

# Trump cracks down on immigrants



Democracy Now!

By LISA LUINENBURG

Donald Trump's views on immigrants are well known. Over the past year and some months that he has been president, Trump has attempted to bully Congress into enacting ever more draconian measures targeting undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S. He has threatened to build a wall and make Mexico pay for it. He has threatened to beef up the Border Patrol and other security measures at the U.S.-Mexico border. He has threatened to renegotiate the NAFTA trade deal. He has called Mexican immigrants dangerous drug dealers and rapists.

Although many of his threats have yet to be implemented, many changes in the immigration enforcement system have been enacted. But are these changes initiated by Trump the result of the racist policies of one man, or are they a deeper symptom of the capitalist economic system we live under?

The Trump administration recently announced that it would be ending the TPS, or Temporary Protective Status program, for 200,000 Salvadoran immigrants, 45,000 Haitian immigrants, and 90,000 Honduran immigrants. Other groups—such as immigrants from Nicaragua, Nepal, and Sudan—have already lost their

status. In fact, due to the changes initiated by Trump, 98% of the 317,000 TPS holders in the U.S. have now lost their protective status.

The TPS program was created in 1990 to provide legal protections for immigrants coming from countries devastated by natural disasters like hurricanes or armed conflicts and violence. It provides immigrants from the designated countries with legal status and authorization to work in the U.S.

Many of the recipients in the program have now lived in the United States for decades and have built a life here. They have jobs, pay taxes, own homes, and have children who were born in the U.S. They send money to support their relatives back home—money that the economies of their countries of origin depend on.

According to *The New York Times*, in 2016, 17% of the economy of El Salvador was built on remittances. Similarly, CNN reports that in 2017 remittances made up 19% of the GDP of Honduras. Removing that flow of income would be devastating to those countries and the people who live there.

Despite the fact that many of these countries continue to experience ongoing violence, economic devastation, and a serious lack of infrastructure, the Trump

(Above) Anti-ICE protest in San Francisco.

administration is basing its decisions to end TPS programs on whether the original conditions for the TPS designation, such as the earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001, still exist. But the programs were originally created to protect immigrants and refugees whose countries did not have the resources to reabsorb them, and many of them still don't have the ability to do so.

The recipients whose TPS status has been terminated must now face devastating choices. Most of them are given an 18-month timeline to leave the U.S. If they choose to stay, they will lose their jobs and join the ranks of the 11 million undocumented immigrants who face deportation every day in order to put food on the table for their families.

Originally quoted in *The New York Times*, Veronica Lagunas, a 39-year-old Salvadoran woman with two U.S.-born children, said that she would prefer to stay in the United States illegally, losing her job and benefits and risking deportation, rather than return to her home country. She said, "There is nothing to go back to in El Salvador. The infrastructure may be better now, but the country is in no condition to receive us."

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# Labor militancy continues in Iran

By ERWIN FREED

At the beginning of 2018, Iran saw the largest uprising of labor militancy in a decade. The Islamic Republic's armed goons managed to smash the resistance of workers and peasants, killing dozens and jailing hundreds in the process. But Iranian workers have remained mobilized, while the social conditions in the country remain the same, if not worse.

Iranian workers are still experiencing high unemployment rates, officially between 12% and 60% depending on the location; falling wages, with much of the working population going months without pay; and skyrocketing commodity prices. For example, "the prices of eggs, meat, and bread are rising more than 10% a year," according to *The Wall Street Journal* (May 6, 2018).

The government of President Hassan Rouhani has been cutting back on state services, temporarily ending a very popular cash-transfer program in January before being forced to reinstate it due to popular opposition. Many workers do not have health insurance or pensions and are forced to take multiple low-paying jobs.

In response to these conditions, workers across the country have gone on strike and protested in the face of brutal state repression. The National Coalition of Resistance in Iran has reported daily actions since the beginning of the year.

Major actions include nearly a week of illegal mass protests in mid-April by workers and farmers in the county of Kazerun, a weeks-long strike of thousands of steelworkers in Khuzestan



VOA Persian

over back pay in March, and Tehran teachers' protests in May for higher wages and to protest privatization of education. An international campaign has been launched to free the imprisoned teacher union leaders Mohammad Habibi and Esmail Abdi.

Thousands of sugarcane workers who were on strike in Khuzestan in March demanded the right to an independent union as well as protesting horrible working conditions and the non-payment of wages. The workers faced many attacks and arrests by security forces.

Truckers, who have been on strike in seven provinces since mid-May for better working conditions, received solidarity statements from transport unions worldwide, including London-based International Transport Workers Federation.

The state expected that normalized trade relations with the United States

(Above) Truck drivers and owners strike on May 22, with signs stating they are protesting high tolls and costs for parts while wages are stagnant.

following the 2015 "Iran Deal" would lead to an improved economy; however, lifting sanctions only served to sharpen the class struggle. When the government's promises of improved living conditions for workers after the deal failed to be realized, and food prices continued to rise, the country exploded.

Along with demands for better wages and social services, Iranians have been calling for an end to the one-party political system, freedom for jailed workers, and women's rights.

On the last point, hundreds of women have been arrested since January for publicly taking off their veils.

In some cases, labor organizations have expressed solidarity with the

struggle for women's rights. On Jan. 30, the Association of Electrical and Metal Workers of Kerman-shah issued a statement in which they defended the actions of women who have been protesting the compulsory hijab: "There is no doubt that the girls and boys who have become known as "those from Revolution Avenue," also include women and men workers, and those from the lower layers of society. Therefore, the Iranian working class, half of whom are women, considers this current movement against the compulsory hijab as related to itself and is obligated to support it with determination."

A further demand is that the Iranian government stop funding military excursions in Syria, Yemen, and throughout Africa, although it is unclear from what section of society this call is coming from.

As Trump moves to withdraw from the "Iran Deal," the short-term future of the Iranian ruling class remains unclear. To maintain profitability, Iran needs foreign investment in new extractive technologies, meaning closer relationships with the technically savvy imperialist powers. On the other hand, Iranian development since the revolution has relied heavily on state direction, surely not the most attractive thing to big international capitalists. So far, the means of getting past this contradiction has been to drive Iranian workers into further misery.

However, the Iranian working class has a long and proud history of struggle, and given the current balance of forces, the scale could very quickly be tipped in their favor. ■

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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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# Teacher strikes: New beginning for labor?

By JEFF MACKLER

North Carolina teachers capped off two months of unprecedented national teacher militancy as they rallied 20,000 strong at the state capitol on May 16. During their one-day “sick leave” strike, the teachers closed down 40 local school districts with one million students.

As with the previous five statewide teacher strikes in 2018, beginning with West Virginia in March and continuing in Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado, and Oklahoma, North Carolina teachers struck in defiance of a state law banning strikes.

Collective bargaining in North Carolina is similarly outlawed, but as with the coordinated strikes in other states where legislation bars teachers from negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment, teachers are learning that their capacity to improve their lives and public education derives directly from their collective, defiant, and statewide power in the streets in alliance with parents and school workers rather than pursuing negotiations at isolated local bargaining tables where school boards are increasingly starved for funds.

Needless to say, no politician, court, or legislative body chose to enforce these anti-strike laws, calculating that punishing poor striking teachers and/or their unions would only deepen their commitment to struggle against, if not defy, court injunctions until all threatened reprisals were withdrawn. In short, teacher power rendered reactionary laws in these largely “right to work for less” states unenforceable, a lesson not lost on the broader labor movement. That capitalist law is subordinate to workers’ power remains the central and guiding principle that brought unions into being in the first place.

To date, every poll recording public attitudes toward striking teachers today indicates massive solidarity with these “lawbreakers”—66 percent support teachers among Republicans, 78 percent among independents, and 90 percent among Democrats—a broad reflection of the rapidly changing attitudes among workers more generally in a national context where broadside attacks on every aspect of working-class life is under bipartisan attack.

As with the statewide strikes in this initial wave, North Carolina’s teachers demanded higher salaries for teaching *and* non-teaching personnel and increased funds for public education. Since 2008, North Carolina teachers’ real wages have fallen 9.4 percent. As with the other statewide actions, teachers pointed to public statistics demonstrating that teacher pay and funding for public education over the past decade has decreased by at least the same 9-10 percent, while state laws and budget allocations granting tax breaks and other benefits to the corporate elite and the super rich have *increased* in roughly the same proportion.

Another key issue that has become integral to teachers’ concerns is the growing privatization of public education in the form of for-profit charter schools, which further siphon state funds from public education to private interests. The corporate-led charter school movement, led by billionaire “charitable” and “public-interest philanthropic” groups like the Bill and Linda Gates Foundation, has succeeded in channeling public funds authorized by state legislatures and local school districts into corporate hands.

Expenditures for charter schools have doubled over the past decade and today account for nearly seven percent of state education funding. Driven by the spurious arguments that public schools are failing due to incompetent teachers, teacher tenure, and other reactionary notions with racist overtones, the charter “movement” has proven incapable of presenting significant evidence that privatized charter schools achieve better results for students than the public school system, however much the latter has been starved for funds.

## Re-segregation of public schools

Today, the re-segregation of public education nationwide is an undeniable fact. African-American teacher Michelle Burton, a librarian in the Durham County, N.C., school system, stated bluntly, “The children that are coming to [public] schools now are mainly children of color, black and brown kids. There is a correlation here. Funding of public education has decreased with the rise of more children of color going to public schools. This is a civil rights issue.”

Indeed, it is. Coupled with a major increase in neigh-



borhood segregation patterns driven by large income disparities and inadequate funding for poor districts, especially in large urban centers, as well as charter school entrance requirements and selection procedures, public schools today are perhaps more segregated than in 1954 when the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ended the “separate but equal” and racist “legal” segregation of that era. Class-conscious educators are quick to note the deepening “school to prison” scenario wherein Black and Latino youth from poor and racist police-oppressed neighborhoods are channeled through depressing and dilapidated schools into the increasingly privatized for-profit prison-industrial complex.

## Regressive tax schemes

In Arizona, per-student funding has fallen 13.6 percent since 2008, while corporate tax rates in 2011 alone were cut by 30 percent. Oklahoma legislators approved multiple rounds of tax cuts for the rich beginning in the mid-2000s, while reducing per-student funding by 28 percent since the 2008. Teachers there just won their first raise in 10 years.

In North Carolina, the corporate tax rate has been trimmed by more than half in the last five years. In 2013, it was 6.9 percent; this year it is 3 percent, and the Assembly voted to drop it to 2.5 percent next year. The cuts cost the state treasury over \$600 million a year, which could otherwise be going to education. Moreover, over half of the tax savings went to people earning more than \$500,000 a year, while working people received next to nothing.

Roy Cooper, North Carolina’s Democratic Party governor, presented a plan to “freeze” tax cuts for corporations and those making above \$200,000, while giving teachers an 8 percent average pay increase, with some receiving raises as high as 14 percent. “It is tax fairness for teacher pay,” Cooper said.

