

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Fidel Castro: Our principles are key to Cuban Revolution

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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 82/NO. 1 JANUARY 1, 2018

Cop who shot Walter Scott in S. Carolina gets 20 years

BY MAGGIE TROWE

In a victory in the fight against police brutality, a federal judge in Charleston, South Carolina, Dec. 7 sentenced North Charleston cop Michael Slager to 20 years in prison for the 2015 killing of Walter Scott.

Slager stopped Scott on April 5, allegedly for a broken taillight. Scott, who had a bench warrant for unpaid child support, tried to run away. Slager chased him and they scuffled. The unarmed Scott, who was African-American, broke free and resumed running. Slager, who is Caucasian, shot him five times in the back, then tried to cover it up by claiming Scott had grabbed the officer's Taser.

In the context of spreading demonstrations against cop violence at the time, police and city officials were faced with immediate protests and a call for an independent investigation from Scott's family, leaders of the In-

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Fall campaigns took SWP deeper into working class

Drive led by party members in retail industry



Militant/Clay Dennison

Retired postal worker Jim Kirwan talks with Walmart workers Pat Scott, center, and Mary Martin about *Militant*, Socialist Workers Party in Federal Way, Washington, October 2016.

BY DAN FEIN

The Socialist Workers Party's successful nine-week fall campaign to expand the reach of the *Militant* and books by leaders of the party in work-

ing-class communities and on the job, together with raising \$100,000 for the SWP fund drive to meet party expenses was led by members of the party's trade union fraction in the retail industry.

Fraction members in the U.S. sold over 10 percent of all the subscriptions and books sold by party members and its sister Communist Leagues in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the

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Teva workers in Israel join together to fight layoffs

BY SETH GALINSKY

In one of the largest labor actions in Israel in recent years, thousands of workers joined a four-hour general strike Dec. 17 in solidarity with Teva Pharmaceutical workers fighting layoffs and plant closings announced Dec. 14.

Teva, the largest generic drug company in the world and one of Israel's biggest companies, plans to lay off 25 percent of its workers, including 1,750 of its 6,400 workers in Israel.

In Jerusalem, workers barricaded themselves inside a Teva factory and wouldn't allow supervisors to leave. All 11 of Teva's factories and research facilities went on strike Dec. 19.

"The layoffs are a big blow to working people in Israel," Eliran Koznik, a Teva worker and Histadrut union leader in Kfar Saba near Tel Aviv, said by phone Dec. 18. "A lot of people believed that if you worked for Teva, you would have financial security until you got your pensions. It's not like that anymore."

"Workers at Teva come from all walks of life, Jewish, Arab citizens of Israel, immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia. And it's half women, half men," he said. "The workers are not the problem. The workers are the solution."

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'Our system is based on solidarity,' Cuban revolutionary tells unionists



Militant photos by Dan Fein

Griselda Aguilera, inset, speaks to United Steelworkers Local 1010 in Hammond, Indiana, Dec. 7. Aguilera was youngest volunteer in Cuba's 1961 mass campaign that wiped out illiteracy.

BY DAN FEIN

CHICAGO — "Our industries are no longer privately owned," Cuban revolutionary Griselda Aguilera Cabrera told members of United Steelworkers Local 1010 at their monthly meeting in Hammond, Indiana, Dec. 7. "They are run by the workers, their unions and the government. The unions work with the government to plan production. The workers make the decisions on safety and other work conditions."

Tom Hargrove, president of the local, introduced Aguilera, who was the youngest volunteer in Cuba's 1961 literacy campaign that taught millions of workers and farmers to read and

write, enabling them to take control of the direction of their country. The local organizes workers at the Arcelor-Mittal steel mill in East Chicago. The 75 union members watched a shortened version of the film "Maestra," or Teacher, about the mass literacy campaign before Aguilera spoke.

Workers in industry attended classes held in their factories for two hours per day, Aguilera explained. One hour was paid as part of the workday, and one was voluntary labor.

One union member asked Aguilera about wages in Cuba. "They are about \$100 per month, which is too low," Aguilera said, "but they are

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Kurdish people's independence fight under attack in Iraq, Syria

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Washington, Moscow and the Shiite- and Sunni-led capitalist governments in the Middle East have been jockeying for position to defend their national interests as the wars against both the Bashar al-Assad re-

gime in Syria and Islamic State in Syria and Iraq wind down. A key facet has been the shifting prospects for the Kurds — the world's largest nationality without their own state. There are more than 30 million Kurds divided among Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

As the final battles to oust the reactionary Islamic State from Iraq

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Washington, NKorea probe possible nuke negotiations

BY SETH GALINSKY

Recent developments and statements by government leaders in South Korea, North Korea, the United States, Russia and China have all indicated that despite their sharply counterposed views and national interests, they are looking for ways to start negotiations to reach an agreement in relation to North Korea's development of nuclear weapons.

The South Korean government has

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Rail workers fight bosses' plan for driver-only trains

Kazakh miners organize sit-in to fight for wages, safety

Migrant workers in Beijing mobilize to protest evictions

BY EMMA JOHNSON

Thousands of migrant workers in Beijing are fighting back against a stepped-up campaign by city officials seeking to force tens of thousands of them out of the area. City officials have demolished whole neighborhoods, in some instances ordering residents to pack up their belongings and leave with less than a day’s notice.

The city government is targeting these workers, the “low-end population” as officials call them, to free up land for profit-hungry real estate developers and replace the migrant workers with middle-class layers.

But the “low-end” workers are striking back. Hundreds gathered Dec. 10 in Feijia village on the outskirts of the city and hung a banner reading, “Violation of human rights” across the front gate of the village committee’s office. They rallied for several hours before police dispersed them.

In another neighborhood residents blocked a major roadway, chanting, “We want heat! We want to eat!” In other areas workers have organized to go to the local government to demand their rents be reimbursed.

Officials used a Nov. 18 fire in Xinjian neighborhood as a pretext to intensify and speed up the evictions, claiming they were acting to ensure people’s safety. Nineteen workers were killed and eight injured in the burned-out building, where more than 400 residents were crammed into 108-square-foot rooms, three to five in each. Many of the rooms had no windows.

Following the fire, the government

declared a 40-day campaign against “illegal structures.” Authorities had tolerated, inspected and taxed these buildings for years.

“They never said it was illegal when it was built, or when they came to inspect it, or when we paid our deposits, but now we’re being told to move,” Luo Haigang, a driver who was given two days’ notice to get out, told the *New York Times*.

They threw people, young and old, out into the streets in the middle of the coldest days of winter. Xinjian was reduced to rubble within a week.

“They called us at 5 a.m. and by 8 a.m. they had arrived with demolition equipment,” Bi Yanao, a 54-year-old worker who has lived in Beijing for 13 years, told *Japan Times*. “In just one hour they flattened a 100-meter-long [109 yards] stretch of land.”

How many of the 175,000 residents in Xihongmen township, which contains Xinjian village, will be pushed out is unclear, but hundreds of people, possibly thousands, are on the move. Similar eviction notices are being enforced in other parts of the metropolitan area, affecting some 100,000 people.

