

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

1961 literacy drive in Cuba
'transformed working people'
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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

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Hiring upturn can lead to advance in workers' unity

BY TERRY EVANS

"A new milestone" has been reached in a nine-year capitalist economic expansion, proclaimed the *Wall Street Journal* Nov. 29. But the last nine years haven't felt like that for the toiling majority, as working-class living standards have been slashed, millions driven out of the workforce and more workers have been hit by a spreading social crisis.

Workers could use an expansion in hiring. And there are indications an uptick is underway in capitalist production and trade. What the government calls gross domestic product is growing at the fastest rate in three years. One gauge of this is the rise of the Baltic Dry shipping index, considered a leading indicator of economic growth. It was up to 1,578 points Nov. 30 from an all-time low in February 2016. But it still remains a long way short of its 2008 peak of 11,793.

While the bosses have no way to escape the long-term decline of capitalist profits rates, any growth of manufacturing is good for the working class. It means more jobs and the toilers gain confidence to fight for more.

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Million plus in Puerto Rico still left without electricity US colonial rule at heart of social crisis



Protest in Carolinas, Puerto Rico, outside electric company Dec. 4. More than 72 days after hurricane hit, half of island is without power, light; tens of thousands of homes have no roofs.

BY SETH GALINSKY

More than two and a half months after Hurricane Maria battered Puerto Rico, half of the U.S. colony's inhabitants are still without electricity. And tens of thousands of people in homes whose roofs were blown off by the storm still haven't received plastic tarps, much less aid to repair their homes.

"We have running water, but it's not drinkable, we still have to boil it first," retired hospital worker Luis Epardo told the *Militant* from Aguadilla, on the northwest tip of the island, Dec. 4. "And the mosquitos! It's incredible, garbage and rubble from the damaged homes hasn't been picked up." The city government has sprayed insecticide from vehicles, he said, "but they say that only kills 5 percent." Nonetheless, Health Department officials insist there has been no increase in

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Join fight to overturn ban against 'Militant'!

BY SETH GALINSKY

"By refusing to allow prisoners to read the *Militant*, the Literature Review Committee is depriving individuals of their constitutional right to read material of their choosing," says a Dec. 1 letter from PEN America, backing the *Militant's* fight against the decision of Florida prison officials to repeatedly impound the *Militant* this year.

"Although every issue of the *Militant* covers public protests and encourages workers to back protests that advance their interests, the *Militant* does not suggest or incite rebellion against prison institutions or the government."

The impoundment of the Nov. 6 issue of the paper is the ninth time this year the paper has been prevented from reaching its dozens of subscribers in Florida's 16 prisons. Any time authorities at any Florida prison seizes a copy of the *Militant*, they are removed from subscribers at all state institutions.

The *Militant* has appealed every act of censorship and the Literature Review Committee overturned four of the first seven impoundments and upheld three. The committee will review the impoundment of the Nov. 6 issue, as well as the seizure of the Oct. 30 issue.

Prison officials impounded the
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Thousands protest in DC for 'No deportations!'



Militant/Sheila Lawrence

WASHINGTON — A youthful and spirited crowd of several thousand from as far away as California protested here Dec. 6 against the U.S. government's decision to end Temporary Protected Status, which bars deportation of thousands of Haitian, Nicaraguan and Salvadoran immigrants. They also demanded extension of DACA, which gives work permits and protection from deportation to thousands of young students. Several unions joined the action, including Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ, Laborers' International, UNITE HERE and United Food and Commercial Workers Local 888.

"My dream is that everyone in this country be equal and have the same opportunities," said Ray Virgen, who came from Middletown, New York. "I want to fight for these things." Socialist Workers Party members and other participants raised demands for "Amnesty now! No deportations!"

— SHEILA LAWRENCE

US gov't to keep troops in Syria to defend its imperialist interests

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Washington remains the foremost military power in the Middle East, despite inroads being made by Tehran in asserting its military and political role in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, and the growing influence of Moscow in the region. The Pentagon announced Dec. 5 that the U.S. rulers plan to keep their bases and troops in Syria for the foreseeable future, determined to defend their imperialist interests there and throughout the region.

"The U.S. will sustain a 'conditions-based' military presence in Syria to combat the threat of a terrorist-led insurgency, prevent the resurgence of ISIS [Islamic State], and to stabilize liberated areas," Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon told Agence France-Presse Dec. 5.

Washington must deal with Tehran's "growing capability, their use of militias, proxies and terrorist organizations," National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster said Dec. 3. "About 80 percent of [Syrian dictator Bashar

al-Assad's fighters are Iranian proxies in Syria to establish a land bridge over into the Mediterranean."

But U.S. rulers face a dilemma. They cannot deploy massive numbers of ground forces to the area because

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Tel Aviv pushes African refugees to leave

BY SETH GALINSKY

The Israeli government is campaigning against some 40,000 Sudanese and Eritrean refugees, trying to force them to leave the country. Some 5,000 of the refugees are children, mostly born in Israel.

From 2006 to 2013 some 36,000 Eritreans and 15,000 Sudanese entered Israel by crossing Egypt's Sinai desert, fleeing brutal regimes and harsh conditions in their home countries. They headed to Israel, which they viewed as the most democratic country in the region, with the best chance of jobs and advancement.

Tel Aviv responded by building a border wall, completed in 2013, stopping further entry. Because of the political cost the government would pay if it forcibly deported the refugees — and a Supreme Court ruling saying it would be illegal — Tel Aviv is pushing them to “self-deport.”

Unmarried male refugees have often been forced into the so-called open detention center at Holot in the Negev Desert for up to a year. They have to be present for roll call three times a day.

The combination of threats, detention and offers of \$3,500 cash have convinced 15,000 refugees to leave, including 2,100 in the first six months this year. Several thousand obtained visas to go to Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden or the United States. A number had been going to Rwanda, but that has slowed to a trickle after reports that few who arrived there were granted legal status. Most fled the country.

On May 1 Tel Aviv began requiring employers to deduct 20 percent of refugees' pay and put it into a special account that can only be accessed if they leave the country. Employers were also required to pay another 16 percent on top of wages into the fund.

Thousands of Eritrean and Sudanese refugees protested in Tel Aviv June 10, chanting, “We are refugees — not slaves!” They were joined by Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel.

“This is wage theft and that made it easy for us to object and join the protests,” Shay Cohen, a leader of the Koach L'Ovdim union federation, which backed the action, told the *Militant* by phone Dec. 3. “The government is openly trying to increase their economic dif-

ficulties.”

The Knesset, Israel's parliament, is now considering a bill that would allow the government to jail asylum-seekers indefinitely if they travel outside assigned regions in Israel or refuse to move to Rwanda or Uganda. The bill is backed by opposition Labor Party leader Avi Gabbay.

But Zouheir Bahloul, the Labor Party's only Arab member of the Knesset, protested. “We need to get rid of this bill and allow the 40,000 refugees to be integrated by spreading them around the country,” he said.

Eritrean refugee Thomas Yohannes, 29, who has been in Israel for seven years, “going to the office to renew my temporary visa every two months,” was told he had to go to Holot. “They gave no reason,” he said in a Dec. 2 interview from Holot.

