

THE MILITANT

INSIDE
ISSCO conference takes up what Chinese living overseas face
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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 88/NO. 48 DECEMBER 23, 2024

Strikers out six weeks in fight with Milk-Bone win solidarity

BY CANDACE WAGNER

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Workers at Milk-Bone are winning broad support as their six-week strike continues. The 165 members of Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers Local 36G walked out Oct. 28 in a fight for solid wage increases and against the company's proposal to impose a much more expensive health care plan. Milk-Bone, a dog treat producer, is owned by the J.M. Smucker Company, which posted sales of over \$8 billion last year from their mostly nonunion workforce.

"The fact that we are striking today shows how upset we are," Sandra Woodward told this *Militant* worker-correspondent on the picket line Dec. 8. Woodward is called "number one," by her fellow workers because of her seniority — she started working in the plant in 1975. Woodward has never been on strike in her 49 years there.

"I've never seen this kind of solidarity in the union before. Almost everyone

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Moscow wages war on Ukraine toilers, Russian troops protest

BY ROY LANDERSEN

For over 1,000 days of war, working people in Ukraine have tenaciously resisted the invasion by Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime. Both sides are using drones as weapons, but Kyiv overwhelmingly targets Russian military sites, while Moscow focuses its fire on residential areas and key infrastructure, killing and maiming civilians.

"They are hunting us," Oleksandr Prokudin, head of the Kherson regional military administration, told the *Financial Times*, describing Moscow's drones. "Imagine what that does to a person, the psychological impact."

Since mid-July there have been over 9,500 small-drone attacks on the Kherson area alone. At least 37 people have been killed, with hundreds more injured.

Russian operators send killer drones remotely to hover above homes, buzz into buildings and chase people in cars, on bicycles or while walking. They rain terror on people in crowded areas —

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Fall of Assad shakes Mideast, US-led imperialist world order



Reuters/Karam al-Masri

People in Aleppo, Syria, Dec. 8 celebrate fall of brutal Bashar al-Assad regime. Israel's blows to Hezbollah and Iranian forces, and the weakening of Moscow by Ukrainian resistance to its invasion, left Assad's unpopular government to collapse in face of the weeklong rebel uprising.

BY SETH GALINSKY

The overthrow of the 50-year bloody dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad and his father is a consequence of the world-shaking impact of the resistance to Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, anti-Jewish pogrom in Israel and Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Like those two watersheds in world politics, the fall of the Tehran- and Moscow-backed Assad regime is accelerating the crisis of the U.S.-led

"world order" and the shifts in alliances and rivalries among competing bourgeois forces in the region. It's also drawing millions of working people into politics and opening possibilities to put their stamp on the road ahead.

Syria was a key part of Tehran's "axis of resistance" and the main route for weapons it sent to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Despite this latest blow,

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Postal workers strike across Canada is fight over wages, pensions, safety



Militant/Katy LeRougetel

Striking members of Canadian Union of Postal Workers picket at Chabanel Street depot in Montreal Nov. 25. Homemade sign says, "Heroes in pandemic. Zeros now! Thanks!"

BY KATY LEROUGETEL

MONTREAL — Over 55,000 members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers went on a nationwide strike Nov. 15, standing up against employer plans to introduce part-time weekend positions at lower pay and second-rate benefits.

Mediated negotiations between Canada Post and the union broke off Nov. 27. Other key issues highlighted by the union are higher wages, "retiring with dignity" and safe working conditions.

"Postal workers suffer the second highest rate of disabling injury among

workers under federal jurisdiction, behind only the road transportation sector," CUPW National President Jan Simpson told the media Dec. 3. "Carriers need time to prepare and deliver neighborhood mail, so they aren't overburdened, and real fixes to problems like late start times so they aren't working in the dark.

"All workers deserve the right to retire with dignity, and for us that means postal workers — present and future — maintain their defined benefit pension plan," she said.

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After Trump wins election, liberals speak out against 'ignorant' voters

BY TERRY EVANS

Amid soul-searching by liberal commentators and Democratic Party politicians, *Washington Post* columnist Jennifer Rubin claims she knows why Ka-

mala Harris didn't beat Donald Trump. The problem, Rubin wrote Nov. 29, was the "prevalence of low-information" voters, who "know shockingly little about government.

In case there's any confusion about what she means, Rubin says they are "sometimes categorized as 'ignorant.'" This is to be sharply distinguished from people like her, who she describes as a "certain stratum of Americans" who "prioritize learning about politics."

Rubin goes so far as to make the argument that "low-information" voters have trouble understanding issues or "assessing the state of the economy." But workers *live* in the crisis-ridden reality

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Two months after hurricane disaster, evictions spread

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

It's been over two months since Hurricane Helene devastated Asheville, North Carolina, and other nearby towns and rural areas. While the flood waters have receded, the social and economic catastrophe wrought by the storm continues to weigh on the lives of working people. This includes a wave of evictions pressed by profit-hungry landlords.

The storm killed over 225 people across six states, with the biggest toll in western North Carolina. Over 100,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. But many people were obligated to keep paying rent on homes or apartments that still stood, even

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Australia warehouse workers fight boss speedup drive 3

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— On the picket line, p. 5 —

Starbucks workers picket at Minneapolis store for a contract

UK food workers resume strike action, fight for union rights

After storm, evictions spread

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though they couldn't live in them because of damage and no power or running water. And many ran out of money amid long-term joblessness, as businesses, stores, restaurants and farms closed for weeks into months.

While hundreds of volunteers responded to the crisis, offering help and expertise to clean up and organize food and other aid, they couldn't solve some deeper problems.

For nearly two months it was unsafe to drink from Asheville's heavily damaged water system. The city finally lifted its boil water notice Nov. 18, though residents have still been advised to flush their pipes daily to avoid lead contamination.

Since the courts in Buncombe County, which includes Asheville, reopened in mid-October, at least 225 new eviction cases have been filed there, the North Carolina Tenants Union reported. And filings have accelerated as more people missed November rent deadlines.

Those most deeply affected are workers "who are the backbone of the service economy here, some who haven't been paid for two months," Marcia Mount Shoop, a pastor at the Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Asheville, told the *Militant* in a phone interview Dec. 7. She helps lead the relief center at the church, which has worked to raise and provide supplies and funds for those facing evictions.

"The majority of people coming for support are monolingual Spanish speakers. They work in restaurants, hospitals, clean hotel rooms. Some are in landscaping, many are agricultural workers, where some of their workplaces were just washed away," she said. "Some are construction workers,

who have not worked at all, and some who are now back at work, getting just two days a week."

Rents were high in Asheville and the surrounding area before the storm, with half of renters in Buncombe County paying at least a third of their income on housing. With the huge numbers of damaged and uninhabitable housing today, profit-gouging landlords have been taking advantage of this situation to raise rents even higher.

"While it is never an ideal situation, sometimes tenant eviction is a must to keep your rental business healthy and profitable," Asheville Phoenix Properties says on its web page. It's the leading real estate management company in the city. In North Carolina, tenants can be evicted within as little as three weeks if the owner or realtor gets a court order for the Sheriff's Office to do so.

'Scale of this is unfathomable'

"Every single day we serve about 100 people at the church's relief site, and every single day we see new people coming in with eviction letters," said Mount Shoop. "The scope and scale of this is unfathomable. We're paying landlords. It's not like giving cash to tenants. We need more time to get through all the requests, there are so many!"

The church has given out \$1.5 million in rent support in the last two months, she said. "Most comes from private donations from people all over the world."

For thousands who have lost their homes, little to nothing is being done by government authorities to provide assistance. Blue Ridge Public Radio reported that through early December only 14 families in western North Carolina received a mobile home or trailer from



Blue Ridge Public Radio/Laura Hackett

Some 50 residents of Asheville and Buncombe County, North Carolina, demonstrated outside Buncombe Courthouse Oct. 13, demanding a moratorium on evictions and for rent relief.

the Federal Emergency Management Agency to use as temporary housing.

It's working people pitching in that makes a difference, Mount Shoop said. "They come from all over the community and from out of town," and make donations, both large and small. "One person came and got rent support and handed us \$3, saying he wanted to help somehow."

