

## W. Virginia teachers strike — A model for all labor

Craig Hudson / Charleston Gazette-Mail



By HUGH STEPHENSON

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — West Virginia teachers stunned politicians, the media, and labor officials across the country when they launched a nine-day wildcat strike demanding wage increases and better health-care benefits for all state employees. Some 27,000 teachers from all 55 counties of West Virginia walked out of their classrooms on Feb. 22. They never wavered on their demands.

On March 6, a tentative agreement was reached, giving all state workers a 5% increase in wages. The contentious issue of health insurance was to be sent to a task force for further study.

The settlement is a strong victory for labor, even if the increase in wages isn't much money. West Virginia state workers will still be at the lower end of pay scales. Moreover, the legislature threatened to fund the wage gain through cuts to Medicaid and other social programs, although Governor Jim Justice promised that the cuts would not take place.

But the win sent a shock wave through boardrooms and state capitols across the nation. And they aren't happy. West Virginia GOP politician Lynn Arvon was overheard saying to an aide, "The teachers have to

understand that West Virginia is a red state and the free handouts are over." As if pay for working, and being a teacher in particular, is a free handout!

The victory was largely the product of tireless preparation and organizing work by the rank-and-file teachers and other school workers. Labor union members and leaders would do well to take note and follow the teachers' example.

Teachers' strikes are "unlawful" in West Virginia, as in many other states. In addition, collective bargaining is not provided for in state law; instead, the legislature is empowered to regulate school labor issues by statute. But conditions were so bad that the teachers struck anyway.

Initially, Gov. Justice tried to offset the teachers' anger by signing a bill giving a 2% increase in wages with an additional increase of 1% in 2020 and another 1% in 2021—hardly enough to offset increases in health-care costs and inflation. In response, the teachers walked off the job, demanding a 5% immediate increase and caps on insurance premiums.

West Virginia is one of the poorest states in the Union, and teachers rank 47<sup>th</sup> in pay compared to other states. Teaching is predominantly "women's work," and low salaries reflect the value politicians

(Above) Teachers rally inside the Capitol building in Charleston, W.V.

place on women. To make ends meet, teachers, bus drivers, and school service workers often hold down one or two additional jobs.

Low wages also force experienced teachers to seek employment outside of West Virginia. Many teachers said they had nothing to lose by striking. They're right. One teacher said, "If they fire me, I'll just go to Target and get a job there for more money."

Teachers recognized their action would harm students that get nutritional needs met by food programs offered by the schools. According to CNN, "Before they made the decision to strike they wanted to make sure their students' needs were taken care of," said Jennifer Wood, with the American Federation of Teachers union in West Virginia.

Support for the strike from within the state and across the country shows just how important this strike is to workers everywhere. On March 5, San Francisco's teachers union donated pizza to feed those at the rally. A gofundme site raised \$320,000

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# Port automation is a dystopia for dockers

BY CHRIS GOSSE

There is a train of thought that imagines new technology has the potential for great job creation. You can go to McDonald's and to your local grocery store and use automated machines to do a self check-out. But what about the people who did those jobs before?

Now, the bosses can have an employee monitoring six self check-out lanes. That's pretty good profit maximization, six for one. I haven't seen a full-service gas station in a while. The local gas stations used to have a minimum of two people. Now they are down to one. This is a trend in many industries, including mine, the stevedore and longshore industry.

There are longshoreman locals in Canada that once had 3500 members loading/unloading conventional vessels by manual labour. In the 1960s, as containerization and mechanization brought technological change, these locals declined in membership—to 150-200 members each today.

There are fully automated terminals in three places in the world right now. The employers' group on the West Coast (Pacific Maritime Association) is trying to push through a job-killing contract extension with the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU). While on the East Coast, the employers' group, the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX), is pushing the automation envelope as well.

As recently as a few weeks before Christmas, International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) President Harold Daggett broke off talks with the em-



ployer group on a new collective agreement. The bosses want fully automated terminals that can run with two or three employees, while the union favours semi-automated terminals that have automated features but are operated by dock workers. President Daggett has viewed automation as the main issue in current contract talks.

Of the three fully automated ports, not one has the same productivity as those operated by workers. The bosses like automation because they don't have to deal with workers, unions, and safety issues.

Labour is a source of value — the wealth produced by workers. Corporations want to produce profit as the

number one goal. Some of those corporations pushing for automation want public subsidies and public investment. It is bad enough that members of the 1% control 51% of the world's wealth, but they want your tax dollars to make themselves wealthier and to destroy good, decent-paying jobs in the process. Also, 22% of working people are working poor. Social Security belongs to the workers, not to the bosses.

What is happening to the Panama and Paradise Papers bandits? What are the regulators and Canada's federal government going to do to protect good jobs on the docks? Where is the social contract with the employer to make sure that workers aren't dumped and

replaced by machines that don't pay taxes like the people exposed by the Paradise and Panama Papers?

How do we secure core working-class values like universal health care (including Pharmacare), public education, public transit, public mail service, and postal banking? Casualized, outsourced, contracted-out, precarious work in the transportation industry will not help our people, especially our country's workers.

The way to achieve a truly realistic prosperity is through uncompromising revolutionary change and by exerting workers' power for creative and socially productive work in a world of ecological sustainability and genuine equality.

Let's take a page from the Transitional Program, a set of demands formulated by Leon Trotsky in 1938, which includes the call for shorter work time without loss of pay or benefits, to share the available jobs along with the boon of rising productivity that comes from technical change.

In the late 19th century, Friedrich Engels called the London dockers' strike the greatest promise he had witnessed in the fight for the working class. Harold Daggett and the ILA have shown the greatest promise in the current fight for the dignity of the working class against the dystopia of capitalist automation. When the dockers get organized and win, all other sections will follow. ■

*Chris Gosse is president of the International Longshoreman's Union local in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and was the Socialist Caucus candidate for Vice-President-Labour in the New Democratic Party.*

## JOIN SOCIALIST ACTION!

Socialist Action is a national organization of activists committed to the emancipation of workers and the oppressed. We strive to revitalize the antiwar, environmental, labor, anti-racist, feminist, student, and other social movements with a mass-action perspective. Recognizing the divisions that exist on the left and within the workers' movement, we seek to form united front type organizations around specific issues where various groups have agreement. In this way we seek to maximize our impact and demonstrate the power and effectiveness of mass action.

In the process we hope to bring activists together from different backgrounds into a revolutionary workers' party that can successfully challenge the wealthy elite—whose profit-driven system is driving down living standards and threatens all life on this planet.

We are active partisans of the working class and believe in the need for independent working-class politics—not alliances with the bosses' parties. That is why we call for workers in the U.S. to break from the Democratic and Republican parties to build a Labor Party based on the trade unions.

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# Fast food workers strike in the South

By ANN MONTAGUE

Activists with Fight For \$15 renewed their struggle on Feb. 12 with rallies and strikes throughout the South in remembrance of the 50th anniversary of the Memphis, Tenn., sanitation worker's strike. Fight For 15 teamed up with civil rights leader William Barber for a day of action in support of racial justice. They called on fast food workers to strike in two dozen Southern cities to mark the anniversary. The events also were held in cities outside the South, such as Kansas City, Detroit, and Las Vegas.

Sanitation workers in Memphis walked off their jobs on Feb. 12, 1968, after two workers were crushed to death when a trash compression mechanism malfunctioned. Some 1300 workers launched a two-month strike to protest dangerous working conditions, poor benefits, and poverty wages. They demanded that the city of Memphis recognize their union and a minimum wage of \$2 an hour.

Every day of the strike, workers marched from Clayborn Temple to



Memphis City Hall, staring down mace, teargas, police dogs, and cops with shotguns. They wore signs that said, "I am a man."

This year, cooks and cashiers in the fast-food industry throughout Memphis went on strike, demanding \$15 an hour and union rights. They marched

from Clayborn Temple to Memphis City hall—the same route the sanitation strikers marched 50 years ago.

The strikers are building toward a season of direct action and civil disobedience that will start on May 13 and continue through June 21 to fulfill Martin Luther King's goal of bringing

the needs of poor people directly to the nation's capital. King's plan, cut short by his death, was for a multiracial coalition of the poor to descend on Washington for mass civil disobedience that would block traffic and shut down the city. The demand would be for action to end poverty, hunger, and homelessness.

King came to Memphis several times during the sanitation workers' strike. He spoke to a huge mass meeting on April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated, saying, "We have got to give ourselves to this struggle to the end."

In that spirit, Shavonda Wilson, a Wendy's worker and Fight For 15 activist who makes \$7.55 an hour, told the striking workers, "My mother told me when I was growing up, 'if you want change you better be ready to fight for it.' That is the lesson I teach my kids and hope they learn when they see me chanting in the streets. Because in Memphis, and across the country, the fight started by sanitation workers 50 years ago continues." ■

## Iraq veteran runs for U.S. Senate — Vote Socialist Action!



Ten years after the crash of 2008, a refreshing growth in unionization and militant strikes shows promise of developing into a new wave of working-class action. This follows years of struggle against police murder and a wave of protest that began with 4 million marching for women's rights. Tens of thousands flooded airports throughout the U.S. to stop bans on refugees and Muslim immigrants. And socialism continues to grow in popularity among young people.

What will be the fate of these struggles? Will the

militant strike in West Virginia be the harbinger of a new labor movement? Will revolutionary socialism become a major force in working class politics? Or will the activity of working and oppressed people be canalized by the Democratic Party and other organs of big business?

What can political working people do to save new struggles from going the way of the great Wisconsin public workers' uprising of 2011, when an unrelenting succession of mass actions, widely supported, were channeled into a campaign to elect a Democrat who refused to support the aims of the movement, and then promptly lost the race?

This is why Fred Linck, a veteran of the Iraq war, is running for U.S. Senate in Connecticut as a candidate of Socialist Action. "Every election year we are told to forget about exercising our own power and to figure out how we can best elect one of the candidates chosen by the people who exploit us all day" says Linck. "I am running for office to show working people what kind of power they have, and to show that we will only win when we learn to stand on our own feet and stop hoping that someone from the parties of wealth will save us."

Fred Linck is a 30-year-old activist and member of

Socialist Action. At 17 he joined the Marine Corps and fought in the war in Iraq. Fred's experience in Iraq led him to question the U.S. motivations for going to war and the capitalist system that produces war, racism, homophobia, and sexism. He is active in the climate justice group 350 Connecticut.

"In Iraq, I began to figure out that poor people around the world really do have the same interests," says Linck. "It's really just a few thousand rich people who keep the rest of us fighting each other over scraps."

Support for the campaign is growing steadily online and on the ground. The Quiet Corner chapter of Democratic Socialists of America endorsed Linck by a unanimous vote. Campaign supporters' meetings are organized in Hartford and Stamford. A rally at UConn is planned for April 7. Supporters are booking meetings with labor and student organizations, where Linck will present the campaign's politics and ask for endorsements.

The campaign is organizing a petition drive to place Linck on the ballot; 7500 valid signatures from registered voters will be required. The campaign plans to collect 15,000. The last socialist candidate for federal office on the ballot in Connecticut was Christopher Hutchinson, also of Socialist Action, who ran for Congress in 2010.