Cooper spoke from the platform at the May 16 march at the capitol, declaring that low teacher pay was “unacceptable.” A week earlier, Cooper said at a news conference that teachers “shouldn’t have to take to the streets to get the respect they earned.”

A year ago, the newly elected Cooper vetoed the budget bill passed by the North Carolina General Assembly, stating that the tax cuts it offered wealthy corporations were too large, and that it did not offer enough to teachers and state employees. However, the Senate overrode his veto. This year, on June 1, the Assembly voted to continue to cut corporate taxes in 2019 but accepted the governor’s proposal for a raise for teachers. It remains to be seen whether Cooper will veto the bill.

## AFT/NEA leaders focus on electing Democrats

With mid-term legislative elections approaching, the North Carolina governor has been more than willing to assume the role of liberal teacher advocate. He understands that the teachers’ struggle has given the Democrats a popular issue to identify with.

(Above) Arizona teachers rally at the capitol.

Yet there’s no doubt the same “liberal,” as with his posturing counterparts across the country, will find common ground “across the aisle” with Republicans when push comes to shove.

It would be a serious mistake for teachers to bind their struggles to the electoral campaigns of the Democratic Party—which has betrayed them countless times. It oversaw much of the massive defunding of education during the Obama administration.

Unfortunately, the top leaders of the teachers’ unions have thrown in with the Democrats once again. As the summer recess begins, leaders of the 1.9 million-member American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA) are making plans to enter the political arena with the objective of electing “liberal” Democrats who they argue will ensure adequate funding for public education. Indeed, the two national unions have announced plans to join together to run some 400 teachers in the upcoming election cycle, undoubtedly all as Democrats.

Sounding what she perceived as a necessary radical note, AFT President Randi Weingarten told Raleigh, N.C., reporters, “I think a lot about the Arab Spring and I think a lot about Occupy and how you move from this inspiring moment to enduring change.” She added, “And you have to take the next step of electing people who believe in these values.”

Weingarten neglected to mention that the AFT has followed this failed “elect Democrats” “lesser-evil” imperative since the early 1960s, when it pioneered the first major teacher collective bargaining contracts in several major U.S. cities. At that moment in history, in the context of a U.S. capitalism still flush from its World War II victories and absolutely dominant in the world economic arena, funds for public education were readily available. (Need we mention that this largely imperialist war of conquest cost the lives of 80 million people worldwide?) During the Vietnam War “guns and butter” era, funding for public education tripled while teacher salaries doubled. (Need we mention that the United States slaughtered 4 million Vietnamese?)

Over the recent decades, in a world context in which U.S. and world capitalism are in perpetual crises, the ruling rich envision no way out other than at the expense of workers, not to mention via endless wars for plunder and profit and every form of environmental devastation.

Weingarten’s mentor in the 1970s and afterward was the reactionary pro-war racist AFT national president and New York City United Federation of Teachers Local 2 president Albert Shanker. It was Shanker who shackled the AFT hand and foot to the very New York State legislators who approved the infamous Taylor Law, which prohibited teacher strikes.

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## DACA and the Dreamers from El Salvador

By DEWITT KENNARD

"When I feed the hungry, they call me a saint.  
When I ask why they have no food,  
they call me a Communist."

— Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara

"BE PATRIOTIC—KILL A PRIEST"

— a war cry of the "death squads"

The total number of the world's displaced people is at an all-time high. Fear of persecution caused by war, race, religion, or political affiliation is a force that drives these people from their homelands.

El Salvador, a country that lost about 25 percent of its population to migration during its civil war, is one of those countries whose name has popped up regarding U.S. immigration and our DACA program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. DACA involves the future of about 700,000 young "dreamers," and El Salvadorans make up the largest number.

DACA represents only a small part of the quandary of Latino immigration. This conversation has overlooked the crucial reasons why so many Central Americans have left their countries of birth. The explanation is straight forward: broad social inequality, injustice, and gross human rights abuses, much of which has been supported by Washington's years of complicity that has crushed the fabric of much of Central American society.

In San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, there is a prominent road named after our own United States president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This road leads straight to the most remarkable sight of this Third World nation, to the monument "El Salvador Del Mundo," The Savior Of The World. Here you will see the figure of Jesus standing atop a sphere of the earth placed high on a pedestal. It's a reminder of a people's profound faith throughout their troubled past. FDR Boulevard is also a reminder of the powerful scale of our own government's foreign policy, and our country's unrestrained footprint pressed deeply into the smallest country in all of Central America.

### Centuries of oppression

This injustice began five centuries ago with Spain's conquest and continues to this very day with the power and might of the descendants of what is termed "The Original 14 Families." These families are the ruling authoritarian oligarchs who, still today, dictate from their local plantations and from their palatial Miami estates.

Over centuries, how can a handful of people continue to dominate a country's population? Firepower vs. spears, arrows, and machetes is one answer—and a little help from their friends in Gringoland, the U.S.

government.

The year 1932 was one of bitter unrest in El Salvador. During the Great Depression the market price of the country's main cash crop, coffee, had collapsed. The peasant worker was paid with tortillas and beans, and with scrip that was good only at the boss man's company store. (Does that sound like the Mississippi Delta plantations during slavery and our own Jim Crow years?)

With "The Original 14 Families" controlling over 80% of the useable land, inequality and poverty brought the peasant to rebellion. This insurrection was instantly crushed, as waves of indigenous people and peasants were slaughtered. Within the first three days of fighting, an estimated 25,000 rebels were killed. The worker organizing had been led by Farabundo Marti, an activist whose goal was to help the poor. Marti, along with an estimated 30,000 mostly indigenous people, was killed during this unholy massacre that is now called La Matanza, the Slaughter.

### The 1980s rebellion

Let's move forward a few decades. Since land reform was nowhere in sight, the average Salvadoran peasant was still living in misery, and starvation as was evident in the bloated stomachs of malnourished children. After years of rule by the "14" and its ruthless military dictators, the tragedy of this nation was now being played out on the battlefields of its countryside and in its capital city. This was an internal people's civil war, a revolt after so many years of repression. It was not created by outside agitators.



This Cold War period—with our new U.S. president, Ronald Reagan taking the helm—was about to sizzle all of Central America. Reagan's paranoia of communism had been inserted deep into the psyche of generations of Salvador's military officers who the U.S. government had trained at its "School Of The Americas" in Panama. As part of the 1977 Panama Canal Treaty, the U.S. government was forced to move its school from Panama. The Pentagon chose Ft. Benning, Ga.

The enormity of suffering of the Salvadoran people was about to expand at a rapid pace. The rag-tag FMLN guerrilla group, named after the martyred Farabundo Marti, was overpowering the U.S.-backed Salvadoran forces. The U.S. government had poured billions of dollars into arms and training to beef up El Salvador's police, its National Guard, its army, and its air force, which was using savage white phosphorus and napalm jelly bombs. U.S. Special Forces trainers and the CIA were now playing a major role in creating paramilitary security forces that in turn led to the Escuadrones Muertos, the "death squads."

It was December 1980 when three American Maryknoll Sisters and lay workers were returning from a

conference. They never reached their destination. Instead they met their early and unjust deaths. When the bodies of the four beaten, raped, and murdered women were unearthed from a shallow grave, our Secretary of State, General Alexander Haig, stated that the nuns may have been armed and were attempting to run the military roadblock. Years later, low ranking guardsmen were convicted of this god-awful crime.

At this point, Congress was becoming reluctant to fund the continuation of this dirty war. El Salvador's leaders desperately needed a major military victory. Hence, the grim reaper began his midnight creep.

El Mozote was a war-neutral, rural community of around 1000 people, mostly Evangelical Protestants. Again the human face of another cruel, repulsive massacre was about to appear.

The Atlacatl Battalion, which the U.S. government had trained for counter-insurgency, had been fighting guerrillas in the region. The battalion commander had heard that some of the villagers had sold food and supplies to the FMLN. During the next three days of December 1981, over 900 El Mozote villagers were tortured, raped, and murdered as the U.S. government helped El Salvador's leaders chase its common obsession with choking out communism. This bloodbath was presented to Congress as the needed military victory.

The Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutierrez, had written "A Theology of Liberation," a Biblically based "preferential option for the poor" that had been taken up and preached throughout much of Latin America. It was a Christian approach to dealing with poverty and oppression. The U.S. government accused these priests of being Marxists and Communist sympathizers.

In 1977, at age 60, the priest Oscar Romero was elevated to Archbishop of San Salvador. This new archbishop had many challenges ahead as he became an outspoken critic of his own government's years of human rights abuses. Then orders came from the oligarchs in Miami. During his brief four-year tenure, Archbishop Romero became the eleventh priest in El Salvador to be assassinated.

Since those days, it has come to light that Col. Nicolas Carranza, who headed the Treasury Police, helped arranged the archbishop's assassination. Freedom of Information Act records show that Col. Carranza had been on the CIA's payroll, receiving as much as \$90,000 per year.

November 1989: The University of Central America in San Salvador was a highly respected Jesuit University. The Salvadoran government considered it to be a refuge for subversives as civil war continued to rage. Several of the university's priests were pushing for a "negotiated and peaceful" settlement to the brutal war that had claimed over 75,000 lives, many being noncombatants.

Darkness had fallen on the UCA campus as the infamous Atlacatl Battalion, trained at the U.S. government's "School of the Americas," rolled in and to the Jesuit professors' modest quarters. Six Jesuits were executed. Their housekeeper, Julia Elba Ramos, and her 16-year-old daughter, Celina, had been visiting. They too were executed.

Above is a short list of the Salvadoran government's human rights abuses as the U.S. government supported them in their common goal of defeating the FMLN and to help the "Original 14" in maintaining the status quo.

### A nation of refugees

Today, with unbridled violence and gangs ruling its streets, El Salvador has become the most murderous country in Central America. With U.S. government complicity, the fabric of this country's society has been shattered, and a nation of refugees has been created.

The U.S. government does not apologize for its complicity and dark history of backing right-wing butchers around the globe. That's not in its repertoire. But what our government can do is open its blind eye and heart in offering a legal path to citizenship for these DACA "dreamers" who were brought here by their parents and now have settled roots in America. Among them are people who pick the food we eat, care for our children and rock them to sleep at night, keep our tech systems humming, and wear the U.S. uniform on many battlefields around the globe.

As the Southern Poverty Law Center's Morris Dees said, "We're all immigrants. Some came to this country on slave ships, some on free ships. Our nation's strength is in its immigrants."

Today we have a president who, with his dehumanizing language, has inflamed a vicious, anti-immigrant sentiment. We, the people, must not build his Wall, and we must never hang a "No Vacancy" sign from our Statue of Liberty. To save the soul of this nation, we can do better. --As a people we must. ■

# ... Immigration

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Similarly, Trump has also moved to end the DACA program, which protected 800,000 immigrants brought to the U.S. without papers when they were children. Although the program was only a temporary stop-gap solution, it gave young immigrants, often known as Dreamers, an opportunity to live, work, and go to school in the U.S. without constantly looking over their shoulders. After being in effect for five years, Trump announced in September 2017 that he would begin phasing out the program in March 2018 unless Congress passed a replacement, a move that has failed to happen.