At the end of November, the city of Asheville and Buncombe County collectively approved grants of \$500,000 for Grace Covenant's rental assistance program. "But this will be gone in 10 days!" she said.

Those who lost jobs because of business closures can apply for disaster unemployment assistance, but the maximum weekly payment in North Carolina is \$600, which doesn't come close to covering rent payments as well as other necessities, like food and gas.

Hundreds of people signed an open letter Nov. 18 calling for an eviction moratorium. In North Carolina, such an order can only come from the governor, the general assembly or the state Supreme Court. The state legislature in October approved a measly \$1 million for rental, mortgage and utility assistance for all the areas hardest hit by Helene.

Some workers have managed to get their hands on yurts to set up for shelter. These are the primary form of housing for nomadic peoples in Mon-

golia — large, fortified circular tents, with room for a wood-burning stove to cook on that also works as a heater, and provides extra insulation and space.

"They're not camping out. That's their home," Brenda Lunsford told BPR News, standing by the yurt she set up in her backyard. She estimates she would need about \$100,000 to repair the storm damage to her house. "We've been helping each other get wood. And we've got to help each other in this world."

The Low Point of Labor Resistance Is Behind US

The Socialist Workers Party Looks Forward

A decadeslong retreat by the working class and unions has come to an end. More and more workers — of all ages, skin colors, and both sexes — are saying, "Enough is enough! They've begun to wield the collective power of the exploited producers in response."

pathfinderpress.com



THE MILITANT

Protest Canada's plan to deport immigrant workers

Over 180 unions and other organizations have issued an open letter to Ottawa demanding permanent residency for all those living in Canada. "Class solidarity is a life-and-death question for our unions," Philippe Tessier, Communist League candidate, told the *Militant*.



LaPresse/Josie Desmarais
March in Montreal Nov. 2 demands Ottawa end moves to target immigrant workers.

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Liberals target ‘ignorant’ voters

Continued from front page

of high prices, joblessness and rising uncertainty. We know what is happening to ourselves and to millions of fellow workers who are looking for ways to change these conditions.

Rubin says, “What is the point of asking such voters their view?” She urges Democrats to just “reduce and simplify” their message for workers who voted for Trump, or didn’t vote at all. Some 89 million eligible voters didn’t see enough in either capitalist candidate to vote, substantially more than the numbers of voters either Trump or Harris got.

Rubin’s piece captures the disdain shown toward working people by the liberal big-business media and capitalist politicians of all stripes. These views are especially prevalent among members of the upper-middle-class meritocratic layers that dominate the Democratic Party today. They’re convinced their own “higher education and income,” as Rubin puts it, qualifies them to administer and regulate the lives of the toiling majority on behalf of the country’s exploiting capitalist rulers.

Exemplified by Barack Obama, these “smart people” deeply believe the working class is ignorant, inherently bigoted and the source of ultra-right reaction. “The fascist won a lot of working-class support,” Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said Nov. 6, referring to Trump.

In fact the most important thing working people have been doing in recent years is turning to our unions, organizing strikes and winning solidarity. This is a change after decades of relatively low labor resistance to the bosses’ drive to increase their profits on our backs.

The course put forward by the Socialist Workers Party’s presidential ticket and its other candidates in 2024 was grounded in this reality. They joined picket lines, built unions and campaigned on a program to end the twin scourges of inflation and joblessness.

They won support while explaining workers need to break from the bosses’ parties and build a party of our own, a party of labor, to advance the fight to take political power into our own hands. Along that road, the working class will develop a leadership grounded in the experiences of past revolutionary struggles that can point the road toward victory.

‘Preachy or disconnected’

Other liberals argue that Democrats need to learn to be less condescend-

ing, at least in appearance. The newly elected chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Rep. Gregory Casar, says the party must stop being “seen as preachy or disconnected” from the working class.

Democratic Party strategist Steven Schale says Kamala Harris was defeated because “we tend to put voters in different buckets — black, Hispanic, young, gay etc. — and treat these groups like they are more progressive than they really are.”

The 2024 vote registered growing rejection by working people of “woke” attitudes and policies. These are based on the notion that divisions of race, skin color, nationality and what they call “gender” determine who you are, not what you say or do. At its crudest, if you’re white and male then you must be an oppressor. This outlook seeks to bury any idea that class divisions underlie exploitation, national oppression and the second-class status of women.

President Joseph Biden used executive orders to extend the use of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion recruitment and training programs, since he knew he couldn’t get such programs adopted by Congress. DEI officers are charged with the indoctrination of “woke” values and punishing anyone accused of transgressing them.

These programs are in decline today, and rightly so. Tens of millions of workers reject being told what they should think or say, or how they should treat each other.

Under DEI programs, terms like “mother” have been replaced with the



Reuters/David Ryder

Boeing Machinists march after union rally in Seattle Oct. 15. Workers won a 38% wage increase. “The strike gave Boeing a taste of what we’re capable of,” one worker told the *Militant*.

politically correct, but biologically false, “pregnant people.”

One of the most popular ads run by the Trump campaign mocked the use of gender-neutral pronouns. It ended, “Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you.” Convinced that men weren’t backing Harris because they’re sexist, Democrats tried to reach out to these “low-information” men by running a condescending campaign ad with men dressed as cowboys showing viewers just how “man enough” they were because they were going to vote for a woman.

A substantial wing of the Democrats campaigned in defense of men who identify as women competing in women’s sports, part of a broader assault on women’s rights. Trump won support by pledging to put an end to this attack on

women’s athletic competitions.

The rejection of these anti-working-class “woke” policies is an advance.

The worsening conditions workers face were key to the outcome of the election. This is especially true of the ruinous impact of high prices, affecting workers’ ability to pay for everyday essentials and to sustain a family. Told they had no choice but to pick one of the two main bosses’ parties, many workers viewed Trump and the Republicans as the lesser of these two capitalist evils.

As workers continue to use our unions and to win solidarity, our confidence in our own capacities and worth will grow, contrary to all the attempts — from bourgeois commentators to the middle-class left — to dismiss us as the “low-information” folk.

Australia warehouse workers fight boss speedup drive

BY LINDA HARRIS
AND BOB AIKEN

SYDNEY — After 17 days on strike, Woolworths warehouse workers, members of the United Workers Union, won a victory, pushing back the company’s attempt to impose new speedup rules. More than 1,500 workers at three warehouses in Victoria and one in Sydney walked off the job in a fight for new contracts. While the warehouses are on different contracts, their coordinated strike strengthened the fight.

Woolworths is the biggest supermarket chain and the largest private sector employer in Australia. The strike was having an impact, with shelves emptied the month leading up

to Christmas. A week into the strike, Woolworths claimed it had lost 50 million Australian dollars (\$32 million) in sales.

Workers won an above-inflation wage increase at all four sites. But, as pickets told the *Militant*, the strike wasn’t primarily about wages, but about safety and ending the speedup the bosses were imposing through a new “productivity framework.”

The new agreements contain a clause that ensures workers will not be disciplined for the speed they can work at, and an acknowledgement that not everybody can meet the 100% target. This “is a significant achievement,” said Tim Kennedy, national secretary of the United Workers Union.

The “framework” that Woolworths introduced last year included automatic punishment if workers fell behind the rate. It introduced surveillance of workers designed to speed up work at the distribution centers.

This push to work faster undermines safety in an already dangerous industry. According to Safe Work Australia, workers are now more likely to be injured at Woolworths than in coal mining.

“To get performance everyone has to work unsafe,” one young woman at the Erskine Park warehouse picket in Sydney, who is still on probation and asked that her name not be used, told the *Militant*. Under pressure to meet rates, “the pickers” on ride-on pallet jacks “come flying out of the aisles” where others are working on high-reach forklifts.

An older worker, who has worked at Woolworths for over 25 years, described the pressure the company is putting on her to shift at times from receiving to picking and to meet the 100% productivity rate.

In an attempt to break the strike Woolworths applied to the Fair Work Commission, the federal arbitration agency, to have the United Workers Union’s picket lines ruled illegal. The commission ruled in the bosses’ favor Dec. 6, but strikers kept the picket line encampments up until they won new contracts.

