

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

Moscow launches assault on Ukrainian access to Azov Sea
— PAGE 6

A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 82/NO. 47 DECEMBER 17, 2018

Welcome to the 1,404 new readers of the 'Militant'!

BY MAGGIE TROWE

The *Militant* welcomes the 1,404 readers who subscribed over the last eight weeks! A final scoreboard on the drive to sell 1,400 subscriptions and an equal number of books on

SWP SPEAKS IN INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

working-class politics by leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, along with an evaluation of the drive, will appear in next week's issue.

We want to offer a special welcome to the 37 new readers among workers behind bars. These come as we're fighting — with some success — against censorship by prison authorities in Florida.

Most of our new readers signed up for the paper when members of the Socialist Workers Party knocked on their doors in cities, towns and rural areas across the country. This is the best way today for party members to discuss and debate politics and the road forward for working people, to make lasting contacts and to recruit.

Continued on page 3

Disaster from Camp Fire is result of capitalist rule

BY JEFF POWERS

CHICO, Calif. — It was raining heavily when Socialist Workers Party members from Oakland arrived at the Chico Walmart parking lot here Nov. 29. Our goal was to extend solidarity with survivors of the Camp Fire camped out here and to tell their story to workers worldwide in the *Militant*.

Scores of tents were still up, even though Walmart bosses had threatened to close down the encampment a week ago. Those here are mainly from Paradise, Magalia and Concow — the three towns that were almost completely obliterated by the wildfire, the deadliest in California history. Over 80 people were killed.

Most of what the survivors have — from their tents, to the pallets that keep them off the ground, to their clothes, food and other provisions — were donated or paid for by workers in the area.

Everybody living here had been pushed to relocate to one of the six official shelters set up in the area. But many refused to go, pointing to the Norovirus outbreak that has infected several of the shelters, fear of being

Continued on page 4

'Yellow vest' protests force French gov't to back down



Reuters/Stephane Mahe

Protesters at Arc de Triomphe in Paris Dec. 1, before cop tear gas and water cannon attack.

French 'deplorables' demand more, want 'whole baguette'

BY PAMELA HOLMES AND HUGO WILS

PARIS — In face of sustained mass, popular mobilizations from rural areas as well as working-class suburbs, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced Dec. 4 a six-month suspension of the proposed hike in car fuel taxes. These proposed taxes were the "straw that broke the camel's back" and launched what has become known as the "yellow vest" movement. The name comes from the yellow-colored reflective safety vests the demonstrators wear on their mobilizations.

The prime minister also said the government would halt planned increases in gas and electricity prices this winter, as well as postponing

Continued on page 9

Working class must lead rural revolt against capitalist rulers

Around the world, a mood of angry revolt is spreading among the "people from nowhere" — workers, family farmers and the rural poor,

EDITORIAL

those who never have a voice in the big business press. Whether wage slaves or debt slaves, they are increasingly saying, "Enough!" after being pushed towards the edge for years by a rapacious profit-driven system built on their backs, and being ignored or treated like dirt by bosses, bankers, politicians and government bureaucrats of whichever ruling-class party is in power.

Exploding in small cities and towns

Continued on page 9

'We won!' Marriott hotel workers vote to end strike, return to work



Militant/Eric Simpson

Dec. 1 rally by striking San Francisco Marriott hotel workers. Union members there and in Hawaii made gains on higher wages, job security, better work conditions, health care.

BY BETSEY STONE

SAN FRANCISCO — Marriott hotel workers here ended their strike Dec. 3, voting by 99.6 percent to accept a new four-year contract. The workers, members of UNITE HERE, kept picket lines strong for two months

at seven of the city's hotels. They returned to work Dec. 5. Strikers in Hawaii had voted up a new contract and settled with Marriott Nov. 27.

The atmosphere at the Parc 55 Hotel where workers came to vote was

Continued on page 4

National coalition against censorship says stop Florida bans on 'Militant'

BY SETH GALINSKY

The National Coalition Against Censorship and the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida have sent letters calling on Florida prison officials to cease their ongoing attempts to keep the socialist newsweekly *Militant* out of the hands of subscribers behind bars there.

Wardens and other Florida prison officials have impounded the paper at least 20 times in the past two years, violating the constitutional rights of the *Militant* and its subscribers. Although the prison system's Literature Review Committee overturned most of the bans — often only after the *Militant* appealed — it upheld five of them without explanation.

"Not a single impoundment is justified," said *Militant* editor John Studer.

"The National Coalition Against

Censorship was formed in 1974 to promote freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression. It opposes all forms of censorship," the group's executive

Continued on page 7

Inside

Canadian nationalism, tariffs dead end for working farmers 2

At G-20 US, China rulers reach truce in trade dispute 6

Florida victory boosts fight for ex-prisoners' voting rights 7

—On the picket line, p. 5—

Minn. Somali Amazon workers fight speedup, discrimination

Welcome to 1,404 new readers

Continued from front page

Party members also expanded the reach of the *Militant* and the books to workers, while joining in labor struggles and social protests.

As the drive ends, the party is getting ready to field candidates in 2019 statewide and municipal elections, to pose the need for working people to fight to take political power into their own hands.

“Our door-knocking is helping us gear up to organize a bold campaign for governor of Kentucky,” Amy Husk, SWP organizer in Louisville, told the *Militant* Dec. 4. There will also be elections for mayor in Chicago, Dallas and Philadelphia, and other offices nationwide.

“Last week Dan Fein, who ran as SWP candidate for governor in Illinois in the 2018 elections, and other SWP members from Chicago came to Louisville to campaign with party members here,” she said. “Dan and I met Irma Carpio, a 17-year-old Fern Creek High School student. We discussed the teachers’ actions in West Virginia, Kentucky and other states last spring as an example of the kind of fight that workers need to support.”

“I went to Frankfort [Kentucky’s capital] last spring along with other students to back the teachers,” Carpio said. “I really support their fight.”

“My parents don’t make enough money to pay all the bills, so I work at a restaurant every day after school to pitch in,” she said, adding that she also takes care of her siblings while they’re working. “We need unions for hotel workers. My mom only makes \$10 an hour cleaning rooms.”

Fein showed her the *Militant*’s coverage on hotel workers on strike around the country, and their demand: “One job should be enough!”

“The Socialist Workers Party will be running candidates for governor of Kentucky and other offices across the country where we’ll take up issues like this and be the voice speaking out in the interests of the working class,” he told Carpio. “We invite young people and others to get involved in the campaign.”

“That sounds great,” Carpio said. “I know some other people at my school who would be interested. Maybe we could have your candidate speak at my high school.” Carpio wanted to subscribe to the *Militant*, and asked Husk to come back the next day for the money. “She had her \$5 in her hand when I dropped by,” Husk said.

Hotel strikers in San Francisco and elsewhere were interested in the *Militant*’s coverage also. UNITE HERE

Local 5 in Hawaii put one of the paper’s articles about the strike on its webpage.

Members of the SWP branch in Oakland, California, joined more than 1,000 strikers and supporters in a Dec. 1 San Francisco march and rally called by three Bay Area county labor councils, Carole Lesnick reported Dec. 4.

Lesnick, the party’s candidate for U.S. Congress in the 13th district this fall, spoke with John Lacap, a striking Marriott banquet worker. Lacap said he’s a strong supporter of the union, UNITE HERE Local 2. “I used to be a parking valet getting \$11 an hour,” he told her. “There was no union, no seniority and the pay was about favoritism and control. It’s better with a union. There’s more security, unity and higher pay.” Like six other workers at the rally, Lacap signed up for a subscription.

