha, los trabajadores que representaban a los sindicatos internacionales, a las federaciones estatales y a las centrales sindicales llevaban muchas pancartas, siendo las más destacadas las de la United Auto

Workers, uno de los principales patrocinadores de la marcha, y la Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, dirigida por A. Philip Randolph. Los carteles obreros exigían derechos civiles, puestos de trabajo e igualdad.

Cinco años más tarde, pocos meses antes de ser asesinado el 4 de abril de 1968, el Dr. King apoyó la huelga de los 1.300 trabajadores de los servicios sanitarios de Memphis (Tennessee), desencadenada por la muerte de dos trabajadores negros de la ciudad, Echol Cole y Robert Walker, que habían sido aplastados en el trabajo por un camión que funcionaba mal.

La ciudad de Memphis -que pagaba a estos trabajadores sueldos de esclavo de 65 centavos por hora- se negó a pagar ninguna indemnización a sus familias. Los trabajadores negros en huelga, en su mayoría, no sólo exigían un salario y unas condiciones de trabajo decentes, sino también plenos derechos humanos, portando el cartel: “Soy un hombre”.

En un discurso pronunciado en una concentración de 25.000 trabajadores de los servicios sanitarios, sus familias y simpatizantes, el 18 de marzo de 1968 en Memphis,

el Dr. King declaró: “Ustedes están demostrando algo aquí que debe ser demostrado en todo nuestro país. Estáis demostrando que podemos permanecer juntos, y estáis demostrando que todos estamos atados en una sola prenda de destino; y que si una persona negra sufre, si una persona negra está abajo, todos estamos abajo.

“Estáis exigiendo que esta ciudad respete la dignidad del trabajo. Pero permítanme decirles esta noche, que siempre que estén comprometidos con un trabajo que sirve a la humanidad y es para la construcción de la humanidad, tiene dignidad, y tiene valor. Algún día nuestra sociedad debe llegar a ver esto. Todo trabajo tiene dignidad”. (tinyurl.com/ycknw2b8)

El objetivo del Dr. King de forjar la Marcha de los Pobres en el verano de 1968 era fusionar las luchas por los derechos civiles y los derechos económicos, especialmente de los trabajadores mal pagados, como los de la sanidad, así como de los desempleados.

El llamamiento unificador de King de que “todo trabajo tiene dignidad” se está

llevando a cabo hoy en día, especialmente por los jóvenes trabajadores explotados por empresas como Starbucks y Amazon. Estos trabajadores están liderando el camino para todos los trabajadores de la clase, exigiendo mejores condiciones de trabajo, salario y beneficios a través de la organización sindical, tradicional como los Teamsters y no tradicional como el sindicato de Amazon.

Este es el verdadero significado del legado del Dr. King, que siguió siendo un luchador en primera línea por todas las formas de justicia social hasta el final, cuando las balas truncaron trágicamente su vida. □



El Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. en una marcha con los trabajadores sanitarios de Memphis en huelga, el 28 de marzo de 1968.

## La clase obrera usamericana ¿Al borde de un nuevo empuje sindical?

Por John Catalinotto

Traducido del inglés al español por Sinfo Fernández y publicado por lapluma.net y tlaxcala-int.org.

Los trabajadores de tres centros de distribución de Amazon han iniciado una campaña para formar un sindicato en esta gigantesca corporación que emplea, solo en USA, a más de un millón de trabajadores. Los trabajadores de dos cafeterías Starbucks en Buffalo, Nueva York, han conseguido representación sindical en una votación.

Amazon y los partidarios de los sindicatos celebraron protestas en USA, Europa Occidental y Bangladesh el 26 de noviembre -el llamado Viernes Negro- en los almacenes de Amazon para exigir los derechos de los trabajadores y los derechos sindicales. Las acciones se centraron en los trabajadores de la logística en USA y Europa, y en los trabajadores de producción textil en Bangladesh.

Hay previstas otras acciones para el 12 de enero, fecha del cumpleaños del centimillonario jefe de Amazon, Jeff Bezos, y para la festividad de Martin Luther King, Jr. (supportamazonworkers.org/jan12)

Puede parecer un pequeño comienzo. Sin embargo, ha despertado ya las esperanzas de millones de trabajadores en USA y de miles de activistas sindicales de que algo grande está en marcha. Ha suscitado las esperanzas de los organizadores de trabajadores de que se invierta el descenso de la afiliación sindical de los últimos 68 años.