In the summer the government began demolishing some of the city’s largest migrant schools. There were several hundred schools a decade ago. Now there are only about 100 left.

Shantytowns like Xinjian encircle Beijing’s outskirts, housing the city’s more than 8 million migrant workers. The buildings are draped in tangled power lines supplying a maze of apartments, garment plants, small



Hundreds of migrant workers in Feijia neighborhood in Beijing protest Dec. 10 against city’s moves to evict them, chanting, “Violent evictions are a violation of human rights.”

factories, shops and restaurants along narrow alleyways.

Beijing officials have targeted six downtown districts where they plan to carry out a 15 percent cut in the population within the next two years. That amounts to 2 million people. They plan to demolish 15 square miles of “illegal structures.”

Close to 40 percent of Beijing’s residents are migrant workers. They are the millions who have run the factories, restaurants, delivery companies, construction sites and retail shops as the city and economy have grown. As migrant

workers they have no *hukou* — Beijing household registration — which means they have no access to medical care, social services and schools. Their wages are low, their hours long and their working conditions abysmal. The average rent in the city equals 58 percent of the average income, but fully 100 percent of low-paid migrants’ income.

Over the last three decades hundreds of millions of young people have left rural areas and poured into the factories and construction sites of Beijing and China’s coastal boom towns, providing the cheap labor for capitalist expansion.

Millions of workers saddled with unpayable student loan debts

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

Millions of working people in the U.S. are saddled with huge student loan debts, now at a record level of \$1.37 trillion. That’s higher than any other component of the household debt that is strangling growing numbers of working people, except mortgages.

Total household debt for mortgages, student loans, credit card arrears, auto loans and more is \$12.96 trillion, the highest ever. It’s larger than the gross domestic product for every country on earth this year except the U.S.

These stark figures are a reflection of the disastrous effects on working people

of the crisis of capitalist trade, production and jobs in the last decade.

Nearly a quarter of those with student debts haven’t made a payment for at least a year, meaning they’re in “default,” according to the government. Workers who defaulted on their student debt in the third quarter this year jumped by nearly 274,000. Overall, 4.6 million people are in default, twice as many as four years ago.

“I had to take out new loans every semester,” Dean Mahoney, 23, who graduated from State University of New York at New Paltz, told the *Militant*. “I ended

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THE MILITANT

Join the fight against prison censorship!

The ‘Militant’ is part of the fight for workers behind bars to have access to read whatever literature they want.

On Dec. 7 we won the latest of many rounds against censorship in Florida prisons when authorities backed off and let subscribers there get the paper.



Prisoners on lockdown for not being “tidy” at Flagler County Jail, Bunnell, Fla., in 2012.

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Deeper into working class

Continued from front page
United Kingdom.

Many of the trade union fraction's members work at Walmart, far and away the biggest private employer in the U.S., with 1.5 million employees. Walmart bosses are in a war with Amazon for market share. Both are squeezing workers to strengthen their company's competitive position. There is no union today at Walmart, a bitterly anti-labor employer. Low pay, changing hours of work each week, part-time hours, and no holiday pay are some of the conditions Walmart workers face.

Socialist Workers Party members and supporters who work in retail sold not only to their co-workers, but also door to door in working-class neighborhoods that workers recommended and in neighborhoods near the stores. We met co-workers at their homes or restaurants, and often had the chance to meet and talk politics with family and neighbors as well. Our discussions revolved around what the working class is facing today from the bosses and their government and what course points a road out of the economic and political crisis.

Twenty party members and supporters in retail in 10 U.S. cities adopted quotas at the beginning of the drive to sell 145 subscriptions and 145 books. We also projected playing a leading role in the SWP fund drive, taking goals of raising \$400 in contributions and winning 82 new donors.

Retail workers and their families, like other workers, feel the effects of the worldwide economic crisis and accompanying attacks by the capitalist rulers against the working class — declining standards of living, growing homelessness, lack of affordable housing and medical care, deportations, the devastating opioid epidemic, and unending imperialist war in the Mideast.

We discussed how working people can fight effectively to unify the working class and chart a course of independent working-class political action to break out of the carnage we face. Many we met with said they wanted to keep talking and learn more about the party, getting subscriptions and books. Forty-five co-workers and others we met in the neighborhoods of co-workers donated a total of \$311 to the fund drive.

Pat Scott works at a Seattle area Walmart and led the effort there. "It was a chance to talk to other workers about more than just work," she said. As she went door to door in the neighborhood near her workplace, one person she spoke to said, "I know you — you work at Walmart." She subscribed.

"I was reading *The Clintons' Anti-Working-Class Record* by SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes during a break at work when a co-worker approached me and asked 'What are you reading?'" Scott said. "I told him what it was about and suggested he get a copy, which he did." Seattle campaigners sold 22 subscriptions, 22 books and collected \$70

from eight new contributors.

Rosemary Padia got a *Militant* subscription from a door-to-door team at her home across the street from the Davis Street Walmart in Oakland, California. Later she went to the store to track down Bonnie Brown, who sold her the subscription, to get the "Clinton book." Fraction members in Oakland sold 26 subscriptions and 32 books.

The five books offered at reduced prices with a subscription are featured in the ad on this page.

Overall, fraction members sold 159 subscriptions to the *Militant* and 160 books, going over our goals of 145 each.

Isabella Graham from Chicago said one co-worker contributed \$10 from each paycheck during the drive. "Workers need a political party that supports their struggles and encourages them to organize themselves," she told Graham.

This effort by party members and supporters in retail was led by the fraction's national steering committee. And they led the entire campaign effort to take the Socialist Workers Party deeper into the working class.

Fraction members come out of the drive more confident, determined to continue to advance the party along the same lines. And to follow up with all those they've met who want to learn more about the SWP.

Communist League in UK holds congress



Militant

MANCHESTER, England — The 10th National Congress of the Communist League in the U.K. met here Dec. 16-17. The elected delegates, above, discussed and adopted a Political Resolution outlining a course to build the League and the international communist movement through advancing its work "deeper into the working class." At the heart of the resolution is systematic campaigning on doorsteps and living rooms in working-class areas with the *Militant* and books by Socialist Workers Party National Secretary Jack Barnes, Fidel Castro and other revolutionary leaders. Inset, delegate Jonathan Silberman presents report on the resolution.

Seeking to build the reach of the party and recruit to the League, members will focus on organizing ongoing political discussions with workmates and their families and friends. The congress also discussed the crucial place of involvement in advancing the international efforts of the communist movement. The delegates elected a new Central Committee. The Socialist Workers Party in the U.S. and the Communist League in Canada each sent a fraternal delegation, and greetings from the Communist Leagues in Australia and New Zealand were warmly received. Further coverage will appear in a forthcoming issue.

— TONY HUNT

Millions of workers saddled with student loan debts

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up with a debt of \$36,000 after four years. That's a lot to pay off and I've had a lot of trouble trying to do it."

