Shut out of jobs, gov’t workers say

‘We want to work—with pay!’

By Kathy Durkin

“Stop the war on workers!” and “We want work, not walls!” read signs held by furloughed federal employees at the White House and in cities around the U.S. on Jan. 10. They were protesting the Trump administration’s shutdown of nine federal departments and several federal agencies—one-quarter of the federal government—since Dec. 22.

Some 800,000 government workers are not receiving paychecks. Half of them have been shut out of their jobs, while the other half have been forced to work without receiving paychecks—on threat of being fired. It is a severe hardship for many of those impacted by the longest shutdown in U.S. history, which could go on indefinitely.

The reason for the aggressive attack on these workers: President Donald Trump, backed by top Republicans, is demanding that Congress fund a $5 billion wall at the southern U.S. border with Mexico to bar the entry of desperate Central American families fleeing government repression, violence and poverty, and looking for safe places to live and work. Many of theills they are running from are caused by U.S. political interference in their countries.

Trump’s rants about the need to build this wall are their ploy to build the wall, blaming the migrants for the shutdown and deliberately ramping up anti-immigrant hostility to pursue their racist agenda. This is a familiar divisive tool used by the capitalist class and its political representatives.

All progressive forces, particularly labor unions, must strongly oppose the administration’s bigoted rhetoric and show solidarity with these Central American refugees. They are workers, too. This is about class solidarity.

Time for new tactics

The American Federation of Government Employees, the largest federal government union, called out its members to demonstrate in Washington, D.C., and around the country on Jan. 10. Now is the time to “think outside the box,” to push back the intransigent right-wingers in the administration and their ruling-class backers. This will take creative and militant actions nationally and locally.

The labor movement courageously occupied factories in the 1930s to win union recognition and worker benefits. Public workers were part of the sit-down wave.

The historic Civil Rights Movement sat in at segregated public facilities to break the grip of racist Jim Crow laws in the South. It organized countless demonstrations, including a massive rally in August 1963 in D.C.

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power organized militant actions in the 1980s calling attention to the continued on page 6
Oppose Title IX ‘revisions’

By Sue Davis

The U.S. Department of Education’s proposed revision of Title IX regulations contricts the intent of those rules addressing sexual harassment, assault and abuse in K-12 schools and federally funded colleges and universities.

Instead of helping institutions deal forthrightly with such issues, the proposed changes help institutions avoid them and make it harder for survivors, predomi- nantly of oppressed genders, to confront perpetrators, win justice and put an end to rape culture.

Of students, more than 1 in 5 women, nearly 1 in 4 transgender and gender-nonconforming people, and nearly 1 in 8 men are sexually assaulted annually. Women and girls of color, pregnant students, parents, LGBTQ or gender-nonconforming people are often ignored, punished or labeled “promiscuous.”

Two major DOE changes would make it harder to bring charges against an assailant. One raises the stand- ard for a case from “preponderance of evidence” to “clear and convincing evidence.” The other upgrades the burden of proof from “clear and convincing evidence” to “unwelcome conduct on the basis of sex that is so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person access to the [institution’s] education program or activity.”

Such definitions would help institutions dismiss all but the most blatant cases.

Institutions are only responsible for sexual abuse occurring within “school-sponsored activity”; all elec- tronic communications are excluded. While students are once reported abuse to a trusted teacher, only a Title IX coordinator with “the authority to institute corrective measures” or a K-12 teacher who has “actual knowl- edge” of abuse can help survivors. Institutions can now propose mediation, often used to resolve peer conflict, though that is never appropriate for sexual assault cases.

The most controversial aspect of the proposed reg- ulations involves having sexual assault survivors be cross-examined by an advisor for the accused, with an advisor for the survivor likewise cross-examining the accused. While this was included to supposedly pro- mote due process, it’s also where racist bias persists. Although the DOE’s Office of Civil Rights does not col- lect data on race in Title IX cases, analysis of cases at a private college where 42 percent of students were Black showed 50 percent of sexual-violation accusations were against Black students.

Can mere cross-examination eliminate racist bias, given the raging racism ratcheted up by the Trump administration? Not given the virulent, U.S. history of Black men lynched or imprisoned for sexual assault.

See National Women’s Law Center (nwlc.org) for more analysis.

Don’t let DOE Secretary Betsy DeVos get away with destroying Title IX. Public comments are accepted until Jan. 28; all submissions are said to be considered in the final revision. Post comments on regulations.gov under the title “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance” (listed on Nov. 29).

The NWLC provides two kinds of comments: A pre- written statement (tinyurl.com/ytmos4q) and a per- sonal, customizable comment (tinyurl.com/ysyv6ju). Submit before the Jan. 28 deadline!

In the U.S.

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Alta tecnología, baja remuneración y crisis capitalista

WORKERS WORLD

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

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

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repres- sion, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny. LGBTQ oppres- sion 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 student debt.

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A deadline digest is available via e-mail subscription. Subscription information is at workers.org/email.php. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Workers World, 147 W. 24th St. 2nd Fl., New York, NY 10011.
Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner can be believed, on Dec. 28 while he and his staff were report- edly searching for an office desk in a remote, nearly inaccessible, locked storeroom, they “found” six banker boxes containing files related to political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal’s case.

The newly discovered boxes, supposedly stored under the desk, reportedly had “Mumia” written on the visi- ble side. Until 2013, Edward McCann served 26 years in the DA’s office, the last four as First Assistant District Attorney. Krasner and his assistants say when they pulled the boxes out, they found “Mumia” and “Mumia Abu-Jamal” on the hidden side.

This discovery allegedly took place one day after Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas Judge Leon Tucker’s historic Dec. 27 ruling that Abu-Jamal, impris- oned for over 37 years, had the right to new hearings on appeals previously denied by former PA Supreme Court Justice Ron Castille. In the ruling, Tucker cited evidence of Castille’s bias.

Tucker also raised that prosecutors representing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania failed to produce docu- ments they were obligated to preserve while Abu-Jamal’s appeals were active. He noted that unavailability of the documents could be prejudicial to Abu-Jamal.

In a Jan. 3 letter to Tucker and Abu-Jamal’s attorneys Judith Ritter and Samuel Spital, Assistant DA Tracey Kavanagh wrote: “This [discovery of the boxes] means that the Commonwealth’s prior representations that it had produced the complete file for this Court’s review in this case were incorrect.”

Krasner’s office announced that the files are being reviewed, and will be turned over to Tucker. The office has volunteered to allow inspection by Abu-Jamal’s attorneys. The find was not made public until Jan. 9.

By G. Dunkel

Haitian workers fight racist deportations

Fighting racist deportation plans, Haitians went to federal district court in Brooklyn for a four-day hear- ing Jan. 7-10. Nine individuals, a community group and a Haitian newspaper are bringing suit against the U.S. government. They held a press conference Jan. 7 in front of the courthouse.

The aim of their suit is to force the Trump adminis- tration to drop plans to deny nearly 60,000 Haitians the right to live and work in the U.S. These Haitians cur- rently do so under Temporary Protected Status.

“The Trump administration’s November 2017 decision to terminate Haiti’s TPS was immoral, racist and uncon- stitutional,” said Marline Bastien, executive director of the Family Action Network Movement. “It has thrown the lives of thousands (of TPS recipients and their U.S.-born children) into turmoil.” FANN is one of the plaintiffs in the suit. (Haiti-Liberté, Jan. 9)

Labor support for Haitian workers under TPS was voiced by Alison Hirsh, vice president of Service Employees Int’l Union SEIU 1199. Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-N.Y.) also spoke.