“We presented the books alongside the *Militant*, using them to tie into the key political discussions going on today,” Alyson Kennedy, from the SWP in Dallas said about the drive there.

“For example, in talking about the need to fight for amnesty for immigrant workers here,” she said, “we would point to the section in *The Clintons’ Anti-Working-Class Record* on how their administration presided over the highest number of deportations in U.S. history.”

Party-Building Fund

“When we get into political discussions with workers, a number decide to contribute to the Socialist Workers Party fund,” Ned Measel, a retail worker who had been the SWP candidate for District of Columbia delegate, wrote Dec. 3. “Knocking on doors in apartments today, not many people were home, but we got a total of \$10 in contributions from the three Cameroon-born workers we talked with.

“We explained our class has to do something different from what we’ve been doing. We have numbers, but the numbers are our strength only if we organize a movement independent of the bosses,” he said.

“We gave the examples of the hotel strikers and the ‘yellow vest’ protesters in France to everyone we talked to. A nurse gave us \$5 for the paper. We told her the extra \$4 would go to the Party-Building Fund. She liked that. Another woman got a single copy, and gave us



Militant/Dan Fein

Irma Carpio, a high school student in Louisville, Kentucky, speaks with SWP member Amy Husk Dec. 1. Carpio had organized with other students to support teachers’ strike last spring.

\$5, saying, ‘I like what you’re doing!’”

The final chart for the Party-Building Fund will be printed next week, to allow checks that are in the mail to arrive.

This weekly column on the exchanges between SWP members and workers they meet campaigning door to door will continue as the 2019 SWP election campaigns get going. We welcome re-

ports describing what workers say they face today and discussions about how to build the working-class movement, increase solidarity and class-consciousness, and break from the capitalists’ parties and fight to take political power.

To get involved, contact the SWP or Communist League nearest you, listed on page 8.

Join May Day International Volunteer Work Brigade to Cuba — April 22 - May 5

Meet workers and farmers from across the island; participate in voluntary agricultural work; join hundreds of thousands at Havana annual May Day march.

The brigade is sponsored by the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP). U.S. contingent is being organized by National Network on Cuba.



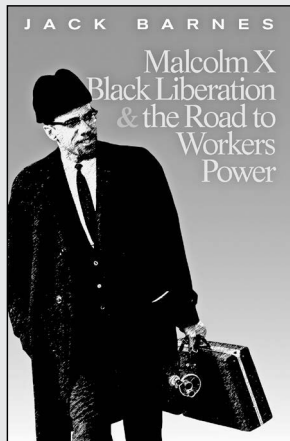
May 1, 2018, march in Havana.

To apply:

Email: ICanGoToCuba@nnoc.info
Applications are due by March 29

MILITANT SUBSCRIPTION & BOOK SPECIALS

Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power
by Jack Barnes
\$15. With subscription: \$10



These books just \$5 each with a Militant subscription (trial offer for new readers: 12 weeks \$5)

Are They Rich Because They’re Smart?
Class, Privilege, and Learning Under Capitalism
by Jack Barnes

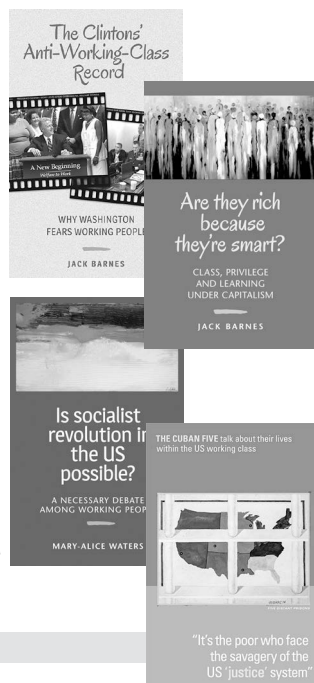
The Clintons’ Anti-Working-Class Record
Why Washington Fears Working People
by Jack Barnes

Is Socialist Revolution in the US Possible?
A Necessary Debate Among Working People
by Mary-Alice Waters

“It’s the Poor Who Face the Savagery of the US ‘Justice’ System”
The Cuban Five Talk About Their Lives Within the US Working Class.

\$7 EACH WITHOUT SUBSCRIPTION

To subscribe or purchase books at these prices, contact Socialist Workers Party or Communist League branches listed on page 8.



—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

GEORGIA

Atlanta

Workers’ Rights Under Attack: Voting Rights, Presumption of Innocence Are Crucial to Working Class. Speaker: Susan LaMont, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Dec. 14, 7:30 p.m. Donation: \$5. 777 Cleveland Ave. SW Suite 103. Tel.: (678) 528-7828.

WASHINGTON

Seattle

What Is Behind the War in Yemen? Speaker: Henry Dennison, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Dec. 14, 7:30 p.m. Donation: \$5. 5418 Rainer Ave S. Tel.: (206) 323-1755.

Disaster from Camp Fire

Continued from front page

separated from their pets and other reasons.

When we showed people the *Militant* with its article on the social catastrophe resulting from the Camp Fire — “California Wildfire Carnage Is Product of Capitalist Rule” — it got nods of approval. “I agree with that headline,” 26-year-old Joseph Cook said.

The dog-eat-dog profit drive at the heart of the capitalist system means the bosses and bankers toss aside safety and workers’ interests to squeeze out the biggest return. This is what shapes priorities and morals for the construction bosses, insurance bloodsuckers, utility bosses, and the politicians they control, while workers pay the price.

Cook said that he was an agricultural worker born and raised in Paradise. He was staying in a tent with his twin brother who rescued their disabled mother from the fire. “We plan to go back and rebuild,” Cook said. “There is a lot of spirit, life, and camaraderie among the survivors.”

Mark Kinsey, 57, a former iron worker and employee at a welding shop in Paradise, explained that most people in the city got no warning of the coming calamity. “I did the warning. I was the one who called people I knew and got them out of town,” he said. “The politicians did nothing.”

We ran into Matt Montgomery, 59, a retired chemical engineer, and his wife Donna, just outside the door of the Federal Emergency Management Agency headquarters here. The Montgomerys are from Concow. They had also survived a 2008 wildfire that destroyed their old home and much of that town. This experience helped them survive the Camp Fire.

“We were sleeping late,” Matt Montgomery said. “Donna is recovering from open-heart surgery and needed her rest. A friend tried to reach me and the phone rang at 8:30 a.m. I didn’t answer it but it woke me up. I saw the house had an orange glow.”

“We immediately got up and grabbed the pets and put a few things together,” Donna Montgomery said. “We ran outside. There were 30- to 40-foot flames in the backyard. I drove the Jeep, Matt got into our Sierra pickup, and we took off.”

“We had to turn the headlights on. It was pitch black on account of the smoke,” Matt said. “As we drove we got people to jump into the back of the truck.”

Eventually they reached a fire truck that was blocking the road. “A CalFire bulldozer started to clear the land near

us,” he said. “Once the land was clear enough to get past the fire truck, we took off again. There still were 30- to 40-foot flames. People don’t realize that you can drive through flames if you go fast enough and the road is clear.”

The Montgomerys said they were very proud that they helped get to safety a number of Spanish-speaking workers they ran into. “One guy told us that a white man had never treated him as good as I did,” Matt said.

Utility bosses seek to escape blame

Giant Northern California utility company PG&E is coming under heavy criticism because of its history of putting profits before safety in previous wildfires, including the Santa Rosa fire last year, as well as its likely role in starting the Camp Fire.