Facing required payments of \$400 a month, Mahoney opted to restructure his loan with Navient Corporation, a private company that collects these loans for the government for a comfortable profit. "Navient gets 10 percent of what I make a year," Mahoney said, "and I still owe them around \$50,000. I'll be paying back these loans for a lifetime."

Many facing this spiraling debt load are forced to drop out of college, the New York Federal Reserve reports. Others face having their wages and tax refunds seized, and reduced Social Security payments as Washington seeks return of the loans.

"Twenty states suspend people's li-

censes and credentials if they fall behind on monthly loan payments," reported the *New York Times*. That means you can't work any more if you're a firefighter, nurse, teacher, barber or lawyer. The state of South Dakota suspends driver's licenses, making it nearly impossible to get to work.

A bill before Congress, euphemistically titled "The Student Security Act of 2017," offers to make a deal with those still saddled with student loan debts when they retire. The deal? The government will reduce an individual's debt by \$550 for each month they hold off from getting Social Security benefits. "Under the legislation, participants can get a maximum of \$40,150 in debt relief," reported CBS News Dec. 14. That means you can't claim any Social Security pay until you're over 71 years old.

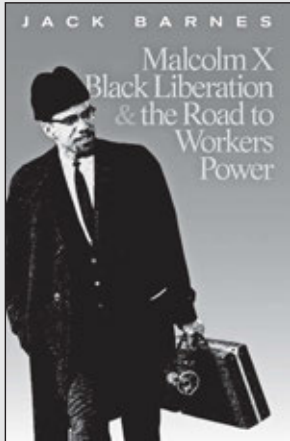
Another bill being pushed in the U.S. House education committee would further tighten the squeeze. It would put a stop to programs that exist today that allow debtors to write off remaining student-debt balance if they've made continuous payments over 20 or 25 years.

And whatever is "forgiven" is counted as income on your taxes that year, meaning you'll keep paying more to Washington.

"Everyone in my class is struggling with these debts unless they have richer parents to pay for it," said Mahoney. "College-level education should be accessible to the working class." He noted that his father, a mechanic, who went back to school about a decade ago, faces a similar situation. "He's still paying on his loans, while I'm paying on mine. It's really insane."

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The 'Militant' is taking a holiday break

This is a two-week issue.
The next issue will be
mailed out January 4.

S. Carolina cop gets 20 years

Continued from front page
ternational Longshoremen's Association and community groups.

Two days after the shooting a cell-phone video taken by Feidin Santana, a barber who was on his way to work, was made public. It not only showed Slager shooting Scott in the back, but also dropping an object that looked like a stun gun near the body. The North Charleston Police Department fired Slager the next day.

Murder charges against him ended in a mistrial in December 2016, but in a plea deal in May this year Slager admitted guilt to violating Scott's civil rights by using excessive force against him.

Slager's attorneys argued that the shooting was of manslaughter severity, while prosecutors said it was akin to second-degree murder and called for life imprisonment. U.S. District Judge David Norton, calling the shooting "reckless, wanton and inappropriate," condemned Slager to 20 years in prison.

Walter Scott's family members expressed satisfaction with the sentence. His mother, Judy Scott, and brothers Rodney and Anthony Scott, all said they forgave Slager.

"The sentence is severe enough — and jail time for policemen is a big thing, it doesn't happen that often," Dwayne German, 58, a maintenance worker at The Citadel military college in Charleston, said by phone Dec. 18. "But the evidence, the video, everything pointed to Slager's guilt. Walter Scott wasn't shot in the chest, he was shot in the back, so it was hard to argue self-defense."

I met German when I traveled to North Charleston to join the protests against Scott's killing and to cover the fight to bring Slager to justice for the *Militant*. German's stepson, 19-year-old Denzel Curnell, died in police custody in June 2014.

"Those who enforce our laws must also abide by them — and this Department of Justice will hold accountable anyone who violates the civil rights of our fellow Americans," Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement. "On behalf of the Department of Justice, I want to offer my condolences to the Scott family and loved ones."

"Officers rarely receive any prison

sentence at all for their crimes, and while Officer Slager is receiving what some may see as a strong sentence, we know that no punishment can repair the hole left in the lives of his loved ones," Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, said in a statement. "The fact is that Walter Scott should be alive today."

"It wasn't enough but I'm glad he didn't get off the hook," Evangeline Michelle Felder, 60, a certified nursing assistant in Charleston, said by phone Dec. 18. "Twenty years was better than nothing. A lot of us thought he would get off with a slap on the hand."



Demonstration in front of North Charleston City Hall after cop Michael Slager killed Walter Scott on April 5, 2015, shooting him in the back. Slager was sentenced to 20 years in jail Dec. 7.

Quebec: Frame-up case against rail workers unravels

BY JOHN STEELE

MONTREAL — At the conclusion of the state's presentation Dec. 12 of its frame-up case against locomotive engineer Tom Harding and train controller Richard Labrie, members of United Steelworkers Local 1976, their attorneys told the judge and jury they will not call any defense witnesses. The reason is that the prosecution — after almost two and a half months of testimony from 31 witnesses — has failed to show the workers engaged in any criminal actions.

The two unionists, along with former low-level Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway operations manager Jean Demaitre, were each charged with 47 counts of criminal negligence causing death after the July 2013 Lac-Mégantic runaway crude oil train derailment and explosion that killed 47 people and burned out the downtown core there. A conviction could mean life in prison.

Demaitre's attorney also said he wouldn't present any defense witnesses.

It has been clear from the start of the trial Oct. 2 in Sherbrooke, Quebec, that the main target of the government and rail bosses is Harding, who was the one-person "crew" on the train. He is accused of not setting a "sufficient" number of hand brakes on the 72-car train when he finished work that night.

The prosecution case against Harding, based on a report commissioned by Quebec provincial cops, is in direct contradiction to the conclusions of the official and published report by the in-

dependent Transportation Safety Board.

The TSB pointed to 18 different factors, documenting widespread disregard for safety by Montreal, Maine and Atlantic bosses and oversight failures by the government's Transport Canada. The latter had approved the railway's request to slash crew size in half in order to cut wage costs and raise profits.

Because of a pretrial ruling by presiding Superior Court Judge Gaétan Dumas, the safety board report could not be introduced in the trial, and cannot be used by the jury in its deliberations.

As he had done many times before, Harding parked the train on the main line at the village of Nantes seven miles up a slope from Lac-Mégantic. He left the lead locomotive running with its air brakes on, as usual, as well as setting a number of hand brakes, to prevent the train from moving. But during the night volunteer firefighters called to the scene turned off the engine when they put out a small fire that resulted from unsafe conditions and lack of service. Company personnel called Harding to tell him what happened. He volunteered to get out of bed and come check things out. He was told the company had people on the scene, that all was under control, and he should go back to sleep.

Lacking power the air brakes bled out and the train rolled into Lac-Mégantic, derailed and exploded.