By Betsey Piette

Court battle

PHOTO: HAÏTI LIBERTÉ

By G. Dunkel

Haitian workers fight racist deportations

By Betsey Piette

Potential grounds for new trial

Responding to an earlier order from Tucker in September 2017, prior to Krasner taking office, the dis- trict attorney’s office had handed over 22 boxes of unex- amined case-related files, sequentially labeled “1 of 32, 2 of 32, 3 of 32,” etc.

The newly reported boxes were labeled “11 of 29, 21 of 29, 24 of 29, and 29 of 29,” with one box unlab- eled. In his Jan. 3 letter Assistant DA Kavanagh wrote: “Nothing in the Commonwealth’s database showed the existence of these six additional boxes.” Kavanagh did not account for the other 24 boxes in the marked sequence.

That boxes of files on Abu-Jamal’s case were never accounted for in the DA’s database, and were then bur- ied in a remote storage area under office furniture, is no surprise to Mumia’s supporters who feel there are ample grounds for his case to be blown wide open.

The timing of the “discovery” — one day after Tucker’s ruling — raises a serious question: Would the files have seen the light of day if Tucker had ruled for the Commonwealth and denied Abu-Jamal’s appeal? If these boxes contain any evidence that prosecutors improperly withheld from Mumia’s defense in his first hearing — significant enough that the jury might have found a verdict of “not guilty” — that could be grounds for a new trial.

Even less significant evidence could create an opening for a new Post Conviction Relief Act hearing before the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas.

Krasner’s office has sole authority to appeal Tucker’s Dec. 27 ruling and has until Jan. 26. In recent court hearings in the case, Abu-Jamal supporters voiced concerns that Krasner, despite his background as a pro- fessor of constitutional law, appeared to be bending to pressure from the Fraternal Order of Police — who were given preferential seating in Tucker’s courtroom.

Between Jan. 3 and Jan. 7, supporters of Abu-Jamal inundated Krasner’s office with thousands of petitions, phone calls, emails, letters — and a twitter storm. This support came from U.S. and international individuals and organizations, including prominent labor unions.

All urged Krasner to allow Abu-Jamal’s appeals. One can only hope the concerted public pressure moved the DA to acknowledge the missing files.

Strong evidence of police and judicial misconduct

Whether or not these files contain “new evidence” about Castille’s involvement relating to the basis for Abu-Jamal’s 2017 appeal, the very existence of hidden files mirrors decades of police and prosecutorial miscon- duct in denying justice to Abu-Jamal.

After spending nearly 29 years in isolation on death row, since 2011 the 64-year-old political prisoner has been serving a life-without-parole sentence at Pennsylvania SCI Mahanoy. As a result of years of untreated hepatitis C, he suffers from unrelieved skin rashes and cirrhosis of the liver, a potential precursor to liver cancer.

Unjustly convicted in 1982 for the death of a Philadelphia police officer, Abu-Jamal’s case stands as one of the most controversial in the history of Philadelphia, which is known for widespread corruption in both the police department and district attorney’s office.

Fifteen of the 35 police officers involved in collecting evidence in Abu-Jamal’s case in 1981 later went to jail for evidence tampering. Several witnesses in his case reported being pressured by police to change their testi- mony. Krasner’s predecessor Seth Williams, who delayed Abu-Jamal’s release from death row from 2001 until 2011, is currently in prison for five years for bribe-taking.

Mumia Abu-Jamal, the highly political, nationally honored Black journalist, was targeted by the state for his support of the MOVE organization; his public oppo- sition to racist, neo-fascist former Philadelphia Mayor and one-time police commissioner Frank Rizzo; and his earlier membership in the Black Panther Party.

Atlanta

Housing activists march for homeless people

By G. Dunkel

Another plaintiff is the Haitian community newspa- per, Haiti Liberté, whose Jan. 9 statement was read at the press conference by its representative Jocelyn Gay: “Since U.S. Marines first invaded Haiti a century ago, the U.S. has plundered and strengthened our nation, leaving it impoverished and politically unstable. The U.S. has re-enlisted our people, first in the Marines’ corvées, today in cheap labor sweatshops. Through coups d’état or electoral shenanigans, Washington has imposed and supported dictators, like Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier, or neo-Duvalierist charlatans, like Michel Martelly and Jovenel Moïse, all of whom have plundered state coffers.

“However, the death and destruction caused by the Jan. 12, 2010, earthquake in Haiti shocked the world into a brief, realist moment of conscience. … The Obama admin- istration was compelled to grant some 50,000 Haitians Temporary Protected Status (TPS).”

After mentioning the additional catastrophes of cholera and massive displacement, as well as Trump’s racism, Haiti-Liberté’s statement ended by urging Judge William Kuntz, who is hearing the case, to do the right thing and preserve Haitian status.

Both the plaintiffs and the U.S. government will be allowed to submit additional material during the month of February. Judge Kuntz will then begin deliberations and issue his decision after March 1.

Plaintiffs fighting deportation, workers, labor union representatives, local community activists and activists held a press conference at U.S. Courthouse in Brooklyn Jan. 7.

Over 4,000 petitions were delivered to Philadelphia DA Larry Krasner Jan. 7, telling him not to appeal judicial ruling in favor of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Housing rights activists marched Jan. 7 in an effort to make the city open warming and day shelters for home- less people who currently face harsh winter weather.

The city forced the largest sell-off in close to 2018 — effec- ting the removal of a number of people living on the streets. The march, sponsored by Atlanta Street Groomers, went from the Fulton County morgue to Atlanta City Hall where a press conference was held. Then march- ers attended the City Council meeting to raise this issue with council people. The city claims to have solved home- lessness in Atlanta, but the hundreds of people who are sleeping in subfreezing weather tell another story.

— Report and photo by James Raynor

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— Report and photo by James Raynor
It is estimated that at least 150 million workers, perhaps as many as 200 million, participated in the two-day All-India General Strike Jan. 8-9.

The strike was probably the largest general strike in world labor history. Although generally ignored by the Western capitalist news media, this was a world-shaking event. Workers throughout India participated — from the largest cities of Mumbai (12 million plus) and Delhi (11 million plus) to the 67 percent of the country that remains rural.

Workers in government, banking, transit, manufacturing, transport, education, agriculture and the informal economy were among those walking out. Every sector of the economy experienced slowdowns and in some cases total shutdowns.

As of 2017, India’s population was 1.34 billion people; only China’s population is larger. One in six people in the world live in India. Of those 1.34 billion, at a bare minimum more than 1 in 9 took part in the strike.

Or about one striker for every 30 people in the entire world! Classwide unity

As in other general strikes against the current government, 10 of India’s most important labor federations, along with various independent unions, came together and struck as one. The politics of these federations range from conservative to revolutionary. According to British blogger Jamie Woodcock, who witnessed the strike’s impact in Bangalore, “The majorities of the workers don’t actually care about the ‘red’ unions, and political parties were playing an important role.” (notesfrombelow.org)

Prominent in strike photos are the red banners of the All-India Trade Union Congress, which is India’s second largest labor federation and the largest with left-wing leadership. Founded in 1900, AITUC is also the oldest labor federation in India and is affiliated with the World Federation of Trade Unions, which AITUC co-founded in 1945.

