

US hands off Venezuela!

Working people in the United States and worldwide should help build opposition and protests against the escalating threats by Washington — with bipartisan support — against Venezuela’s sovereignty and its government. We should protest the crude disregard for human life shown by the destruction of boats and their crews al-

EDITORIAL

legedly carrying drugs, including the Sept. 2 “double-tap” order from Washington to “eliminate” one already sunk with survivors clinging to it. The arrogant imperialist government in Washington is stepping up its attacks, declaring Venezuela’s airspace closed and demanding the Venezuelan government step down, or else. These moves are dangerous for working people everywhere. The White House claims it has the “legal” authority to bomb boats allegedly carrying drugs to the U.S. and to carry out attacks within Venezuelan territory to protect “Americans” and vital U.S. interests. None are true. The U.S. capitalist rulers’ interests do not include the well-being of workers anywhere. Their goal is to strengthen their hand to profit from

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50,000 protest gov’t attack on unions, rights in Quebec



Over 50,000 joined union-sponsored demonstration in Montreal Nov. 29 to protest new laws pushed by Quebec government, a frontal attack on right to strike, other political rights.

BY MICHEL PRAIRIE
MONTREAL — More than 50,000 working people took part in a large union federation-sponsored demonstration here Nov. 29, protesting a series of new laws either adopted or proposed by the Coalition for the Future of Quebec (CAQ) government of Premier Francois Legault. These laws target the right to strike,

the internal democracy of the unions, the working conditions of doctors and the health care system, the rights of immigrants and those of the province’s English-speaking minority. This is a frontal assault on the working class and the oppressed. The demonstration also denounced the government’s across-the-board cuts on social services. The protesters came by car and chartered buses from virtually every

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Ukraine fights to defend itself, US gov’t talks deal with Putin

BY ROY LANDERSEN
Moscow’s murderous war on Ukraine is centered on attacks on civilians in the country’s cities today. In Kherson, Russian President Vladimir Putin is retaliating against working people for rising up against Moscow’s occupation. Russian forces are using new FPV — First-Person View — small, armed drones with livestreaming cameras to target and drop bombs on people driving in cars, walking with their children, or otherwise trying to carry on a life. People there call it a “human safari.” “When people, cars or even a cyclist appear, the drone suddenly lifts off and drops the explosive,” resident Orlena Horlova told The Associated Press. “It’s gotten to the point where they even drop them on animals — cows, goats.” They hunt people as revenge for the celebrations that broke out when Kherson was liberated, she said. These murderous assaults on hundreds of civilians have been documented both by the United Nations’ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine as well as Human Rights Watch, which issued “Hunted From Above,” a 93-page report on the attacks.

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Defend Israel’s right to exist as a refuge from Jew-hatred, pogroms Defend Palestinians in Gaza from Hamas!



Segev Kalfon, left, in helicopter Oct. 14, free after 738 days as hostage. Like other Israeli prisoners of Hamas, he speaks out about physical, sexual and mental torture inflicted on him.

BY SETH GALINSKY
The tenuous ceasefire imposed in Gaza by Washington led to the release of the remaining hostages seized by Hamas during its Oct. 7, 2023, anti-Jewish pogrom in Israel, except for two bodies not yet recovered. Nothing else in Israel’s war to defend its existence as a refuge for Jew-hatred and pogroms is resolved.

With no other force strong enough to counteract it, and Israel instructed not to intervene, Hamas is reestablishing its brutal dictatorship on the 47% of Gaza still under its control. It seeks to rebuild its badly battered terror army and accumulate weapons for future assaults on Jews. Its death squads have murdered

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As polarization in Mexico deepens, US acts to increase military weight

BY RÓGER CALERO
Jew-hatred reared its ugly head during Nov. 15 demonstrations in Mexico City charging the government of President Claudia Sheinbaum with corruption and ties to organized crime. During clashes between police and protesters, the doors of the Su-

preme Court building in the capital was smeared with antisemitic graffiti as a group of hooded thugs tried to break in. The graffiti said “puta judía” — “Jewish whore” — directed at Sheinbaum. A crossed-out Star of David was also painted there. News and photos of the graffiti were run in the media worldwide. “For those responsible, even though her faith was irrelevant to the politi-

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As holidays loom, workers face debt, exorbitant prices, economic squeeze

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS
After nearly five years of persistent high prices, with the costs for rent, electricity, health care and more up at least 25% since 2020, class differentiations are sharpening. The working class faces increasing difficulties making ends meet, while the capitalist rulers and their well-remunerated upper-middle-class supporters say

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US acts to raise weight in Mexico

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cal message, they chose to attack her based on her Jewish identity,” the European Jewish Association said in a statement Nov. 19. “We condemn this antisemitic graffiti and the use of sexist slurs. Political protest is, of course, every citizen’s right, but this graffiti is not about politics, it is antisemitism.”

Government officials in Mexico criticized the violent protests, but said nothing about the antisemitic graffiti.

This is not the first time Jew-hatred has been directed at Sheinbaum, even though she doesn’t identify herself as Jewish, saying repeatedly that she does not practice any religion. In the eyes of the Jew-haters that makes no difference. As the capitalist crisis deepens, politicians will increasingly resort to antisemitic demagoguery to try to distract working people from the real source of the problems they face: capitalism.

The protest followed the assassination of Carlos Manzo, mayor of Uruapan, allegedly at the behest of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel. Manzo took a hard-line stance

against crime and government corruption. He accused the Sheinbaum government of allowing drug cartels to run the state of Michoacán, and challenged its policy of refusing to wage war against the traffickers.

Sheinbaum was elected in 2024, succeeding Andrés Manuel López Obrador, founding leader of the Morena party. AMLO, as he is known, enjoyed broad support due to his populist rhetoric for allocating state resources to social programs and for promising to root out corruption and bring down crime.

Sheinbaum has also commanded relatively high approval ratings, but she inherited a deepening social and political polarization, a slow-growing economy, debt and unabated violent crime. Big-business drug gangs continue to wreak havoc in the country. And the alliance Morena built with Mexico’s capitalist rulers is fraying.

‘War on narco-trafficking’

During his six-year term, AMLO promoted a “hugs not bullets” policy toward drug-related violence. Instead of an all-out effort to bring down the cartels, his government said it would focus on addressing the “causes” of violence. They set up more education and sports centers, and promoted “poverty reduction” programs.

The drug lords and their capitalist associates who profit from the multi-billion dollar trafficking business in Mexico, however, don’t need “poverty reduction.”

There were as many homicides under AMLO’s administration, if not more, as under his predecessors. The opposition to Morena — by the same



U.S. Air Force photo

Under an initially undisclosed covert program begun by the Joseph Biden administration, the CIA is flying unmanned aerial vehicles, like the MQ-9 Reaper drone, above, deep into sovereign Mexican airspace to gather intelligence on drug-smuggling operations there.

bourgeois parties that presided over similar devastating conditions in previous decades — now demagogically exploits the widespread insecurity among working people. All too often workers’ lives are torn up by the kidnappings, extortion and other criminal violence as the cartels battle for control over drug routes and profitable immigrant smuggling operations.

Threats to Mexico’s sovereignty

Blaming the Canadian and Mexican governments for failing to stop the flow of fentanyl into the U.S, the Donald Trump administration has used a combination of economic and trade pressures to demand policy changes from them.

The Morena government, while safeguarding the interests of Mexico’s ruling capitalist families, has maintained compliance with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement. This trade deal went into effect in 2020, replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement. It strengthens the ability of the U.S. bosses to plunder Mexico’s natural resources and the labor of its working people.

Sheinbaum has bowed to Washington’s pressures to step up use of Mexico’s military to act as a border patrol, and for greater military col-

laboration with U.S. federal agencies and the Pentagon. This increased militarization has led to a number of abuses, including soldiers killing six migrants traveling in a pickup truck in October 2024.

The U.S. administration blames illegal migration for fueling the opioid epidemic, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people. However, cocaine and fentanyl smuggled by drug cartels in Mexico primarily come to the U.S. disguised as regular goods through legal ports of entry.

As the U.S. government has built an armada in the Caribbean, threatening to bring down the Nicolás Maduro government in Venezuela for “narco-terrorism,” it has also threatened to take unilateral action against cartels in Mexico.

Through a previously undisclosed covert program, originally begun under the Joseph Biden administration, the CIA has been flying drones well into sovereign Mexico to gather intelligence on drug-smuggling operations, the *New York Times* reported.

The Trump administration says that if cooperation and intelligence sharing with the Mexican government does not lead to the dismantling of fentanyl labs there, the U.S. War Department does not rule out cross-border raids.

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Militant/Betsey Stone

AFSCME members picket in Oakland Nov. 18 during two-day strike at UC hospitals.

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Signed articles by contributors do not necessarily represent the *Militant’s* views. These are expressed in editorials.

Quebec protest hits gov't attacks

Continued from front page

region of the province, as well as from Ontario and New Brunswick, and some from the United States.

"I'm a member of Unifor," Alicia Si-pocz, an autoworker at Stellantis, told the *Militant*. "We came on buses from Windsor, Ontario, 110 people in all. Rolling back workers' rights in Quebec is going to roll back workers' rights for everybody — union or nonunion!"

In the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference contingent, two train conductors from Canadian National told the *Militant* why they joined the demonstration. Like thousands of workers across the country over the past year, including postal and port workers, their strike was ended by a federal government back-to-work order.

When Ottawa tried to do the same to 10,000 striking Air Canada flight attendants in August, they defied the order, winning broad support from working people and unionists nationwide and making gains.

"These laws affect me more than people realize," said rail worker Alexandre Jacob. "Reducing the power of unions reduces the power of all workers. These laws are a blank check to employers and include shameful moves to divide workers."

The huge protest had a big impact on all those who joined in. It was called by Quebec's four labor federations and five other sizable unions. It received support from the Quebec Federation of General Practitioners, targeted by one of the CAQ's recent anti-democratic laws, and from federations representing 4,500 community groups defending women's rights, access to housing and other social issues.

Farmers came with signs from the Union of Agricultural Producers, which represents the majority of Quebec farmers.

Others joined the action to educate

about assaults they've faced. A group of immigrants from Mauritania carried a large banner denouncing the racist torture and executions the government there dished out to hundreds of black political prisoners in 1990-91.

Attacks on political rights

Protesters denounced Bills 94 and 21, which would prohibit teachers and other employees in the school system from wearing religious symbols such as a Muslim headscarf or a Jewish kippah. In addition, the Legault government has proposed a new Quebec constitution that would impose "Quebec values" on immigrants, people of different religions and those whose first language isn't French.

Two days before the demonstration, the government introduced a new bill that further restricts the right to worship for students, teachers and employees in the education system, from kindergarten to university. The pretext for the restriction is to defend "Quebec's secularism."

Nawal Chi, a unionist and school secretary in the Montreal school board, held a sign reading, "The woman wearing a headscarf is a human being capable of deciding what to put on her own body. No to law 94 and to law 21. My veil, my choice, my dignity, my freedom of dress."

"The government wants to divide and rule," Chi told the *Militant*. "I am a mom with three children. It's about human values, not Quebec values. No child has ever asked me at school why I wear a headscarf. They see me as someone who is there to protect them. I'm here so my union will defend me."

Retirees from Rio Tinto Alcan in the Saguenay region told a *Militant* worker-correspondent and UNITE HERE member from Pittsburgh about the high rate of bladder cancer among plant workers, a result of tox-



Rail workers join union-called march of 50,000 in Montreal Nov. 29. When Teamsters Canada Rail Conference members struck last year, government ruled strike illegal, imposed contract.

ic chemicals the company uses. They are fighting to regain cost-of-living protection for their pensions.

They discussed the powerful and successful fight U.S. coal miners and their union waged against deadly black lung disease, caused by bosses' refusal to offer protection against coal and silica dust. The miners organized a revolution in their union, the UMW, and used it to win control over safety and production, virtually eliminating the disease. But today bosses have weakened the union and the disease has come back.