Federal Judge William Alsup has been assigned to monitor PG&E’s “safety culture” since the company was convicted on felony charges of criminal negligence in the 2010 San Bruno gas pipeline explosion that leveled more than 35 homes and killed eight people. The judge is demanding PG&E provide answers concerning the company’s actions in a series of other fires.

Alsup got the assignment as part of the five-year “probation” PG&E was sentenced to in the killings. Probation for eight deaths!

Alsup told the utility bosses they



Huffington Post/ Cayce Clifford

Fire survivors Rubyjade Stewart and son Rene, outside their tent in Chico Walmart lot Nov. 21.

had until Dec. 31 to give “an accurate and complete statement of the role, if any, of PG&E in causing and reporting the recent Camp Fire in Butte County and all other wildfires in California since the judgment herein.”

While workers are camped out in the Walmart parking lot in the rain, in disease-stricken shelters, or put up by relatives or friends, PG&E has already been bailed out by the state government from judgments in lawsuits by the victims of its profit-driven negligence and disdain in earlier fires, like the Santa Rosa wildfire. State of-

ficials have held that the utility management is responsible for at least 17 of 21 major fires in Northern California last fall.

Moves are underway in the legislature to extend a law passed earlier this year that allows PG&E bosses to cover lawsuit judgments by imposing higher fees on customers to cover the Camp Fire. After the plan was announced, PG&E stock — which had taken a hit — began to rise.

Some workers and others are demanding PG&E be forced to open its books to public inspection.

Marriott Hotel workers settle strikes, return to work

Continued from front page

one of celebration. Many told the *Militant* they were happy they won one of their key demands — keeping health coverage at no cost for single workers and \$10 a month for family coverage.

Up until the final days of the strike Marriott insisted there would be no pay raise if the medical coverage was retained. Although details of the contract have not been released publicly, workers report they did get pay raises and the bosses made concessions on other union demands as well.

The new contract includes modifications to the “Make A Green Choice” program, where guests get a break if they agree not to have their room cleaned. For housekeepers, this program has led to cuts in hours and harder work — cleaning rooms that haven’t been touched for days. The new contract contains an adjustment in workers’ schedules to allow for more time to clean these rooms.

“I’m happy,” Courtyard Marriott bartender Fortunado Martinez told the *Militant* after voting. He thought the union came out stronger from the strike. Many of his co-workers are from China, he said, and before the strike he didn’t talk with them because they speak Chinese. After being on the picket lines, he said, “Now we are family. When we meet we give each other high-fives. We’ll be going back stronger.”

“This was not any easy victory,” said Peter Kwan, who works at the Weston St. Francis. They kept up chanting and drumming from 6 a.m. to 10 at night, he said, picketing 24 hours a day, facing smoke from the wildfires and then rain. “What affects me most,”

he said, “was that we got through all this together. It showed the unity.”

Just two days before the vote, over 1,000 strikers participated in a rally and march called by the San Francisco, Alameda and San Mateo labor councils in support of the strike. Workers marched to four of the struck hotels, chanting, “One day longer, one day stronger.”

Larrilou Carumba, a housekeeper and picket captain at the Marriott Marquis, spoke at the rally, emphasizing the importance of the strike’s signature slogan — “One job should be enough.” She said after her shift at Marriott she had to work a second job to support her kids.

Marie Nazaire, a union member and housekeeper at the Pickwick Hotel, got a leave of absence to work full time in support of the Marriott strike. “It’s the children who have suffered from the situation where so many have to work two jobs,” she said.

One of the backbones of the strike was the large number of Local 2 workers who had been through earlier union battles. “My first strike was in 1980 when all the hotels went on strike for weeks,” St. Regis striker Rafael Linares, a 40-year member of Local 2 who works in the restaurant there, told the *Militant*. “New managers come in and start treating you like you have no union. Pushing you. We then have to organize and push back.”

The national strike against Marriott began in October when over 7,000 hotel workers walked out in Oakland, San Jose, San Diego, Detroit, Boston, and Maui and Oahu, Hawaii. With the settlement at the seven San Francisco hotels, workers have voted up new contracts in all seven cities.

San Francisco was the last to settle. After the ratification vote, UNITE HERE Local 2 President Anand Singh

told the media, “Now we turn to the remaining 5,500 Local 2 hotel workers who are still working with expired contracts. To the Hilton, the Hyatt, the Fairmont, we say, ‘This is the new standard for San Francisco hotel workers.’”

Workers win new contract in Hawaii

On Nov. 27, Marriott workers at five hotels in Hawaii voted to ratify a new four-year contract. UNITE HERE Local 5 said strikers got a \$1.50 raise in the first year for nontipped workers and 75 cents for tipped workers, as well as gains in health care, job security, workload reductions and protections for new hires.

“People learned how to win on the lines,” Royal Hawaiian hostess Janal Kaina said. “How to stand up for themselves, how to stand up for respect and dignity.”

While Marriott bosses in Hawaii haven’t saddled housekeepers with the “Green” room program, strikers still won a reduction in the number of rooms each worker is expected to clean — from 14 to 13 a shift at most of the hotels.

It was the longest hotel strike on the islands since 1970, rallying support from other area workers and even from many inconvenienced vacationers.

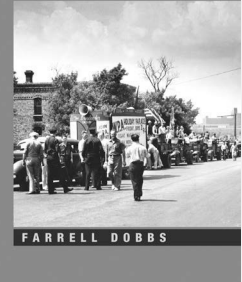
“I think it’s fabulous for the staff they get what they deserve,” Michael Psarris, visiting from Australia, told HawaiiNewsNow. “A strike of 51 days shows how important it is to them.”

More strikes could be on the horizon. UNITE HERE officials told the press that contracts expired at the end of November covering some 8,000 union members at 25 hotels in Los Angeles and Orange County, most operated by Marriott.

Marriott is the world’s largest hotel company, with 177,000 workers at 6,700 properties in 130 countries. Bosses there raked in \$1.37 billion net profit in 2017.

Recommended reading

TEAMSTER POLITICS



“Unionism and politics cannot be separated. Power generated at the trade-union level can be shattered by government blows. Workers must enter the political arena as an independent class force, with their own party.”

— Farrell Dobbs

Part of four-part series with:

Teamster Rebellion;
Teamster Power; Teamster Bureaucracy

\$15 each or all four for \$40
pathfinderpress.com

—ON THE PICKET LINE—

This column gives a voice to those engaged in labor battles and building solidarity today. Send in articles, photos and letters on picket lines and other labor protests to themilitant@mac.com, post them directly on our website, or mail them to 306 W. 37th St., 13th floor, New York, NY 10018.

Minn. Somali Amazon workers fight speedup, discrimination

East African workers, most originally from Somalia, employed at Amazon's 20-football-field-long warehouse in Shakopee, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis, are leading a fight against jacked-up packing quotas. They have forced the company to negotiate. Some 60 percent of Amazon's warehouse workers in the area are East African.

They are demanding the company reverse its decision to increase the packing quota to at least 230 items an hour, up from 160. Other issues include dehydration, exhaustion, and job injuries, as well as Amazon's insensitivity to Muslim prayer practices.

They are inviting everyone to join them is a public protest at 3:30 p.m., Dec. 14, outside the Fulfillment Center at 2601 4th Avenue E, in Shakopee. Meanwhile, Amazon workers in Germany, Spain, Italy and the U.K. organized strikes on Black Friday, Nov. 23, demanding increased wages, improved working conditions and the right to unionize.