"At the beginning the prosecution thought they had an open and shut case, based on the number of hand brakes

Harding applied," Thomas Walsh, one of Harding's lawyers, told the *Militant* in a Dec. 14 phone interview. "But as the trial unfolded and their witnesses testified about the lack of training and safety practices by the MMA, their case began to dissolve."

Government's case not convincing

"The burden is on the prosecution to prove its accusations beyond a reasonable doubt," he said. "They haven't even come close to establishing that Harding committed a crime."

Under cross-examination many of the prosecution's own witnesses, including locomotive engineers and others who worked with Harding, admitted the company's "culture" of disregard for safety and profit-driven priorities created a disaster waiting to happen.

It was revealed, for example, that the bosses ordered Harding, in order to save the company time and money, not to use an additional braking system that would have prevented the disaster. Management took no safety precautions when it cut the crew size down to one person. They let the train go that day, even though they knew the engine was acting up and the train was 3,000 tons over the legal limit. Bosses ignored requests by Montreal, Maine and Atlantic workers, including Harding, to have the lead locomotive sent to the shop to be fixed. All this and more came out.

A number of people came from Lac-Mégantic to sit in on parts of the trial. Overwhelmingly they say the wrong people are in the dock — the workers should be free and the railway's owners and officials of Transport Canada should be on trial.

The trial is recessed until Jan. 3, when the prosecution will make its closing arguments. Defense attorneys for Labrie and Demaitre will present their arguments Jan. 4, and Harding's lawyers the next day. Then the case goes to the jury.

Supporters of Harding and Labrie urge defenders of workers' rights to be in the courtroom to show their opposition to the frame-up and stand with the workers. Messages in support of Harding and Labrie should be sent to USW Local 1976/Section locale 1976, 2360 De Lasalle, Suite 202, Montreal, QC Canada H1V 2L1. Copies should be sent to Thomas Walsh, 165 Rue Wellington N., Suite 310, Sherbrooke, QC Canada J1H 5B9. Email: thomaspwalsh@hotmail.com.

Michel Prairie contributed to this article.

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—ON THE PICKET LINE—

Rail workers fight bosses' plan for driver-only trains

AUCKLAND, New Zealand—Some 500 members of the Rail and Maritime Transport Union held a one-day strike and picketed stations here Dec. 8 to protest company plans to introduce one-person passenger train “crews.”

“Safety of staff and the public is paramount in this fight,” Stuart Johnstone, the union’s northern region organizer, told the *Militant*.

Currently each train has both a driver and a conductor, called a train manager, with the latter responsible for monitoring door operation and passengers, and for medical emergencies. Transdev Auckland, which operates the trains for Auckland Transport, plans to eliminate permanent on-board crew members. Some 170 conductors and 40 ticketing inspectors will be laid off.

“This will put an immense amount of pressure on the driver to safely operate the train alone,” said Johnstone.

As passersby expressed support for workers at the Papakura Train Station picket line, they gave us examples of how on-board workers are essential for safety. One train manager recently saved a crawling baby from being crushed, stopping train doors closing on it.

“The company’s perception of safety is different to workers,” said Paul Stirling, a train driver from another company, who came to show support. “Their view is purely on economics.”

Auckland Transport has said they will deploy up to 230 “transport officers” to patrol the rail, bus and ferry networks when driver-only trains are implemented. But, workers said, that won’t make them safer. There will still be only one person on the train, the driver.

In November workers at Transdev Wellington, a sister company, went on strike over demands to slash their working conditions and cut overtime rates for weekend work.

— Baskaran Appu

Kazakh miners organize sit-in to fight for wages, safety

Some 680 coal miners in north-central Kazakhstan stayed underground Dec. 11-14, halting production and

occupying the ArcelorMittal mine in Shakhtinsk to press their fight for wages, safety and other demands. The miners, members of the Trade Union of Mining and Metallurgy Workers of the Republic of Kazakhstan, extended their action from four to eight ArcelorMittal mines Dec. 12. Family members and other miners brought food and clothing, sending them down to the mine floor to sustain the striking workers.

Kazakhstan authorities declared the strike illegal but agreed not to prosecute miners on their return to work.

The unionists won a 30 percent wage increase for underground miners. Negotiations will continue on wage rates for surface workers and on the miners’ demands for a reduction in the retirement age, additional safety measures and an improvement in the infrastructure of their hometown Shakhtinsk.

In August three miners died after a gas leak at the Qazaqstan mine there. “The technical equipment at the mine is lagging behind the Russian and Ukrainian mines,” stated Marat Mirgayazov,



Militant/Baskaran Appu

Members of Rail and Maritime Transport Union picket Papakura Train Station in Auckland, New Zealand, during one-day strike Dec. 8 to protest plans to cut train crew to one worker.

chairman of the Mineworkers’ Union Korgau at ArcelorMittal Temirtau.

The sit-in was the country’s largest strike since cops shot dead 14 people during an oil workers strike in 2011.

In January courts shut down the Confederation of Independent Trade

Unions of Kazakhstan. In July the confederation’s president, Larisa Kharkova, was convicted on frame-up charges of “abuse of office” and banned from holding any position in a trade union, for five years.

— Terry Evans

Washington, NKorea probe possible nuke negotiations

Continued from front page

proposed to Washington that they put off joint military maneuvers that they have carried out annually for nearly 40 years until after the Winter Olympics and Paralympics in South Korea.

These games are scheduled to end March 18. Operation Foal Eagle, in which tens of thousands of U.S. and Korean troops practice attacking the North and “eliminating” its leadership, usually take place in February or March.

This move comes among other signs that talks are possible.

“We know that North Korea wants above all to talk to the United States about guarantees for its security,” Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told Secretary of State Rex Tillerson when they met on the sidelines of the Dec. 7 Vienna meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, according to Russian media reports. “We are ready to support that, we are ready to take part in facilitating such negotiations.”

“We hope all relevant parties can take

steps to alleviate tensions,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang told the press at the meeting.

“We’re ready to talk anytime North Korea would like to talk,” Tillerson told a Dec. 12 forum in Washington. He outlined three conditions — a prior period of “quiet” in which the North Korean government does not carry out any nuclear or missile tests; that Pyongyang tell Washington it wants to negotiate; and that no North Korean tests take place during the negotiation process.

Tillerson has said that Washington has held numerous informal discussions with North Korean representatives since President Donald Trump took office.

Tillerson rejected a proposal by Moscow and Beijing — which have both carried out some of the U.N. sanctions against North Korea, but not to the extent demanded by Washington — for a “freeze-for-freeze.” This means that North Korea would suspend nuclear and missile tests, but not get rid of its existing nukes, in exchange for a moratorium

on U.S. military maneuvers.

At the same time Washington has used the U.N. Security Council to ramp up sanctions — and demanded that allies and rivals alike join in — to try to get North Korea to accept U.S. dictates and abandon its nuclear weapons and intercontinental missile program.