Algunas voces, entre comunistas y sindicalistas, y entre observadores de los medios de comunicación corporativos, han hablado de la historia del auge del sindicato industrial CIO en la década de 1930 y se preguntan si podría estar llegando una nueva oleada.

The New York Times y The Boston Globe, por ejemplo, han informado de la campaña de organización de Starbucks y Amazon con grandes titulares y han mencionado los años treinta. El Times informa normalmente de las noticias laborales en la sección de negocios. La mayoría de los artículos son sobre huelgas que se perdieron o sobre divisiones entre los trabajadores de base y los líderes sindicales.

En el otoño de 2021 los trabajadores sindicalizados de USA hicieron más huelgas que en décadas. En las grandes huelgas de los fabricantes de cereales Kellogg’s y de los tractores y excavadoras John Deere, los trabajadores en huelga obligaron a los dirigentes de sus sindicatos a continuar con las huelgas después de que estos últimos hubieran llegado a acuerdos con la patronal.

Este rápido aumento del número de trabajadores en huelga se produce tras décadas de descenso de la afiliación sindical. Hubo huelgas heroicas, pero los sindicatos las perdieron casi todas.

### Descenso de la afiliación sindical

Tras una expansión de la sindicalización desde finales de los años treinta hasta mediados de los cincuenta, casi el 35% de los trabajadores usamericanos pertenecían a algún sindicato. Los sindicatos eran especialmente fuertes en la industria pesada:

acero, carbón, fabricación de automóviles, donde arrancaban mejores contratos a sus jefes de las clases dominantes del mundo.

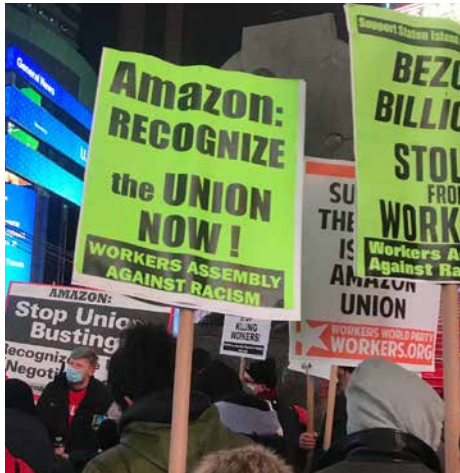
La patronal y el gobierno atacaron primero a los trabajadores con la Ley Taft-Hartley de 1947, que bloqueaba la organización sindical. El ataque de la Guerra Fría contra los comunistas obligó a los mejores organizadores políticos a abandonar los sindicatos.

Después, la desindustrialización de la economía usamericana sustituyó a los trabajadores por máquinas y trasladó la industria a regiones con salarios más bajos utilizando nuevos métodos de producción. La mano de obra sindicalizada se jubiló o fue despedida definitivamente. Los nuevos puestos de trabajo se encontraban a menudo en las industrias de servicios, la logística, la sanidad y la educación.

El gobierno federal emprendió un ataque total contra los controladores aéreos cuando se declararon en huelga en 1981. Esto rompió la huelga de PATCO (Organización Profesional de Controladores de Tráfico Aéreo), iniciando un fuerte descenso de la fuerza sindical. Aunque en los años siguientes se produjeron huelgas heroicas de trabajadores de base, pocas se tradujeron en victorias.

La desindustrialización se aceleró tras el colapso de la Unión Soviética y la apertura de la mano de obra china al empleo capitalista internacional. En efecto, desde la década de 1980 hasta el año 2000 la fuerza de trabajo mundial explotable se duplicó, pasando de unos 1.500 millones a 3.000 millones de trabajadores.

Había un vasto ejército de mano de obra



WWW/MO FOTO: TONY MURPHY

Manifestación en Times Square, Ciudad de Nueva York, el 22 de diciembre.

excedente. Los salarios medios disminuyeron al igual que la afiliación sindical. La desigualdad aumentó rápidamente.

En 2020 los trabajadores sindicados solo representaban el 10,8% de la mano de obra en USA. Aunque este país representa un ejemplo extremo, la afiliación sindical se redujo a la mitad o más en Japón, Europa y la mayoría de los países imperialistas.

### Huelgas en octubre (Striketober)

El aumento de las huelgas y de la organización tiene lugar cuando la cuarta ola de COVID-19 está golpeando especialmente el Medio Oeste y el Noreste de USA. La crisis de la COVID ha enseñado a los trabajadores de la sanidad, la educación, el comercio minorista y la logística que su trabajo es “esencial”, si es que no lo sabían ya antes.

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