In a press announcement issued with Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Trump stated that he was motivated by a concern for “the millions of Americans victimized by this unfair system.” Sessions added that the DACA program had “denied jobs to hundreds of thousands of Americans by allowing those same illegal aliens to take those jobs.” Some critics of the DACA program have also contended that it has only encouraged more immigrants to come to the U.S. seeking protections. They have claimed that these children went on to become members of violent gangs in the U.S.

In 2014, there was a surge of immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border. Many of the tens of thousand of immigrants who arrived during this wave were in fact children from Central American countries who were fleeing gang violence in their home countries. The fact is that the vast majority of people who come to the U.S. are fleeing economic devastation, wars, and climate disasters that the United States played a direct role in causing.

Four years later, it has come to light that 1500 children who crossed the border into the U.S. from Central American countries like Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador are simply missing. These were vulnerable children who were fleeing drug cartels, gang violence, and domestic abuse in their home countries and were taken into government care when they arrived at the border alone. They were then placed with sponsors who were supposed to care for them and make sure they attended school while waiting for their immigration hearings. Government workers were supposed to check in with the sponsors over the phone to ensure the children’s needs were being met, but the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recently found that they were unable to account for the whereabouts of 1475 children in the program.

This has raised concerns that the children may have fallen into the hands of human traffickers. According to *The New York Times*, in 2016 Health and Human Services officials placed eight children with human traffickers who forced the children to work on an egg farm in Marion, Ohio. As a result, Homeland Security and the DHHS signed a memorandum of agreement to put new guidelines in place to prevent similar episodes from occurring in the future. But two years later, these guidelines have still not been implemented.

In early May, the Trump Administration announced that it would enact a policy of “100% prosecution” at the border, meaning that they would refer anyone caught crossing the border without papers for federal prosecution. This new policy will effectively separate parents from their children at the border, because children are not allowed to accompany adults who are



Kevin C. Downs / NY Daily News

taken into federal custody. In April of this year, Trump announced the “extraordinary” measure of deploying the National Guard to the border to protect national security and support the Border Patrol agents already working there. But this measure wasn’t extraordinary at all. In fact, thousands of National Guard troops were also deployed to the U.S.-Mexico border by President George W. Bush and even President Obama himself, the “deporter in chief.”

Meanwhile, families continue to be ripped apart on a daily basis by an escalation in raids and deportations. As of May 31, more than 10,800 migrant children are being held in federal custody, according to the Department of Health and Human Services—up 21 percent from a month earlier.

## ICE raids on the rise

Although the wave of ICE raids has been nationwide, one area that has been particularly hard-hit has been Philadelphia. It was recently reported by *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that ICE agents rounded up 49 undocumented immigrants there in a raid that lasted seven days. ICE claims that it targeted “dangerous criminals,” people who had been previously deported, or those released on an ICE detainers. Detainers are issued to local authorities (such as county jails) when ICE asks them to hold immigrants booked on other charges (or sometimes people who haven’t been charged with any crime at all) until ICE can come and pick them up. That is a common way that undocumented immigrants who are booked into jail on minor charges, such as traffic violations, end up in deportation proceedings.

On June 6, a federal judge ruled in favor of Philadelphia’s claims as a “sanctuary city,” saying that the city is acting reasonably in its refusal to honor detainers issued by ICE. Battles like this one are being waged in cities, large and small, across the U.S. The truth is that despite Trump’s recent crackdown on undocumented immigrants, the U.S. economy depends on the cheap and easily exploitable labor of the many immigrants, undocumented or living with precarious immigration status, who make up the fabric of our communities.

The immigration system isn’t broken. It is working exactly as it was intended to, and policies like the ones

Trump promotes are designed to keep immigrants afraid while keeping their potential allies in the U.S. working class alienated from their struggle. Hence the constant claims that immigrants are out to steal U.S. jobs and the xenophobia common in corporate media.

Throughout U.S. history, there has always been a scapegoat immigrant class. From the Chinese who built the railroads crisscrossing the U.S. landscape, to the Eastern Europeans who worked in the Chicago packing houses in Upton Sinclair’s classic book “*The Jungle*,” although the countries of origins and skin colors of immigrants coming to the U.S. have changed over the years, the virulent attacks against immigrants have remained the same.

But that doesn’t mean that immigrants and their allies today are taking all the attacks that Trump has leveled against them without a fight. Many of Trump’s immigration policy changes have sparked heated debate and protests in the streets. On May 1, thousands of people marched in the streets in modest demonstrations across the U.S. for International Worker’s Day and in support of immigrants’ rights.

In Minneapolis, the Immigrant Movement for Justice recently organized a panel discussion on the TPS issue. J. Rivas from Immigrant Movement for Justice said, “It is time to raise our voices and fight together for our brothers and sisters who are part of this country because their family should be considered part of this country too. Together we will create resistance to the injustices of incarceration and deportation that our communities are facing.”

“We stand with those who immigrated to the U.S. Those with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) status. Those with Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Those who have Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). Those who have received political asylum. Those who came here as refugees.”

“The Immigrant Movement for Justice stands together, and we will continue to defend the rights of all people, including those who don’t have legal status and are fighting for amnesty to stay and live here without fear of one day being deported and torn from their family and community. Let’s build a movement!” It remains to be seen what the spark will be that will set that movement afire. ■

## Conn. rally for incarcerated women

By ERWIN FREED

On May 8, CT Bail Fund called a rally outside of York Correctional Institute, a women’s prison in Niantic, Conn. Eleven other groups were listed as co-sponsors on the events facebook page and around 40 people showed up in solidarity. The rally was called in conjunction with the Bail Fund’s successful effort to collect enough money to release 30 women from York in time for Mothers’ Day.

Speakers included formerly incarcerated women, many of whom served time at York, the only women’s correctional facility in Connecticut. Conditions in the institute are horrible; it was repeatedly called a “hellhole.” Guards are notorious for sexually assaulting inmates, showing the women “dick pics,” forcing them to show their breasts, and worse. One speaker blamed correctional officers for multiple women’s deaths behind the prison’s walls, saying, “when I was in [York], women died because of the medical neglect of the COs” especially due to detoxing.

Nicole Kennedy, who was released on May 7 thanks to the Bail Fund, described how when she first arrived at the prison, she and a group of other women were kept in a single room for seven days for “medical lockup.” She was arrested on a three-year-old warrant and worries that the state will revoke her bond. Another woman spoke about how she was

forced to give birth shackled to the hospital bed, a practice that was recently made illegal in the state but surely remains in the arsenal of tools of torture for COs.

Protesters took a moment of silence for women who have died behind York’s walls. We also were told the story of “Jane Doe,” a young transgender woman who was put in solitary confinement at York for three months in 2014, despite being 16 years old at the time and never having been convicted, or even charged with, a crime.

The extreme terror of U.S. prisons and police serves to maintain class dominance for capitalists in a lot of different ways. As Elizabeth Hinton argues in her recent book, “From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime,” modern-day mass incarceration is rooted in the “Great Society” social programs of the LBJ era. Even at their most “radical,” American capitalists tied up things like community centers, jobs programs, and public housing projects with an increasing police presence in Black and working-class communities. Community centers were forced to increase “community engagement” with the police. The biggest “job programs” of them all were created by the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965 and the war in Vietnam, and police were stationed in the new, segregated, projects at all hours.

At the protest, a speaker revealed that York has been illegally allowing ICE agents into the facility, where they ques-

tion incarcerated women without identifying themselves as ICE. The practice is similar to undercover ICE agents’ illegally picking up undocumented people at the federal courthouse in Hartford.

One of the fastest growing sections of the prison-industrial complex has been immigrant detention centers, where families are often separated and people are held in deplorable conditions for months without trial. Virtually all detained undocumented people are effectively refugees from the violence of U.S. imperialism.

A large number of the women in York, and incarcerated people in general, are in prison simply because they are too poor to afford bail. Over one-third of these women at York should be presumed innocent. Many women are victims of sexual and domestic abuse and are incarcerated for defending themselves from their abusers.

The name Marissa Alexander was mentioned among others. Marissa was sentenced to 20 years after shooting off a warning shot when her abusive ex-husband threatened to kill her. This was in Florida, a state with stand-your-ground gun laws. She ended up spending three years behind bars.

Today, mass incarceration is an industry with revenues of well over \$65 billion. At any given moment, more than 2 million people, disproportionately working-class people of color and LGBTQ+ folks, are behind bars. The protesters who gathered outside York on May 8 called for the immediate release of all the women in the facility, including those with life sentences. ■

# General Strike in South Africa

The Maverick



(Left) Metalworkers Union (NUMSA) members rally.

By MARTY GOODMAN

Worsening poverty and attacks on organized labor by South Africa's neo-liberal African National Congress (ANC) government have ignited a wave of working-class militancy, resulting in a general strike on April 25. The militant action targeted a planned minimum wage of just 20 rand (\$1.60) an hour, calling it "slave labor" wages. It also opposed anti-strike legislation that increases corporate and governmental control over unions and new taxes on working people.

The general strike was not total, but it was powerful. At least 10,000 marched in the streets nationwide. The largest assemblies were in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and business centers in some cities virtually shut down. According to the National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa, almost all of the country's automotive plants were closed down, including BMW AG, Ford Motor Co., and Toyota Motor Corp. Thirty-four percent of companies surveyed by the National Employers Association of South Africa were affected, with 23% experiencing a total strike.

"It's a war!" declared Secretary General Zwelinzima Vavi of the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) to a cheering crowd of Johannesburg workers on April 25. "Today we are too big to march, so instead we'll occupy Johannesburg!" he said to a roar of approval. SAFTU is demanding a 12,500 rand (about \$1000) monthly minimum wage.

Lerato Mohatlane, a member of the Food and Allied Workers' Union, said at a May Day rally that he gets paid R3500 a month, equal to the planned new minimum wage. He called the new minimum "nonsense."

"I am trying to survive with R3500. I only manage to buy groceries costing R600 and I have to buy maize meal, salt, sugar, and everything. I give my mother R200 and money to my siblings as well. Like today, it is 1 May, I don't have [money] at all, yet I [was paid] on 25 April," he said.

Backing the measures and the main target of worker outrage was South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, the former mineworkers' leader who is also president of the ANC. His personal wealth is at least an astounding \$550 million, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers. Ramaphosa faces his own corruption problems, owing back taxes and engaging in crony capitalism. Irwin Jim, general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), the country's largest trade union with over 360,000 members, called Ramaphosa "the Donald Trump of South Africa."

In a May 30 statement, Jim said, "We reject the right-wing Thatcherist agenda of Cyril Ramaphosa. The president is using his so called "New Dawn" to oppress and to drive the exploitation of the working class. Since taking office the suffering of the working class has increased. The state has increased general taxes in the form of VAT; the electricity price has gone up and the cost of all basic goods has increased expo-

**'As long as the majority of Black and African people live below the poverty line, there is no freedom.'**

— NUMSA statement on May Day

nentially because of increases in the fuel price. The state has done everything possible to please business at the expense of the Black and African working class. The ANC government and the leadership of COSATU will go down in history as the butchers of the South African working class majority because they sold out the hard won gains of workers to the highest bidder."