He had been working in a supermarket in Ramla, Israel. “I had Jewish and Arab Christian coworkers,” Yohannes said. “They would ask me why I came to Israel.”

“My coworkers told me, don't go to Rwanda,” Yohannes said. “They will take your money and kill you.”

Capitalist ‘justice’ system exposed in Philadelphia

BY OSBORNE HART

PHILADELPHIA — The 10-year legal saga of Meek Mill, a well-known rap musician, is a story of how the U.S. “justice” system comes down on working people.

On Nov. 6, Mill, a 30-year-old African-American, was sentenced to two to four years in prison for violating his parole, stemming from a 2008 conviction after Philadelphia cops stopped him on the way to the store. They beat him up and charged him with possession of drugs and a weapon. He served eight months in prison and was put on probation for five years.

Since then he has been arrested and repeatedly dragged into court on charges of violating his parole. Driving to the airport to go to a concert appearance in Atlanta in 2012, he was stopped by cops who said they smelled marijuana coming from his car. The charges were dropped the next day, but he had missed a \$40,000 payday.

“If we had freedom to form political parties, to have demonstrations in Eritrea, why would we come here?” added fellow Holot detainee Tesfa-gi Afgodom.

Anti-refugee groups claim Africans cause high crime rates in South Tel Aviv, where thousands of refugees live. “We are here on a mission to give back south Tel Aviv to the Israeli residents,” Netanyahu said there Aug. 31. The Africans are not refugees, he said, but “illegal aliens.”

“I am not a criminal. I am a mother trying to protect her children and give them a good life,” Shukriyya, from Sudan, who has three Israeli-born children, told the *Jerusalem Post*. “I was told Israel was a country that had humanity and accepted people who are persecuted.”

The anti-refugee moves don't have



Active Stills/Yotam Ronen

June 10 protest in Tel Aviv against law deducting 20 percent of wages of African refugees, recoverable only if they leave Israel.

wide popularity. Moran Merkamel, founder of the Negev Refugee Center, has been organizing “high school, college students and any other groups that are willing to hear what the refugees have to say” to go to Holot to talk with detainees.

“We've brought hundreds of people,” she told the *Militant*. “They see the big gap between what the media and the politicians say and then the reality.”



Justice4Meek

Advertisement on side of bus in Philadelphia builds campaign to free rap singer Meek Mill.

He was taken to court in 2014, charged with violating his parole by leaving Philadelphia to perform without getting permission from the court. This began a series of hearings and rulings by Judge Genece Brinkley. She sent him back to prison, sentenced to serve three to six months. When he got out he was put back on parole and ordered to attend etiquette classes.

Brinkley got him back in court in 2016, again charging him with traveling

without her permission. She sentenced him to wear an ankle monitor and serve 90 days of house arrest, do community service and prohibited him from performing or traveling outside of Philadelphia.

In March, Mill got involved in a dispute when he refused to have his picture taken with someone at the St. Louis airport. He was charged with misdemeanor assault, a charge that was later dropped.

When he went to New York in August to promote his latest album on the Jimmy Fallon show, a bystander videoed him doing wheelies on a motorbike in Inwood. After the video was posted on social media, New York cops filed charges of reckless endangerment and driving. The charges were expunged after he signed a plea deal.

These two nonconvictions led Brinkley to pull Mill back into court. Against the recommendation of both the city prosecutor and Mill's parole officer, the judge sentenced him to two to four years in state prison, ordering him to be taken to jail straight from the courtroom.

The judge's latest sentence has met with protests from civil libertarians and celebrities alike.

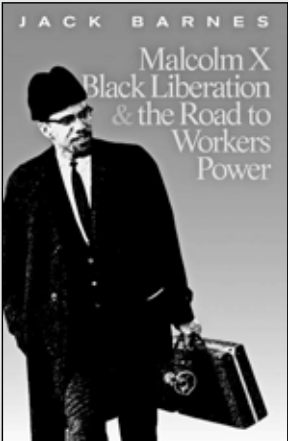
“If you can do this to a successful artist like Meek Mill, you can do this to many around this country,” Rev. Al Sharpton, National Action Network president, said after visiting Mill in prison. Sharpton emphasized that what is happening to Mill in the courts, prisons and parole system happens to working people every day.

Colin Kaepernick, the NFL quarter-

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Guantánamo prisoners’ art brings threats from US gov’t

BY EMMA JOHNSON

NEW YORK — A fascinating exhibit here of 36 paintings, sculptures and drawings made by detainees at the U.S. military prison at Guantánamo has so incensed the Pentagon that officials there have decided to confiscate all the inmates’ artwork, claiming it’s government property. They have forbidden moving any more artwork outside the prison and detainees who are released are not allowed to take their art with them.

The crackdown comes after the exhibit by eight current and former inmates began getting national and international attention. In addition to making the art public, the exhibit also puts the spotlight on Washington’s brutal and dehumanizing treatment of the prisoners.

“Ode to the Sea: Art from Guantánamo Bay” opened at John Jay College of Criminal Justice Oct. 2 and will be up

until the end of January. The art was created at Guantánamo between 2010 and today. Four of the prisoner artists have since been released. I urge readers to go see the display.

The art program at Guantánamo started in 2009. The Pentagon hoped it would distract prisoners from protesting the abuse they suffered and conflicts with guards.

When inmates were moved from their cells to take art classes they were shackled and searched. After arriving they were searched again. They then had shackles taken off their hands, but kept on the legs.

In 2013, as a hunger strike against their oppressive conditions spread to about 100 of the then 166 detainees, Washington ordered an armed raid on the camp. Soldiers seized artwork and legal documents from the cells. Documents were eventually returned, but artwork never was.

The mesmerizing sea

As with much of the art produced by workers behind bars, the majority of the paintings made at Guantánamo show scenes of the outdoors. A big majority of the items exhibited at John Jay are related to the sea — showing storms, boats, bridges, beaches, shipwrecks, waterfronts and lighthouses. An essay in the exhibit catalog by Mansoor Adayfi explains why. Adayfi is



“Drowned Syrian Refugee Child” by Muhammad Ansi shows 3-year-old Alan Kurdi, whose body washed up on Turkish shore after family tried to cross Mediterranean in 2015. Ansi, a Yemeni citizen, was imprisoned at Guantánamo from 2002 until release January 2017.

a Yemeni citizen who was imprisoned at Guantánamo from 2002 when it opened until 2016. He was then sent to Serbia.

He describes how when the detainees first arrived they were ferried from the aircraft to Guantánamo, gagged, blindfolded and shackled. They had no idea where they were. But they could hear the sea all around them. Some of them were Afghans, who had never seen the sea. All that they knew was that “it was a lot of water that kills and eats people,” he writes. We “tried to explain” but “that made them even more afraid.”

Their interrogators used this fear to threaten them, saying, “When we finish with you here, you will be taken to the sea and you will be thrown there.”

Detainees who came later told them they were at the Guantánamo Naval Base in Cuba, on territory occupied by the U.S. against the will of the Cuban people and their revolutionary government.

The barbed wire fences that ringed the prison camp were covered from top

to bottom with green tarp to stop prisoners from seeing the sea only a few hundred feet away. They tried lying on the ground to get a glimpse in the little space below the tarp. Then guards closed that space. They climbed to see above the tarp, and guards built the fences higher.