Black Friday is one of the busiest shopping days of the year worldwide. From Thanksgiving Day to Cyber Monday, shoppers ordered a record 180 million items from Amazon.

Those bearing the brunt of all this are the workers employed in the company's gigantic warehouses, which Amazon euphemistically calls fulfillment centers. They face relentless speedup, unsafe conditions, miles of Rube Goldberg-like

conveyor systems, thousands of robots roaming all over the place, all in a drive to make workers work harder and faster.

Demanding they not be "treated as robots," workers in the U.K. protested outside five major Amazon warehouses Nov. 23. Chants included, "next-day delivery should not mean a lifetime of pain for Amazon workers."

Over 600 workers struck in Germany the same day, walking out of warehouses in the towns of Bad Hersfeld and Rheinberg, according to Reuters. In Vercilly, Italy, managers were left to try and pack boxes after workers walked out of an Amazon facility there.

Workers at Amazon's biggest warehouse in Spain, San Fernando de Henares, struck Nov. 23-24. The action left "only two people to staff the loading dock," reported Vox website, and orders had to be frantically diverted to the company's other depots in the country.

— Brian Williams

Canadian postal workers protest gov't order to go back to work

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — After six weeks of rotating strike actions, the federal government Nov. 26 ordered some 50,000 members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers back to work. The legislation rushed through made further strike action illegal.

"Christmas gifts are more important than people's rights. Our health and safety is put aside in favor of big profits for large corporations," Denny Pasquier, an inside postal worker since 2007,



Militant/John Steele

Members of Canadian Union of Postal Workers picket St. Laurent sorting plant near Montreal Oct. 30. The workers conducted rotating strikes for six weeks demanding increased hiring, end to forced overtime. Workers rallied Dec. 1 against government order to go back to work.

told the *Militant* as we joined him picketing in Richmond.

Because they deliver more packages of goods ordered online, "letter" carriers face heavier loads. With no adjustments in the number of workers or the size of the routes, injuries have soared. Postal workers report five times more disabling workplace injuries than other federally regulated workers, like longshoremen, rail workers and miners. "Canada Post is becoming ... more and more a wing of the retail sector," the *Toronto Globe and Mail* editorialized Nov. 21. "Parcel revenue was up 23 per cent last year, and cracked \$2 billion for the first time."

The postal workers' demands center on the need for more hiring and an end to forced overtime.

The Retail Council of Canada, eBay Canada, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business were among the employers' organizations clamoring for back-to-work legislation.

"The only power a union has comes from the solidarity of the members," picket captain and letter carrier Sarah Hanon told Walmart workers Simran Singh and Katy LeRougetel as we joined their picket at the Surrey, British Columbia, post office Nov. 23. "The only way we can express that power is strike action. If that's taken away, we have no power."

Her local was protesting the back-to-work law. One union demand is that rural mail carriers, who are majority female, get the same pay and treatment as their urban counterparts.

When working people hear the facts about postal workers' conditions, they wholeheartedly support the strikers, Communist League members have found, as they take news about the strike and the stakes in it to workers on their doorsteps. But there has been little organized union solidarity to spread the word and draw others into the fight.

Some 150 unionists and others rallied here Dec. 1 against the back-to-work legislation, one of 27 actions across the country that day.

The last postal workers strike in 2011 also ended with government-ordered back-to-work legislation, which CUPW challenged in court. Five years later, a court ruled in the union's favor.

The back-to-work law imposes mediation, followed by binding arbitration.

— Katy LeRougetel and Joe Young

Striking Kentucky concrete workers fight bosses' 'final offer'

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — The strike by 45 concrete workers, members of Teamsters Local 89 here at Allied Ready Mix, remains strong after eight weeks of picketing. The drivers, mechanics, loader operators and batchmakers walked out Oct. 8, after rejecting the bosses' "final offer" that would cut health care, vacations, overtime and pensions, with even steeper reductions for new hires.

"Since the strike began two months ago, the company hasn't made any moves to re-establish negotiations," striker Joe Buckman told the *Militant* on the picket line Nov. 30. "We keep the picketing going daily, even though some of us have had to pick up some part-time and temporary work to make ends meet."

Buckman said the company told them they had no need to strike as they were all part of the "Allied family."

"When they told us they were going to start implementing the cuts in health care and everything, whether we agreed to their contract or not," he said, "we saw just how much they valued us as 'family.'"

Send messages of support and contributions to: Teamsters Local 89, 3813 Taylor Blvd., Louisville, KY 40215. Attn: Allied Ready Mix Strike. Email: teamsters89@aol.com.

— Jacquie Henderson and Steve Packard

Amazon: Do Right for Minnesota Workers and Communities!

Amazon has raised the packing quota to at least 230 items an hour, up from 160.

Friday December 14

3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Amazon Fulfillment Center

2601 4th Ave E, Shakopee, MN 55379

Sponsored by Awood Center and ISIAH

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



December 20, 1993

Fleshing out President Bill Clinton's campaign to "end welfare as we know it," the administration's task force on welfare reform has prepared draft legislation that will force most recipients to work at low wages after two years. The program will be financed by cuts in welfare and other social services.

The task force document outlines two options for those who exceed the two-year limit. The first places welfare recipients in private business jobs for 35 hours a week at minimum wage. Under the second, recipients must enroll in a "community work experience program" — again at minimum wage — to receive their benefits.

Employers in both the private and public sector will receive government subsidies as part of the program. The employment offered through the program will be temporary.



December 20, 1968

The Seamen's Union in Wellington, New Zealand, refused to bring U.S. soldiers ashore from the carrier *America* Nov. 18. They also refused to service or supply the vessel as a protest against the Vietnam war.

"In line with Federation of Labour and Labour Party policy," the union said in a statement, "our efforts have been aimed at the withdrawal of United States, New Zealand and all aggressive troops in Vietnam. Our refusal to man Union Steam Ship Company tugs to supply stores and ferry men to and from their recreation is a further indication of our stand in operations."

The Wellington Harbour Board and U.S. government agencies were forced to rent tourist launches from the nearby town of Picton to ferry the military personnel ashore. The seamen stood firm in their antiwar action.



December 18, 1943

The Smith "Gag" Act, passed in 1940, is being used to deprive the American people of their right of free expression. It was deliberately designed to stifle working-class opposition to the reactionary foreign and domestic policies of the administration. The 18 leaders of the Socialist Workers Party and of Minneapolis Truckdrivers Local 544-CIO have been prosecuted under this Act and railroaded to prison for 12 to 16 month terms solely because of their opposition to the crimes of Big Business, because of their militant union activities and their revolutionary socialist ideas.

Although the Smith "Gag" Act under which the 18 are the first to be convicted clearly violates the Bill of Rights, the U.S. Supreme Court brazenly refused — without explanation — to hear their appeal.

Moscow launches assault on Ukraine access to Sea of Azov

BY ROY LANDERSEN

In an aggressive inflammation of tensions, the capitalist rulers in Moscow ordered Russian forces to fire on and seize three Ukrainian naval vessels, including a tugboat, and their crews as they tried to pass through the Kerch Strait Nov. 25 to the Ukrainian port of Mariupol. The Russian forces parked an old tanker under the Kerch bridge to block the channel. The Ukrainian ships were attacked by a Russian jet, helicopter and troops on Russian vessels.

The Russian government then arrested the 24 naval personnel, some of whom had been wounded in the attack, and took them to Moscow to be put on trial.

The Kerch road bridge, the longest in Europe, built by Moscow to link the annexed Crimean Peninsula to Russian territory, was opened in May 2017. A railway bridge is due to be operational by the end of 2019.