“The crowd of workers was diverse, with a large number of women, as well as significant numbers of visible Muslims,” Woodcock noted. Muslims are the largest of many religious minorities in India, whose population is 80 percent Hindu. India has over 2,000 ethnic groups, speaking many languages that belong to four distinct linguistic families.

Women have played a major role in the ongoing struggle against the neoliberal government of Narendra Modi. In a letter to the editor with this writer, AITUC General Secretary Aamarjeet Kaur spoke about women’s participation in the Sept. 2, 2016, general strike: “Women were essential because they are hard hit. All the social security investment which the government is reducing is hitting women because it is making education, health, drinking water and food items expensive. Good jobs and opportunities are being lost. Women are being engaged only in precarious jobs, where wages are not protected at all, so women’s participation in our strike was immense. They were in the forefront everywhere.” (“Women & the All-India Trade Union Congress,” Workers World, Nov. 20, 2016)

“A clear warning from the working class” Unions built the mass work stoppage around 12 demands. The first opposes Prime Minister Modi’s efforts to dismantle the 1947 Labor Law, demanding the government “stop all pro-corporate, anti-worker amend- ments.” Other demands address inflation, privatization, the right to unionize, irregular and “non-permanent” employment, and social security for unorganized workers, the Foreign Direct Investment policy in banking, high unemployment and pensions.

The strike’s strength extended far beyond the unionized sector, which is only about 30 million workers, a majority of them in government.

Student and farmer organizations supported the strike. Farmers engaged in road and rail blockades to back the strike demands and “to save rural farmers’ lands from the corporate.” (Times Now News, Jan. 8)

Strike leaders were arrested, including Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders from West Bengal, Sujit Chakraborty and Anadi Sahoo, who were detained in Kolkata, along with their comrades from Jadarpur. “The struggle will continue,” Chakraborty stated emphatically.

Ajit Sen, general secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, added, “This strike is a clear warning from the working class and toiling people of India that they were not going to take lying down the attacks on their basic rights and living condi- tions.” (The Morning Star, Jan. 8)

In addition to the demands for union rights and a minimum living wage, the strike called for the withdrawal of the new national security law, which is a clear attack on civil liberties and free speech. The law already has been used against hundreds of workers and students.

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AS L.A. TEACHERS STRIKE
Oakland teacher unions prepare for action

By Judy Greenspan
Oakland, Calif.

Jan. 15: Yesterday 30,000 Los Angeles public school teachers went on strike. Today teachers will be picketing 5,000 schools in the second-largest school district in the U.S. With the slogan “On strike for our students,” their demands include more nurses, counselors and librarians, smaller class sizes.

Jan. 12 — Today, the people’s protest site in downtown Oakland, Oscar Grant Plaza, was red with over 2,000 teachers, students and community activists who came out to support public education. Activists wore red shirts, jackets and armbands to show support for California teachers who are fighting for a living wage and better working conditions. The East Bay Rally for Public Education drew the support of dozens of Bay Area unions and community organizations.

On Jan. 14, thousands of Los Angeles teachers, members of United Teachers Los Angeles/California Teachers Association, will go on strike for a living wage, smaller class sizes, funding for public education. Activists talked about how impossible it is to survive in the Bay Area on their low salary. Teachers in both Los Angeles and Oakland are feeling the impact of the funding cuts on public education. At the same time, school districts are supporting and funding the opening of privatized charter schools. In December, the Oakland Unified School District announced plans to close or consolidate 24 public schools.

Although the list of schools to be closed has not yet been made public, community members and OEA teachers have begun to mobilize to save their community schools. Over 150 students, teachers, parents and their supporters from Roots International Academy, a predominantly African-American public school, rallied inside the Jan. 9 Oakland School Board meeting demanding that their school be kept open. Roots families also attended today’s rally and spoke from the stage about the fight to save their school.

It is well known and accepted that California “skimps” on education spending. Some studies place California 41st in per-pupil spending and 46th in money spent per student. California, however, ranks first in prison spending. A recent article by EdSource.org, explains that for the last four decades, California simply has not made education a priority. (tinyurl.com/7y6sc3c)

The state’s failure to prioritize spending for public education, including real cost-of-living increases for teachers and support staff, is a catalyst behind the rapid radicalization of California’s teachers.

Several high schools have already organized day-long sick-outs to put pressure on the school board to bargain in good faith. Although the Bay Area is one of the most expensive areas to live in, the school board has refused to offer a cost-of-living increase or to consider a reasonable resolution in class size.

Teachers all over the country will be watching the Jan. 14 Los Angeles strike by the second-largest teachers’ union in the country. OEA believes that it too will be on strike in the near future. Teachers say the future of public education is at stake.

Greenspan is an Oakland public school teacher and a member of the Oakland Education Association.

West Va. education workers hold walk-ins a year after historic strike

By Workers World West Virginia bureau

Jan. 10 — One year after the nine-day work stoppage in West Virginia that paved the way for education worker walkouts in other states, teachers and support staff in that state are once again starting to take action. On Jan. 9 — the same day coal baron Gov. Jim Justice delivered his so-called “State of the State” address, which is also the first day of the state’s 2019 legislative session — school workers in several locations throughout the state conducted an informational walk-in.

As a unified way to show solidarity, participants wore red and held signs that expressed concerns for public education. Some brought back the slogans #53Strong and #53United, referring to all 55 West Virginia counties whose schools were closed during the unified 2018 education worker strike.

Some signs featured messages of support to the majority Black and Latinx educators in the Los Angeles school district, who are facing their own battle against greedy administration.

The purpose of the walk-in was to show the billionaire governor and his right-wing-led legislature that teachers and staff are still united across the state. One high school social studies teacher told Workers World, “This is a perfect opportunity to educate the public on what is going on and why we are still not happy. We also want the governor and the legislature to know we are watching them closely this year.”

In his address, Justice gave superficial lip-service to teachers and to “improving” the state’s education system. He even showed a prerecorded video of Shaquille O’Neal talking about “communities in schools.” And Gov. Justice mentioned a 5 percent raise for all public employees.

Concerns about health insurance

But the governor is still refusing to offer long-term solutions to fully fund state and education workers’ health insurance through the Public Employees Insurance Agency. He promised to provide $150 million toward PEIA, but that will not be a permanent solution; it will only temporarily keep premiums from increasing.

The governor’s proposals still have to pass the legislature, which is even more hostile toward public employees than he is. Justice also opposed suggestions about expanding coverage made by the PEIA Task Force, which was created shortly after the nine-day walkout.

For most people who stood on picket lines in frigid temperatures last year, the cost for PEIA was their number one concern. Premiums have been increasing to the point where people are quitting the teaching profession and leaving the state on a larger scale than anywhere else in the country.

Last year, most people involved in the strike suggested that the legislature help fund PEIA by passing an increase in the severance tax on natural gas. The governor acknowledged his legislative sanction of the financial ties to energy resource extraction industries.

Education workers also know that the state’s pro-Republican, lawmaker-led Senate and House are preparing to bring back anti-union bills defeated during the strike. These bills include promoting charter schools, offering school vouchers for students attending them, and stripping away seniority rights and elimination of payroll deductions for union dues.