In 2014 news came that a hurricane was heading towards Cuba. The camp administration decided they had to take down the tarp.

“We all faced one direction — toward the sea. It felt like a little freedom, to look at it,” Adayfi writes.

The tarp remained down for four days and the detainees started making art about the sea. Some wrote poems. And everybody who could draw, drew the sea.

Some began making sculptures of boats, using debris they found around the camp.

“Most of these drawings took months to complete and months to get approved. They were searched, scanned, and detained. Like us,” Adayfi says. “These drawings had a long hard journey to get to you. To meet you. Let the sea remind you we are human.”

A total of 780 people have been detained at Guantánamo. Of those, 731 were never charged or convicted but remained incarcerated in subhuman conditions for many years, some more than a decade. Of the 41 men held there today, overseen and guarded by 1,500 soldiers and staff, only 10 have ever been charged or convicted.

Major Ben Sakrison, a Pentagon spokesperson, told the *New York Times* Nov. 27 that the brass found out about the exhibit from the media. News reports said the Pentagon threatened to destroy the art and order the exhibit taken down. This brought further attention and media coverage.

On Nov. 28 Army Col. Lisa Garcia of the U.S. Southern Command, which oversees the prison, told the *Miami Herald* that the command now recommends the prison “archive” the artwork rather than destroy it.



“Giant” by Moath al-Alwi, held at Guantánamo for 14 years. Al-Alwi, from Yemen, makes model ships from scraps, including cardboard, old T-shirts and plastic housing of shaving razors.

Washington’s war games, sanctions hit at NKorea

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Washington joined South Korean military forces Dec. 4 in a massive five-day “Vigilant Ace exercise” involving a fleet of over 230 aircraft and 12,000 military personnel, simulating infiltration and “precision strike drills” against North Korea. The U.S. rulers’ most advanced warplanes, the B-1B Lancer stealth bomber along with F-35 and F-22 stealth aircraft, are involved.

Simulated B-1 bombing runs took place less than 100 miles from the South’s border with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. The exercises come one week after the DPRK deployed its longest missile launch so far, North Korea’s third such test this year, covering 620 miles in a high arc before splashing down in the waters between Japan and the Korean Peninsula.

In addition to the military exercises, the Donald Trump administration stepped up its calls for more severe sanctions to be imposed against North Korea, including asking Beijing for more help in squeezing the people of the DPRK.

“All countries should sever diplomatic relations with North Korea and limit military, scientific, technical or commercial cooperation,” Nikki Haley, Washington’s ambassador to the U.N., told a special session of the Security Council called by Washington Nov. 29. “They must also cut off trade with the regime by stopping all imports and exports, and expel all North

Korean workers.”

The Security Council has imposed eight rounds of sanctions on North Korea over the past decade, along with further steps taken by Washington and other imperialist governments. These actions impact working people there the hardest.

Despite war rhetoric from some in Washington, both President Trump and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson responded by saying increased pressure was aimed at forcing the DPRK to the bargaining table. “Diplomatic options remain viable and open,” Tillerson said.

A week before the missile launch, Trump redesignated North Korea as a “state sponsor of terrorism,” along with Tehran, Damascus and the government of Sudan. North Korean officials described this decision as “a serious provocation.”

The Treasury Department announced a new round of sanctions against Pyongyang, targeting Chinese trading companies as well as North Korean companies and ships.

The U.S. rulers have had some success getting Beijing, which accounts for 92 percent of Pyongyang’s foreign trade, to press against DPRK leaders. The Chinese government has curbed its exports of North Korean coal, a chief source of hard currency for Pyongyang. Beijing’s trade with North Korea dropped by 20 percent in October.

The North Korean leadership views the war exercises as acts of aggression

by Washington rooted in the decades-long effort by the U.S. government to overthrow the DPRK and re-establish control over the entire peninsula.

With the agreement of Moscow, Washington seized southern Korea after the second imperialist world war, aiming to take control over all of Korea. After workers and farmers in the north won independence through revolutionary struggle, U.S. troops invaded in 1950. Through carpet bombing and widespread use of napalm, cities in the north were reduced to rubble and some 4 million people were killed during the war. Washington considered, but ultimately decided not to use, nuclear weapons.

The Korean people — backed by troops from China — fought Washington to a draw. A cease-fire was signed in 1953, but for the 64 years since the U.S. rulers have refused to sign a peace treaty with the DPRK.

Over the past 70 years the Socialist Workers Party has opposed Washington’s intervention in Korea and supports the struggle of the Korean people for reunification. The party calls for an immediate end to Washington’s economic and financial sanctions against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea; for withdrawal of the more than 28,000 U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula, and U.S. planes and ships from Korea’s skies and waters; for a nuclear free Korean Peninsula and Pacific; and unilateral nuclear disarmament by Washington.

**New York
Ode to the Sea:
Art From
Guantánamo Bay**

*President’s Gallery
John Jay College of
Criminal Justice
899 10th Ave., 6th floor
Mon.-Fri., 9 am-5 pm.
Until Jan. 26.*

—ON THE PICKET LINE—

Locked-out workers in Quebec pledge to stay the course

LONGUEUIL, Quebec — Hundreds of workers rallied and marched here Nov. 20 in solidarity with nine locked-out mechanics at the Kia dealership.

Serge Minguy, who owns the Kia dealership as well as the Mazda and Nissan franchises next door, locked the mechanics out two months ago. Since then the workers, members of Unifor Local 4511, have kept up their picket line, bolstered by workers from other unionized dealerships who drop by after work.

Minguy wants to impose a four-year wage freeze. “We’re standing up to him,” Remi Lambert, a mechanic at the dealership and local shop steward, told the *Militant*. “We refuse to concede, we’ve conceded enough in the past.”

Workers have to pay for a lot of their own tools, Lambert said. He estimates he’s spent \$50,000 himself. The boss refuses to pay the 1 percent obligated by law towards a pension for the nine mechanics. He does pay this for all other workers at the three dealerships.

“We’re a real team, almost brothers,” Lambert said, describing the nine striking mechanics. “We’ve stood together, and we’re going to continue to stand together.”

Unifor organizes the majority of autoworkers in Canada, with 55,000 members in Quebec.

— Annette Kouri
and Pierre-Luc Filion

Part-time teachers strike, win support from students, unionists

CHICAGO — Some 50 part-time teachers walked the strike picket in front of Columbia College downtown here Nov. 29. An equal number of students and unionists, including members of the Chicago Teachers Union, joined them. The action was part of a two-day strike by the Part-Time Faculty Association of Columbia College, protesting college bosses’ attacks on job security, seniority and wages. They carried a large ban-

ner reading, “We stand for students, not for profits.”

“The top of the pay scale for us is \$30,000 per year when we teach a full load. The administration says that’s too much. And most of us don’t teach a full load,” William O’Conner, a theater instructor with 21 years seniority, told the *Militant*. “Over 70 percent of the faculty here is part time.”

The association represents 1,200 part-time faculty members. Their contract expired in August.