The strike also rejected an 18 rand minimum wage for agricultural workers in rural areas, where less than one-third of South Africans now live and where unemployment is highest. Union organizers there face many obstacles, not the least of which is the racism, sometimes violent, of white landowners.

The April 25 general strike coincided with an ongoing nationwide bus strike of 17,000 workers, which ended May 14 with two 9% raises in line with union demands. NUMSA backed the strike and joined picket lines. The anti-worker measures promoted by Ramaphosa were set to pass on May 1 but were sent back to parliament for "review" after the bills provoked a labor backlash. On May 30, the bill passed in the National Assembly.

Key to the April 25 mobilizations was NUMSA, which was expelled from the ANC-Communist Party-aligned COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) in 2014 after NUMSA refused to back the ANC in the presidential election. NUMSA initiated what became the SAFTU union confederation in April 2017, which now has 30 affiliates and 800,000 members, second only to COSATU. COSATU did not support the April 25 action.

What apparently began at a small meeting called by a community-based group, according to one participant, long-time activist Trevor Ngame, was joined by NUMSA and SAFTU and other unions and leftist groups. However, the NUMSA role was key. Protest photos show a sea of red, the color of NUMSA T-shirts. Tapping into widespread working-class rage, NUMSA invited all workers, union and non-union, including the unemployed, to join the April 25 actions.

## Neo-liberalism in South Africa

The ANC government overturned apartheid laws in 1994, which was actually desired by big capitalists at the time to free up labor and end international sanctions. However, since the presidency of the ANC's Nelson Mandela, it has followed the economic strategy of the U.S.-dominated World Bank austerity program.

ANC politics were from the outset reformist, not revolutionary. The GEAR program of 1996, during the early Mandela years, was overtly neo-liberal. Heavily influenced by the South African Communist Party (SACP), the ANC pursued the strategy of pursuing a so-called progressive "democratic" revolution, which meant overturning legal apartheid, but committing to capitalism and not working-class rule.

The old white capitalist 1% has been left in power while the Black majority remains mired in poverty. Unemployment hovers around one-third or more of the population. The ANC/COSATU/South African Communist Party tripartite alliance in power became feeding troughs for careerism, corruption, and pro-business sellouts.

A turning point in South African politics was the 2012 massacre of striking miners in Marikana. In 2012, during the strike in Marikana at the Lonmin platinum mine,

Cyril Ramaphosa, the company's executive director, ordered a mop-up operation that led to the deaths of 34 peaceful strikers by ANC cops and company goons. Ramaphosa, despite his past as a union militant, wrote e-mails to Lonmin executives and the ANC minister of police, portraying strikers as "dastardly criminal(s)," and called for "concomitant action" against the unarmed workers. Ramaphosa was nicknamed "the butcher of Marikana."

As a result of the massacre, fissures within the ANC emerged. Adding to the ANC crisis was the corruption of former South African President Jacob Zuma, who posed left at election time but rapidly established himself in 2009 as yet another ANC neo-liberal president. Zuma, who resigned in February of this year, faced an amazing 783 charges of corruption. Even Ramaphosa seemed a welcome relief from Zuma's scandals for many (if naïve) South African voters.

On May Day, both COSATU and SAFTU held their main events in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape within a few blocks of each other. COSATU mobilized, having Ramaphosa scheduled to speak, but could fill only three-quarters of a 10,000-capacity stadium. Meanwhile, at the SAFTU rally, it was standing room only.

## NUMSA calls for new socialist party

On May 1, General Secretary Irwin Jim released a NUMSA statement, which read in part, "On this May Day we cannot ignore the fact that the journey to real political and economic freedom for the Black and African working class is far from over. Today this black government, led by the ANC, and which rose to power because of the sacrifices of the African working-class majority, has itself, become an oppressor of the working class..."

"For as long as the majority of black and African people are still living below the poverty line there is no freedom. The class struggle continues, and therefore NUMSA has no choice but to organize the working class as a class for itself and to crystalize a revolutionary socialist workers party whose mission and task is to fight in the interests of the working class. We must raise working-class levels of consciousness in order to overthrow capitalism. A system of greed will be replaced by a socialist system that advances humanity.

"As NUMSA, we pledge to leave no stone unturned in our struggle to forge the political weapon of the working class: the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party, and to win political power for the working class."

That a mass organization like NUMSA would release a statement calling for building a "Socialist Revolutionary Party" is historic and challenges head-on the bankruptcy of reformism, a strategy that has proven itself a disaster in defending our class against exploitation, racism, sexism, war, poverty, and environmental suicide. The South African workers need our solidarity! Workers of the world unite! ■

# Fred Linck speaks on electoral politics

The campaign to elect Socialist Action candidate Fred Linck to the U.S. Senate is gaining steam. At press time, supporters have gathered over 2500 signatures. On June 2, supporters collected 440 signatures at the Puerto Rican Day Parade in Hartford, Conn. Especially popular was the demand for reparations to Puerto Rico. Demands to jail killer cops and stop all deportations also received strong support

On June 3, Fred Linck spoke at the Left Forum in New York on a panel entitled, "The Way Forward for Independent Left Electoral Politics." His remarks are below.

Over the past decade, interest in socialist ideas and support for socialism has grown dramatically, especially among young people. And now we are beginning to see growing combativity in workplaces. More workers are joining unions; teachers are demonstrating the power of strikes on the national stage.

The choices we in the organized left make about elections matter to these and many other developments of historic significance. At stake are the movements growing today; at stake is the future of the socialist movement. When it comes to these questions, we must be clear, we must not confuse the workers who are just now gathering up the confidence to fight back.

Class is central to politics. And it must be central to our orientation towards parties and elections.

Think about the drive to organize a union. How well would a union drive go if you invited management to meetings? If you gave them votes? If you let them chair? And then if you gave people who came to union meetings a vote based on how much money they could contribute? And then if you put the bosses and owners in charge of running the meetings? How many unions could you organize with this kind of approach?

Obviously, this would make union organizing impossible. When workers organize unions they keep everything secret from management for as long as possible. No one in their right mind even brings up unions in front of bosses. This is because the interests of workers and bosses are in direct opposition to each other. And for the same reasons, working people cannot collaborate with their bosses when organizing on the job; they cannot collaborate with their bosses when they organize politically, either.

Let's think more about why this is. We live in a peculiar historical situation. The majority of people on this earth, and the vast, overwhelming majority of people in this country, cannot access the basic elements of nature we need to live without working for someone else. We work all our lives and generally end up with nothing at our deaths. Working harder does not make us wealthier. But it does enrich our employers. Workers in this country are working much harder now, and for longer hours than 40 years ago, and are, in fact poorer. The rich are, in fact richer.

Production is carried out socially, and on the largest social scale ever witnessed on planet earth. Yet the means of production are owned by individuals. Every year production involves more people and becomes more globally interconnected, and at the same time, the number of people owning the whole operation becomes smaller and smaller. One recent major study found that just a few thousand companies control 80% of the economy, worldwide.

## Parties manage the capitalist state

This peculiar arrangement does not spontaneously reproduce itself like a force of nature. It is not some fundamental expression of humanity. It came into being at most only a few hundred years ago. It can only be maintained, reproduced, and regulated with the aid of a state apparatus—with armies, police, prisons, and courts.

This state apparatus is no more neutral in our society than is the management hierarchy of a workplace. Without these armies, police, prisons, courts, and other instruments of coercion, the whole situation we find ourselves in, in which we have to go to work to live, would not exist. Billions of people don't work for the benefit of a tiny handful for no reason.

This state apparatus is managed by parties. Their whole existence is based on being the best managers of this state and the best at convincing people that it is acting in their interests. In the U.S., the Republican and Democratic Parties run almost everything. Of course, both of these parties would not like you to view them as hardened instruments of giant corporations. Their job is to make the interests and policies of big business look like the interests of everyone.

They would like you to think they're just a bunch of ordinary folks. Especially when working people start to get political. When working people start to radicalize, the Democrats send some of their people around,



telling everyone that the Democratic Party is just an empty car, waiting for someone to step in and take over.

Then we have the truly unfortunate fact that many in the socialist movement are now saying that the Democratic Party is just a ballot line. But this is a party that manages the largest and bloodiest imperialist power in human history. An organization capable of managing such a brutal hierarchy, that effectively serves the interests of the most powerful economic forces on earth, is not an organization that will allow itself to be taken over from the inside.

Of course, if you want to change a party from the inside, then you need credibility in that party, and to do this you need to *build* the party. You have to support its candidates against opposing parties. You have to defend its policies from critics. And, as an outside political force that declares itself hostile to the central interests of the party, you can still be blacklisted, hounded, and expelled, despite maintaining perfect loyalty.

This is exactly what happens when workers' parties try to enter the Democratic Party. They change their own program and activity to suit that of the Democrats. Then they are marginalized and even expelled.

With few exceptions, the Communist Party gave more loyalty to the Democrats in the 1930s, '40s and '50s than any other leftist grouping in the United States. It supported Roosevelt's war aims, it supported internment of Japanese Americans, it organized in support of a no-strike pledge during World War II and even in favor of Roosevelt's plan to conscript labor. The latter actions were opposed even by the conservative trade-union bureaucracy.

But when the Democrats no longer needed their support, they joined the Republicans in putting CP members on trial, and waged an all-out offensive on their movement, from workplaces to entertainment to unions. The results of Communist Party support for Democrats should have settled this question decades ago. Other attempts have been made before and since then, and all have produced defeats for the working class.

This last year provides us with an important reminder of the need for independent working-class leadership. The day after Trump was inaugurated, four million people hit the streets. A week later, tens of thousands stormed the airports to stop the Muslim ban, and they forced a Bush-appointed judge to put the ban on hold.

And yet for months, all the Democrats have done is to channel people into legislative sessions and into an anti-Russia campaign. And in so doing, they are inching people off the streets and into support for another of capital's representatives. But nonetheless, the class struggle refuses to end. And now teachers are striking in numbers not seen since the 1970s, if ever.

## Workers need their own party

To fight on the political field, workers have to have their own political party. Before the creation of such a mass party, what can socialists do in election season? We can run our own candidates. What is the purpose of such campaigns? What does success look like? What does winning look like?

This is a society where the center of power lies in

(Above) Socialist U.S. Senate candidate Fred Linck speaks to hotel workers at the UNITE-HERE Local 217 hall in Stamford, Conn.

the private ownership of property and production, and in the vast unelected bureaucracy of the state machinery, and in the armed bodies of the police and the military, directed by the leadership of officers and generals. Taking seats in some of the few elected offices does not neatly translate into taking power.