New enemy in the struggle

During last year’s walkout, the two people who were hit the most were Gov. Jim Justice and Senate President Mitch Carmichael. Carmichael is a former CEO of Frontier Communications, whose workers went on strike at the end of the education workers’ strike. In early December of 2018, Carmichael personally appointed Sen. Patricia Rucker to become chair of the Senate Education Committee, replacing a more “moderate” Republican who actually had a background in public education. Union leaders immediately spoke out in disgust and concern. Rucker is an open proponent of homeschooling, charter schools and “faith-based” curriculum. She is also an ardent opponent of vaccinations and a denier of global climate change.

Born Patricia Elena Puertas in Caracas, Venezuela, Rucker grew up in Montgomery County, Md. She spent most of her political career serving the interests of white male supremacy in spite of her Latinx heritage. She was an active member of the racist Tea Party movement in 2008. She and her family moved to Jefferson County, W.Va., — in her own words — be “refugees from socialist Montgomery County.” (The Federalist, Feb. 14, 2017)

In addition to being anti-union and anti-public education, Rucker is actively anti-communist. Despite having nothing to lose politically, Rucker is involved in right-wing politics here and in Europe, she still travels to Venezuela every couple of years and is an open sympathizer with the violent right-wing opposition.

As a traditional Catholic who refuses to acknowledge the current papacy, Rucker is closely affiliated with anti-choice extremists and loosely associated with the anti-Semitic “Radical Traditionalist Catholic” movement. As the new chair of the state Education Committee, Rucker will have enormous authority about the direction of legislation regarding public education.

Rank-and-file led action

The Jan. 10 walk-ins were organized by rank-and-file active members of the American Federation of Teachers-WV, West Virginia Education Association and the West Virginia Service Personnel Association, which call themselves the United Caucus. Walk-ins did not occur at every school, but in places where they did not, the staff wore red. While state union leaders did not initiate the walk-ins, they all expressed support for their members.
Despite clemency, Cyntoia Brown remains in prison

By Monica Moorehead

The case of Cyntoia Brown, the now 30-year-old African-American woman who spent almost 15 years in a Tennessee prison, has garnered worldwide attention especially through social media. Brown was sentenced for killing a white male sexual predator who solicited her for sex when she was just 16 years old. As a child, Brown suffered from fetal alcohol syn- drome and homelessness, and as a juve- nile, she was a victim of multiple rapes.

Her case has helped shine a bright spotlight on global sex trafficking, espe- cially that targeting young people of color regardless of gender, gender expression or national borders.

A mass campaign of petitions and other forms of support forced Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam to grant clemency to Cyntoia Brown. Haslam is the same right-wing Republican governor whose administration in 2014 was exposed as undermining unionization of a Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga by providing lucrative financial incentives to the anti-labor auto conglomerate. To women’s marches

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women’s march movement, there will be separate, com- peting marches in several cities including New York City. This splintering weakens the struggle. It serves the interests of Trump, the right-wing Republicans, the Democratic Party leadership and especially the capital- ist class they truly represent. There can be little doubt these had a hand to some degree, however hidden, in concocting the phony “controversy” to create this split.

The mounting attacks on march leaders Tamika Mallory, Linda Sarsour and Carmen Perez, three women of color, are doing the work of the enemy, even if they don’t realize it. Everyone who really wants to fight against gender oppression must closely track and reject these efforts to divide the movement, despite any get- out-the-vote slogans from the Democratic Party.

Why this slander? Why now?

Which class benefits from anti-Semitism?

Over the last few decades in the U.S., claims of anti-Semitism have been brought against Black activists especially. This is meant to confuse people, to diffuse support, to block solidarity—in other words, to sow disunity. Which is exactly what has happened in the lead-up to this women’s march.

What a cynical strategy. There is a deep, long, very real history of anti-Semitism. But it is not to be found in the Black or any other oppressed community. It flourished in Europe over centuries, fomented by the czars in Russia and ultimately, horrifically, by the genocidal Nazi regime. Tens of millions died, both at the hands of the fascist death machine and in the heroical effort, led by the Red Army of the Soviet Union, to defeat it.

The U.S. has its own sordid history of anti-Semi- tism. There was early 20th century anti-Jewish persecution gene- ralizing by powerful figures such as capitalist Henry Ford. There were long decades of discrimination in housing and employment. And there is the current per- secution in Charlottesville, Va., chant- ing, “Jews will not replace us,” and a white supremacist murdering 11 people in a Pittsburgh syn- agogue last year.

However it manifests, scapegoating of Jewish people as somehow the cause of everyone’s troubles always emanates from one source. And that’s the ruling class, which is overwhelmingly WASP—white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Its goals: to break up unity, undermine the working-class struggle and deflect anger from itself as the real cause of our problems.

No other force in society, least of all any oppressed community, has the motive or the power to promote anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism serves only ruling-class interests. The actual threat to Jewish people is from the fascists in Europe and class and those it mobilizes.

Solidarity with the Palestinian people

There is another element at work in developments around the women’s march. That is the question of Palestine. As so often happens, solidarity with the Palestinian people’s righteous struggle for self-deter- mination is being conflated with anti-Semitism. This is a false equation, and it makes the claims against Tamika Mallory, who is Black, and Linda Sarsour, who is Palestinian, particularly odious. It’s outrageous that Mallory and Sarsour have been forced to repeat- edly affirm their opposition to anti-Semitism simply because they stand with Palestine.

We support Palestine. As we oppose anti-Semi- tism and Zionism. As we support the rights of women and all gender-oppressed people.

As we fight against racism. As we defend Black, Brown and indigenous women.

We call for unity among all working and oppressed people against our real enemies. Crush Trump! Defend women’s lives! Defend LGBTQ2S+ people! Unite! Unite! Unite for fight!

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And last year, disabled activists occu- pied local congressional offices and Senate office buildings in D.C. to defend the Affordable Care Act. For many, it was a life-and-death struggle.

There are new, progressive Democratic members of Congress, many women of color. Some of them, along with long-time congresspeople, are joining workers’ pro- tests and speaking out on their behalf. A number are denouncing “Trump’s wall” and housing.

It’s a big political party. Where are its leaders? They could call for a mas- sive demonstration to circle the Capitol. Democratic members of Congress would take the floor and insist on an end to “business as usual” until the shutdown ends and all furloughed employees and contracted workers are paid lost wages.

But this is a party of Big Business. The workers cannot rely on it for solutions.

Shutdown’s impact on federal workers

U.S. imperialism’s main instrument, the Pentagon, is not affected by the shut- down. It was fully funded earlier by a vote of both congressional parties.

But many federal workers who perform vital social functions like inspecting food, taking care of national parks, administer- ing public housing, curtailing pollution, preparing and serving food, and work- ing as custodians in federal buildings are either furloughed or working without pay.

This shutdown is harming the low- paid workers the most. Many are hav- ing difficulty paying rent, mortgage, rent, transportation, child care, medication, food and utilities. While they will receive lost pay retroactively, they need their re- turns now! Many are taking part-time work, relying on family members and/or taking out loans with interest fees. Some are turning to food pantries, churches, and charities and/or setting up online fund appeals.

The shutdown has exposed the reality that millions of workers, federal employ- ees or not, lack the funds to get through a crisis. It has further exposed the finan- cial inequities faced by African-American, Latinx and other workers of color.

Women comprise the majority of the federal workforce, and 81 percent of women workers in the U.S. live paycheck to paycheck. Many are heads of house- holds and sole supporters of their fami- lies. Cuts in essential government services are endangering them and their families’ health and well-being. Gender-oppressed people are among those harmed by this shutdown.