Unionists who are members of the Communist League got a good response at the protest. "The CAQ is making problems for everyone," Pierre Germain, a Montreal worker of Haitian origin, told Katy LeRougetel, a member of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union

and the Communist League candidate for mayor in the recent Montreal municipal election.

"I was in Alberta last month," LeRougetel said, "to bring solidarity to 51,000 striking teachers. The provincial government declared their strike illegal, the same way as Ottawa and Quebec City are doing today! This anti-labor assault is being led by Canada's capitalist rulers as a whole, not just those in Quebec."

"It's becoming a war between bosses and workers," Germain agreed. LeRougetel said, "We need to go further than union battles. Workers need to build a party of our own that can fight for political power, like workers and farmers did in Cuba."

A contingent of workers came from Beton Provincial, a concrete company that has locked them out since Dec. 5, 2024. They carried a big sign reading, "Beton Provincial demands a four-year wage freeze and no insurance." Their T-shirts proudly said, "You won't break us."

The demonstration shows workers are ready to defend themselves against the bosses and their governments at all levels.

Working-class resistance boosts sales at Montreal book fair

BY JOHN STEELE

MONTREAL — Pathfinder Books, which features books by leaders of the Socialist Workers Party and other revolutionaries worldwide, from Fidel Castro to Russian revolutionaries V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, mounted a sizable stand at the Nov. 19-23 Salon du livre here.

The annual book fair presented over 500 booths. It's a major cultural event in Quebec for families, schoolchildren, working people of all ages, book sellers, distributors and authors. This year over 100,000 people attended.

The Pathfinder booth was a hive of discussion on the deepening crisis of capitalism today, Israel's defensive war against Hamas to prevent another Holocaust, other flashpoints in the class struggle, and the need for working people to break from the capitalist parties and build our own party to fight for political power.

Volunteers at the table also got out the word about the upcoming Nov. 29 march and rally organized by the united Quebec labor movement, along with doctors, students and others. The protest targets a series of new laws attacking the labor movement and political rights by the Quebec government. Many said they knew about the action and planned to participate.

"We sold 262 books and 22 sub-

scriptions to the *Militant*," Philippe Tessier, who organized the booth, said. "That's almost double the amount that was sold in previous years, reflecting the sharpening of the class struggle in Canada and internationally."

The best sellers were *Women's Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle* by Thomas Sankara, the communist leader of the 1983-87 Burkina Faso Revolution, with 19 sold, and 17 copies of *Are They Rich Because They're Smart? Class, Privilege, and Learning Under Capitalism* by SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes.

Other big sellers were 15 copies of *Cosmetics, Fashion, and the Exploitation of Women* by Mary-Alice Waters, Joseph Hansen and Evelyn Reed and 12 copies of *Revolution and the Road to Peace in Colombia: The Example of the Cuban Revolution* by Fidel Castro.

Arian Villar Carlin, a Montreal engineering student, said she bought *Cosmetics, Fashion, and the Exploitation of Women* because "women need to fight for their rights. We need to understand how the fashion and cosmetics industries manipulate us to make profits. This book says that it's capitalism which is behind this. I want to read this book to understand this better."

William Boucher, a young warehouse worker, bought *The Fight*

Against Jew-Hatred and Pogroms in the Imperialist Epoch: Stakes for the International Working Class. It explains the origins of Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, pogrom and how working people can fight to defend Israel's existence as a refuge for Jews.

"I want to learn about what is happening in the world. What has led to the social movements we see today," Boucher said.

Canadian National freight train conductor Billy Labrie, a member of the Teamsters union, also bought the book on fighting Jew-hatred, as well as a special offer at the booth of three issues of *New International*, which explain what's behind the deepening crisis of world capitalism. The featured articles are titled "Washington's Assault on Iraq: Opening Guns of World War III"; "Imperialism's March Toward Fascism and War"; and "Capitalism's Long Hot Winter Has Begun."

"I think it is crucial to look at what underlies the challenges facing the trade unions in the fast-changing world around us," Labrie said.

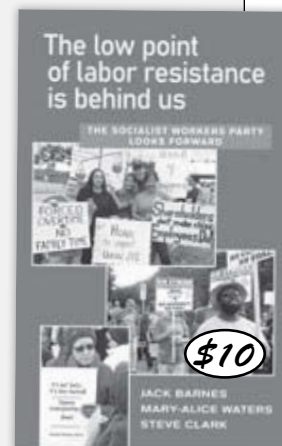
Pathfinder volunteers at book fairs like this around the world have netted significantly higher sales than in previous years. Workers and youth are looking for explanations and a road forward.

The Low Point of Labor Resistance Is Behind Us

The Socialist Workers Party Looks Forward

The global order imposed by victors of the inter-imperialist slaughter of World War II is shattering with explosive ramifications for workers and farmers worldwide. A decadeslong retreat by the working class and unions has come to an end. More and more workers are saying, "Enough is enough!" They've begun to wield the collective power of the exploited producers in response.

pathfinderpress.com



Bolshevik Revolution showed the road forward for working people

BY BEVERLY BERNARDO

Nov. 7 marked the 108th anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, led by V.I. Lenin. That powerful revolution showed workers can take political power into our own hands, and showed the kind of revolutionary working-class political party that is needed.

As working people in the U.S. and around the world confront today's wars and deepening capitalist crises, studying the lessons of the Russian Revolution is indispensable.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 demonstrated that capitalism had exhausted its former progressive historic mission. Lenin's Bolshevik Party led the revolutionary forces in splitting from the Socialist International when its reformist and centrist leaders sided with their "own" imperialist ruling classes at the outbreak of the slaughter.

In February 1917 a revolutionary upsurge of workers and peasants overthrew the Russian monarchy. The revolution was driven by deep opposition to the imperialist world war, lack of basic democratic rights, widespread hunger, landlessness and the subjugation of oppressed nationalities in the czarist empire.

Capitalist politicians patched together a Provisional Government, which continued the war and ignored the demands of working people.

During the uprising workers formed their own councils, called soviets in Russian. These bodies were a vastly more democratic form of workers rule and a parallel government to that established by the capitalist rulers. Representatives were freely elected by workers in the factories and other workplaces, by peasants and by soldiers. The soviets debated policies and elected delegates to an All-Russian Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

At first, the parties of class collaboration — the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries — held a majority in the Soviets. They handed authority over to the Provisional Government. But over time the Bolsheviks won growing numbers of workers to the demand, "All power to the Soviets."

Such a highly unstable dual power could not last. Eight months of war and

privation impelled working people toward another revolution. By the end of October the Bolsheviks gained a majority in the Soviets. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets met and voted to take power, and did so, establishing a workers and farmers government.

Proletarian parties can lead fight

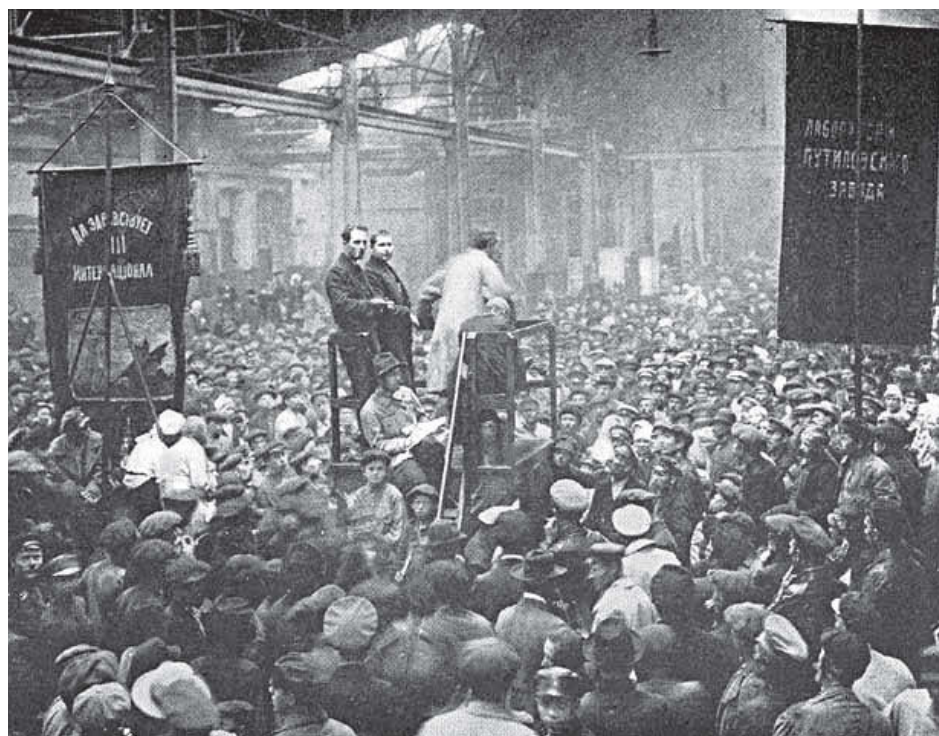
The experiences of the Russian Revolution in 1917 proved conclusively that given a revolutionary situation, a proletarian party can lead workers to fight for power. The cadres of the Bolshevik Party were forged in struggle and had acquired habits of discipline. They were equipped with a Marxist program and theory, and had deep ties to the broadest layers of workers, peasants and the oppressed. After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks led working people to take control over the land, factories and banks, creating the world's first workers state.

The dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia broke the chain of world imperialism at its weakest link. It signaled the beginning of the international proletarian revolution and opened the door to the founding of the Communist International.

In early 1918, as imperialist and domestic procapitalist forces unleashed a bloody civil war against the revolutionary government, the Red Army, led by Leon Trotsky, organized to defend Soviet power. It took firm measures to crush the counterrevolutionary forces led by former landlords and capitalists.

And despite the hardships caused by imperialist invasion and civil war, the Soviet workers state acted to advance the emancipation of women, bring electricity across Russia to strengthen the alliance of workers and peasants, guarantee the rights of oppressed nationalities to self-determination and end anti-Jewish pogroms.

The Soviet republic during these years found itself isolated, facing tremendous obstacles. The revolu-



Workers meeting in a factory during 1917 Russian Revolution. The victory of the Bolshevik-led socialist revolution inspired millions worldwide to build communist parties, including in U.S.

tionary workers movement suffered defeats in Hungary, Italy and Germany. A restabilization of world capitalism, the imperialist blockade of Russia, the economic toll of the civil war, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, including many Communist Party members and vanguard workers, led to a retreat.

Stalin led counterrevolution

These pressures and the death of Lenin in 1924 led to the consolidation of a bureaucratic caste, which had a petty-bourgeois outlook and increasingly promoted its power and relative material privileges against the interests of the working class. Joseph Stalin presided over the degeneration of the Communist Party and the rise to power of this parasitic layer. On the back of this counterrevolution, he organized the betrayal of revolutionary struggles worldwide.

For Stalin, "the historic mission of the Soviet bureaucracy was to build socialism in a single country," Trotsky explained. He answered this "theory" in *The Revolution Betrayed*, explaining that a "prolonged isolation of the Soviet Union would not end in national communism but in a restoration of capitalism."

In 1923 Trotsky formed the Left

Opposition to continue the fight to revive Lenin's course — a battle he led over the next 17 years, consolidating and helping build proletarian parties worldwide. He was murdered by a Stalinist agent in Mexico in 1940.

In November 1928 the first issue of the *Militant*, the paper of Lenin's revolutionary course in the U.S., ran a statement hailing the 11th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

The revolution "broke forever the unity of the world and divided it into two hostile camps — the camp of imperialist exploitation and the camp of social revolution. At one polar extreme stands America, the strongest imperialist world power. At the other stands the USSR, the land of the workers' rule. The antagonism between them, and the systems they represent, is irreconcilable. They cannot live together permanently side by side.