For the working class, taking power from their exploiters is a far more comprehensive and challenging process than simply signing petitions and winning votes can encompass. The class struggle takes place on many fronts, though, and the electoral arena—even that arena set up and managed by the capitalist class—is one such front.

## What a socialist campaign can achieve

An electoral campaign offers socialists the opportunity to advance the political consciousness and sophistication of working people. It is an opportunity to counter-pose socialist politics against those of the capitalist parties, to expose the class nature of their parties, and the class nature of society—and most of all, the class nature of the state, and its essential role in the rule of capital. Elections are about who should rule. Socialists can use them to pose the question of which class should rule.

Socialist electoral campaigning opens an opportunity to discuss how to organize as a class rather than as a series of isolated interest groups. And by this we have no desire to displace the many grievances and struggles of the oppressed with a crude class category. To the absolute and unequivocal contrary: Our perspective is to oppose all the many forms of oppression and exploitation that make up this social order, to expose them, to demand their abolition, to show how each one is part of the many-headed hydra of capitalism and how it plays its own vital role maintaining capitalism's existence, and to paint a vision of how the many movements against these evils can join together to overthrow the social order that maintains them.

An electoral campaign is an opportunity to clarify who the enemy is and who the enemy is not. The enemy is the capitalist class and all its institutions and organizations—including its parties. The enemy is not working people of other countries, or from other countries.

At a time when workers—West Virginia teachers—can win a 19% raise across an entire state by their own strike action, it should be clear that what workers need is not some savior in a high place. What they need is the political consciousness required for uniting, expanding, and deepening their struggles.

And at a time when more young people are googling "socialism" and "Marx" every day, the value of explaining socialist ideas to a mass audience could not be clearer.

As the early 20th-century revolutionary socialist leader James P. Cannon put it: "However one may think socialism is going to come to the United States, one thing is sure—it's not going to be smuggled in. ... The cause of socialism can be advanced only by counter-posing it directly to capitalism—simply, honestly, and directly." ■

# A reprieve for death-row prisoner Kevin Cooper?

San Francisco Bayview



By JEFF MACKLER

Executions are scheduled at one minute after midnight at San Quentin Prison, just over the San Rafael Bridge in Marin County and overlooking the San Francisco skyline. On the cold winter night of Feb. 10, 2004, death-row inmate Kevin Cooper was being fully prepped for the hereafter, dressed in a new set of clothes while attendants plied his arm for the proper size veins to inject the deadly chemicals that would end his life.

Outside San Quentin's gate, standing vigil for Kevin, were some 300 supporters from the Kevin Cooper Defense Committee, Death Penalty Focus, and a spate of human rights organizations and activists rallying against the unfolding horror of the state of California's executing an innocent man.

I was on the speaker's platform, as director of the Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, yet another innocent death-row prisoner, and representing activists of Kevin's defense committee. As soon as I stepped down from the platform, I was stunned when actor/activist Mike Farrell, who headed Death Penalty Focus, pocketed his cell phone and announced that Kevin had been granted a stay of execution by the Ninth Circuit of the U.S. District Court of Appeals.

While the stay had been issued hours earlier, prison officials declined to inform Kevin and continued with the routine pre-execution routines, an unmitigated and brutal horror in itself. Kevin was only informed that he would not be executed several minutes before midnight.

Since that stunning moment, Kevin's attorneys from the prestigious law firm of Orrick, Herrington and Sutcliffe have exhausted all appeals. His lead attorney, Norman Hile, has filed a 300-page appeal with California Governor Jerry Brown, requesting a reprieve from Kevin's death-penalty conviction pending new DNA testing that should definitively prove Kevin's innocence. Brown, who for the past two years has declined to respond, now says that Kevin's request is "under consideration."

Were it not for the front page May 20, 2018, *New York Times Sunday Review* article, "Was Kevin Cooper Framed for Murder?" penned by Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial page journalist Nicholas Kristof, it is highly unlikely that Kevin's appeal to Brown would have garnered more attention than the hundreds of similar appeals filed by death-row inmates across the country. But Kristof's championing of Kevin's innocence has today garnered the support of people prominent in public life far beyond the usual anti-death-penalty and human-rights activists on the left.

California's U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris and other public officials have added their names in support of the DNA testing that is central to Kevin's freedom. Harris was formerly California's attorney general, who then refused DNA testing. In recent weeks, however, Harris told Kristof, "I feel awful about this." This was followed by a public statement from Harris, to wit: "As a firm believer in DNA testing, I hope the governor and the state will allow for such testing in the case of Kevin Cooper." The editorial board of the *San Francisco Chronicle* prominently announced support to Kevin's appeal.

Below I have quoted key sections of Kristof's arguments. With few exceptions they describe the same evidence presented by Cooper's attorneys over three and a half decades.

Kristof's arguments are based on his interviews with public officials involved in the case, on detailed examination of the court transcripts, on meetings with Kevin's attorneys and Kevin himself, and with Patrick O'Connor, author of the comprehensive book, "Scapegoat: The Chino Hills Murders and the Framing of Kevin Cooper." (See [www.socialistaction.org](http://www.socialistaction.org) for O'Connor's summary of the case, first printed in the April 2012 edition of *Socialist Action* newspaper). Together they represent a powerful exposé of the racist frame-up trial and conviction that still threaten to take an innocent man's life.

## "A broken justice system"

Kristof's passionate appeal for Kevin Cooper is unmistakable. Here's his opening salvo: "This is the story of a broken justice system. It appears that an innocent man was framed by sheriff's deputies and is on death row in part because of dishonest cops, sensational media coverage and flawed political leaders. ... This was a failure at every level, and it should prompt reflection not just about one man on death row but also about profound inequities in our entire system of justice."

He begins the story: "In 1983 four people were murdered in a home in Chino Hills, Calif. The sole survivor of the attack said three white intruders had committed the murders. Then a woman told the police that her boyfriend, a white convicted murderer, was probably involved, and she gave deputies his bloody coveralls. So here's what the sheriff's deputies did: They threw away the bloody coveralls and arrested a young black man named Kevin Cooper."

"The first sign that something was wrong was a continuous busy signal on the home phone of Doug and Peggy Ryen. Bill Hughes, who lived nearby, wasn't initially concerned. His 11-year-old son, Chris, had slept over at the Ryens' and he thought maybe they had all gone out for breakfast. But finally at noon Hughes drove over to pick Chris up and, when no one answered the Ryens' door, he peered through the sliding glass doors—and his brain couldn't process all the red. 'This is paint, makeup,' he thought wildly.

"Then reality sank in, and he kicked the kitchen door in. Blood from the five victims was splattered everywhere. Hughes rushed to his son, but the body was cold. Doug and Peggy Ryen, both nude, had also been stabbed to death, and the bloody corpse of their 10-year-old daughter, Jessica, was in a doorway. But Josh Ryen, 8 years old, was moving feebly on the floor even though his throat had been slashed and his skull fractured.

"Soon sheriff's deputies were swarming all over the Ryen house. ... Several signs, including Josh's personal account, pointed to three white attackers, and blond or brown hairs were found in the victims' hands, as if torn off in a struggle.

"Sheriff's deputies were also contacted by the woman whose boyfriend was a convicted murderer, recently released from prison, whom she suspected of involvement in the Ryen killings. She not only gave deputies

his bloody coveralls but also told them that his hatchet was missing from his tool rack and resembled one of the weapons reportedly used in the attacks. But instead of testing the coveralls for the Ryens' blood, the deputies threw them away—and pursued [Kevin] Cooper. After a racially charged trial, he was convicted of murdering the Ryens and Chris Hughes."

Kristof pointed out that when sheriff's deputies had learned that Kevin Cooper had recently escaped from a nearby minimum security prison, they decided to ignore the evidence that tended to implicate the three white men. "They examined Cooper's file and mug shot and saw a black man with a huge Afro who fit their narrative of an incorrigible criminal. He had a long arrest record dating back to when he was 7 years old. ... Still, the authorities had a problem: Although they were sure Cooper was the killer, they couldn't find fingerprints, hairs or other evidence implicating him. So evidence began to turn up in mysterious ways.

"Consider the Ryens' station wagon. It was found in Long Beach, 30 miles away, and inconveniently had blood on the driver's seat, the front passenger seat and the back seat — suggesting at least three killers. A bloody hatchet was also found near the Ryen house, probably thrown out of the station wagon window—on the passenger side.

"A thorough search of the station wagon found no evidence that Cooper had used the car. That problem was remedied when a second search of the vehicle turned up some of Cooper's cigarette butts; sheriff's deputies had found such cigarette butts in the empty [nearby] house where he had stayed, [after he walked through a hole in the prison fence], but the butts had vanished.

"The prosecution suggested that Cooper wanted to steal the station wagon. But the Ryens kept the keys in the car; there was no need to enter the house. Nevertheless, four days after the discovery of the murders, the sheriff announced the crime had been solved: Cooper was being sought for murder."

Kristof points out that "while the police were desperately trying to connect Cooper to the crime, another man who should have been a prime suspect was not being investigated. ... Fletcher, the federal judge, wrote a long section in a judicial opinion implicating this man, whom I'll identify only by his first name, Lee. It was his girlfriend, Diana Roper, who had alerted deputies after the murders made the news to the reasons she believed that he had participated in the Ryen murders.

"Roper and her sister said that Lee came home late on the night of the killings in a station wagon like that of the Ryens, wearing blood-drenched coveralls, and that his hatchet was missing from his tool rack and resembled one of the murder weapons described by authorities. She said that on the day of the killing she had laid out for Lee a medium-size tan Fruit of the Loom T-shirt with a pocket; she remembered because she had just bought it for Lee at Kmart. It was exactly like a Fruit of the Loom T-shirt found by the bar with blood on it; testing showed it was the Ryens' blood.

Roper said in an affidavit: "Lee was wearing long sleeve coveralls ... splattered with blood. ... He did not have the beige T-shirt. Lee took the coveralls off and left them on the floor of the closet. ... Roper gave deputies the bloody coveralls. But instead of testing them to see if the blood was from the Ryens, the sheriff's office threw them out."

Kristof reported that a new witness has emerged who saw the station wagon the day after the murders with three white people inside. She has said that she would testify under oath that the driver was driving crazily and almost crashed into her car. Her grandmother wrote down the license plate number, and after authorities broadcast on the radio the license number of the missing vehicle, they compared the numbers and "it was exactly the same." She said that she wrote to the police with her information, but the authorities did not follow it up or share it with the defense.

## Behind the cover-up

"With all these uninvestigated threads," Kristof writes, "it's worth considering the motives of the San Bernardino sheriff's office, which handled the investigation. Sheriff Floyd Tidwell had recently been appointed to his position and was facing election that year, adding to the pressure to solve the most brutal crime in the county's memory. It's clear that the sheriff's office wasn't a stickler for rules. Tidwell was later convicted for stealing more than 500 guns from county evidence rooms.