“While tuition has increased, the number of courses and size of faculty have decreased,” President Diana Vallera said in a statement printed in *Crain’s Chicago Business*. “The administration must value students enough to funnel resources into experienced faculty and a well-developed curriculum, not administrators’ salaries.”

“We have no job security. We don’t know how many courses we will



Unifor Local 4511 Facebook

March in Longueuil, Quebec, Nov. 20 in solidarity with nine mechanics locked out at Kia dealership for two months. With help of other unionists, workers have picketed every day.

teach semester to semester,” Andrea Dymond, who also teaches in the theater department, said on the picket line. “We have our next bargaining session in two days. This is near the

end of the semester and if we don’t get a contract, we’ll have to continue the strike in January when school starts again.”

— Dan Fein

Hiring upturn can lead to advance in workers’ unity

Continued from front page

Declining unemployment figures over the last few years mask how the capitalist crisis has deepened divisions in the working class. The labor force participation rate — measuring the number of workers actively working or looking for work — has changed little from last year’s 40-year low, reflecting the growing numbers who’ve given up. In addition, the proportion of workers employed as temps, with lower pay and worse conditions, hit a record high in October.

Workers pushed out of the active working class see little prospect of escaping the carnage around them. Opioid addiction has hit record levels.

Without a more substantial rise in economic growth that begins to draw back those who’ve been written out of the workforce, it is harder for us to tackle the divisions the bosses foster among working people.

Another problem workers face is the pressure of debt. Capitalist lenders profit by foisting an ever-greater debt burden

on working people, then pressing us to pay it back with interest. Total U.S. household debt has risen more than 16 percent since 2013, to just under \$13 trillion. But this figure disguises the vastly different impact of this debt on different classes, and the onerous consequences for workers.

Workers who default on auto loans find that years after their car is repossessed they’re still paying off the loan with their wages garnished by the courts. Some 107 million people in the U.S. are currently carrying auto loan debt, owing over \$1.1 trillion — both record highs. And outstanding student loans now top \$1.4 trillion.

The \$13 trillion household debt today is greater than the GDP of every country on earth, except for the U.S.

Health costs continue to rise while medical care is harder to get. Workers over 65 are becoming the fastest growing group of new-hires as they find it impossible to live on Social Security or shrinking pensions. Rents and mortgages keep going up, and so do defaults and

homelessness.

Whatever immediate gains the bosses register for themselves as their economy expands, they cannot reverse the decline in industrial profit rates capitalists have faced since the late 1960s. That would take inflicting massive defeats against the working class, and we will have our chance at taking political power before that could happen.

But production and trade is growing today. And it makes a difference for the working class.

More jobs = more confidence to fight

Where workers have stood their ground and fought the bosses in recent years, their struggles are largely isolated. Union officials have done nothing to organize workers to rely on our own forces and mobilize union power to resist the employers’ attacks. They tell us to rely on the Democrats, or Republicans, or some “independent” capitalist politician, instead.

But the longevity of the crisis and the multifront assaults of the bosses make many more workers today hungry for discussion on how we can find ways around these obstacles and organize to resist what the employers and their political parties impose on us. As unemployment rose starting in 2008, bosses and their politicians tried to pit employed against unemployed, native-born against immigrants, to further divide and weaken the working class.

When unemployment declines enough that workers in areas where job losses are widespread begin to see neighbors and friends back at work, when the bosses’ production needs lead to a new wave of immigration, then the working class will be in a position for a new rise in organizing and use of union power to fight for our class interests.

New International
A magazine of Marxist politics
and theory, 1934-present
Intercontinental Press
International news magazine
1963-86
Online at themilitant.com
pathfinderpress.com

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



December 18, 1992

Under the “humanitarian” cover of a United Nations mission to feed starving people, the Bush administration is about to launch an invasion of Somalia.

The action, whose goal is to safeguard strategic U.S. interests in eastern Africa and set a precedent for future military intervention in other parts of the world, has received full bipartisan backing. President-elect Bill Clinton called it a “historic and welcome step.”

Pentagon officials, cynically dubbing the mission “Operation Restore Hope,” plan to pour at least 28,000 troops into Somalia. The U.S. force includes four warships, tanks, 155-millimeter howitzers, and Cobra attack helicopters. France is sending 2,000 men, along with 10 Mirage fighter planes and 20 helicopters. Britain, Belgium, Canada, Pakistan and Jordan have all vowed to contribute troops or supplies.



December 18, 1967

NEW YORK — Thousands of antiwar demonstrators, mostly youth, joined “Stop the Draft Week” here Dec. 4-8. They came out for four days in a row in spite of repeated attempts by Mayor Lindsay’s police to suppress the peaceful demonstrations in a massive assault on the right to dissent.

Contrary to the image the daily press sought to create, the demonstrators were peaceful. There were virtually no acts the police could have construed as provocations at any time during the demonstrations, even though police agents had infiltrated the crowd.

The protest was called by an ad-hoc Stop the Draft Committee, a coalition of various antiwar youth groups, including the Resistance, the Young Socialist Alliance, the Student Mobilization Committee, the DuBois Clubs, and pacifist organizations.



December 19, 1942

The Post Office, which has been withholding from the mails all recent issues of “The Militant,” has permitted the Nov. 28 and Dec. 5 issues to be dispatched and delivered.

Unquestionably this action is partially a result of the protests registered by numerous labor and liberal journalists and organizations in the six-week period since the Post Office began to interfere with the mailing privileges of “The Militant.”

Only a single group in the country has thus far expressed the slightest approval for the Post Office action, and that is the Communist Party, which not only wants “The Militant” suppressed altogether, but also wants a witch-hunt started against all labor organizations and papers critical of the administration and opposed to reactionary Stalinist policies.

1961 literacy drive in Cuba 'transformed working people'

BY NAOMI CRAINE

CHICAGO — “Without the literacy campaign, none of the success we’ve had would have been possible. It’s the base of Cuba’s development,” Griselda Aguilera Cabrera, a veteran of revolutionary Cuba’s mass literacy drive in 1961 that taught workers and peasants across the island how to read and write, told an audience of 65 at a meeting here Dec. 2. It was held at the SEIU Healthcare union hall and sponsored by the Chicago Cuba Coalition.

The event included a showing of the documentary “Maestra” (teacher) by Catherine Murphy, which describes how a quarter of a million volunteers worked with more than 700,000 fellow Cubans, wiping out illiteracy in one year. Some 100,000 of these volunteers were under the age 18, the majority female. The film interviews several women who participated in this historic effort, including Aguilera, who at age 7 was the youngest volunteer.

In January 1959 the workers and peasants of Cuba, led by the July 26 Movement headed by Fidel Castro, overthrew the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and began to reorganize society based on the needs of the toiling majority — opening the road to the first socialist revolution in the Americas. The literacy campaign was one of the major steps in the transformation of Cuban working people, which enabled them to run their own country.

“It was a very intense year, with the whole population involved in one way or another,” Aguilera said. Many of the young literacy teachers went to the countryside, living and working with peasant families and teaching classes at night. Many rural workers lived in huts with dirt floors and no electricity or running water, she said, a new experience for youth from the urban areas.

“In the cities, classes were organized in existing schools, workplaces and union halls,” Aguilera said. “My student was a street cleaner, 58 years old and completely illiterate. The themes of the lessons were about the world, about the right to health care and to land. At the same time students were learning to read, we were gaining consciousness about our country and about the world.”