— DANIEL ADAM

By BILL ONASCH

**Labor Board Reverses Itself** — A previous Labor Briefing reported a December decision by the new Republican majority on the National Labor Relations Board to reverse the *Browning Ferris* ruling made late during the Obama administration. That ruling, establishing *joint responsibility* of corporations with their contractors and franchises in collective bargaining, had the potential to become a game-changer for efforts of fast food workers, port drivers, and others who had fallen through some cracks in red-letter labor law.

But this reprieve for the likes of McDonald's and the Port of Los Angeles didn't last long. It was discovered a new Trump appointee had a business stake in the outcome of that action and should have recused himself. Without his vote, the Board was tied and *Browning Ferris* was reinstated.

**Sanctuary Through Solidarity**—The New York *Daily News* reported: "Worried about federal immigration policies,

a New York labor organization is taking steps to protect its own. Across Long Island and throughout the city, some 120,000 Teamsters are getting prepped to become a 'sanctuary union.' In 27 shops, business agents, supervisors and front-line workers are getting schooled on their rights under U.S. law — and when and how to challenge federal immigration agents who show up to search their work sites. The training is complex and technical—hinging on specific types of warrants and the definition of a raid. But in fundamental labor terms, it follows one simple rule: Union solidarity first, immigration status second."

**They Move Chicago**—After two years of contentious austerity negotiations, and mobilization of public support by the unions, 9000 Chicago Transit Authority ATU train and bus workers have a new

contract through arbitration that will expire next year. It includes \$45 million in both retroactive and forward wage increases and maintains the same level of employee health-care contributions. The CTA has said it will not raise fares. The *Chicago Tribune* quotes the ATU Local 241 bus division president as saying it was "probably the best agreement we've had in decades."

**Go Fund the Boss?**—The Associated Press reported: "Southwest Airlines appears to be backing down from a demand to get credit for money donated to a fired employee's GoFundMe account. The change of heart comes after a union accused Southwest of abusing the generosity of the man's co-workers.

"Southwest fired Dallas mechanic Ken Hackett a year ago and accused him of helping organize a boycott of overtime

assignments. In December, an arbitrator ordered the airline to reinstate Hackett with back pay minus any income he earned from other sources.

"Southwest originally considered the \$25,000 raised on GoFundMe to be outside income, reducing the amount it owed Hackett. Southwest earned \$3.5 billion last year."

**Putting Movement Back In the Labor Movement**—That's one of the slogans of *Labor Notes*, a useful monthly publication that covers labor struggles, and movements for union democracy that are given scant attention by the boss media. Every two years, they sponsor well-attended educational conferences. This year it's expected that 2000 labor activists from across North America—and dozens from other continents—will be at the Labor Notes Conference in Chicago, April 6-8. Details can be found online at: [labornotes.org/2018](http://labornotes.org/2018). ■

If you have a suggestion for *Labor Briefing*, please contact: [billonasch@kclabor.org](mailto:billonasch@kclabor.org).

## Labor Briefing



(Left) Poultry workers and supporters rally in Harrisonburg, Va.

## Virginia poultry workers under attack by Cargill

By HUGH STEPHENSON

While teachers in West Virginia were occupying the state capitol building and continuing their wildcat strike for increased wages and better health care, a Cargill poultry processing plant in nearby Dayton, Va., pursued its campaign to deny the right of plant workers to organize a union.

Cargill is an international food conglomerate that in 2016 was found guilty of violating the rights of Muslim workers in its Colorado operation. Cargill recently fired three union activists from its Dayton facility. The firings are just the latest in the company's push to keep the Dayton plant union free. The company routinely intimidates staff to prevent employees from becoming pro-union and has retained the services of

Peter List and Kulture Consulting—a notorious anti-union advisory company.

The recent firings are not the first time that Cargill retaliated against employees it deemed to be problematic. According to a local television station, WHSV, Wilfredo Flores' job was terminated for doing nothing more than publicly describing conditions inside the processing plant. After injuring his hand while at work, Flores was informed by Cargill management that he was no longer employed. Flores now works with United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 400 (UFCW), in its drive to win a union contract at the plant.

Ernestina Castillo, one of the recently fired employees, worked at Cargill for 14 years and injured her hand on the job (an all too common occurrence for

poultry workers). Management traditionally moves an injured employee to another position on the line or provides training for other tasks. However, Castillo was seen wearing a union shirt by management and consequently lost her job. Workers are now wearing union shirts on the job to show their solidarity.

Dangerous working conditions and line speed-up (the act of increasing the processing speed of plant machinery to increase company profits) are two of the biggest complaints that workers have against Cargill. As a result of Cargill's practices, broken bones, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other injuries occur. In addition, it is reported that Cargill often denies workers' compensation to injured staff. One trick used by Cargill is to intimidate employees who speak only Spanish into signing a form written in English. The form denies all culpability by Cargill.

Workers who are able to avoid physical injury are subject to job burnout due to long working hours (not always compensated) and line speed-up. Burnout results in frequent staff turnover. This turnover, not coincidentally, makes unionizing more difficult and further suppresses already low wages.

Workers have reported that company management engages in dirty practices, such as spreading petty personal rumors among employees in order to divide workers and make unionizing difficult. Management also routinely warns new workers to keep clear of pro-union workers.

At recent pro-worker rallies held outside the Dayton plant, Cargill locked the building doors to block workers from joining the rally while on their break. Of course, locked doors are a danger to all inside the building should a fire or other emergency occur. Plant supervisors have formed lines to watch and scare workers at the events, and as the workers returned to work, the managers have removed from their hands the union support cards given out by rally organizers.

Nevertheless, despite company intimidation, workers' support for the union continues. At the end of February, community activists, church leaders, and the UFCW aided the recently fired workers and filed unfair labor practice charges against Cargill with the National Labor Relations Board. Results are pending.

You can follow the Cargill plant workers' fight for a union by visiting the following Facebook sites: • <https://www.facebook.com/justiceforpoultryworkers/>; • <https://www.facebook.com/shenandoahvalleyreds/> ■

## ... WV teachers

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to help teachers cover lost wages. Students formed the group #SecureOurFuture to show that they stand with their teachers.

A March 5 rally was held at the West Virginia state capitol building in Charleston. About 5000 teachers and supporters occupied the capitol building, forcing it to close due to its having reached maximum capacity as permitted by the fire marshal. An overflow crowd of at least another thousand filled the outside grounds. Pro-union music and passionate speeches by labor organizers and activists highlighted the rally.

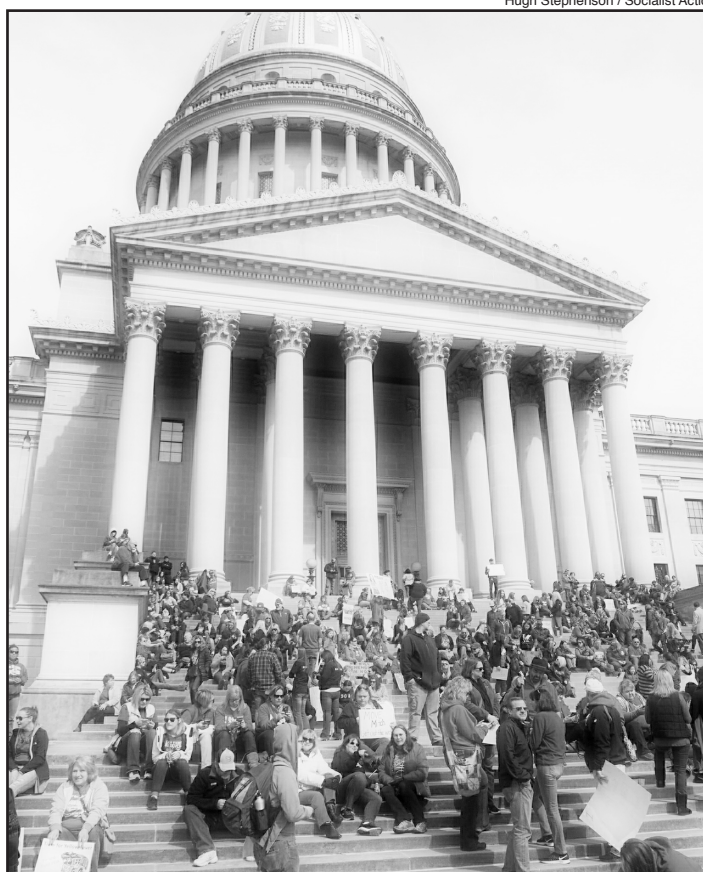
Dale Lee, head of the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA), announced to the cheering crowd, "The world is watching, the world is watching, and our being on national TV for something positive is igniting a revolution across the nation."

Jerry Goldberg, a visiting teacher from Detroit, told the strikers, "You have inspired people in Oklahoma, the struggle is spreading. It is time for working people to take back our rights, to take back what has been taken away." Teachers in Oklahoma and Pittsburgh, energized by events in West Virginia, are making preparations for their own strikes.

One teacher in the crowd, Kim, pointed out to *Socialist Action*, "We have to learn how to organize again, we've been de-educated. My mother was an AFT union member. It is ironic because West Virginia is a mythical place in the labor movement"—a reference to the Mining Wars of 1912 to 1921, when workers fought a war for the right to organize.

The mining wars were on the minds of many of the striking teachers. "We come from an area that is known for standing up for what they believe in," Katie Endicott, a high school teacher who brings home less than \$650 per week, said to *The New York Times*. "The union wars, they originated in the South in Mingo County. We believe we're following in their footsteps."

The crowd chanted pro-labor slogans between speakers while raising their fists in unison. Flashing



(Left) Teachers rally outside West Virginia capitol building on March 5.

five fingers twice and then a fist, they referenced "55 Strong," a slogan capturing the unity of all 55 state counties for the labor action. Bob, a science teacher, told *Socialist Action*, "We learned from state workers in Wisconsin. We won't demobilize until documents are signed. We won't fall for their bait and switch." Bob was referencing two issues:

1) Wisconsin workers occupied their own capitol building in 2011, protesting union-busting legislation by Governor Scott Walker. The protesters demobilized when union leadership agreed to resolve Walker's anti-union plans in the courts. In a blow to labor, the courts ruled for Walker and against the unions.

2) West Virginia's governor, Jim Justice, announced an agreement with the West Virginia Education Association on Feb. 28 for a 5% teacher's raise and a 3% state worker raise. The agreement failed to address the insurance issue—which infuriated many teachers. The walk-out went on.

Moreover, the House approved the raises but the Senate didn't, on the alleged grounds that there was not enough money to cover costs. Instead, the Senate offered a 4% increase for teachers. Union leaders and politicians expected teachers to agree to the 4% raise. But they didn't fall for the state government's tricks and again voted to continue the strike.

At the same time that West Virginia's Senate claimed funds weren't available for a 5% raise, the legislature passed tax cuts for the mining industry. Even Gov. Jim Justice, himself an owner of several mine companies, agreed with rescinding recent mining company tax breaks to pay for the raises. Many of the teachers are demanding funding of their wage increases by rescinding mining company tax breaks.