This fight sets an example for other workers. Some 150 workers at the Coca-Cola plant here voted Dec. 9 to take strike action in a fight for higher wages.

Militant Labor Forums

The fall of the Assad tyranny; responses from Israel to Iran; the deepening crisis of the U.S.-led imperialist world order; prospects for the working class taking political power

Hear members of the Socialist Workers Party National Committee:

Los Angeles: Norton Sandler, Sun., Dec. 15, 5 p.m.

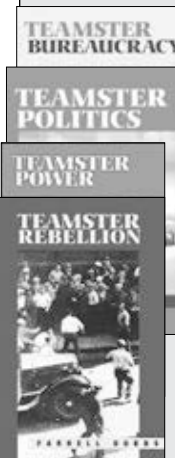
Minneapolis: Mary Martin, Sat., Dec. 14, 7:30 p.m.

New York: Steve Clark, Sat., Dec. 14, 6:30 p.m.

Union City, New Jersey: Dave Prince, Sat., Dec. 14, 7 p.m.

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ISSCO conference takes up what Chinese living overseas face today

BY PATRICK BROWN

BANDUNG, Indonesia — The impact on overseas Chinese communities of Beijing's increased economic and military weight in Southeast Asia underpinned discussions at the 14th regional conference of the International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas held here Nov. 7-8.

Since 1992 ISSCO has organized conferences, from Southeast Asia to North America, to promote the study of the history of Chinese living overseas, including their struggles against prejudice and discrimination.

In the opening speech, professor Leo Suryadinata from Singapore said Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative — a multibillion-dollar network of loans and construction projects in over 70 countries — “reflects China's rising power.”

For its part, Washington has sought to aggressively counter Beijing's challenge by expanding military collaboration with governments in the region, including those of Japan, Australia, South Korea and the Philippines.

Overseas Chinese communities increasingly find themselves caught in the middle of these conflicts.

One example is the frame-up of Philip Chan Man Ping, a businessman from Singapore. Suryadinata said that after observing a parliamentary session in China, Chan was designated by officials in Singapore as a “politically significant person” under the country's Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act. Chan now has to give an annual account of his political activities to authorities. Penalties for breaching the act include up to 14 years in prison.

‘Fifth column’ accusations

In the discussion at the second plenary session, Steve Penner, a leader of the Communist League in Canada, pointed to Suryadinata's description of the prosecution of Chan in Singapore.

“The Foreign Interference Act sounds familiar to me,” Penner said, since the Canadian government has introduced a new law with a similar purpose, establishing a registry of “foreign agents” and making it a crime to act on behalf of another government.

“In Canada, as in the United States,” Penner said, “Chinese academics have effectively been accused of being ‘fifth columnists’ whose loyalty is to China, simply on the basis of their nationality and sometimes their collaboration with other academics and scientists in China. This is supposed to make them a security threat.”

Long history of migration

Driven out of southern China by poverty and war in the 19th and 20th centuries, working people settled in many countries around the globe, professor Danny Wong Tze Ken from Malaysia told the conference. Generations of this diaspora faced brutal working and living conditions.

In another feature presentation, Thung Ju Lan of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences addressed how these challenges were experienced in Indonesia. From the 17th century, Chinese immigrants worked in slave-like conditions in Dutch colonial plantations and mines on Java and Kalimantan. Legal restrictions on housing and interracial

marriage, among other measures, reinforced discrimination.

After a decadeslong independence struggle forced the Dutch colonial rulers out of Indonesia, the bourgeois nationalist government of Sukarno came to power in 1945. It maintained discrimination against the Chinese.

This deepened under the regime of Gen. Suharto, established after the military-led massacre of hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants and its crushing of the Maoist Communist Party of Indonesia in 1965.

Suharto's regime forced Chinese Indonesians to carry special identification and adopt Indonesian names. It banned cultural displays, like the celebration of the Lunar New Year. Chinese-language schools were closed.

Suharto resigned in 1998 after protests by hundreds of thousands of workers and students. The worst of his anti-Chinese edicts were abolished. However, as Ju Lan said, prejudice and discrimination are alive and well. Today Chinese companies in Indonesia and the workers from China they bring with them are often blamed for worsening economic conditions.

One of the panels took up efforts to revive Chinese language and culture in post-Suharto Indonesia. Dimas Krisna Aditya described attempts today to popularize Wayang shadow puppet perfor-



Some of the participants at ISSCO's 14th regional conference Nov. 8 in Bandung, Indonesia. Discussion was underpinned by China's increased economic, military weight in Southeast Asia.

mances that combine both Javanese and Chinese cultural elements, which were outlawed under Suharto.

At another panel speakers from the Philippines discussed the blight of the Asian opium trade spread by the British imperialists in Asia in the 19th century. It caused “large-scale opium addiction in China, and the Chinese in the Philippines were not exempt,” said Teresita Ang See of the Kaisa Heritage Center in Manila.

Volunteers from Australia, New Zealand and Canada set up a table of Pathfinder books, which feature titles by Socialist Workers Party leaders, Cuban revolutionaries and others, alongside

those of other book vendors and displays of art, crafts and batik clothing.

Our History Is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution was the Pathfinder table's most popular title. It describes their participation in the country's socialist revolution that brought an end to the decades of discrimination Chinese Cubans faced.

The Malaya University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, will host the 2025 gathering, the 12th international conference, Nov. 4-6.

Linda Harris and Steve Penner contributed to this article.

Strikers out six weeks in fight with Milk-Bone win support

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came to the strike vote, same on the contract vote,” she said. “We turned down two contract offers, the second offer was worse than the first one. I think the company is trying to get rid of the union.

“We have to take care of the next generation,” Woodward explained. “The people in the past took care of us. At one point the company tried to sell us on a two-tier contract. We said no. You can't have someone working next to you who's making \$10 an hour less than you forever. Me, I have no skin in the game, but I'm part of this fight.”

Solidarity keeps arriving. “Some 25 members of the United Auto Workers from a number of locals came in solidarity this week,” said Steve Palumbo, chief shop steward.

“We see the importance of this strike for us,” Art Neal, a UAW Local 686 officer at the nearby Lockport General Motors radiator plant, told the *Militant* by phone. “Every union has to stick together. We've been to the Milk-Bone strike three times so far. This past week we brought grocery store gift cards and tents. Being on strike is hard. They need a lot of support.”

Melissa Straubel, executive board chairman of BCTGM Local 81, and Shantel Myers, the local's recording secretary, drove nine hours from Traverse City, Michigan, to bring a carload of supplies for the Milk-Bone picket line in late November. Both women work at a Sara Lee industrial bakery.

“I read about the strike on Facebook,” Straubel told the *Militant* by phone. “I told my board, ‘They can use our help, let's send them a care package.’ Our president said, ‘No, we should send them people and supplies.’ Shantel and I volunteered right away to go.

“What they are facing we are fac-

ing too. We're just trying to support our families and have a decent life. The company we work for is going after our health care,” Straubel said. “We have long hours, double shifts, different shifts. Our contract is up in December next year and the company is watching the Milk-Bone strike. Our local is now working on a raffle to raise money for the strikers.”

A big issue is health care costs. Striker Francisco Rivera said that with a family and two kids, he would have to pay thousands of dollars in deductibles before insurance started paying the bills. “I showed it to my wife, and she said, ‘That's got to be the worst in the country!’”

“We're out here for the long haul,”

striker Hunter Winch said. “We're fighting for a future.” Factory management and scabs are working 12-hour days in the struck plant, but “the company warehouse is close to empty. There are few products on hand and very few loaded trucks coming out of the plant.”

The BCTGM international put out a flyer describing how you can help. Everyone is encouraged to join the picket line or drop off food, drinks or supplies at 243 Urban Street in Buffalo. Donations to the strike fund are needed. Make checks payable to BCTGM International Union and write “Local 36G Strike Fund” in the memo line. Send it to the BCTGM at 10401 Connecticut Ave., 4th Floor, Kensington, MD 20895. Help spread the word about the strike.