This accomplishment “required both action by the government and a desire of the people to do it,” Aguilera

said. “No one got a vacation that year, but no one complained.

“We caught up our courses the next year,” she said.

In response to a question, she described how the Cuban government has taken the initiative since 2001 to help expand literacy in other countries, particularly in Latin America. “More than 10 million people have learned to read with this program,” with the help of Cuban volunteers in some 30 countries, Aguilera said. Washington “accuses Cuba of trying to interfere in other countries,” she added, “but our only goal is to allow people to help in the development of their own countries.”

The meeting included brief presentations on conditions facing working people in Puerto Rico today. Miguel Alvelo Rivera of Chicago Boricua Resistance described how the “Junta” — the fiscal control board imposed by Washington on the island’s colonial government — is forcing the closure of 184 schools in rural areas.

José López, executive director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, talked about fundraising efforts to help people



Militant/Dan Fein

“Classes were organized in existing schools, workplaces and union halls,” Griselda Aguilera, inset, veteran of Cuban Revolution’s 1961 literacy drive, told Dec. 2 event in Chicago, above.



recover from Hurricane Maria that devastated Puerto Rico in September. The social catastrophe in the wake of that storm “brought to light the unnatural problem of Puerto Rico” caused by U.S. colonial rule, López said.

What happened in Puerto Rico showed the “lack of preparation of people to confront a natural phenomenon,” Aguilera said. She described how the government in Cuba leads in “creating the conditions and educating

the people” to face the inevitable hurricanes that hit the islands in the Caribbean. “In every school students learn the plan, and in the workplaces.”

The way the Cuban Revolution mobilizes working people to prepare for, meet and rebuild after hurricanes like Maria and Irma and the literacy campaign Aguilera described vividly in her talk are striking examples of what difference a socialist revolution — the working class in power — can make.

European Cuba solidarity conference held in Bulgaria

BY JONATHAN SILBERMAN

SOFIA, Bulgaria — The Third Central and Eastern Europe Cuba Solidarity Conference was held here Nov. 17-19. The conference was organized jointly by the Bulgaria-Cuba Friendship Association and the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP). It attracted participants from 21 countries — 80 people registered from abroad and over 100 from Bulgaria.

“This has effectively become a Europe-wide conference — and beyond,” Tamara Takova, the Friendship Association’s president, said in welcoming participants.

Alexandar Paunov, representing the Bulgarian parliamentary Cuba group; Pedro Pablo San Jorge, Cuban ambassador to Bulgaria; Elio Gámez, ICAP’s first vice president; and Aleida Guevara March, daughter of historic Cuban leader Ernesto Che Guevara also spoke at the opening session. The 50th anniversary of Guevara’s death in combat has been marked in countries across Europe and worldwide.

Aleida Guevara also spoke at a press conference and met with members of the Bulgarian parliament during her visit.

In addition to conference participants, delegations from trade unions, cultural and academic organizations and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church came to the opening.

The largest foreign delegation was from Germany, with representatives of three solidarity groups — the Germany-Cuba Friendship Association; Cuba Sí, which is linked to the Left Party; and the mediCuba NGO — coming from cities across the country, east and west.

A cultural group of 10 young people, called the Grenada Association — taking their name from a Russian poem — came from Moscow. Tatiana Vladimirskaia, a professor from whom they learn Spanish and the group’s facilitator, also attended.

Smaller groups and individual delegates came from Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Moldova, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the U.K.

Participating from Poland, Beata Karon, a leader of the Communist Party there, is currently out on appeal against a thought-control conviction and prison term for propagating “totalitarian ideas.”

The Communist League in the United Kingdom participated for the first time. The CL delegation of two brought with us books in English, French and Spanish by leaders of the Cuban Revolution and on communist politics, the *Militant* and other materials. Conference partici-

pants bought 32 books, 15 copies of the *Militant* and two subscriptions. A number gave us their contact information in order to stay in touch.

In addition to exchanges on their varied experiences in getting out the truth about the Cuban Revolution and defending it from economic and political attacks from Washington and imperialist regimes across Europe, participants discussed and debated their different political viewpoints in conference plenary sessions and workshops.

The conference adopted a final declaration that condemned Washington’s decadeslong economic war against Cuba and demanded the immediate return of Guantánamo to the Cuban people.

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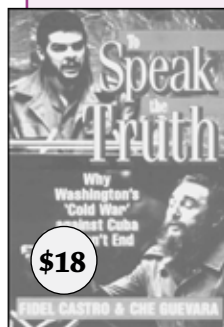
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Hart: ‘We joined revolutionary movement led by Fidel Castro’

Below is an excerpt from Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground, 1952-58, a Participant’s Account by Armando Hart. Hart, who was a founding member of the July 26 Movement and helped lead its urban underground, died in Havana Nov. 26. He became a central leader of the revolution, and of the government that took power in 1959, serving as Minister of Education and Minister of Culture. In this selection Hart, at the time a member of the Revolutionary National Movement led by García Bárdena, describes the impact on him of the campaign for amnesty for Fidel Castro and other revolutionists imprisoned for the 1953 assaults on the Moncada and Bayamo garrisons. He explains how he was won to the program and movement led by Fidel Castro. Over the next few weeks the Militant will run additional excerpts from the book, as well as an appreciation of Hart’s life and revolutionary accomplishments. Copyright © 2004 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BY ARMANDO HART

On October 10, 1954, a group of compañeros, including Mario and Bebo Hidalgo, Faustino Pérez, Eloy Abella, Pepe Prieto, Enrique Hart, and I, were meeting in the Havana Teachers College at 411 Malecón. We were discuss-

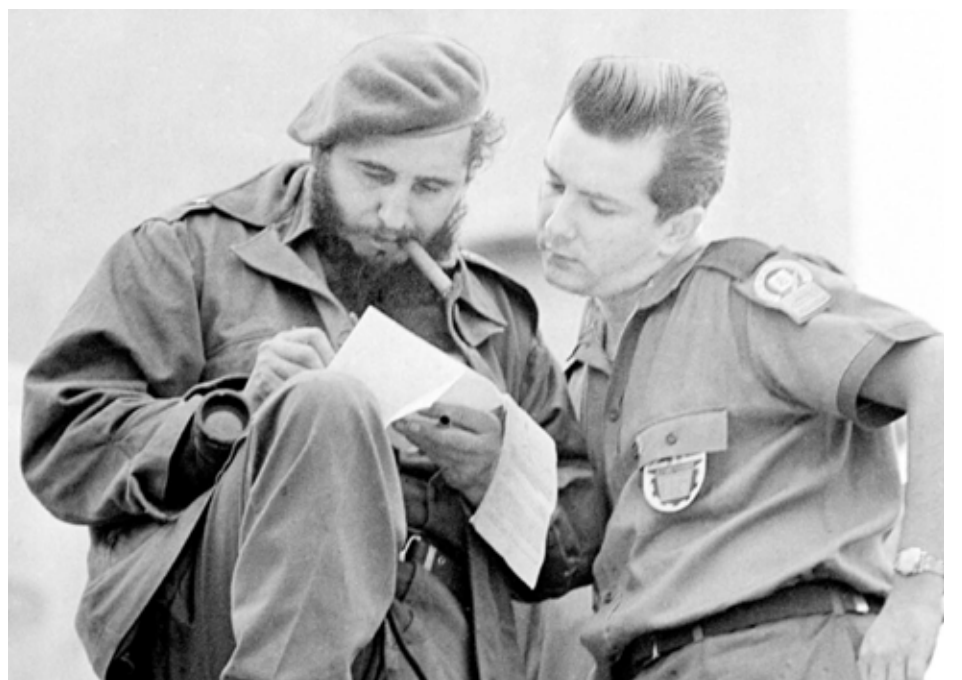
ing how to respond to the November electoral farce and what contacts to make in other provinces through the young people we had political relations with. At about noon, the police broke in and arrested us all. ...