"A lab technician who 'found' shoe print evidence [now discredited] against Cooper was later fired for stealing heroin from the evidence room. The sheriff's office also bungled the forensics, so that 70 people trampled through the crime scene. Then, a day after the bodies were discovered, the district attorney closed the on-scene investigation for fear, he said, of gathering so much evidence that defense experts could spin complicated theories."

(continued on page 9)



# ... Teachers

(continued from page 3)

Nicknamed the RAT law after its initiators, N.Y. State Senate and House leaders Nelson Rockefeller and Anthony Travia, the law, still in effect today, provided for fining striking teachers in the amount of “overtime in reverse,” that is, the forced deduction from teacher paychecks of a day and half pay for every day teachers struck!

Weingarten’s proclamations about Occupy notwithstanding, the AFT leadership has always supported the candidates and party of the “one percent.” And it was Obama’s Democratic party that engineered the wars in the Middle East aimed at setting back the Arab Spring in order to re-impose the dictatorships that the Arab Spring mobilizations sought to challenge in Libya and Egypt.

In the same vein, Lily Eskelsen García, NEA national president, proclaimed her union’s intention “to mobilize and keep a focus on legislators who are now backtracking on their promises.” She added, “We won’t be fooled.”

Her reference here was to state legislators in Oklahoma who have already repealed taxes on hotel and motels that were passed to pay for teachers’ raises. In Tucson, Ariz., teachers are finding out that due to previously unknown state funding formulas they won’t be receiving the 9 percent raise that they were promised when they ended their strike.

## Important but still limited teacher victories

Teachers have won some significant pay raises for themselves and other state employees. They have solidified support for their cause by championing and winning school funding increases, but their grievances have not been fully addressed. Oklahoma passed its first tax hike in 28 years to raise \$450 million in new education funding, but legislators balked at reinstating a capital gains tax they demanded. Instead, the state approved new regressive taxes on cigarettes, oil, and gas that primarily are paid by working people and not the wealthy.

In Arizona, teacher pay will be raised 20 percent by 2020, but the legislature has refused to restore school funding to pre-recession levels. The state has yet to come up with a plan for paying for the raises, and teachers fear that their pay hikes will accrue from state budget funds earmarked for Medicaid and other social services accounts.

It is fair to say that round one in the emerging national battle initiated by outraged and united teachers has been a resounding but far from definitive victory for teachers and their allied school workers and students. The coming school year will reveal whether a class-struggle leadership core will emerge, crystal-



Marti Maguire / Reuters

(Above) North Carolina teachers demonstrate in Raleigh on May 16.

ize, and make its mark locally and nationally in the now radicalizing teacher-union movement.

## Oakland teachers invite “red state” allies

A positive indication of a shift in this direction is the initiative of the leadership of the Oakland Education Association in Northern California. OEA leaders have set Saturday, June 9, for a regional teachers’ meeting at Oakland Technical High School. Entitled “Lessons from the Red State Rebellion: What Can California Learn?” the free public forum is co-sponsored by the San Francisco United Educators, the Berkeley and Richmond teachers’ unions and the community college-based Peralta Federation of Teachers.

The organizers have secured an auditorium with a capacity of 800 to hear reports from their teacher peers in West Virginia, Arizona and Kentucky states where rank-and-file teachers, including a number of organized socialists, played a leading role preparing the organizational and political groundwork in the year leading up to their successful statewide strikes.

It is no coincidence that the OEA leadership initiated this meeting. This often militant union has engaged in five major strikes over the past decades, likely the largest number in the nation’s history. The June 9 meeting takes place in the context of the union’s leadership having declared an impasse in their negotiations with the Oakland Unified School District, thus opening the door to the possibility of a sixth strike in the months ahead.

Oakland school funding is usually near the bottom of national levels; its schools are highly segregated, its teachers and non-teaching personnel underpaid, while its administrative staff is swollen with “professionals” who believe that their already bloated sala-

ries need to keep pace with the “private sector.”

The direct and organized cross fertilization of fighting “red state teachers” flush with important victories with beleaguered “blue state” San Francisco Bay Area teachers and staff bodes well for future coordinated California or nationwide struggles, a first in a state whose Democrats totally dominate the state legislature and endlessly tout California as “the fifth richest ‘nation’ in the world.” But California’s Gross Domestic Product aside, the “blue state’s” educational system ranks among the lowest in student achievement levels, and its teacher salaries—relative to the cost of living in the area—are not much different from that of their “red state” sisters and brothers.

## Need for trade-union-based labor party

Teacher power exercised in the streets at state and regional levels, if not nationally, coupled with their independent organization in the political arena through a fighting trade-union-based labor party inclusive of the broad labor movement and its allies among the oppressed nationalities, would represent a historic and permanent gain for working people across the country. Such a political class break from the twin parties of capitalist war, racism, and plunder can only emerge from the kind of fighting formations we have witnessed among teachers over the past year.

They have taught some invaluable lessons that will not be lost on the rest of the organized labor movement and on the yet to be organized militant working-class forces that will inevitably enter the class-struggle road in the period ahead. ■



BBC

(Above) Crowds celebrate at Dublin Castle following the May 25 vote in Ireland to overturn the country’s ban on abortion. By a margin of 66.4% to 33.6%, the referendum approved repealing the Eighth Amendment of the constitution, which grants an equal right to life for both the mother and the fetus.

Socialist Democracy, the sympathizing organization of the Fourth International in Ireland, said prior to the referendum: “The dangers come after the vote. The removal of the Eighth Amendment will be a terrible blow to the Church. However this is a blow they have long prepared for. The momentum of the repeal campaign, run largely within constituency

boundaries, is towards the Dail [parliament], and this is a terrain where reactionary forces have the advantage. The strategy will be to fight on the issue of a 12-week window for abortion, to tie in chains a million other restrictions beyond that and to build in a freedom of conscience clause for medical staff that will lead to a long guerrilla war in the health service, in which working-class women will be the casualties. ...

“In the aftermath of the repeal vote we will need to mobilise to insist on the right to choose and to link that right to the more general restriction of workers’ rights caused by the influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society.”

# ... Kevin Cooper

(continued from page 8)

“Cooper’s trial unfolded amid the ugliest racism. At a hearing, a crowd displayed signs reading “Hang the Nigger. One man displayed a noose around a stuffed gorilla. Newspapers carried inaccurate reports, apparently based on prosecution leaks, that tied Cooper to the murder scene and suggested falsely that he was gay (seizing upon 1980s homophobia as well as racism).

After the Ninth Circuit granted the 2004 stay of execution, Kristof writes, “Cooper was now permitted to conduct a new test on the tan T-shirt, and this time the labs found something extraordinary. Yes, that may have been Cooper’s blood on it—but the blood had a chemical preservative called EDTA in it. That suggested that the blood came not from Cooper directly but from a test tube of his blood. Sure enough, the sheriff’s deputies had taken a sample of Cooper’s blood and had kept it in a test tube with EDTA.

“Now the lab checked a swatch of blood from that test tube. More wonders! The test tube miraculously contained the blood of two or more people. This indicated that the sheriff’s office may have used the test tube of Cooper’s blood to frame him, and then topped off the test tube with someone else’s blood.”

Kristof notes, “The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals en banc refused to hear an appeal by Cooper, but [Judge William A.] Fletcher wrote a remarkable 100-page dissent, con-

cluding, “The State of California may be about to execute an innocent man.” Four judges joined in this extraordinary judicial opinion. Likewise, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found in 2015 that there had been profound flaws in the case and called for a review. The deans of four law schools and the president of the American Bar Association expressed concerns. At the end of his term in office, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger urged a “thorough and careful review” of the case.”

I have visited Kevin Cooper at San Quentin a number of times over the past decades and toured his biographer, J. Patrick O’Connor, who tirelessly campaigned for Kevin’s freedom. He has matured from a relatively non-political person to a passionate and informed fighter for human and democratic rights and social justice as well as a talented artist/painter.

Kevin is currently awaiting the outcome of various legal struggles and expected appeals regarding the constitutional validity of California’s 2016 voter-approved death-penalty ballot initiative. If the legal challenges fail, Kevin stands in first in line to be executed. Yet the national prominence given to his case by the recent Nicholas Kristof *Times* article has once again brought his struggle for life and freedom to the forefront of national politics.

Add your voice to Kevin’s cause. Contact Governor Jerry Brown to demand the DNA testing that will prove Kevin’s innocence. Demand that Brown grant Kevin Cooper clemency now! ■

# Northern Lights

News and views from SA Canada

website: <http://socialistaction.ca>

## No to Ottawa's purchase of Trans-Mountain pipeline

By BARRY WEISLEDER and GARY PORTER

**Q:** When should workers oppose nationalization of an industry?

**A:** When it is a bail-out of a nature-destroying, Indigenous rights violating, ruthlessly greedy corporation.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's decision on May 29 to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline is that, and much worse. While the Liberal federal government can't come up with the cash to ensure clean drinking water in Indigenous communities, or to provide free, quality public childcare, free post-secondary education, pharma care, and dental care for all, it had no trouble finding \$4.6 billion to purchase the existing pipeline and related properties of Texas-based Kinder Morgan. (KM paid a mere \$550 million for the works in 2007.)

Completion of the pipeline expansion, to triple its capacity to move the dirtiest oil on Earth from Alberta to the British Columbia sea coast, will cost about \$7.4 billion, and rising—plus the price of any further delay.

The bill is certain to climb well above \$13 billion—without even taking into account what it will cost to clean up any spilled diluted bitumen, which is heavier and stickier than standard crude. Bitumen will not float on the ocean's surface; it leeches out over

decades, poisoning marine life of all kinds. Think of, instead, what could be done with \$7.4 billion to create sustainable green energy alternatives to carbon-emitting power sources. Trudeau's decision exposes the sham of his environmental and "Indigenous reconciliation" policies. It may cost him the 2019 federal election.

But far worse is what it will cost the working class and humanity as a whole. Workers will pay for the austerity measures necessitated by Trudeau's bail-out of Kinder Morgan and his build-up of a nature-wrecking Crown Corporation. And everyone will suffer from the catastrophic effects of extreme weather and further climate change.

There will be a huge loss of food, loss of ocean and land habitat for countless species, more mass migration of climate refugees, and escalating wars fought over increasingly scarce vital resources around the world.

Remember, in this context: 1) Pipeline construction jobs are fleeting. 2) There are no jobs under 10 meters of seawater.

Instead of nationalizing Kinder Morgan, which is reminiscent of Ottawa's prodigal bail-out of General Motors and Chrysler a decade ago, what should the government do? Expropriate the oil and gas giants, starting with Suncor Energy, Imperial Oil, Husky Energy, Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., and Syncrude Canada. There can be no



question of compensation for these pirates.

The clean-up of the massive waste pools at Fort McMurray will cost more than all the royalties ever earned by Alberta on the Tar Sands. In July 2016 the regulator estimated that the toxic ponds cover more than 220 square kilometres and contain more than 1.2 trillion litres of contaminated water. Toxic materials include bitumen, naphthenic acids, cyanide, and heavy metals. They pose a threat to wildlife and release air pollutants and greenhouse gases. Research suggests these substances are leaching into groundwater.