Unions have been on a long retreat in the United States. In West Virginia, even miners have suffered defeats. According to *The New York Times*, only 5% of miners are unionized. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 10% of workers are in unions nationwide. This is down from 33% union membership 50 years ago.

West Virginia teachers have taught workers lessons that were long lost. It doesn't matter if reactionary laws exist to block labor organizing. It doesn't matter if a state is "right-to-work" or bans strikes altogether. It doesn't matter when the Supreme Court rules in favor of big business. If labor is united, like the WV teachers, labor can use its power to move the world. ■

By JOHN LESLIE

# Cops convicted in Baltimore

Two Baltimore police detectives, Daniel Hersl and Marcus Taylor, were convicted in a federal trial last month that resulted from an investigation into the police department's corrupt "Gun Trace Task Force." A total of eight members of the Baltimore police department were originally accused, with six of them pleading guilty before going to trial. As many as a dozen other officers have been linked to the corruption.

The scandal in Baltimore extended to Philadelphia, where a Philly cop has been accused taking part in a drug trafficking scheme with the Baltimore cops. The Philadelphia officer, Eric Snell, allegedly resold heroin and cocaine stolen by the Baltimore cops.

The Baltimore squad repeatedly violated the civil rights of suspects, entered homes without search warrants, and shook down dealers for money and drugs in what was described by acting Police Commissioner, Darryl De Sousa as "some of the most egregious and despicable acts ever perpetrated in law enforcement."

Despite the prosecution of a few bad cops, the systemic problems and culture of impunity remain. On March 6, Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner revealed the names of 66 Philly cops and ex-cops (including 29 involved in hard-core criminal activity) who are considered so corrupt, racist, or tainted in some way that they can't testify in court without prosecutors seeking permission from the DA's office.

At least one, a homicide detective, Phillip Nordo, was dismissed from the force for "misconduct." A city defense attorney expressed concern about Nordo's involvement in a case involving one of his clients, Darnell Powell, in a 2015 murder case. Nordo apparently put money in the jail commissary account of a witness against Powell without revealing the deposits.

The extent of the corruption scandal in Baltimore has impelled one state legislator, Delegate Bilal Ali, to advocate the break-up of the Baltimore PD, a force still feeling the after-effects of the police murder of Freddie Gray in 2015 and the resulting uprising of Black youth. What Delegate Ali is advocating is modeled on the way the Camden, N.J., police department was disbanded and replaced with a new force in 2013. The new Camden force is held up as an example of "com-



munity policing." Politicians and police officials in Maryland are pushing back against this proposal.

Disbanding and replacing a police force, while it may have a temporary beneficial effect, does not alter the fundamental role police play in capitalist society. Police are the enforcers of the dominant social and economic order.

Mumia Abu-Jamal pointed out: "Police are the employed servants of the state, and as such the instruments of state policy. And what is the state? Marx and Engels said: 'the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.' Thus, police serve the ownership and wealth classes of their societies" ("To Protect and Serve Whom?" by Mumia Abu-Jamal).

Housebroken police review boards aren't sufficient, and district attorneys' offices across the country have proven incapable of standing up to the pressure exerted by the police unions. Cop unions, the "Blue Klux Klan," representing cops and corrections officers, are a reactionary intrusion into the labor movement, and should be excluded from it.

Police are part of the machinery of the mass incarceration regime that targets Black and Brown people and the poor. Disbanding and replacing urban police forces is a gimmick and not a real solution to the problems faced by the victims of a racist criminal justice system. The fight for police abolition is necessarily tied to the struggles to end mass incarceration and to stop police violence against people of color. ■

## Bail reform passed in Philadelphia

At the beginning of February, the Philadelphia city council passed a resolution appealing to the Pennsylvania legislature to reform the bail system in the commonwealth. In the current set-up, nonviolent and low-risk offenders are often jailed while awaiting trial because they lack the resources to make even the most modest bail.

Larry Krasner, the new Philadelphia District Attorney, campaigned on questions of criminal justice reform. Since taking office, he has backtracked on some issues, such as opposition to the death penalty, but he appears to be maintaining his support for cash bail reform. It remains to be seen whether a state legislature that is dominated by right-wing forces will enact any reforms.

A New Jersey reform, which practically eliminated cash bail, took effect at the beginning of 2017. A 2013 study showed that 73 percent of the state's 13,000 inmates in local jails were not convicted of any crime and were awaiting trial in jail. Of these almost 40 percent were eligible for bail but unable to afford even a low cash bail.

Sixty percent of the more than 600,000 prisoners serving time in local jails in the United States have not been convicted of a crime. They are awaiting trial and are not able to make bail because of poverty. This is on top of the more than 2.3 million prisoners in state and federal prisons and the 4,933,667 adults either on probation or parole. In 2017, more than 840,000 people were on parole. More than 7 million adults are under some form of incarceration or correctional control (prison, jail, probation, or parole) in the U.S. An additional 70,792 youth were in "juvenile detention" in 2010.

Detention while awaiting trial exacts a heavy toll on prisoners and their families. Incarceration can lead

to loss of jobs, homelessness, and the loss of children into the foster care system. Sixty percent of the 96,000 women in jails were not convicted of any crime. Prisoners are disproportionately Black, Latino, and poor. Racism is an essential element of the mass incarceration regime.

The Philadelphia County jail has cut the number of prisoners awaiting trial in recent years. Of the approximately 6700 prisoners, about 30 percent are awaiting trial. This is down from 57 percent a few years ago. The number is still too high. There is no reason to hold nonviolent offenders due to poverty or lack of resources.

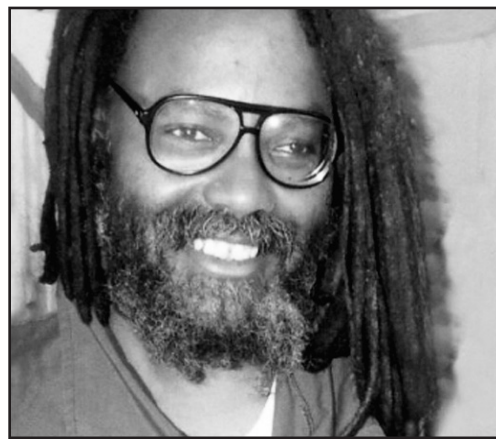
The fight for bail reform is part of the broader struggle against mass incarceration. Millions are caught up in a system that continues to affect them after their release. Former prisoners have a harder time finding employment and, in many cases lose their right to vote. More than 4 million ex-prisoners cannot vote. Again, the statistics reveal a disproportionate number of African Americans are impacted. Black males account for 35 percent of those deemed ineligible to vote because of past criminal offenses.

A mass social movement is needed to put an end to the prison industrial complex and to end the racial disparities in the criminal injustice system. This struggle must be linked to broader struggles for jobs, education, and to preserve the social safety net. We must demand jobs for all, including ex-prisoners, at union wages and benefits.

Ultimately, the end to this sort of injustice can't come under a system based on inequality, racism, and exploitation. Only a socialist reconstruction of society, in which workers and the oppressed control the state and economy, can put an end to this travesty.

— JOHN LESLIE

## All out for Mumia Abu-Jamal!



By JOHN LESLIE

New mobilizations are planned in the case of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. The events will take place at a critical juncture in Mumia's case, which opened up with the *Williams v. Pennsylvania* decision, presenting an opportunity to finally win Mumia's freedom.

This is particularly urgent because Mumia's health continues to be in danger. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has failed to adequately treat his liver damage, and a skin condition that causes severe itching persists. The DOC allows an outside doctor to visit Mumia, but does not allow the doctor to treat Mumia's ailments or even carry medical equipment for a thorough examination.

Mumia activists are asking that supporters around the world organize local actions around the hearing scheduled for March 27, and that U.S. supporters consider mobilizing to come to Philadelphia on March 27, and again at the time of Mumia's court date on April 30.

Supporters of Mumia's struggle for freedom have long known that his original trial was a sham, based on the collusion of prosecutors, cops, and a corrupt judge.

Time and again, evidence of Mumia's innocence has come to light, yet the state's determination to silence the voice of a fighter for justice has only increased.

Freemumia.com reports: "On April 28 [2017], Philadelphia Common Pleas Judge Leon Tucker issued an order to the Philadelphia District Attorney's office to release all records and memos regarding former Philly DA Ron Castille's involvement in Mumia Abu-Jamal's case. On May 30, the DA's office failed to follow the judge's order, only releasing documents already available in public records.

"The order followed a recent landmark Supreme Court decision, *Williams v. Pennsylvania*, which ruled that judges must remove themselves from any case that they had a hand in prosecuting. Ronald Castille was Assistant Philadelphia DA at the time of Abu-Jamal's 1982 trial and Philadelphia District Attorney when his office opposed Mumia Abu-Jamal's direct appeals in 1988. Castille twice refused to recuse himself when Abu-Jamal's appeals reached the state's highest court." Castille's repeated refusals to recuse himself denied Mumia a fair and impartial hearing. This would meet the standard for a decision in Mumia's favor regarding *Williams*.

At a status report hearing held on Feb. 26, the District Attorney asked for a 90-day continuance to look through boxes "from 70 cases" for a missing memo from Castille directing an assistant to produce a status report on pending capital cases.

Another document demonstrating Castille's direct involvement in Mumia's case is a letter sent from Castille to Gov. Robert Casey on June 15, 1990. In this letter, Castille urged the governor to sign death

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# Our feminism must be anti-capitalist



By CELESTE MURILLO and ANDREA D'ATRI

*The authors are members of Pan y Rosas (Bread and Roses), a feminist organization in Argentina. This article was written in 2017 and first appeared in Left Voice. We are re-printing it as a contribution to the discussion on the goals and strategy of the women's movement.*

*"The socialist who is not a feminist lacks breadth. The feminist who is not a socialist lacks strategy." — Louise Kneeland*

On March 8, 2017, women around the world marched through the largest metropolitan centers. The call for a global strike revived International Women's Day—long relegated to a largely symbolic, celebratory formality for a small group of feminists and leftists. This year [2017], millions claimed the day as their own. They organized actions in workplaces and schools and attended massive demonstrations. Protests large and small took place in 50 countries around the world—from the U.S. to Nigeria to Indonesia.

Madrid's Gran Vía was entirely shut down hours before the marches began, and almost all of the capital cities in Europe participated in these international mobilizations. In Montevideo, Uruguay, thousands took to the streets, and there was a six-hour work stoppage called for by the trade union confederation PIT-CNT.

In the United States, after the record-breaking women's marches on Jan. 21 that mobilized an estimated three million people across the country, there was an upsurge of protests on March 8, reviving a tradition that had long been lost in the heart of imperialism.

Even without having read the declarations of feminist organizations, trade unions, and political parties, women around the world expressed their rage against sexist violence, the precarious labor conditions that condemn them to misery, the irrational inequality that keeps women subordinate, and the constant fear that molds women's existence.