The approaches constrict the Kerch Strait to a narrow channel under the high point in the bridge. Kiev opposed the construction while European governments and Washington imposed additional sanctions on Russia over it.

Moscow has been engaged in an ongoing series of brazen violations of Ukrainian sovereignty since the mass popular Maidan uprising overthrew the pro-Russian-government of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

The Russian rulers responded by seizing and annexing the Crimean Peninsula and fomenting a bloody war in eastern Ukraine that imposed Moscow-backed forces still occupying parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts today.

Crimea was historically the homeland of the Crimean Tatars. In 1944 Joseph Stalin forcibly deported the Tatars en masse into Russia's interior and fostered emigration from Russia to repopulate parts of Crimea. After decades of protest, the Tatars were finally allowed to return to Crimea in the 1950s, many to find their land had been stolen. Since seizing Crimea in 2014, Russian rulers have carried on a relentless campaign against the Tatars, expelling Mustafa Dzhemilev and other Tatar leaders.

After the assault on the three vessels, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko claimed there was danger of a "full-scale war," as he pointed to a Russian military buildup along the border. The Ukrainian president imposed martial law in the eastern half of the country for 30 days, while closing the Ukrainian border to Russian men between 16 and 60 years old. He said this was to prevent the formation of "private armies" in Ukraine.

Martial law allows the government in Kiev to clamp down on political rights.

Poroshenko — who made his name while becoming a billionaire from his Roshen chocolate empire and other capitalist ventures — has become increasingly unpopular. The next presidential election is set for March, and if current polls hold, he will lose badly. Some think he's using his response to the attack, especially the martial law, to try to boost his standing.

Moscow says the three ships were

maneuvering threateningly and had to be stopped. While Moscow forces are permitting Russian-bound ships into the Sea of Azov to the port of Rostov-on-Don in Russia, they continue to bar much commercial shipping to Ukrainian ports. This is causing serious damage to agricultural and steel exports from the region.

Response of world capitalist rulers

The imperialist rulers in the U.S., Germany, France and elsewhere are seeking to contain further escalation. They're hampered by the differences and competing interests among them.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel met Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Buenos Aires Dec. 1. She got a promise of talks between the European imperialist governments of Germany and France and representatives from Kiev and Moscow to try to defuse tensions and resolve the standoff disrupting shipping to Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov.

Government heads from President Donald Trump to Merkel urged Moscow to release the ships and crew. Trump canceled a scheduled G-20 meeting with Putin, but then talked with him "informally."

At G-20 US, China rulers reach truce in trade dispute

BY ROY LANDERSEN

President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping, met over dinner after the G-20 summit ended in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Dec. 1. They agreed to a 90-day truce over imposing any new punitive tariffs on Chinese imports by the White House.

The announcement from Washington was greeted with relief in capitalist ruling circles from Europe to Asia, as capitalist production and trade worldwide is slowing down. The pause in any escalation of what is often superficially — and wrongly — referred to as a "trade war," or even hyped as a new "Cold War," sent stock markets back up for the moment.

In return for Washington's pause, the White House statement said that the Chinese delegation agreed to address the trade imbalance by buying a "very substantial amount of agricultural, energy, industrial and other products from the U.S." The next day, Trump announced the Chinese government had agreed to "reduce and remove" its own retaliatory tariffs on imported U.S.-made cars.

The White House said Xi had made commitments to discuss "structural changes [on] forced technology transfer, intellectual property protection, non-tariff barriers, cyber intrusions and cyber theft, services and agriculture."

As of Dec. 4, the government-controlled press in China hasn't mentioned most of this. Nor has it reported the Trump-led delegation's only concession, the 90-day withholding of tariff increases. Because of the differences in what the two governments have or haven't said, stocks have gyrated. Anti-Trump liberals have increasingly belittled the agreement.



Russian fighter jets fly over Kerch bridge with Russian tanker blocking access to Sea of Azov during assault on, seizure of three Ukrainian naval boats and their 24 crew members Nov. 25.

Poroshenko has called for a more forceful response from NATO powers, including sending warships into the Sea of Azov.

Merkel called for the two countries to abide by the 2003 treaty which accords equal rights of access to Ukraine and Russia. Moscow replied that its "union" with Crimea annulled the treaty.

Washington backed calls by London, Warsaw and the Baltic States for the European powers to impose extra sanctions against the Russian government. This includes rethinking the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline that is planned to link Russian gas fields with Germany, bypassing Ukraine. Trump has repeat-

edly assailed Germany's dependency on oil and gas from Russia. This is part of deepening rifts among the NATO allies.

Historically, the czarist rulers and the bureaucratic dictatorship under Joseph Stalin regarded Ukraine as part of their "near abroad." As do Russia's capitalist rulers today.

The only exception was from 1917 during the first few years of the Russian Revolution, when Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin fought for the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. His last political battle before his death was to lead resistance against Stalin's efforts to impose Great Russian chauvinist rule over Ukraine and Crimea.

The Trump administration has been wielding tariffs, and the still greater size and weight of the U.S. capitalist economy, as a punishing weapon in its strategic competition with Beijing. Washington, though weakened, remains the number one capitalist power worldwide. And U.S. military might still far outreaches that of the Chinese rulers. But China's rise is an increasing challenge to U.S. domination, from Asia to Latin America and Africa.

"We are dealing from great strength, but China likewise has much to gain if and when a deal is completed," Trump said. "Level the field!" Beijing is more vulnerable in this current duel, given Chinese exports to the U.S. market far outweigh those moving the other way.

Washington has already levied tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods — about half of its exports — while Beijing reacted with extra duties on \$110 billion of U.S. products. The White House was set to raise its tariffs from 10 to 25 percent at the start of 2019, but that step is now suspended. The onus is now on China to take steps to meet Washington's demands.

The G-20, a gathering of political figures supposedly representing the 20 largest world capitalist economies, is another multilateral institution suffering stress fractures as the crisis of capitalism sharpens the competition and national antagonisms among the rulers.

These institutions that were hammered together after the U.S. emerged as the top dog from its victory in the second imperialist world war — NATO, the European Union, the World Bank, the G-20 and such — are increasingly coming apart. And the

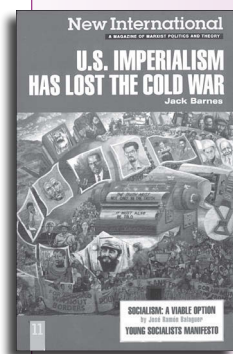
Trump administration, which acts on the conviction that one-on-one negotiations are the best way to win agreements that reflect the weight the U.S. rulers still command in the world, is deepening the pressure.

Negotiators reported that as late as the first day of the meeting, it wasn't clear if an agreement could be reached on a joint statement by the G-20. At one point U.S. officials questioned whether the statement really had to say that the International Monetary Fund is "at the center" of the global financial system. It was kept in after the EU negotiator replied, "Yes, it's in Washington."

In the end, the official communiqué "buried their differences in obscure language," Thomas Bernes, a former IMF and World Bank official, told the *Australian* newspaper Dec. 2. "The question is whether we are burying the G-20 in the process."

U.S. Imperialism Has Lost the Cold War

by Jack Barnes



U.S. imperialism has lost the Cold War, the Socialist Workers Party concluded after the collapse of regimes and parties across Eastern Europe and the USSR that claimed to be communist. Contrary to imperialism's hopes, the working class there has not been crushed.

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Fight Fla. prison censorship!