"The victory of the Soviet system on a world scale means the liberation of enslaved humanity and its ascent to heights of culture and achievement beyond our dreams — to socialism and beyond that to communism. The victory of imperialism would hurl civilization into the abyss. Such is the issue of the epoch of wars and revolutions in which we live and fight."

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO

THE MILITANT
A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

December 11, 2000

HAVANA — During the Second World Conference of Friendship and Solidarity with Cuba, held here Nov. 10-14, Vilma Espín, president of the Cuban Federation of Women (FMC), led a discussion with more than 50 participants.

"As women took part in the revolution, their sense of solidarity grew. The changes have been enormous, a real revolution within the revolution." From the earliest days, the revolutionary leadership has taken initiatives to expand the participation of women in society.

While according to law there are no restrictions on women taking any kind of job, explained Yolanda Ferrer, general secretary of the FMC, "the FMC wants to encourage women to take on nontraditional jobs. There are women who drive trucks, trains and sugar combines. We have women leaders in the sugar industry, in laboratories and in scientific work."

THE MILITANT
A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

December 12, 1975

The independence for which Angolans fought for so many years is now imperiled by South African and U.S. intervention.

The political pressure that was mobilized around the world for Angolan independence from Portugal must now be mobilized against the intervention — direct or indirect — of Washington, Pretoria, and the other imperialist centers.

The imperialists' aim is to secure control over the wealth of Angola and the destiny of its people. They also know that Angolan independence could give a tremendous impetus to the liberation struggles in Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The demand of all those in the United States who support the right of self-determination ought to be aimed squarely at Washington and its imperialist cohorts: Hands off Angola!

THE MILITANT
PUBLISHED WEEKLY IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

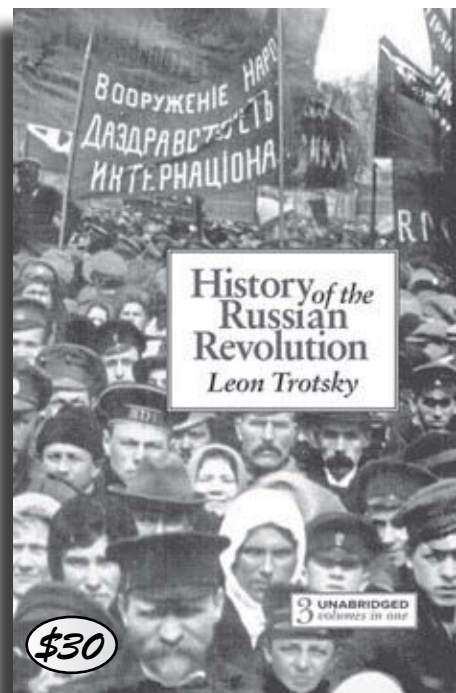
December 11, 1950

Attorney General McGrath's petition to the new Subversive Activities Control Board, demanding that the Communist Party be required to register its membership under the provisions of the McCarran-Kilgore police-state law, will quickly be followed by petitions directed against other organizations now included on the Attorney General's "subversive" blacklist.

This information was revealed by Seth Richardson, chairman of the SACB. "There are some 130 organizations, which already have been proscribed as subversive. Others may be added from time to time." The "subversive" list, initiated three years ago, was absolutely arbitrary and had no legal authority whatever.

Opponents of the new law, including the *Militant*, warned that the law was so loosely written that almost any organization could be attacked by an enforcement agency that chose to do so.

Recommended reading



pathfinderpress.com

G20 meeting exposes growing fight by rival capitalist rulers

BY TERRY EVANS

Mounting conflicts between the world's rival capitalist powers over economic supremacy, political domination and the threat of new wars were exposed at the Nov. 22-23 G20 summit.

Washington refused to attend, while the governments of Brazil and host nation South Africa used the gathering to puff up their claims to be an ascending counterweight to the U.S. rulers. Joined by Beijing, Moscow and others in the BRICS bloc, they put a fight to address a global "inequality emergency" at the center of the meeting.

The G20 was set up by the main capitalist powers worldwide in 1999 on the heels of what was known as the Asian financial crisis, to try to restabilize their system. They set yearly meetings of financial ministers to discuss ways to keep things on an even keel.

After the even deeper 2008 crisis broke out, the meetings were led by the presidents and prime ministers of the member countries, and the new body was convened by President George W. Bush.

In 2025, "growing geopolitical tensions further strain the group's ability to reach consensus," the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations said in fluent diplomatz. "Strategic rivalry between the United States and China, sharp divisions between Group of Seven members and Russia over the war in Ukraine, and wider conflicts such as the Israel-Hamas fighting have complicated efforts to reach unified outcomes."

In plain English, the G20 is being torn apart as today's capitalist crisis and conflicts deepen worldwide and the threat of fascism and war inevitably grows.

The BRICS bloc was established by Beijing and Moscow in 2009. It includes the rulers in Brazil, India and South Africa. They challenge Washington's worldwide supremacy, claiming to speak for the downtrodden in the "Global South."

Days before the G20 summit convened, the presidents of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, along with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, issued a self-serving statement of their intentions for the G20. Published prominently in the *Financial Times* Nov. 20, it declared, "High levels of inequality lie at the root of our economic, political, societal and environmental crises," and this "threatens democracy itself."

They said the road to eradicating inequality lies in "enlightened cooperation," as opposed to "unilateralism," by which they mean Washington's position as the world's dominant imperialist power.

But Lula, Ramaphosa and Sánchez are all millionaires who govern weaker capitalist nations where inequality and class polarization are rising, an inescapable consequence of profit-driven capitalist exploitation. Ramaphosa, who was a leader of the miners' union during the fight to overturn apartheid, has since made a vast fortune off the backs of the toilers in South Africa and features regularly in lists of the continent's wealthiest individuals.

'Experts' weigh in on 'inequality'

A study presented to the summit by an "Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality" said "inequality" is dangerously high and has only fallen, "due largely to economic development in China."

Beijing's state-capitalist rulers are seeking to extend their clout and secure allies to counter the supremacy of U.S. imperialism. They present trade and other ties with China as the path for less developed capitalist nations. Both Beijing and Moscow backed the summit's final declaration, which condemned "unilateral trade measures," a



Media Drum World via ZUMA Press

Vast disparities between social classes counterposed in Johannesburg, 2018. Claiming to fight "inequality emergency," some G20 forces attack Washington's place as top imperialist power.

reference to President Donald Trump's tariffs. In a break with previous practice, the declaration was adopted on the first day of the meeting, as if what was to follow was just a show.

Reflecting the interests of Russia's capitalist rulers, the statement made only passing mention of the war in Ukraine, without any reference to the Kremlin's murderous invasion and attempt to conquer the Ukrainian people.

The statement also calls for peace in "the Occupied Palestinian Territory," a reference to what is in fact Israel. Ramaphosa claimed this statement was adopted unanimously. But in fact Argentina voted against and the Trump adminis-

tration, which wasn't represented, made clear it disagreed with this and other parts of the document.

South African Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola told the meeting, "The G20 is not about the U.S.," adding haughtily, "those of us here have decided this is where the world must go."

But none of these rulers are capable of replacing the military and economic clout of U.S. imperialism, whatever its relative decline. Nor will a meeting of capitalist powers trying to paper over their own conflicting national interests chart a new way forward for what Lamola calls "the world."

Continued on page 11

Hong Kong catastrophe: capitalist greed, gov't disdain

BY JULIE CRAWFORD

LONDON — A catastrophic fire at Hong Kong's Wang Fuk Court complex left at least 159 dead, with dozens of people still missing as of Dec. 3. The inferno began at the high-rise apartments Nov. 26 and has drawn comparisons with the deadly Grenfell Tower fire disaster here in 2017.

Wang Fuk Court was home to 4,600 people, most now displaced, in eight 31-story blocks containing some 2,000 apartments.

The fire erupted outside one building and spread rapidly to engulf seven of the complex's towers with hundreds of residents trapped inside. It took 750 firefighters more than two days to extinguish the blaze.

Anger among working people deepened across the city after it was revealed that the fire alarms were turned off.

For months beforehand, residents had raised complaints with authorities about flammable materials used to cover the buildings during a major renovation. Styrofoam used to seal windows, protective netting, and canvas and plastic sheets accelerated the spread of the fire.

When residents had complained about the netting covering the building, the Labour Department said it had inspected the building 16 times since July last year and the netting met its safety standards. A week before the blaze, it admitted better fire-safety measures were needed, but claimed "no matters warranting prosecution were discovered."

Anger over the disaster was deepened by opposition to the Beijing-imposed government in the city.

The staggering death toll from the fire prompted an outpouring of volunteers willing to help people displaced

by the disaster. Thousands turned out to pay their respects, laying flowers, toys and notes for the victims.

Almost 40% of residents were over 65. It was especially hard for elderly residents to escape as there was no warning of the spreading fire. As the fire took hold, burning debris, especially plastic netting and tarpaulins, began to fall from the building.

Miles Kwan, a 24-year-old student, was arrested by police for "seditious intent" after handing out flyers demanding government accountability over the fire. He was released on bail Dec. 1.

Kwan called for the resettlement of residents, an independent investigation and a review of authorities' oversight of construction. An online petition containing these demands gathered more than 10,000 signatures in less than a day before officials deleted it.

Luk Yu Yeung, who lost his mother in the blaze, posted the petition's demands online. "These are things they should be doing — they shouldn't need to be told," he told Bloomberg News. "No matter how long it takes, the government owes us an answer regarding this project. ... This was a man-made disaster, not a natural one."

The Beijing-controlled national security office in Hong Kong accused those circulating the petition of trying "to incite confrontation and tear society apart."

After huge protests for democratic rights in Hong Kong in 2019, China's rulers imposed a repressive national security law. Since then, Hong Kong cops have arrested 348 people for various national security "crimes," like the sedition charge Kwan faces.

The day after the fire began, city officials denounced those in charge of the construction company responsible

for the renovation as "grossly negligent" and arrested two of its directors and a consultant on manslaughter charges. By Dec. 1, another 11 had been arrested on similar charges, as authorities sought to deflect blame from themselves.

Prestige Construction & Engineering contractors began the renovation work on Wang Fuk Court last year. The company was fined three times in 2023 for failing to meet safety standards on other projects. Concerned about the company's disregard for safety, homeowners at Wang Fuk Court had voted to remove the management committee at a general meeting prior to the fire.

"Authorities moved quickly to try to pin the blame all on the construction company," Daniel Chan, a Hong Kong resident, wrote in a letter to the *Militant*. "But companies often violate rules because even if they're convicted they usually only pay a fine with no other consequences."

In the U.K. and elsewhere, the fire was reminiscent of the June 2017 Grenfell Tower disaster in London, which led to the deaths of 72 people and injured a similar number.

That 24-story tower had been wrapped in highly flammable cladding that went up in a fast-spreading fire. The building also had broken fire alarms as well as no sprinkler system. Like at Wang Fuk Court, residents had complained before the blaze that the building was a death trap only to have their warnings unheeded by authorities.

"Our hearts go out to all those affected by the horrific fire in Hong Kong," the Grenfell United survivors group wrote. "To the families, friends and communities, we stand with you. You are not alone."

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— Jack Barnes

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Reactionary jihadi rebels mount blockade of Bamako, Mali capital

BY JANET POST

Bamako, the capital of Mali, with 4 million people, is being choked off by a blockade imposed by Islamist rebels, preventing fuel, food and other goods from getting to the city, in an effort to bring down Mali's military government.

The Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, or JNIM, affiliated with al-Qaeda, is now within 30 miles of the capital. It also has targeted convoys bringing fuel from neighboring Senegal and Ivory Coast, including setting fire to tankers stranded along Mali's borders.

The result has been blackouts, school closures, a medical care crisis, inflationary food costs and dayslong lines at gas stations. Fuel, when any gets through, has risen more than 400%, from \$6 to \$32 a gallon.