Contracted Black and Latinx workers

The federal government also relies on contracted workers: 2.8 million of them perform service jobs, from health aid to computer programmers. Many are women. Some of them are affected by the shutdown. A vast pay gap exists among these and other federal workers. Those doing food service and facility mainte- nance, those who are administrative assis- tants and security guards all work long hours for little pay—many earning only the federal contractor minimum wage.

Already among the lowest paid in the federal workforce, they will continue to feel financial pain for years to come. Unlike other federal employees, they are outrageously blocked from receiving pay.
The third group was the much smaller, leftist Spartacist League. Its leaders, Liebknecht, Ruh, and Zetkin, among them — heroically promoted using mass opposition to the war to keep alive the class struggle forward. This group existed inside the centrist USPD as a political tendency until they founded the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) on Dec. 30, 1918.

After she and Liebknecht were released from prison by the Nov. 9 mass military revolt, Luxemburg took over responsibilities for the SPD, she wrote, “Deeds, not deals” and “Arm the workers; disarm the soldiers.”

In September 1918, Luxemburg, while in prison, had written a pamphlet differing with the Russian communists, calling on them to convvoke the popularly elected Constituent Assembly. As this body was dominated by bourgeois, anti-revolutionary parties, the Soviets pushed it aside. Zetkin shows that, from the very beginning, as editor of Rote Fahne, not only did Luxemburg write the lead editorials, she reviewed every word in the revolutionary tribune.

Luxemburg was as tough as nails. When the Independents wanted to negotiate with the MSD, she wrote, “Keep the workers and soldiers united” and “Arise and resist.”

Of the workers took back a newspaper, they will otherwise become the personal bodyguard of the Ebert-Haase (MSD) Cabinet.” She urged workers and soldiers to “demand the disarmament of all officers and of the White Guard trained by the Ebert-Haase government and create the Red Guard.” She also called for them to “reject the National Assembly and identify it as an attack on the revolution and thus on the workers’ and soldiers’ councils.”

Socialism as ‘the mightiest civil war’

On Dec. 29, a spontaneous action of the workers took back a newspaper — Vorwärts — that the MSD had seized from the workers two years earlier during the war. The MSD attacked this action as “illegal seizure of property.”

In her “Spartacist Program,” Luxemburg wrote: “The fight for socialism is the mightiest civil war ever seen in world history, and the proletarian revolution must procure the necessary tools for this civil war; it must learn to use them — to struggle and to win.”

Such arming of the solid mass of laboring people was the main instrument for the tasks of the revolution — that is the dictatorship of the proletariat and therefore truly democratic, because it gives seats next to the capitalist, the rural proletariat next to the Junker (rural landlord) in fraudulent equality, to engage in parliamentary debate over questions of life or death, but where the million-headed proletarian mass seizes the entire power of the state in its calloused fist — like the god Thor his hammer — to smash the head of the ruling classes: that alone is democracy, that alone is not a betrayal of the people.

No matter how many times present-day political militants read the chapter of Luxemburg’s revolutionary life work, they can’t change the outcome of her death and subsequent events in Germany. They can, however, do their best to learn from her and whatever her differences with Luxemburg, categorized her as an “eagle” who soared above the other working-class leaders of her epoch. 

Gov’t workers say ‘Pay us for work!’

By Gloria Rubac

At their January meeting, members of the Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement demonstrated the consequences of the lack of back pay for federal contract workers who have been employed by NPS contractors providing essential services like trash collecting. They noted that while they have been providing essential services, they have not received back pay after past furloughs. This Black woman is concerned that they will lose their jobs if they are not paid. The Jan. 11 Guardian that she lacks federal wage earners work for the federal government, due to the current shutdown. Local 32BJ covering 2,000 federal contract workers in the Washington, D.C., area, is a national nonprofit organization serving the federal contract workforce. Families are still separated. Asylum hearings have been postponed for thousands of households living in public housing. The capital of capital punishment is still operating at a reduced level, with the number of executions in the U.S. declining in recent years. The shutdown has repercussions on the working class beyond the federal workforce, especially for women of color, people with disabilities and seniors. Food and nutrition program (WIC) funding for 7 million women, infants and children has already stopped, reports the Jan. 12 Business Insider. Food stamps should continue through February.

Domestic violence shelters countryside cannot obtain federal funds they depend on. D.C. area, says, “Our members are predominantly, if not exclusively, African-American and Latino. They don’t necessarily have health care or pension benefits and most of these have multiple jobs.” Loss of a paycheck means they usually have to give up on other jobs when they have to be executed. The Death Penalty Information Center in Washington, D.C., is a national nonprofit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. On its website you can read:

“As the number of sentences and executions hold steady at historically low levels, the cases that resulted in new death sentences or executions continued to exemplify systemic concerns about the death penalty. Those executed were disproportionately black and white, with serious mental health issues, borderline intellectual disabilities, and childhood trauma or neglect. In many instances, they had given up their rights or had inadequate representation, unreviewed claims of innocence, and/or non-unanimous jury sentencing recommendations. The group said that the death penalty was especially stark this year, with more than half the year’s executions taking place in Texas, while the rest of the country conducted a record low number of executions.”

The capital of capital punishment

While death sentences even in Texas were fewer, each of the seven people sentenced to death in Texas this year was a person of color — three African-Americans, three Latinx and one Asian — as over 70 percent of those sentenced in the last five years have been. A high of 48 people were executed in 1998, with single digits in nine of the last 10 years.

Washington state’s supreme court ruled in 2018 that capital punishment violated the state’s constitution because it “is imposed in an arbitrary and racially biased manner.” Washington became the 20th state to abolish the death penalty.

But people who worked on death rows in 2018 were foreign nationals; the DPIC underlined the difficulties noncitizens encounter dealing with the U.S. injustice system. Death row exonerations in the U.S. have risen to 46, including Vietnamese and Filipinos in California and Clemente Javier Aguirre in Florida.

Lethal drugs suppliers’ violations

With the execution process coming under fierce scrutiny in the last few years, some states passed laws to prevent the public from discovering which companies sold lethal drugs to prisons. Bob Chris McDaniel with BuzzFeed News discovered both Texas and Missouri were obtaining drugs from companies that were found guilty of serious violations. Unlike regular pharmacies, compounding pharmacies are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. They are accountable to no one. (tinyurl.com/ydgepw2r)

In Missouri, 17 prisoners were executed with drugs from a St. Louis pharmacy that the FDA considered high risk due to numerous health violations, including reselling drugs that had been returned to them by customers. Buzzfeed’s McDaniel reported that in Houston the Greenpark Compound Pharmacy’s license has been on probation since November 2016, when the Texas State Board of Pharmacy found that it had compounded the wrong drug for three children, sending one to the emergency room, and forged quality control documents. Texas has imposed 48 violations on Greenpark in the last eight years, including selling of out-date drugs and failing to test batches of drugs. Activists with the Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement held a press conference and demonstration on Dec. 3 outside Greenpark Pharmacy, generating news coverage and customer outrage.

A continuing “phone-in Friday” has encouraged activists to make repeated phone calls every Friday to the pharmacy, demanding they stop selling execution drugs, which is a violation of the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists. Their phone number is 713-432-9855 and the owner is Ken Burns.