Haydée [Santamaría] came to visit us and inquired about Faustino and me. She and Melba [Hernández], desiring to establish relations with revolutionary groups of every type, were working to win support for an amnesty. They were busy distributing Fidel’s main documents, particularly *History Will Absolve Me*, which had begun to circulate in October. ...

As soon as I got out of prison, I contacted Melba and Haydée. They talked to me about what Moncada represented and told me of the work carried out by Abel Santamaría and the group of compañeros who together with Fidel had prepared the action. They also explained Fidel’s ideas and program to me, as well as this revolutionary leader’s fundamental opposition to the traditional parties. ...

At that time, all the political and social organizations of the opposition began to mobilize broadly in support of an amnesty for Fidel and the Moncadistas; it in fact became a demand of the nation. The regime was forced to decree the amnesty in May 1955.

The people were waiting for the



AP Photo/Prensa Latina via AP Images

Cuban revolutionary leaders Fidel Castro and Armando Hart in Havana, Dec. 22, 1961. Hart says he was won to movement Castro led because it “was capable of organizing the masses.”

brave freedom fighters to be released from their cells. Everyone knew of the spirit that had inspired the Moncada and Bayamo combatants and had governed their actions. These fighters had confronted the tyranny, and for that they had been sent to prison or had fallen courageously. ...

The government tried to use the amnesty to present itself as the “dove of peace,” but its actions revealed this claim to be a total farce. The amnesty did not represent so much as a single step to restore tranquility to the country. Hunger was growing, unemployment still stalked the land, dissatisfaction was increasing, and we could not put up with any more deceit. Batista compelled us to go to war. The government

was the first and most obvious obstacle to genuine harmony. ...

For the most dynamic social layers of the population, Fidel had become the center of attraction and the most important political figure. He was already the natural leader of the new generations of young revolutionaries, as well as of broad sectors of the population. This was because young people politically supported the insurrectional line and valued the Moncadistas’ heroic conduct and determination to do battle. Moreover, the Moncada group was not tied in with the traditional parties, but represented their very negation. In the leader of the July 26 action we found what we had been looking for since March 10 [1952, when Batista carried out a coup and seized power with Washington’s backing] and even before: a political and revolutionary leader, with deep popular and democratic roots, with no ties to the existing system, and, at the same time, capable of organizing the masses to action.

I joined the July 26 Movement as the result of a natural process. The Moncada program concretized for me the ethical sentiments that were deeply rooted in the Cuban patriotic tradition.

A powerful wave of rebellious people gathered around Fidel. As the struggle developed, this unstoppable whirlwind was transformed, over the course of months and years, into a true revolutionary hurricane. ...

From [that] moment ... we were already a part of the movement led by Fidel. Faustino and I assured Fidel that we were immediately joining him and his compañeros.

Join fight to overturn ban against ‘Militant’!

Continued from front page

Oct. 30 issue because it reported on the *Militant’s* appeal of Florida prison censorship of yet another issue of the paper, even though the Literature Review Committee has overturned the impoundment of previous issues banned on the same basis.

The impoundment of the Nov. 6 issue is even more serious. Unlike previous impoundment notices, this one makes the outrageous claim that the entire paper is “dangerously inflammatory in that it advocates or encourages riot, insurrection” and “may lead to the use of physical violence.” Florida authorities give no reason for this belief, merely listing four pages in the issue.

The nine impoundments this year “are at least twice as many as in the prior decade in Florida, and twice as many as in the rest of the nation, state and federal combined,” David Goldstein, the *Militant’s* lawyer, of the well-known civil liberties law firm Rabinowitz, Boudin, Standard, Krinsky & Lieberman, states in his Dec. 4 appeal of the ban.

The censoring of the latest issues is “difficult to understand as anything other than a highly improper intensify-

ing effort by the Florida Department of Corrections,” Goldstein wrote, “to target the *Militant* for unconstitutional and arbitrary content-based and viewpoint-based censorship.”

Jefferson Correctional Institution prison officials also charged that the *Militant* “encourages protesting and group disruption.”

One article on the pages cited is headlined, “Protest US Economic War Against Cuban Revolution!” and the other pages feature ads promoting a “Rally and march for silver miners on strike” in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, and a “Rally to defend Cuban Revolution at the United Nations” in New York.

Goldstein points out that the Literature Review Committee overturned the impoundment of the Sept. 11 issue, which prison officials had singled out because of a front-page article that reported and advocated protests against racism. He also noted that in 2013 and 2016 the Literature Review Committee overturned attempts to censor the paper for reporting on prisoner hunger strikes and protests in California.

In addition to PEN America, Amnesty International USA, New York’s Riverside Church Prison Ministry and Miami-based Alianza Martiana, a coalition of Cuban-American groups, have sent letters to the Literature Review Committee, and more are on their way.

Alianza Martiana said that the prison authorities “have violated the letter and spirit of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.”

Amnesty International points out that the impoundment violates not only the Constitution, but also the United Na-

tions Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners, commonly known as the Mandela Rules, after South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela.

“Prisoners are fellow workers behind bars,” said *Militant* editor John Studer. “They have a right to read about the world we live in, to consider different views, to form their own opinions. Prison authorities have no right to ban views they disagree with.

“We are not going to stop supporting the struggles of working people around the world and urging readers, including those behind bars, to take a stand,” Studer said. “Our fight against arbitrary and unconstitutional censorship in Florida strengthens everyone’s right to free speech and for freedom of the press.”

Capitalist ‘justice’ in Philadelphia

Continued from page 3

back who is de facto banned from playing for refusing to stand for the national anthem in protest of police brutality, has talked with Mill over the phone offering his support. Jay Z, Kevin Hart and many other performers have spoken out against his imprisonment. Rallies have been held at City Hall demanding: “Free Meek Mill!” Driving around the city, you see signs in storefront windows, on newsstands, even on the sides of buses. People wear T-shirts saying, “Stand with Meek Mill.”

On Dec. 1, Judge Brinkley denied Mill’s motion for bail while his attorneys appeal the prison sentence. The attorneys appealed her denial and filed a motion that Brinkley recuse herself from the case.

“For about a decade, he’s been stalked by a system that considers the slightest infraction a justification of locking him back inside,” Jay Z wrote in a Nov. 17 *New York Times* op-ed. “What’s happening to Meek Mill is just one example of how the criminal justice system entraps and harasses hundreds of thousands of Black people every day. Probation ends up being a land mine, with a random misstep bringing consequences greater than the crime.”