Tillerson told a Security Council meeting Dec. 15 that Pyongyang is “a direct threat to our security and the security of the entire world.” Jan Song Nam, North Korea’s U.N. ambassador replied. “The U.S. has now stockpiled more than 4,000 nuclear warheads in its nuclear arsenals,” and is the worldwide “leader in nuclear proliferation.” He argued that North Korea’s nuclear arsenal is necessary in the face of U.S. threats.

After World War II, the Korean people rose up in a countrywide revolutionary movement for independence. Washington — which had thousands of troops occupying southern Korea — and Moscow divided Korea, despite the desire of the Korean people for one, united, country. While Koreans carried their revolution through in the north, the U.S. government installed a bloody dictatorship in the south, which killed thousands of workers, peasants and other opponents of imperialist domination.

Washington, under the cover of the United Nations flag, bombed much of the north into rubble during the 1950-53 Korean War, but was fought to a standstill by Korean and Chinese soldiers. Washington to this day refuses to sign a formal peace treaty with North Korea.

Since the 1940s, the Socialist Workers Party has championed the fight of Korean workers and farmers for one, united, Korea, and demands that Washington get out. The SWP also backs the demand for a nuclear-free peninsula and a nuclear-free Asia.

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



January 8, 1993

Washington is moving close to active military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. The ruling families of the United States, Germany, Britain and France are seeking to intervene to put their stamp on the outcome of events.

The last thing the people of former Yugoslavia need is imperialist military intervention. In the past they have fought to overcome national divisions and unite to advance their own interests, including against Nazi occupation in the 1940s.

From the beginning of the carnage a year and a half ago, layers of the working class in Yugoslavia have resisted the slaughter. Working people around the world should demand an end to the economic sanctions against Serbia, as well as the arms embargo, massive food and medical aid to the besieged people of Bosnia.



January 1, 1968

The organizers of the boycott by Black athletes of the 1968 Olympics have drawn up a list of demands which must be met before they will call off the boycott.

The demands include: 1) Reinstatement of Muhammad Ali as world boxing champ; 2) No competition between the United States teams and the “lily-white” teams of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia; 3) An end to the discrimination against Black people and Jews by the New York Athletic Club;

4) Appointment of an additional Afro-American coach to the U.S. Olympic team; 5) Appointment of a Black person to the U.S. Olympic Committee and; 6) Resignation or ouster of Avery Brundage, the President of the International Olympic Committee.



January 2, 1943

The American ambassador to Bolivia stands accused of having intervened on behalf of the Bolivian bosses against the workers during the strike at the Catavi tin mines in Bolivia.

Ernesto Galarza, chief of the Labor Division of the Pan American Union, stated: “The workers have been demanding for many years the passage of a new labor code which would grant them the right to collective bargaining, freedom of organization, minimum wages, and the payment of wages at least every fifteen days. This code was to have been approved by the Bolivian Congress on December 8. On the days immediately preceding that date, the ambassador communicated to the president of Bolivia the viewpoints of the big mine operators, the object of which was to delay or prevent the improvement of working conditions set forth in the code.”

— CALENDAR —

CALIFORNIA

Bay Point

Labor and Community Town Hall on Health and Safety in Support of Striking IAM Local 1584 Members. Sat., Jan. 6, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. Ambrose Community Center, 3105 Willow Pass Road. Tel.: (925) 826-8033.

‘I urge you, go see for yourself the truth of Cuba’s revolution’

Samir Rohlin Hazboun, who was a participant in “In the Footsteps of Che” International Brigade to Cuba Oct. 1-15, writes here what he learned about the Cuban Revolution and its example. Hazboun works on the education team at the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee.

BY SAMIR ROHLIN HAZBOUN

I wanted to write a reflection of my experience in Cuba and observations about the health care system. I hope it is of some use in encouraging people to go and see the truth of the Cuban Revolution for themselves!

“Cuba is able to provide free health care to all its citizens!” This is often one of the first points a supporter of the Cuban Revolution will mention in a conversation about Cuba in the United States. The need for a comprehensive universal health care system is one that resonates with almost anyone here as the brutal attacks by the ruling class continue to rain down on workers’ right to medical treatment. Most folks are one hospital bill away from losing what little they have left and don’t need to be told twice how terrible the state of health care is. I distinctly remember when my friend suffered a sports concussion and while sprawled out on the field in pain, snapped into alertness to shout, “Do not call an ambulance! I am broke!” before collapsing back onto the ground.

However, while Cuba’s ability to provide universal health care as a socially guaranteed service is certainly remarkable, what is often overlooked is how the Cuban Revolution has also brought about a powerful cultural transformation within the health system. In Cuba, because profit is no longer the basis around which all decisions are made, health care workers can make decisions based on human need.

To make clear the distinction, let’s use the example of someone developing a mild flu bug. In the U.S. even if you had the best health insurance possible and the cost of a doctor’s visit wasn’t a factor at all, you would still likely have a doctor whose mindset would be to provide you with a medical solution that allows you to return to work as quickly as possible. This

is because under capitalism the entire social system is geared around productivity for profit’s sake. You would likely be prescribed an antibiotic, a steroid shot, and whatever else would alleviate the symptoms as quickly as possible so you could return to wage labor. None of the long-term consequences of taking antibiotics for such a mild affliction or jump-starting my immune system into overdrive with a steroid shot would be considered.

In Cuba the doctors can prescribe something that in the U.S. is almost inconceivable ... to simply take time off to rest and let the body fight off the sickness through its own means! This is only possible when you have a society that is so organized and focused on doing what is best for people that one need have no fear of being punished for taking care of your health. Compare this to the demands of bosses here that workers in hurricane-ravaged areas show up to work or risk losing their jobs!

I was able to witness the impressive health care achievements of the Cuban Revolution firsthand when I traveled to Cuba for the Che Brigade in October of 2017. On one of the first days one member of the U.S. delegation developed severe back spasms, a chronic



Samir Hazboun

Samir Hazboun, left, with Cuban farmer on whose land he did voluntary work during October brigade. He describes contrast between health care in revolutionary Cuba and for-profit U.S.

condition for him. We encouraged him to go to the doctor, but he explained that it’s always the same thing when he goes in. A prescription for pain pills and to “take it easy.” It’s no coincidence that pharmaceutical company profits are sky-high and that there’s an opioid epidemic in this country.

He ended up going to the Cuban doctor and he came back later that day with a huge smile on his face as he raved about how he had received an acupuncture treatment and electroshock therapy right on the spot and that his back already felt better. Not only that, but the doctor came and knocked

on our door the next day to make sure he was feeling better and to invite him to come back for another treatment!

Finally, I must thank the members of the Socialist Workers Party who attended the Che Brigade as it was through their constant willingness to have conversations, impressive commitment to making books available and infectious enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution that I was able to understand how it is the fact that the Cubans had a true workers revolution that laid the foundation that makes possible in Cuba powerful achievements like quality health care!

Cuban literacy brigade veteran speaks to unionists

Continued from front page

higher than before the revolution. And you have to remember, we don’t pay for medical care or education. Rent, mortgage payments, and utility rates are low. We are a poor country, impacted by the embargo by the U.S.”