Along with Burkina Faso and Niger, Mali is one of three nations in West Africa run by military dictatorships, which have formed a bloc, the Alliance of Sahel States. They present themselves as anti-imperialist rulers, with support from Moscow, but do little to aid the workers and peasants.

The U.S. and other countries have urged their nationals to leave Mali immediately.

The JNIM, which is also active in all three countries, was formed in 2017 as a coalition of jihadist factions, including Algeria-based al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and three Malian armed groups — Ansar al Dine, Al-Murabitun and Katiba Macina. It's led by Iyad Ag-Ghaly, an ethnic Tuareg, who founded Ansar al Dine with the goal of imposing Islamic law in the region.

"JNIM presents itself as an alternative to the government, which it calls 'puppets of the West,'" Al Jazeera reported Nov. 6. It seeks to recruit from the oppressed ethnic minorities of Mali, including the Tuareg, Arab, Fulani and Songhai peoples.

JNIM aims to "capture and control territory and to expel Western influences in its region of control," Al Jazeera said. It "destroys infrastructure, such as schools, communication towers and bridges, to weaken the government."

"This summer it embarked on a campaign of economic warfare in western Mali," attacking factories and gold mining sites, CNN reported. JNIM is funded by profits extracted from artisanal gold miners, taxation in towns it controls, cattle rustling, drug and weapons smuggling and kidnappings for ransom.

The government of President Assimi Goita, who seized power in two coups in 2020 and 2021, is unpopular among working people for enriching itself on their backs. The army itself is faction ridden and has been unable to push back the jihadist forces.

In 2013 France increased the number of its troops in Mali, seeking to stabilize the capitalist government, but the French forces were no more effective in halting the Islamist expansion. Working people in Mali rightly blame much of their condition and the divisions between ethnic groups on centuries of French colonialism in the Sahel.

In 2019 protesters in Bamako carried signs reading, "Get out, France! We don't want to see you here." Despite its desire to continue siphoning wealth from Mali's rich resources, Paris had to

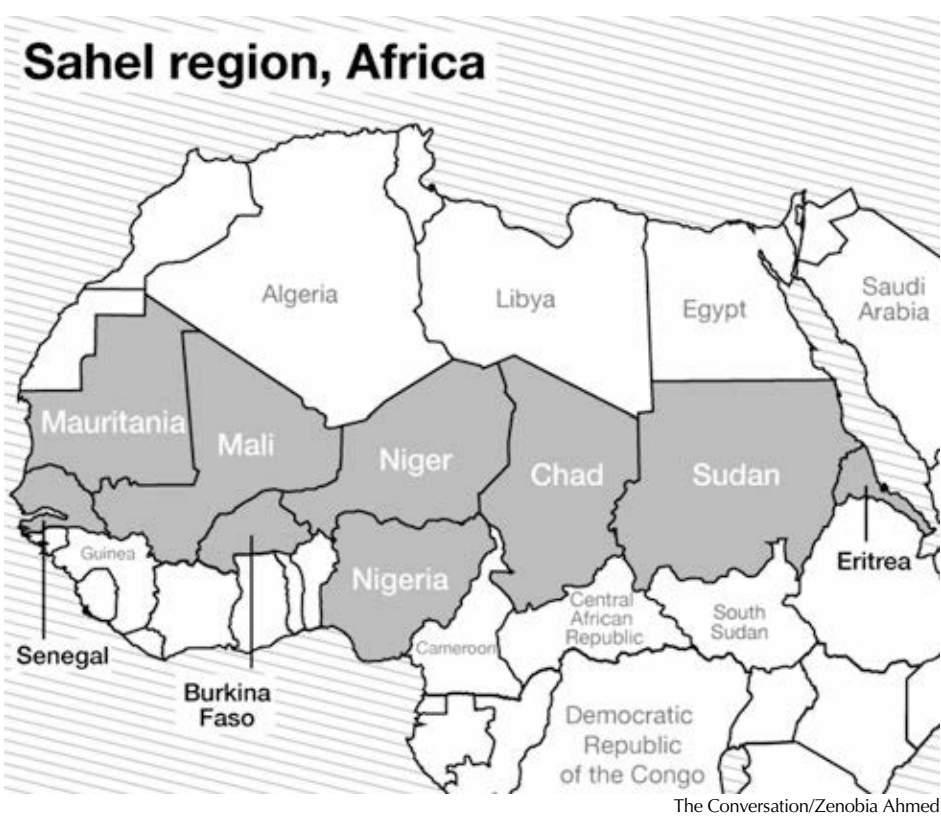
contend with the military coup and was forced out in 2022, with U.N. "peace-keeping" forces leaving in 2023.

To fill the vacuum, the junta brought in the Russian mercenary Wagner Group, which began a reign of terror over working people. Moscow took over the operation directly after dispatching the Wagner forces to support its invasion of Ukraine. It set up an Africa Corps, which includes some remnants of the Wagner Group. Africa Corps mercenary forces have also been accused of abuses, including torture and rape. "Rather than bolstering state forces, the mercenaries have spent years extracting resources to fund Moscow's war in Ukraine," wrote the *New York Sun*.

With a deepening crisis facing the military government today, Washington reached out to see if there was an opening for U.S. imperialism to intervene. "The U.S. commends the armed forces of Mali in their fight against Islamic extremist militants," Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau said Nov. 4. He said he's been in touch with Mali's foreign minister and looks "forward to greater cooperation."

Working people are the victims

Workers, farmers and seminomadic herders in this majority agricultural country face constant threats. If sus-



Islamist rebels aim to topple military government in Mali, impose Sharia law on toilers there.

pected by JNIM of supporting the government, they can be killed. If suspected by the army of supporting the jihadists, they will be killed.

Residents of the village of Balle have been under JNIM domination for years. "We pay the *zakat* [Islamic tax] every year," one man told Human Rights Watch. "If there are disputes, the jihadists settle them. There are no soldiers, no gendarmes, no police here."

"As a result, the army assumes we're JNIM fighters. The army doesn't differentiate between us and them."

Mali has vast resources of gold, lithium, iron, bauxite, uranium, phosphates and manganese. But because of imperialist intervention and military corruption, working people face one of the highest poverty rates in the world. Between 2020 and 2022 only 45% of Malians had access to basic sanitation, 48% had access to electricity and 40% to clean drinking water, most in the capital. As of September 2024, 378,000 people had been displaced due to the violence, with 50,000 fleeing across the border to Mauritania.

Cuban ambassador: 'US moving to attack Venezuela'

BY PATRICK BROWN

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — "Cuba and other countries of Latin America are facing real challenges today, as the U.S. government moves to take military action against Venezuela," Luis Morejón Rodríguez, Cuba's ambassador to New Zealand, told a meeting of 55 people at the Onehunga Public Library here Nov. 23.

The meeting launched an exhibit of "Twelve Iconic Photographs of the Cuban Revolution," depicting Fidel Castro and other leaders of the revolution and important events in Cuba's history. The exhibition is part of the lead-up to the centenary next August of Castro's birth.

The armada amassed around Venezuela by the U.S. military includes the "world's largest warship, the Gerald Ford, and a nuclear-powered attack submarine," he said.

Since September, U.S. forces have killed dozens of small boat crew members in waters off Venezuela. U.S. President Donald Trump claims to be "targeting the drug trade," the ambassador said, "but no evidence of that is left after the bombings."

Washington is determined to extend its control over Venezuela's vast oil reserves, and to shore up its domination over South America, he said.

Speaking next, Rongo Wetere, the former chief executive of the Te Wananga O Aotearoa, a Maori-based educational institution, told the meeting he met Fidel Castro and Cuba's minister of education in a visit to Cuba in the early 2000s. As a result, Cuba sent teachers to New Zealand to work with the wananga to set up the Green Light literacy program in 2003. This was part of Cuba's decadeslong record of

international solidarity.

In 2016 the U.S. State Department announced its diplomats in Havana had suddenly begun suffering headaches, nausea and other symptoms, said Robert Bartholomew, a lecturer in psychology at the University of Auckland and co-author of *Havana Syndrome: Mass Psychogenic Illness and the Real Story Behind the Embassy Mystery and Hysteria*.

The cause of this so-called Havana Syndrome might be a new sonic weapon, U.S. government officials claimed.

"It was a convenient excuse to go after Cuba," Bartholomew said. He and neurologist Robert Baloh investigated the claims and issued their results in 2019: Havana Syndrome was "a catch-all for an array of ambiguous health complaints with no one cause." Four years later the CIA admitted this was true.

The meeting concluded with "Today Fidel Will Speak," a film including excerpts from Castro's remarks on the October Missile Crisis of 1962; his "Words to the Intellectuals" speech defending artistic freedom the same year; and speeches he gave on the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its effects on Cuba, as well as on attacks on Cuba by U.S. imperialism and its allies.

Chairperson Robert Reid, former general secretary of the Workers First Union, encouraged those present to donate to the Pacemakers for Cuba fundraising campaign backed by the Cuba Friendship Society, which sponsored the event and the exhibit.

Reid also noted the impact of Hurricane Melissa, which pummeled the Caribbean in late October. Despite substantial damage to homes and schools in Cuba, not a single person was killed, because of the timely response of Cuba's government and people to evacuate thousands in harm's way.



Luis Morejón Rodríguez, Cuba's ambassador to New Zealand, right, and author Robert Bartholomew at program in Auckland Nov. 23. "Cuba, other countries of Latin America, face real challenges as U.S. government moves to take military action in Venezuela," Morejón said.

Israel's right to exist as a refuge

Continued from front page
more than 80 people in Gaza since the start of the ceasefire, many of them accused of being “collaborators” with Israel. No one knows how many people have had their legs or other limbs broken by Hamas thugs as a warning.

The group has also begun “taxing” civilians, including reportedly charging as much as 500 shekels a month (\$155) for a tiny beach plot to pitch a tent.

Gazan residents say Hamas is once again using three hospitals as “interrogation centers” to torture and threaten its opponents and their families.

Despite this, Palestinians in Gaza are still speaking out against the reactionary Tehran-backed group. “Everyone is angry and resentful toward them,” an elderly man says in a video recorded in a Gaza tent camp.

“The resistance should be here, on the home front,” another man in a tent city flooded by recent rains says. “They should provide food, drink and necessities. Well? Where are they?”

The majority of people in Gaza are living in difficult conditions, with nearly half relying on food handouts from international aid agencies. Most homes and businesses were damaged as a result of Hamas’ policy of setting up its command posts, weapons stores and tunnels underneath and in homes, mosques, schools and hospitals, drawing fire from Israel and intentionally making “martyrs” of thousands of Palestinians.

Gaza remains class divided and those with money can find fancy restaurants

to eat at, or buy food at inflated prices.

One restaurant and coffee shop, which rebuilt after the Jan. 19 ceasefire in Al-Rimal — once one of Gaza City’s wealthiest neighborhoods — is offering all kinds of “luxurious” treats. But its Instagram page includes a message to “those who make the decisions” — a reference to Hamas. “We are humans who are killed and our dreams are made homeless. Have mercy on us,” it says, concluding with a plea “to stop this madness.”

“There will be a moment when we will have to decide, we are going in” to Hamas-controlled parts of Gaza, Israeli Brig. Gen. Amir Avivi said Dec. 1. Israeli forces currently hold 53% of the territory, but a minority of Gaza’s population currently lives there.

‘Axis of resistance’ still a threat

Though weakened by Israeli blows over the last two years, the Tehran-led “axis of resistance” is still a serious threat. Besides Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza and the West Bank, the “axis” includes Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and militias in Iraq.

Like in Gaza, the U.S.-imposed ceasefire in Lebanon is marked by Hezbollah’s attempts to rebuild its forces and missile stores and Israeli attacks to prevent it from doing so.

Hezbollah is smuggling large numbers of short-range rockets from Syria, setting up new military outposts north of the Litani River and still has operatives in southern Lebanon in violation of the ceasefire accord, despite some moves by the Lebanese government to reel it in. Israel has warned the Lebanese government that if it does not stop Hezbollah, Israel will.