Freedom for Boualem Sansal! Algeria gov't imprisons prize-winning novelist

BY ROY LANDERSEN

The Algerian government has imprisoned prominent French Algerian novelist Boualem Sansal on charges of violating national security. The 75-year-old writer is an outspoken critic of reactionary Islamism, authoritarianism, and government attacks on freedom of expression. He was disappeared for a week after Nov. 16, when he arrived at Algiers airport from Paris. If convicted, he faces the rest of his life behind bars.

Numerous writers and civil liberties groups have called for his release. A joint appeal for his freedom, as well as that of “all writers imprisoned for their ideas,” was run in the French magazine *Le Point* Nov. 23. Written by Algerian novelist Kamel Daoud, it pointed to the “alarming reality in Algeria, where freedom of expression is nothing more than

a memory in the face of repression, imprisonments and the surveillance of the entire society.”

Writers who signed Daoud's letter included Salman Rushdie, Annie Ernaux, Wole Soyinka and many more. PEN America denounced the “climate of fear and repression” in Algeria and called for Sansal's release.

Since the Oct. 7, 2023, pogrom by Hamas against Jews in Israel, the regime of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune in Algiers has hosted meetings for Hamas and other Islamist currents.

Sansal's books were banned for a period in Algeria. His first novel, in 1999, was *The Oath of the Barbarians*, a detective story revealing corruption during Algeria's “Black Decade.” This was when the military suppressed an Is-

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—ON THE PICKET LINE—

Help the *Militant* cover labor struggles around the world!

This column is dedicated to spreading the truth about workers' struggles for a union movement in every workplace today. It gives a voice to those engaged in battle and helps build solidarity. We need your help to make it a success. If you are involved in a skirmish or strike or know other workers who are, please contact us at (212) 244-4899 or themilitant@mac.com. We'll work together to ensure your story gets told.

UK food workers resume strike action, fight for union rights

WREXHAM, North Wales — In a show of determination to win their fight for a union, hundreds of workers at the Oscar Mayer ready-meals factory here voted Nov. 21 by 97% to continue their strike.

The 600 workers, members of Unite, went on strike Sept. 12, fighting against company attempts to impose pay cuts of up to 3,000 pounds (\$3,820) by eliminating all paid breaks, extra pay for work on bank holidays and against the company's refusal to recognize their union.

The strikers returned to work Nov. 21-27, but strike action resumed for another week Nov. 28, with further walkouts planned for Dec. 12 to at least Jan. 9.

Union organizer Dean Shone told the *Militant* that by returning to work for two one-week periods, "the strikers learned how much production had lowered in their absence and many reported chaos inside the factory."

The bosses hadn't expected them all to rejoin strike action," Shone said, "but that's what happened."

"The vast majority of us came back out, with some new people joining us who are fed up with conditions inside," Joanna Kowalska, one of the strike leaders, said Dec. 4. "When we went back to work we realized the impact our strike action is having. We are more confident now than before knowing that."

After the Nov. 21 vote, 150 workers joined in a celebration social. "Once you start something, you cannot go back, you have to see it through," Kowalska said. "Without a union we have nothing."

Shone said solidarity was coming from Unite branches across Wales, from the "several thousand Airbus workers, from the nearby Broughton factory, to the Unite union branch that orga-

nizes Wrexham council workers."

Messages of solidarity can be sent to Unite Union, 33 King Street, Wrexham, LL11 1HR, Wales, UK. Email: joanne.hurford@unitetheunion.org

— Andrés Mendoza

Locked-out Montreal hotel workers fight for new contract

MONTREAL — Bosses at Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth, a major hotel here, locked out its 600 unionized workers without warning Nov. 20. The workers, members of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN), had voted by over 90% to reject the employer's latest contract offer the day before.

Some 30 strikers were walking the picket line in front of the main entrance to Quebec's biggest hotel when *Militant* worker-correspondents brought their solidarity Dec. 4. The area was festooned with CSN flags, and several of the workers were busy plastering "lock-out" stickers on the hotel's windows. A striker disc jockey played loud rhythmic music through portable speakers to help the pickets keep warm.

Workers reported scab labor cleaned the windows last night, but they simply stickered the windows again. One sign in French that was stuck to a window said, "Shame on the employer. Workers on the outside. Scabs on the inside."

Union negotiators and the company have agreed on a wage package, 10% the first year and 21% overall in a four-year contract. But the main issues are outstanding — the bosses' insistence on using nonunion agency workers to fill in for unionized staff and the abusive workload housekeepers face. Workers demand the number of rooms per shift be capped at 11. The bosses want 13 rooms during the high season and 14 the rest of the year.

The union says that housekeepers



Militant/Pete Clifford

Food workers on strike against Oscar Mayer rally in Wrexham, North Wales, Nov. 18. Some 600 Unite members are fighting for union recognition, against bosses' moves to cut their pay.

have been overworked since the hotel's multimillion-dollar renovation in 2017. "There have been work accidents and injuries," Alexandre Laviolette, CSN commerce federation president, told the *Montreal Gazette*.

The union says the company is violating Quebec law by using scab labor, including managers doing union work, outside agency workers and other nonunion labor.

The 17 other CSN-organized hotels in Quebec have reached new contracts with the union covering 4,000 workers.

Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth hotel is owned by Ivanhoe Cambridge, the global real estate subsidiary of the Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec, one of the largest investment fund managers in North America.

Join the picket line 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. seven days a week. Send solidarity donations to: CSN, 1601, avenue De Lorimier, Montreal H2K 4M5.

— John Steele

Prelco workers return unbowed after six-month boss lockout

MONTREAL — Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) members at Prelco's Montreal window-glass production plant voted by 96% to accept the company's offer of a 21.5% raise Nov. 17. The new contract runs through September 2029.

"At first, the company was offering 10% over six years," Sylvain Nelson told the *Militant*. Then a "final offer" of 17% was rejected by 92% Nov. 4.

"By holding out, we made wage gains and learned a lot," Michelle Pelletier said. "I used to be the first to say 'what are they doing on strike?' But until you've gone through it, you don't know."

Pelletier joined striking postal workers on their picket line after the Prelco lockout ended.

"If we hadn't had CSN support, we wouldn't have gotten as far," she said. The locked-out workers got over \$72,000 in donations.

"Over the course of the fight, we made contact with Prelco employees who are members of Unifor in Riviere-du-Loup, Quebec, and in New Brunswick," Nelson said. "Some of them came down from Riviere-du-Loup to picket with us, and they wore our union shirts on their jobs." Unifor members at this Prelco plant are currently in negotiations.

"This was the first time I was ever on strike or locked out," Koffi Dramane, the local union president, said. "It put me in contact with others who are part of the same fight elsewhere."

— Katy LeRougetel

Starbucks workers picket at Minneapolis store for a contract

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Starbucks Workers United union members and their supporters held a "practice picket" Dec. 7 outside a Starbucks store here demanding bosses finally sign a contract.

Pickets shouted, "No contract, no coffee" and "What's disgusting? Union busting," while passing cars honked in support. Some store patrons and passersby also offered solidarity.

While reticent to give their names as they protested in front of the store where they work, some pickets told the *Militant* that as the year draws to a close and negotiations with the coffee giant grind on, the company hasn't made good on its promise to settle contracts with the union by the end of this year.

In 2021 workers at a Starbucks store in Buffalo, New York, formed Starbucks United Workers and voted to demand a contract. Since then, some 12,000 workers at over 500 stores have joined them, including at 150 stores this year.

Workers told the *Militant* that they hoped a union contract could resolve critical issues workers face — insufficient hours leading to loss of health care insurance benefits, arbitrary scheduling, and outstanding tips customers paid by credit card that were never turned over by the company.

— Mary Martin

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO

THE MILITANT

December 27, 1999

The following statement was issued by the New York Socialist Workers Party.

The rulers of New York City and the state have launched a vicious attack on the rights of the transit workers who run New York City's subways and buses. They are threatening to use the cops and courts to impose astronomical fines and arrest not only against any worker who strikes, but against anyone who advocates exercising the basic right to withhold one's labor.

This blatant government intervention is aimed not only against the Transport Workers Union members, but all working people in the city and beyond.