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate worldwide, at 22 percent of the world’s prison population. Seven million people, overwhelmingly workers and disproportionately African-American, are in federal or state prisons, local jails, or on parole or probation today.

Join anti-censorship fight

Copy and distribute the *Militant’s* articles on the fight.

Get statements of support from unions, churches and defenders of workers rights and free speech. Send to: themilitant@mac.com

Send a check to the *Militant*, 306 W. 37th St., 13th floor, New York, NY 10018, earmarked “Prisoners Rights Fight.”

Abram Leon: Example for working-class youth today

The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation by Abram Leon is one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for December. In the opening "Biographical Sketch of Abram Leon," Ernest Germain records Leon's life as a militant in the Jewish Socialist Zionist youth in Belgium, his break with Zionism and his leading role in the Fourth International, formed in 1938 to build on the revolutionary continuity of the Russian Bolshevik Party led by V.I. Lenin. Ernest Germain was the underground name for Ernest Mandel, who joined the Belgian party in 1939 at the age of 16. Copyright © 1970 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

BY ERNEST GERMAIN

In the course of his researches, [Leon] forwarded several articles to the Belgian Trotskyist weekly, La lutte ouvrière (The workers struggle). The editors of this periodical established contact with him. ...

From this moment on, the story of Leon was linked with the history of the Trotskyist movement in Belgium. The principal inspirer of the party, he served as political secretary from the time the first executive committee was set up. As a journalist, with an incisive, lively, and clear style, he made his readers feel that he understood thoroughly every problem with which he dealt. The editorial



Ernest Mandel and Abram Leon, on right, in early 1940s. Inset, first issue of Arbeiter und Soldat (Worker and Soldier), distributed to soldiers in German occupation army in France 1943-44. Leon organized distribution of a similar paper in Belgium.

board of the illegal Voie de Lénine (Lenin's road) worked under his direction and its first issues contained a masterly study from his pen of the structure and future of the various imperialist powers. In this study he traced the main line of future events in the war exactly in the way in which they later unfolded. An exemplary organizer and educator, he guided the branches, tried to build the party under conditions of illegality, and concentrated with infinite patience on winning the confidence of workers districts and on forming a recognized and responsible national leadership on the basis of this confidence.

I met him personally for the first time on the first central committee of the party which was reconstituted by his efforts in July 1941. ...

As soon as the party was reconstituted, Leon began to worry about international relations. An internationalist to his marrow, he found it intolerable that the Belgian section should live in isolation from its brother movements in Europe and throughout the world. The need for contact with the other sections of the Fourth International did not arise solely from his desire to compare the political line of the Belgian party with that of its brother parties; it also correspond-

ed to a very clear realization that the great military and revolutionary shocks would in the future inevitably assume a continental character and that no political leadership could any longer function effectively on a national scale. ...

This period of illegal activity under the most dangerous conditions, when one's heart involuntarily jumped each time the doorbell rang or an automobile pulled up close to the house, was a time of extreme nervous tension, of continuous waiting for an explosion that would finally make a breach in the walls and bring closer the day on which would explode all the gates of the enormous prison into which Europe had been transformed. We awaited this explosion from the very depths of this prison. Our thoughts were centered on the reserves of revolutionary energy stored up during the long years of suffering by the proletariat on the Old Continent. When Leon personally assumed the direction of party work among the proletarian soldiers of the Wehrmacht or when he attended meetings of the underground factory committees set up in the Liège metallurgical plants, he invariably invested these various tasks with a meaning which

transcended the present; he wished to sow that the party would be able to reap when the decisive moment came. ...

Then came the downfall of Mussolini. We finally felt the rising wind of the revolution; our activities multiplied. Each of us expended himself unsparingly; the culmination was approaching. There took place a number of secret trips to France where Leon participated actively in the work of the European Conference of the Fourth International in February 1944. We halted our work of self-preparation; it was now a question of intervening actively in the workers struggles which were erupting everywhere. In the Charleroi region, the Trotskyist organization took the initiative in organizing an illegal movement of miners delegates. This movement spread rapidly to about fifteen pits: in complete illegality the party's ideas began to take root among the masses. Understanding the full importance of this movement, Leon wished to follow it step by step. He decided to locate himself in Charleroi in order to collaborate daily with the revolutionary workers of the region. News of the Allied landing in Europe and fears lest connections between the various regions be broken, hastened the preparation for the shift. After living for two years in complete illegality, he went to settle at Charleroi with his wife. On the very evening of his arrival the house into which he had moved was searched by the police. He was arrested and sent to prison.

Then followed long days of moral and physical torture. The Gestapo used every means to make him talk. He was torn with worry about the party which had lost five of its first rank leaders within the period of two years. He succeeded in gaining the confidence of one of the soldiers of the guard. A contact was established with the party. The letters which he sent are the most convincing testimonial that in the most difficult hours of his life all his thoughts were centered on the organization, its immediate projects, its future. He wanted so much to continue his work shoulder to shoulder with his comrades. Destiny willed it otherwise. The rapidity with which he was deported frustrated the preparations to effect his escape undertaken by the party and he was flung into the hellish place where five million human beings were to perish — Auschwitz.

December

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

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8 The Militant December 18, 2017

Build working-class unity, confidence

The bosses claim recent capitalist economic growth is good for “American interests.”

But there are no “American interests.” On one hand, there are the interests of the U.S. propertied rulers, defended by the bosses’ political parties — Democrats, Republicans and growing numbers of self-proclaimed “independents” who seek to convince workers disgusted with capitalist politics-as-usual to stay in the swamp. Our union officials are among those who continuously tell us “you can’t fight City Hall” and to rely on Democrats or others who will be our “friends” when they get into office.

On the other hand there are the interests of the working class and our allies around the world. We need to find ways to fight effectively against the attacks on our jobs, working conditions and deteriorating conditions of life.

Strengthening our unity to resist the bosses involves taking a stand against any attempt to blame fellow working people for the crisis we face.

If the temporary uptick in capitalist production

and trade continues to expand, an unintended consequence will be to open a door for the working class. As more of us get jobs, and those who lost hope after months and years without employment see a way out of the crushing burden they’ve faced, our confidence and willingness to fight will grow.

The ability of the bosses to use their crisis to try and get employed and unemployed, native-born and immigrant workers to fight against each other for a “shrinking pie” will be weakened.

It will be easier to see the possibility — and the necessity — for our class to mobilize the vast majority of working people to overthrow dog-eat-dog capitalist rule and take political power. The propertied rulers *can* be overthrown and a new kind of world built — working people in Cuba demonstrated this in 1959 and ever since. Through struggle, we too will develop the courage, confidence and class consciousness necessary to emulate Cuban workers and farmers and take political power.

Join us in this fight!

Million plus have no electricity in Puerto Rico

Continued from front page

mosquito-born diseases like Zika, dengue and chikungunya.

The government claims that only 58 people died from the storm, despite figures showing that in September alone 472 more people died than the year before. There was a similar jump in October. The gov’t figures don’t include deaths from lack of adequate medical care, not enough insulin or oxygen or being unable to get dialysis.