After the meeting, three union members expressed interest in signing up for the 2018 May Day Brigade to Cuba.

Aguilera spoke to hundreds of people at meetings in Milwaukee and Chicago Nov. 29 through Dec. 9, as part of a tour organized by the Chicago Cuba Coalition.

She spoke to two high school classes in Chicago, one at Pedro Albizu Campos High School in the Humboldt Park neighborhood and one at Bogan High on the South Side. Marilen Corres, the teacher who organized the meeting at Bogan, had gone on the annual May Day brigade to Cuba earlier this year. “The students got a chance to hear the truth about Cuba,” she told the *Militant*.

The Loyola University Department of Sociology and Chicago ALBA Solidarity group sponsored a meeting at the Corboy Law Center in downtown Chicago Dec. 5, titled “Women in Cuba: Our Achievements and Continuing Struggles.”

“We don’t experience sexual harassment like women do in the U.S.,” Aguilera said. “Our system is based on solidarity, and hiring and promotions are based on qualifications not sexual favors.”

“Why is Cuba so different from other countries?” Ananda Badil, a college student, asked her. “In Cuba, women are respected,” Aguilera said. “And we gained confidence through our revolution.”

On Dec. 9 Aguilera joined three

doctors and a nurse from Cuba at a public meeting. The medical workers are in Chicago as part of a project organized by the University of Illinois Cancer Center. They have been studying how to address the infant mortality rate in Englewood, an overwhelmingly Black working-class neighborhood, which is more than double that of the city as a whole. More than 50 people attended the meeting, held at a neighborhood community center.

Health care is accessible and free

Dr. José Armando Arronte Villamarin described how the Cuban Revolution changed people’s conditions of life, including health care. In 1959 “we had 8,000 doctors. Half of them left the country after the revolution, and the other half stayed in the cities,” he said. The revolution had to reorganize things so everyone could see a doctor. “Infant mortality was more than 60 per 1,000 live births, sanitary conditions were precarious, and many children died of preventable disease.

“Today we have more than 85,000 doctors,” he said. “There is 100 percent access to health care in rural areas, and infant mortality is 4.3 per 1,000.”

“It was very hard for us to understand the health insurance system here,” Arronte added, to laughter, “because for us health care is accessible and free.”

Both Arronte and Aguilera stressed that these changes were the product of a revolutionary social transformation involving the entire population. The Cuban people, led by Fidel Castro and the July 26 Movement, confronted the legacy of underdevelopment left by colonial and capitalist rule in Cuba. When young volunteers went to the

countryside to teach reading and writing in 1961, many peasants they taught had no clean water or modern sanitation.

“Part of the literacy campaign was to introduce education on basic health and hygiene,” Aguilera said, “and to do so in a way not to undermine the self-esteem of the people.”

All of the members of the Cuban medical delegation in Chicago had taken part in internationalist missions to aid working people in other countries.

“There are more Ghanaian doctors in New York than in Ghana,” Dr. Berta Maria Bello Rodríguez said, describing her experiences there. “In many areas the only doctors are Cuban. In Africa we encountered diseases that are no longer a problem in Cuba, such as malaria. We had to go back to the books.”

“It’s hard to get insulin,” Arronte said, describing the impact of Washington’s 50-year-long economic war against the people of Cuba. “We were receiving it from a U.S. company that was based in a third country,” and that supply was suddenly cut off.

“I was privileged to visit Cuba with the May Day brigade,” said Michael Jabari Tidmore, who chaired the event. He urged others to go next year.

“Cuba plays an important role around the world,” he said, adding that part of Washington’s unrelenting campaign against the Cuban Revolution is to make sure “this information is blocked from getting out. This blockade must end.”

Aguilera will be in the U.S. through February. Anyone interested in organizing events for her to speak should contact the Chicago Cuba Coalition at chicagocubacoalition@pobox.com.

Cuba and the Coming American Revolution

by Jack Barnes

This is a book about the example set by the people of Cuba that revolution is not only necessary — it can be made. It’s about the class struggle in the U.S., where the potential of workers and farmers are today as utterly discounted by

the ruling powers as were those of the Cuban toilers. And just as wrongly. \$10

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Fidel Castro: Our principles are key to Cuban Revolution

Excerpt from book by Cuban leader Armando Hart underscores moral strength of July 26 Movement

Below is an excerpt from *Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground, 1952-58, a Participant's Account by Armando Hart*. Hart, who helped found the July 26 Movement and led its urban underground, died in Havana Nov. 26. After the overthrow of the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship in 1959, Hart served as Minister of Education and later as Minister of Culture in the new revolutionary government and spent decades in the central leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba. *The Militant* is publishing a series of excerpts from his book. This selection, titled "Manifesto to the Nation: Response to the Miami Pact," was drafted by Fidel Castro, the revolution's central leader, in collaboration with Hart and other leaders of the July 26 Movement, and released Dec. 14, 1957.

The manifesto repudiates the Miami Pact, referred to here as the "unity document," which was an agreement among bourgeois opposition forces that contained both public and private clauses, after its drafters falsely claimed it had been signed onto by leaders of the July 26 Movement. Copyright © 2004 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted with permission.



No matter how desperate our situation in face of thousands of the dictatorship's troops mobilized to annihilate us, and perhaps with more determination because of it (since nothing is more humiliating than to accept an onerous condition under trying circumstances), we would never accept the sacrifice of certain principles that are fundamental to our conception of the Cuban Revolution. These principles are contained in the Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra.

To omit from the unity document the explicit declaration that we reject every form of foreign intervention in the internal affairs of Cuba is a sign of lukewarm patriotism and of cowardice, which must be condemned in and of itself.

Declaring that we are opposed to intervention is not simply asking that there be no intervention in support of the revolution, which would undercut our sovereignty and undermine a principle that affects all the peoples of the Americas. It also means opposing all



Fidel Castro, Armando Hart, Celia Sánchez and Raúl Castro, January 1958. July 26 Movement repudiated 1957 pact signed by bourgeois forces that didn't reject foreign intervention.

intervention on the side of the dictatorship by supplying the planes, bombs, tanks, and modern weapons that maintain it in power. No one knows this better than we do, not to mention the peasants of the Sierra, who have suffered it in their own flesh and blood.

In short, ending such intervention means achieving the overthrow of the dictatorship. Are we such cowards that we won't even demand no intervention on the side of Batista? ...

The unity document omits the explicit rejection of any kind of military junta as a provisional government of the republic.

The worst thing that could happen to Cuba at the present time would be the replacement of Batista by a military junta, as this would be accompanied by the deceptive illusion that the nation's problems had been resolved by the dictator's absence. ...

We do not hesitate to declare that if a military junta replaces Batista, the July 26 Movement will resolutely continue its struggle for liberation. It is preferable to do battle today than to fall into a new and insurmountable abyss tomorrow. ...