For the first time in decades representatives of the Lebanese and Israeli governments met face to face Dec. 3 — pressured by the White House, which is worried that a resumption of full-scale fighting with Hezbollah would throw a wrench in Washington’s plans for the region.

The U.S. imperialist rulers are not concerned about Jews, Arabs or working people of other nationalities. They want stability in the Middle East so they can advance their own interests, reaping profits from their plunder of oil, gas and other natural resources.

There have been



Omar Ashtawy/APA Images via ZUMA Press Wire

The majority of Palestinians in Gaza live in difficult conditions today. Hamas is the main reason, their Oct. 7, 2023, pogrom caused the war. It deliberately set its command posts, tunnels and weapons stores underneath hospitals, school and mosques. “Everyone is angry and resentful toward Hamas,” one man said Dec. 1 at camp like one above outside school in Gaza City.

clashes between Israeli troops and Islamist groups in Syria. After the fall of the Bashar al-Assad dictatorship, Israel expanded its buffer zone along the Syrian border to ensure that groups set on Israel’s destruction could not open up a new front.

Just days after Israeli troops clashed with an Islamist terror group near the buffer zone Nov. 28, President Donald Trump warned Israel to not “interfere with Syria’s evolution into a prosperous State.”

An ‘imperial’ Israel?

The *New York Times* ran articles Nov. 30 and Dec. 2 implying that an “Imperial Israel” is making “peace impossible” and “disarmament [of Hezbollah] much more difficult.”

The *Times* editors blame Israel for refusing to recognize a Palestinian state. That’s what they claim has ignited war “at regular intervals.”

This explanation turns the cause of the conflict on its head. There was a de facto Palestinian state — in Gaza — for more than a decade. Instead of seeking economic development and a course to advance Palestinian interests, Hamas — backed by Tehran — used that state to oppress Palestinians there and prepare the Oct. 7 massacre of 1,200 people in Israel, the worst anti-Jewish pogrom since World War II.

Tehran, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and others in the so-called axis of resistance are not interested in two states. Hamas’ pogrom announced a renewed drive to destroy Israel and eliminate or expel Jews from the region.

Defeating and dismantling of Hamas will remove a huge obstacle to common struggle by working people of all religions and nationalities. Like in every capitalist country, working people in Israel need to organize to defend their class interests against the bosses

and overcome divisions between Jewish, Arab workers and immigrant workers.

Former hostages speak out

Many former hostages are speaking out, touring the U.S. and other countries, to let the world know the truth about Hamas’ brutal treatment of Jews, from physical and psychological torture to sexual abuse.

Segev Kalfon, who survived 738 days in captivity, is one of the last hostages freed. His captors broke his teeth, starved him and pressured him to convert to Islam. He was given so little food that at times it was difficult to even stand up.

He told the press how the thugs played mind games, like telling six hostages held together to pick three of them to be executed and three to be shot in the leg. When they refused, the thugs chose lots, though they didn’t carry out the threats.

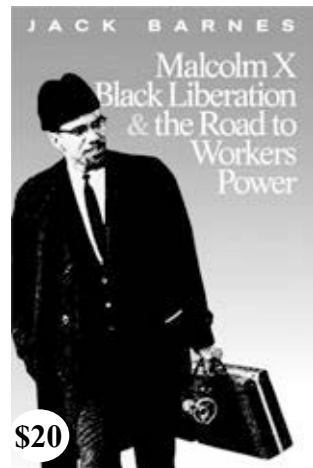
Edan Alexander spoke to a group of 1,000 Christian supporters of Israel in early December at an event at the site of the Nova festival near the Gaza border. For the first time since his release he appeared in public wearing his Israel Defense Forces uniform. He told the crowd that he asked to reenlist in the IDF. “I wanted to show them that although they hurt me, I am returning to stand strong.”



Israel Defense Forces

Hamas rockets and rocket launchers recently found by Israeli soldiers near the “yellow line” dividing Hamas and Israeli-controlled areas of Gaza.

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‘Cuba and the Independence War in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: The Fall of the Last Colonial Empire in Africa’

Below is the introduction by Mary-Alice Waters to the new book *Cuba and the Independence War in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: The Fall of the Last Colonial Empire in Africa* by Victor Dreke. Waters is the editor of the book along with Martin Koppel, a Pathfinder editor. She is the president of Pathfinder and a member of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party. Copyright © 2025 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

NEW BOOK BY CUBAN LEADER VÍCTOR DREKE

BY MARY-ALICE WATERS

Cuba and the Independence War in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde: The Fall of the Last Colonial Empire in Africa brings to life one of the most important chapters in the vast wave of anticolonial, anti-imperialist struggles that swept the globe during and in the aftermath of World War II.

It is a chapter rich in political lessons for the toilers. And a chapter that is also among the least known.

This is a firsthand account of that historic struggle by Victor Dreke Cruz. As a young but already seasoned commander of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces, in 1967–68 Dreke led Cuba's internationalist military mission in the West African countries of Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry.

Initiated by Cuban leaders Fidel Castro and Ernesto Che Guevara, the mission provided both military training and medical help to the cadres of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) led by Amílcar Cabral. The PAIGC combatants fought to put an end to five hundred years of Portuguese colonial exploitation and domination. The triumph of the Guinean people over that regime triggered the collapse of the last colonial empire in Africa, bringing independence not only for Guinea-Bissau in 1974 but, a year later, for Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

It also brought down the decayed fascist regime in Portugal itself.

Victor Dreke's account of that turning point is not a dry “history.” What comes to life in these pages is the pride and confidence of a previously subju-



Cuba's socialist revolution offered aid to African liberation struggles from the start. Above, at a Feb. 4, 1962, rally of 1 million Cubans, Fidel Castro presents Second Declaration of Havana, a call to revolutionary action to anti-imperialist and working-class fighters internationally.

gated and exploited people fighting not only for their own freedom but, as Cabral expressed it, coming to see themselves as part of “humanity's soldiers” and acting accordingly.

Alongside them you will also meet revolutionary Cuba's internationalist volunteers, who showed the world the kind of human solidarity that men and women transformed by making a genuine socialist revolution are capable of.



In the 1950s and 1960s a tsunami of anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements swept across Asia and the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. It was a byproduct of World War II itself. The second inter-imperialist slaughter of the twentieth century was waged by rival world powers for redivision and plunder of the earth's markets and natural resources. The deadliest war in human history, it ended an estimated seventy to eighty-five million lives. Most were civilians.

To understand the class character of that war, we must add that the overwhelming majority of those deaths, civilian and military alike, were of workers, peasants, small traders. The oppressed and exploited humanity of all races and nationalities.

From the ashes of World War II, US capitalism emerged as the dominant economic and military power. More important, the imperialist world order, born in the closing years of the nineteenth century, had been vastly weak-

ened. In a few short years the colonial empires built (some over centuries) by Portugal, Spain, France, England, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Japan, and the United States crumbled in face of victorious national liberation struggles the world over.

The relationship of forces on an international scale was changed.

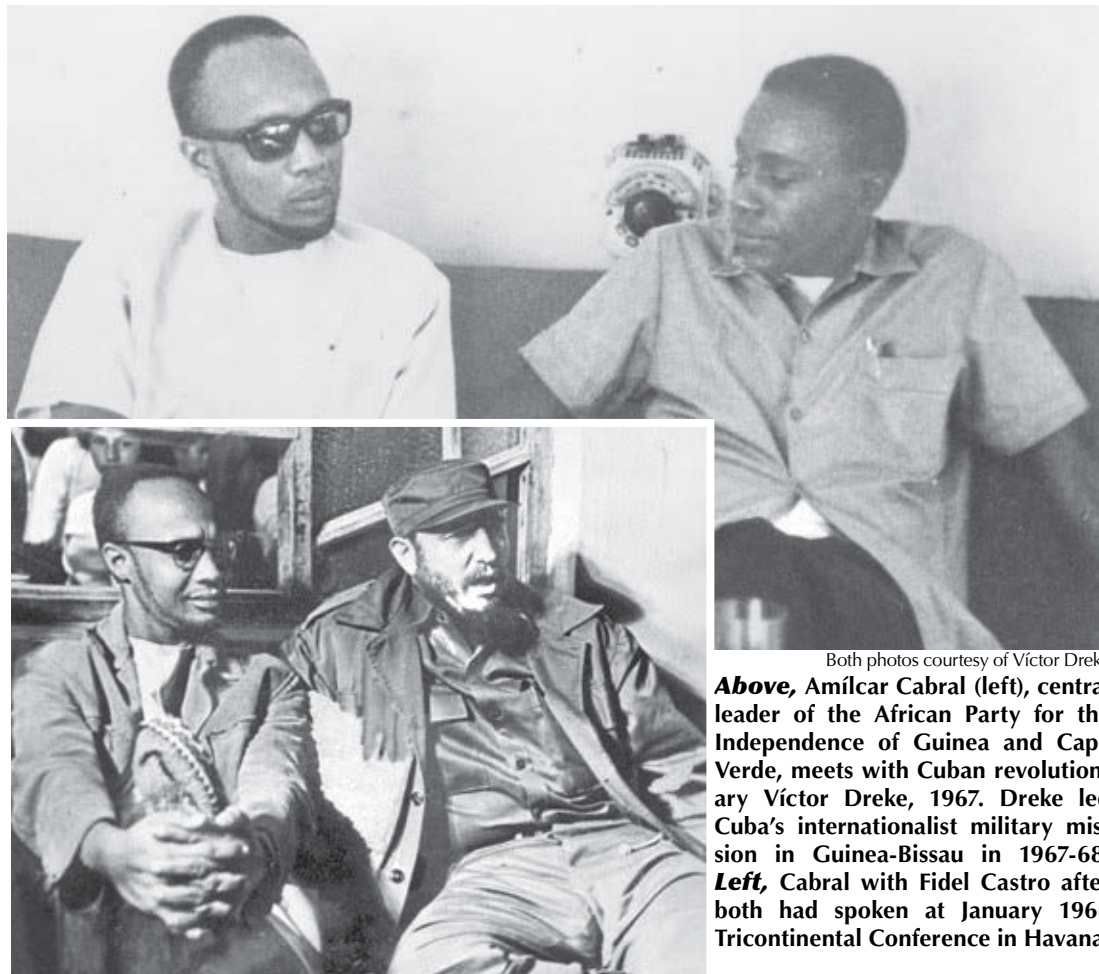
The impact of that revolutionary upsurge reached inside the imperialist centers too. It inspired battles for rights, jobs, and human dignity by oppressed nationalities from Ireland and Quebec, to Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, and beyond.

Above all, the anticolonial movements in Africa helped fuel the historic battle that exploded in the United States itself, as working-class men and women who were Black, with growing confidence and pride, stood up to the most formidable imperialist ruling class on earth. Over a decade of increasingly powerful mobilizations, they brought down the entire capitalist structure of “Jim Crow” segregation that for three quarters of a century had dominated—and retarded—social relations across the North American continent. Their example, demonstrating what the working class in action is capable of achieving, brought to political life an entire generation of youth of all races. It opened the door to the racial integration of the modern labor movement and forever changed race and class relations throughout the United States.

This anti-imperialist and anticapitalist tide reached its highest political level with the opening of the Cuban Revolution on Washington's doorstep. The movement of Cuban working people forged under Fidel Castro's leadership toppled the US-backed Batista dictatorship in 1959 and opened the first socialist revolution in the Americas. For the US ruling class, that was a “crime” the owners of capital and their government will never forgive nor forget.

In 1960 alone, seventeen new African nations established their independence, and another fifteen did so before the end of the decade. By 1970 the only colonial empire still standing was the oldest: Portugal's.

How the Portuguese empire's un-



derestimated subjects brought it down is the subject of this book.



Two things especially stand out in the account by Victor Dreke, which is supplemented in the last chapter by the reflections of several other Cuban volunteers who also put their lives on the line in “Portuguese Guinea” or were part of leading that eight-year internationalist mission.