If the expropriated assets do not cover the massive clean-up, sue the corporate directors for the difference. If there is anything left after the clean up, invest it in green energy generation (solar, wind, tidal waters, geo-thermal). Rapidly phase out the Alberta Tar Sands development while implement-

ing a re-training transition plan that leaves no energy worker behind.

Clearly, the working class can count on no capitalist government to carry out such measures. Nor can we count on the courts, like the BC NDP government does, to pursue such a course. The harsh treatment of protesters by the prosecutor and the judge in Burnaby, B.C., proves this once again.

The best prescription by far is mass political action in the streets and work places. That is the way major advances have been achieved by labour, women, LGBTQI folks, oppressed nations, students, and the environmental movements for 100s of years.

By organizing democratic, united-front campaigns, and taking to the streets, workers and our allies can stop the expansion of the Trans Mountain line. Most of all, we can preserve the hope of a habitable and more just world. ■

## Global debt hits \$164 trillion

By BARRY WEISLEDER

The world's debt load has ballooned to a record \$164 trillion, a trend that could make it harder for countries to cope with the next capitalist recession and pay off debts if financing conditions tighten, the International Monetary Fund said in April.

Global public and private debt swelled to 225 per cent of global gross domestic product in 2016, the latest year for IMF figures, according to its semi-annual Fiscal Monitor report. The previous debt peak was in 2009.

The IMF is an international body based in Washington, D.C., of 189 countries. It claims to be "working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world." But its behaviour tells a different story.

Formed in 1945 at the Bretton Woods Conference, in line with the ideas of Harry Dexter White and John Maynard Keynes, it started with 29 member countries and the goal of reconstructing the International payment system.

It now plays a central role in the management of balance of payments difficulties and international financial crises. Countries contribute funds to a pool through a quota system from which countries experiencing balance of payments problems can borrow to buy essentials and meet payroll. As of 2016, the fund had about \$668 billion.

But in order to borrow from that fund, "conditionalities" must be met. The latter often require severe cuts to social expenditures and public sector employment, plus major

concessions to private capital, especially to foreign investors operating in poor and less developed economies.

The IMF forecast expansion of 3.9 per cent in 2018 and 2019, while saying that in subsequent years the global economy could be impacted by tighter monetary policy and the shrinking effects of U.S. spending.

Surging private-sector debt, particularly in China, is driving the buildup. China is responsible for almost three-quarters of the increase in private debt since the financial crisis, according to the IMF. Its report reveals the debt hangover from which the capitalist world is still recovering—a decade after the global banking system went to the brink, triggering a deep recession. Governments increased spending to boost growth, while central banks resorted to unconventional methods to ease financial conditions, such as buying bonds—in effect, printing huge sums of money.

Now the focus is on "recalibrating" fiscal policy to reduce debt-to-GDP levels. Welcome to the austerity agenda—social cutbacks, precarious work, no benefits, de-regulation of the natural environment and privatization of public assets.

Why? Make the working class and the impoverished pay for the irrational, violent, and wasteful capitalist order.

Those at the top of the income pyramid will do better, while the "hollowing out" of the so-called middle class continues apace. Liberals pledge to help the squeezed "middle." Right-wing populists talk about opposing the elites, but they follow their policies aggressively. The challenge to the left is to fight austerity and, at the same time, to target the system that fosters it. ■

## Commuted value: A pension pitfall

By BRUCE ALLEN

In 2012 auto contract negotiations at Ford, then General Motors, convinced Unifor to give retiring workers the option of taking the commuted value or lump sum equivalent of their defined benefit pensions instead of receiving a monthly defined benefit pension for the rest of their own and their spouse's lifetime. Since then a growing proportion of the workforce at GM has decided to choose that option.

Many workers see no problem with this. They welcome getting a choice between an immediate large sum of money versus a defined monthly pension for the rest of their days, or the life of a surviving spouse. But little is being said about the many problems that develop when growing numbers of workers opt to take the commuted value of their defined benefit pensions. The most obvious one is the possibility that the lump sum will be quickly spent, thus leaving a retired worker and his or her spouse with no retirement income beyond poor government pensions.

Other consequences arise when growing numbers of workers opt to take the commuted value of their defined benefit pensions. It generates a big windfall for employers who get to unload the "legacy costs" associated with defined benefit pensions. Indeed, Unifor facilitated this rising windfall for the bosses without getting anything in return. That regressive move reinforced a trend to undermine defined benefit pensions by agreeing to defined contribution pensions for new hires.

A less obvious problem occurs when growing numbers of retiring workers take the commuted value option: it typically goes together with another choice. The other choice is to start working for a new employer in order to continue to earn a wage—which very often is a minimum wage job.

What's wrong with this? Autoworkers fought in 1950 to win defined benefit pensions so that they have an income for life sufficient to live on without having to work. It

means the commuted value option is facilitating a situation where a great many "retired" autoworkers see a financial need to work for years and years after leaving the auto industry. Significantly, this compounds the effect of the Ontario legislation that ended mandatory retirement at age 65. When employees work until they die, it greatly benefits employers.

The commuted value option also has the effect of severing the relationship of large numbers of autoworkers with the union that first negotiated defined benefit pensions in 1950.

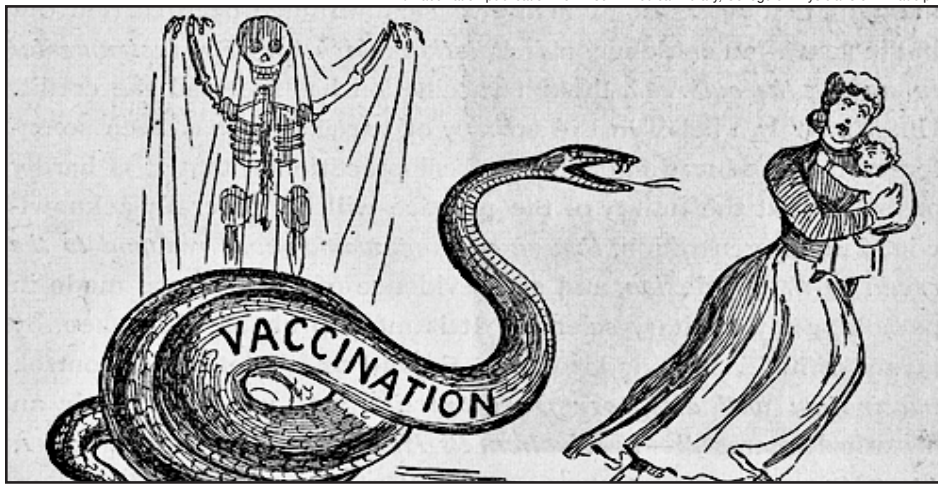
Workers who take the commuted value of their defined benefit pensions rather than a monthly pension benefit have no option to have their retired members' union dues automatically deducted from a monthly pension benefit. Absent this provision, very few workers opting to take the commuted value make the effort necessary to go to a union hall to pay union dues. Consequently, they stop being members in good standing of their union. Thus, taking the commuted value option usually becomes synonymous with effectively ceasing to be part of the life of the union.

This is a prescription for the eventual disappearance of viable retired workers' chapters. Nearly every functioning retired workers' chapter in Unifor is comprised of autoworkers with defined benefit pensions. Eliminate defined benefit pensions and retired workers' chapters will vanish. Furthermore, insofar as retired workers' chapters are invaluable reservoirs of history and experience within a union like Unifor, that history and experience will stop being readily available to active workers who could benefit greatly from it.

These features define the context and implications of the commuted value option in auto. They show that its widespread acceptance in Canada's auto industry contributes to the ongoing retreat of Unifor as a social and economic force that draws its strength from both active and retired members. Unions should be focused on building on past gains, like defined benefit pensions, not helping them to disappear. ■

# What's behind the anti-vaccine movement?

Anti-vaccination publication from 1894 / Medical Library, College of Physicians of Philadelphia



Routine childhood vaccination is one of the cornerstones of modern public health. Evidence points to its major role in improving health by a dramatic reduction in the incidence of infectious diseases that formerly caused significant illness and death.

Yet, as any nurse or physician delivering primary care can tell you, there is a small but significant number of parents who refuse vaccines for their children. Vaccines are suspect because they are not “natural.” Scientific and medical authority have been eroded. There is widespread criticism of the pharmaceutical industry that produces the vaccines. The claim of a link between the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism has frightened many people even if the claim has been de-bunked.

Opposition to vaccines springs from religious, anti-scientific or anti-elitist sentiment. Such opposition goes back to the time when vaccines were first introduced experimentally in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Today's anti-vaccine movement has a long pedigree.

Modern vaccines have mild side effects and, rarely, an allergic or other significant reaction. It is not possible to exclude adverse consequences that have not yet come to light. However, based on current evidence, involving rigorous testing, large-scale studies, and years of experience across an entire population, vaccines are overwhelmingly beneficial and without significant risk.

British gastroenterologist Andrew Wakefield claimed to show a link between the MMR vaccine and autism in a study published in *The Lancet* in 1998. The study was widely publicised and led to a decline in vaccine uptake followed by outbreaks of measles. Further studies failed to duplicate Wakefield's findings. After it was found that he had falsified data, his article was retracted by the prestigious medical journal, and in 2010, he was struck off the UK medical register.

Wakefield has continued his campaign to indict MMR as a cause of autism, declaring himself a victim of a conspiracy by the medical establishment. Recently, he directed a film entitled “Vaxxed” (2016), in which he is interviewed at

length along with parents whose children developed autism apparently after receiving the vaccine. The film appeals to the emotions, presents no convincing evidence, and implies a secret conspiracy involving medical bodies, the pharmaceutical industry, and epidemiologists to hide the truth.

Autism appears to be on the rise. Whether this is because of increased reporting and an expanded criterion for diagnosis or a genuine increase in incidence is unclear. The cause of autism is unknown but suspected to be multi-factorial with a strong familial predisposition based on a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

In the case of the proponents of an autism-MMR connection, we have crossed the line from doubts or apprehension to fixed beliefs that are actually anti-scientific and trade in emotional manipulation, fraudulent claims and conspiracy theories.

How should socialists approach anti-vaccine beliefs and anti-Vaxx campaigners who hope to recruit to their cause? For example, is there a case to be made for obligatory vaccination in childhood?

We can start by posing the issue of children's rights. Parents who refuse vaccination are denying their children an important health benefit that may have consequences later in life. Babies and toddlers cannot give informed consent.

Secondly, parents who do not vaccinate

are getting a “free ride” from families that do vaccinate their children. A high vaccine uptake creates so-called “herd immunity” protecting the small minority who are not vaccinated. A fall-off in vaccination rates below a critical threshold will result in a return of infectious disease in the community that puts vulnerable persons at risk.

Thirdly, there are situations involving epidemics or other health emergencies in which public health considerations override civil liberties. Measures such as compulsory treatment, quarantine, and restrictions on the right to travel might be justified. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is such an instance.