Continued from front page
director, Christopher Finan, wrote in its Nov. 28 letter to the Florida Department of Corrections.

The letter was cosigned by 13 organizations and prominent individuals, including American Booksellers for Free Expression, the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, and People for the American Way. The coalition itself is made up of 56 national organizations.

"The recently overturned ban on issue no. 34 of the *Militant* is an example of how prison officials have abused their power to censor," Finan wrote. "They cited as justification an article about opponents of solitary confinement in California and another about the hunger strike by Oleg Sentsov, a Crimean movie director who was imprisoned in Siberia by the Putin regime. They claimed the articles could encourage 'riot' or 'insurrection' without explaining how."

"Federal courts," Finan pointed out, "have repeatedly affirmed that prisoners have a First Amendment right to read, and publishers and others have a right to send them reading materials."

The Florida impoundments are four times more than the *Militant* has faced "in all the other prisons in the country over the last 10 years," Finan noted. "We urge you to halt the frequent and unjustified efforts to disrupt the distribution of the *Militant*, which violate the First Amendment rights of both the publication and the inmates who wish to read it."

The letter is featured on the coalition's website ncac.org, headlined "Florida Department of Corrections Blocks Distribution of Socialist Newspaper." It is also posted on the websites of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida and the *Militant*.

Censorship is unconstitutional

In the letter from the Florida ACLU, Staff Attorney Benjamin Stevenson added that although the Literature Review Committee overturned the ban on issue no. 34 — after first reversing it, then reimposing it, then declaring it reversed again — "the timely delivery was delayed and its newsworthiness diminished."

"Furthermore, prison wardens and the Literature Review Committee have a constitutional duty to detail the reason(s) for denying a prisoner's access to the *Militant*," Stevenson said. "However, far too often, the warden simply checks the may-cause-a-riot box or the catch-all box that the issue 'otherwise presents a threat to security.' Neither the warden nor the Committee explain why it may cause a riot or another specified threat."

"This is unconstitutional," he concludes.

Join fight against prison censorship!

Get out the word. Distribute copies of *Militant* articles on this fight.

Get statements of support for the *Militant's* appeal 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."

The *Militant* has readers behind bars across the country, including in Florida, California, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Illinois and New York.

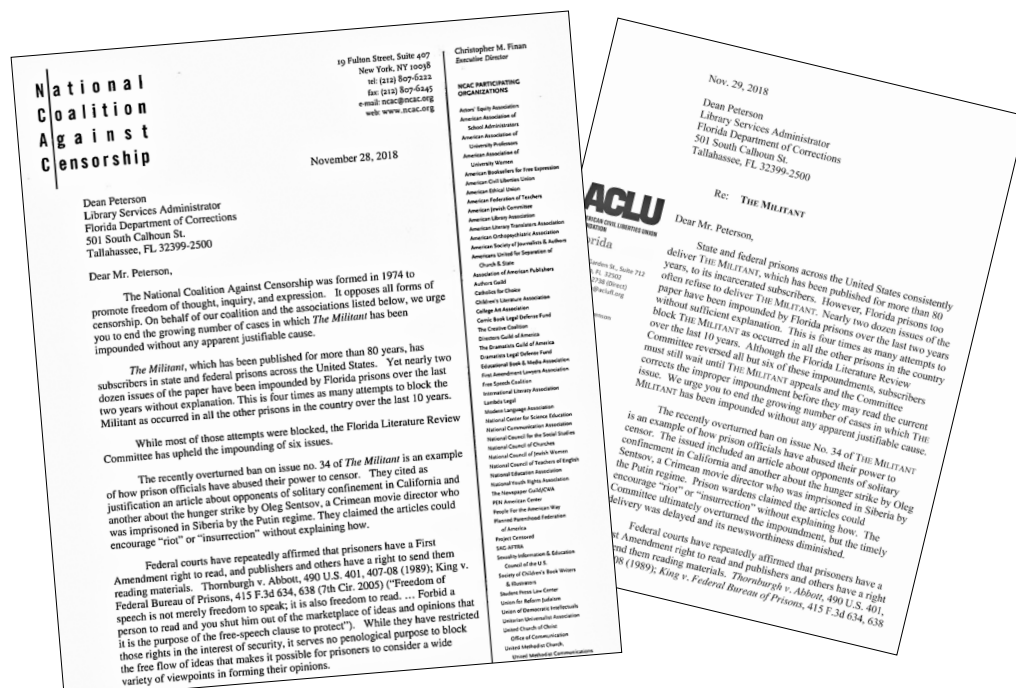
Out of fights against censorship dating back to the Attica prison rebellion, New York state prison regulations include the *Militant* by name as one of the publications that "shall generally be approved." But in Florida, local prison officials have no guidelines that require them to refrain from violating the constitutional rights of the press and their readers.

On several occasions they have violated their own rules by not informing the *Militant* of the impoundments or have withheld the paper from prisoners without a formal order of impoundment. The Literature Review Committee refuses the urging of the *Militant* and others to inform local prison authorities of this responsibility.

More than once the committee has upheld an impoundment only to then reverse themselves after public pressure — but not once have they given an explanation of what lies behind their decision.

The fight against the Florida authorities' attempts to censor the *Militant* has sparked more interest in the paper on both sides of the prison walls. And the number of prisoner subscribers is increasing.

The *Militant* has received letters from prisoners across the country backing the



Letters from the National Coalition Against Censorship and the American Civil Liberties Union to Florida calling on Florida prison authorities to stop interfering with delivery of the *Militant* to its prison subscribers there, a violation of constitutional rights of prisoners and the paper.

fight, asking to subscribe, and sometimes asking for copies of the articles Florida has censored.

"Like all workers, prisoners need to be able to read and consider a wide variety of viewpoints to make up their own mind on where they stand on the most important political questions today," Studer said. "Though the capitalist rulers' so-called criminal justice system has put them behind bars, they remain part of the working class, interested in world and national politics."

"The vote in Florida restoring voting rights to former prisoners. The vote in Louisiana requiring a unanimous jury vote to convict a person accused of a felony. Moves to end mandatory life

sentences. These are all signs that working people don't like the way their fellow workers are being treated," Studer said. "Defending the constitutional rights of prisoners helps unify the working class."

Join the fight against prison censorship. Get your union local, church group, local prison rights and civil liberties organizations, student groups and co-workers to send letters.

Send them to Dean Peterson, Library Services Administrator, Florida Department of Corrections, Attn: Literature Review Committee, 501 South Calhoun Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-2500, or email Allen.Peterson@fdc.myflorida.com. Email a copy to themilitant@mac.com.

Florida victory boosts fight for ex-prisoners' voting rights

BY JANET POST

Working people across the country were inspired by the Nov. 6 voting rights victory in Florida when an amendment to the state constitution was passed overwhelmingly, restoring the franchise to workers released from prison after serving time on felony convictions.

Supporters of workers' rights are organizing to press for similar advances across the country.

Outside of Florida, laws that restrict the franchise for ex-felons prohibit some 5 million people from voting. This represents an enormous increase from 1976, when it was 1.17 million — due to the soaring number of workers thrown behind bars as the capitalist rulers cranked up their criminal "justice" system. This includes one in 13 African-American men nationwide.



Oct. 30 rally in Florida for Amendment 4, which passed overwhelmingly, restored franchise to over a million ex-prisoners. Victory has spurred similar efforts in Kentucky, Iowa.