The TWU membership will now be voting on a proposed contract. Whatever gains they make will have been the result of the determined stance of the ranks. We need to stand in solidarity with the transit workers and demand: Hands off the TWU!

THE MILITANT

December 27, 1974

BOSTON — "Keep the buses rolling!" rang out through the streets as thousands poured into this city in the first national response to the racist attacks on school desegregation here. The Dec. 13-14 teach-in and march marked a turning point.

The action marked the first time supporters of busing have outmobilized the "antibusing" bigots in the streets. *Militant* reporters estimated the size at about 12,000. By comparison, only 5,000 people turned out the next day for an "antibusing" march organized by the racists. It was a big setback for the segregationist forces.

Eunetta Pierce of Chicago, who began marching for Black freedom in 1954, came in a contingent of trade unionists from Amalgamated Meat Cutters Local P-500. "Marches like this are the only way you achieved your civil rights in the 1960s. If it takes that in the 1970s, we'll do it again."

THE MILITANT

December 26, 1949

In the midst of the Greek rulers war on the partisans, off the southern tip of Attica lies the island of Makronissos whose name has become synonymous with horror for the working masses of Greece.

The sadistic bourgeoisie of Greece chose Makronissos as the site for its camp of extermination. For three years all workers, peasants and soldiers whom the rulers view with suspicion have been shipped here. Under indescribable terror and torture, the bourgeoisie seeks to root out every trace of class consciousness.

Most insufferable is the psychological pressure. They are compelled to sign declarations repudiating their ideas. Those who don't are immediately sent to "the Syrma," a special department for incorrigibles. To this day, after three years of the existence of the camp, not a single person has come back from this Syrma.

Georgia protesters defy attacks from pro-Moscow government

BY VIVIAN SAHNER

Tens of thousands of demonstrators continue to protest across Georgia after the pro-Moscow Georgian Dream government announced plans Nov. 28 to postpone talks on joining the European Union until at least 2028. Undeterred by brutal attacks from security forces, protesters have turned out daily in Tbilisi, the country's capital, and dozens of other cities, including Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Zugdidi and Telavi.

Police have been using increasing force in the regime's drive to end the demonstrations, which center on the parliament building in Tbilisi. More than 300 protesters have been arrested and over 100 people injured, as riot police use water cannons and tear gas against the crowds, beating scores of demonstrators. Police raided the offices of several opposition parties, with one video showing cops dragging the leader of Coalition for Change into a police car.

"The first days were the hardest, everyone was there as an individual, now we are more organized," protester Ruso told the *Militant* in a phone interview Dec. 9. "If attacked, we move to another street, but often there are thugs organized by the government waiting in cars. They show no remorse and are much worse than the SWAT teams. They also focus on the media, trying to destroy any evidence, any photos."

Lazare Maglakelidze described to the *New York Times* how he was snatched by men in unmarked black uniforms, dragged into a van and beaten. He said he wasn't giving up and found parallels between the protests and the 2014 Maidan uprising in Ukraine. "Ukraine is where we see people fighting for their dignity, dedicating their lives to the highest of high concepts that anybody can imagine," he said.

Protesters have answered the attacks with more marches, with demonstrators carrying signs saying, "We demand free and fair elections" and "Free all unjustly arrested." Several hundred media workers marched down Tbilisi's central Rustaveli Avenue Dec. 8, putting up posters of colleagues they say have been attacked.

Protesters are demanding a rerun of the October elections, which they say were rigged. The Georgian Dream government, which has been in office for 12 years, was formed and bankrolled

by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a multibillionaire capitalist with banking and steel interests in Russia. "We didn't need to hear the election results to know what they would be," Ruso told the *Militant*. "People could see who you voted for. People with government jobs — teachers, bus drivers — would risk their jobs for voting the wrong way.

"And Georgian Dream urged us to not create another Ukraine, using a poster showing bombed-out buildings there. Neighbors would say, 'I hope you voted for peace,'" she said.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has vowed to "eradicate" what he calls "liberal-fascist" opposition, echoing language used by the Vladimir Putin regime in Moscow to target political opponents. He accused the demonstrators of organizing a repeat of the Maidan revolution that ousted pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine. He insists the fight is "already over," and that protest leaders will be brought to justice.

No retreat

But protesters continue to gather outside parliament, with no signs of retreat. The actions follow months of rising tensions. After tens of thousands took to the streets in early 2023, the government initially backed off from imposing another Russian law — a "foreign agents" statute that would curtail po-

Moscow war hits Ukraine toilers, Russian troops protest

Continued from front page markets, gas stations, cafés, post offices and aid distribution centers.

Kherson was captured by Russian forces shortly after their Feb. 24, 2022, invasion, but the occupying forces faced widespread protests by residents. After nine months the city was liberated by Ukrainian forces.

After not hearing drones for an hour, Serhiy left his Kherson apartment in early November. He stepped on a "petal," one of the small anti-personnel mines dropped by drones in gardens or playgrounds. "I fell to the ground and then I noticed that I was missing my foot," he told the *Financial Times* from a hospital bed.

Everyone in the area knows someone who was killed, wounded or is

freedom of expression it will be possible to disagree with Israel, "only without the hate." The same year he won an Arabic novel award in France, but the prize money was revoked under pressure from opponents of Israel's right to exist, including a fatwa issued by Hamas. "It is a terrorist movement of the worst kind," Sansal said. "Hamas has taken Gazans hostage. It has taken Islam hostage."

His latest book, *2084: The End of the World*, won the French Academy Grand Prize in 2016. A modern take on George Orwell's famous novel *1984*, it describes a postapocalyptic extremist caliphate where anyone who criticizes the regime is disappeared. Like Orwell's classic, it is a cry of rebellion against totalitarianism.



Mautskebeli

Mass demonstration in Tbilisi, Georgia, Nov. 28 after pro-Moscow Georgian Dream government announced plans to postpone talks on joining EU until at least 2028. Daily nationwide protests call for fresh elections in defiance of brutal attacks by security forces.

litical rights and limit freedom of the press. In April 2024 some 20,000 people, mainly young, protested in Tbilisi, chanting, "No to the Russian law!" Despite widespread opposition, parliament passed the bill in May.

Many people see the current protests as an important moment in the history of Georgia's long fight for independence. After fostering groups of pro-Moscow separatists, beginning in the early 1990s in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Moscow invaded Georgia in 2008, taking control over the two areas with Russian troops stationed in both.

Georgia was originally annexed by Russia's reactionary czarist regime in 1801 and only gained its freedom

following the Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution in 1917. That workers and farmers government freed Georgians and other oppressed people from the czarist boot, guaranteeing their right to self-determination. This conquest was later reversed by the counterrevolution in Russia led by Joseph Stalin.

Georgia, a country of 3.7 million people, declared independence again in 1991 when the Stalinist regime collapsed. There is widespread opposition in Georgia to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"Now there are protests in other cities, even in small towns and some villages," Ruso said. "This is unheard of here in Georgia. We say, where you live, you can protest."

lucky to have survived one of the drone attacks, he said.

Swarms of drones often circle homes "like birds," said Tetyana Aksenchuk from the nearby village of Veletenske. "If they see any movement, they immediately attack."

Incendiary bombs are also dropped to set homes and fields alight. Aksenchuk was badly injured from another drone attack while fighting one of these fires. Ambulances coming to treat her were hit by more drones with several medics injured and one driver burned to death.

Aksenchuk lost her lower left arm and may lose her shattered left leg. The cost of surgery, let alone a possible prosthetic limb, is well beyond her means.

The aerial barrages have forced more civilians to leave the area. Out of 250,000 Kherson residents before the war, only 60,000 remain.

Many now carry small drone detectors to alert them about danger hovering nearby. Others only travel at night without lights.

Moscow steps up attacks

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Dec. 8 that 43,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died in the war so far, with 370,000 wounded. About half of the wounded have been able to recover enough to return to the front, he added. Courageous rescue operations, conducted by Ukrainian medics under fire from Moscow's forces, have ensured a high rate of recoveries.