If one lacks faith in the people, if one lacks confidence in their great reserves of energy and struggle, then one has no right to interfere with their destiny, distorting and misdirecting it during the

most heroic and promising moments of the republic's life. Keep the revolutionary process free of all dirty politicking, all childish ambitions, all lust for personal gain, all attempts to divide up the spoils beforehand. Men are dying in Cuba for something better. ...

Another point that is equally unacceptable to the July 26 Movement is secret provision number 8, which states: "The revolutionary forces are to be incorporated, with their weapons, into the regular armed bodies of the republic." ...

Our experience in the territory dominated by our forces has taught us that the maintenance of public order is a key question for the country. Events have shown us that as soon as the prevailing order is eliminated, a series of problems are unleashed and crime, if left unchecked, sprouts up all over. It was the timely application of severe measures, with full public blessing, that put an end to the outbreak of banditry. ...

Anarchy is the worst enemy of a revolutionary process. To combat it from now on is a fundamental need. Whoever does not understand this has no concern for the fate of the revolution, and those who have not sacrificed for the revolution, logically enough, do not share this concern. The country needs to know that there will be justice, but under the strictest order. Crime will be punished no matter where it comes from.

The July 26 Movement claims for itself the role of maintaining public

order and reorganizing the armed forces of the republic.

1. Because it is the only organization that possesses organized and disciplined militias throughout the country, as well as an army in the field, with twenty victories over the enemy.

2. Because our combatants have demonstrated a spirit of chivalry free of all hatred toward the military, invariably respecting the lives of prisoners, tending their wounded, never torturing an adversary, even when they are known to possess important information. And they have maintained this conduct with an unprecedented equanimity.

3. Because the armed forces must be imbued with the spirit of justice and nobility that the July 26 Movement has instilled in its own soldiers.

4. Because the calmness with which we have acted in this struggle is the best guarantee that honorable military men have nothing to fear from the revolution. ...

It is the members of the July 26 Movement alone who have spread rebellion from the wild mountains of Oriente to the western provinces of the country. It is the members of the July 26 Movement alone who are carrying out sabotage, the execution of assassins, the burning of cane fields, and other revolutionary acts. It is the July 26 Movement alone that has been able to organize workers in revolutionary action throughout the nation. It is also the July 26 Movement alone that today can carry out the strategy of strike committees. And it is the July 26 Movement alone that has helped organize the Civic Resistance Movement, which today groups together the civic sectors in almost all the localities of Cuba. ...

We are prepared, even if alone, to triumph or die. The struggle will never be as difficult as it was when we were only twelve men; when we did not have a people organized and tempered by war throughout the Sierra; when we did not have, as today, a powerful and disciplined organization throughout the country; when we did not possess the formidable mass support demonstrated at the time of the death of our unforgettable Frank País.

To die with dignity does not require company.

Fidel Castro Ruz

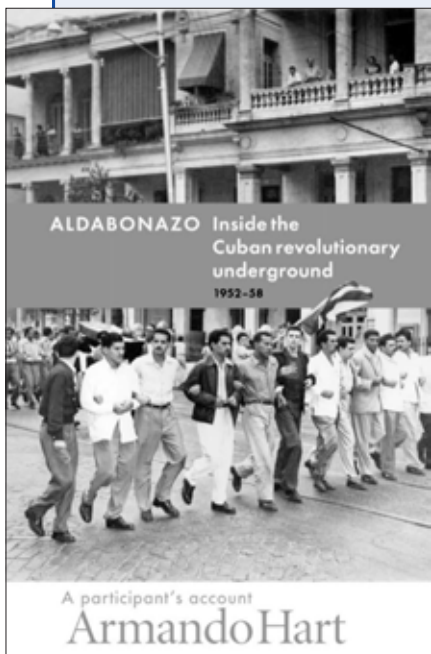
For the National Directorate
of the July 26 Movement,
Sierra Maestra, December 14, 1957

Special offer: \$18 (through March 1) Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground 1952-58

by Armando Hart

In this firsthand account by a historic leader of the Cuban Revolution, we meet men and women who led the urban underground in the fight against the U.S.-backed Batista tyranny. Together with their comrades-in-arms in the Rebel Army, their actions and example worldwide changed the history of the 20th century — and the century to come. Also in Spanish.

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Che: Fidel spoke for all of us

In Episodes of the Cuban Revolutionary War, 1956-58, Cuban revolutionary leader Ernesto Che Guevara describes the broad support in both wings of the July 26 Movement for Fidel Castro's principled, revolutionary response to the Miami Pact. Copyright © 1996 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BY ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA

It is important to point out that the fighters in both the Sierra and Llano were able to hold opinions on tactics that were at times diametrically opposed, without having this lead to the abandoning of the insurrectional struggle. ... In the face of all pressures from outside our

movement, and all attempts to divide or infiltrate it, we always presented a common front of struggle. Moreover, even those comrades who saw the Cuban revolution less clearly at the moment we are speaking of were wary of opportunists.

When Felipe Pazos, invoking the name of the July 26th Movement sought to appropriate for himself and for the most corrupt oligarchic interests of Cuba the positions offered by the Miami Pact, nominating himself for the position of provisional president, the entire Movement was solidly against this stand and supported the letter that Fidel Castro sent to the organizations involved in the struggle against Batista.

Join in advancing the reach of the SWP

As 2018 begins the *Militant* invites its readers to join members of the Socialist Workers Party in expanding the readership of the paper, getting books by party leaders and other revolutionaries into the hands of fellow workers, and using SWP 2018 campaigns for U.S. Senate and other offices to introduce the program and activities of the party.

Join in as we visit with co-workers, their families, friends and neighbors, and knock on doors in working-class neighborhoods far and wide. And as we join discussions on strike picket lines and protest actions against cop brutality, attacks on immigrants, assaults on women's rights, and against Washington's wars.

We will discuss how the deep-going crisis of capitalism today drives the propertied rulers to step up their attacks on workers' living standards,

dignity and rights. Join us in participating in the wide-ranging discussions among workers looking for a way to overcome the divisions the bosses impose on us and stand up to their assaults. Through struggles in the years ahead, workers will develop the courage, class solidarity and self-confidence to make socialist revolution here possible.

Fifty-nine years ago working people in Cuba demonstrated that our class *is* capable of forging the cadres and leadership needed to take political power. And they went on to overturn the dictatorship of the capitalist class, replacing it with the power of the toiling majority and reaching out to aid fighting peoples worldwide.

We will build such a party here. This is a life worth living! Join us!

Teva workers in Israel unite to fight layoffs



Dec. 18 protest by Teva Pharmaceutical workers outside factory in Jerusalem.

Continued from front page

While Teva produces scores of generic drugs, its biggest profit maker was Copaxone, a drug for treating multiple sclerosis. But that patent expired and Teva faces increased competition.

In a bid to strengthen its edge against rivals, Teva last year bought Activis, a U.K.-based generic drug company, saddling itself with \$35 billion in debt just as prices for many generics were falling.

Over the last decade the Israeli government gave the company some \$6.2 billion in tax breaks and subsidies. That, along with ostentatious benefits to top executives, irks many of the workers.