Kentucky's constitution permanently bans all workers with past felony convictions — some 300,000 — from voting, unless the governor personally restores their franchise. In 2017 Gov. Matt Bevin reinstated voting rights to only 24 ex-prisoners out of the 1,100 who applied.

After the Florida vote, Kentucky State Sen. Morgan McGarvey said he would propose a constitutional amendment allowing some who have completed their felony sentences to vote. Such amendments must be passed by the state legislature and approved by 60 percent of voters in a referendum.

In 1792 Kentucky's constitution was the first in the country to disenfranchise people convicted of a crime. The anti-working-class restriction disproportionately affects African-Americans, barring one in five from voting there today.

In Iowa, workers convicted of a felony are ineligible to vote unless given permission by either the governor or the president. You have to pay all fines or costs imposed on you by the courts before you can file a petition requesting the right to vote. This has disenfranchised some 52,000 people, roughly 2 percent of the state's population.

"We really want Iowa to continue to move forward and get out of that one or two states" that don't allow felons who have completed their sentences to vote, Karen Person, speaking for the League of Women Voters of Iowa, told a hearing of Iowa's Public Safety Advisory Board Nov. 14. The board unanimously recommended the state restore these rights.

On Nov. 29 Gov. Kim Reynolds told the press she was open to the possibility of restoring voting rights to felons in Iowa.

State Reps. in New Jersey introduced a bill Feb. 26 to allow some 94,000 workers with convictions, including 58,000 on probation and 15,000 on parole, to vote. If the bill passes, New Jersey will become the third state, along with Maine and Vermont, to allow voting for workers in prison, on probation and parole.

The measure is backed by more than 75 organizations, including the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Some anti-working-class restrictions remain under the new Florida law. Workers convicted of felonies can't regain their voting rights until they finish all parole or probation. And those found guilty of murder or sex crimes are excluded. The momentum from the referendum victory opens the door to moves like those be-

Continued on page 9

Castro: ‘Internationalism is paying our debt to humanity’

Below are excerpts from *In Defense of Socialism* by Fidel Castro. The book contains four speeches by the central leader of the revolution given around the 30th anniversary of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. These speeches were given at the high point in the rectification process in Cuba — a fundamental reorientation of the revolution based on voluntary labor and deepening working-class political leadership. Castro led this fight to reverse the growing impact of bureaucracy and capitalist methods on working-class consciousness and morale. The victory of Cuba’s internationalist mission against the South African apartheid regime’s invasion of Angola reinforced this battle. The excerpt is from a Dec. 5, 1988, speech, “As Long As the Empire Exists, We Will Never Lower Our Guard.” Copyright © 1989 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.



Verde Olivo

Cuban and Angolan fighters celebrate 1983 battle in Cangamba, Angola, pushing back forces backed by apartheid South Africa and U.S. rulers. “This internationalist mission in Angola” Castro said, victorious in 1988, “had a very big impact on Africa,” helping lead to fall of the apartheid regime.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

BY FIDEL CASTRO

We are a small country — an island, what’s more — located many thousands of kilometers away from any potential or real allies; ninety miles away from not just the most powerful imperialist power on earth but also the most high-handed and arrogant one. Or as we have pointed out on other oc-

casions, we are not even ninety miles away but just a few millimeters, a few microns, from a piece of our territory illegally occupied by them.

That empire still is and will continue to be, perhaps for a long time to come, just that: an empire, and a powerful one at that.

We are the first socialist country in the Western Hemisphere, the first socialist country in Latin America, the last one to free itself from Spain, the first one to free itself from U.S. imperialism, [Applause] the first one to establish full control over its own wealth, the first one to disobey their orders, the first one to challenge them, the first one to carry out the deepest of revolutions on the basis of new concepts, new ideas, new values.

We have been the first country to raise aloft the banner of the workers, the peasants, the poor, and to implement their demands and rights. We have been the first country to set the example corresponding to this stage of historical development of the peoples of Latin America. We have upheld those banners and that attitude for nearly thirty years, and the empire will never forgive us for that.

But it’s not just a question of wounding the empire’s pride but also of causing a great injury to its imperial interests. We are a symbol, we are the road to rebellion, freedom, and independence.

And the empire will never stop trying to crush that symbol, that example, that road one way or another. As long as the imperial domination of our hemisphere exists, that is and will continue to be their goal.

Even if the day were to come when relations between socialist Cuba and the empire improve formally, that would not stop the empire from trying to crush the Cuban revolution. And they don’t hide it; their theoreticians explain it, the defenders of the imperial philosophy explain it. There are some people who say it’s better to make certain changes in their policy toward Cuba in order to penetrate it, weaken it, destroy it — peacefully, if possible. Others think that the more belligerence shown toward Cuba the more active and effective Cuba will be in its struggles on the Latin American and world scene.

Therefore, there is something that must be the essence of Cuban revolutionary thought; there is something that must be absolutely clear in the consciousness of our people, who have had the privilege of being the first to travel this road: and it is the awareness that as long as the empire exists we will never be able to lower our guard, to neglect our defense. [Applause] ...

The question of our defense was never in anyone’s hands but our own. [Applause] It’s very important that we

realize this! We were never defended by nuclear missiles. We have nothing to gain or lose in this regard if some missiles of one type or another are dismantled or even if there is universal nuclear disarmament — something which unfortunately does not appear to be so close at hand — since our defense never depended on short-, intermediate-, or long-range missiles. ...

We know that the United States had some sleepless nights over the kind of boldness whereby a small, blockaded and threatened country like Cuba was capable of carrying out an internationalist mission of this nature. The empire can’t conceive of this. They are the only ones in the world who are entitled to have troops everywhere, weapons everywhere, bases everywhere. And so the fact that a

small Caribbean country was capable of providing support to a sister African nation is something beyond their parameters, concepts, and norms.

It’s clear that this internationalist mission carried out by Cuba had a very big impact on Africa. The African peoples, and even African governments that are not revolutionary but belong rather to the right have viewed with admiration the mission carried out by Cuba in Africa. The African peoples know these are troops allied with them; they know that the only non-African country whose troops were sent to defend an African country against the aggression of racist and fascist South Africa is Cuba. [Applause] ...

There are some who have even dared question the internationalist spirit and heroism of our people, who have criticized it. This is the Yankees’ hope: that anti-internationalist currents would arise among our people to weaken us. As we have said before, being internationalists is paying our debt to humanity. [Applause] Whoever is incapable of fighting for others will never be capable of fighting for himself. [Applause] And the heroism shown by our forces, by our people in other lands, faraway lands, must also serve to let the imperialists know what awaits them if one day they force us to fight on this land here. [Applause and shouts]

December

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

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‘Yellow vests’ push back French gov’t

Continued from front page

tougher rules for vehicle emissions tests. The hikes were announced by President Emmanuel Macron to force people to drive less, supposedly to help control climate change.

Macron blinked one week after he vowed not to capitulate to the demands of the street. The yellow vests call former investment banker Macron “the president of the rich.”

From what these Communist League members from the U.K. witnessed on the Dec. 1 demonstration in Paris, it is by no means a given that the government’s concessions will be sufficient to stifle the protests. They are driven by the effects of today’s economic, political and cultural crisis of capitalism on the rural poor, and are supported by millions of working people throughout the country and beyond.

Yellow vest spokesman Benjamin Cauchy told Agence France-Presse that the movement wants the taxes cancelled — not postponed. “The French don’t want crumbs, they want a baguette [a whole loaf of bread],” he said. Many yellow vest protesters are now calling for wider changes, including higher pay and a rise in the minimum wage.