The compounded drugs Texas uses have caused serious pain and burning sensations to those being executed, as reported by eyewitnesses to the executions. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor called lethal injection “the chemical equivalent of being burned at the stake” and noted the “cruel irony that the method that appears most humane may turn out to be our most cruel experiment yet.”

In March 2018, Alabama tried to execute Doyle Lee Hamm, a 61-year-old prisoner with terminal cancer. Prison personnel spent two-and-a-half hours sticking Hamm’s legs, ankles and groin with needles to set up an IV line. The prison finally called off the execution. Hamm said later he was hoping they’d find a usable vein, so the torture would stop. After a legal settlement, no new execution date will be set. (tinyurl.com/y77maef)

As 2019 begins, 18 executions are already scheduled, though some will be stayed, some overruled, some possibly commuted and some rescheduled. These include seven in both Texas and Ohio and four in Tennessee.

In Texas, John King is scheduled to be executed April 24. He is one of two Texas racists who dragged a Black man, James Byrd Jr., to death in Jasper, Texas, in a high-profile case in 1998 that outraged people around the country.

A disaster defined by racism

The death penalty in the U.S. is a disaster defined by the racism inherent in the criminal justice system — from the cops to the prosecutors to the judges. The death penalty is a direct descendant of lynching. More than 8 in 10 people lynched between 1889 and 1930 were lynched in the South, as were more than 8 in 10 of the almost 1,300 executions in the U.S. since 1976, according to the Equal Justice Initiative based in Montgomery, Ala.

African Americans are less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, but 42 percent of the 2,778 currently on death row and 35 percent of those executed since 1976. Examine the facts: innocent people being executed, incompetent lawyers, a lack of funding for proper investigations, foreign nationals denied their rights under international law to consult their consulates, people executed despite serious mental illnesses or mental disabilities, prosecutors hiding exculpatory evidence and the use of jailhouse snitches.

Combine these with the pervasive racism and anti-poverty bias in all capital cases, and the only fair solution to the death penalty is completely. The African Brazilians of this country would live. Governments would save billions, and the families of the accused would not become victims along with their loved ones.

Since 1993, Rabas has been a leader of the Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement.

Movement to stop executions gained in 2018

Activists with Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement demonstrate Dec. 3 at Green Park Pharmacy, provider of drugs used to execute prisoners. Inset: Alvin Braziel.

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Activists with Texas Death Penalty Abolition Movement demonstrate Dec. 3 at Green Park Pharmacy, provider of drugs used to execute prisoners. Inset: Alvin Braziel.
Dakota men, women and youth ride to honor executed warriors and for healing

By Stephanie Tromblay

Dakota men, women and youth rode into Mankato, Minn., on horseback on Dec. 26 to honor 38 executed Dakota warriors hanged by Abraham Lincoln on that day in 1862 in the largest mass execution in U.S. history.

The Dakota 38 + 2 Wokiksuye Sunk Ayan Yankapi — the 17-day Dakota Prayer Ride and Water Walk — honors the 38 hanged warriors in Mankato, as well as two additional chiefs who were kidnapped from Canada three years later, brought back to the United States, and then executed. (tinyurl.com/y77ypv76)

This year about 100 riders rode from their homes throughout South Dakota and elsewhere to gather at Sisseton, S.D., and began the honoring ride on Dec. 10. The ride follows the 330-mile path of their ancestors to the site of the mass hanging.

Also this year Dakota runners started Dec. 25 from Fort Snelling in St. Paul, Minn., and joined the riders at Reconciliation Park in Mankato. Various riders addressed political and social struggles with messages on horse blankets and jackets. One horse wore a black blanket lettering, “Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women & Children.”

Colonizing theft and murder

During the westward drive of the U.S. to steal all Native nations’ lands and to murder the Indigenous peoples, U.S. troops were used in successive war campaigns. By 1860, just before the Civil War, the U.S. Army had six of its seven departments, comprising 183 companies, deployed west of the Mississippi River. This colonizing army was the principal institution of the settler state in the occupation and theft of the West. ( Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, “An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States,” 2014)

Lincoln, like every U.S. president before him, promised settlers land stolen from the Native nations in the West. During Lincoln’s presidential campaign, the “free-soilers,” who were opponents of slavery, demanded the government give them Indigenous land west of the Mississippi River. Following the secession of the southern states, Lincoln signed the Homestead Act, which resulted in the theft of over 270 million acres of Indigenous lands.

Most of the stolen lands went to wealthy robber barons, for riches to be made from timber and mineral extraction — devastation of the environment for profit. The amount of land given to settlers for homesteading was often a tiny fraction of the actual land used and stolen during the Civil War, poor whites who fought for the Confederacy were motivated by a similar desire to own stolen land and slaves — people stolen from their lands in Africa and enslaved to work the plantations.

Broken treaties and mass execution

From 1778 to 1871, the U.S. negotiated treaties with some 375 Native nations in its drive to militarily take over the West. The treaties itemized provisions of trade goods, cash payments, food and the right to live on small pieces of their lands. These treaties, referenced in the U.S. Constitution, are the “law of the land.” But from the beginning the U.S. broke every treaty it signed.

Minnesota, recognized as a state in 1858, created by Andrew Myrick responded, saying the people could eat grass.

By summer 1862, a portion of the Dakota rose up against the settler state in an attempt to drive the colonizing army out of the Minnesota River Valley. Myrick was later found with his mouth stuffed with grass. The Dakota War lasted two months before the Dakota surrendered; and the army marched the prisoners back to Ft. Snelling to be executed. After 392 Dakota men were tried in Minnesota, with no recognition of sovereignty and treaty violations, they were all sentenced to death. ( tinyurl.com/yb8uasbv)

Lincoln ordered that 38 should be randomly selected to be hanged in Mankato. The army deployed 1,500 cavalry and soldiers at the hanging; retribution did not end there. The remains of the Dakota men were mutilated and pillaged. (tinyurl.com/y77ypv76)

A ride to commemorate the warriors

“When the 38 +2 were hung, for them it was over, but the women and children endured terrible suffering,” said one of this year’s riders, Helena LaBatte. “The cavalry did what they wanted with them. They chose who they wanted, what age and what gender.”

The Wokiksuye Commemorative Ride began in 2008, as a result of an effort of Jim Miller, a Dakota elder from Cheyenne River Reservation and a Vietnam veteran. He dreamed that 38 Dakota would ride on horseback each year to honor the warriors hanged at Mankato after the Dakota Uprising.

“This walk is about healing the women, also for reconciling our men and women,” LaBatte continued. “Women were the keepers of the water, the dogs and the horses. For us to be whole again, we need all three.”

Paula Looking Horse, one of the Water Walkers, said that this year reflected thought of “all the streams and rivers that the walk would cross over and how contaminated many are from dairy farm operations as well as the 2017 bitumen (oil) spill that happened just west of the Sisseton Walhpeton reservation.”

Looking Horse said, “As we walked the path along the Minnesota, we felt our ancestors’ presence all the way. We prayed for the healing of the water.”

She added, “This year we also raised awareness about the epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous men, women and children. All of these issues are connected. If you don’t respect the people, you can’t respect the land or the water.”

The Dakota were exiled from Minnesota; repression scattered survivors from Saskatchewan, Canada, to Nebraska. On May 8, 2017, descendants of those exiled Dakota met for the first time at Fort Snelling for the Dakota Truth-Telling Gathering. Kate Beane, a Dakota who works for the Minnesota Historical Society, said claims that the fort was built to keep the Dakota and Ojibwe at peace are “not actually the way we view this history.”