"Recently all of management got big bonuses," Koznik said. "Why should workers have to pay for bad administration?"

Teva workers learned about the cuts from the media. "Everything about the layoffs and closing of some of the factories was a surprise to the workers," Koznik said. "We want Teva to negotiate with us."

The composition of the workforce at Teva is not unusual for Israel. The development of industry and growing numbers of Arabs, Jews and immigrants toiling side by side have opened the door to deepening class struggle as today's crisis of capitalism unfolds.

A Dec. 15 article by Matti Friedman, Jerusalem-based correspondent for the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, described a piece of the changing relations between Jewish and Arab workers.

Friedman notes that after President Donald Trump announced Dec. 6 that Washington would officially recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and eventually move its embassy there, "Arab leaders called for 'days of rage' and a chorus of Western observers predicted an explosion."

But that's not what happened. The protesters who showed up at Old Jerusalem's Damascus Gate "were outnumbered by journalists," Friedman says. "There weren't spontaneous mass celebrations on the Jewish side or mass disturbances on the Arab side. The past week has been fairly normal."

"Nearly half the city's Arab workers are now employed in Jewish areas," he said. "Salaries in Palestinian homes increasingly come from Israeli employers," so Palestinians and Jews in Israel "are becoming more tightly entwined, and everyone has more to lose if things fall apart."

Friedman says that anyone wanting to understand Jerusalem today needs to visit the city's Talpiot industrial zone. A big supermarket there is in "an Israeli area," he said, but of the 50-odd workers I counted among the aisles of produce and cereal, at least two-thirds were Palestinian." A Jewish cashier was serving three Muslim women. At a SuperPharm an Arab female pharmacist was "serving a Jewish woman with a prescription, a Jewish cashier and two Arab guys stocking the shelves," Friedman wrote. "Ten years ago, it would have been remarkable to see Palestinian customers or salespeople in a Jewish part of town, but today what's remarkable is how unremarkable it's

become."

A new poll in Israel reports that 84.3 percent of Arabs and 63.7 percent of Jews believe they should coexist. The study reports 84.2 percent of Arabs want their children to learn Hebrew, while 56.4 percent of Jews think their kids need to learn Arabic.

Anti-Israel boycott loses steam

This reality makes it harder to paint Israel as a pariah nation or an outcast that should be destroyed. That's one of the reasons the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions movement against Israel is losing steam.

More musicians are refusing to give in to pressure to cancel their concerts in Israel. Among musicians who have toured Israel recently or have upcoming tours are Radiohead, Bon Jovi, Elton John, Neil Young, Bryan Adams, Nick Cave, Lorde and the Cuban band Pasi3n de Buena Vista, formed in tribute to the internationally known Buena Vista Social Club, which performed in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa in December.

In July Nasreen Qadri, an Israeli-Arab musician, wrote in *Newsweek* that politically pressured cancellations are "hurting those who wish to promote peace and tolerance in a troubled region."

"I was born in Haifa and grew up in Lod — two cities with a mix of Arab and Jewish communities, living side by side. It wasn't always easy, but my personal experience has taught me that open dialog is the only way to overcome our differences," she wrote. "Those who call for boycott are only trying to divide us."

A Dec. 8 editorial in the *Jerusalem Post* criticized a law passed in the Knesset in March that bans entry to Israel of foreigners who publicly back the boycott. "People should not be penalized for their political views. Truth is the best remedy," the editors said.

—Statement by the— Socialist Workers Party

- For recognition of a Palestinian state and of Israel
- For repeal of U.S. Jerusalem Embassy Act
- For workers' solidarity in Israel, Palestine, the world over

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Kurds under attack

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were shaping up, leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government organized a referendum on independence. Over opposition from Washington and its imperialist allies, and almost all capitalist governments in the region, the referendum took place, passing overwhelming. Tens of thousands of Kurds took to the streets to celebrate.

Saying there could be no independence, the Shiite-led Iraqi regime organized its troops along with Tehran-backed Hashd al-Shaabi militias to seize Kirkuk, nearby oil fields and other territories in the north that had been under the protection of the KRG. The confrontation was unequal — the regime had air power, tanks and heavy artillery the Kurds lacked, all provided by Washington — and the Kurds were divided between followers of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Washington gave backhanded support to Baghdad's forces.

The result was a serious setback for the Kurds. Their peshmerga troops withdrew from some 40 percent of the territory they had held. Kurdish toilers already faced difficult economic circumstances — Baghdad had cut off essential finances in 2014, oil prices plummeted, and the KRG took on the expense of caring for some 1.8 million refugees who sought protection there. The Kurdish people also face government corruption at every level.

With working people squeezed for cash, one-third of the markets in Erbil, the KRG capital, have closed over the past four months.

Protests broke out Dec. 17 in the Kurdish provinces of Sulaymaniyah and Halabja, with teachers, cops and thousands of other government employees demanding an end to further cuts in their wages and for improvements in electrical services. They also protested government corruption.

In Chamchamal, protesters rallied and then attacked a power plant and blocked the road between Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. Actions also took place in Raniya, Saed Sadiq, Taqtaq, Kalar, Qaladze and Ruwanduz.

In some places protesters set fire to the offices of all five Kurdish political parties. The Kurdistan region's parliament and all the parties issued statements saying they agreed protesters demands were just, but urged them to keep the actions peaceful.

Syria's Assad calls Kurds 'traitors'

Kurds in adjoining Syria are also facing threats. Washington relied on Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) forces to drive out Islamic State, and tries to limit territory in which Tehran and its ally Hezbollah had free sway. With U.S. air support, they defeated IS at Kobani, Raqqa and Deir el-Zour to the Iraqi border north of the Euphrates River.

As the Assad regime tottered, Moscow in September 2015 sent bombers and troops to prop up his rule. This effort has been largely successful, defeating the anti-Assad rebel forces that grew out of the mass mobilizations in 2011.

Damascus and Ankara have both threatened to attack the Kurds. Washington has said it will stop arming the YPG, and has asked for the return of heavy artillery "loaned" to them.

Assad called Kurds in Syria "traitors" for collaborating with Washington and carving out their own autonomous region. "All those who work for a foreign country, mainly those under American command, are traitors," the *Daily Sabah* quoted Assad Dec. 18.

Ankara, which fears that Kurdish gains in Syria or Iraq would stir nationalist pride and protest in Turkey, where some half of all Kurds in the region live, also looks to target the YPG.

As part of a deal with Moscow and Tehran to monitor a so-called de-escalation zone in Syria's Idlib province, Ankara sent troops and artillery there. They are now deployed along 22 miles of the border with Kurdish-run Afrin province, many within 1.3 miles of YPG fighters. The YPG reports daily exchanges of fire.

"We will clean Afrin of terrorists, we will clean Manbij of terrorists," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Dec. 18. "We will clean Tel Abyad, Ras al-Ayn, and Qamishli of terrorists." In other words all the Kurdish border areas in Syria.

John Studer contributed to this article.