Decades of assaults on living standards

Anger at decades of assaults on living standards of working people, and the disdain of the political elite for their struggles, is what fuels yellow vest actions. They are very much a part of what Hillary Clinton in the U.S. dismissively called the “deplorables.”

“For us, every day is a battle to get by,” Tiphaine Galinet, a child care worker from Chartres, told us at the Dec. 1 protest. “We came today to show that ‘yellow vests’ are not vandals and to see for ourselves what it is really like on the streets.”

“I’ve never been in political demonstrations before,” Yoann Decoux, an out-of-work electrical lineman, told the *New York Times*, “but we said, enough is enough. They don’t even know how we get by with our tiny little salaries, but we are humans too, for God’s sake!”

“Either they reduce taxes or increase our wages,” Christopher, a 33-year-old worker in a perfume bottle factory from Picardie, in the north of France, told the *Militant*. “They should also stop the hikes in the costs of utilities and health insurance, but the government instead wants to stay on the topic of ‘ecology.’”

“It’s not that the environment isn’t important to us,” interrupted Ourilie, 34, an office worker with Christopher, “but taxing us isn’t the answer. I had to postpone the purchase of new glasses for my daughter, because it isn’t covered by the health insurance.”

In the countryside, people are dependent on their cars, Marco Pavan, a former taxi and truck driver in Besançon, told the *Washington Post*. “Ask a Parisian — for him none of this is an issue,” he said, referring to the fuel tax hikes, “because he doesn’t need a car. We live on the side of a mountain; there is no bus or train to take us anywhere. We have to have a car.”

Thousands came to Paris, the seat of power, because that’s also where the rich and the so-called en-



Serge D’ignazio

Cops launch attack on yellow vest protesters in Paris Dec. 1.

lightened meritocracy live and they wanted to be seen and heard. But the number was limited by the massive police presence, and marked by police attacks with tear gas and water cannons, as well as provocations by some on the far left and far right.

Some 75,000 people joined in largely peaceful protests and roadblocks across France. Some 1,500 marched in Limoges, many chanting, “Macron démission!” [Macron resign!] In an area known for its dairy production, one sign read, “Vache à lait — ras le bol.” (We’ve had enough of being cash cows.)

Over 1,000 marched in Lille. Trade unionists from the CGT trade union decided to join the march of the yellow vests. The same happened in Saint Nazaire. The national leadership of the CGT has opposed the yellow vest actions, saying they are influenced by ultrarightists.

It’s in the interest of the whole working class for the unions to join the yellow vests. As the crisis of capitalism continues to deepen, either the working class takes the lead in championing the rural toilers, or the fascists will.

And the protests haven’t stopped. On Dec. 3, high school students blocked more than 100 school gates across the country in support of the protests and against education ‘reforms’ the Macron government proposes. There were about 50 sizable roadblocks in southern France that day, *Midi Libre* reported.

Rejection of the government, parties

Many at the protest in Paris Dec. 1 expressed anger at all political parties, the government, the state and at the trade union officialdom. A 53-year-old woman named Natalie told us she was disgusted with all politicians, that none represent the people, that something new is needed. She voted for the leftist candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round of the last presidential elections, and then for the National Front candidate Marine Le Pen in the run-off with Macron.

Another protester wrote “Frexit” on his vest, supporting British workers who voted for Brexit, and suggesting France should get out of the EU as well.

Nat London, Jacques Salfati and Erik Wils contributed to this article.

EDITORIAL

Working class must lead the rural revolt

Continued from front page

in the rural areas and working-class suburbs of France, and onto the streets of Paris, the “yellow vest” movement is a powerful example of this rebellious sentiment.

Class contempt for the provincial “deplorables” oozes from every pore of the ruling families and wealthy professional layers and meritocrats who staff the capitalist rulers’ government. The protesters have defiantly hurled this back, calling themselves “les beaufs,” or “rednecks.”

The “green” taxes by French President Emmanuel Macron, which he has since suspended, were merely the spark that ignited tinder-dry deep-seated popular anger over the rulers’ unrelenting assaults on our livelihoods.

These workers say they don’t follow any of the bourgeois political parties or the top union officialdom — none have shown themselves to care one whit for what today’s deepening crisis of capitalism is doing to working people.

At the farmers’ demonstration in Quebec — a nationalist and protectionist action covered in this issue that was backed by the main union federations — protesters asked their Canadian rulers to use tariffs and other steps to hit the products of workers and farmers of other countries. But working-class internationalism is what is needed.

These actions pose the question of who will lead the countryside — the capitalist rulers or the working class?

The challenge is for working people to rebuild the labor movement — a bureaucratic shell of what it was in the past — to fight to win allies to the cause of the emancipation of the downtrodden majority. For the revolutionary vanguard of the working class, the challenge is to set the example, to act as tribunes of the people, raising demands that advance the interests of farmworkers, family farmers and other toilers in the countryside.

It is the working classes — including family farmers and other toilers — who work the products of nature to create all wealth, and are the guardians of all culture. Only in the custody of the working class can the environment be protected from the ravages of capitalism.

This is only possible if working people can win over today’s version of a peasants’ revolt to form an alliance to take political power out of the hands of the propertied rulers and use it to transform social relations — and ourselves — to build a society based on human need, not capitalist greed.

Florida voting rights

Continued from page 7

ing advanced in New Jersey.

In other states with laws on the books like the one voted down in Florida, the governor is granted the authority to restore ex-felons’ voting rights. Before leaving office in January 2018, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe individually reinstated voting for some 173,000 workers who had completed their sentences, parole and probation.

In April, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo issued an executive order restoring voting rights to ex-prisoners granted conditional pardons after being released on parole. Some 32,000 conditional pardons have been issued so far this year.

The fact that Cuomo and other governors are taking this action reflects the impact of the growing working-class sentiment on this issue. In the first five years of Cuomo’s administration he had only issued eight such pardons.

To ensure ex-prisoners’ right to vote requires abolishing these laws, not reliance on capitalist politicians.

Even where it is legal for ex-prisoners to vote, local authorities’ disdain for working people can create obstacles. The New York City Voters Guide mailed out two weeks before the 2018 election wrongly stated that you cannot vote if you are “on parole for a felony.” Election officials later apologized.

LETTERS

Septuagenarian isn’t the issue

The article “Join Socialist Workers Party Campaigning in Working Class” in the Dec. 10 issue of the *Militant* describes Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as backing “Septuagenarian Nancy Pelosi” for speaker of the house, in a paragraph explaining why socialist Democrats provide no alternative for the working class.

The clear implication is that backing a person in their 70’s for political leadership is evidence that someone isn’t really “progressive” or means they won’t challenge capitalist rule.

Nancy Pelosi is a capitalist politician, and a leader of one of the twin capitalist parties in the United States. That’s what’s important about Ocasio-Cortez’s support for her speakership.

But many of the most capable and experienced working-class leaders alive today are “septuagenarians.” An individual’s age has nothing to do with whose class interests they act in.

Harry D’Agostino
Albany, New York

Editor’s note: Point well taken. The point we had wanted to make was that candidate Ocasio-Cortez campaigned on the need to over-

turn the Democratic Party establishment. Instead, after she won, she suddenly decided Pelosi was “progressive” enough and backed her.

Prisoners’ political rights

I wanted to let you know that after having written you and the institution’s mail room, several issues of the *Militant* finally appeared. I received six issues on Nov. 19. Many thanks for your help in the fight for our civil right to read your newspaper and your unconditional support.

A prisoner
Florida

The letters column is an open forum for subjects of interest to working people. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

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