In Argentina, this rage fed into large-scale participation in strikes—far greater participation than the union bureaucracy had intended. At the PepsiCo factory, work stoppages began at 5 a.m., based on a vote by a workers' assembly called for by the shop council, which stands in opposition to the current union leadership. At the Buenos Aires airport, LATAM airlines workers stopped check-in services, once again bolstered by assemblies organized by the opposition to the union leadership. Women from the socialist women's organization Pan y Rosas (Bread and Roses) formed part of the oppositional caucuses in both of these work stoppages, and along with other male and female coworkers, were integral in the fight for a strike on March 8.

In addition, there were countless partial work stoppages and protests in hospitals. Teachers also played an important role, forcing several unions to engage in

***The urge to revive an alliance between the women's movement and the working class speaks to the possibilities of strengthening the anti-capitalist wing of the movement.***

strikes in the midst of a struggle between the teachers and the national and state governments.

## **Equality in law is not equality in life**

What is the explanation for the renewal of mass demonstrations and protests on March 8? There are many who criticized the marches, saying women have already achieved equality. The reality is that, with the capitalist crisis underway, there are deepening contradictions between the rights that have been won (at least in the imperialist countries and some semi-colonies like Uruguay, which has legalized abortion and same-sex marriage) and the material conditions of the majority of women, as austerity measures and cuts affect large sectors of the population. These economic realities are compounded by interminable sexist violence, in which the state and its institutions are complicit.

However, the expansion of rights has opened the eyes of millions of women and elevated their aspirations for a better life. The harsh realities that hold women back have kindled a sense of rage. After decades of neoliberalism, the economic crisis and all of its social consequences demonstrate more and more clearly that "equality in law is not equality in life."

## **Nothing is achieved without struggle**

The enormous March 8 demonstrations didn't appear overnight. They were preceded by recent actions around the world, including the massive Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) mobilizations against femicide in Argentina demanding that the state allocate money and take other measures to prevent femicides; the strikes in Iceland and France against the gender pay gap; the protest under torrential rain where hundreds of thousands of women stopped the further criminalization of abortion in Poland; and the massive women's protests against Trump in the U.S.

The widespread support that these protests generate among ordinary citizens is evidence that they express not only the demand for women's rights but also the discontent of millions of workers and students with austerity, cuts, and precarious working conditions caused by the capitalist class and the governments that forced workers to pay for the crisis in order to maintain their profits. This unity between workers and students is the seed of an alliance that will be essential for defeating capitalist patriarchy.

This new wave of women's mobilizations is international and more radical in character, breaking with decades of liberal feminist hegemony. In previous

years, it became common sense to think of individual *free choice* as the horizon of emancipation, without challenging capitalist democracies—without questioning the fact that the rights that were won were only available to a small number of women.

According to this de-politicized and de-politicizing framework, women's emancipation is simply a question of gradually gaining rights within the existing political regime. Once these rights have been written into law, each woman will individually be responsible for the life she "chooses" to live.

The flaw in this reformist logic is the separation between the fight for democratic rights and the struggle against the social and economic system. By fighting for rights within bourgeois democracy without questioning the capitalist structure that maintains and profits from sexism, reformist feminism implicitly or explicitly approves of the system that signifies, legitimizes and reproduces women's subordination.

This "feminism" does not take into account that these rights are inscribed in a limited, circumstantial and temporal way in the social system. It does not take into account that many of these rights were won in a moment when capitalism in imperialist countries was not in crisis. What the capitalist governments give with one hand, when there is prosperity, they take with the other when there is a crisis.

What gives women's demands a political character is not lobbying Congress, which is a path to co-optation for many sectors of the movement. Rather, their political character comes from uncovering the intrinsic relation between basic rights that are still denied to us (like the right to not be murdered for being women) and the social system that is based on exploitation by a parasitic class of capitalists.

The liberal discourse transformed feminism, like other social movements of the oppressed, into something so harmless that it could be easily appropriated by the right. This liberal feminism stripped the women's movement of deeper social criticism and opened the doors to right-wing women. The fact that Ivanka Trump can be presented as a representative of "conservative feminism" shows what a quagmire liberal feminism is trapped in. Sectors of the ruling classes do not have any problem arguing that women, ethnic minorities, and LGBT people should have positions of power in capitalist society. This is how Hillary Clinton presented herself in the elections, the clearest example of imperialist or neoliberal feminism.

But Clinton failed to convince enough women to vote for her in order to break the glass ceiling and be an effective alternative to the Republican candidate, who epitomized modern misogyny. Her corporate feminism fell flat in the face of the problems affecting millions of wage laborers, unemployed workers, Black people, and immigrants.

Today, the Democratic Party hopes to use the re-emergence of the women's movement throughout the world to rebuild itself after the defeat at the hands of the right. It is no coincidence that many of the women who organized the International Women's Strike in the U.S. warned of the danger of the Democratic Party attempting to capitalize on this enormous movement. Democrats hope to rebuild themselves after their enormous electoral defeat and at the same time are attempting to control the most radical aspects of the women's movement.

## **Neoliberal feminism in crisis**

The USA, as the most important imperialist power, exported liberal feminism to the rest of the globe by imposing a neoliberal world order and corresponding policies towards women in health, education, and social welfare using the IMF and the World Bank. This means that in many semi-colonies, these international organisms demanded that countries create gender and sexuality ministries. They even promoted laws to end sexist violence.

This allowed the capitalist state to wash its hands of

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# Conn. activists assemble at Climate Justice Teach-in

WEST HARTFORD, Conn.—On Feb. 24, around 170 crowded into the Elmwood Community Center here to hear, as the promotional material described the event, “Experts and activists exploring some of the toughest questions facing the climate movement.”

Jacqui Patterson, the director of the national NAACP’s Environmental and Justice Program, told the stories of individual people of color whose bout with climate change was inexplicably intertwined with issues of income and racism. Anne Hendrixson, who teaches a course called “Beyond the Population Bomb” at Hampshire College, worked to try to dislodge the audience’s conviction that reducing population would mitigate climate change.

Sean Sweeney, the coordinator of Trade Unionists for Energy Democracy, brought down the house with his explanation of the failure of a strategy of private investment and the necessity to move quickly to the social ownership of energy systems and their control by democratic means.

Alexis Rodriguez of the Connecticut Puerto Rican Agenda won the crowd to an understanding that without decolonization, true recovery on the island was impossible. Workshops put activists on the road for organizing a Sept. 9 state demonstration for a transition to a 100% renewable energy system and numerous other climate-related campaigns.

The teach-in opened with the following remarks by Christine Gauvreau of 350 Connecticut.

Why are we here? In Todd Miller’s new book, “Storming the Wall,” he says that when the Berlin Wall fell in 1988, there were 16 border fences around the world. Now, he says, there are 70. What we are looking at is what one geographer called “a situation of border fortification in a warming world.”

In India, one such militarized border wall is meant to keep out the millions of Bangladeshis whose farmland is increasingly falling into the ocean. In the U.S. the administration hopes to keep out farmers from Honduras, where the climate extremes that are disrupting agriculture are the greatest in the hemisphere. Wars for oil and gas in the Middle East have displaced incredible numbers. Over 5 million people from Syria are now living outside the country in camps.

The new expanded border regimes around the globe are meant to enforce a division, in the face of extreme climate change, between—as the title of another book terms it—“The Secure and the Dispossessed.” While we in the climate movement in the U.S. and Europe are organizing to stop the flow of fossil fuels and demand an emergency transition to renewables, military think tanks here and around the globe are churning out white papers on the kind of security regimes necessary to defend the major industrialized nations from the hundreds of millions of people they expect to be on the road by 2050.

Like economic refugees in general, those forced to roam due to displacement by climate extremes have no legal status. A resident of the South Pacific whose island has been inundated has no national rights any-



(Above) Jacqui Patterson, director of the NAACP’s Environmental and Justice Program.

where on the globe. Climate change is underway, and its reality can be increasingly measured not only in parts per million but in human lives. A third of the world’s population lives on the coasts, and much of the remainder will face weather extremes.

In one of the most dystopian responses to climate change, major foundations and the U.S. AID are pushing reactionary population control measures in Africa, Latin America, and India—all to nip those unruly populations in the bud, all in the name of defending the globe from climate change. On the level of brute force used by extractivists and their governments, we can cite the *Guardian* newspaper, which tells us that today there are four environmental activists assassinated each week.

In the U.S. we have survivors of Katrina and Sandy, let alone Harvey and Maria and the fires out West, who remain abandoned by the system. Today, in Connecticut, we must rally against the cruel decision of FEMA to kick Puerto Rican climate refugees out of their hotels. In the U.S., fear of the dispossessed and the future dispossessed is used to justify every more powerful surveillance and police powers. And all this comes on top of a legacy of environmental racism whose virulence and scope continues to astound.

The point is that the climate movement is faced with a momentous choice. Without the concerted intervention of people with a sense of justice and humanity, the response of the powers that be to climate change is clearly a very dark and very reactionary one. It is a vision of walls, wars, policing, displacement, dispossession, gentrification, populationism, and an ever increasing effort to separate the secure and the dispossessed. Such a future is unacceptable.

Shaping an alternative future is up to us. To challenge this dystopia, we cannot limit ourselves to de-

manding lower parts per million.

We must somehow create a social power greater than theirs. We must create a view of the future more powerful than theirs. We must find a way to create a majority movement against the fossil fuel enablers but also against the dystopian world that they envision in the wake of climate change.

A majority movement would have to admit the role of the Pentagon in stoking fossil fuel wars and spreading environmental destruction. A majority movement must be fortified by the powerful moral legacy and combativity of the civil rights and African American nationalist struggles and the youth of Black Lives Matter. It must have the power of organized labor, which however threatened and diminished, starts and stops the trucks, the trains, the construction, and all production every morning.

It must have the imagination and grit of the immigrant rights movement that just 12 years ago, in 2006, put millions into the streets and shuttered the doors of businesses around the country in the largest U.S. demonstration to date. It must have the determination of the Dreamers, who made their cause one of the most well known in the country. And can a movement flourish today that does not appear as allies to women and gender non-conforming people?

So, our teach-in today is meant to challenge us to think about how we create a climate movement that is seen by all as about justice and about emancipation. Our speakers and workshop presenters are extremely well equipped to lead us in that discussion. What we in Connecticut do with these new insights and knowledge is up to us. ■

## ... Feminism

(continued from page 6)

responsibility for the precarious conditions that most women face. One of the most emblematic examples is in Mexico. Although many laws to prevent sexist violence have been passed, the state continues to be complicit in violence against women, especially workers on the border and Central American immigrants making their way to the US. The United States also disseminated liberal feminist ideology through global non-profits and the export of American academic works in colleges and universities.

Ella Mahony of *Jacobin* explains: “It’s become axiomatic in left feminist spaces that there’s a ‘neoliberal’ feminism against which all new forms of feminism must develop. What’s less often articulated is the political character and origins of this corporate feminism. The key catalyst for neoliberal feminism’s rise was the slow asphyxiation of left political alternatives from the 1980s onwards.”

Liberal feminism began to show its weakness in its inability to combat Trump. As we saw in the recent mobilizations of women around the world who contest the myth that we have already achieved equality, as well as in the discussions brought about by Clinton’s loss, neoliberal feminism is being increasingly questioned.