The first is the political importance and detailed attention Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and other leaders of the Cuban Revolution gave to the national liberation struggles sweeping Africa. And the importance those struggles had for educating the people of Cuba about their own history and the realities of capitalist exploitation.

As Fidel often reiterated, the Cuban people's internationalist aid to those struggles was “paying our debt to humanity.” Their course of action—from Algeria to the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Angola, and beyond—was not only an act of solidarity, however. It strengthened Cuban working people

and their revolution as well.

The best known example is Cuba's contribution to defending the newly independent Angola from multiple invasions by apartheid South Africa. That internationalist mission spanned sixteen years, from 1975 to 1991. Its importance for all of Africa—and the world—was singled out by South African hero Nelson Mandela shortly after he was freed in 1990 after more than twenty-seven years in the prisons of the apartheid regime.

Speaking to a crowd of tens of thousands in Matanzas, Cuba, on July 26 that same year, Mandela thanked the Cuban people for their decisive aid, including the 425,000 volunteers who served in Angola, more than two thousand of whom gave their lives there. He underscored the “truly historic significance of their presence and reinforcement” in the 1988 battle of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola.

“The crushing defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale was a victory for the whole of Africa!” Mandela told the world. It has been “a turning point in the struggle to free the continent and our



Cuban and Guinean combatants, including Cuban commander Raúl Díaz Argüelles (sunglasses). Cabral had requested Cuban combatants to aid their fight against Portuguese colonial rule “because he knew he could trust us,” Dreke said. “We were comrades in struggle.”

country from the scourge of apartheid.”

Equally important was the impact inside Cuba of these internationalist missions. The hundreds of thousands of Cuban men and women who took part in one or more of Cuba's twenty-four missions in Africa over more than three decades came back as changed human beings. They had “broadened their scope,” to use a favorite phrase of Malcolm X.

The generations of Cubans who were born and grew up after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution knew of capitalist exploitation only from books and the stories of their parents and grandparents. For them, living and fighting side by side with the people of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Angola, and elsewhere was an unforgettable education in the barbarism of capitalism. It deepened their understanding of what Cuba's socialist revolution had accomplished, what it had opened.

Raúl Castro, then minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, expressed this in the clearest possible way in May 1991 as he welcomed home the last Cuban volunteer troops to leave Angola. Operation Carlota, as the Cuban military mission to Angola was named, was now completed, he said. And Raúl underscored its importance with these words:

“When we face new and unexpected challenges, we will always be able to recall the epic of Angola with gratitude. Because without Angola we would not be as strong as we are today,” Raúl emphasized. “If our people know themselves better, if all of us know much better what we are capable of achieving,” he said, “that, too, is thanks to Angola.”



The second thing that stands out in Victor Dreke's account is the programmatic clarity, as well as the leadership capacities and conduct, of Amílcar Cabral, the central leader of the independence struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

Cabral was assassinated in January 1973 in an operation organized by Portuguese intelligence forces. He didn't live to see the day in April 1974 when the eroded fascist regime in Portugal was overthrown by a military coup, a coup accelerated by spreading demoraliza-

tion in the ranks and officer corps of the armed forces due to the defeats it was suffering in Guinea.

The PAIGC, and the liberation struggle its cadres led, survived Cabral's loss. More than anything, that was due to the fact that the political course Cabral led had won not only the support but the active participation of decisive numbers of Guineans and Cape Verdeans.

“We're not militarists,” he insisted, addressing party cadres in 1966. “We're armed militants,” political militants above all.

“Maybe I disappoint people, but I'm not a great defender of armed struggle,” he told a US audience in 1972. “I am very conscious of the sacrifices demanded by armed struggle. It is violence even against our own people.” If it “were possible to solve this problem without armed struggle, why not?” But a liberation war “is not our invention,” he said. “It is the requirement of history.”

Cabral had expressed himself even more simply and clearly when he spoke in 1966 to villagers who had joined the guerrilla army on the northern front of Guinean territory. “The armed struggle is very important, but the most important thing of all is an understanding of our people's situation,” he told them.

“Our people support the armed struggle. We must assure them that those who

bear arms are sons of the people and that arms are no better than the tools of labor,” Cabral said. “Between one man carrying a gun and another carrying a tool, the more important of the two is the man with the tool. We've taken up arms to defeat the Portuguese, but the whole point of driving out the Portuguese is to defend the man with the tool.”

Speaking in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, at a 1965 conference of leaders of the liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies, Cabral again explained the political cornerstone of the struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde:

“We are not fighting simply to hoist a flag and to have a national anthem.” We are fighting, he said, “so that our peoples may never more be exploited by imperialists, not only Europeans, not only people with white skins, because we do not confuse exploitation or exploiters with the color of men's skins.

“Who is this enemy who dominates us?” Cabral asked. “This enemy is not the Portuguese people, nor even Portugal itself.” It's not even Portugal's fascist dictator, António Salazar, he said. “The enemy is Portuguese colonialism.”

Portugal, Cabral emphasized, “is an economically backward country, in which about 50 percent of the population is illiterate.” The fact that Portugal was (and still is) a class-divided society meant that Portuguese soldiers captured by the PAIGC forces were often illiterate themselves.

Portuguese prisoners of war were not brutalized or humiliated by the liberation fighters but treated with dignity and respect. They sometimes mixed freely in the camps with the liberation forces, sharing in daily tasks such as collecting firewood and carrying water. They were turned over to the Red Cross when the opportunity arose, not to the Portuguese army. There is even a photo in this book of them playing a soccer match with each other!

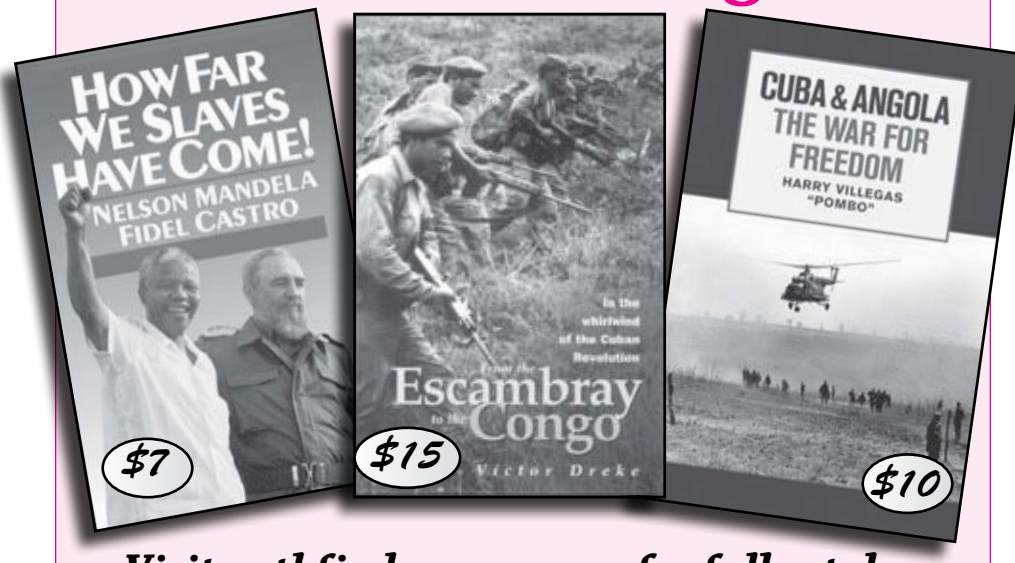
The armed struggle for independence had been launched in 1963. It was begun only after the PAIGC had established—through experience since their clandestine founding in 1956, including bloody colonial repression of strikes and public protests—that they had no alternative.

In a country with no industry and virtually no working class, they decided they first needed to go into the bush, village by village, and win support among people of all tribes. That's what they did over the course of two years, at the same time organizing clandestine cells in the towns. They sent young cadres to work with the rural villagers and learn the conditions of their lives. They fought to counter tribal antagonisms the Portuguese fostered and took advantage of in order to sharpen divisions.

They organized schools for children and adults—illiteracy in Guinea-Bissau was more than 99 percent. They established clinics, health brigades, militias, village administrative councils, and judicial structures. They drew women into these activities; they opened the door for women to lead. And much more that readers will

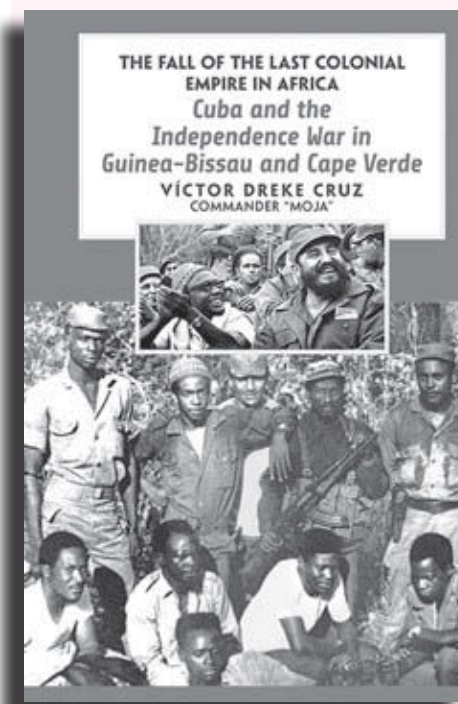
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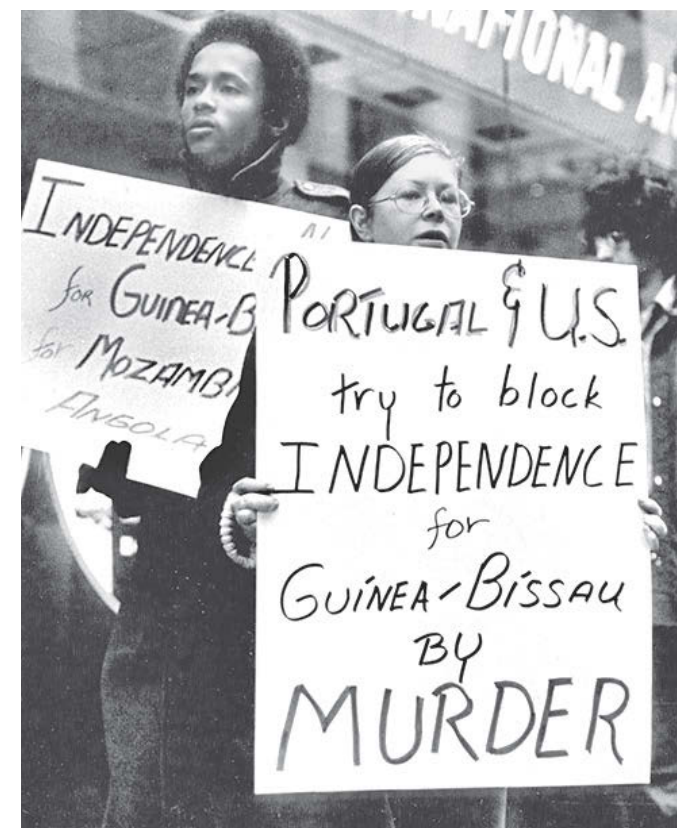


IN 1974-75 the people of two West African countries, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, put an end to 500 years of Portuguese colonial exploitation. Led by a popular movement forged by Amílcar Cabral, their struggle triggered the collapse of Portugal's entire colonial empire and brought down the fascist dictatorship in Portugal itself.

VÍCTOR DREKE's firsthand account brings to life this decisive victory in the wave of anti-imperialist struggles that swept the globe during and after World War II.

CUBA's revolutionary leadership provided vital aid to the African fighters we meet here — the men and women Cabral saw as part of “humanity's soldiers.” We also meet the Cuban volunteer combatants who joined their struggle.

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Jan. 22, 1973, protest in New York against assassination of Cabral and U.S. military aid to Lisbon's colonial wars. Liberation struggles in Africa helped fuel Black struggle in the United States.