Finally, vaccination is a social, not an individual, question. In other words, we have to resolve questions collectively rather than defer to individual choice. Resort to mandatory vaccination therefore cannot be ruled out in principle.

However, coercion would be counterproductive in the current situation, with a risk of driving people into the anti-vaccine camp. Refusal to vaccinate does not at present constitute a public health emergency. What is required is reasoned explanation of the case for vaccination in the expectation that the proportion who are immunised can be maintained above the critical threshold.

Let's remember, as well, that coercive and punitive measures can be part of a reactionary agenda. For example, the

withholding of social assistance to families who refuse or neglect to vaccinate their children or barring entry to day care for unvaccinated children have been proposed by right-wing governments in Australia.

We should not encourage blind obedience to medical authority, and there needs to be acknowledgement of the pharmaceutical industry's influence on medical practice. However, under-vaccination and infectious disease outbreaks continue to be a public health problem in the global South. In richer capitalist countries, like Canada, there is underfunding of vaccines by governments looking to cut costs.

Socialists should defend free mass vaccination and argue further for public ownership of the drug industry under democratic control. That is the way to resolve questions of safety, efficacy, and access in a way that is transparent to all.

The fraudulent claims and irrational arguments of the anti-vaccine zealots need to be challenged. However, it would be wrong to suppress the anti-vaccine movement by denying them a platform. We cannot leave it to the medical experts to decide what arguments can and cannot be heard. And we should have confidence that ordinary working people can sort out the questions being debated.

New Zealand socialist James Robb expresses this class perspective on contentious health-care issues rather well: “It is not trust in the medical profession that the working class needs. It is trust in *scientific evidence* ... trust in their own judgement and above all trust in *their own power* to effect changes in society. When the working class gains such self-confidence and begins to act independently of the bourgeoisie and its professional appendages, it will find many medical workers and professionals are fighting by its side.”\*

\*“Why ‘Vaxxed’ gets a hearing and why defence of vaccination can't be left to doctors,” *A Communist at Large*, June 5, 2017.

Robbie Mahood is a member of *Ligue pour l'action socialiste* in Montreal and a semi-retired family physician.

## ... Gaza slaughter

(continued from page 12)

class citizens. In the occupied West Bank, Israel is creating the facts on the ground for annexation, in violation of international law. Construction of illegal settlements on confiscated Palestinian land continues, despite condemnation by the international community. Settler attacks on Palestinians go unpunished. Settlers have dumped garbage and toxic waste on Palestinian land. Rightist Israeli politicians openly advocate the expulsion or “transfer” of Palestinians and the annexation of the West Bank and Golan Heights.

Conditions in Gaza are dire. Israel has enforced a blockade of the area for years, creating what many call an “open-air prison” or a concentration camp. Residents of Gaza lack clean drinking water, access to education, adequate food supplies, and medicine. Electrical service is only available for a few hours daily. Ninety-six percent of drinking water is unfit for human consumption. Forty-five percent of children in Gaza suffer from anemia, and malnutrition is widespread.

The lockdown of Gaza has resulted in an unemployment rate of more than 45 percent, the highest in the world. Youth unemployment exceeds 60 percent. As a result of Israeli attacks over the years, the city is a maze of ruins.

Security zones in Gaza, established by the Israelis, have barred farmers access to one-third of Gaza's arable land. Entering these zones is punishable by death, as Israeli troops can attack with impunity. Fishing off the coast of Gaza is also restricted by Israel, with fishing boats regularly attacked by Israeli naval vessels. The Egyptian government, in collusion with the Zionist state, restricts access to and from Gaza at the Rafah crossing into Sinai. In short, Israeli policy has rendered Gaza uninhabitable.

Now is the time to redouble efforts to build solidarity with the legitimate national liberation struggle of the

Palestinian people. Israel's continued violence against the Palestinian people must be rejected. Claims by apologists for the Zionist state, including the capitalist media, that there is “violence on both sides” ignore the imbalance between a people resisting occupation and the violence of the most heavily armed military power in the region.

The capitalist media are complicit in U.S. imperialist support for Israel. Media reporting excuses Israeli violence by referring to “clashes” and “conflict” at the Gaza border. As the watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) noted, “The term ‘clash’ is almost always used to launder power asymmetry and give the reader the impression of two equal warring sides. It obscures power dynamics and the nature of the conflict itself.”

A statement released by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) places responsibility for the violence squarely on the United States and Israel: “The Trump administration has given the green light to the right-wing Zionist government of Israel by declaring that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and by moving the U.S. embassy there. This has led to increased repression for the Palestinian people, ranging from more arrests of children like Ahed Tamimi to the massacres of unarmed protesters in Gaza. But this joint U.S./Israeli aggression does not end with Palestine: In recent days, we have witnessed major Israeli missile attacks on Syria following U.S. missile attacks.”

### Two states or one?

For many years, a section of the Palestinian movement, under pressure of the imperialist powers, accepted the notion of a “two state” solution based on Palestinian recognition of Israel's right to exist and the formation of a mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza. Even some on the left push the idea of two coexistent “socialist” states. However, the Israeli government has done everything in its power to create the conditions for the annexation of remaining Palestinian territory.

It's increasingly clear that any sort of “two-state so-

lution” is not viable.

Revolutionary socialists support the right to self-determination of oppressed nationalities. Support for the demand for a democratic secular Palestine, with equal rights for all, is not a concession to bourgeois nationalism. Rather, it is a part of a revolutionary strategy encompassing the whole Middle East.

Writing in 1990, Tony Greenstein described the social dynamic that would be unleashed by the advance of the Palestinian national movement: “... because of the configuration of forces in the Middle East, with the U.S. propping up the majority of Arab regimes as well as Israel, and because of the hostility of those regimes to the Palestine revolution, it is inconceivable that the overthrow of Zionism could be achieved outside of general social revolution in the Arab East, which at the very least would pose the question of capitalism's existence in the region” (*Khamsin Bulletin* #9).

Broad, united front, Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns, aimed at isolating the Israeli state, can help force a change in the balance of forces. Support for BDS actions, like the campaign to stop the Philadelphia Orchestra's trip to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel, can raise public awareness and increase support for the Palestinian people. Similarly, campaigns to stop cooperation programs between Israeli security forces and U.S. police forces can help build alliances against state violence here and in Palestine.

Labor action against apartheid is also essential. The Tunisia General Labour Union is threatening to refuse to unload U.S. ships. Dockworkers around the globe could play an essential role in the struggle by “hot cargoing” U.S. and Israeli products.

Stop the violence against Gaza and end the blockade! Free all Palestinian prisoners, including the more than 400 children! For the right of Palestinians to return! End all military and economic aid to Israel!

Stop Israeli training of U.S. police forces! End the slanders against the BDS movement! For a democratic secular Palestine, with equal rights for all!

## Israel slaughters 65 protesters in Gaza

John Leslie / Socialist Action



By JOHN LESLIE

The Great Return March culminated on May 15, the 70th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel, known to the Palestinian people as the Nakba (catastrophe). Israel hit Gaza with air strikes and tank fire, claiming to be targeting Hamas positions.

A day earlier, a mass mobilization of more than 100,000 Palestinians took place on the border between Gaza and Israel. Israeli occupation forces opened fire on protesters with live rounds and tear gas, killing 65 and wounding more than 2400. Among the dead were at least 10 teenagers and an eight-month-old baby, Laila Anwar al-Ghandour, who died from exposure to tear gas. One of the wounded was a Canadian doctor, Tarek Loubani, who was shot while treating the wounded. Dr. Loubani was clearly marked as a doctor.

The Gaza border protests began on March 30 with a protest of more than 30,000. On that day, 23 were killed and more than 1400 wounded. In over six weeks of mass protests, at least 115 protesters were killed and more than 9000 wounded by either exposure to tear gas or gunshot wounds.

The Committee to Protect Journalists reports that 20 journalists were wounded by Israeli fire, with two others, Yaser Murtaja and Ahmed Abu Hussein, killed while covering the protests. No Israelis have been killed or wounded during any of these protests.

Palestine solidarity activists around the world responded to the May 14 Gaza massacre with protests. In Philadelphia, more than 200 marched from City Hall to the Kimmel Center concert hall, protesting the Philadelphia Orchestra's decision to play in the apartheid state. In London, tens of thousands marched. Large protests were held in South Africa, New York,

New Delhi, and Paris.

At the same time that Israeli forces were mowing down unarmed protesters, U.S. President Trump's daughter, Ivanka Trump, and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, represented the president at the opening of the new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem. The decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem signals Washington's endorsement of the illegal Israeli annexation of the city seized during the 1967 Six Day War.

The decision has bipartisan support, with Democrat Chuck Schumer and others endorsing the move. This action is an admission that the U.S. is not, and never has been, a fair or impartial arbiter between Israel and the Palestinians. The number two Democrat in the House of Representatives, Steny Hoyer, defended the border violence on May 15, saying, "Israel's in a tough situation. It's trying to defend its borders," while labeling the unarmed protesters as terrorists.

During the ceremony marking the opening of the embassy, Kushner praised Israel, stating, "We stand with Israel because we both believe in human rights, democracy worth defending, and believe that we know that it is the right thing to do." Outside of the ceremony, unarmed Palestinian protesters were beaten by Israeli security forces as Israelis, on hand to celebrate the embassy opening, chanted, "Burn them, shoot them, kill them." Many U.S. allies were conspicuously absent from the ceremony. On Tuesday, Turkey expelled the Israeli ambassador and withdrew its envoy from Israel.

During a session of the UN Security Council, called in response to the border violence, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley defended Israeli violence against Gaza protesters, claiming that Israel acted with "restraint." Haley walked out of the Security Council meeting as the Palestinian representative rose to speak.

(Above) May 14 march in Philadelphia to protest Israel's massacre of Gaza protesters.

The U.S. vetoed a Security Council call for an independent investigation of the Gaza violence. U.S. support for the Gaza massacre has isolated Washington from some of its allies in Europe and elsewhere, whose governments have condemned the violence. Avigdor Lieberman, the racist Israeli defense minister, rejected criticism and calls for an independent inquiry into the violence, stating, "Our soldiers deserve a commendation."

In a public statement, Doctors Without Borders, whose medical volunteers have been working tirelessly to treat the wounded, said, "This bloodbath is the continuation of the Israeli army's policy during the last seven weeks: shooting with live ammunition at demonstrators, on the assumption that anyone approaching the separation fence is a legitimate target. Most of the wounded will be condemned to suffer lifelong injuries."

### Dispossession and ethnic cleansing

In the 1948 Nakba, the Israelis forced more than 700,000 Palestinians into exile, driving them from their homes and denying their right to return to the place of their birth. Israel, a colonial-settler state, was born of violence and ethnic cleansing. The Zionist nationalist ideology asserted the Jewish people's right to Palestine based on the myth that Palestine was a "land without a people for a people without a land," essentially erasing the Palestinian people and their historic claims to the land.

Israel's Palestinian citizens (so-called Arab Israelis living inside the 1948 border) are treated as second-

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