In this sense, the call to build a “Feminism of the 99%” is symptomatic of a changing consciousness

that sees the connection between capitalism and patriarchy as the source of many of the problems affecting the majority of women. The urge to revive an alliance between the women’s movement and the working class in a country like the U.S. speaks to the possibilities of strengthening an anti-capitalist wing inside the new women’s movement. Similarly, in Argentina, Chile, and other countries, the language of anti-capitalism is heard at the meetings of the women’s movement, in their manifestos, and in their mobilizations.

For socialist revolutionaries, the discussion of anti-capitalism opens the doors to a fruitful debate about what strategy and political program should be implemented against patriarchal capitalism. It forces us to think of the alliances we must build to fight for our own emancipation and how we could try to mobilize the working class to take up these demands.

Imagining an anti-capitalist feminism forces us to consider the question of the political subject: without working women, who make up half of the class that is the immense majority of society, there is no future. We fight for a movement of the working class—a movement of the majority, which is antagonistic to the rights of the few capitalists who control our lives. Furthermore, if it is not the working class (both women and men) who fly the banners of emancipation of the most oppressed sectors, then anti-capitalism becomes mere wishful thinking.

This alliance between the working class and women fighting for their rights goes back to the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when women were able

to win the right to vote and to fight against imperialist wars. The Bolsheviks were able to achieve hitherto unimaginable rights for women by bringing the working class to power. Many of the rights that existed in the USSR in the early 20th century have not yet been won in many capitalist countries.

Since then, this alliance between the working class and women has been perversely annihilated by the ruling classes, by the betrayal of union leaders who immerse the working class in pro-business unionism, and by the co-optation of social movements into the state and their de-politicized fragmentation in non-profits.

Rebuilding the historic alliance between the working class and the women’s movement is a central task in the rebuilding of a truly anti-capitalist feminism. Only when there is a real stoppage of the production and circulation of goods, of the service sector and of communications can the more precarious and marginalized people—the housewives being hidden away in individual homes, the women in prostitution, and all of those who are worthless to this ignominious system—make their voices echo in the silence. This alliance is not a given. We must build it.

Building this alliance does not mean overlooking sexism within the working class. Some sectors of the left refuse to confront workers’ prejudices—ideologies fomented by the ruling classes using the institutions under their control, such as the media and schools.

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# 60,000 in London demand funding for National Health



By ANN MONTAGUE

On Feb. 3, doctors, health-care workers, unions and anti-austerity activists hit the streets in the pouring rain to demand an end to the decades-long budget cuts to the National Health Service (NHS). They also demanded money to raise salaries for workers and to completely reverse the privatization schemes planned by the Tories, the current ruling party.

The activist organizations, People's Assembly and Health Campaigns Together, worked to organize unions, health workers, and Labour Party activists in a strong united-front coalition based on a list of demands to save the NHS from privatization. They have specific demands: End the spending freeze and cap on NHS pay; halt the imposition of "new models of care" pending full public scrutiny; reinstate the NHS as a public service—publicly accountable, publicly owned, and publicly funded.

The 60,000 London marchers carried signs: "More Staff, More Funds, More Beds" and "Saving Lives Costs Money, Saving Money Costs Lives." One marcher, Tam-syn Bacchus, told *The Guardian* that she was afraid there were plans to change the NHS into a U.S.-style user-pays health service. "It is so important that when you are ill, when your child is running a fever, when you need the hospital or a doctor, you can get them without worrying about having to pay for it."

Marxist historian Paul Le Blanc was in London and attended the march. He reported that the most visible forces at the march were the unions, particularly the transport workers, communications workers and health-care workers. Also, local Labour Party and

Young Labour groups took part.

Le Blanc said that the speakers he heard were "quite militant, clear, class-conscious, persuasive—sometimes quite moving." Some speakers spoke of escalating street actions and not wanting to wait for the next election. In addition to the mass march in London, 54 other events took place across Britain, including actions in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Le Blanc told *Socialist Action* that the U.S. also needs health care as a right, "without insurance companies and other profiteers getting in the way. That is what the working-class majority won in Britain right after World War II, and now the right wing is trying to defund it and gut it and sell it off to private business."

Just prior to the London march, Professor Stephen Hawking and leading doctors won a full judicial review to determine the lawfulness of Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt's proposals to introduce Accountable Care Organizations (ACO) into the NHS. Hunt was forced to table a plan that would have allowed commercial companies to run health and social services across a region of the country.

Hawking has consistently claimed that health policy under the Tories was heading toward a "U.S.-style insurance system run by private companies." The NHS doctors represented by the public sector union UNITE were concerned that "without the judicial review it would be pushed through Parliament with no vote and no scrutiny."

U.S. President Trump took the opportunity of the mass demonstration to attack the National Health Service. He claimed that it shows that "The Democrats are pushing for Universal Health care while thousands

of people are marching in the UK because the universal system is going broke and not working."

Trump received a swift reply from everyone from the Tories to Labour. Health Secretary Hunt tweeted, "I may disagree with some of the claims of the march, but not ONE of them wants to live in a system where 28 million people have no cover. NHS may have challenges, but I am proud to be in a country where all get care no matter the size of their bank balance."

James Ball of *The Guardian* decided that people in the United States need to be schooled on the NHS. "The first thing Americans should know about the NHS is that it is free at the point of use to anyone who needs it. You do not have to fill out much paperwork, and you get no bills, whether you go to a family doctor, or go to hospital. No one in the UK goes bankrupt through medical costs, no one needs to delay treatment until they can afford it, and virtually no one is uninsured. Nurses and Doctors are the most trusted professions in the country."

According to data collected by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the NHS spends half of what the U.S. does on medical care, with much better outcomes.

In the United States, the discussion and organizing around single-payer health care is disparate, with no central demands, and often uses the tactic of lobbying the Democratic and Republican parties in separate states for a variety of different pieces of legislation.

The only concrete single-payer plan put forward is contained in a congressional bill called Medicare For All, which envisions partial government-financed health care for all U.S. citizens along the lines of the current Medicare provisions for people over 65. The bill was proposed in the Senate by Senator Bernie Sanders, and other prominent liberal senators have spoken publicly in support.

But no nationally coordinated united-front mobilizations to support the measure have been projected to date. And it should be noted that current Medicare contains large gaps in funding for various services—often requiring seniors to pay huge amounts of money out of pocket.

Moreover, it is doubtful that the two corporate parties will pass a bill that eliminates health insurance companies. Two Democratic Party senators have a competing proposal for what they call "Medicare X," which would provide government health coverage as only one option while keeping private insurance offerings intact.

A movement to take the profit out of the U.S. health-care system can only succeed if it is built around a clear demand, is rooted in the working-class organizations, and is independent of the corporate parties. It is an illusion that we can succeed by sitting in politicians' offices and merely "telling them our stories." We need to build a powerful movement demanding the health care we all deserve. ■

## ... Mumia

(continued from page 5)

warrants in 16 Philadelphia capital cases in which the appeals process had been completed, saying, "I urge you to send a clear and dramatic message to all police killers that the death penalty actually means something."

Mumia's appeal before the U.S. Supreme Court was still pending, meaning that a death warrant could not be signed in his case at that time. The Castille letter indicates his direct involvement in the management of capital cases, including Mumia's.

The defense said they didn't object to the DA's request for a continuance. Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas Judge Leon Tucker, however, said that he was unwilling to wait 90 days. He ordered a 60-day continuance, with a status report hearing on March 27. Actions are planned on the 27th as Mumia's supporters pack the court to demand his freedom.

A new hearing date was set for Monday, April 30. There will be a major mobilization aimed at pressuring the DA's office and the criminal justice system on this date.

Organizers want to put pressure on "progressive" Democrat Larry Krasner, who got elected as District Attorney on a platform of criminal justice reform, to release documents related to Mumia's

case to the public. Krasner has already backed off on his previous opposition to the death penalty and has also adjusted his position on juvenile lifers. A decision by the DA's office not to oppose Mumia's request for relief under *Williams* would not result in Mumia's release, but would open the door to further legal challenges to Mumia's conviction.

### Who is Mumia Abu-Jamal?

Mumia Abu-Jamal joined the Black Panther Party (BPP) at age 14, when he helped form the Philadelphia chapter of the party. The founding of the Philadelphia chapter was met with police violence under command of the reactionary police commissioner (and later mayor) Frank Rizzo.

After leaving the party in 1970, Mumia pursued a career as a journalist, becoming an uncompromising critic of the actions of the Philadelphia police and Frank Rizzo, earning the reputation as the "voice of the voiceless." Mumia's reporting on the 1978 attack on MOVE by Philadelphia cops, which led to the imprisonment of nine members of the organization, garnered a threat from Mayor Rizzo.

"At his press conference following the cop assault, Frank Rizzo, then the mayor, looked directly at Mumia (Abu-Jamal) and declared that a 'new breed of journalism' was to blame for Ramp's death [police officer John J. Ramp was shot, quite likely by fellow officers, during a

police attack on MOVE members in 1978] and that someday those like Mumia were 'going to have to be held responsible and accountable'" ("The Fight to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal," by Rachel Wolkenstein).

Mumia was convicted of the 1981 murder of a police officer, Daniel Faulkner, in a frame-up trial with demonstrated collusion between prosecutors and the judge, who was a member of the Fraternal Order of Police. At the time of the trial, the judge, Albert Sabo, was overheard by a white court stenographer saying that he was going to "help them [prosecutors] fry that n\*\*\*\*r."

Convicted and sentenced to die, Mumia continued to write and speak out in defense of the oppressed and victims of this society. Mass action and grassroots organizing were crucial elements of the effort to keep Mumia alive over the years. The death sentence against Mumia was vacated in 2001 by a federal judge who ruled that there were irregularities in the way the jury was instructed in the original case. The judge, however, failed to order a new trial, which supporters feel would exonerate him. The state of Pennsylvania continued to fight to reinstate the death sentence until 2011.

### Health update

On Jan. 3, 2017, U.S. District Court Judge Robert Mariani granted the motion filed by Mumia Abu-Jamal for a preliminary injunction ordering the Pennsylvania De-

partment of Corrections (DOC) to begin preparations to treat Mumia's hepatitis C, a life-threatening liver disease. The judge's order overturned a lower court decision on the same matter.

The denial of such treatment, wrote Mariani, represented a violation of Mumia's rights under the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment, prohibiting "cruel and unusual punishment." Mumia began receiving an anti-viral drug in April 2017, and the treatment seemed to have overcome the hepatitis.

Nevertheless, Mumia's health situation remains serious and has even deteriorated in recent months. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has refused to offer adequate treatment for a skin condition that has cracked his skin and caused it to bleed, while causing severe and debilitating itching. There are strong concerns about lasting liver damage caused by the hepatitis C that the DOC allowed to go untreated for too long.

*Socialist Action* urges political activists, the labor movement, and all supporters of democratic rights in the U.S. and internationally to build demonstrations in their local areas. We also encourage all who can come to the March and April court dates to pack the court for Mumia's freedom. We cannot rely on the capitalist courts and politicians to grant him justice. Winning Mumia's freedom depends on the mass actions of all of those who oppose oppression. ■



# Syrian Kurds begin break with U.S. imperialism

By JEFF MACKLER

The U.S. imperialist war against the Syrian government and people stood exposed as never before when the fighters it had backed to the hilt in the name of fighting the Islamic State (ISIS), the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), essentially switched sides and signed a pact with the Bashar Assad government. The objective? To join forces against Turkey's invasion of northwestern Syria.