By contrast, workers in uniform in the Russian army are sent to storm Ukrainian positions in "meat grinder" attacks with little regard for casualties

and with the dead and injured often left on the battlefield. A far smaller portion of Russian wounded get to a hospital.

In a Dec. 5 video appeal made in a Russian hospital, some of Moscow's soldiers, shown on crutches or in handcuffs, complained about their officers forcing them back into combat before their treatment and recovery is over. Those who refused to go were charged with desertion.

The war has cost working people in Russia over 700,000 dead or wounded, as Putin drives to seize more territory.

Moscow keeps its casualty figures top secret. But Anna Tsivilyova, a relative of Putin and a deputy defense minister, accidentally exposed the scale of the deaths. She admitted authorities had received 48,000 DNA test requests from families trying to find missing soldiers.

Alexei Gorinov, a former Moscow politician and Putin critic, was the first to be jailed by the Kremlin under its wartime censorship laws for opposing the invasion. He was back in court Nov. 29 to hear that his seven-year sentence was extended by three years.

"I never thought I would live to see such a level of degradation of my country's political system and its foreign policy," he said in a courtroom statement. The war is causing the "deprivation and suffering of millions of people on a level unprecedented since World War II. We cannot remain silent."

Many thousands of Russian people have paid "with our freedom, and for some, with our lives" for opposing the war, he said. He urged others to speak out, "Let us stop this bloody, needless slaughter."

Assad fall shakes Mideast, world

Continued from front page

the Iranian regime continues to drive ahead on developing nuclear weapons and looking to advance its reactionary influence in the Middle East.

Thousands of people poured into the streets of Damascus after Assad fled Dec. 8, to celebrate his overthrow. While many working people are wary of the Islamist groups, they are glad to finally have Assad's boot off their necks.

Assad had held on to power after working people joined mass protests in 2011 and armed bourgeois opponents then took over large swaths of Syria, challenging his rule. He was only able to survive and regain control of much of the country with Moscow's airpower, billions of dollars in military aid, advisers from Tehran and thousands of Hezbollah thugs.

But hatred for the regime and opposition kept growing, even among the Alawite minority in Syria, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, to which Assad and most of the army officers belonged. When the uprising began in Aleppo, Assad's army came apart.

Working people paid high price

Working people in Syria paid a high cost for the civil war, with over 306,000 civilians killed and 12 million "internally displaced" or as refugees in Turkey, Lebanon and other countries. Thousands have already begun heading home.

The bulk of Assad's armed opponents withdrew to Idlib province in the northwest near Turkey, where they set up their own government. They developed relations with the Turkish-created Syrian National Army.

But over the last two years Moscow pulled out many of its troops, planes and much of its military equipment from Syria to replace massive losses from its war against Ukraine. The Putin regime still hopes that the rebels will allow it to keep its airfield in Latakia province and its naval base in Tartus, the only Russian naval facility on the Mediterranean.

Most decisively, Assad's fall was the "direct result of the heavy blows we landed on Hamas, on Hezbollah, and on Iran," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Dec. 9. "We are transforming the face of the Middle East."

Opening Assad's prison doors

Assad's bestial and rotted-out regime collapsed within days of the start of the Turkish-endorsed rebel offensive.

As the rebels advanced they busted open the doors to prisons in city after city. At the notorious Sednaya prison alone, just north of Damascus, thousands of gaunt and pale prisoners of all political stripes streamed out — men, women and even children. As many as 13,000 opponents of the regime were murdered there between 2011 and 2015. Thousands more were viciously tortured.

"One man told me he didn't know where to go," one rebel fighter told the *Financial Times*. "The prison has been his home for 30 years and he doesn't remember where his family lives."

The largest of the mostly Sunni Islamist-based groups in the coalition of bourgeois factions that toppled Assad is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Its leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, was born in Saudi Arabia to

Syrian-parents and raised in Damascus.

He broke with al-Qaeda in 2016 and has painted his organization as nonsectarian. That remains to be seen. He says he doesn't want a conflict with Washington.

"Syria deserves a governing system that is institutional, not one where a single ruler makes arbitrary decisions," al-Sharaa told CNN.

Tahrir al-Sham announced that soldiers drafted into the Syrian army would be given amnesty, but not the officer corps or those responsible for murder and torture.

As the Tahrir al-Sham-led forces advanced, they tried to assuage the fears of Druze, Alawite and Christian minorities. A longtime Assad opponent in the region of Latakia told the *Financial Times* that the rebels "know all the Alawite sheikhs, and they talked to all of them."

Turkish forces attack Kurds

While the rebel forces consolidated their gains, the Syrian National Army — backed by the Turkish rulers' airstrikes — attacked and took over Manbij, which had been under the control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces since 2016, when it defeated Islamic State there.

Some 30 million Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey make up the world's largest nation without their own country. The Turkish government fears that any advances for Kurds in Syria will fuel struggles by Kurds in Turkey fighting for their national rights.

The Kurdish forces, which had taken advantage of the earlier war against Assad to form an autonomous region in the north, played a key role in alliance with Washington in defeating Islamic State. There are still some 900 U.S. troops based in the Kurdish region and the border areas near Iraq where most of the country's oil is produced.

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, claimed that "America and the Zionist regime" were the masterminds of Assad's fall, while also complaining about the role of Tehran's erstwhile ally Ankara. In reality, Tehran, like Hezbollah, is widely hated by Syrians for its backing of the Assad dictatorship.

After Assad fled, angry Syrians trashed the Iranian Embassy. According to Al Jazeera, Tehran evacuated 4,000 Iranian citizens from Syria.

Nonetheless, Khamenei said, "Iran



Syrians at infamous Sednaya prison near Damascus Dec. 9, hoping to find loved ones after rebels broke down doors to release thousands held in atrocious conditions by Assad dictatorship. Anadolu/Emin Sansar

and Syria have a long history, and we expect our friendly relationship to continue."

Iran's "axis of resistance" is greatly weakened. But the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Iran now has enough fissile material to make more than a dozen nuclear weapons if it decides to do so. Netanyahu has said that Israel will do everything in its power to prevent that.

Israel defends its borders

The Israeli government moved immediately to defend Israel's borders.

Even though Damascus was the only other government that was part of Tehran's "axis of resistance," Assad was careful not to directly attack Israel. During his rule the Syrian and Israeli governments honored a 1974 agreement to maintain a 50-mile-long "buffer zone" between the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights and Syria.

While Tahrir al-Sham has said little about its intentions toward Israel and the Jews, the Israeli government is taking no chances given the Jew-hating origins of many of the Islamist currents in its coalition.

Israeli troops crossed into the border zone and took over the Syrian outposts after Assad's troops fled as the regime collapsed.

"We have no intention of interfering in Syria's internal affairs, but we clearly intend to do what is necessary to ensure our security," Netanyahu said. "We want relations with the regime," but won't tolerate a return to Tehran using Syria to transfer weapons to Hezbollah or attack Israel.

As Israeli troops moved into the buffer zone, the Israeli air force hit more than

320 targets of the former regime's army throughout Syria, including aircraft, underground bases, chemical weapons sites, weapons depots and production facilities, missile sites, radars and tanks. It demolished the Syrian navy.

Washington reacts

The U.S. government sought to make clear that U.S. imperialism is still a force to be reckoned with, ordering B-52 bombers and other aircraft to strike more than 75 Islamic State targets in central Syria Dec. 8. Washington reportedly convinced the Turkish government to agree to a ceasefire while the Kurdish forces withdrew from Manbij.

The blows to Tehran, Hezbollah and Assad are also strengthening Israel's hand in Gaza. Hamas has reportedly retreated from its demands that Israel withdraw all its troops from Gaza before agreeing to a ceasefire and the release of more of the hostages taken Oct. 7.

In a Dec. 8 interview with NBC, President-elect Donald Trump reiterated that he wants to see an end to the war in Gaza. "I want [Netanyahu] to end it," he said. "But you have to have a victory."

Trump also responded to criticism of Israel by liberal Democrats and some forces who deny the reality of the program that happened Oct. 7.

"You know, you have Holocaust deniers. Now you have Oct. 7 deniers," he said. "No, Oct. 7 happened. What happened is horrible."