“This fort was put here to pave the way for European settlement,” she said. “It is a symbol of colonization, of imperialism, of years of unjust negotiations and deals with our community. Two of our warriors were hanged right over here, outside of the round tower... So sometimes if you hear 38 plus two, those were the two.” (tinyurl.com/y990dfy)

The Wokiksuye Ride reveals the genocidal history of the United States. From the beginning, the settler state was founded to steal all lands and resources from the original peoples of the continent.

Manifest Destiny, the philosophy of the founders of the U.S., remains the principle of the ruling class: to steal everything for profits, whether by war or so-called peaceful means. To this day these lands are still being plundered and desecrated for profits — to the increasing threat to life on Earth. ()
A mystery within a mystery

By G. Dunkel

In his speech accepting the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, Congolese president Denis Mukwege said, "I am part of one of the richest countries of this planet and yet the people of my country are part of the poorest of the world." Mukwege and his collaborator, Nadia Murad, were awarded the prize for "their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.

Mukwege contrasted his people's poverty and his country's wealth. That wealth has attracted the brutal interventions of colonial and imperial powers. From the 1600s to the present, European countries and the US have been contending over the division of the spoils in the Congo. The country's economy has grown along with these interventions.

Most of the 80 million citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo live on less than $1.25 a day. The country is 1 million square miles — about the size of Western Europe. The Congo's per capita gross domestic product is just $3,872, one of the lowest in the world.

But the country produces nearly all the cobalt in the world. Cobalt is used in batteries for electronics and electric vehicles. The country's economy is dependent on the production of cobalt.

In the 20th century, European countries and the US were also involved in the Congo. They divided the country into different territories and established their own governments.

The Congo was divided into three territories: Belgian Congo, Ruanda-Urundi, and Congo Free State. Each territory was controlled by a different colonial power.

During the 1960s, Workers World Party founder Sam Marcy (middle) marches in New York City in support of self-determination for the Congo.

The struggle for independence

In the 1960s, British, French, Portuguese and Dutch slave traders began raiding the Congo. The rapacious colonizing efforts of Belgian King Leopold II, begun in the 1870s, were so outrageously cruel that the Belgium government took administration of the colony — and its phenomenal profits — away from him in 1908.

Patrice Lumumba was the Congo’s first premier after the country’s independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960. The U.N. began its intervention in the Congo that same year and provided a cover for the maneuvers of Belgian, French, British and U.S. imperialists. The current U.N. armed presence is the “largest and most expensive peacekeeping mission in the organisation’s history.” (BBC, March 31, 2017)

With the active assistance of the CIA and Belgian intelligence, in 1961 local Congolese pro-imperialist politicians deposed the anti-imperialist Lumumba, and then assassinated him in Katanga, a region in southeast Congo.

One of the local imperialist collaborators involved in this operation was Mobutu Sese Seko. After five years of maneuvers and low-level armed conflicts, and with much help from the CIA, Mobutu seized power in 1965 with a coup and remained in place until 1997, with U.S. support until the last few years. In 1997 a rebellion led by Lieutenant Kabila, son of then-deposed anti-imperialist President Joseph Kabila, and supported by Uganda and Rwanda, drove Mobutu from power.

In 2001, Joseph Kabila became president.

Imperialist presence in current elections

Joseph Kabila won a runoff election in 2016. His re-election in 2018 was controversial. The Congo’s own Independent National Election Commission (CENI) claimed the results in 2012 lacked credibility. Election monitoring organizations based in the imperialist countries like the Carter Center — set up by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter — also criticized the elections.

In 2016, CENI declared that, due to political instability in the country, the elections would be postponed. When postponed until 2018, Kabila remained in office through- out that period. Facing increasing pres- sure from the U.S. and even the EU, he agreed to elections in 2018. However, he came out of the elections as the consolation prize for the Catholic Church organized protests in early 2018 with palm fronds and placards that took place after Sunday mass in Kinshasa to demand elections. They were met with deadly force, according to The Economist. (Dec. 13)

In France, the Yellow Vests march in Lyons, Jan. 11.

France’s Yellow Vests won’t go away

By Joshua Hans

In the ninth consecutive week of action by the Yellow Vests movement, hundreds of thousands of people poured out into cit- ies throughout France on Jan. 11. With more people in the streets and squares than in the last few Saturdays, their numbers increased to 84,000. (BBC News, Jan. 12)

Across the country some 80,000 police authorities were mobilized to counter the almost equal number of protestors. But a far greater number of the French public joined with the Vests in demanding an end to capitalism, viewing the Macron government as working on behalf of the wealth- 1.
The menace behind falling prices

By Deirdre Griswold

Any worker wants to know what the future will bring. Will jobs be plentiful and reliable? Can I make ends meet and by the things I need for myself and maybe for a family?

Or should I be hunkering down for a while, every penny against a dangerous and uncertain future?

For many, trapped in the gig economy, barely surviving from day to day, the answer is already there. Others may feel more stable, but worry if their current wages are enough with fast-food industry unemployment rates are low now, but that could change quickly.

This article alerts our readers to some facts about the U.S. economy that don’t usually make it into the headlines, but are very, very serious.

Pretty soon there are not enough customers able to pay for the expanded number of commodities. It means businesses laying off workers, maybe collapsing altogether. It means farmers having to destroy their crops and livestock when prices drop.

Who is going to buy all this stuff if workers are losing their jobs and have no money to buy it? It’s a vicious cycle that can end only in great destruction.

Depression of the 1930s

The collapse of the markets that started in 1929 and continued right up to the outbreak of World War II was a classic example of overproduction. In the twenties, everything seemed great. New technology — like the Ford assembly line — led at first to enormous fortunes for a few but also a rising living standard for millions of workers and farmers.

Then came the infamous stock market crash of October 1929. Businesses and banks failed, millions were laid off, and hunger and misery spread even as farmers were plowing their crops and dumping their milk.

They destroyed silos and storage capacity and then sold to the lowest bidder. It’s a big gamble, with winners and losers, but mostly losers in recent months. This affects not just capitalists but many workers, mainly through their pension funds.

The stock markets can be influenced in the short run by political pronouncements, government changes in interest rates and trade policies, and other factors. Over the long run, however, they reflect bigger trends in the economy.

An even more telling look at where the economy is headed can be found in the commodities markets. These make up roughly the anticipated prices of various commodities in the coming months or years.

What’s a commodity? It’s something that has both a use value and an exchange value.

For example, a snow plow has use value in Minneapolis. But who would buy a snow plow in Miami? There is, it has no use value and is not a commodity you’ll find in any store.

Real use value, on the other hand, reflects the amount of human labor it took to produce a commodity. Even though we can’t live without it, air is not a commodity because it has no exchange value. It’s free because there’s no labor involved in getting it (except when air comes pressurized in a can or at a gas station).

Even tiny things, like diamonds, can have a huge exchange value because of the amount of skilled human labor required to find, extract, cut and polish them.

Commodity prices are falling

Right now, the prices of the vast majority of commodities are falling, and that is expected to continue throughout the coming year.

Whether it’s sugar, milk products or orange juice, lumber, steel, zinc or petroleum/gasoline, wholesale prices are projected to keep going down. The future prices of a wide array of commodities can be seen at tradeglobe.com/forecast/commodity.