Last month, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) stated, "After a month of our forces' epic resistance to the Turkish invasion and the terrorist organization allied with it," the YPG asked the "Syrian government and its army to perform its duty by participating in defending Afrin and protecting the Syrian borders. The Syrian government has answered our call ... and sent military units on Tuesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>, to be stationed along the borders and to help in defending the unity of the Syrian territories and its borders."

A Feb. 28 *New York Times* article confirmed the dramatic shift in the relationship of forces that had been largely concealed or minimized by the warmongering corporate media over the past few weeks. *The Times* wrote, "Thousands of Kurdish fighters and commanders who make up the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces in recent weeks have diverted [defected] to defend Afrin, in Syria's northwest, where other Kurdish militia are facing sharp attacks from Turkish troops." These "Turkish troops" include the so-called Free Syrian Army, organized and funded by U.S. imperialism to overthrow the Syrian government. Thus, the world became witness to the spectacle of NATO-allied Turkish jets raining death and destruction on the Kurdish YPG and the Syrian Army while "Free Syrian Army" troops slaughtered both on the ground in the same Afrin region.

*The Times*, referring to the escalated fighting in Syria as akin in intensity to World War II, reported that U.S. jets attacked Syrian-allied Russian forces and Syrian government troops seeking to retake parts of Syria from ISIS in the Euphrates River region to the west. To complete the U.S.-led onslaught on Syria, Israeli jets, using the pretext of a stray drone over its territory, mercilessly bombed Syria. The Zionist settler state news media claimed to have taken out one-third of Syria's air defenses.

The now open rift between the Kurds and U.S. imperialism had its origins in Afrin during the past two months when U.S. officials assured its NATO ally, Turkey, of its long-term intentions in Syria. Former U.S. ambassador to Turkey and Iraq, James F. Jeffrey, bluntly stated, "We told the Turks that the Kurds were temporary, tactical, and transactional to defeat ISIS. Now we need them to contain Iran. The whole purpose of this is to split the Russians from the Syrians by saying we're going to stay on to force a political solution in Syria" (*The New York Times*, Jan. 22, 2018).

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made U.S. objectives clear in a Jan. 17 Stanford University speech, in which he proclaimed that the U.S. was preparing a permanent U.S.-orchestrated Syria occupation force of 30,000 troops aimed at partitioning close to one-third of Syria in the north (see "U.S. seeks Syria partition," February 2018 *Socialist Action*).

Assuaging Turkish fears that the U.S. will abandon Turkey's ongoing efforts to destroy Kurdish forces in northern Syria, on the one hand, while convincing the increasingly wary Kurds to remain in the so-called fight against ISIS on the other, is no easy task. To this end Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, and Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster (the White House national security adviser) have all met with Turkish officials in efforts to convince them, with little success, to refrain from attacking their now-wavering U.S. Kurdish allies.

Maj. Gen. Jamie Jarrard, Special Operations commander for the American-led coalition in Iraq and Syria, boasted in early February that the elimination of the entire [ISIS] caliphate was "very close." Jarrard added, "Anything that disrupts us or takes our eye off that prize is not good." In truth, the U.S. focus today is qualitatively less on ISIS, whose growth and influence was largely tolerated as long as its guns and weapons—provided by the U.S. and the Arab State monarchies—were trained on the Syrian government. Today, President Trump repeatedly states that the so-



(Above) U.S. President Trump discusses the situation in Syria with Turkish President Recep Erdogan in November 2017.

called U.S. war against ISIS is all but over. But ISIS's defeat was qualitatively more the product of the Syrian government forces and its invited allies—Russia, Iran, and the Lebanon-based Hezbollah—than it was to selective U.S. bombings.

## Syria's right to self-determination

A sovereign and historically oppressed Syria exercised its right to self-determination when it requested military aid from Russia and others. In point of fact, were it not for Syria's allies, there is no doubt that uninvited U.S.-backed imperialist troops and the U.S. itself would be occupying Damascus today as neo-colonial conquerors.

The seven years of war in Syria clearly demonstrates that whenever ISIS and its associated reactionary forces, al-Qaeda and other imperialist coalition-backed mercenaries, headed south toward Damascus, they were allowed to proceed unhindered. Today, less than 400 ISIS forces remain in Syria. Those that previously occupied and exploited northern Syrian oil fields and used them to finance their goal of overthrowing the Bashar Assad government were allowed to proceed with impunity.

Today, these same oil fields are under direct U.S. control, as is the northern region in general, where the U.S. oil magnates hope to construct pipelines across Iraq and Syria to the Mediterranean. In the meantime, the U.S. occupation of Syria, as with Iraq, will undoubtedly see U.S. corporations stealing Syrian oil to pay for the costs of the U.S. war!

The Syrian Democratic Forces are reported to consist of 50,000 Kurdish and Arab fighters based in eastern and northern Syria. While the Kurdish fighters are said to be only 40 percent of the SDF, they are the most effective anti-ISIS fighters and are overwhelming based in northern Syria along the Turkish border where the Kurdish population is the largest. In only rare and exceptional instances have they been arrayed *against* Syrian government troops.

Today, 20,000 Kurds have rallied to Afrin to *join forces with Syrian government troops*. This Kurdish force originated from the U.S.-held Deir al-Zour region, where ISIS forces were allowed to relocate after their defeats in Raqqa and elsewhere. Once in the Deir al-Zour region, however, U.S. warplanes attacked both Syrian Army and their Russian-allied forces when they sought to liberate this area and its environs.

Commenting on the fracturing of the SDF, which consists of Kurds and regional Arab forces, with the latter recruited by the U.S. to either overthrow the Syrian government or otherwise support U.S. imperialist interests in the region, Jennifer Cafarella, a senior intelligence planner with the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, noted, "The SDF is unlikely to clear remaining ISIS-held areas of the Euphrates River and could even begin to take losses due to the shift in Syrian Kurds' main effort."

Cafarella here suggests that the Russian/Syrian government advances toward Deir al-Zour also provided the Kurdish fighters' safe transit to Afrin across government-controlled territory and exploited their departure to strike the less experienced Arab partners in the SDF. Muhammed Abu Adel, a top Kurdish commander and a leader in Manbij (a city in northern Syria with a large Kurdish population and home to a contingent of U.S. Special Operations troops), expressed the now widely held disdain for U.S. impe-

rialism's supporting Turkey's attacks on his city. He exclaimed, "We sacrificed thousands of lives of our soldiers, we sacrificed so many to finish ISIS and now this, while fighting the most terrible terrorist group, and suddenly there is a state member of NATO come to fight you."

## Ghouta: pretext for intervention

In early March, U.S.-backed forces in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta, along with a host of Qaeda and related terrorist forces, found themselves near defeat at the hands of the Syrian Army. The U.S.-allied terrorists there had been shelling downtown Damascus and other highly populated areas in this capital city for most of the past seven years.

Today, on the verge of defeat, these "rebels" sought United Nations support in the form of a "humanitarian relief" resolution aimed at allowing the U.S. and its allies to "legally" intervene as it did in Libya in 2009-10, when U.S. jets and offshore bombings destroyed Libya's infrastructure based on the now-discredited pretext that the Libyan government was poised to slaughter some 80,000 civilians in Benghazi. The same version of "humanitarian relief" was employed in Iraq under the similarly discredited pretext that the Iraqi government was poised to use "weapons of mass destruction."

On the suggestion of the Syrian government, Russia's UN Security Council representative vetoed the U.S.'s thinly disguised effort to secure support for yet another imperialist slaughter.

## U.S. to remain in Syria

A Feb. 22 *New York Times* headline read: "U.S. Says Troops Can Stay in Syria Without New Authorization." The article opened as follows: "The Trump administration has decided that it needs no new legal authority from Congress to indefinitely keep American military forces deployed in Syria and Iraq, even in territory that has been cleared of Islamic State fighters, according to Pentagon and State Department officials."

Today, estimates vary widely and change daily as to how many troops these are. Last month, Trump administration officials put the number at 5,000, not counting the troops stationed in Qatar to oversee the U.S. bombing of Syria or the additional thousands on board U.S. warships in the Mediterranean. Add to this the usual covert privatized mercenary forces, the "Special Operation" CIA death squad forces, the drone operations and now three permanent military bases in northern Syria, and it's clear that the U.S. imperialist beast is in Syria to stay, even if its entire "coalition of the willing" isn't, and even if Kurdish forces are departing.

In the U.S. a new and critical factor is emerging to challenge all U.S. wars—at home and abroad. The April 14-15 nationwide regional mobilizations initiated by the United National Antiwar Coalition and the Coalition Against U.S. Foreign Bases are the perfect starting point to mobilize mass opposition to U.S. imperial war policy. Join the struggle! Self-determination for Syria and all oppressed nations! U.S. Out Now! Contact: SpringAction2018.org. ■

# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

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## NDP tops couldn't stifle convention delegates

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The Feb. 16-18 convention in Ottawa was not just a gathering to “launch” Jagmeet Singh as the new leader of the labour-based New Democratic Party. It was an effort, not entirely successful, to assert his control over the entire apparatus and to impose a milquetoast political message. In that sense, it was very Jack Laytonesque—a highly centralized PR effort designed to avoid controversy, and thus, geared to stifle meaningful debate.

It started with the party brass relegating progressive motions, endorsed by dozens of local NDP district associations, on issues of party democracy, the Middle East, NATO, NAFTA, new pipelines, tuition-free college education, public ownership, progressive taxation, etc., to the bottom of policy priority lists. That ensured they'd never be debated on the convention floor. Preliminary workshops, held early Friday morning to consider amendments to the bureaucratically determined priorities lists, were stacked by the right wing and burdened with plentiful procedural obstacles.

Nonetheless, there were points of sharp resistance, even some small breakthroughs for the rank and file, among whom were hundreds of young, first-time delegates. That was the music of the future.

At the foreign policy panel, with over 400 folks crowding the room, a motion to top-rank a soft pro-Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (against apartheid Israel) resolution was debated. It failed by only 11 votes. In other panels, motions to move up policies on free education and for internet input from NDP members on policy priorities, were hard fought—and won.

A number of the 1751 registered convention delegates expressed visceral discontent with the stonewalling and obstructionism evident all around them. They used points of order and procedural arguments to attempt to short circuit establishment resolutions in plenary sessions.

Socialist Caucus supporters avoided such tactics—with one notable exception. We did challenge the blatant bullying and domineering tactics employed by Jagmeet's henchmen (who tried to seize control of all the mics, pro and con, and to silence voices for Palestine in the debate Saturday night on World Affairs), and we did this rather successfully.

As a result, the case of 17-year-old Palestinian political prisoner Ahed Tamimi, jailed by Israel for “embarrassing the Occupation”, gained national TV exposure. It drew media coverage to the over 100 mostly young delegates who defiantly stood in a long double line across the center of the convention holding aloft “Free Tamimi” placards.