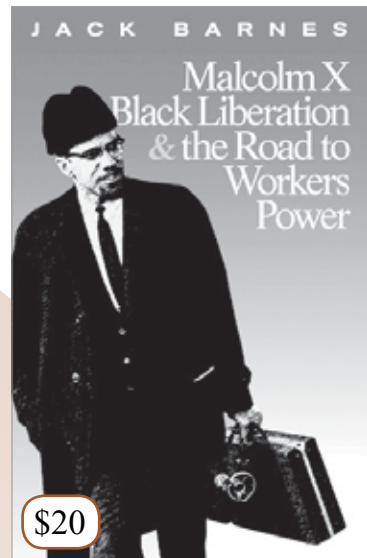
The bourgeois news media has focused its attention on the rivalries and shifting alliances. But they largely miss the most important development, the rising confidence of working people, who are taking advantage of space that is opening up to fight for their interests, opening possibilities for common struggles and down the road the construction of revolutionary working-class parties.

That could be seen in the celebrations throughout Syria following Assad's fall and in the thousands of people going to the prisons looking for some sign that relatives or friends were still alive.

Similar forces are at work in Iran, where thousands of oil workers have been threatening to go on strike if their demands for better wages and working conditions in the face of rising prices are not met, and truck drivers are planning a nationwide strike Dec. 16.

At a protest by retired workers in Kermanshah Dec. 8, one of the slogans was, "We don't want war or slaughter; we want lasting welfare."

Two books for class-conscious workers



See distributors on page 8 or visit www.pathfinder.com

'Cuba's revolution showed us we can do the same thing in the US'

On Jan. 1, 1959, Fidel Castro led Cuba's working people to victory, ousting the U.S.-backed military dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. To mark that anniversary, we are featuring Cuba and the Coming American Revolution by Jack Barnes, national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party. The excerpt is from the first chapter, "1961: Year of Education." That year saw the deepening of the socialist revolution as Cuba's workers and peasants defended their accomplishments arms in hand. As Barnes notes, "The victory of Cuban working people at Playa Girón punctured the myth of U.S. imperialism's invincibility." He describes how the Cuban Revolution led him to the SWP. Copyright © 2007 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.



Cuban militia members celebrate victory over U.S.-backed mercenary invasion at Bay of Pigs in April 1961. Fidel Castro led toilers to deepen, defend first socialist revolution in the Americas.

SPECIAL FEATURE

BY JACK BARNES

This political battle that began more than forty years ago was one that changed the lives of a substantial number of young people in the United States. It transformed the communist movement here in a way that paralleled the profound changes taking place in Cuba and elsewhere around the world. Nothing since the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia has had such an impact on the class-conscious workers movement and on radicalizing youth.

There are moments in history when everything ceases to be "normal." Suddenly the speed of events and stakes involved intensify every word and action. Neutral ground disappears. Alignments shift and new forces come together. The polite conventions of civil discourse that

normally reign in bourgeois circles evaporate, including within the "academic community."

April 1961, when the bombing and invasion of Cuba by mercenaries organized, financed, and deployed by Washington met the fearless resistance and lightning victory of the Cuban people, was such a moment. ...

Our understanding of these class questions was accelerated immeasurably by the fact we were sharing our day-by-day experiences ... [with] people like V.R. Dunne, who had been a member of the Communist International from its founding in 1919, a leader of the Teamsters strikes and organizing drives in the Upper Midwest during the 1930s, and one of the first victims railroaded to prison by the federal government under the infamous Smith "Gag" Act for opposition to U.S. imperialism leading up to and during World War II.

These workers pointed us to the history of the class struggle in the United States, to the lessons we needed to learn from the workers and farmers in this country whose fighting legacy we inherited. They drew on this rich history to help us understand what we had to be prepared for as we went up against the most violent and brutal ruling class in the world.

Above all, they taught those of us

who, like themselves, were so strongly and passionately attracted to the example being set by the fighting workers and peasants of Cuba that the challenge — *for us* — was not in Cuba. Our fight was in the United States. Cuba's workers and farmers had proven they could take care of themselves. Washington, to paraphrase Cuban Division General Enrique Carreras, would never be able to get that bone out of its throat.

Those workers like Dunne and others helped us see that the contest would end only with the defeat of the revolution in Cuba or a victorious socialist revolution in the United States.

"There is one thing we can most certainly tell Mr. Kennedy," Fidel Castro told a cheering crowd in Cuba on March 13 of that year. "A victorious revolution will be seen in the United States before a victorious counterrevolution in Cuba."

That had become our conviction too. But above all it was becoming the guide to a lifetime of action, a course of conduct born of the historic needs, interests, and capacities of the working class. As beyond belief as this revolutionary goal appeared to the average American, it had become clear to us it was the only *realistic* perspective, and we set out to speed the day. ...

As Cuban workers and farmers pressed forward their socialist revolution and U.S. aggression mounted in reaction to their gains, the lessons transformed the way we looked at the battle for Black rights in the United States as well. The mass proletarian-based struggle to bring down the Jim Crow system of statutory segregation throughout the South, with its various forms of discrimination deeply entrenched throughout the country, was marching toward bloody victories at the same time that the Cuban Revolution was advancing. We could see in practice that there were powerful social forces within the United States capable of carrying out a revolutionary social transformation like the working people of Cuba were bringing into being.

The core of the activists defending the Cuban Revolution were young people who had cut their political eyeteeth as part of the civil rights battles, supporting the Woolworth lunch counter sit-ins and joining or supporting marches and other protests in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and elsewhere in the South.

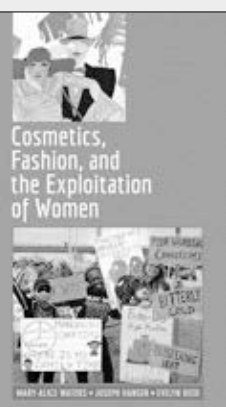
The many faces of reaction, some in Ku Klux Klan hoods, others with sheriff's uniforms and FBI jackets protecting them; the lynchings and murders on isolated country roads; the dogs and water cannons unleashed on protesters — all were burned in our consciousness as part of the lessons we were learning about the violence and brutality of the U.S. ruling class and the lengths to which it will go to defend its property and prerogatives.

And we were learning lessons, too, from the armed self-defense organized by Black veterans in Monroe, North Carolina, and elsewhere in the South. ...

We rapidly came to see that the legal and extralegal violence directed against those fighting for their rights and dignity as human beings here in the United States was one and the same as the mounting overt and covert aggression against the people of Cuba. We took part in the struggle for Black rights as part of the world class struggle, not just in "domestic politics." It became totally intertwined for us with the stakes in defending the Cuban Revolution.

Prepublication special offer!

Cosmetics, Fashion, and the Exploitation of Women



How the cosmetics and fashion bosses rake in profits from the social insecurities of women and youth. This lively debate from the mid-20th century

— now in a 2024 edition with a new preface and an opening article by Mary-Alice Waters — offers a Marxist understanding of the origins of women's oppression and fight for their liberation as part of the working-class struggle for power.

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The working class must take political power

The overthrow of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria is being celebrated all across that country and worldwide. It is a major setback to the reactionary capitalist regime in Iran. It follows the powerful blows struck by Israel Defense Forces against the Iranian rulers and their proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas.

Despite these blows, the course of Tehran's expansionist rulers remains a mortal danger to working people — in Iran, Israel and elsewhere.

The Socialist Workers Party 2022 political resolution, published in *The Low Point of Labor Resistance Is Behind Us: The Socialist Workers Party Looks Forward*, addresses crucial aspects of what lies behind these conflicts. Written by SWP leaders Jack Barnes, Mary-Alice Waters and Steve Clark, it lays out what it will take to end the danger of nuclear war.

"Tehran's expansionist drive to extend the bourgeois clerical regime's military and economic domination across the Middle East continues to pose the threat of an expanded conflagration," the resolution says. "These perils are multiplied by the Iranian capitalist rulers' declared aim of eliminating the State of Israel, home to nearly half the world's Jews." And they have been underscored by shifts in the world following Hamas' deadly pogrom Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 Jews and others in Israel.