‘Cuba and Independence War in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde’

Continued from page 9
discover in this account.

“We decided to mobilize the population in the bush,” Cabral explained. “A lot of people think we came to this decision by applying the theories of Mao Zedong or whoever, but at the time we didn’t even know who Mao Zedong was. The needs of our land led us to make this decision,” Cabral said, “and our own missteps showed us the way.”

Cabral’s watchword guiding the PAIGC cadres was: “Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories.” The admonition conveys the same confidence in the exploited and oppressed as the spirit that guided the men and women of the Rebel Army in Cuba’s Sierra Maestra mountains.

In September 1973, more than six months before the fall of the Portuguese regime, the PAIGC was strong enough to organize a national assembly of representatives from the administrative bodies of villages across the liberated territories. The delegates elected from these areas declared Guinea-Bissau an independent country. Even before formal independence had been recognized by Portugal, these liberated zones already covered two-thirds of the country.

It’s evident from what Amílcar Cabral did and what he said that he was a conscious materialist, a dialectical, historical materialist. He was comfortable with and had internalized what he had read of Marx and Engels. In a country still marked in many regions by pre-class social relations, Cabral understood and explained in a clear and simple way to audiences of all kinds that the history and evolution of humanity is based on the development of productive forces. History doesn’t begin with the birth of class divisions and oppression. The social and economic antagonisms of capitalist society are therefore not eternal, but can be transformed by revolutionary action of the toilers.

Cabral urged young people, irrespective of religious convictions, to study science, to overcome traditional fears of nature. To study and learn from contact with other societies. He insisted that, whatever the similarities among national liberation struggles, the leaderships of each one must begin by understanding the uniqueness of the history and economic development of their people.

To those who condemned all things Portuguese, Cabral explained that capitalism in Europe and worldwide had played a huge and irreplaceable role in the evolution of human society and improvement of people’s lives. Capitalism had once been the most productive force on earth. But that had changed fundamentally with the dawn of the imperialist epoch.

“While we get rid of colonial culture and negative aspects of our own culture,” Cabral told the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, “we have to create a new culture, also based on our traditions, but respecting everything that the world today has conquered for the service of mankind.”

A person’s “patriotism or sincerity cannot be measured by the color of their skin, their name, or the way they dress,” Cabral explained. “Some among us think that if their name is N’Tan Passa, Keita, or Bubacar, or whatever, then for that reason alone they’re more Guinean

than someone called Lourenço Marques or Lúcio Vieira, which are white names. This isn’t true. A name doesn’t make someone more of a child of their land, more entitled to the land, more a friend of the people.

“A person’s name or the color of their skin isn’t what matters. What matters is what that person has in his head and in his heart. It’s the work he does each and every day that makes him a true child of the land.”

Speaking with a group of Black rights fighters during an October 1972 trip to the United States, Cabral answered a question by an American supporter about the status of women. “Yes, we have made great achievements, but not enough,” he answered. “We are very far from what we want to do. But this is not a problem that can be solved by Cabral signing a decree. It is all part of the process of changing the material conditions of our people.”

Cabral also responded to a question on Pan-Africanism during that US trip. “Pan-Africanism is a very nice idea, but we have to work for it,” he said. He reminded his audience that in many newly independent African countries, “they only replaced a white man for a black man, but for the people it’s the same.” In an earlier speech he explained, “We are for African unity in favor of the African peoples. We consider unity to be a means, not an end. [It] must not betray the end. That is why we are not in such a great hurry to achieve African unity.”

Speaking at the 1965 Dar es Salaam conference of liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies, Cabral emphasized that “our armed struggle is only one aspect of the general struggle of the oppressed peoples against imperialism, of man’s struggle for dignity, freedom, and progress. In the vast front of struggle in Africa today, we should consider ourselves as soldiers, often anonymous, but soldiers of humanity.”

Given the materialist foundation and class clarity guiding Cabral’s political course, it is no surprise he was sometimes asked if he was a Marxist. His reply to such a question at a 1971 public meeting in London is a pleasure to read.

“Is Marxism a religion?” Cabral asked the questioner. “I am a freedom fighter in my country. You must judge from what I do in practice. If you decide it’s Marxism, tell everyone it’s Marxism. If you decide it’s not Marx-



Keystone Press Agency/ZUMA Press Wire

Victory of Guinean people helped trigger the collapse of Lisbon’s colonial empire in Africa and set off mass revolutionary upsurge in Portugal. “The enemy is not the Portuguese people,” Cabral taught independence fighters, “it’s Portuguese colonialism.” Above, thousands in Lisbon celebrate overthrow of Salazar dictatorship there in April 1974.

ism, tell them it’s not Marxism. But the labels are your affair; we don’t like those kinds of labels.

“People here are very preoccupied with the questions: are you Marxist or not Marxist?” he added. “Please, just ask me whether we are doing well in the field. Are we really liberating our people, the human beings in our country, from all forms of oppression?”

“Ask me simply this, and draw your own conclusions.”



Cabral not only welcomed the internationalist aid the liberation movement received from the government and people of Cuba. He was attracted to the political example of the Cuban Revolution and its leadership.

“If any of us came to Cuba with doubts in our mind about the deep-rooted character, strength, maturity, and vitality of the Cuban Revolution,” Cabral said in a speech in Havana in January 1966, “such doubts were dispelled by what we have already been able to see.” He was presenting one of the keynote talks at the Tricontinental Conference, which had attracted some five hundred delegates from more than eighty countries around the world.

“The vanguard of the Cuban Revolution has mobilized, organized, and

politically educated the people,” Cabral continued. It has “kept them permanently informed about national and international questions that affect their lives,” enabling them “to take an active part in addressing those problems.

“This constitutes a lesson for us, especially for the national liberation movements, and specifically for those who want their national revolution to be a true revolution.”

As shown by these few examples and by others throughout Víctor Dreke’s account, what marked the character and political course of Amílcar Cabral’s leadership of the PAIGC was confidence in the revolutionary capacities of the exploited and oppressed. No wonder Fidel and Che recognized in Cabral a kindred soul and sent some of the best and most experienced cadres of the Cuban Revolution to aid them. To fight alongside them, as Cabral insisted, not for them.

Over the eight years of the war for independence, some four hundred Cuban internationalist volunteers at one time or another fought at the side of the liberation forces of Guinea and Cape Verde. They lived to the fullest Fidel’s call to action:

“Those not willing to fight for the freedom of others will never be able to fight for their own.”

September 30, 2025

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Ukraine fights to defend itself

Continued from front page

The ongoing war in Ukraine continues to fuel an upheaval in global alignments among rival capitalist powers and shakes the world imperialist order. President Donald Trump is trying to impose an end to the war that favors Moscow, to advance stability for U.S. business and bankers as they pursue their predatory interests against competitors in Europe and elsewhere.

Russian President Vladimir Putin held a five-hour meeting in Moscow with Trump's envoys Dec. 2, saying the latest peace plan was unacceptable. He demanded Kyiv cede more territory and threatened war with Europe.

The day before, Moscow launched a massive missile barrage on the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro, killing four people and injuring 40.

Top U.S. and Ukrainian officials had met days earlier. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky admitted questions of territory and Ukraine's security guarantees had yet to be agreed between himself and the U.S. president.

Trump said Nov. 25 he would only join a summit once a ceasefire agreement between Moscow and Kyiv is in "the final stages."

Whatever the outcome of the talks, a deep contradiction will remain between the Kremlin's drive to conquer Ukraine, ending its existence as an independent nation, and the determination of working people there to defend their country's national sovereignty.

Trump seeks to realign with Moscow

Representatives of both Trump and Putin met in October, "privately

charting a path to bring Russia's \$2 trillion economy in from the cold — with American businesses first in line to beat European competitors to the dividends," the *Wall Street Journal* reported Nov. 28.

They discussed a wish list of commercial opportunities for U.S. and Russian capitalists if Washington signs off on Moscow's military occupation in Ukraine. This includes rare-earth mining and energy projects for U.S. investors across Russia and in the Arctic; joint missions to Mars between Elon Musk's SpaceX and the Russian space industry; and appropriation of the \$300 billion in Russian assets frozen by European central banks, to be used for collaborative investment in Russia and a U.S.-led reconstruction of Ukraine.

"Moscow could reshape the economic map of Europe — while driving a wedge between America and its traditional allies," the *Journal* noted.

"We know this is not about peace. It's about business," Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk said.

Toll of Russian workers in uniform

Putin has scant interest in stopping the war, despite the fact that Moscow's forces — Russian workers in uniform — suffer heavy casualties with over 1,000 killed or maimed daily. He hopes he can continue sacrificing their lives without provoking resistance to his rule and eventually grind down the outnumbered but determined Ukrainians.

The pace of Moscow's military recruitment has fallen to a two-year low. Only 37,900 people took sign-on bonuses in the second quarter of



AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky

Nataliia Naumova, 70, right, recovers from FPV drone attack in Kherson hospital, Ukraine, Nov. 3. Russian drone operators conduct "human safaris" on Ukrainian civilians in Kherson.

2025, compared with 92,800 in the same period last year. In Russia's Irkutsk region, the number of volunteers signing an army contract has fallen by half from a year ago.

To make up for troop losses, the Kremlin has turned to Russia's less developed regions, with high unemployment among younger men. But in the Far Eastern Republic of Yakutia, one of the country's poorest territories, authorities have only been able to meet 40% of recruitment targets.

Indigenous Yakut residents "are unwilling to die for the interests of Moscow" said a Ukrainian intelligence report.

In desperation, the Kremlin has lowered enlistment standards. Now recruits with tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis are eligible. Volunteers with

such illnesses are combined in special "chronic illness" units, unaware that they will likely be assigned to near-suicidal frontal assaults.

In both 2023 and 2024, the Kremlin recruited an estimated 150,000 prison inmates to the army. But this fell dramatically as word got around about the high death rate. Prisoners are now given a choice of "volunteering" or of facing escalating fabricated charges and a life under Putin's brutal prison guards.

In the Leningrad region, nine convict volunteers organized to escape their transport to the front by killing the driver and fleeing into the forest. This is not the first such escape.

The Kremlin's war is reinforcing instability around the world and preparing growing resistance to Putin's rule at home.

NJ townspeople win chef's release from ICE lockup

BY NANCY BOYASKO

ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS, N.J. — Ruperto Vicens, a chef and co-owner of a popular Mexican restaurant here, was released from Newark Delaney Hall Detention Center Nov. 18, following a campaign on his behalf that included rallies in this town of some 4,500 people and at Delaney Hall. He'd been arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents a month earlier.

Vicens is originally from Mexico. He spoke to *Militant* worker-correspondents about his fight at his restaurant, Zoe's Emilio's Kitchen, Nov. 30.

On the day of his arrest, Vicens said, he'd noticed two unmarked cars following him for several blocks as he drove to work along with two other workers. When he was pulled over, the two were arrested. Vicens showed his ID and work permit. The ICE agents claimed there were "problems" with them and arrested him.

The detention center "was overcrowded and chaotic. I was expecting to see only Latinos in the lockup but there were people from all over, including China and Japan."

He described the indignities detainees faced in the cramped cell he shared with 13 others.

When toilets got clogged and drains were backed up it could take days for them to be fixed. Detainees were allowed to use the phone for just three minutes for free, but after that the call cost money, he said. There was one phone in the cell but it didn't always work and sometimes there was so much noise you couldn't hear what was said.

At mealtimes you couldn't be bare-

foot. "Something had to be on your feet, flip-flops, or even just socks," he said. But there was a shortage of these items for detainees to wear.

At one point, authorities said they were going to move Vicens to another facility. He told guards that he had a judge's order to prevent his removal, but they insisted ICE orders took precedence.