The SC even helped to win a majority (558 votes, 56.1 per cent) in favour of adding 30 minutes to the plenary time for debate on the Middle East topic. Sadly, we just fell short of the 2/3 super-majority required for that agenda modification. The policy adopted—a status quo, blame-both-sides-for-the-

violence, antiquated two-state solution statement—left many folks wondering what happened to lawyer Jagmeet Singh's vaunted commitment to civil liberties.

As time ticked down, the socialists did not try to rush through equity policy resolutions, even though the non-controversial motions (such as a name change for a party committee) prevented more contentious issues from being addressed. Needless to say, we voted for all the equity-seeking resolutions.

The SC did try to streamline proceedings, to provide more time for policy debate, by attempting to amend the agenda at the opening of convention. While we did not win that vote, the attempt contributed to a later success for the resolution pushed by Courage to find better means to determine resolution priorities. Unfortunately, the ultimately adopted measure consisted



(Above) NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh.

merely of a research project on the use of the internet for gathering membership input. As a result, there will be no change in the existing, exceedingly corrupt, manipulative, priority-setting mechanism going into the next convention. Maybe there will be at the one after that.

Many delegates (certainly those not enamored with incrementalism at a snail's pace) thanked me and other SC comrades for trying to amend the agenda. Clearly, the numerous guest speakers and informative showcases could have been scheduled for night-time sessions. Wouldn't it have been nice to enjoy an educational alternative to the \$300 a plate *Ignite* dinner with the Leader, and to the so-called “free” socials replete with expensive bar prices?

Clearly, the rank and file will continue to fight for greater democracy in the NDP. That will include the struggle for an agenda that devotes at least 70% of convention time to policy debate, not the miserable 42% seen at conventions of the past three decades. And it can be predicted with confidence that at the next convention the NDP will emerge with a pro-BDS policy—an outcome unimaginable just a few years ago.

The best showcase event was titled “Nation to Nation.” It featured activist/artist Ellen Gabriel; teacher and anti-violence consultant Sahra MacLean; and Ian Campeau, a founder of the musical group A Tribe Called Red. The speakers presented an incisive and refreshing



(Above) The Socialist Caucus met in December 2017 to prepare resolutions for the NDP Convention.

anti-capitalist analysis. Similarly, British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who sent a video message of solidarity, got a rise out of the crowd when he said “both our parties are socialist.” It was the only use of the ‘s’ word to come from the front of the hall all weekend.

The Socialist Caucus celebrated the election of one of its candidates for Executive (Dirka Prout for co-chair of the NDP Women's Council) and took pleasure in the fact that its other candidates received a healthy vote, including Corey David who got 16% for President, Gary Porter 27% for Treasurer, Chris Gosse 20% for V.P. Labour, and chalked up from 20% to 33% for various positions on executive and federal council.

What other left current in the party presented the delegates with a choice in the election for Executive and Federal Council? What other tendency in the party fought for clear socialist policies, let alone a transitional programme of working class demands?

Leap held a large, spirited meeting at the Museum of Nature, but chose not to intervene in the NDP convention—which made it a little easier for the party establishment to sideline any discussion of the Leap Manifesto vision. Courage deserves credit for impressive cross-country organizing to promote its proposals for greater party democracy and for free post-secondary education. Likewise, much praise should go to the movement of Palestinians, progressive Jews and others for driving the campaign to ban Israeli settlement products from the Canadian market. Finally, NDP Momentum held a series of modestly attended events titled *The World Transformed*.

Unfortunately, none of those groups presented an alternative policy platform or a team of candidates to challenge the right-wing party establishment, much less target the toxic capitalist system.

Despite being approached by the SC, both before and during the convention, none of the leaders of the above-mentioned groups showed any willingness to collaborate on specific issues or actions. While a political merger of forces is clearly not on the agenda, due to important differences over programme and strategy, a left united front for particular aims is possible—and it would be powerful, if not irresistible. Unity in action should be our common goal.

The Socialist Caucus forum on Foreign Policy, Friday night, featured Montreal-based author Yves Engler and drew a large crowd. It sparked a great discussion that energized delegates for the next two days of convention, including

for battles over democracy and certain emergency resolutions. Over 20 SC resolutions, with the support of dozens of EDAs across the country, filled the resolutions book. Its display table was a hub of activism, garnering revenues of close to a thousand dollars. Over 35 people joined the SC at Convention. Far from isolation, the group felt empowered by the experience.

In the Leadership Review vote, Jagmeet Singh gained the approval of 90.7 per cent of the delegates—hardly a surprise, coming just four months after he won the top job. But he paid a political price for his ham-fisted, über-control tactics and for his bland, rambling 40-minute oration. Singh pissed off hundreds of new, young members, and had pundits scratching their heads. *Toronto Star* columnist Chantal Hebert nailed it with an understatement: “The rookie leader's speech fell well short of being a major departure from the recent past.”

Singh's theme was to reduce “social inequality.” How? By closing tax loopholes, increasing corporate taxes, fashioning a pan-Canadian pharmaceutical, eye care and dental care program, achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and pushing for a more proportional voting system, he said. But would discredited former leader Tom Mulcair differ with that, especially absent any bold proposals to make big business pay for it?

Singh completely avoided a mere mention of pipelines (ignoring the war of wine and words between the NDP provincial governments in B.C. and Alberta) and was silent on the scourge of climate change. (Is he for a carbon tax, cap and trade, or public ownership of the energy giants to fund a rapid transition to green energy?) His policy outline reads more like a mystery novel, than a party platform.

To the sound of one hand clapping, NDP officials decreed the gathering a “paperless convention.” But the dysfunctional electronic app made access to timely information a constant frustration. The *faux-ecology* gesture proved a dismal failure. Adjournment came as a relief to more than a few techno-peasants in the auditorium.

In the end, image prevailed over policy, but did so rather uneasily. The achievement of the balance of power for the left in the party is some ways down the road, yet it is within our grasp—when socialists and progressives decide to unite in the common cause of fighting boldly to win the NDP and labour to a Workers' Agenda. After all, no victory is possible without a struggle. ■

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likely to be involved in violent crime. As a step toward eliminating gun violence, we should better fund public elementary and high school education, reduce class sizes, and increase teacher pay to attract the best and the brightest.

University education should also be free and available to all. Is this practical? Absolutely. Note that university education is currently free in Estonia, Norway, Finland, Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, and Sri Lanka, among others. Undergraduate tuition in France is less than 200 euros per year. The University of California system was tuition-free up until 1970.

### 3. Guarantee jobs for all

A publication of the International Monetary Fund suggests that “lack of employment opportunities may trigger violence and juvenile delinquency.” According to Daniel Webster, professor and co-director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, “One of the strongest correlates for homicide is ‘concentrated disadvantage,’ where everyone living in an area is poor and unemployed.”

To really address gun violence, we must guarantee everyone the right to a good job, at union-scale wages. Is this feasible? Absolutely. In the first place, there is much work that needs to be done repairing aging infrastructure; building additional schools and health care facilities; constructing local, regional, and national mass transit networks; and retrofitting the economy to run on sustainable energy. But even if every single useful job were covered, it would *still* be possible to guarantee jobs for all.

American labor productivity has increased tremendously since the eight-hour day was mandated for the printing trades in 1905 and for most other workers by 1937. Productivity *per capita* of U.S. workers has increased over 5000% since 1929 (\$45,551 vs. \$851.) By 2009, every man, woman and child was producing 64 times more value per year, on average, than their counterparts during the New Deal (\$45,551 vs. \$713.)

So the solution to joblessness is simple: reduce the workweek to 30 hours with no reduction in pay. This would spread all of the available work around, while allowing working people to share in the monumental productivity gains that their labor has wrought. Ironically, a change of this type might create such a demand for labor that we would have to encourage immigration from Mexico and elsewhere to fill all of the available jobs.

### 4. Slash the war budget

The violence we see at home is a reflection of the violence our government exports. The U.S. spends more on killing than the next 10 largest military budgets in the world combined, props up murderous dictators, and violently suppresses popular rebellion—all in order to shore up corporate profits. It has no moral standing to address violence at home.

Bring *all* the troops home now! Use the trillions spent on the Pentagon, the CIA, and the NSA to fund health care, education, and other needed social programs. Retool factories and retrain workers involved in war production to build mass transit and other socially useful things.

What about terrorist threats? Would these changes leave us vulnerable to foreigners who might want to do us harm? To the contrary. Much of the animus towards the U.S. is blowback from the government’s military and profit-centric foreign policy. Besides, more Americans die annually from traffic accidents or intestinal illnesses than from terrorism.

In his 1967 speech at Riverside Church, MLK cited our own government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.” If we want to be serious about addressing gun violence at the grass roots, we can’t ignore the policy and culture of violence that is promoted at the highest levels.

### 5. Abolish the “War on Drugs”

This one should be obvious. Regardless of anyone’s view on personal drug use, it’s abundantly clear that modern drug prohibition has been no more effective than was alcohol prohibition in the 1920s. And just as earlier prohibition spawned the likes of Al Capone, the modern “war on drugs” has contributed significantly to urban violence, with the FBI reporting an average of 490 drug-related murders per year between 2007 and 2011. Add to this a pattern of discriminatory enforcement and the unequal impact the “war on drugs” has had on the poor and people of color, and it’s abundantly clear that, to really address urban violence, the phony war on drugs has got to go.

Treat drug addiction as an illness, not a crime. And, with guaranteed jobs, educational opportunities, and health care for all, no one would be compelled by economic necessity to enter the drug trade. Now consider this: Drugs that have long been illegal are still widely available on the

# ... Addressing gun violence

Spencer Platt / Getty Images



street. Shouldn’t this give us pause when considering whether legal prohibition of firearms would actually make them unavailable?

### 6. Address root causes of depression and alienation

What makes an individual become a mass shooter? Jack Levin, a professor of sociology and criminology at Northeastern University offers: “You know, most mass killers have suffered some kind of chronic depression and frustration.” This is troubling since depression is on the rise in the United States, according to Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health.

So to really address gun violence, we have to address widespread depression and alienation. But what causes them? In his book, “Lost Connections,” Johann Hari attempts to answer this key question. Based on meetings and interviews with distinguished research scientists, Hari identifies nine causes of depression and anxiety, challenging accepted wisdom that they are caused primarily by an unlucky brain or chemical imbalance. The first seven causes involve disconnection from: Meaningful work; other people; meaningful values; childhood trauma; status and respect; the natural world; a hopeful or secure future. The final two he describes as the “Real [limited] Role of Genes and Brain Changes.”

So job insecurity, or having a stressful job over which you have no control; a breakdown of solidarity and a lack of nurturing connections with people and the community; being subjected to a culture that values shopping for *things* over genuine human wellbeing; racial, sexual, or other abuse suffered as a child, and this within a culture that puts complete responsibility for raising children on individual families and then fails to provide the needed resources; a tenuous hold on status or respect, possibly due to a job loss or other economic factors; an urbanized lifestyle, disconnected from nature; diminished hope for the future—these are all key factors that breed depression, anxiety, and alienation. But for a great many, this is nothing more

(Above) Police are being increasingly militarized. In addressing the source of gun violence, we cannot ignore the policies of violence promoted at the highest levels.

than a routine description of life in capitalist America today! With the decline of unions, all workers are under more pressure. Rates of suicide and opioid abuse have increased alarmingly.