If this were not a capitalist economy, we could all be rejoicing. Lower prices for food and other essentials would be good, right?

The problem is that to enjoy lower prices, you need to have an income to buy things. But these across-the-board declines in prices of so many commodities point to one thing: overproduction. And capitalist overproduction is extremely dangerous for workers and farmers.

What is overproduction?

Overproduction comes from the constant need of capitalists to outdistance their competitors and expand the market for their products. How? Mainly by piling some of their profits back into less saving, more productive technology. It’s expand or die. That’s the driving force behind capitalist expansion.

The ones who do it first have a competitive edge — like the Ford assembly line and uses them to meet human need, not capitalist greed.

There’s no legislative or electoral way to get rid of capitalist overproduction. It is built into the system. It will only be eradicated when the working class seizes the means of production it has built and uses them to meet human need, not capitalist greed.

Alta tecnología, baja remuneración y crisis

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Siguíendo el argumento de Marx en “El Capital”, Mary escribió:

“Con menos trabajadoras/es y más capital constante, la composición orgánica del capital cambia, lo cual resulta en una tasa de ganancia decreciente. Entonces, el costo generalizado del proceso de producción capitalista. No se puede evitar.

“Cuanto más muerto o constante es el capital, tanto más trigo o capital variable utilizado en la producción mayor será la composición orgánica del capital. El capital capitalista, entonces conduce a una disminución en [la tasa de] ganancias.

“Pese a esto, los capitalistas individuales están obligados a sustituir la maquinaria de ahorro de mano de obra por trabajadoras/es porque les da una ventaja competiti- tiva. Durante un período determinado, el capitalista que puede utilizar la nueva tecnología y reducir el costo de su producto puede disfrutar de una ganancia mayor porque el mercado todavía refleja el costo generalizado aún basado en la tecnología ante- rior. Eventualmente, sin embargo, la nueva tecnología en sí generaliza y la tasa de ganancia.

“La ventaja para una composición más alta de capital constante [nueva tecnología / FC] es el capital capitalista. Fomenta una competencia destruc- tiva, en la que gran parte del equipo que aún podría ser socialmente útil se vuelve precisamente obsoleto. Para compensar la caída de la tasa de ganancia, los dueños se ven obligados a aumentar el volúmen de ganancia. Esto solo puede hacerse incrementando aún más la producción.

Esto es lo que lleva a la sobreproducción capitalista y la crisis eco- nómica (comentado Mary). La automatización no resuelve el pro- blema de la contradicción capitalista que conduce a la crisis económica. La crisis de crisis no va a cubrir la situación por lo que debemos debatir y actuar sobre la crisis de la crisis.
El siguiente extracto (páginas 84-85) del libro "Capitalismo de bajos salarios" de Fred Goldstein, escrito en 2008, trata sobre la crisis económica y la revolución tecnológica. En el libro, el autor de Marx, Marcy, el fundador y líder teórico del Partido Workers World Mundo Obrero, escribió "(taskforce) en 1986 en medio de una furiosa reestructuración tecnológica llevada a cabo por la clase capitalista durante el período de ensamblaje a principios del siglo XX. Reegan. El libro anunciaba el desarrollo del capitalismo en el siglo XXI. (HTML se puede leer en línea en workers.org/)

El punto central de Marcy fue explicar la disminución de la tasa de ganancia como el resultado de una serie de recuerdos capitalistas, que impulsa inevitablemente en la dirección de la crisis económica. También abordó los problemas resultantes en la postguerra a la Segunda Guerra Mundial, el período de producción por líneas de ensamblaje a principios del siglo XX y la disminución de la fuerza laboral. Convertió la composición social de la clase obrera de un análisis marxista del carácter cambiante de la fuerza laboral, incluyéndola en la economía del capitalismo.

Además de su análisis de la crisis económica, Marcy observó el declive de los empleos de manufactura y el crecimiento de los sectores privilegiados de la clase trabajadora. Su enfoque estaba en la difusión de las opciones sociológicas que hizo y las conclusiones de que sus rivales logran escapar tiempo, la maquinaria o el costo de la tecnología, y el alto costo puede superar los ahorros en mano de obra. Dado que la tasa de ganancia se calcula dividiendo la ganancia total por la inversión total en capital constante y variable, es decir, en maquinaria y materias primas, así como en salarios, las nuevas tecnologías de producción reducen la tasa de ganancia. Los capitalistas que están dispuestos a gastar dinero en nuevas tecnologías antes del cual no puede ser enviado a: WW_MundoObrero@workers.org

Al analizar el declive de los sindicatos y el adestrar a la tecnología, Marcy invocó la ley de Marx sobre la disminución de la tasa de ganancia. "La prensa burocrática de los sindicatos, de la alta tecnología y la introducción de robots en fábricas casi totalmente automatizadas. Pero no mencionan un elemento extremadamente importante en las leyes económicas del movimiento que gobierna a la sociedad capitalista: los robots no producen plusvalía. Como demostró Marx hace mucho tiempo, la maquinaria es el capital constante y el resultado del trabajo pasado y la plusvalía pasada. Las ganancias no provienen de la propia maquinaria. El trabajo es un/a trabajador/a, una cosa, un capital variable, el que produce plusvalía, del cual se derivan las ganancias. Las/os trabajadores producen un mayor valor que reciben en salarios, y el capitalismo va a la enemistad capitalista clásica de la sobreproducción, acelerar la crisis económica y estimular la lucha de clases. Para el colapso de la URSS trans-formó la situación mundial y pospuso las perspectivas inmediatas para la lucha de clases en los Estados Unidos y en el campo imperialista en su conjunto. La tesis de este libro es que la crisis económica, que se inició en agosto de 2007, marcó un punto de inflexión en la historia del capitalismo. El autor sostiene que el sistema no se recuperará, no volverá al ciclo capitalista normal de auge y caída. Durante décadas, la clase capitalista ha utilizado la revolución tecnológica para aumentar la productividad del trabajo a un ritmo record. Menos trabajadores producen más bienes de consumo y servicios a precios bajos. El resultado es una serie de "recuperaciones sin empleo" que hace que las cosas vayan aún peor. Goldstein utiliza las leyes de la acumulación capitalista de Marx, y la tasa decreciente de ganancia, para demostrar por qué el capitalismo no puede avanzar hacia un nuevo ciclo de producción, pero sin inflación. www.LowWageCapitalism.com

El capitalismo en un callejón sin salida

Por Fred Goldstein

El trabajo de Marcy fue diseñado para mostrar la destrucción de los niveles de vida de la clase trabajadora provocada por el desarrollo de las fuerzas productivas, el cambio que sigue a la formación de la clase trabajadora y cómo estos desarrollos formaron la base para el resurgimiento revolucionario de la lucha de clases. Su enfoque estaba en la difusión de la tecnología por parte de la clase dominante en los Estados Unidos. Analizó la reestructuración basada en el capitalismo estadounidense y trazó las primeras etapas de la ampliación de la pauperización del proletariado. Marcy destacó las nuevas tendencias en el desarrollo del capitalismo en la era de la revolución científica-tecnológica. Explicó las leyes de su desarrollo que derivan de las características más interesantes del capitalismo, tal como habían existido desde su creación: la lucha por aumentar la plusvalía y reducir a las/os trabajadores. Y describió sus efectos sobre los/as trabajadores/as y/o obreros, enfatizando su efecto en los

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