Along with other detainees waiting to be moved, he was shackled on his wrists and ankles, he said. They were given pieces of bread with packets of peanut butter and jelly, an apple and a small bottle of water for breakfast, and left to figure out how to make a sandwich while chained up. At the last minute he was pulled out of the line and returned to his cell.

Under these conditions, he said, detainees found ways to offer each other solidarity, sharing food and resources.

"I was lucky to have community support and a lawyer," he said. In addition to the rallies held to demand his release, Vicens received some 50 letters of support, including from the town's mayor, Lori Hohenleitner. A GoFundMe page set up by supporters raised \$96,000.

After hearing he would be released, Vicens told fellow detainees to have their wives call him and he would try to help find them lawyers. He has received at least one call. Many immigrants picked up by ICE have to weigh the cost of hiring a lawyer versus meeting the living expenses of their families.

Vicens was released with a GPS ankle bracelet after posting a \$7,000 bond. He's on probation for 90 days.

At the restaurant he owns with his

brother, Emilio, some 100 supporters celebrated his release Nov. 22.

"I want to thank all of you because I never imagined all of this. I'm just thinking how I can pay back to this community," Vicens told the crowd who had marched to the restaurant from a rally at Veteran's Park.

"We want to make sure you all go back home with a happy belly," his brother said. "We've got some food inside. So please, come in."

Craig Honts contributed to this article.

G20 meet exposes capitalist rivalries

Continued from page 5

The Trump administration, which after the meeting became head of the G20, says it will ban South Africa's delegation from next year's summit. And it will exclude United Nations officials and cut invitations to non-G20 member states. All the usual workshops on "climate change" and other "woke" issues will be eliminated and the agenda stripped down to "emphasizing economic growth."

Capitalist exploitation is root of crisis

All G20 summits are used by rival governments as forums to jockey for position. None issue declarations that are binding, let alone address the social and economic devastation facing working people. The fakery that marks these get-togethers was highlighted by the "inequality" agenda presented by Ramaphosa. The only concrete proposal emanating from the "inequality" report

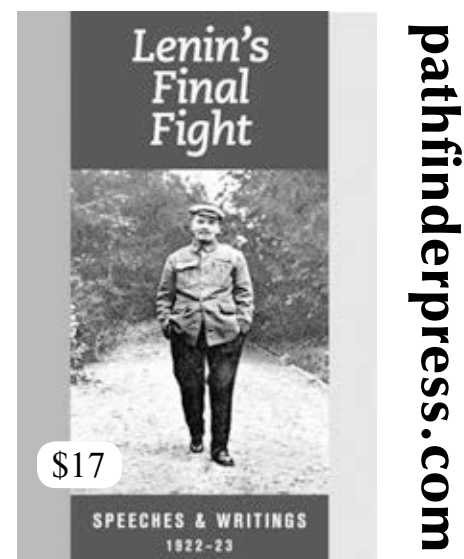
was a call to set up a permanent panel to further investigate "inequality"!

The crisis facing working people is deepening. The World Health Organization reports the number of people living without access to electricity grew in 2024 to 730 million, 55 million more than in 2021. One in four of the world's population, 2.1 billion people, still lack access to safe drinking water.

None of the governments represented at the G20 meeting, nor the U.S. rulers, are interested in or capable of addressing this. In fact, their system is the cause.

"Those who live in a palace do not think about the same things, nor in the same way, as those who live in a hut," Thomas Sankara, the communist leader of the 1983-87 revolution in Burkina Faso, explained.

It will take socialist revolutions to end the intolerable conditions working people face under capitalism.



US hands off Venezuela!

Continued from front page

the exploitation and oppression of workers at home and abroad.

The Donald Trump administration, backed by Democrats and Republicans alike in Congress, aims to install a government in Venezuela subservient to the imperialist rulers' interests. This is to deepen their stranglehold over the natural resources and the wealth produced by workers and farmers in Latin America and the Caribbean. And to push back struggles by working people for land, political rights and improved living and working conditions.

A prime objective of Washington's growing push to overthrow the government of Nicolás Maduro in Caracas is to deal blows to the Cuban people and their socialist revolution. For over 60 years the U.S. rulers have been determined to bring Cuba down and subject its people to capitalist exploitation once again. They hate the example Cuba's revolution set

for working people worldwide.

The economic, social, and political convulsions unfolding in the region and the world today are propelling working people to see there can be no solution to the problems they face under capitalism — from the tens of millions unemployed or underemployed, wars, Jew-hatred and the rampant violence endemic to the profit-driven drug trade. Working people must take control of our own destiny.

That's precisely what working people in Cuba did: they took power out the hands of the ruling capitalist families and their imperialist masters in Washington and reorganized society for the benefit of all. Workers and farmers transformed themselves as they transformed society, offering solidarity to workers' struggles worldwide.

Working people and youth in this country should stand for the interests and needs of the toilers worldwide. U.S. hands off Venezuela!

As holiday looms, workers face debt, high prices

Continued from front page

things are just swell today.

This deepening economic and social crisis profoundly affects the lives of millions of working people. "I work two jobs, my partner works two jobs, and it feels like we are like scraping for crumbs here," Anissa Camacho, a 26-year-old florist in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, told the *Financial Times*. She has moved in with her grandparents because her rent went up out of reach.

Demetri Nash, a 32-year-old driver at a local Bethlehem warehouse, works as many as 72 hours some weeks to try and get by. "It's not optional. It's mandatory for me to work the hours that I work because of the rise in cost of living," he said.

Since January the average monthly cost of electricity has risen 11% nationally. In Missouri, it's up 37%. Power cutoffs by utility companies are rising as more working-class households can't keep up. In New York City, for example, Con Edison reported it's cut the power off in 111,000 households so far this year, up from 30,000 in all of 2024.

In Sheffield Lake, Ohio, Jason Ross and his wife both work three jobs to try to keep up with their bills, including for electricity. It has more than doubled in the past year, to about \$350 a month.

"For the first time, we're behind on all of our utilities," Ross, a special education coordinator for charter schools who also delivers for DoorDash and does some freelance work, told the *Washington Post*. "I'm 40 years old, and I've never been behind on anything, until now."

Medicare boosts premiums

Also rising through the roof are health care costs, with average annual insurance premiums in 2026 projected to jump by over \$1,000. In November, Medicare officials announced premiums will rise 9.7% next year, to \$202.90 a month. The annual Part B deductible is going up to \$283, an increase of 70.5% over the past 10 years. Meanwhile, Social Security, which automatically deducts Medicare payments from your check each month, is rising by a measly 2.8% next year.

The biggest U.S. retail outlets, which depend on the Thanksgiving-to-Christmas holiday shopping season to rake in a third of their annual profits, face a situation where working-class households are cutting back on what they can buy, or they're going deeper into debt to try to have a happy holiday for their families.

Growing numbers of workers are turning elsewhere in search of bargains. Thrift-store owners are now holding Black Friday sales. To attract more customers, Goodwill is seeking to become "more glamor-

ous," opening larger stores in more affluent neighborhoods. Traffic to its stores this year has been overall more than double that of other clothing stores, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Nov. 24.

They say relocating stores near potential donors, as opposed to the neighborhoods of their more down-trodden clientele, means they get better merchandise to sell. Some have opened drive-up windows, so more upscale donors don't even have to enter the store. One storeowner in West Virginia told the *Journal* they've had Tiffany jewelry dropped off there, as well as designer clothing from Gucci and Chanel.

One problem is a lot of this "better" merchandise never makes it to working people. The *Journal* reports there is a whole new class of purchasers visiting Goodwill, looking for cheap but classier items they can profit off reselling online.

The capitalist media — which works overtime trying to cover up class divisions — reported retail sales were up just 0.2% in September. But much of this spending is by the wealthy and their hangers on, who have been getting richer off speculative investments in the stock market. The top 10% of households today account for nearly half of all consumer spending.

And retail giants like Walmart now cater more and more to the wealthy to boost profits. "We continue to benefit from higher-income families choosing to shop with us more often," Doug McMillon, Walmart's chief executive, told the *New York Times*.

Sharpening class divisions

And these class divisions are getting sharper. The net worth in the hands of the wealthiest 0.1% of U.S. households reached \$23.3 trillion in the second quarter this year. The amount held by the 50% of working-class households at the bottom is one-sixth of this.

Black Friday sales online hit a record \$11.8 billion, Adobe Analytics reports, while admitting the most popular items were luxury apparel and accessories bought up by the rich.

High home prices and daunting mortgage rates are preventing many young people from moving out of their parents' place in hopes of being able to raise a family. Median home prices have risen by more than one-third since 2021, to just under \$400,000 today. And foreclosures are increasing.

"We see a lot of people who have been evicted because they couldn't pay their rent, because they had a car accident and then couldn't pay their medical bills," Marc Rittle, executive director of the New Bethany food pantry in Bethlehem, told the *Financial Times*. "I think that's the sort of homelessness that we'll start to see a lot more of."

The rising homelessness in New York City is having a huge impact on students. An all-time high of 154,000 children in the city's public schools, nearly one in seven, were homeless during the past school year. In some neighborhoods, including East Harlem and the Bronx's Concourse, student homelessness is as high as one in five. Nationwide, over 1.3 million students have no steady place to live.

Agency workers walk out, join refuse workers strike



Militant/Catharina Tirsén

U.K. refuse workers rally in Birmingham Dec. 1. Agency workers hired as strikebreakers are now joining the strike.

BY CATHARINA TIRSÉN

BIRMINGHAM, England — Over 200 striking refuse workers and supporters rallied Dec. 1 at the Smithfield waste depot near the city center here to celebrate their reinforcement by dozens of workers employed by the Job & Talent temp agency.

Chanting "Workers strike, workers win — put Job & Talent in the bin!" they marched to the Birmingham Town Hall.

Hundreds of Unite-organized drivers and loaders, who collect waste for the Birmingham City Council, have been on strike since March against job losses and a wage cut of up to 8,000 pounds (\$10,550) a year. The Labour Party-run City Council, backed by the Labour government, has continued waste collections using agency workers as strikebreakers. The union says, at least 42 of the temp workers are now on strike.

As agency workers, whom the bosses had relied on to break the strike, started reporting harassment by bosses and threats of blacklisting, Unite organized to ballot the agency workers who are union members to join the strike effective Dec. 1.

"The bosses have no idea about duty of care," Andy Graham, an agency worker, told the *Militant* on the picket line at the Perry Barr Depot Nov. 4. "I once hurt my shoulder while maneuvering a container, but when I called the depot, they just asked 'how much have you got left of your round?'"

"We had a low union membership before the strike, but people joined when the fight started," said Luke Dalton, a shop steward at the Perry Barr Depot.

Speaking at the rally, Clare Keogh, Unite national officer for local government, congratulated strikers on the vote by the agency workers, as well as an earlier vote by directly-employed workers to continue the strike. "There is a reason why so many employers use agencies," Keogh said. "It's to pit workers against each other and keep us all down. But you've shown that your fight is the same fight."

"The brave agency workers joining the strike say everything, about the courage of these workers and about how the council has messed things up," Onay Kasab, Unite national lead officer, told the rally. "We are going to win."

Kasab reported that Unite members had knocked on 17,000 doors in Birmingham "and nine out of 10 support the strike." Unite says, 6,000 people have put stickers in their windows to show their support.

He pointed to remarks by Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves when she raised taxes recently. "When Reeves says everyone must make 'a bit of a contribution,' does she mean workers losing thousands of pounds?"

Ahead of the rally, the Birmingham council announced all depots would be closed that day "because of expected mass picketing and protests."

The day after the rally, shop steward Danny Taylor told the *Militant* they were back on the picket line, and seeking to win more agency workers to the fight. The council had brought in at least 10 more for the union to win over.

'Militant' Prisoners Fund

The fund makes it possible to send prisoners reduced-rate subscriptions. Send a check or money order payable to the 'Militant' and earmarked "Prisoners Fund" to 306 W. 37th St., 13th Floor, New York, NY 10018. Or donate online at www.themilitant.com