Our culture is optimized for reproducing depression, alienation, and hopelessness, which are key ingredients in mass shootings. So it makes perfect sense that the United States—the undisputed world leader in war and international violence, exploitation and oppression at home and abroad, environmental degradation, and a soul-crushing focus on boosting corporate profits before all else—should also be the global champ of domestic gun violence.

Points 1 through 5 above would begin to confront some of the societal factors that increase depression and alienation. But to really get to the root of this problem, we need a complete reboot that would allow us to rebuild society in a way that puts human needs before profits.

So there you have it: a plan which, if implemented, would drastically reduce gun violence while improving everyone’s quality of life in countless other ways. There is nothing rhetorical or tongue-in-cheek about this solution. Some will argue that this plan is not practical, but this confuses what is practical with what is easy. Sure, there’s bound to be resistance to this solution by those who have a vested interest in the status quo.

By comparison, passing additional laws to regulate the personal use of firearms might seem easier to accomplish. Trouble is, the passage of such laws would be unlikely to lead to an enduring solution. In the end, a solution that really works is infinitely more practical than any quick fix that does not truly address the underlying problem. A difficult reality is far more practical than the most appealing illusion. ■

## ... Feminist movement

(continued from page 7)

These sectors also refuse to put themselves on the front lines of fighting for the most basic democratic rights, arguing that the problem of women’s oppression is only an expression of capitalist exploitation. At the same time, this kind of class reductionism absolves the most conscious members of the working class and even their own militants from responsibility for the reproduction of sexism.

When female workers take the front lines of the struggle, like the women at PepsiCo and LATAM, this creates better conditions to both fight against sexism within the working class, but also to fight against the sexism of the bosses. The struggle against class reductionism cannot take the socialist women’s movement to the opposite extreme, taking up individualistic notions of sexism that equate verbal harassment on the street with state sponsored terrorism against women.

The massive mobilization of women around the world gives a new relevance to the debate about the course that the women’s movement should take in order to avoid ending up like the women’s movement of the 1970s. In a contradictory manner, the movement brought about partial triumphs and the

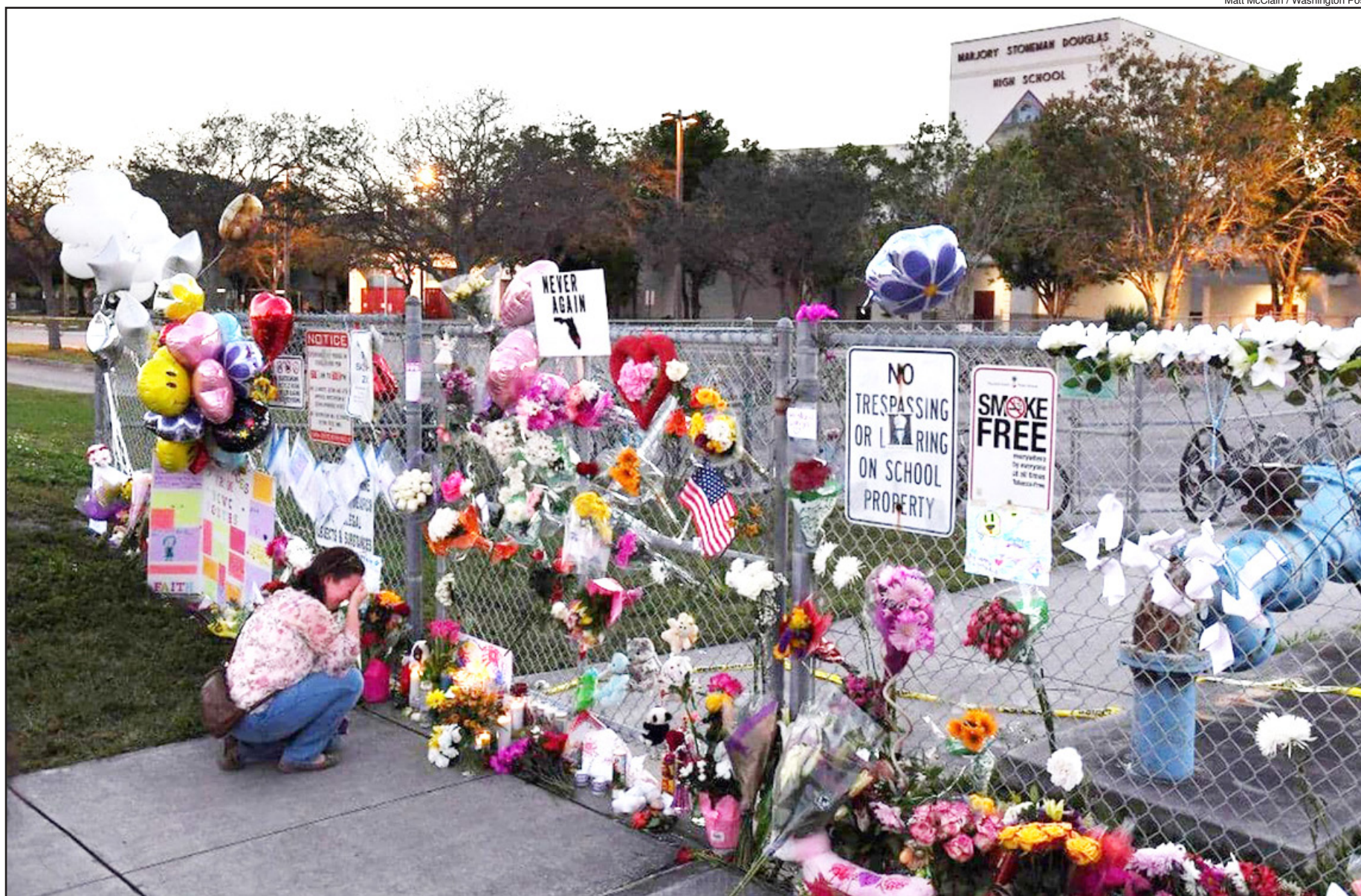
expansion of rights. On the other hand, the movement was domesticated and the idea of a radical transformation of the capitalist system was buried. The current movement puts this debate on the table: Is the ultimate goal going to be occasional resistance to right-wing attacks, or are we going to finally build a strategy to win?

The international women’s organization Pan y Rosas (Bread and Roses), of which the authors of this piece are members, exists in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, México, Venezuela, the Spanish State, France, and Germany. The organization actively intervenes in and builds this new women’s movement in workplaces, schools, and universities with a socialist perspective. We fight for the women’s movement to build roots in the working class and give examples of the revolutionary potential of this alliance.

Our ideas, program, and strategy are based on the accumulated lessons learned from previous generations of revolutionary Marxists. We believe in a feminism that seeks to be a political movement of the masses, where the struggle for democratic rights and liberties is connected to a denunciation of this regime of exploitation and misery for the majority. Only a movement that seeks to defeat this system can be truly emancipatory. ■

## A surefire plan to deal with gun violence

Matt McClain / Washington Post



By BRUCE LESNICK

With 346 shootings with multiple victims in the U.S. in 2017 and 34 in the first two months of 2018—including the Parkland, Fla., tragedy that cost the lives of 17 high school students and injured 15 others—many are justifiably angry and frustrated.

Mainstream politicians dither, debating how best to treat the symptoms of the problem without overly upsetting the arms manufacturers who fund their campaigns. Increased background checks and bans on certain types of weapons are discussed, but little concrete action is taken, and few Americans believe that the limited palette of solutions considered by Congress would do much to staunch the bloodshed.

After all, the manufacture of new assault weapons was temporarily banned by federal law from 1994 to 2004, but it's not clear that this had any impact on reducing gun violence. The National Rifle Association reliably rails against any gun control legislation, ostensibly out of reverence for the Second Amendment, but more likely out of fealty to their corporate funders. Still, it is not always true that the enemy of my enemy is my friend—or in this case, that new laws to restrict access to firearms would effectively address the symptoms, let alone get to the root of the problem.

And what is the root of the problem? In a word: poverty, alienation, and a culture of violence—the example for which is set by our so-called leaders. As Martin Luther King Jr. explained, poverty is violence; exploitation and injustice are violence, perpetrated by those at the top against those at the bottom.

People who are happy, healthy, loved, well-educated, and constructively employed rarely become mass shooters. Moreover, individuals tend to be influenced by the example set by those in positions of power.

What happens in the corporate and government *suites* sets the tone for what occurs in the *streets*. In our current culture of endless war, imperial aggression, public officials turning a blind eye to Wall Street and other corporate crime, rock star status for the super-rich, and callous disregard for the working poor—the message filtering down is very different than would be the case if peace, justice, and solidarity were the hallmarks of our domestic and foreign policy.

With this in mind, here are six steps we can take right now to make gun violence a thing of the past.

### 1. Free, single-payer Medicare for all

Improving health care may be one of the best ways to reduce urban violence, as a community nursing program begun in 1970 demonstrated. If we're serious about ending mass shootings, we should expand Medicare to cover everyone, from cradle to grave, with no premiums, no deductibles, and no copays. Include complete coverage for preventative care and all necessary medical, dental, and optical care. Treat health care as a right rather than a privilege. Remove the for-profit insurance companies completely from the mix. Instead, let health and wellbeing steer our national health policy.

Populations with single-payer health care systems—like Canada, Japan, Switzerland, France and Cuba—are healthier than in the U.S. But far more benefit is derived from a single-payer system than improved physical health. There is also a huge reduction in personal anxiety and financial stress. There would no longer be any need for individuals to worry about health care costs. And significantly, a comprehensive national health plan would completely separate health care eligibility from work. If you couldn't find a job, or you got laid off, or you had to go on strike, you'd still be fully covered.

(Above) Memorial to victims at site of Feb. 14 school shooting in Parkland, Fla.

What about Obamacare (aka. Romneycare, aka. the Heritage Foundation Plan)? Does this move us toward the single-payer ideal? Absolutely not. Obamacare is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It was designed to guarantee mega-profits to the insurance industry while it leaves 30 million without access to health care, and large premiums, copays, deductibles, and out-of-pocket expenses for the rest. Barak Obama himself, in a speech to the American Medical Association, assured all concerned that his health plan was no Trojan horse for single payer.

Right-wing ideologues oppose Obamacare for the wrong reasons—because they oppose *any* national policy that offers even a pretense of benefiting working people. Moreover, in the current political landscape in which the Democratic and Republican parties fall over each other in their obsequiousness to corporate power and stake their reputations on the perception that they are ideologically distinct from one another, if the right *were to have embraced* Obama's phony health-care solution it would likely have been the kiss of death for the plan.

Are those on the extreme right wily enough to see that feigning condemnation of their own Heritage Foundation plan when it was branded as Obamacare was the best way to ensure its adoption? Who knows? In any case, we are again reminded that the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend.

### 2. Free quality education for all

There is a strong correlation between crime and education. Better educated youth and adults are less

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