"Tehran's accelerated course toward developing

and deploying a strategic nuclear arsenal endangers all those throughout the region and beyond.

"The most important curb to this danger is Iran's working people — of Persian, Kurdish, Azerbaijani, Arab, and other national origins — who have protested in massive numbers in cities, villages, and rural areas in 2018, 2019, and again in 2022, in defiance of the regime and all its wings."

The possibility that nuclear weapons will be used today also flows from the deepening crisis of the U.S.-led imperialist world order. Every ruling class worldwide is building up its military and looking for allies to protect its national interests.

From the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington's military interventions have the sole aim of advancing the profit-driven reach of the U.S. rulers at the expense of their rivals and, more importantly, of working people.

The SWP resolution explains that "only socialist revolutions in the imperialist countries can bring the danger of a world nuclear conflagration to an end once and for all." In the U.S. and everywhere that requires "building a proletarian communist party as part of a world communist movement."

That is the road to advance workers' interests, as well as the national aspirations of Jews, Kurds, Palestinians and others in the Middle East.

Canada Post strikers fight for wages, pensions, safety

Continued from front page

Canada Post has offered a paltry 11.5% wage increase over four years. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers is looking for double that to catch up with inflation.

In a move the union denounced as "a clear intimidation tactic in violation of the Canada Labour Code" and "an attack on your fundamental right to strike," Canada Post informed some employees they were laid off after the strike began.

Strikers at the Chabanel depot here also told this *Militant* worker-correspondent that health benefits have been discontinued by the employer, leaving those with cancer and other urgent care needs facing serious financial burdens.

Employer associations, backed by the boss press, have been campaigning for government strikebreaking intervention, reinforcing Canada Post's intransigence. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business released a poll of its members saying 69% want Ottawa to "immediately" adopt back-to-work legislation. Jasmin Guenette, the federation's vice president of national affairs, said the government "has the power and the duty to end the strike."

Labor Minister Steven MacKinnon, while declaring himself "extremely frustrated," has up to now ruled out government intervention.

But Philippe Tessier, Communist League candidate in the provincial by-election in Quebec's Terrebonne riding and Teamsters rail worker and conductor at Canadian National Railway, noted, "Ottawa has ordered port workers in Quebec and British Columbia, mem-

bers of the Canadian Union of Public Employees and of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, along with Teamsters union rail workers, back to work under binding arbitration. We must fight to defend democratic freedoms, including the right to strike against Ottawa's attacks."

"I've joined fellow rail workers on the picket lines of the longshore workers and Canada Post strikers," Tessier said.

Countering one aspect of the strikebreaking campaign, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers reiterated its commitment to delivering pension and social assistance checks. "We do not want pensioners and people who rely on government assistance to suffer during the current work disruption," the union said Dec. 5. "Our fight is with Canada Post and not these members of society."

Fridays are often targeted for special union picket action, bringing strikers from different depots together in a show of union strength. Some 150 demonstrated in St-Jerome, north of Montreal, Dec. 6, receiving many honks of support from passing drivers. Two hundred marched to the offices of Ottawa's Quebec lieutenant minister, Jean-Yves Duclos, in Quebec City the same day.

"When employers unite to act against workers' interests, I think it's super important that unions mobilize as well," Cory Crawford, a Teamster CN rail conductor who joined CUPW pickets Nov. 17, told the *Militant*, "and unite for a better life for those who produce the most in society — the workers."

Build solidarity. Join the CUPW picket lines!

LETTERS

Justice for Palestinians, Israelis

I read your article, "Support Israel's right to exist, defend itself as a refuge from Jew-hatred and pogroms," with a critical eye. While no one should question the right of Jewish people to live free of fear, it is important to contextualize Israel's role as a gladiator nation-state — an extension of Western geopolitical interests rather than a purely autonomous entity.

Israel's establishment and continued expansion reflect a legacy of colonialism rooted in the displacement of Palestinians. Historical documents, such as the 1917 Balfour

Declaration, highlight Western powers' use of Zionism as a tool for control in the Middle East. Today, U.S. foreign aid to Israel exceeds \$3.8 billion annually, primarily in military support, reinforcing its role as a regional enforcer.

Israel's actions in the Occupied Territories, from settlement expansions to blockades, exemplify policies of apartheid as documented in Amnesty International's 2022 report. These actions serve Western interests by destabilizing the region to prevent autonomous development of neighboring states, ensuring continued reliance on Western

military and economic systems.

Defending a nation should not mean condoning its role in ongoing oppression. The global community must pursue justice that upholds the dignity and self-determination of all people — Palestinians and Israelis alike. Only then can we dismantle systems of domination that perpetuate cycles of violence.

Mike Canty
by email

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints of interest to working people. Please indicate if you prefer your initials be used rather than your full name.

Fight against Jew-hatred, Hamas opens door to defend Palestinian rights

BY SETH GALINSKY

Mike Canty raises important questions about Israel and Palestinian national rights in his letter to the *Militant*. "The global community must pursue justice that upholds the dignity and self-determination of all

REPLY TO A READER

people — Palestinians and Israelis alike," he writes.

But Canty is mistaken when he argues that Israel's existence reflects "a legacy of colonialism rooted in the displacement of Palestinians" and its actions in the West Bank and Gaza are "apartheid." These are myths promoted by a well-financed, worldwide amalgam of Stalinists, leftists and Islamists to justify their call for the destruction of Israel and the expulsion or death of the Jews who live there.

Israel was created in 1948 not because of Zionism. The Stalinist betrayals of revolutionary uprisings in Europe in the 1930s that could have prevented the second imperialist world war; the refusal of the rulers in Washington, London and other imperialist powers to open their doors to Jews; and the slaughter of the Holocaust meant Jews had nowhere else to go.

It was not "an extension of Western geopolitical interests." President Harry Truman imposed a stiff U.S. arms embargo to prevent the new state from getting weapons to defend itself from the reactionary war immediately launched against it led by former Nazi collaborators and the semi-feudal Arab nations' leaders.

Central to that reactionary Arab leadership was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini. During World War II he worked with Adolf Hitler to carry out their shared goal of the "Final Solution" — the elimination of the Jews.

Amid the bloody war with atrocities committed on both sides, thousands of Palestinians fled the new state of Israel. Many left at the urging of reactionary leaders who said they could return after the "victory," or out of fear of being caught up in the fighting. Others were forcibly expelled by Israeli forces.

But thousands of Arabs stayed. Today some 20% of Israeli citizens are Arabs. Jews and Arabs work side by side, get treated at the same hospitals, join the same trade unions and are on strike picket lines together.

Canty also presents an inaccurate view of the West Bank. Yes, there is injustice and discrimination. Palestinians are often denied water rights, building permits and access to their farms. And face demeaning treatment at checkpoints. Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives in the West Bank seek to use this to foster hatred and attacks against Jews.

Inside Israel itself, Arab and Jewish workers need to overcome divisions. But the only road forward is for Jewish and Arab workers to come together in struggle to forge a common leadership.

The Socialist Workers Party is for building revolutionary parties in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, throughout the Middle East, in the U.S. and the world. Parties to unite workers of all national origins and religious beliefs — Jews, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Druze, Kurds and more — to defend our class interests on the road to taking power out of the hands of the capitalist class. Workers and the governments they will form will cooperate to resolve national questions and join in the worldwide fight for socialism.

Such parties cannot be built today without battling against Jew-hatred and pogroms, which are turned to by the capitalist rulers in the imperialist epoch.

What distinguishes Israel from every other capitalist nation is that it defends Jews, arms in hand. But capitalist relations in Israel undermine the fight against Jew-hatred and the fight to defend Israel as a refuge for Jews. We don't give political support to the capitalist government, state or army in a class-divided Israel. But we are not neutral.

We support Israel's defense of the safety of a refuge for Jews. We are for Israel defeating Hamas, Hezbollah, Tehran and the "axis of resistance." Those thug-gish Nazi-like groups are the biggest obstacle to Palestinian rights and the interests of workers and farmers throughout the Middle East. They must be dismantled as part of a fight to unite the working class.