“The governor said that we would have electricity by Dec. 15, but we haven’t seen anybody working,” Luis Aristud, an insurance adjuster in Canóvanas, east of San Juan, said by phone.

“Many people in the U.S. who went through Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy still haven’t gotten help,” Aristud said. “Imagine us! They’re like a landlord. When you need something fixed, forget about it, but miss a rent payment, they call the cops.”

“We’ve been a colony ever since the U.S. invaded,” Aristud said. “Even though we’re U.S. citizens, we just have to take the dish they serve us, good, bad or so-so.”

“And people didn’t realize that the only part of their house that is insured, if they have insurance, is the part the bank owns,” he said, “not their belongings inside.”

There is no electricity at all on the island of Vieques, off Puerto Rico’s eastern shore, said Ismael Guadalupe, a retired school teacher and veteran leader of the successful fight to oust the U.S. Navy bombing range there. So many people have installed generators “that it just sounds like one big car at night,” he said.

El Nuevo Día reported that 1,200 poles for power lines — out of a promised 65,000 needed to get electricity back up — arrived at the San Juan port Nov. 30.

Justo González, acting executive director of the Electric Energy Authority, said Dec. 1 that 2,000 electrical workers from the U.S. will arrive “in the coming weeks” to speed up restoring power.

On Nov. 29, Federal Emergency Management Agency reported it had canceled a contract with Bronze Star company three weeks earlier, because they didn’t deliver a half million light tarps for hurricane victims. In addition, some 60,000 blue tarps are needed to put up on homes that lost their roofs, but FEMA says it is only able to install 350 a day due to lack of supplies.

It’s facts like these — little reported in the big-

business press in the U.S. — that show that the people in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico are suffering not from a “natural disaster,” but a man-made capitalist catastrophe.

Eliminating the Christmas bonus

William Hernández, a mechanical engineer, told the *Militant* electricity was restored three weeks ago at the pharmaceutical factory where he works in Guayama, on the southeast part of the island. Puerto Rico is a major center for medicine and medical supplies.

The Puerto Rican government exempted bosses at hundreds of private companies from paying the legally mandated annual Christmas bonuses that are a big part of workers’ yearly pay, because the storm cost them income.

“At the company where I work, they paid it,” Hernández said. “But where my friends work, they’re not going to pay. The pharmaceutical companies make big profits. They are using the tragedy of the hurricane to benefit themselves and it can’t be justified.”

Working people in Puerto Rico have been hit hard over the last decade by the worldwide capitalist economic crisis, exacerbated by the island’s colonial oppression. Dozens of factories have been shuttered and gross domestic product declined there every year since 2006. The government took out new loans to pay off earlier ones, and now the colonial government’s debt has soared to \$74 billion. To keep paying the bondholders, the government closed schools, laid off thousands of public employees, reduced pensions, raised sales taxes and cut maintenance on the electrical grid. The effects of the hurricane deepened the crisis.

According to the island’s Labor and Human Resources Department, in October the number of people with a job or actively looking for one was 38.6 percent, the lowest level in 27 years. There were at least 54,000 fewer workers in October compared to last year.

In 2016 President Barack Obama appointed a Fiscal Responsibility and Oversight Board to press the colonial regime to cut back more on jobs, social services and other government expenses. The board has veto power over all of the government’s financial decisions to ensure the maximum payment possible on the debt.

Board members chastised Puerto Rican Gov. Ricardo Rosselló Nov. 27, saying his decision to pay the annual Christmas bonus to public employees this year “demonstrates a lack of fiscal discipline.” With the typical arrogance of the imperialist rulers, the board told Rosselló that they expect to be “consulted” on all such decisions in the future.

‘Militant’ Prisoners’ Fund

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US troops in Syria

Continued from front page

of political opposition by working people at home. With the exception of Kurdish forces fighting Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, backed by Washington, the Pentagon has been unable to put in place an effective fighting force on the ground in the region.

While not widely publicized by Washington, the number of U.S. forces in the Middle East is in the tens of thousands and slowly rising. Some 10,000 military personnel are stationed in Qatar at the Al Udeid Air Base, which coordinates U.S. airstrikes throughout the region; another 7,000 are in Bahrain, from where the 5th Navy Fleet operates; and 15,000 are in Kuwait.

The U.S. military has 10 bases and “outposts” in northern Syria, several of them with airfields, and two other outposts in southern Syria near the Iraqi border, with no plans to leave anytime soon. U.S. forces have 11 regular and “temporary” bases in Iraq.

The biggest winner in the war against Islamic State has been the regime in Tehran. They have moved to “fill the void in Iraq and Syria,” McMaster said, calling them “weak states” Tehran can take advantage of.

Moscow, whose airstrikes over the past couple of years together with ground troops from Iran, Hezbollah and related Tehran-backed militias, has resurrected the Assad dictatorship in Syria, and is expanding its military presence there. A decadeslong agreement with the regime reinforces Russia’s Tartus naval base on the Mediterranean, its air base in the Latakia area, and a new one built near Damascus, Syria’s capital.

Saudi rulers push ‘modernization’

To counter Tehran’s growing influence, Washington is backing the al-Saud monarchy in Saudi Arabia and its drive to clear away aspects of the country’s tribal-based social, religious and political relations that pose obstacles to capitalist “modernization” there.

There are 5,000 third-generation princes in Saudi Arabia whose families and entourages eat up \$30 to \$50 billion per year. These “royals” have accumulated vast economic power through special access to government contracts and control over imported labor.

The Saudi regime is now offering freedom to some of the over 200 people — princes, current and former cabinet ministers and oil-monopoly billionaires — arrested Nov. 4 on charges of “corruption” if they put large amounts of their wealth into government coffers. This would place some \$100 billion in capital in the hands of the state for investments to expand infrastructure, industry and manufacturing to diversify the economy away from over-dependency on oil.

Over three-quarters of Saudi citizens work for the state, with generous social benefits. That’s not the case for the 9 million foreign-born workers — about 30 percent of the total population — who comprise nearly 80 percent of the workforce. Many are brought into the country on fixed-term contracts and face dangerous working conditions and low pay.

This drive — led by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman — includes eliminating many restrictions on women, including the right to drive and attend public events. These steps are popular among the vast majority of the Saudi population, 65 percent of whom are under age 30. Steps have also been taken to reign in the powers of the Wahhabi Muslim ministry over political and social life.

To further its impact in the region, the Saudi government has initiated a Muslim Military Alliance of some 40 countries that includes Turkey and excludes Iraq, Syria and Iran.

With Washington’s support, the Saudi air force has been bombarding Yemen in a nearly three-year-long war aimed at defeating Tehran-backed Houthi rebels who have taken control over large parts of the country. At Riyadh’s insistence, the U.N. Security Council imposed a total blockade on the country Nov. 6.

According to the U.N., some 7 million of the country’s 28 million people are on the brink of starvation, nearly 1 million have contracted cholera and over 2,000 have died from it.

Former Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh was killed in Sanaa Dec. 4. Saleh made billions for himself ruling Yemen with an iron fist for 33 years before being forced to resign in 2011 because of mass “Arab Spring” protests. He sided with the Houthis against the Saudi-led coalition, but broke with them two days before being killed.

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